

Birds as Ornithologists
Scholarship between Faith and Reason

Intra- and Inter-disciplinary Perspectives

Edited by

Orna Almogi



INDIAN AND TIBETAN STUDIES 8

Hamburg • 2020

Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Universität Hamburg

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O monks, my words should be accepted by the wise after they have examined/tested them, as gold [is accepted by the wise after they have tested it] through heating it, cutting it, and [the use of] a touchstone—not just out of reverence [and without examination].

*tāpāc chedāc ca nikaṣāt suvarṇam iva paṇḍitaiḥ |
parīkṣya bhikṣavo grāhyam madvaco na tu gauravāt ||*

~ Śāntarakṣita, *Tattvasaṃgraha* 3588

As cited and translated in Harunaga Isaacson, “The Opening Verses of Ratnākaraśānti’s Muktāvalī (Studies in Ratnākaraśānti’s tantric works II),” 130–131. In Ryutaro Tsuchida and Albrecht Wezler (eds.), *Harānandalahari. Volume in Honour of Professor Minoru Hara on his Seventieth Birthday*. Reinbeck: Dr. Inge Wezler Verlag, 2001, 121–134.

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Preface

One of the main objectives of the Khyentse Center for Tibetan Buddhist Textual Scholarship, situated at the Department of Indian and Tibetan Studies, Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg, has been to promote modern textual scholarship among traditional Tibetan Buddhist scholars. The aim is to enable them to approach their own intellectual culture—including religion, philosophy, and history—from different angles, and in doing so to facilitate communication and collaboration between their tradition and modern academia. In order to achieve this goal the Khyentse Center committed itself to providing the necessary assistance for setting up research centres for Tibetan Buddhist textual scholarship at Tibetan Buddhist monastic institutions in South Asia and to conducting workshops for training Buddhist monk and nun scholars in pursuing a modern academic study of Tibetan Buddhist texts and ideas through an historical-philological approach. The first such workshop took place in September 2013 in Bhutan, and soon afterwards, in March 2014, the first research centre, Ngagyur Nyingma Research Centre (NNRC), was set up at Namdroling monastery (Bylakuppe, Mysore, South India) and a four-year pilot programme was launched under the co-supervision of Prof. Dorji Wangchuk and myself. Following the success of the early stages of the pilot programme and the interest shown by other monastic institutions, the Academic Research Program Initiative (ARPI) was launched in 2015 with the generous support of the Khyentse Foundation. Two other research centres were set up, the Chökyi Lodrö Research Center (CLRC) at Dzongsar Institute (Chauntra, North India) and the Shechen Research Division (SRD) at Shechen Monastery (Baudhanath, Nepal), and the first four-year training programme (ARPI-I) started in August 2016. To our delight a second round (ARPI-II) could be launched in March 2020, likewise with the generous support of the Khyentse Foundation. The programme currently involves altogether 29 Tibetan *mkhan pos*, *slob dpons*, and *slob dpon mas*.

In the course of our engagement in the ARPI project, various theoretical and practical questions and concerns have arisen surrounding issues of traditional versus modern scholarship, in general, and faith versus reason, in particular. While the former phenomenon is an outcome of the increasing contact and exchange between the tradition and modern academia, the latter has undoubtedly been present in the Buddhist tradition at large from early on. This state of affairs led to the decision to organize a conference within an ARPI framework, with the aim of addressing these issues from historical, present, and future perspectives, including discussing the faith versus reason dichotomy and ways around it, legitimate concerns, and future prospects. As these issues and concerns are not confined to Tibetan Buddhism alone, we wished to include speakers from not only other Buddhist traditions but also from other religions, particularly ones with a long history of interaction between traditional scholarship and modern academia. Despite the numerous challenges—such as overcoming great cultural and language barriers, the hardship of a long journey to an unfamiliar destination, and other inconveniences—a number of scholars accepted our invitation and contributed to a fruitful discussion, producing many unforgettable moments, and to them we are very grateful.

The conference, titled “Birds as Ornithologists: Scholarship between Faith and Reason,”¹ took place at Namdroling monastery on July 23–25, 2017. The present volume contains six of the papers

¹ The name of the conference was inspired by an anecdote told by Prof. *em.* Dr. Werner Ende (University of Freiburg) during his lecture “Orientalismus, Orientalistik und gegenwartsbezogene Orientwissenschaft: Die Asien-Afrika-Studien in Hamburg,” held on the occasion of commemorating the centenary of the Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg (“100 Jahre Asien-Afrika-Wissenschaften in Hamburg: Vom Hamburger Kolonialinstitut zum Asien-Afrika-Institut der Universität Hamburg,” December 2, 2008). The anecdote, both offensive and amusing at the same time, concerns a Buryat scholar who, while assisting a Russian scholar in his research on Buryatia, “dared” to express his opinion on an issue concerning the research topic and was dismissed with the remark that a bird could never be an ornithologist.

Preface

presented during the conference, all of which focus on issues concerning complex themes that have often led to tension between faith and reason, as observed both in past and in present times, and from within and outside the respective traditions. Three of the papers deal with issues concerning the Buddhist tradition from within: Prof. Dorji Wangchuk's (Universität Hamburg) paper discusses the issue of secrecy in Buddhism with particular focus on questions such as what should or could be revealed to or concealed from whom; Prof. Norihisa Baba's (The University of Tokyo), the case of the Japanese Buddhist master Shaku Sōen, one of the earliest modern Buddhist monk-scholars, and his impact on modern Buddhist Studies; and Prof. Mahesh A. Deokar's (Savitribai Phule Pune University), issues concerning faith versus reason among individuals from the Ambedkarite Buddhist community and Vipassanā practitioners pursuing academic Buddhist Studies at Pune University. A fourth paper, by Prof. P.V. Viswanath (Pace University, New York), deals with the issue of gifts to the early medieval Buddhist monastic community in India and offers interpretations from outside the Buddhist tradition from the perspective of the academic field of economics. Last but not least, two papers discuss issues concerning tension between faith and reason within the Jewish tradition: Prof. Rabbi Daniel Sperber's (Bar Ilan University) paper deals with ethical challenges and hermeneutical solutions with a focus on Rabbinic literature framed within a broader comparative discussion, and Prof. David C. Flatto's (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem) focuses on themes of struggle and uncertainty in the context of Jewish prayer. Although the conference and the present volume are far from addressing all issues related to "scholarship between faith and reason," let alone covering all religions and all Buddhist traditions, it is hoped that they will be the first of several other such events and publications. To be sure, the diversity of traditions, religions, and topics represented in the conference, and the intra-Buddhist and inter/multidisciplinary approaches and perspectives offered up, tremendously enriched the experience of everyone present there, including the speakers, ARPI members, and the numerous invitees from various monastic institutions.

Birds as Ornithologists: Scholarship between Faith and Reason

In conclusion, I would like to particularly thank the Khyentse Foundation, without whose financial support the ARPI project could not have materialized, and to Prof. Dorji Wangchuk for both the very fruitful joint supervision of the project and for the financial support of the conference provided by the Khyentse Center under his directorship. Thanks are also due to Namdroling monastery for their great openness, trust, and overall support of the programme, to the Nyingma Ngagyur Institute (*bshad grwa*) for hosting the conference, and to Khenpo Sonam Tsewang, the then director of the NNRC, for his cooperation and assistance in all logistical matters before and during the conference, which greatly contributed to its success. Special thanks are also due to the conference speakers and the contributors to the present volume for their forthcomingness and cooperation. Heartfelt thanks also go to all others who directly or indirectly contributed to making both the conference and the publication of the present volume a success but could not be mentioned here by name.

Orna Almogi
Hamburg, August 2020

Secrecy in Buddhism

Dorji Wangchuk (Universität Hamburg)¹

“The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.”

~ Einstein 1931: 6.

1. Prologue

In the context of the academic study of Buddhist texts and ideas, particularly of Vajrayāna/Mantranaya (or Esoteric Buddhism), one of the challenges that a “bird” inevitably faces while trying to be an “ornithologist” is whether it is at all permissible to investigate certain texts and ideas that, it is professed, are imbued with sacrosanctity and shrouded in secrecy to varying degrees. One concern on the part of the tradition seems to be that the unauthorized investigation of sacred Buddhist texts and topics and the publication of one’s research outcome will invariably lead to the unauthorized revelation of the secrets to the uninitiated and unsuitable public, and thereby adversely affect the continuity and authenticity of Buddhist teachings and transgressively reveal

¹ I wish to express my profound thanks to Philip Pierce for correcting my English and also for making valuable suggestions; Dr. Orna Almogi for her editorial work, patience, and encouragement; and Prof. Dr. Harunaga Isaacson for going through the article twice and for making several valuable corrections. Needless to state that I myself am responsible for all the mistakes that may still remain.

Buddhist teachings to the wrong recipients at the wrong time, thus doing harm to oneself and other sentient beings.²

What I wish to do in this article is not so much to address the pertinent challenges as to examine the very idea of secrecy in mainly Buddhist contexts. I first seek to examine the idea of secrecy in secular or temporal (*laukika*: 'jig rten pa) contexts, and then in the specific Buddhist or supramundane (*lokottara*: 'jig rten las 'das pa) contexts of the Śrāvakayāna, Bodhisattvayāna, and Vajrayāna. By a "temporal context," I mean a context in which there is a presupposed notion of secrecy and which is not confined to or associated directly with Buddhist soteriology. In each of these contexts, I enquire (1) whether there are such things as secrets at all, (2) what possible secrets might be, (3) who usually are the possessors of secrets, (4) whether one should as a matter of course keep secrets, (5) from whom these secrets are to be concealed or to whom they should be revealed, (6) why one is supposed to conceal or reveal secrets, and (7) how or by what means secrets are to be concealed or revealed.

² Inappropriate disclosure of Mantric secrets is considered a cardinal transgression according to several Tantric scriptures or systems. The *Durgatipariśodhanatantra* (at least according to the eleventh-century scholar Rong zom Chos kyi bzang po), a Yogatantric scripture, teaches seven "basic pledges" (*rtsa ba'i dam tshig*), the seventh being identified by Rong zom pa as "non-revelation/non-disclosure of Mantric teachings" (*gsang ba mi bstan pa*), for which, see Wangchuk 2007: 305–306. The *Śrīparamādyatantra*, another Yogatantric scripture, also contains a scheme of seven pledges (*dam tshig rnam pa bdun*), of which the fourth is "not revealing 'great methods' out of ignorance or confusion concerning why [it (i.e. *bodhicitta*) should] not go to waste in the mental continuum of others (*de gzhan gyi rgyud la chud mi gsan pa'i mtshan nyid mi shes pa dang rmongs pas tshul chen mi bstan pa*). That "it" refers to *bodhicitta* is understood from the context. Similarly, according to those Tantric scriptures such as the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra*, which follow a fourteen-*mūlāpatti* scheme, the seventh cardinal transgression is the disclosure of secret teachings to immature individuals (Wangchuk 2007: 320, 324). For the **Guhyaagarbhatantra* as well, which follows a scheme of five primary and ten subsidiary pledges, the fifth primary pledge is not disclosing secrets (Wangchuk 2007: 329).

2. Secrecy in Secular Contexts

Now we shall examine the idea of secrecy in temporal contexts as revealed by Indian and Tibetan sources. The secular–sacral or mundane–supramundane (*laukika–lokottara*) distinction I make here is based not on the textual sources themselves but rather on the contexts in question.

2.1. Secular: Whether There Are Such Things as Secrets

Unlike some of the clichés reiterated by a number of followers of non-/pre-Mahāyāna Buddhism, namely, that there is no such a thing as secret or esoteric teaching in Buddhism (an assertion we shall return to below), it is perhaps superfluous to ask at all about the existence of secrecy in secular society—past and present—in India and Tibet. The existence of the idea of secrecy can be taken as given, inasmuch as there are an abundance of words that express it. (a) There are plenty of verbs,³ such as *√guh*, *√gup*, *√chad*, *√rakṣ*, *saṃ√vr*, and *√hnu*, that express the act of keeping secret. (b) We also find a number of adverbs (or indeclinables) that express the manner “secretly, privately, in secret, or covertly,” such as *guhyaṃ*, *guptam*, *rahas*, *rahasi*, *rahasyam*, and on forth.⁴ (c) Several neuter verbal nouns including *gopana* (*sbed pa*; *gab pa*), *nigūhana* (*sbed pa*), *vinigūhana* (*gsang ba*), and *praticchādana/chādana* (*‘chab pa*) express the action of keeping secret. (d) The idea of that which is concealed or kept secret or deemed secret, and thus “secret” in a strict sense, is often conveyed by adjectives and substantives in the past passive participle form, such as *gupta* (*sbas pa*; *gsang ba*), *gopita* (*sbas pa*), *gūḍha* (*sbas pa*; *gsang ba*), *vinigūḍha* (*sbas pa*),

³ Monier-Williams 1899 (*s.v.* *ni√guh*, *vini√guh*, *gupti√kr*, *pra√gup*, *gupti√kr*, *pra√gup*, *pra√chad*, *āchad* (*√chad*), *saṃ√chad*, *praticchad* (*√chad*) *pari√rakṣ*, *apa√hnu*, *ni√hnu*).

⁴ One can find numerous indeclinables that express the manner “secretly” or “privately,” such as *suguptam*, *gūḍham*, *sugūḍham*, *sagūḍham*, *huras*, *mithas*, *nigūḍham*, *niṅik*, *niṅyam*, *nibhṛtam*, *sunibhṛtam*, *parokṣam*, *parokṣeṇa*, *parokṣāt*, *parokṣe*, *prṣṭhataṣ*, *pracatā*, *pracchannam*, *praticchannam*, *rahite*, *rahiteṣu*, *sanutar*, *sasvar*, *tiras*, *tiraścathā*, *upāṃśu*, *anurahasam*, *apavāritam*, and *aprakāśam*.

pracchanna (*sbas pa*), *saṃvṛta* (*sbas pa*), *vinihita* (*sbas pa*), and *nikhāta* (*sbas pa*). (e) Similarly, the idea of “to-be-concealed, to-be-kept secret, to-be-worthy-of-being-concealed” is expressed by adjectives or substantives in a future passive participle (or gerundive) form, such as *guhya*, *rahasya*, *gopya*, *gopanīya*, and *parirakṣitavya*. (f) Finally, the closest Sanskrit words to English “secrecy” in the sense of the action of keeping something secret or the state of being kept secret seem to be feminine abstract nouns such as *guptatā* (*bsrungs pa nyid*), *gupti* (*sba ba*), *gūḍhatā*, and *pracchannatā*.

2.2. Secular: What Are the Secrets?

For heuristic reasons, the idea of secrecy, even in the temporal context, can be said to be of five types, namely, information or facts about the body, speech, mind, quality, and activity of a human being. (a) Obviously, the most intimate and private parts of a human physical body are usually concealed and kept secret. It is thus no wonder that the Sanskrit word *guhya*⁵ and the Tibetan *gsang ba* (“secret”) or *gsang gnas* (“secret spot/place”)⁶ are euphemisms for male and female genitals,⁷ interestingly also referred to as “secret parts” or “private parts” in textual sources in

⁵ Böhrling & Roth 1855–75 (*s.v. guhya* 3b) “die Schamtheile”; Monier-Williams 1899 (*s.v. guhya*) “the pudenda”; Apte 1957–59 (*s.v. guhya*) “a privity, the male or female organ of generation.”

⁶ *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (*s.v. gsang gnas*) “male and female marks” (*pho mo'i mtshan ma*); Jäschke 1881 (*s.v. gsang ba*) “secret parts” (*gsang ba / gsang ba'i gnas*). The female secret parts in particular have also been called the “secret lotus” (*gsang ba'i padma*) and “secret wheel/circle” (*gsang ba'i 'khor lo*), for which, see the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (*s.v. gsang ba'i pad ma & gsang ba'i 'khor lo*); Bu chung, *mNgon brjod tshig mdzod* (p. 121.5–6); dPa' ris & Nor bu, *mNgon brjod khungs btsun* (*s.v. pad ma*, p. 433). In Tibetan (*Tshig mdzod chen mo*, *s.v. gsu bel*), the birth canal is called the “secret path” (*gsang lam*). See also Monier-Williams 1899 (*s.v. rahasya*) “hair on the private parts” (*rahasyāni romāṇi*).

⁷ The “secret faculty” (*guhyaendriya: gsang ba'i dbang po*) enumerated in the set of six faculties in the *Vimalaprabhā* (Negi 1993–2005: *s.v. las kyi dbang po*) obviously refers to the male and female reproductive organs.

English. The word *rahas* (“secret/secrecy”) is also a euphemism for coitus.⁸ This is also true in Tibetan, where it is called the “secret act” (*gsang spyod*),⁹ although the word can also denote the call of nature.¹⁰ Similarly, “secret water” (*gsang chab*) is a euphemism for urine.¹¹ The venereal diseases are called what may be translated as either “secret diseases” or “diseases of the secret parts” (*guhya*roga: *gsang ba’i nad*).¹²

In Tibetan medicine, various vital points of the body called *lus kyi gsang gnad* or *lus kyi gnad gsang* (“secret points/centers of the body”) have been identified. Such physiological vital points, also called “secret eyes/foci” (*gsang mig/dmigs*), are the points in the body targeted for phlebotomy/venipuncture (*gtar kha*) and cauterization/moxibustion (*me btsa’*),¹³ two of the eighteen

⁸ Böhrling & Roth 1855–75 (s.v. *rahas*) *Beischlaf*; Monier-Williams 1899 (s.v. *rahas*) “sexual intercourse, copulation”; Apte 1957–59 (s.v. *rahas*) “copulation, coition.”

⁹ See the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *rgyo*), where “secret act” (*gsang spyod*) is mentioned as one of several synonyms meaning copulation.

¹⁰ Jäschke 1881 (s.v. *gsang ba*); *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *gsang spyod*). According to the latter, a toilet is also called a “secret chamber/house” (*gsang khang*).

¹¹ Jäschke 1881 (s.v. *chab*) treats *chab gsang* and *gsang chab* as both denoting urine. The *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *chab gsang* & *gsang chab*), however, seems to distinguish between *chab gsang*, which covers both “feces and urine” (*dri chen dang gcin pa*), and *gsang chab*, which signifies only urine.

¹² *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *gsang ba’i nad*): *skyes pa dang bud med kyi mtshan ma’i nad*. The corresponding Sanskrit term for the Tibetan *gsang ba’i nad* seems to be *guhya*roga, which is recorded in Böhrling & Roth 1855–75 (s.v. *guhya*). Compare, however, Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. *gsang nad*), where *prasuptikā*—which I could not trace anywhere else but which is obviously a variant of *prasupti* (“sleepiness, paralysis”)—is rendered as *gsang nad*. This requires further investigation.

¹³ *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *gnad gsang*): *gtar ga’i dmigs dang | me btsa’i gsang lta bu lus kyi rtsa gnad dang rgyus gnad med pa’i gsang dmigs |*.

conventional kinds of treatment in Tibetan medicine.¹⁴ The same may apply to acupuncture and acupressure. The equation of a “vital point” of something with its “secret” or “mystery” is nothing surprising if we consider the Sanskrit word *marman* (from \sqrt{mr}), which means “mortal spot, vulnerable point, any open or exposed or weak or sensitive part of the body,” “the core of anything,” “any vital member or organ,” that is, so to speak, an “Achilles heel,” and by extension “anything which requires being kept concealed, secret quality, hidden meaning, any secret or mystery.”

(b) The idea of secrets associated with speech can be understood by considering terms such as “secret utterance/statement” (*nihnavavacana*: *gsang ba'i gtam*), “secret words” (*rahasyapada*: *gsang tshig*), “secret discussion” (*gsang gros*), and by extension to “secret message” (*gsang 'phrin*), “secret letter” (*gsang yig*), “secret formula” (*mantra*: *gsang sngags*), and so on. In all of these, secrets are seen to be one of two kinds, namely, that which is to-be-revealed (*abhidheya*: *brjod par bya ba*) and that which reveals (*abhidhāna*: *brjod par byed pa*). That which reveals (e.g. the text of a letter) itself may be public and thus not secret but its to-be-revealed content could have a concealed or secret meaning (*saṃguptārtha/parokṣārtha*). Puzzles or riddles (*prahelikā*: *gab tshig / lde'u*) would belong to such a category.

(c) Secrets that are associated with the mind are primarily cognitions and emotions (including perceptions, sensations, notions, and intuitions). These are secrets about how a certain person thinks and feels. They are concealed by, or remain concealed in, the mind (*manogupta*: *yid sbas*). Most forms of

¹⁴ *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *gso thabs lag len bco brgyad*): *smān pas nad pa'i khamś ma snyoms pa gso zhing nad las grol ba'i thabs lag len gyi rim pa bco brgyad de | thang dang | phye ma | ril bu | lde gu | smān mar | snum 'chos | bshal | skyugs | sna smān | 'jam rtsi | ni ru ha | rtsa sbyong | gtar kha | me btsa' | dugś lums | byugs pa | thur dpyad bcas dang lag len nyer gsum sde tshan bco brgyad du bsdu tshul ni smān chang thang gi khongs dang | rin po che dang khanda gnyis ril bu'i khongs | sngo sbyor dang thal smān gnyis phye ma'i khongs su bsdu ba'o ||.*

expertise or knowledge will belong to this category. The expertise of a doctor can be given here as an example of a “trade secret.”¹⁵ (d) Secrets, further, can harbor positive and negative qualities, vices and virtues, strengths and weaknesses. But usually it is one’s imperfections rather than one’s perfections; weaknesses rather than strengths; vices rather than virtues; one’s fallibility rather than one’s infallibility, that one tends to keep secret. Such an idea is conveyed, for example, by the *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra*, where only negative qualities or attributes, not positive ones, are considered the stuff of secrets.¹⁶ It is, however, true that one’s good qualities have also been regarded as worth keeping secret. Sa paṅ Kun dga’ rgyal mtshan (1182–1251), for example, states that although the good qualities (*yon tan*) of the wise are concealed, they are revealed to the whole world, just as the fragrance of the jasmine flower spreads even when covered.¹⁷ According to Masūrākṣa, one should conceal and keep one’s true nature secret, but should fathom that of others.¹⁸ (e) And as the

¹⁵ *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra* § 85 (Habata 2013: 71): *bcom ldan ‘das dper gsol na | sman pa tshē’i rig byed yan lag brgyad la mkhas pas | bdag gi bu la ni rgyud phyi ma slob par bgyis kyi | slob ma la ni bdag dang mnyam par ‘gyur du dogs nas slob par mi bgyid pa de bzhin du | chos kyi rgyal po sman pa chen po ser sna mi mnga’ ba khyod kyi theg pa chen po’i rgyud phyi ma la de ltar mi mdzad par bcom ldan ‘das yun ring du bzhugs su gsol ||*.

¹⁶ *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra* § 221 (Habata 172: 172): *de la yid mi bde ba dang | g.yo dang | ser sna gang lags pa de ni gsang ba lags par rig par bgyi’o || dang ba dang dga’ bas bu gcig pa’i ‘du shes dang ldan pa gang lags pa de ni | gsang ba zhes mi bgyi lags so ||*.

¹⁷ Sa paṅ, *Sa skya legs bshad* 2.42 (Eimer 2014: 86): *dam pa’i yon tan sbas gyur kyang || ‘jig rten kun la khyab par gsal || sna ma’i me tog legs bkab kyang || dri zhim kun tu khyab par ‘gyur ||*.

¹⁸ Masūrākṣa, *Nītīśāstra* (D, fol. 140a5; P, fol. 188a7): *rang¹ gi rang bzhin sba bya zhing || gzhan gyi² rang bzhin shes par gyis || (1 rang] P, gang D; 2 gyi] D, gyis P).*

Prajñādaṇḍa ascribed to one Nāgārjuna suggests, one's actions or conduct are secrets that ought to be kept.¹⁹

2.3. Secular: Who Are the Possessors of Secrets?

Regarding the possible possessors of secrets (*rahasyadhārin/vinigūhitr*), three types of persons come to mind. The first type would be knowledgeable and wise persons. Experts as possessors of secrets seem to be best expressed by the term *marmajña* (*gnad shes*), which is to be understood as an expert who knows all the secrets or crucial points of a trade.²⁰ Again, a doctor can be mentioned here as the possessor of trade secrets, which has been mentioned in the *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra*.²¹ Even concerning the possessors of virtues kept secret, Sa paṅ, for example, states that the wise conceal their good qualities in the depths of their being, while fools reveal them with their mouths, just as straw floats on water, whereas jewels sink.²² Thus the wise are considered worthy keepers or possessors of secrets, and fools not.²³

The second type of possessors of secrets are professionals who have been entrusted with the task of keeping secrets and carrying out secret activities on behalf of a person, institution, or nation. They might be spies, secret agents, or secret emissaries, for which we find several words, such as *praṇidhi*, *mantragūḍha*, *herika*, and *apasarpa*. Wherever espionage, sabotage, and subversion are being

¹⁹ Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Prajñādaṇḍa* (1) 15 (Hahn 2009: 16–17): *rang gi spyod pa sba bar bya || 'dam gyi nang du lus bcug pa'i || gal te myu gus ma bos na || padma'i rtsa ba su yis rnyed ||*.

²⁰ Monier-Williams 1899 (s.v. *marman*).

²¹ For the pertinent citation from the *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra*, see above, n. 15.

²² Sa paṅ, *Sa skya legs bshad* 4.104 (Eimer 2014: 99): *blun po'i yon tan khar 'byin te || mkhas pa'i yon tan khong du sbed || sog ma chu yi steng na 'phyo || nor bu steng du bzhaḡ kyang 'bying ||*.

²³ A Tibetan saying seems to express a similar idea that the “best of men” (*pho rab*) keep “eighteen great secrets” and the “best of horses” (*rta rab*) run “eighteen great races.” See Cüppers & Sørensen 1998: 155, no. 5902: *pho rab la gsang chen bco brgyad || rta rabs la bang chen bco brgyad ||*.

undertaken, there are obviously spies and secret agents. This is true also in the Tibetan context, where the technical term for a spy or secret agent is *gsang nyul* (literally something like “stalker of secrets”).

The third type of possessors of secrets includes all fallible human beings who have something to hide and who have a sense of shame, guilt, fear, insecurity, and so forth. This presupposes that imperfect and fallible persons tend to hide their deficiencies and delinquencies.²⁴ From the Buddhist idea that a *buddha* is “one who [needs] no concealment” (*nirāraṅka*: *bsrung ba med pa*)²⁵ it follows that only an infallible being has nothing to hide. The fallible majority will always have something to hide, and hence possess some secrets. This would include charlatans, hypocrites, cheats, culprits, criminals, debtors, “secret thieves” (*pracchannataskara*), “secret sinners” (*pracchannapāpa*), “secret rogues or rascals” (*pracchannavañcaka*), and false friends, such as those who talk to or look at their friends’ spouses or partners secretly (*parokṣe*: *lkog tu*), as mentioned, for example, in the *Prajñāsataka*.²⁶

2.4. Secular: Whether Secrets Should be Concealed or Revealed?

Even in secular contexts we find instances where secrets are supposed to be kept, and other instances where they are meant to be revealed. One piece of advice to a king given in the

²⁴ *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (P, mDo sna tshogs, vol. Ju, fol. 70b5–6; T, Myang ’das, vol. Ka, fol. 104a2–3): *rigs kyi bu ’di lta ste dper na | mi zhig dbang po ma tshang ba¹ | mig ya gcig gam | lag pa ya gcig gam | rkang pa ya gcig ma tshang na ngo tsha ba’i phyir | gzhan gyis mi mthong bar byed pas gsang ba zhes bya’o ||* (1 ba] T, pa P).

²⁵ Edgerton 1953 (s.v. *araksya*) “his conduct is completely and automatically pure, so that he does not need to be on guard, in body, speech, and mind (*kāya, vāc, manas*).” I prefer to render *nirāraṅka* as “one who is free from covering up [something]” or “one who [needs] no covering up [of one’s actions],” in accord with the German rendering found in Nakamura 2016: 66: “Du, der Du von Vertuschen frei bist / der Du [Deine Taten] nicht vertuschen [brauchst] (*nirāraṅka*).”

²⁶ Nāgārjuna, *Prajñāsataka* 193 (Hahn 1990: 312–313).

Smṛtyupasthānasūtra simply states that “[things] deemed secret should not be revealed outside.”²⁷ This is also what Masūrākṣa’s *Nītiśāstra* states.²⁸ The *Prajñādaṇḍa* clearly advises that one should protect not only one’s own secrets but also others’, in the same way as one protects a dear son.²⁹ This sentiment is also found in the just mentioned *Nītiśāstra*.³⁰ The *Sa skya legs bshad* is more nuanced. According to it, trivial or inconsequential secrets—so to speak, *de minimis* secrets—need not be kept, whereas secrets whose divulgence would have grave consequences ought to be kept even at the cost of one’s life. Sa paṅ’s actual point here is that inferior persons keep *de minimis* secrets, which need not be kept, and needlessly disclose secrets carrying grave consequences, which should not be disclosed, whereas superior persons would not keep anything unnecessarily secret, but would at all costs keep a secret that had to be kept.³¹ In a similar fashion, Mi pham rNam rgyal rgya mtsho (1846–1912) in his *Lugs kyī bstan bcos* distinguishes between what are deemed “secrets” (*gsang bar ’os*

²⁷ *Smṛtyupasthānasūtra* (P, mDo sna tshogs, vol. Ru, fol. 262a2–3; T, mDo sde, vol. Gi, fol. 362a4): *gsang¹ bar bya ba rnams ni phyi rol tu mi byed do* || (1 *gsang*] T, *gsad* P). It may be noted that the Tibetan translation of the *Smṛtyupasthānasūtra* transmitted in the *bKa’ ’gyur* is comprised of four volumes (P, mDo sna tshogs, vols. ’U–Lu; T, mDo sde, vols. Ki–Ngi) and that our line occurs in the third volume containing, so to speak, a Sūtric *Rājanītiśāstra*.

²⁸ Masūrākṣa, *Nītiśāstra* (D, fol. 138a5–6; P, fol. 186a7): *gang du bsrung ba med pa’i yul du yang¹ || kun gyi gsang tshig nam yang mi smra ste* || (1 *du yang*] D, *de spang* P).

²⁹ Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Prajñādaṇḍa* (1) 2 (Hahn 2009: 8): *bdag gi gsang dang gzhan gyi gsang || rang gi bu gces bzhin bsrungs na || sa rnams la ni snyoms gyur pa’i || mi ni gces pas rab gces ’gyur* ||. No Sanskrit parallel was traced by Hahn.

³⁰ Masūrākṣa, *Nītiśāstra* (D, fol. 138b1; P, fol. 186b1–2): *bdag gi¹ gsang dang gzhan gyi² gsang || bu gcig gces bzhin bsrung bya ste* || (1 *gi*] P, *gis* D; 2 *gyi* P, *gyis* D).

³¹ Sa paṅ, *Sa skya legs bshad* 4.137 (Eimer 2014: 105): *dman rnams dgos pa chung ngu gsang || gsang dgos dgos pa med par smra || dam pa dgos med gsang mi ’gyur || gsang dgos srog la bab kyang bsrung* ||.

pa) and “top secrets” (*shin tu gsang bar 'os pa*), and while the former may or may not be revealed depending on the motive or circumstances, the latter should not be revealed to anyone else.³² We also encounter the idea that one should keep one’s good qualities concealed.³³ A narrative found in the *Vinayavibhaṅga*³⁴ admonishes that one should not reveal what is nowadays called a “trade secret” or “professional secret” to anyone for nothing but should rather either take it to the grave or exchange it with knowledge, honor, or wealth. A Tibetan saying makes it clear that one should also not reveal secrets prematurely,³⁵ or in an inopportune moment,³⁶ which implies that it is not only the nature of secrets and the person to whom one confides one’s secrets, but also time and occasion that would decide whether one should reveal one’s secrets.

Most of the answers in the preceding paragraph to the question as to whether secrets should be concealed or revealed seem to presuppose a *realpolitik* context. The main concern is the security of persons, institutions, or nations, and the fear or risk of undermining it through espionage, sabotage, or subversion. In addition to the context of practical politics, however, there are

³² Mi pham, *Lugs kyi bstan bcos* (pp. 35.1–36.1): *gsang bar 'os pa ma bshad kyang* || *dgos pa'i dbang gis 'gal ba med* || [...] *shin tu gsang bar 'os pa ni* || *rang las gzhan pa su la'ang min* ||; Cabezón 2017: 32.

³³ Cāṇakya, *Rājanitiśāstra* (D, fol. 134a1; P, fol. 181b2): *rus sbaḷ yan lag sbed pa ltar* || *rang gi yon tan sba bar bya* ||. The second *pāda* is omitted in P.

³⁴ *Vinayavibhaṅga* (P, 'Dul ba, vol. Je, fol. 29b3; T, 'Dul ba, vol. Ca, fol. 454b2–3): *rig pa su la'ang sbyin bya min* || *rig dang bcas te 'chi bar bya* || *rig pa rig dang gus pa dang* || *nor gyis¹ sbyin par bya yin* || (¹ gyis] T, gyi P). There are slightly different versions of the verse elsewhere.

³⁵ Padma tshe dbang, *gTam dpe'i bang mdzod* (p. 117): *'phrad ma thag tu ngo nag ma bsdu* | *'dris ma thag tu snying gtam ma shod* | (“Do not frown immediately after meeting someone; do not reveal your secrets immediately after getting to know someone”).

³⁶ Padma tshe dbang, *gTam dpe'i bang mdzod* (p. 33): *dga' dus snying gtam bshad* | *sdug dus dgra la langs* | (“Sharing secrets when happy; becoming enemies when sad”).

also ethical concerns. Even in a secular context, withholding information out of base motives such as selfishness or jealousy is judged negatively. One's knowledge, skill, or expertise should not be kept secret, as the *Prajñāsataka* clearly states: one should speak without the "tightfistedness of a teacher" (*ācāryamuṣṭi: slob dpon gyi dpe mkhyud*).³⁷

In connection with the question of whether secrets should be concealed or revealed, one may also briefly reflect on the concealability and revealability of secrets in the first place. In other words, are secrets at all concealable or revealable? Secret deeds such as a murder can hardly be said to be concealable because they would leave behind traces and clues. Such a sentiment has been expressed by a Tibetan saying, which states:³⁸ "There is no point in concealing a secret [deed or whereabouts of the perpetrator] because [he] has obviously left [his] footprints on the snow." Likewise, not all secrets, on many possible accounts, can be said to be disclosable. Secrets of all kinds in the form of mysteries and enigmas can be said to remain unrevealable or unsolvable.

2.5. Secular: To Whom Should Secrets Be Revealed?

The concealability of secrets seems to have been viewed with disbelief. The assumption is that secrets revealed to one person will eventually be revealed to all. (a) According to some advice to a ruler, those that are worth keeping extremely secret (*shing tu gsang bar 'os pa*) should be disclosed to no other person, and without reason one should never reveal secrets to anyone, not

³⁷ Nāgārjuna, *Prajñāsataka* (1) 18 (Hahn 1990: 38): *dpe mkhyud med par smra ba dang || ji skad smras bzhin bsgrub pa dang || chos bzhi rnams dang sbyar ba yi || mi pho rnams ni bde bar 'tsho ||*. For a German translation, see Hahn 1990: 39.

³⁸ Cüppers & Sørensen 1998: 271, no. 10392: *gsang dang mi gsang mi 'dug | zhabs rjes gangs la bzhag 'dug |*. The same saying has been recorded by Padma tshe dbang in his *gTam dpe'i bang mdzod* (p. 206), where it is rendered: "There is no use to being secretive; the foot-prints are left in the snow."

even to one's friends.³⁹ (b) If a secret is to be disclosed, it should only be disclosed to a person "who is capable of keeping secrets" (*gsang thub pa*),⁴⁰ the ability to do so being seen as a quality of personal integrity and reliability.⁴¹ Secrets are thus not to be disclosed to deceitful persons (*gya gyu can*).⁴² (c) According to the *Prajñāsataka*, secrets should not be revealed to people of base character (*ngan pa*) who could harm one like a poisonous snake.⁴³ The idea that the divulgence of secrets to people with base character would cause their dissemination is also found in the

³⁹ Mi pham, *Lugs kyi bstan bcos* (pp. 35.17–36.3): *shin tu gsang bar 'os pa ni || rang las gzhan pa su la'ang min || mdza' bas mdza' bar tshig spel las || tha ma rgyal khams khyab par 'gyur ||*; Cabezón 2017: 32. Cf. also Padma tshe dbang, *gTam dpe'i bang mdzod* (pp. 67–68): *snying gtam zab mo grogs la yang ma shod ||* ("Never share your deep secrets even with your friend").

⁴⁰ The term *gsang thub pa* occurs as a rendering of the present participle causative form (i.e., *saṃgūhyan*) of the Sanskrit verb *saṃ√guh* in the *Mahāvvyutpatti* (Sakaki 1916–25: no. 6342; Fukuda & Ishihama 1989: no. 6320). The alternative rendering recorded there is *legs par sbed pa*. See also Edgerton 1953 (s.v. *saṃgūhayati*); Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. *gsang thub pa*). The compilers of the *Mahāvvyutpatti* seem to have employed the present participle as an adjective "[capable of] keeping [something] a secret" and thus also as a substantive "one who is [capable of] keeping [something] a secret." The term *gsang thub pa* does not seem to be recorded as a lexeme in Tibetan-Tibetan dictionaries, but the expression *gsang tshig thub pa* can be found as one of the meanings of *kha dam po* ("tight-mouthed") in the *Tshig mdzod chen mo*.

⁴¹ dPal dbyangs, *Sārasaṃgrahalekha*, excerpts from Mātrceta's *Kaniṣkalekha* (Dietz 1984: 434, 435 n. 117): *slu bar mi tshugs gsang thub dang ||*.

⁴² Padma tshe dbang, *gTam dpe'i bang mdzod* (pp. 88–89): *'dod pa can la nor ma ston || gya gyu can la snying gtam ma shod ||* ("Do not show valuables to the greedy person; do not reveal secrets to the unreliable person").

⁴³ Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Prajñāsataka* (1) 78 (Hahn 1990: 54): *snying la yod pa'i gsang tshig rnams || ngan pa rnams la spel mi bya || brang 'gro gdug pa khros pa bzhin || de la de yis gnod 'gyur srid ||*. For a German translation, see Hahn 1990: 55. See also Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Prajñāsataka* (1) 91 (Hahn 1990: 58): *sbrul la 'o ma blud pa ni || dug phel 'gyur bar kho nar zad || ngan pa rnams la gdams pa yang || shig pa za 'gyur zhi mi 'gyur ||*. For a German translation, see Hahn 1990: 59.

Tibetan translation of the *Vinayavastu*.⁴⁴ The implicit message is that one should not reveal one's secrets to such people. (d) Both the *Prajñādaṇḍa* and *Lugs kyi bstan bcos* specify that secrets should not be revealed to women.⁴⁵ Such an idea can also be found, for instance, in the Tibetan translation of the *Vinayakṣudrakavastu*,⁴⁶ and also in a Tibetan saying.⁴⁷ It may be noted here in passing that in the *Mahābhārata*,⁴⁸ Yudhiṣṭhira is so devastated by Kuntī's

⁴⁴ *Vinayavastu* (T, vol. Ka, fol. 422a4; P, vol. Khe, fol. 278b3): *ngan la smras pas gsang tshig 'phel* ||.

⁴⁵ Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Prajñādaṇḍa* (2) 184 (Hahn 2010: 43): *mkha' lding dbang pos khyer ba'i tshe* || *pad dkar klu yis smras pa ni* || *gsang tshig bud med la smras pa* || *de yi srog ni der zad 'gyur* ||; Mi pham, *Lugs kyi bstan bcos* (pp. 35.17–36.3): *ji ltar mdza' bar gyur kyang ni* || *dgos med gsang tshig smra mi bya* || *gsang tshig bud med la smras pas* || *skye bo phal cher nyams la ltos* ||; Cabezón 2017: 32–33.

⁴⁶ *Vinayakṣudrakavastu* (T, vol. Tha, fol. 102a4; P, vol. Ne, fol. 274a6–7): *rgyal po grogs su gyur pa¹ med* || *gdol pa na ni bshes pa med* || *bud med rnam la gsang mi brjod* || *rma bya'i sha ni bza' mi bya* || (1 gyur pa] T, 'gyur ba P).

⁴⁷ The Tibetan saying is as follows: *rgya ya ye la ngo shes ma byed* || *khyim chung ma la gsang gtam ma bshad* || (Cüppers & Sørensen 1998: 63 no. 2340). The meaning of the first line is not quite clear to me but the saying seems to say something like: “Do not pretend to be familiar with a dishonest (*ya ye = ya yo?*) Chinese. Do not disclose secrets to the wife of a family.” See also Padma tshe dbang, *gTam dpe'i bang mdzod* (p. 120): *bu gsum skyes pa'i a mar yang* | *snying gtam shod par ma gnang* | (“Never reveal your secrets even to the mother of your three sons”).

⁴⁸ *Mahābhārata* 12.6.9–10 (Sukthankar 1933–1966: vol. 13, p. 19): *ity ukto dharmarājas tu mātrā bāṣpākulekṣaṇaḥ* | *uvāca vākyaṃ dharmātmā śokavyākulacetanaḥ* || *bhavatyā gūḍhamantratvāt pīḍito 'smīty uvāca tām* | *śāsāpa ca mahātejāḥ sarvalokeṣu ca striyaḥ* | *na guhyaṃ dhārayiṣyantīty atiduhkhasamanvitaḥ* ||. The translation by Ganguli 1883–96 (vol. 12, pp. 8–9): “Thus addressed by his mother, king Yudhishtira, with tearful eyes and heart agitated by grief, said these words: ‘In consequence of thyself having concealed thy counsels, this great affliction has overtaken me!’ Possessed of great energy, the righteous king then, in sorrow, cursed all the women of the world, saying, ‘Henceforth no woman shall succeed in keeping a secret!’”

keeping the true identity of Karna secret that he curses all women thus: “Henceforth no woman shall succeed in keeping a secret!” Perhaps this narrative is meant to explain the notion of why women cannot keep secrets and thus why secrets should not be revealed to them. While we cannot deny that these sources viewed women as more talkative than men, and hence less capable of keeping secrets, the statement that secrets should not be revealed to them can hardly be interpreted as implying that while secrets may be revealed to even malevolent and untrustworthy men they should not be revealed even to benevolent and trustworthy women. The actual point of such a statement seems to be that one should not reveal secrets to those who are malevolent and untrustworthy. (e) The *Prajñādaṇḍa* also advises that secrets should not be revealed to fools (*mūrkhā: blun po*).⁴⁹ (f) A Tibetan saying states that one should not disclose secrets to shameless/indiscreet (*khrel med*) people.⁵⁰ (g) While some sources suggest that knowledge or expertise as a kind of “trade secret” should be bequeathed only to one’s progeny,⁵¹ the

⁴⁹ Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Prajñādaṇḍa* (3) 239 (Hahn 2011: 336): *blun po rnam la gdams pa ni || 'khrug par 'gyur gyi zhi mi 'gyur || sbrul la 'o ma blud pa ni || dug 'phel 'gyur ba kho nar zad ||*. The Sanskrit parallel, found in several sources such as (the different versions of) the *Cāṇakyanītiśāstra*, *Hitopodeśa*, Bhartṛhari’s *Śatakṛayī*, *Pañcatantra*, *Subhāṣitārṇava*, and so on, has been traced (Hahn 2011: 336): *upadeśo hi mūrkhānām prakopāya na śāntaye | payaḥpānaṃ bhujāṅgānām kevalaṃ viśavardhanam ||*.

⁵⁰ The Tibetan saying reads: *khyi gu'i khar mdzub gus [= gu?] ma brlag || khrel med la gsang gtam ma bshad ||* (Cüppers & Sørensen 1998: 33 no. 1173). If I understand the saying correctly, it should mean something like: “Do not lose [one’s] little finger in the mouth of a little dog (or puppy). Do not disclose [one’s] secrets to shameless people.” Note that *khyi gu* and *mdzub gu* are diminutives of *khyi* (“dog”) and *mdzob mo* (“finger”), and the former can mean both “puppy” and a “bud” of leaves and branches (Jäschke 1881: s.vv. *khyi* & *khyi gu*). The instrumental *mdzub gus* is unexplainable.

⁵¹ The *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra*, for example, alludes to the idea that an extremely skilled doctor normally reveals his trade secrets to no one but his son—not even to his disciples; see the citation above (n. 15).

disapproval of the “tightfistedness of a teacher” (*ācāryamuṣṭi: slob dpon gyi dpe mkhyud*)⁵² suggests that secret knowledge should be revealed to the right kind of people so as to benefit them.

2.6. Secular: Why Keep Secrets?

Multiple motives are conceivable why one would wish to keep certain secrets. The reasons for keeping one’s virtues or strengths secret would certainly be different from those for concealing one’s vices or weaknesses. Here I wish to consider a few possible motives. (a) One of the fundamental factors that impel one to keep secrets would be emotional defilements such as hatred or aversion (*dveṣa: zhe sdang*), envy/jealousy (*īrṣyā: phrag dog*), and avarice (*mātsarya: ser sna*). Without these, one would lose a key motive for keeping anything secret. This has been made clear, for example, in the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*.⁵³ The motive for the “tightfistedness of a teacher,” for example, could be put down to selfishness or greed. Other motives include the eight specific worldly concerns (*lokadharma: ’jig rten pa’i chos*),⁵⁴ namely, hopes of gaining (material) possessions (*lābha: rnyed pa*), reputation (*yaśas: snyan grags / snyan pa*), acclamation (*praśamsā: bstod pa*), happiness (*sukha: bde ba*), fear of loss or non-acquisition (*alābha: ma rnyed pa*), a bad reputation (*ayaśas: mi snyan pa*), condemnation (*nindā: smad pa*), and tribulation (*duḥkha: sdug bsngal*).

⁵² Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Prajñāśataka* 18 (Hahn 1990: 38).

⁵³ *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (P, mDo sna tshogs, vol. Ju, fol. 71b2–3; T, Myang ’das, vol. Ka, fol. 105a5–7): *rigs kyi bu khyod kyis smras pa bzhin te | zhe sdang gi sems dang | phrag dog dang | ser sna’i sems dang bcas pa ni gsang ba zhes bya’i | de bzhin gshegs pa la ni zhe sdang ba dang | phrag dog dang | ser sna’i thugs mi mnga’ bas na gsang ba yod do zhes byar mi rung ngo ||*.

⁵⁴ For some sources on “eight worldly concerns,” see Edgerton 1953 (s.v. *lokadharma*). To this one may add Nāgārjuna, *Suḥrlekha* 29 (Tenzin 2002: 166; Jamspal et al. 1978/83: 80): *’jig rten mkhyen pa rnyed dang mi rnyed dang || bde dang mi bde snyan dang mi snyan dang || bstod smad ces bgyi ’jig rten chos brgyad po || bdag gi yid yul min par mgo snyoms mdzod ||*. For an explanation, see Mahāmāti, *Vyaktapadāṭīkā* (Tenzin 2002: 236.7–237.5).

The underlying reason why Vararuci, for instance, recommends not disclosing one's economic woes, family problems such as having an unfaithful wife at home, and such personal experiences as being an object of deceit or ridicule,⁵⁵ would appear to be concern for the loss of reputation. The *Prajñādaṇḍa* suggests that one should conceal one's beliefs and fantasies, such things as seem impossible or incredible to others—for example, delusional experiences, as a peacock springing out of a wall painting and starting to eat jewels—even though one may not be able to deny to oneself that such an experience occurred.⁵⁶ The reasons for keeping such experiences secret seems obvious. It would undermine one's reputation of sanity and credibility.

(b) Beside unwholesome emotions that cause human beings to keep things secret, feelings of shame, embarrassment, and guilt associated with stigma and social or religious taboos also drive one to keep matters private, confidential, or secret. According to what I wish to call “Buddhist evolutionology,” suggested by Abhidharmic sources,⁵⁷ the psychology of secrecy is actually

⁵⁵ Vararuci, *Gāthāśataka* 75 (Hahn 2012: 428): *nor phyir yid ni gdungs pa dang || khyim na chung ma log par spyod || bslus dang brnyas pa byas pa rnams || blo dang ldan pas smra mi bya ||; arthanāsaṃ manastāpam grhe duścaritāni ca | vañcanam cāpamānaṃ ca matimān na prakāśayet ||.*

⁵⁶ Nāgārjuna, *Prajñādaṇḍa* (1) 16 (Hahn 2009: 17–19): *gal te mngon sum gyur kyang ni || mi srid dngos po smra mi bya || ri mo la gnas rma bya yis || ji lta nor bu za bar byed ||.* The Sanskrit parallel for the *pādas* ab have been traced: *asaṃbhāvyaṃ na vaktavyaṃ pratyakṣam api drśyate |.*

⁵⁷ Śamathadeva, *Abhidharmakośaṭīkopāyikā* (P, mNgon pa'i bstan bcos, vol. Tu, fols. 241b4–242a5; D, mNgon pa, vol. Ju, fol. 194a6–b5): *gang yang sems can de dag ma rmos ma btab pa'i 'bras sā lu zas su za ba dang | yongs su spyod pa na dbang po tha dad pa dag byung bar gyur te | gcig la ni pho'i dbang po | gcig la ni mo'i dbang po | de nas¹ pho dang mo'i dbang po dang ldan pa'i sems can de dag phan tshun du mig gis mig la btsugs te lta bar byed do || ji lta ji lta mig gis mig la btsugs te lta ba de lta de lta kun du chags so || ji lta ji lta chags pa de lta de lta sred do || ji lta ji lta sred pa de de lta log bar zhugs so || sems can de dag log par zhugs pa sems can gzhan gyis mthong nas rdul dag gtor bar byed | gseg ma dang gyo mo dag 'thor zhing 'di skad du | kye sems can grong pa bya ba ma yin pa byed pa | sems can grong pa bya ba ma yin pa*

rooted in the psychology of privacy, the need for privacy is rooted in the psychology of guilt and shame, and the psychology of guilt and shame is rooted in gender and sexuality, which is not viewed as serving the purposes of procreation but rather connected with Buddhist alimentology. For better or worse (from the perspective of Buddhist soteriology), the evolution or differentiation of gender has been directly attributed to the kinds of nutrition that sentient beings take to sustain themselves. Gender-specific physical features evolved as a direct consequence of shifting from

*byed pa da ltar sems can sun 'byin pa byed dam | zhes smra bar byed do || 'di lta ste | da ltar mi'² nang nas bag ma gtong pa na phye ma dag 'thor bar byed | spos dang | phreng ba dang | gos dag kyang 'thor zhing bu mo bde bar gyur cig | bu mo bde bar³ gyur cig ces smra ba lta bu ste | de bzhin du sems can de dag log par zhugs pa sems can gzhan gyis mthong nas rdul dag 'thor bar byed cing gyo mo dang gseg ma dag kyang 'thor zhing 'di skad du | kye sems can grong pa bya ba ma yin par byed pa | grong pa bya ba ma yin pa byed pa da ltar sems can dag sun 'byin par byed dam zhes smra bar byed do || gnas 'jog gang sngon chos ma yin par 'dod pa de ni da ltar chos su mngon par 'dod la | gang sngon 'dul ba ma yin pa de ni da ltar 'dul bar mngon par 'dod cing | gang sngon smad pa gang yin pa de ni da ltar rjes su bsngags te | lan gcig dang lan gnyis dang gsum dang bdun gyi bar du sten⁴ bar byed do || gang yang sems can 'di dag chos ma yin pa'i shin tu sdig⁵ pa can gyi brtul⁶ zhugs len cing gnas pa na 'di skad du bdag cag khyim dag byas la der bya ba ma yin pa bya'o zhes khyim bya ba'i 'du shes skyes so || khyim gyi rtsom (rtsom] D, tsom P) pa 'jig rten du byung ba'i dang po ni de yin no || (1 nas] P, dag D; 2 mi'i] D, ma'i P; 3 bar] D, par P; 4 sten] D, bsten P; 5 sdig] D, sdigs P; 6 brtul] D, brdul P); Daśabalaśrīmitra, *Saṃskṛtāsaṃskṛtaviniścaya* (P, Ngo mtshar, vol. Nyo, fol. 28a4–7; D, dBu ma, vol. Ha, fol. 128a1–3): sā¹ lu de las zos pas skyes pa dang bud med tha dad du byed pa'i rtags kyi gzhi byung bar gyur to² || de'i tshe bud med kyi rtags byung ba mthong bas skye bo gzhan rnam smod³ par gyur to || de'i tshe ngo tsha dang bcas pa'i skyes pa dang bud med rnam rtags⁴ sgrib pa'i phyir yid bzhin gyi na bza' rnam byung ngo || de nas skyes pa bud med rnam phan tshun rnam mthong bas gnyis sprod⁵ kyi chags pa skyes so || gzhan de rnam la shin tu chags pas 'khrig pa bsten par⁶ byas so || 'khrig pa bsten pa'i mi de dag la gzhan rnam shin tu ches smod par byed do || de nas 'khrig pa'i tha snyad rab tu rgyas pas 'khrig pa'i don du sgrib pa'i phyir khang pa byas so || (1 sā] D, sa P; 2 gyur to] D, 'gyur ro P; 3 smod] D, rmod P; 4 rtags] D, rtag P; 5 sprod] D, spros P; 6 bsten par] D, sten pa P); *mChims chen* (p. 332.12–19).*

a much finer, lighter, and subtler form of nutriment to a grosser, heavier, and coarser one. The intake of nutriment is believed to have a direct consequence on the mode of excretion. Genitals, which came to be called the “private parts” or “secret parts,” are said to have evolved to function as apertures of excretion. The evolution of sexual organs and sexual activities may be seen as the actualization and manifestation of one’s sexual desire. One is, so to speak, born in the *kāmadhātu* to live out one’s *kāmarāga* (with all its implications). But obviously human beings in the *kāmic* sphere are not particularly proud of their *kāmic* desires and pleasures, *kāmic* organs, and *kāmic* activities, and so prefer to keep them private and secret. The Abhidharmic evolutionology, in fact, clearly tells us that a home or house was felt necessary,⁵⁸ and hence built, not primarily to protect oneself from other dangers

⁵⁸ The evolution of the construction of houses is not mentioned by Vasubandhu. See his *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* (Pradhan 1967: 187.5–9): *tatrāpi grddhāḥ sā ’py antarhitā | akṛṣṭoptaḥ śālir utpannas taṃ prabhuktāḥ | tasyedānīm audārikatvān niḥsyandanir vāhārthaṃ sattvānām mūtrapuriṣa-mārgau saha strīpuruṣendriyābhyām prādurbhūtau saṃsthānaṃ ca bhinnam | teṣām anyonyam paśyatām pūrvābhyāsavaśād ayoniśomanaskāra-grāhagrāsātām gatānām kāmarāga udīrṇo yato vipratipannāḥ | eṣa ārambhāḥ kāminām kāmabhūtagrahāveśasya |*; Tib. (P, mNgon pa’i bstan bcos, vol. Gu, fol. 186a4–7; D, mNgon pa, vol. Khu, fol. 155b4–6): *de la yang chags par gyur pa dang¹ | de yang nub nas² ma rmos³ ma btab pa’i ’bras sā lu⁴ byung bar gyur nas de’i tshe de zos pa dang⁵ de ni⁶ ches rags pa yin pa’i phyir rgyu mthun pa ’byung bar bya ba’i phyir sems can rnam kyī gcin dang phyi sa dang | pho dang mo’i dbang po dang bcas pa dang | dbyibs tha dad pa yang byung bar gyur to⁷ || de dag phan tshun mthong ba dang sngon goms pa’i dbang gis tshul bzhin ma yin pa yid la byed pa’i gdon gyis zin par⁸ gyur pa rnam ’dod pa’i ’dod chags shas cher skyes nas de nas⁹ log par zhugs¹⁰ te | ’dod pa rnam¹¹ ’dod pa’i ’byung po’i gdon gyis rlom¹² pa’i rtsom pa ni de lta bu yin¹³ no ||* (1 de la yang chags par gyur pa dang] P, de la chags pas D; 2 nub nas] P, nub par gyur pa dang D; 3 rmos] D, smos P; 4 sā lu] D, sa lu zhig P; 5 de’i tshe de zos pa dang] P, de za ba’i tshe na ni D; 6 de ni] P, de D; 7 to] P, nas D; 8 byed pa’i gdon gyis zin par] D, phyed pa chu srin ’dzin khri’i khams du P; 9 shas cher skyes nas de nas] P, skyes pa’i phyir D; 10 zhugs] D, zhags pa yin P; 11 rnam] D, rnam kyī P; 12 rlom] P, bab D; 13 de lta bu yin] D, yin P).

but to protect one's privacy, so that one's kāmīc activities can be performed and kāmīc desire be fulfilled in private, without the peering or jeering eyes of onlookers being besieged with all kinds of cognitional-emotional defilements. Thus, at least according to Abhidharmic evolutionology, the need for secrecy is rooted in the need for privacy, and the need for privacy is rooted in one's cognitional-emotional defilements, about which one is not particularly proud but rather embarrassed and ashamed of. The *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, for example, explicitly states that worldly people consider male and female genitals "secrets," to be concealed by clothing owing to their unsightliness (*mi sdug pa*).⁵⁹

(c) In addition to the feeling of shame and guilt, another important motive for keeping something secret is the fear arising out of the awareness of one's fallibility, vulnerability, and vincibility. One can presuppose here the truism that "knowledge is power" (*scientia potentia est*), and knowledge of the weaknesses and strengths of a person, institution, or a nation can be used, misused, or abused by the malevolent and maleficent actors to subvert one's security and sense of well-being. It is thus clear why some sources that we have seen above advise against revealing "top secrets" (*shin tu gsang bar 'os pa*) to anyone else. Unless a person, institution, or nation is absolutely sure of its infallibility, invincibility, and security, it is bound to have a reason to keep its secrets. The fears relating to the harm that can be caused by the disclosure of secrets are illustrated in the analogy of a venomous snake.⁶⁰ It is deemed not wise to disclose one's secrets even to friends because even they can turn into enemies, who could then reveal them to others⁶¹ or use them themselves. The factor of the fear underlying secrecy has been illustrated in the *Mahāpari-*

⁵⁹ *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (P, mDo sna tshogs, vol. Ju, fol. 71a2–3; T, Myang 'das, vol. Ka, fol. 104b2): *rigs kyi bu 'di lta ste | 'jig rten na mi dag ni pho mo'i mtshan mi sdug pa'i phyir gos kyis 'gebs pas na gsang ba zhes bya'o ||*.

⁶⁰ See above, n. 43 where *Prajñāsārika* 78 is cited.

⁶¹ Cāṅkya, *Rājanitiśāstra* (D, fol. 134a4; P, fol. 181b5–6): *gal te mdza' bo khros gyur na || gsang tshig thams cad smra bar byed ||*.

nirvāṇasūtra translated from the Chinese through comparison to a poor person encumbered with debts going into hiding from his creditor.⁶²

2.7. Secular: How Should Secrets Be Concealed/Revealed?

Concealment and revealment of a secret would be redundant if all human beings were equally omniscient or uninterested in others' affairs. The reality is that a few people generally do possess cognitive access to matters of concern, and that there are generally others interested in gaining the same access to them. (a) One may identify numerous means of concealing a secret, such as camouflaging, distortion, obscuration, or encryption, but the safest way of doing so is obviously not to reveal it to anyone in the first place, for once it is revealed, no secret can remain leakproof. A Tibetan saying also says something to the same effect, namely, that one may be skilled in concealing the secret but others may be skilled in revealing them.⁶³ Also despite the wish and effort to conceal a secret, it may be inadvertently be revealed.⁶⁴ George Orwell went a step further, stating that "if you want to keep a secret you must also hide it from yourself."⁶⁵ (b) The *Prajñādaṇḍa*, for its part, suggests that instructions should not be revealed indiscriminately.⁶⁶ The implication is that one should

⁶² *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (P, mDo sna tshogs, vol. Ju, fol. 70b7–8; T, Myang 'das, vol. Ka, fol. 104a4–5): *rigs kyi bu 'di lta ste dper na | mi dbul po zhig la bu lon mang po chags na | bu lon ded pas 'jigs te mi mthong bar bya ba'i phyir na gsang ba zhes bya'o ||*.

⁶³ Cüppers & Sørensen 1998: 271 no. 10395: *gsang ba [= bar] rang mkhas kyang shod par mi mkhas ||*. See also Padma tshe dbang, *gTam dpe'i bang mdzod* (p. 206), where it is rendered as "If one is skilled in keeping the secrets, others are skilled in divulging them."

⁶⁴ The possibility of an inadvertent disclosure of secrets has been expressed by the following Tibetan saying (Cüppers & Sørensen 1998: 271 no. 10393): *gsang 'dod zhe la yod kyang | gsang tshig kha nas shor |*.

⁶⁵ Orwell 1949: 162.

⁶⁶ Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Prajñādaṇḍa* (2) 166 (Hahn 2010: 30–31): *mi ni su la'ang ma brtags par || gdams ngag sbyin par mi bya ste || spre'u tsam gyis gnas bcas kyang || gnas med par ni byas la ltos ||*. Michael Hahn has traced

disclose secret information only after careful consideration. Even then the general idea is that revealing secrets always remains a liability for the revealer.

3. Secrecy in Śrāvakayāna

Now we shall examine the idea of secrecy in the Śrāvakayāna in the sense of the pre-/non-Mahāyāna form of Buddhism by trying to answer (1) whether there are such things as secrets in it or from its perspective, and if so (2) what would the secrets be, (3) who the possessors of secrets might be, (4) whether one should keep secrets at all, (5) from whom these secrets are concealed or to whom they are revealed, (6) why one is supposed to conceal or reveal secrets, and (7) how or by what means secrets should be concealed or revealed.

3.1. Śrāvakayāna: Whether There Are Such Things as Secrets

The question regarding whether there are such things as secrets or esoteric teachings in Buddhism at all can be discussed here briefly. Scholars have been aware of what appear to be two contradictory statements or ideas that we can find in non-/pre-Mahāyāna sources, namely, the idea that the Buddha did not conceal (or withhold) anything and that he had revealed (or laid bare) everything, and the idea that the Buddha did not reveal all that he knew, which may be seen as tantamount to stating that he did not disclose all his secrets.

On the one hand, at least three ideas already found in pre-/non-Mahāyāna sources could be (and have been) used to propose that the Buddha had no secrets to conceal and that he laid bare everything, and thus there are no such things as secrets or esoteric teachings according to early Buddhism. (a) The rejection of secrecy and endorsement of transparency in Buddhism can be said to be supported by the disapproval of the “tightfistedness of

a Sanskrit version of the verse in the *Cāṇakyanītiśāstra* and *Subhāṣitārṇava*, which reads: *upadeśo na dātavyo yādṛśe tādṛśe jane | paśya vānaramūrkhena sugrhi nirgrhikṛtaḥ ||*.

a teacher” (*ācāryamuṣṭi*: *slob dpon gyi dpe mkhyud*),⁶⁷ which is explained, for example, by the *Critical Pāli Dictionary* as “a teacher’s close-fistedness, his reluctance to impart his whole learning, skill, doctrine, to pupils, his keeping back knowledge (a precaution alien to the *Buddha* and *Bodhisatta*)—or secret, esoteric doctrine.” Noteworthy is that what is held back is explicitly regarded here as “secret” and “esoteric doctrine.” That the Buddha did not hold anything back is reiterated in several sources. The most popular of these seems to be the Pāli *Mahāparinibbānasutta* (*Dīghanikāya* 16; II,100), which has been referred to by several scholars.⁶⁸ Such an idea is not confined to Pāli sources. The *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra* is explicit in its denial of secrecy. I render the pertinent passage as follows:⁶⁹

“O Exalted One! How is [it]? Are there secrets in what has been taught by the Exalted One? Pray do not keep [any teachings] secret in the guise of ‘intentional statements’ (*ābhiprāyikaṃ vacanam*: *dgongs pa’i tshig* = *bsam pa can gyi tshig*). O Exalted One! How is [it]? Are the teachings of the Buddha akin to an

⁶⁷ For other references including the *Mahāvvyutpatti* (Sakaki 1916–1925: no. 6525; Fukuda & Ishihama 1989: no. 6501), see Edgerton 1953 (*s.v.* *ācāryamuṣṭi*). See also Trenckner et al. 1924–1992 (*s.v.* *ācariya-muṭṭhi*); Bechert et al. 1994–2014 (*s.v.* *ācārya-muṣṭi*).

⁶⁸ See, for examples, Rahula 1974: 2; Pesala 2001: 90 n. 95; Stuart-Fox & Bucknell 1983: 6; Bucknell & Stuart-Fox 1986: 29. The pertinent Pāli text of *Dīghanikāya* 16, which is parallel to the Sanskrit fragment of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, is cited in Waldschmidt 1950: Part 2, p. 196 (§. 14): *na tatth’ ānanda tathāgatassa dhammesu ācariyamuṭṭhi* |.

⁶⁹ *Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra* §. 219 (Habata 2013: 170–174): *gsol pa | bcom ldan ’das ci lags | bcom ldan ’das kyis bstan pa la gsang ba mchis sam | dgongs pa’i tshig dgongs pa’i tshig ces gsang bar mi mdzad du gsol | bcom ldan ’das ci lags ga | sangs rgyas kyis gsung mig ’phrul mkhan gyi ’khrul ’khor dang | sgyu ma mkhan gyis bgyis pa’i ’khrul ’khor gyi sgyu ma’i bud med dang ’dra lags sam | bka’ stsal pa | nga’i bstan pa la ni gsang ba med de | sangs rgyas kyis gsung ni ston gyi zla ba rgyas pa bzhin du skyon med pa dang | mtshan mas ma btab pa dang | rmongs pa med pa dang | gsang ba dang | gsang chen dang bral ba dang | gsal ba yin no | |.*

illusory woman, a magical creation, created by the magical (diagrammatic) device (*yantra*: 'khrul 'khor) of an illusionist and magician?" [The Exalted One] replied: "There are no secrets in my teachings, and the teachings of the Buddha, like a waxing moon in Autumn, are immaculate, not blemished with marks, without confusion, free from secrets and huge secrets, and are transparent (or clear)."

Another Mahāyāna scripture, the *Caturdāraśasamādhisūtra*, also makes it clear that the Buddha was totally transparent and that he disclosed everything to his disciples, so that there was not the slightest that they could receive in addition. The pertinent passage from the Tibetan translation may be rendered as follows:⁷⁰

O Monks! I have carried out my duty as a teacher for you disciples. I, without a teacher's tightfistedness [and] with total transparency (*phyi nang med par*) have finished disclosing absolutely everything. There is now not even the slightest that could be obtained in addition, that is, [the equivalent of] even a fraction of the part of the tip of a blade of grass. You should now (*da*) abide in perseverance. I have taught teachings on *nirvāṇa*; also taught the path that leads one to *nirvāṇa*; have properly generated basic wholesome virtues of (or in) sentient beings that are extremely difficult [to generate]; have finished properly bringing about the highest correct complete awakening (*anuttarasamyak-*

⁷⁰ *Caturdāraśasamādhisūtra* (B, vol. 56, pp. 473.14–474.2): *dge slong dag | ngas khyed cag nyan thos rnams la ston pa'i bya ba gang yin pa de'ang byas te ngas chos la slob dpon gyi dpe mkhyud ma byas par phyi nang med par rnam pa thams cad du thams cad bstan zin te | de las lhag par thob par bya ba ni | tha na rtswa'i rtse mo'i cha shas tsam yang med kyis da khyed cag gis nan tan la gnas par bya'o || ngas khyed cag la mya ngan las 'da' ba'i chos kyang bstan | mya ngan las 'da' bar 'gro ba'i lam yang bstan | sems can rnams kyi dge ba'i rtsa ba shin tu dka' ba dag kyang yang dag par bskyed | bla na med pa yang dag par rdzogs pa'i byang chub kyang yang dag par bsgrubs zin gyis de bzhin du thams cad rjes su yongs su zung la ci nas kyang nyams par mi 'gyur ba de ltar gyis shig |.*

sambodhi). Similarly, [you too] embrace all [sentient beings] and show [them] favor, and in that way ensure that [they] do not come to ruin.

These and similar sources state that the Buddha did not conceal anything but revealed everything. The idea that the Buddha displayed no *ācāryamuṣṭi* can be found also in other non-/pre-Mahāyāna sources transmitted in Sanskrit and Tibetan sources, for example, the Vinayavastu as translated into Tibetan. It states:⁷¹

O Ānanda! The Tathāgata does not display *ācāryamuṣṭi*, which consists in the thought that a *tathāgata* should conceal something lest other [persons] come inappropriately to know of [it].

We shall see below that the negative connotations of *ācāryamuṣṭi* are found not only in secular contexts and in the Śrāvakayāna, but also in the Bodhisattvayāna and Vajrayāna.

(b) The second argument that has been used in favor of transparency and against secrecy is the statement in the *Aṅguttaranikāya*,⁷² according to which the moon, the sun, and the *dharma-cum-vinaya* taught by the Tathāgata shine in the open and not in secret. This idea shows up, too, in the *Milindapañha*.⁷³ (c) A third idea that can be employed in support of the position that there is no such thing as a secret teaching in Buddhism is that of the Buddha's "gift of teaching" (*dharmadāna: chos kyi sbyin pa*),⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Vinayavastu* (B, vol. 2, p. 114.11–13): *kun dga' bo de bzhin gshegs pa la ni gang zhig gzhan dag gis shes na mi rung bas de bzhin gshegs pas bcab bo snyam du dgongs pa'i slob dpon gyi dpe mkhyud mi mnga'o ||*; *Vinayakṣudrakavastu* (B, vol. 11, pp. 595.20–596.2). This statement has been cited as a parallel passage to the Sanskrit fragment of the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* and translated into German in Waldschmidt 1950: Part 2, p. 197 (§. 14).

⁷² Nyanatiloka 1969: vol. 1, p. 236 (*Aṅguttaranikāya* III.132); Bodhi 2012: 361.

⁷³ Pesala 2001: 108–109.

⁷⁴ The distinction between material gifts (*āmiṣadāna: zang zing gi sbyin pa*) and the "gift of *dharma*" (*dharmadāna: chos kyi sbyin pa*) is already made in the Pāli canonical sources, such as the *Aṅguttaranikāya* (I.91) and *Itivuttaka* (98), as pointed out in Ohnuma 1998: 325 n. 5.

which can be seen as an ultimate expression of benevolence and generosity and as opposed to *ācāryamuṣṭi*, which is characterized by selfishness and jealousy. The tacit argument is that the Buddha, who selflessly practiced *dharmadāna*, could not possibly be selfish and withhold secrets. I have, however, not seen sources that use the idea of the Buddha's *dharmadāna* to argue against the existence of secrecy in Buddhism.

On the other hand, we do, however, also come across the idea that the Buddha did not reveal all that he knew, which is tantamount to stating that he did not disclose all his secrets. At least four ideas seem to be pertinent to the notion of secrecy in pre-/non-Mahāyāna sources. (a) The idea that the *Vinayapīṭaka*, and particularly *Prātimokṣasūtra*, should be revealed or disclosed only to the fully ordained and should remain concealed to others could suggest that there is, after all, such a thing as secret teaching, an argument put forward by the king in the *Milindapañha* supporting a contradiction between the proposed transparency and secrecy.⁷⁵ Significant for the present discussion is that Nāgasena does not attempt to resolve the contradiction by explaining away Vinaya

⁷⁵ Pesala 2001: 108–109. In a note to the English translation of the *Milindapañha* (Rhys Davids 1890: 264 n. 2), Thomas William Rhys Davids points out that the notion that the *Prātimokṣasūtra* should be recited in the presence of the laity can be found in the Vinaya (*Mahāvagga* II, 16, 8) but that he had not found any canonical reference to the *Prātimokṣasūtra* or Vinaya (in general) having to be kept secret. The thrust of the *Milindapañha*, however, seems to be that the Prātimokṣa or Vinaya practices or activities are confined to the ordained community and are thus not open to public, inasmuch as these are irrelevant to the community of the laity. According to the Tibetan Vinaya commentaries such as the *mTsho ṭik*, the issue of Vinaya secrecy versus unlimited or unrestricted transparency seems to be related to the challenges that the ordained community of monks and nuns faced in dealing with the infiltration of anti-Buddhist persons seeking to penetrate the *saṃgha*, acquire insider information, and undermine it. Granting access to Vinaya teachings and practices (i.e., of the *gzhi gsum cho ga*) to those who have no Vinaya rights and responsibilities would be tantamount to supporting fraudulent persons or actions (*steyasaṃvāsika: rku thabs su gnas pa*).

secrecy but rather by justifying its necessity. Regardless of how satisfactory his explanations may be, he provides three reasons, whose cogency one may debate. First it is the tradition of the *tathāgatas* to recite the *Prātimokṣasūtra* in the presence of the fully ordained, just as warrior traditions are passed down to only warriors. Here we may think of the privacy of the family tradition. The presupposition here seems to be the legitimacy of a family's private circumstances (i.e., privacy), especially if it does not cause anyone harm. The second and third reasons are said to be regard for the Vinaya and the fully ordained. The explanation of the two, however, reveals that the underlying reasons are the sanctity, venerability, profundity, and preciousness of the Vinaya teachings, and the possibility of misuse by unwise persons who may not see their true value.

(b) A more conspicuous idea that might suggest that there is such a thing as secret teaching is the content of the *Sīsapāvanasutta* (**Śiṃśapāvanasūtra*),⁷⁶ which has been referred to by several modern scholars.⁷⁷ According to this Sūtric scripture, the knowledge that the Buddha revealed is comparable to a number of a few *śiṃśapā* leaves in his hand, whereas the knowledge that he did not reveal can be compared to the numerous numbers of *śiṃśapā* leaves in a *śiṃśapā* forest.

(c) The Buddha's initial reluctance to teach and his preference to withdraw himself from the world and remain silent in the forest, which can be found in both pre-/non-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna sources, could in theory be used to insinuate that the Buddha did display *ācāryamuṣṭi* and that he did not wish to share what he had discovered. Sources such as the *Milindapañha* do thematize the Buddha's initial reluctance to teach. But neither the questions

⁷⁶ For an English translation of the *Sīsapāvanasutta* of the *Sīsapāvanavagga* of the *Samyuttanikāya* (56.31), see Bodhi 2000: 1857–1858.

⁷⁷ See, for examples, Rahula 1974: 12; Bucknell & Stuart-Fox 1986: 29, 204 n. 16.

raised by Milinda⁷⁸ nor Nāgasena's responses harbor such an insinuation.⁷⁹

(d) The Buddha's categorical and consistent refusal to answer ten (according to Pāli sources)⁸⁰ or fourteen (according to Sanskrit ones)⁸¹ stereotypical and purely speculative philosophical

⁷⁸ Pesala 2001: 126 "You say that for four aeons (*asaṅkheyya*) and 100,000 world-cycles (*kappa*) the Bodhisatta practised the perfections in order to gain omniscience, yet after he had gained omniscience his mind inclined to not teaching the Dhamma. Like an archer who had practised for many days might hesitate when the day for battle had come, even so did the Blessed One hesitate to teach the Dhamma. Was it then because of fear, or lack of clarity, or weakness, or because he was not omniscient that he hesitated?"

⁷⁹ Pesala 2001: 125–126. Some of the reasons given here by Nāgasena are the profundity of the teachings, suitability or capability of the sentient beings, and the rarity and preciousness of not giving away unsolicited, and thereby devaluing, the precious teaching.

⁸⁰ See Nicholson 2012: 533 n. 1, where several Pāli sources for the ten questions have been provided (i.e., *Avyākatasaṃyutta* of *Samyuttanikāya* IV. 374–403; *Cūlamāluṅkyaputtasutta* of *Majjhimanikāya* I. 426–432; *Jacchandavagga* 4 of *Udāna* 66–69; *Aggivaṇṇagottasutta* of *Majjhimanikāya* I. 483–489; *Paṭṭhapādasutta* of *Dīghanikāya* I. 187–195; *Vacchagottasaṃyutta* of *Samyuttanikāya* III. 257ff.; *Jāliyasutta* of *Dīghanikāya* I. 159–160; *Nidānasaṃyutta* of *Samyuttanikāya* II. 60–62). Occasionally, the *Sabbāsavasutta* of the *Majjhimanikāya*, too, is said to contain sixteen such questions.

⁸¹ The collective term for the set of fourteen stereotypical and purely speculative philosophical questions in the sources of Northern Buddhism is *caturdaśāvyaṅkṛtavastu* (*lung du ma bstan pa'i dngos po bcu bzhi po / lung du ma bstan pa'i dngos po bcu bzhi / lung du ma bstan pa'i chos bcu bzhi*). Two of the sources for this term are the *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* and *Prasannapadā*. The list is found, for example, in *Suhrillekha* 108 (Tenzin 2002: 192; cf. Jamspal et al. 1978/1983: 107): *lung ma bstan pa bcu bzhi 'jig rten na || nyi ma'i gnyen gyis rab gsungs gang dag lags || de dag rnams la bsam par mi bgyi ste || de yis blo ni zhi bar bgyid ma lags ||*; Mahāmati, *Vyaktapadāṭīkā* (Tenzin 2002: 301.13–303.3). See also Lindtner 1997: 303 n. 108. The list is recorded in the *Dharmasaṃgraha*, no. 137 (Müller & Wenzel 1885: 32–33, cf. 67; Zangmo & Chime 1993: 90, and in the

questions, too, seems to have caused some to suspect that the Buddha withheld some information or knowledge that could be regarded as secrets. For example, in the *Milindapañha*, King Milinda sees a contradiction between the statement that the Buddha displays no *ācāryamuṣṭi* and the statement that the Buddha refused to answer Māluṅkyaputta's questions. The king asks Nāgasena whether the reason for the Buddha's refusal to answer lies in his ignorance or he was concealing something.⁸² Nāgasena explains that it is neither of the two cases, and refers to the four types of questions, or rather the four ways of answering a question, namely, by (a) giving a straightforward answer, (b) differentiating nuanced cases, (c) posing a counter question, and (d) suspending the question and not giving an answer at all,⁸³ an idea found also in Sanskrit sources.⁸⁴ Importantly for us, Nāgasena takes the Buddha's lack of *ācāryamuṣṭi* for granted.

Mahāvvyutpatti (Sakaki 1916–25: nos. 4652–4666; Fukuda & Ishihama 1989: nos. 4638–4651).

⁸² Pesala 2001: 90: “The Blessed One said to Ānanda, ‘In respect of the Dhamma the Tathāgata does not have the closed fist of a teacher who holds something back.’ Yet when he was questioned by Māluṅkyaputta he made no answer. Was it because of ignorance that he did not reply or did he wish to conceal something?”

⁸³ Pesala 2001: 90–91.

⁸⁴ *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* 10.119 (Nanjio 1923: 280; Negi 1993–2005: s.v. *mu stegs byed pa'i smra ba*): *caturvidham vyākaraṇam ekāṃsapariṣṭhanam | vibhajyasthāpanīyaṃ ca tīrthavādaniṣṭhānaṃ ||; lung bstan pa ni rnam bzhi ste || mgo gcig dang ni dri ba dang || rnam par dbye dang gzhag pa rnams || mu stegs byed kyi smra bzlog pa'o ||; Vasubandhu, Abhidharmakośa 5.22a–c (Gokhale 1946: 91; Negi 1993–2005: s.v. *gzhag par lung bstan pa*): *ekāṃsato vyākaraṇam vibhajya pariṣṭhānaṃ ca |sthāpyaṃ ca ... ||; mgo gcig dang ni rnam phyed dang || dri dang gzhag par lung bstan pa ||; Vasubandhu, Abhidharmakośabhāṣya (Negi 1993–2005: s.v. *dris nas lung bstan par bya ba*): *caturvidho hi praśnaḥ—ekāṃsavvyākaraṇīyaḥ, vibhajyavyākaraṇīyaḥ, pariṣṭhānaḥ vyākaraṇīyaḥ sthāpanīyaś ca; 'dri ba ni rnam pa bzhi ste | mgo gcig tu lung bstan par bya ba dang | rnam par phyed nas lung bstan par bya ba dang | dris nas lung bstan par bya ba dang | gzhag par bya ba'o ||; Mahāvvyutpatti (Sakaki 1916–1925: nos. 1657–1661; Fukuda & Ishihama***

The above two kinds of seemingly contradictory statements—namely, that the Buddha did not *conceal* anything and that he did not *reveal* everything—could be reconciled from the perspectives of both the pre-/non-Mahāyāna and Mahāyāna forms of Buddhism. The general pre-/non-Mahāyāna approach to the reconciliation seems to be to retain the position of transparency and explain away the assertion of secrecy, although, as I pointed out above, Nāgasena does not really do so. The *Sīsapāvanasutta* makes it clear that the Buddha *revealed* those teachings that are soteriologically relevant but *concealed* (or did not disclose) those that are soteriologically irrelevant to the Śrāvaka soteriology. One cannot deny that one major point that comes through in the *Sīsapāvanasutta* is that the greater part of the Buddha's knowledge lies concealed to *śrāvakas*. The negative evaluation of *ācāryamuṣṭi* neither seems to necessarily imply a total denial of the existence of secrecy in Buddhism, nor does it seem to suggest that secrecy is necessarily condemnable from a Buddhist standpoint.

With regard to the question whether there are at all such things as secrets in Buddhism, it may be stated that the existence of the secrecy or transparency in various strands or forms of Buddhism does not seem to be an issue at all. The issue, rather, is their degree. The earlier the form of Buddhism, the greater the degree of transparency and the lesser the degree of secrecy, while the later the form of Buddhism, the greater the degree of secrecy and the lesser the degree of transparency. Secrecy is generally evaluated negatively and transparency more positively in earlier forms of Buddhism. This tendency of mistrust towards secrecy or tight-fistedness when it comes to the teaching in Buddhism in general, and particularly in the Śrāvakayāna, is perhaps understandable in the light of the contrast that the early Buddhists saw between the Buddhist emphasis on the transparency of the Buddha's teachings and the Brahmanical emphasis on Vedic secrecy.

1989: nos. 1663–1667); *Madhyavyutpatti*, nos. 257–260 (Ishikawa 1990: 86–87).

Such a contrast has been pointed out, for example, by Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin:⁸⁵

The Vedic [teachings] of the heretical teachers
Are expounded only in isolated places.
You, [however,] teach the *dharmā*
By proclaiming [it] with a lion's roar.

Similarly, he states:⁸⁶

Those who desire [to teach Vedic] teachings
Claim that knowledge should not be given to the
śūdras.
You, [however], out of compassion,
Teach even the *caṇḍālas*.

Indeed the Buddha is said to be generous with his teachings. The positive evaluation of transparency in Buddhism may become clearer if we take a look at the idea of a *buddha's* three or four “points that do not need to be safeguarded” (*araksya: bsrung ba med pa*),⁸⁷ which adequately illustrates the point that a *buddha* does not possess any sense of bashfulness or inhibition (*lajjā: 'dzem pa*) or insecurity in front of other persons, inasmuch as he “has not the slightest fault (or deficiency) to be concealed” (*bcab par bya*

⁸⁵ Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin, *Viśeṣastava* 23 (Schneider 1993: 58): *mu stegs can gyi rig byed tshig || dben pa khor nar smra bar bgyid || khyod kyis bsgrags nas seng ge yi || sgra yis chos dag ston par mdzad ||*; Prajñāvarman, *Viśeṣastavaṭikā* (Schneider 1993: 132).

⁸⁶ Udbhaṭasiddhasvāmin, *Viśeṣastava* 59 (Schneider 1993: 68): *chos 'dod pa dag dmangs rigs la || blo gros sbyin par bya min zer || khyod ni gdol pa rnam la yang || thugs rjes dam chos ston par mdzad ||*; Prajñāvarman, *Viśeṣastavaṭikā* (Schneider 1993: 242–244).

⁸⁷ Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. *bsrung ba med pa*, *bsrung ba med pa gsum*, *bsrung ba med pa bzhi*); Tshig mdzod chen mo (s.v. *bsrung ba med pa gsum*).

rgyu'i skyon kyi rnam pa phra mo yang mi mnga' ba).⁸⁸ Such a concept can already be found in Pāli sources.⁸⁹

3.2. Śrāvakayāna: What Are the Secrets?

While discussing the types of secrets according to the Śrāvakayāna, I will assume that the Śrāvakayāna sources presuppose notions of secrets such as those discussed above in the secular context. In fact, ideas of most types of secrets found in the narrative parts of the Jātaka and Vinaya literature may pertain to those kinds of secrets, which are nothing specifically Buddhist.⁹⁰ In this context, therefore, I wish to consider only those secrets that are of significance and relevance to the Buddhist ethical-ascetical discipline and rules.

Secrets in the Śrāvakayāna may be subsumed under three types, namely, (a) those that are regarded as positive in terms of Buddhist ethical-ascetical (and also of societal) norms, (b) those that are regarded as negative in terms of these norms, and (c) those that are regarded as neutral in terms of these norms but are nonetheless very personal. (a) As an example of the first type of secret, it would suffice to mention the secret involving *ācāryamuṣṭi*, the content of which would invariably be some form of “trade secret” that one is likely to cherish and protect. (b) The second type of secret would be primarily some ethical-ascetical transgressions or offences about which one would normally feel

⁸⁸ Mi pham, *mKhas 'jug* (p. 206.1–2): *sde tshan bcu drug pa bsrung ba med pa zhes | sku la bsrung ba med pa sogs gsum ni | sku gsung thugs la bcab par bya rgyu'i skyon kyi rnam pa phra mo yang mi mnga' bas gzhan la 'dzem pa'am bsrung ba ci yang med pa'o | |*.

⁸⁹ See Trenckner et al. 1924–1992 (s.v. *a-rakkheyya*), where the term is translated as “that needs not to be guarded (hidden, kept in secret).”

⁹⁰ It is certainly not the case that Pāli sources do not allude to the idea of “secrecy” and “mystery.” For instance, the Pāli word *antara* is also said to mean “secret, mystery”: Trenckner et al. 1924–1992 (s.v. *antara*); *ibid.* (s.v. *ekamante*) “in a secluded place, in secret”; *ibid.* (s.v. *ekanta*) “a lonely, secret place”; *ibid.* (s.v. *anu-raho*) „in secret, privately.”

guilty and ashamed.⁹¹ Secrets belonging to this category would thus include, for examples, one's reprehensible deeds (*ātmano 'vadyam: bdag gi kha na ma tho ba*), one's unwholesome karmic debts (*pāpa: sdig pa*), one's flaws (*skyon cha*), one's mistakes (*nor 'khrul*), one's illnesses (*nad gzhi*), and so forth. In the case of a cardinal offence (*pārājika: phas pham pa* or *mūlāpatti: rtsa ba'i ltung ba*) according to the Vinaya, the thought of concealing the offence has been considered so important that a *pārājika* offence is classified under two categories, namely, "a *pārājika* offence that is characterized by the thought of concealing [it]" (*praticchādanapārājayika: 'chab pa'i pham par 'gyur ba*)⁹² and one which is not. Tibetan sources call these, respectively, "*pārājikas* with *praticchādana*" (*pham pa 'chab bcas*)⁹³ and "*pārājikas* without *praticchādana*" (*pham pa 'chab med*),⁹⁴ or, "*mūlāpattis* with *praticchādana*" (*rtsa ltung 'chab bcas*)⁹⁵ and "*mūlāpattis* without *praticchādana*" (*rtsa ltung 'chab med*).⁹⁶ Of the ninety venial transgressions (*prāyaścittika/pātayantika/pāyantika: ltung byed / ltung ba*) for a *bhikṣu*, the fiftieth according to the *Vinayavibhaṅga* is the "transgression of concealing baseness (i.e., others' transgressions)" (*duṣṭhulapratichādane prāyaścittikam: gnas ngan len*

⁹¹ *Paṭicchannasutta* (as paraphrased in Malalasekera 1937–1938: vol. 2, p. 114): "Three things which are practised in secret: the ways of women, the chants of brahmins, the views of perverse men; and three others which are there for all to see: the sun, the moon, and the *dhammavinaya* of a Tathāgata."

⁹² Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. '*chab pa*).

⁹³ Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 192.8–9); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 108.13).

⁹⁴ Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 196.21); mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (p. 254.4). Dharmasrī also uses the term *rtsa ba 'chab bcas* (*ibid.* p. 200.6).

⁹⁵ Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 191.14); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 106.18).

⁹⁶ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (p. 254.3); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 112.8).

'*chab pa'i ltung byed* = '*chab pa'i ltung ba*).⁹⁷ According to the *Bhikṣuṇīvinayavibhaṅga* of the Sarvāstivāda school, deliberately concealing the *pārājika* offence of a fellow *bhikṣuṇī* gives rise to a *pārājika* offence of one's own, namely, the seventh of the eight cardinal transgressions (*pārājika: phas pham par gyur pa*) of a *bhikṣuṇī*.⁹⁸

(c) Very personal and private matters of an individual, which may not necessarily be evaluated as reprehensible from the point of view of ethical-ascetical discipline, may be called a neutral secret, the disclosure of which would nonetheless cause one shame and embarrassment. Perhaps the very role of a “secret revealer” (*raho'nuśāsaka: gsang ste ston pa*)—one of the members of the ordaining committee and one of the five types of instructors according to some Vinaya traditions—would help us understand the idea of personal and private matters as secrets according to the Śrāvakayāna. While the actual purpose of a “secret revealer” is to examine or interrogate a candidate for ordination and find out if he or she faces obstacles/hindrances (*āntarāyika: bar chad*), it

⁹⁷ Concealing the baseness (i.e., transgression) of fellow *bhikṣus* is considered a *pāyantika* (*ltung byed*) offence according to the Mūlasarvāstivādins, Mahāsaṃghika-Lokottaravādins, Sarvāstivādins, and Theravādins, for which see Prebish 2002: 143, 83, 86. See also mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 628.7–629.7); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (pp. 140.20–141.3); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 75.9–13); *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. '*chab pa'i ltung ba*): *gsang sems kyis kun nas bslangs pa'i lus ngag gi rig byed dang rig byed min pa'i gzugs can ci rigs pa'o* ||. If a *bhikṣu* conceals a *pārājika* or *saṃghāvāśeṣa* offence of another *bhikṣu*, he incurs a *pāyantika* offence. If he conceals offences other than these two, he incurs a *duṣkṛta* (*nyes byas*) offence.

⁹⁸ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 702.21–703.8); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 156.14); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 85.7). See also Hirakawa 1999: 121–125. Except for differences in order and position, the *avadyapratichādika*, which comprise the eight cardinal offences called the eight *gurudharmas*, can be found in Mahāsaṃghika, Sarvāstivāda, Mūlasarvāstivāda (of both Chinese and Tibetan traditions), Dharmaguptaka, Mahīśāsaka, and Theravāda/Pāli Vinaya sources (Hirakawa 1999: 101 n. 1).

would involve asking questions that are deeply personal, so that it would be unethical to pose such questions before other committee members or in public. Hence, the interrogation would be carried out only privately by a *raho'nuśāsaka* appointed by the committee. Such a procedure seems to be intended to protect and respect the privacy or personal secrets of a candidate.

3.3. Śrāvakayāna: Who Are the Possessors of Secrets?

The question regarding who the possessors of secrets might be in the Śrāvakayāna context will have to be answered according to the three types of secrets described in the preceding paragraphs, namely, those that are characterized by ethical-ascetical positivity, negativity, and neutrality. (a) The possessor of positive secrets as exemplified by “trade secrets,” as in the case of the *ācāryamuṣṭi*, may be the experts (particularly in this context) of Śrāvakayāna soteriology, but may also be those who hold the keys to the attainment of mundane but paranormal powers such as clairvoyance and clairaudience and other magical and miraculous powers, which have been taken for granted even by the Śrāvakayāna sources. (b) As in the secular contexts, Pāli sources in general presuppose the existence of secret agents, spies, and thieves as possessors of secrets.⁹⁹ Specifically, as examples of secrets in the Śrāvakayāna contexts characterized by ethical-ascetical unwholesomeness, one may mention members of the ordained community (*saṃgha: dge 'dun*) consisting of monks and nuns who were the main addressees of the Buddha's teachings (naturally from a Śrāvakayāna perspective), along with members of the Buddhist laity, who have transgressed their ethical-ascetical precepts. (c) Even from a Śrāvakayāna perspective, it would be perhaps reasonable to assume that all fallible persons (who are not exhibitionists) or institutions possessing a sense of shame are

⁹⁹ Trenckner et al. 1924–1992 (*s.vv. ocaraka & avacaraka*); cf. Edgerton 1953 (*s.v. avacaraka*), rendered in the *Mahāvīyutpatti* (Sakaki 1916–1925: no. 3807; Fukuda & Ishihama 1989: no. 3803) as *bya ma rta* (“neither bird nor horse”).

potential possessors of secrets, even when these are ethically-ascetically neutral and thus harmless.

3.4. Śrāvakayāna: Whether Secrets Should Be Concealed or Revealed

In general, even in Pāli sources, one does find the idea that “the wise man should keep (the secret) to himself until his undertaking is accomplished,”¹⁰⁰ an idea that, while not specifically Buddhist, can certainly be considered endorsable also in the Buddhist context. The *Sakhāsutta*,¹⁰¹ again in general, also prescribes that one’s own secrets should be revealed and others’ secrets should be concealed. The presupposed reasons for revealing one’s own (obviously negative) secrets and concealing others’ secrets seem to be the positive value attributed to reasonability, reliability, and solidarity.

In the specific Śrāvakayāna context, the issue as to whether secrets should be kept or disclosed may be best discussed in view of the three types of secrets discussed above. (a) If the content of the secret in question is deemed positive and worth safeguarding for example, a kind of “trade secret,” as implied by the idea of *ācāryamuṣṭi*—it should not be concealed. As is usually the case in Buddhism with regard to any action, however, whether or not one should conceal or reveal a secret is determined by the intention or motivation. According to the Vinaya rules, one would commit an offence if one were to withhold some “Buddhist trade secrets” out of stinginess with regard to Buddhist teachings (*dharmamātsarya/dhammamacchariya: chos la ser sna*), or by trading Buddhist

¹⁰⁰ Trenckner et al. 1924–1992 (*s.v. a-nipphāda*).

¹⁰¹ *Sakhāsutta* (as paraphrased in Malalasekera 1938: 972): “Seven qualities which make a man a desirable friend: he gives what is hard to give, does what is hard to do, bears what is hard to bear, confesses his own secrets, keeps others’ secrets, does not forsake one in time of need, and does not despise one in time of one’s ruin.”

teachings (*dharmapaṇa, dharmapaṇana: chos 'tshong ba*).¹⁰² Nonetheless there are a number of prohibitive rules or transgressions associated with giving teachings, such as one of the ninety venial transgressions (*prāyaścittika/pātayantika: ltung byed*) of a *bhikṣu*, namely, “transgression pertinent to teaching women” (*bud med la chos bstan pa'i ltung byed*).¹⁰³ The context seems to make clear that this and similar rules concern mainly precluding any doubt about the activity and ethical-ascetical integrity of a *bhikṣu* who teaches women by ensuring that there is another man who is compos mentis (*vijñāpuruṣa: mi brda 'phrad pa = rig pa'i skyes pa*) also present. It also needs to be borne in mind that a *bhikṣu* or *bhikṣuṇī* is prohibited to disclose the *Prātimokṣasūtra* or *Prātimokṣa* rules to the laity.¹⁰⁴

(b) If the content of the secret in question is deemed negative or unwholesome, for example, an ethical-ascetical offence committed by a fully ordained monk or nun, one is supposed to reveal or confess it. This, however, seems to require some qualification in the specific Vinaya context because the revelation of one's transgression to laity and non-Buddhists who are not particularly sympathetic towards Buddhists and Buddhist teachings would be problematic, as would the concealment of the transgressions of one's friends. (c) Secrets consisting in personal and private matters of other people characterized by ethical-ascetical neutrality should not be divulged, inasmuch as doing so would be an indiscretion and would cause one shame and embarrassment.

Transparency seems to be clearly evaluated positively as a mark of honesty and sincerity, whereas exhibitionism or undue publicity would have been regarded as shameless and thus contrary to the ascetical code of modesty. Whispering behind people's backs is also prohibited, for it contradicts the principle of

¹⁰² mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (p. 731.6–14); Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. *chos 'tshong ba*); *Mahāvvyutpatti* (Sakaki 1916–1925: no. 9430; Fukuda & Ishihama 1989: no. 9363), see Edgerton 1953 (s.v. *paṇana*).

¹⁰³ Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 116.18–21).

¹⁰⁴ Hirakawa 1999: 230.

transparency.¹⁰⁵ Eavesdropping is also considered a kind of offence.¹⁰⁶ Concealing other people's personal belongings or causing them to be concealed is also an offence.¹⁰⁷ Trading secrets is also impermissible; the prohibition of trading with or selling the Dharma (*chos 'tshong ba*) having been specifically prohibited for *bhikṣuṅīs*.¹⁰⁸

3.5. Śrāvakayāna: From Whom Should Secrets Be Concealed? To Whom Should Secrets Be Revealed?

Regardless of the kind of secrets presupposed in the Śrāvakayāna context, it seems to be clear that one is supposed to neither categorically reveal secrets to all nor conceal them from all. From whom a secret should be concealed or to whom it should be revealed would depend not only on the type of secret in question but also on the intention or motivation, the occasion, and the implications of revealing or concealing such a secret. Concealing “trade secrets” pertaining to Śrāvakayāna soteriology or non-soteriology from worthy recipients and concealing one's ethical-ascetical offences from persons and institutions of high ethical-ascetical integrity are considered ethically and ascetically reproachable and illicit. This, however, need not imply that inappropriate disclosure of trade secrets to the wrong recipients or confiding and confessing one's offences to the wrong person or institution would be shrugged off.

Even by Śrāvakayāna standards, and even with regard to secrets to which a positive value has been attached, one should not be totally transparent and reveal secrets to one and all indiscriminately and under all circumstances. We have seen

¹⁰⁵ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho tīk* (pp. 736.18–737.6).

¹⁰⁶ Prebish 2002: 88–89.

¹⁰⁷ Concealment (*gopana: sbed pa*) of others' personal belongings is listed as a *pāyantika* (*ltung byed*) offence according to the Mūlasarvāstivādins, Mahāsaṃghika-Lokottaravādins, Sarvāstivādins, and Theravādins, concerning which see Prebish 2002: 143, 86–87. See also Dharmasīrī's *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 144.8–11).

¹⁰⁸ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho tīk* (p. 731.6–14).

above the idea that the *Vinayaṭīka*, and particularly the *Prātimokṣasūtra*, should be revealed or disclosed only to the fully ordained, and should remain concealed from the laity. Should one recite the *Prātimokṣasūtra* to an unordained person, one would be committing a *prāyaścittika* (or *pātayantika/pāyantika/pācattika*) offence.¹⁰⁹ Similarly, a *bhikṣu* is not permitted to teach women in the absence of a man who is *compos mentis* (*vijñāpuruṣa: mi brda 'phrad pa = rig pa'i skyes pa*),¹¹⁰ that is, in the absence of a “disciplinary colleague” (*khriṃs grogs*), and if he does so, he would be committing a *prāyaścittika* offence.¹¹¹ Despite the

¹⁰⁹ That divulgence of Buddhist teachings amounts to a *prāyaścittika* offence for a *bhikṣu* is true for Mūlasarvāstivādins, Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravādins, Sarvāstivādins, and Theravādins, concerning which see Prebish 2002: 142, 74–75. See also mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 542.22–544.25); Dharmaśrī's *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 130.19–21); Mi pham, *Nges legs them skas* (p. 537.13–16); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug sngogs* (pp. 69.20–70.1). Dharmaśrī's qualifies the verb “recite” (*'don pa*) with an adverbial phrase meaning “impetuously” (*rgod bag gis*). As for the term *rgod bag*, see the *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *rgod bag*), which provides two meanings: (a) *yon tan med cing sems dpangs mtho ba* and (b) *sems rnam par ma zhi ba*.

¹¹⁰ On the basis of its usage in the Vinaya sources, it appears that a *vijñāpuruṣa* is “a man who is *compos mentis*,” that is, a man who is cognitively sound enough to know what is going on and hence be present to witness, for example, a monk giving teachings to a group of women. Or, as glossed by mTsho sna ba in his *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 541.6, 542.6) and Mi pham in his *Nges legs them skas* (p. 537.12–13), a *vijñāpuruṣa* should be a “disciplinary colleague” (*khriṃs grogs*). While it could, in other contexts, mean “wise man”—and thus rendered into Tibetan in other contexts, such as the *Saddharmapuṇḍarikasūtra*, as *skyes bu mkhas pa* (Ejima 1985: 922–923; Negi 1993–2005: s.v. *skyes bu mkhas pa*)—in the pertinent context of the Vinaya offences, understanding *vijñāpuruṣa* as a “wise man” (as in Prebish 2002: 74–75) is not quite correct.

¹¹¹ That a *bhikṣu* giving women in the absence of a “disciplinary colleague” (*khriṃs grogs*) Buddhist teachings would incur a *prāyaścittika* offence can be found according to Mūlasarvāstivāda, Mahāsāṃghika-Lokottaravāda, Sarvāstivāda, and Theravāda Vinaya traditions, for which see Prebish 2002: 142, 74–75. See also mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp.

emphasis on the ethical-ascetical negativity of *ācāryamuṣṭi*, it clearly does not follow that teachings can be revealed indiscriminately to all even by the Śrāvakayāna standard. Of the one hundred twelve minor offences (*duṣkṛta: nyes byas*)¹¹² according to the Vinaya tradition of the Mūlasarvāstivāda in Tibet, the set of offences dealing with giving teachings allude to twenty-six kinds of persons behaving in an inappropriate manner to whom a monk should not give teachings.¹¹³ Similarly, the *Vyākhyāyukti*,¹¹⁴ which in greater part can be viewed as a Śrāvakayāna work, prescribes that one should not reveal or impart teachings to those who are (a) arrogant, (b) disrespectful (of the teaching and teacher), (c) disinterested, (d) distracted outwardly (i.e., inattentive), (e) immersed (inwardly in thoughts or thoughtlessness), and (f) bored. By reverse implication, one

541.3–542.21); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 130.16–19); Mi pham, *Nges legs them skas* (p. 537.9–13); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 67.8–9).

¹¹² The last (and for the Tibetan tradition, fifth) of the five categories of Vinaya offences (*ltung ba sde lnga*) is called *sambahulāḥ śaikṣā dharmāḥ / sambahulāḥ śaikṣadharmāḥ* (*bslab pa'i chos mang po*). This is also the case in the *Mahāvīyutpatti* (Sakaki 1916–1925: no. 8362; Fukuda & Ishihama 1989: no. 8304). No two Vinaya traditions seem to agree on the total number and sequence. According to the Mūlasarvāstivāda tradition followed by the Tibetan tradition, the total number of offences belonging to this category is said to be 112, but this figure is not found in Prebish 2002: 144–148. Autochthonous Tibetan sources often call this category of offence *nyes byas* (*duṣkṛta*). See, for example, mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (p. 691.2); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 150.19); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 80.20).

¹¹³ That the kinds of persons who conduct themselves inappropriately and to whom teachings should not be given are twenty-six in number is specified by mNga' ris pañ chen, *sDom gsum rnam nges* (p. 12.7–12); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 155.1–20); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 84.5–20). mTsho sna ba in his *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 692.24–693.10) is, however, less specific.

¹¹⁴ Vasubandhu, *Vyākhyāyukti* (Lee 2001: 109): *nga rgyal dang ni ma dad dang || don du gnyer ba med nyid dang || phyi rol rnam g.yengs nang bsdus dang || skyo ba nyan pa'i dri ma yin ||*.

should reveal teachings to those who are (a) humble, (b) respectful (of the teaching and teacher), (c) interested, (d) focused on matters at hand, (e) responsive, and (f) enthusiastic.

Interestingly, a monk or nun is also not permitted to reveal information regarding one's spiritual attainments including realization even when it is true.¹¹⁵ We have seen above that concealing one's offences, which is a kind of secret to which a negative value is attached, is itself an offence, the gravity of which can vary depending on several factors. A *bhikṣu*, in revealing a "disciplinary colleague's" offence to someone who is not ordained, would specifically be committing a *prāyaścittika* offence.¹¹⁶

3.6. Śrāvakayāna: Why Should Secrets Be Concealed or Revealed?

In descriptive terms, regardless of whether it is something to which a positive value is attached (for example, "a trade secret") or something to which a negative value is attached (for example, a Vinaya offence), it is apparent that the motives for keeping or wishing to keep something secret are often unwholesome and ignoble, and thus typically give rise to a sense of selfishness, guilt, and shame. In other words, the motives for keeping something positive secret are usually negative, as in the case of *ācāryamuṣṭi*, as are those for keeping something negative secret, as in the case of *duṣṭhulapratichhādana*. In prescriptive terms, therefore, particularly from a Śrāvakayāna standpoint, one is not supposed to be secretive but transparent. In concealing one's own ethical-ascetical offences, one is committing offences, such as the *pratichhādanapārājayika*, and that undermines one's ethical-ascetical integrity and spiritual development. Concealment of the ethical-

¹¹⁵ Hirakawa 1999: 231 (no. 7); mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 547.8–548.17) dealing with *mi chos bla ma bden smra'i ltung byed*.

¹¹⁶ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 545.1–547.7); Dharmasri, *dPag bsam snye ma* (pp. 130.21–131.4); Mi pham, *Nges legs them skas* (p. 537.16–20); Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (p. 67.11–13); Prebish 2002: 142, 74–75. See also Hirakawa 1999: 231 (no. 8) n. 9.

ascetical offences of other “disciplinary colleagues” (*khirms grogs*), persons bound by the same ethical-ascetical precepts, causes damage to the ethical-ascetical discipline of one’s own kind,¹¹⁷ the security and longevity of the ordained community. The motive for maintaining transparency with regard to Vinaya offences can be described as the desire to maintain the purity and security of a person’s and an institution’s ethical-ascetical integrity. In other words, the reason why teaching or knowledge should not be kept secret is that withholding such a secret is unwholesome because of the underlying unwholesome intention, characterized by envy or jealousy, which is an essentially unwholesome (*akuśala: mi dge ba*) mental factor (*caitta/caitasika: sems las byung ba*). In addition, Vinaya rules explicitly forbid the selfishness or stinginess with regard to the Buddhist teachings (*dharmamātsarya: chos la ser sna*).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ While explaining the *duṣṭhulapratichādana* offence, mTsho sna ba (*mTsho ṭik*, p. 623.8–9) states: *dgag bya ni rang rigs kyi tshul khirms la gnod pa’o* ||. I understand the phrase “the ethical-ascetical discipline of one’s own kind” (*rang rigs kyi tshul khirms*) to mean something like “the ethical-ascetical discipline of one’s ordained community.”

¹¹⁸ For a discussion of the Vinaya offence associated with the “selfishness/stinginess with regard to the [Buddhist] teachings” (*dharmamātsarya/dhammamacchariya: chos la ser sna*), see, for example, mTsho sna ba’s *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 750.12–751.1). The idea of the five kinds of selfishness/miserliness/stinginess/meanness (*mātsarya/macchariya: ser sna*) is transmitted in both Pāli and Sanskrit Buddhist sources. The five are: (a) selfishness as regards dwelling (*āvāsamātsarya, āvāsamacchariya: gnas la ser sna*), (b) selfishness as regards family (*kulamātsarya, kulamacchariya: khyim la ser sna*), (c) selfishness as regards gain (*lābhamātsarya, lābhamacchariya: rnyed pa la ser sna*), (d) selfishness as regards praise (*varṇamātsarya, vaṇṇamacchariya: bsngags pa la ser sna*), and (e) selfishness as regard the [Buddhist] teaching (*dharmamātsarya, dhammamacchariya*). See the *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 749.20–751.1); Trenckner et al. 1924–1992 (*s.v. āvāsa-macchariya*); *Dharmasaṃgraha*, no. 78 (Zangmo & Chime 1993: 46; Monier-Williams 1899 (*s.v. mātsarya*); Nyanatiloka 1980: 175). It may be pointed out that the *Dharmasaṃgraha* has *kuśalamātsarya* instead of *kulamātsarya*, which is possibly a corruption. The Tibetan translation of *āvāsamātsarya* in Zangmo & Chime 1993 has *gnas pa la ser sna*, which

A *bhikṣu*, if not appointed (*aniyukta: ma bskos pa*) to do so, is not permitted to teach *bhikṣuṅīs*. Even if he has been appointed, if he is not qualified, he is not permitted to teach. If he does so, he commits a *prāyaścittika* offence.¹¹⁹ The main reason for this prohibition seems to be to guarantee the qualification and securing the integrity of the ordained community. If a *bhikṣu*, even if appointed to teach *bhikṣuṅīs*, teaches until sunset, that too is a *prāyaścittika* offence.¹²⁰ The reasons for this prohibition seem to be clear, namely, to protect his own ethical-ascetical integrity. We have seen above that a *bhikṣu* is not permitted to conceal personal belongings of other monks or cause them to be concealed. The reason given is that doing so would cause harm to others and amount to theft.¹²¹ Eavesdropping, the act of secretly listening to other people's conversation, is also prohibited, and the reason given is that it would increase strife.¹²² The reasons for not revealing one's spiritual realization or other attainments to others seem to be not to offer others an occasion for disparagement or rivalry.¹²³

should be better rendered as *gnas la ser sna*, as found, for example, in the *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 750.12–751.1). Also *varṇamātsarya* in Zangmo & Chime 1993 is rendered into Tibetan as *rigs la ser sna*, that is, *rigs* in the sense of "caste," but contextually it is to be rendered as *bsngags pa la ser sna*. The English rendering of *dhamma* in *dharmamacchariya* found in Nyanatiloka 1980 reads "regarding mental things," but at least in Vinaya sources in the Tibetan language, *dharma* is explained as the teachings of the Buddha or of the *śrāvakas*.

¹¹⁹ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 576.1–578.16); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 134.11–14).

¹²⁰ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 578.17–579.8); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 134.14–18).

¹²¹ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 657.12–658.18); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 144.8–11)

¹²² mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 668.12–669.1); Dharmasrī, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 146.3–6).

¹²³ mTsho sna ba, *mTsho ṭik* (pp. 547.8–548.17).

3.7. Śrāvākayāna: How Should Secrets Be Concealed or Revealed?

Considering the issue of secrecy in the Śrāvākayāna context mainly from the perspective of Vinaya precepts, it would be perhaps reasonable to state that the best way for one to reveal what ought not to be concealed and to conceal what ought not to be revealed is knowing and following the Vinaya precepts relating to secrecy and transparency. In other words, concealment and revealment of the right kind of secrets by the right kind of person in possession of the secret to a proper recipient in a proper place and on a proper occasion presupposes that the possessor knows what is ethically-ascetically objectionable (*heya*: 'dor bar bya ba) and what is admissible (*upādeya*: blang bar bya ba). Being free from *ācāryamuṣṭi* and *dharmamātsarya*, one is supposed to reveal the right kind of “trade secrets” (i.e., Buddhist teachings) to the right kind of recipients at a right time and on a right occasion, and with right motives. One is, then, not supposed to indiscriminately and inappropriately reveal teachings and thereby violate Vinaya precepts connected with the divulgence of Buddhist teachings.¹²⁴

Even for the Śrāvākayāna context, we can tacitly assume the truism that “knowledge is power” and the fears and dangers of misusing it. Exposing one’s “dark secrets,” such as one’s weaknesses and offences, only increases the chances of such secrets being exploited and abused by persons or institutions that may not be well meaning. With regard to the question as to how to conceal or reveal secrets from a Śrāvākayāna perspective, or to the issue of secrecy and transparency in the Vinaya, the role of “secret revealer” (*raho'nuśāsaka*: *gsang ste ston pa*)—one of the members of the ordaining committee and the manner in which he is supposed to interrogate a candidate who wishes to be ordained—and the idea of the “four kinds of wrong courses of action/intercourse” (*agati*: 'gro ba) seem particularly instructive.

¹²⁴ The Tibetan translation of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya scriptures contains a story of the refusal of the Buddha and many of his disciples to teach Devadatta how to obtain magical powers. For a summary of the story, see Rockhill 1884: 84–90.

The four kinds of *agati*,¹²⁵ which may be understood as four wrong ways of going about things, are (a) wrong courses of action induced by desire (*chandāgati*: 'dun pas 'gro ba), (b) wrong courses of action induced by fear (*bhayāgati*: 'jigs pas 'gro ba), (c) wrong courses of action induced by aversion/hatred (*dveṣāgati/dosāgati*: zhe sdang gis 'gro ba), and (d) wrong courses of action induced by disorientedness (*mohāgati*: rmongs pas 'gro ba). The prohibition of *agati* seems to be intended to preclude concessions to favoritism, exploitation through the abuse of authority, deception motivated by hostility, and debacles due to incompetence when dealing with secret information. In short, the best way to conceal or reveal a secret from a Śrāvakayāna perspective seems to be knowing and implementing the Vinaya rules regarding what are objectionable (*heya*: 'dor bar bya ba) and admissible (*upādeya*: blang bar bya ba) and by ensuring that one's motivations and actions are not governed by the four kinds of *agati*.

4. Secrecy in Bodhisattvayāna

Let us now turn to secrecy in Bodhisattvayāna or Pāramityāna sources, which normally presuppose the concepts of secrecy found in the Śrāvakayāna sources but accentuate certain new elements and aspects of secrecy.

4.1. Bodhisattvayāna: Whether There Are Such Things as Secrets

It has been pointed out above in the context of discussing secrecy in the Śrāvakayāna that the existence of secrecy in various strands of Buddhism does not seem to be an issue at all; the issue seems to be rather about its degree. It is not the existence of secrecy in

¹²⁵ Trenckner et al. 1924–1992 (s.v. *a-gati* 2); *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. 'gro ba bzhi): 'dul ba las bshad pa'i gsang ston slob dpon gyis bsgrub bya la bar chad 'dri bar 'gro ba bzhi dang bral ba zhig dgos pa ste | 'dun pas 'gro ba zhes pa bsgrub bya dang gsang ston mdza' ba zhig yin na bar chad yod kyang gsang nas mi smra ba dang | 'jigs pas 'gro ba zhes pa gsang ston bsgrub bya la skrag nas smra mi phod pa dang | zhe sdang gis 'gro ba zhes pa gsang ston dang bsgrub bya mi mthun na log par smra ba dang | rmongs pas 'gro ba zhes pa bsgrub bya la bar chad yod med mi shes pa bcas bzhi'o | |.

general that is interesting in the Bodhisattvayāna but a form of secrecy that is very specific to it. The scope of secrecy in the Bodhisattvayāna can be said to be larger than that in the Śrāvakayāna. One of the possible factors for the extension of the domain of secrecy is that the presence of mystery comes to be ever more accentuated in the Mahāyāna. This, in turn, has obviously to do with the very nature of the Mahāyāna doctrine, so much so that one can hardly understand secrecy and mystery in Mahāyāna without understanding the various aspects of its doctrines, always as opposed or juxtaposed to pre-/non-Mahāyāna doctrines. While one cannot expect a clear-cut line of transition from pre-/non-Mahāyāna to Mahāyāna (one can possibly trace rudiments of the latter already in the former), one cannot ignore the general impression that one gets, namely, that the emphasis laid by pre-/non-Mahāyāna versus Mahāyāna is on simplicity versus complexity, finitude versus infinitude, conceivability versus inconceivability, minimalism versus maximalism, conservation versus innovation, pragmatism versus idealism, and transparency versus secrecy and mystery. The crux of the underlying argument from the perspective of the Mahāyāna (the soteriological goal of which is Buddhahood) for the existence of secrecy and mystery seems to be an epistemological one, namely, that one cannot insist that reality is ordinary, finite, narrow and shallow, as ordinary beings and *śrāvakas* cognize or conceive it to be, but rather that there is the depth and extent of reality which remains concealed to ordinary beings but remains revealed and transparent to extraordinary awakened beings. Against such a background, we can understand why the epistemological implications of the *Śiṃśapāvanasūtra, as we have seen above, can be very appealing to Mahāyānists seeking justification for secrecy and the existence of a form of mystery that is not cognitively or conceptually accessible to ordinary beings and *śrāvakas*. Even Mahāyānists would, however, concede that knowledge of such a mystery is not always or necessarily relevant to or indispensable for the Śrāvaka soteriology. Bodhisattva soteriology, however, presupposes that a

bodhisattva would require to obtain knowledge that does not directly concern salvation.¹²⁶

In the Bodhisattvayāna context, the question *why* appears to be more pertinent than *whether* there are such things as secrets. The inevitability of the existence of secrets and mysteries from a Mahāyāna standpoint can be made more plausible if one considers several Mahāyāna doctrinal presuppositions. First, from a Mahāyāna Buddhological perspective, the qualities of profundity, transcendentality, inconceivability, inexpressibility, and the like, attributed to the Buddha or a *buddha* (including his body, speech, mind, qualities, and salvific activities) are bound to remain secret and mysterious even to the *śrāvaka* and *pratyekabuddha* saints, let alone ordinary sentient beings! Second, from a Mahāyāna soteriological perspective, the uniqueness of the Mahāyāna soteriological disposition spreads over a point of departure (*gzhi*), soteriological models, means, and methods on the level of the path (*lam*), and the soteriological goal (*'bras bu*)

¹²⁶ Asaṅga (ascribed), *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* 11.60 (Lévi 1907: 70.12–13): *vidyāsthāne pañcavidhe yogam akṛtvā sarvajñatvaṃ naiti kathamcit param āryaḥ | ity anyeṣāṃ nigrahaṇānugrahaṇāya svājñārthaṃ vā tatra karoty eva sa yogam ||*; Tib. (B, vol. 70, p. 837.2–5): *rig pa'i gnas lnga dag la brtson par ma byas par1 || 'phags mchog cis2 kyang thams cad mkhyen nyid mi 'gyur te || de lta bas na gzhan dag tshar bcad rjes gzung dang || bdag nyid kun shes bya phyir de la de bston byed ||* (¹ par] PN, na DC; ² cis] PN, gis DC [as recorded in B]). Here, as in many other instances, we notice that the reading in P is closer to the Sanskrit. For a discussion of the varia lectio (i.e., *cis kyang* versus *gis kyang*) and on the different interpretations of *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* 11.60, see, for example, 'Dar stod, *Rig gnas lnga byung tshul* (pp. 256.18–257.13). Mi pham in his *bDud rtsi'i dga' ston* (pp. 261.21–265.12) appears to have followed the readings in D but perhaps based on the commentaries that he consulted, he does seem to have somehow succeeded in reconciling it with the sense intended by the reading in P (and supported by the Sanskrit). That is, his paraphrase *brtson zhing mkhas par ma byas pa zhig na* comes close to P's *brtson par ma byas par* (for *yogam akṛtvā*) and his choice of D's *gis kyang* is compensated by his paraphrase *nam yang*, which comes close to P's *cis kyang* (for *kathamcit*).

would remain as secrets or mysterious to those who fear knowing, or have no desire to know, secrets or mysteries, and who, for whatever reason, are incapable of knowing them even when they are revealed.

4.2. Bodhisattvayāna: What Are the Secrets?

In his commentary on the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*,¹²⁷ Mi pham seems to subsume all types of secrets from a Bodhisattvayāna perspective into two, namely, those consisting in “profound and vast Mahāyāna teachings” (*theg pa chen po'i chos zab cing rgya che ba*) and those pertinent to the “areas or domains of inconceivability” (*bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i gnas rnams*). Perhaps one might take the former type of secret or mystery to be directly relevant to Bodhisattvayāna soteriology, and the latter to be, if at all, only indirectly or remotely relevant to it, although the attainment of Buddhahood is said to be tantamount to the attainment of omniscience. For heuristic reasons, various types of secrets or rather mysteries that remain secret in the Bodhisattvayāna may be approached by attempting to place them into various contexts, namely, in the contexts of Buddhology, Dharmology, soteriology, axiology, ontology, epistemology, and cosmology,

4.2.1. Secrecy in the Context of Mahāyāna Buddhology

The Bodhisattvayāna notion of secrecy and mystery may be viewed here in the context of Buddhology. The Mahāyāna conception of a *buddha* and Buddhahood is different from its pre-/non-Mahāyāna counterpart. Here I wish to take up the Mahāyāna aspects of a *buddha*'s body (*kāya: sku*), speech (*vāc: gsung*), mind (*citta: thugs*), qualities (*guṇa: yon tan*), and activities (*kriyā/kārya/kṛtya/karman: phrin las/mdzad pa*) that have been either explicitly characterized as secrets or mysteries (*guhya: gsang ba*) or as inconceivable (*acintya: bsam gyis mi khyab pa*). On an earlier occasion, I have pointed out that Mahāyāna sources such as the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* and *Tathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśasūtra* explicitly

¹²⁷ Mi pham, *bDud rtsi'i dga' ston* (p. 586.6–12).

characterize the very body, speech, and mind of a *buddha* (and sometimes also of a *bodhisattva*) as the “Three Inconceivable Secrets/Mysteries” (*gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa gsum*), namely, as the “Secret of the Body” (*kāyaguhyā: sku yi gsang ba*), the “Secret of the Speech” (*vāgguhya: gsung gi gsang ba*), and the “Secret of the Mind” (*cittaguhyā: thugs kyi gsang ba*).¹²⁸

The Mahāyāna conceptions of Buddhology are such that the qualities (*guṇa: yon tan*) ascribed to the Buddha’s or a *buddha*’s body, speech, and mind are infinite, inconceivable, and inexpressible, and thus remain, so to speak, as secrets or mysteries even to *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and *bodhisattvas* of the tenth stage, let alone ordinary sentient beings. With regard to the infinity, inconceivability, and inexpressibility of the qualities of a *buddha*, Candrakīrti, for example, states that even if the Buddha

¹²⁸ Wangchuk 2007: 210 n. 59. In addition to the *Daśabhūmikāsūtra* and *Tathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśāsūtra* as non-Tantric Mahāyāna sources for the idea of *kāyaguhyā*, *vāgguhya*, and *cittaguhyā*, we may add *Ratnagotravibhāga* 4.81 (Johnston 1950: 111; Takasaki 1966: 17 n. 27), where the compound *manovākkāyaguhyā* (in its accusative plural form) occurs. Of the nine similes employed in the *Ratnagotravibhāga* to illustrate how the Tathāgata, despite being characterized by non-conceptuality, can still carry out salvific activities, the sixth, seventh, and eighth similes, namely, wish-fulfilling gem (*maṇiratna: nor bu rin chen*), echo (*pratiśrutka/pratiśrutī: sgra brnyan*), and sky (*ākāśa: nam mkha’*) are respectively meant to emblemize *manoguhya* (*thugs kyi gsang ba*), *vāgguhya* (*gsung gi gsang ba*), and *kāyaguhyā* (*sku’i gsang ba*). See ‘Gos lo, *rGyud bla’i ’grel bshad* (Mathes 2003: 553.19–23); Takasaki 1966: 375 n. 202; Mi pham, *mKhas ’jug* (pp. 406.17–407.7). Mi pham notes that the sources of these nine similes are the *Ratnagotravibhāga* and *Jñānālokālamkārasūtra* (Kumura et al. 2004: §§. 6–15, pp. 572 (25)–550 (47); Study Group 2004a: §§. 6–15, pp. 20–74). Noteworthy is that in *Ratnagotravibhāga* 4.81 we have *manoguhya* instead of *cittaguhyā*. It is uncertain whether the forms *manoguhyaka*, *vāgguhyaka* and *kāyaguhyaka* used by Takasaki are attested in Sanskrit sources. See also Chen 2018: 166 n. 94, where important sources such as the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, *Laṅkāvatārasūtra*, *Prasannapadā*, and *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* have been provided for the specific idea of *vāgguhya*, namely, that the Tathāgata did not teach even a single letter (*tathāgatenāntaśa ekākṣaram api nodāhṛtaṃ*).

were to empower his lifespan to an infinite number of eons and without doing anything else were to just describe, as quickly as he can, his own qualities, he would not be able to describe the qualities to the end.¹²⁹

4.2.2. Secrecy in the Context of Mahāyāna Dharmology

Secrecy or mystery in the context of what I call Mahāyāna Dharmology, which may be subsumed under the secrecy or mystery of the Buddha's speech, seems worth considering here separately. The Mahāyāna Dharmology, that is, the Mahāyāna conception of the scriptural (*āgama: lung*) and realizational (*adhigama: rtogs pa*) aspects of *saddharma (dam pa'i chos)*, the Buddhist teachings, would also include what I wish to call Mahāyāna scripturology and Mahāyāna doctrinology, respectively. From the perspective of Mahāyāna scripturology, not all scriptures (*pravacana: gsung rab*) that are said to contain the Word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana: sangs rgyas kyi bka'lgung*) were said to be known to even leading disciples of the Buddha such as Mahākāśyapa, and thus many Mahāyāna scriptures remained as unfathomable secrets or mysteries to the *śrāvakas*.¹³⁰ From the perspective of Mahāyāna doctrinology, Mahāyāna doctrine that teaches two dimensions of reality—namely, what I would like to call “the profound trans-phenomenal reality” (i.e., emptiness) and the “superficial cis-phenomenal reality” (i.e., illusoriness)—are the secrets, as made explicit by the *Ratnāvalī* as follows:¹³¹

¹²⁹ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* (La Vallée Poussin 1912: 396.9–398.8).

¹³⁰ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.52 (Bhattacharya 1960: 198; La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 443, added as a note): *mahākāśyapamukhyaīś ca yad vākyaṃ nāvagāhyate | tat tvayānavabuddhatvād agrāhyaṃ kaḥ kariṣyati ||*; Tib. (Bhattacharya 1960: 198): *ngag gang 'od srung chen po la || sogs pas gting dpogs ma gyur pa || de ni khyod kyis ma rtogs pas || gzung ba min pa su zhig byed ||*.

¹³¹ Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī* 2.9 (Hahn 1982: 42–43): *etat tad dharmagāmbhīryaṃ yat tad guhyaṃ prthagjane | māyopamatvaṃ lokasya*

That which is the profundity of phenomena
Is a secret to ordinary beings.
The illusoriness of the world
Is the nectar-like teaching of awakened beings.

The *Ratnāvalī* also indicates here that such a reality remains a secret to ordinary non-awakened sentient beings. In principle, any domain of Mahāyāna philosophy that is inconceivable and exclusive would remain as a secret and mystery to those who cannot fathom it. In particular, the *Upāyakauśalyasūtra* considers the *upāyakauśalya* teachings to be secret, which are ordered to be kept secret. It states:¹³²

O son of a noble family! Keep these *upāyakauśalya* teachings secret. Do not articulate [them] in the presence of those sentient beings who are endowed with scanty basic wholesome virtues. Why is it so? These *upāyakauśalya* teachings are not even a [suitable] matter [of concern] of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, let alone of those sentient beings who are endowed with scanty basic wholesome virtues. Why is it so? They do not get trained in *upāya*[*kauśalya* teachings,] and thus these are not necessary for them. Except for those *bodhisattvas* who happen to get trained in [*upāyakauśalya*] teachings,

buddhānām śāsanāmṛtam ||; Tib. *so so skye bo la gsang ba* || *gang yin de ni zab mo'i chos* || 'jig rten sgyu ma lta bu nyid || *sangs rgyas bstan pa bdud rtsi yin* ||. See also Mi pham, *bDud rtsi'i dga' ston* (p. 586.6–12).

¹³² *Upāyakauśalyasūtra* (P, fol. 326b3–5; T, fol. 191b7): *de lta bas na rigs kyi bu thabs mkhas pa bstan pa 'di gsang bar gyis¹ shig | sems can dge ba'i rtsa ba chung ngu dang ldan pa rnams kyi² mdun du ma 'chad cig | de ci'i phyir zhe na | bstan pa 'di ni nyan thos dang | rang sangs rgyas kyis³ yang ma yin na | sems can dge ba'i rtsa ba chung ngu dang ldan pa rnams kyis⁴ lta⁵ ci smos | de ci'i phyir zhe na | de⁶ dag thabs la⁷ bslabs pa ma yin pas | 'di ni de dag la mi dgos⁸ so || byang chub sems dpa' gang dag bstan pa 'di la slob par 'gyur ba ma gtogs par gzhan thabs mkhas pa⁹ 'di'i snod du gyur pa¹⁰ gang yang med do ||* (1 *gyis*] T, *bgyis* P; ² *kyi*] P, *kyis* T; ³ *kyis*] (?) P, *kyi sa* T; ⁴ *kyis*] P, *kyi* T; ⁵ *lta*] T, *ltas* P; ⁶ *de*] T, *da* P; ⁷ *thabs la*] P, *thams cad* T; ⁸ *dgos*] T, *dgongs* P; ⁹ *pa*] P, *mkhas pa bstan pa* T; ¹⁰ *pa*] P, *ba* T).

there are none who happen to be [suitable] recipients of these *upāyakaśālya* [teachings].

Another similar Sūtric scripture, the *Mahārahasyopāyakaśālyasūtra* of the *Ratnakūṭasūtra*, also states:¹³³

O son of a noble family! These *upāyakaśālya* teachings should be kept secret. [They] should not be articulated, should not be disclosed, should not be expounded in the presence of those inferior sentient beings who are endowed with scanty basic wholesome virtues. Why is it so? It is because these *upāyakaśālya* teachings are not a [suitable] matter [of concern] of *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, let alone of those spiritually immature ordinary people (*prthagjana*) who are inclined to inferior [soteriological means and goals]. Why is it so? Because they do not get trained in *upāya*[*kaśālya* teachings]. Why is it so? Because these would not end up benefiting them. And because there are none except for *mahāsattvas* [and other] *bodhisattvas* who happen to be [suitable] recipients of these *upāyakaśālya* [teachings] and who train themselves in them.

According to these passages, the secret is the *upāyakaśālya* teachings, and those who possess these secrets seem to be highly

¹³³ *Mahārahasyopāyakaśālyasūtra* (P, fol. 49b4–8; T, fols. 131b7–132a4): *rigs kyi bu | thabs la mkhas pa bstan pa bshad 'di ni¹ gsang bar bya ba yin te | sems can dman pa dge ba'i rtsa ba chung ngu rnams kyi mdun du brjod par mi bya | bstan par mi bya | bshad par mi bya | bklag² par mi bya'o || de ci'i phyir zhe na | bstan pa 'di ni nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas thams cad kyi sa'ang³ ma yin na | byis pa so so'i skye bo dman pa la mos pa rnams kyi lta smos kyang ci dgos pa'i phyir ro || de ci'i phyir zhe na | de dag ni thabs la mkhas pa 'di la ma bslabs pa'i phyir ro || de ci'i phyir zhe na | de dag la 'dis don du 'gyur ba med de |⁴ thabs la mkhas pa bstan pa 'di'i snod du 'gyur ba dang | gang dag gis bstan pa 'di la bslab par bya ba ni | byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po rnams ma gtogs par gzhan 'ga' yang med pa'i phyir ro || (¹ ni] P, na T; ² bklag] T, klag P; ³ sa'ang] T, kyis yang P; ⁴ de |] P, de | der T).*

skilled or developed *bodhisattvas* and, of course, the Buddha. Those from whom these teachings should be kept secret are *pr̥thagjanas* of scanty basic wholesome virtues, *śrāvakas*, and *pratyekabuddhas*. The justification for keeping these teachings secret from the sentient beings of scanty basic wholesome virtues is the unnecessary or superfluity of such teachings for such sentient beings.

Needless to say, the occurrence of “magical formulas” (*mantrapada*: *gsang sngags kyi tshig*) is not confined to Mantrayāna sources but can also be found in pre-/non-Tantric Buddhist sources. For example, the **Buddhapīṭakasūtra* aka **Duḥśīlanigrahisūtra* states that the secret *mantrapadas* of the Tathāgata or his followers should not be disclosed to those for whom his teachings serve no useful function. The passage answers three questions, stating namely that (a) the *mantrapada* is the secret, (b) it should not be revealed (perhaps) to non-Buddhists (c) because it is of no use or relevance to them.¹³⁴

4.2.3. Secrecy in the Context of Mahāyāna Soteriology

Not only the Buddhist soteriological mechanism implied by the concept of the Four Noble Truths, but also certain soteriological means specific to the Mahāyāna strand of Buddhism have been considered as secrets—one might say, trade secrets. Various

¹³⁴ **Buddhapīṭakasūtra* (P, fol. 63a3–7; T, fols. 404b7–405a4): *gang dag de bzhin gshegs pa'am | de bzhin gshegs pa'i 'khor gyi gsang ba'i don gyi gsang sngags kyi tshig*¹ *'di de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsung las phyi rol du gyur pa'i tshig gi bya ba med pa gang yin pa dag la mi smra ste | shā ri'i bu de ltar de bzhin gshegs pas bya ba la gzhol ba gzhī'i shes rab chen pos chos kyi grong khyer shin tu bsrungs pa yin no || shā ri'i bu chos kyi grong khyer de'i bar chad byed pa gang yin pa de ni da ltar med do || shā ri'i bu da ltar chos kyi grong khyer de'i bar chad byed pa gang dag yod na | de dag ni 'di la chom rkun pa zhes bya'o || 'khrug long pa zhes bya'o || gang dag de bzhin gshegs pa'am | de bzhin gshegs pa'i 'khor gyi gsang ba'i don gyi gsang sngags kyi tshig 'di*² *phyi rol pa la smra na | de dag nga'i spyan sngar nye bar 'ongs shing lhags kyang ngas de dag chos dang mthun pa'i gtam gyis sdud par mi mdzad | de dag la bya ba ston par mi mdzad | de dag la gsang ba'i don gyi gsang sngags kyi tshig brjod par mi mdzad do ||* (1 tshig] P, tshigs T; 2 'di] T, om. P).

Mahāyāna soteriological models—such as the model which proposes a collapse of the concept of the Four Noble Truths,¹³⁵ namely, that the *duḥkhasatya* is itself actually the *nirodhasatya*, and the *samudayasatya* is itself the *mārgasatya*—strike one as shocking and mysterious. Such a trade secret would be Buddhist soteriology, particularly but not exclusively from a Mahāyāna perspective, which underscores what may be characterized as “Buddhist soteriological idealism,” that is, the position that the mechanism of saṃsāric thralldom and nirvāṇic freedom is based on and governed by one’s own mind. Any attempt to acquire happiness and avoid unhappiness would be futile, according to Śāntideva, if one did not know/cultivate (*bhāvita*: *shes/bsgoms*) the “secret of the mind” (*cittaṃ guhyam*: *sems kyi gsang ba*).¹³⁶

¹³⁵ For a description of a soteriological model that dissolves the cause-effect (*rgyu 'bras*) and abandonment–adoption (*spang blang*) relationship between *x* and *y* (such as between *samudayasatya* and *duḥkhasatya*, *mārgasatya* and *nirodhasatya*, *saṃvṛtisatya* and *paramārthasatya*, *saṃsāra/saṃkleśa* and *nirvāṇa/vyavadāna*, *sattva* and *vajrasattva*), with the argument that *x* is actually *y*, or more precisely, that *x* has never deviated from its *y* nature, just as a prince wandering incognito among his subjects (*rgyal bu dmangs su 'khyams pa*), see the section on the types of soteriological models in Wangchuk 2019: 278–279, 300–301.

¹³⁶ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 5.17 (Bhattacharya 1960: 56; La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 104): *duḥkhaṃ hantum sukhaṃ prāptum te bhramanti mudhāmbare | yair etad dharmasarvasvaṃ cittaṃ guhyaṃ na bhāvitam ||*; Tib. *gang gis chos kyi gtso bo mchog || sems kyi gsang 'di ma shes na || bde 'thob sdug bsngal gzhom 'dod kyang || de dag don med gyi nar 'khyams ||*. Compare, for example, the English translation of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 5.17 in Steinkellner & Peck-Kubaczek 2019 (verse 5.17): “In vain they roam about in space to destroy suffering, to find happiness, they who have not cultivated this cryptic mind, the very essence of all there is.” The Tibetan translators have rendered the verse with a conditional and principal clause and have taken *na bhāvitam* to mean “not known,” a possibility, for which see Monier-Williams 1899 (*s.v. bhāvita*) “thought about, imagined, fancied, conceived, known, recognised.” Also *dharmasarvasva* seems to be rendered somewhat freely as *chos kyi gtso bo mchog* (“the best among [all] the primary teachings [taught by the Buddha]”).

4.2.4. Secrecy in the Context of Mahāyāna Axiology

In the course of the development of Buddhism, its axiology, that is, its conception of ethical-ascetical and aesthetical values, underwent changes. For example, the Buddhist idea of ethical-ascetical values, encapsulated in the idea of altruism, was modified, so that the Mahāyāna, while still taking for granted what has been termed “passive altruism,” proposed “active altruism,”¹³⁷ which became an indispensable component of Mahāyāna soteriology and axiology. One such altruistic theory and practice of training one’s mind by exchanging one’s point of view for that of others, that is, putting oneself in other people’s shoes, has been explicitly epitomized as the “best secret [of all]” (*paramaṃ guhyaṃ: gsang ba’i dam pa*).¹³⁸

4.2.5. Secrecy in the Context of Mahāyāna Ontology

We have seen above that the *Ratnāvalī* considers the Mahāyāna teachings that have the two dimensions or modes of reality, namely, trans-phenomenal and cis-phenomenal reality, as their doctrinal content, to be secrets. Reality, as conceived of by Mahāyāna ontology, is explicitly or implicitly characterized as enigmatic and mysterious. The idea of profundity and

See Prajñākaramati, *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 104.3–10), where *citta* is glossed as “all Dharmic wealth” (*dharmasarvasva: chos kyi bdog pa kun*) and “that which turns out to be the mundane and supramundane Dharmic treasure” (*sarvalaukikalokottara-dharmanidānabhūta* (‘jig rten dang ‘jig rten las ‘das pa’i chos kyi gter du gyur pa). It is “secret on account of [its] nature not being within the cognitive range of ordinary sentient beings” (*bālānām agocaravabhāvatayā guhyaṃ* (*byis pa rnam kyi spyod yul ma yin pa’i rang bzhin yin pa’i phyir gsang ba*).

¹³⁷ For a discussion of “passive altruism” and “active altruism” in Buddhism, see Wangchuk 2007: 84–86.

¹³⁸ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8.120 (Bhattacharya 1960: 167; missing in La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914): *ātmānaṃ ca parāṃś caiva yaḥ śīghraṃ trātum icchati* | *sa caret paramaṃ guhyaṃ parātmaparivartanam* ||; Tib. *gang zhig bdag dang gzhan rnam ni || myur du bskyab par ‘dod pa des || bdag dang gzhan du brje bya bar || gsang ba’i dam pa spyad par bya ||*.

inconceivability in Mahāyāna Buddhism seems to be somehow related (genetically or generically) to its idea of secrecy and mystery. What makes an entity, reality, event, or mechanism amazing, wondrous, marvelous, and thus also mysterious, is its actuality or viability despite its inexplicability. Of all the ideas of secrecy or mystery associated with Mahāyāna ontology, the idea of what I wish to call “Mahāyāna paradoxology”—that is, the Mahāyāna conception of various kinds of apparently contradictory doctrines that are actually not contradictory—as expressed by the eight kinds of profundity (*aṣṭavidhagāmbhīrya: zab mo rnam pa brgyad*), seems to be most significant.¹³⁹ The ontological secret or mystery here seems to be mainly a virtual paradoxical situation created by two dimensions or modes of reality for someone who is incapable of realizing that these two modes are actually and *ab initio* inseparably one. The underlying concept of the eight kinds of profundity, the (initial) cognitive penetration of which has been characterized as a typical realization (*abhisamaya: mngon par rtogs pa*) of a *bodhisattva* at the eighth stage, is that the ultimate ontological secret or mystery from a Bodhisattvayāna perspective, lies in the coalescence (*yuganaddha: zung 'jug*) or indivisibility of the two modes of reality

¹³⁹ Maitreya (ascribed), *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* 4.59 (Stcherbatsky & Obermiller 1929: Skt. p. 26; Tib. p. 47): *utpāde ca nirodhe ca tathatāyāṃ gabhīratā | jñeye jñāne ca caryāyām advayopāyakaśāle ||; skye ba dang ni 'gag pa dang || de bzhin nyid dang shes bya dang || shes dang spyod dang gnyis med dang || thabs mkhas pa la zab pa nyid ||*. Indian and Tibetan commentaries on *Abhisamayālaṃkāra* 4.59 are numerous, but for a succinct description of the eight kinds of profundity (*aṣṭavidhagāmbhīrya: zab mo rnam pa brgyad*), namely, (1) *utpādagāmbhīrya* (*skye ba la zab pa*), (2) *nirodhagāmbhīrya* (*'gag pa la zab pa*), (3) *tathatāgāmbhīrya* (*de bzhin nyid (rtogs pa) la zab pa*), (4) *jñeyagāmbhīrya* (*shes bya la zab pa*), (5) *jñānagāmbhīrya* (*shes pa la zab pa*), (6) *caryāgāmbhīrya* (*spyod pa la zab pa*), (7) *advayagāmbhīrya* (*gnyis med la zab pa*), and (8) *upāyakaśālagāmbhīrya* (*thabs mkhas la zab pa*), see Mi pham, *mKhas 'jug* (pp. 427.15–432.11). For a discussion on the eight kinds of profundity and some additional sources by Mi pham on the same topic, see Wangchuk 2019: 280, 302 n. 63.

(*bden pa gnyis dbyer med pa*).¹⁴⁰ For those who have not yet gained familiarity with Mahāyāna teachings and those whose accumulation of merits are meager (*theg pa chen po la blo ma sbyangs shing tshogs bsags pa dman pa*) and those who hold the two modes of reality to be contradictory (*bden gnyis 'gal bar 'dzin pa'i blo can rnams*), such a secret or mystery would be an object of fear (*skrag pa'i gnas*). The concept thus presupposes that all misperceptions/misconceptions of the Mahāyāna, including those related to the salvific mechanism of an awakened being and the karmic mechanism of an ordinary sentient being, and the sense of doubt and fear associated with both are associated with the secret or mystery of Mahāyāna ontology, that is, the Mahāyāna theory of reality. The viability of the (virtual or apparent) karmic mechanism despite the intrinsic emptiness of all phenomena has been described by, for instance, the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa*,¹⁴¹ as a wonder, and thus can be characterized as mysterious.

¹⁴⁰ For a study of the concept of the various types of *yuganaddha*, mainly, but not exclusively, from Mi pham's perspective, see Wangchuk 2019.

¹⁴¹ The marvel and mystery of Mahāyāna paradoxology is expressed in the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* (verse 88) ascribed to one Nāgārjuna, as follows (Kano & Li 2017: 24): *citrād api paraṃ citram adbhutād api cādbhutam | jñātoā śūnyān imān dharmān yat karmaphalasevanā ||*; Tib. (Lindtner 1997: 62): *chos rnams stong pa 'di shes nas || las dang 'bras bu bsten pa gang || de ni mtsho mtshar bas ngo mtshar || rmad du 'byung bas rmad du 'byung ||*. This is clearly thematically associated with one of the eight kinds of profundity. Mi pham in his *Nges shes sgron me* (pp. 7.16–8.2) briefly alludes to the idea thus: *des na rang gi lugs la ni || chu zla brtags na chu zla nyid || cung zad mi rnyed med bzhin du || chu zla snang ba mngon sum tshe || med dgag yin kyang snang rung ba || stong dang yod pa so skye'i ngor || 'gal yang 'dir ni mngon sum du || zung 'jug 'di la rmad byung zhes || ngo mtshar tshig gis mkhas rnams bsngags ||*. mKhan po Kun dpal in his commentary, the *sNang ba'i sgo byed* (pp. 82.4–88.15), does not identify the *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* as the source. Khro shul mkhan po 'Jam rdor in his commentary, the *'Od zer dri med* (fol. 39a5), does name a source, the *Pañcakrama*, obviously mistakenly. John Pettit (e.g., Pettit 1999: 269), who translated Khro shul mkhan po's commentary, neither attempted to identify the correct source nor commented on the matter. That Mi pham had *Bodhicittavivaraṇa* 88 as one of his sources in mind seems clear. Such

4.2.6. Secrecy in the Context of Mahāyāna Epistemology

One can observe various theoretical layers in all domains of Buddhist philosophy, including Buddhist epistemology. It is the anomalistic elements in particular that lend an enigmatic and mysterious character to the uncommon Buddhist theories of knowledge. I wish to merely mention here two such concepts. First, an outright rejection of the existence of secrets or mysteries in general would only be plausible if we can rule out that there is no other real extensionality or dimensionality beyond what we ordinary sentient beings can perceive or conceive of, or only if we can contend that we are all omniscient. That is why, from a Mahāyāna perspective, the assumption that the Buddha, who is regarded as omniscient even by the Śrāvakayāna adherents, would have known only what is cognitively accessible to ordinary beings would be unreasonable. The idea of the “four causes of nescience” (*mi shes pa'i rgyu bzhi*), which presupposes the idea of the three kinds of “remoteness or distance” (*viprakaṣa/viprakṣṭa: bskal ba*),¹⁴² is indicative of the idea that many mysteries or secrets

a profundity-based Mahāyāna paradoxology has been, in my view, transmitted in the **Guhyagarbhatantra* and related Tantric scriptures via what is known among exegetes as the *e ma mtshar lnga* (“set of five ‘Oh, how amazing!’”), which actually features in the work’s prologue (*prastāva/prastāvanā: gleng bslang ba*). For the use of the expression *e ma mtshar lnga*, see, for example, rDo grub, *gSang snying mdzod lde* (p. 38.4). Compare also the following popular idea ascribed to Padmasambhava, which seems to be rooted in gTer ma literature (dPal sprul, *Kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*, p. 208.5–6): “The view is higher than the sky! [Mastery of] the karmic mechanism is finer/subtler than barley/wheat-flour” (*lta ba nam mkha' bas kyang mtho || las rgyu 'bras bag phye bas kyang zhib ||*)! Here, the apparent paradox between the profundity of the philosophical view and the ethical scruple is resolved by the idea that one’s realization of emptiness is directly proportional to one’s mastery of the karmic mechanism. The former would not and should not contradict or nullify karmic principles.

¹⁴² Harunaga Isaacson kindly points out that the idea of the three kinds of “remoteness” or “distance” (*viprakaṣa/viprakṣṭa: bskal ba*), namely, “spatially remote/distant” (*deśaviprakaṣa/deśaviprakṣṭa: gnas kyis bskal*

lie cognitively inaccessible on account of not being able to cognitively overcome the barriers posed by the subtlety of the nature, and the remoteness in time and space, of entities or realities.

Second, the elements of secrecy in the context of Mahāyāna epistemology have insinuated themselves by what I referred to above as “Mahāyāna paradoxology,” associated with the eight kinds of profundity, and specifically, the “profundity with regard to knowing” (*jñānagāmbhīrya: shes pa la zab pa*). The secrecy or mystery here would be making sense of the equation of “not

ba), “temporally remote/distant” (*kālaviprakarṣa/kālaviprakṛṣṭa: dus kyis bskal pa*), “essentially remote/distant” (*svabhāvaviprakarṣa/svabhāvaviprakṛṣṭa: rang bzhin gyis bskal pa*), seems to be widely accepted by both Buddhist and non-Buddhist Indian thinkers. The idea can be found, for example, in Dharmakīrti’s *Pramāṇaviniścaya* prose ad 2.34 (Steinkellner 2007: 64.9–10): *trividhā hi viprakarṣiṇo deśakālasvabhāvaviparkarṣaiḥ ...*; Tib. (Steinkellner 1973: 52): *yul dang dus dang rang bzhin gyis bskal bas na bskal ba ni rnam pa gsum ste |*. I owe this reference to Isaacson. One may also add the following statement from Dharmakīrti’s *Nyāyabindu* 2.§28 (Stcherbatsky 1918: 28.1–2): *anyathā ca anupalabdhilakṣaṇaprāpteṣu deśakālasvabhāvaviprakṛṣṭeṣu artheṣu ātmapratyakṣaniḥṣṭer abhāvaniścayābhāvāt*; Tib. (La Vallée Poussin 1908: 5.10–12; cf. Stcherbatsky 1904: 62.15–63.1): *gzhan du na ni yul dang dus dang rang bzhin gyis bskal ba’i don dmigs pa’i rig byar ma gyur pa rnams la ni rang gi mngon sum ldog kyang dngos po med par nges pa med pa’i phyir ro ||*. See also Vinītadeva, *Nyāyabinduṭīkā* (La Vallée Poussin 1908: 66.13–67.16). Although both sets of readings—for example, *gnas kyis bskal ba* and *gnas kyi bskal ba*—are found in Tibetan, the former seems preferable. See also Rong zom pa, *Grub mtha’i brjed byang* (p. 203.6–8): *bskal pa chen po gsum gyis bskal nas | mi mngon pa ni ma yin gyi | yod med pa kho na yin no || rang bzhin gyis bskal pa ldog ‘dre’am | gnas kyis bskal pa tshangs pa’am | ‘di na med pas dus kyis bskal pa gzhan na yod pa lta bu ma yin no ||*. Note that Rong zom pa provides “hungry ghost” (*ltog ‘dre*) as an example of an object that is “essentially remote” and Brahmā as an example of an object that is “spatially remote.” Something that is “temporally remote” for him would be something that is in the distant future.

seeing anything” (*ci yang ma mthong ba*) and “the best of [all] seeing” or “the best seeing” (*mthong ba’i/ba dam pa*).¹⁴³

It is not only that the Buddha was omniscient that has been taken for granted; so too that one gains release from samsāric shackles by knowing true reality (e.g., *pratītyasamutpāda*).¹⁴⁴ On the other hand, in addition to the Mahāyāna idea that reality is “not the domain of cognition/comprehension” (*budhigocara: blo yi spyod yul*) or an “object of cognition” (*jñeya: shes bya*), one also encounters

¹⁴³ Mi pham, *mKhas ’jug* (pp. 429.17–430.12): *don dam par chos gang yang dmigs su med pas mthong ba ci yang med la | ci yang ma mthong ba de nyid mthong ba’i dam pa’o zhes gsungs pa la | blo dman pa dag gis | ci yang ma mthong ba la mthong ba’i dam pa ci zhig yod | mthong ba dam pa yod na de nyid mthong ba yin gyi ci yang ma mthong ba ma yin no snyam du ’gal bar ’dzin la | zab mo’i blo ldan rnams kyis dngos dngos med kyi chos su gtogs pa’i mthong ba’am dmigs par bya ba yod na de nyid de’i mtshan mar ’dzin pa dang lta bar gyur pa yin pas mi rtog pa’i ye shes yod mi srid la | dmigs pas mthong bar bya ba ci yang med pa’i don so so rang gis rig pa la the tshom med cing chos kun gyi gnas lugs bsam gyis mi khyab pa ’di kho na yin par nyams su myong ba yod pa’i tshul khong du chud pa shes pa la zab pa |*

¹⁴⁴ Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakārikā* 24.40 (Ye 2011: 440): *yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaṃ paśyatīdaṃ sa paśyati | duḥkhaṃ samudayaṃ caiva nirodhaṃ mārgam eva ca ||*; *gang gis rten cing ’brel par ’byung || mthong ba des ni sdug bsngal dang || kun ’byung dang ni ’gog pa dang || lam nyid de dag mthong ba yin ||*; Nāgārjuna, *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā* 6 (Li & Ye 2014: 17; Lindtner 1997: 174): *nirvāṇaṃ ca bhavaś caiva dvayam etan na vidyate | pariñānaṃ bhavasyaiva nirvāṇam iti kathyate ||*; Tib. (Li & Ye 2014: 17; Lindtner 1997: 74): *srid pa dang ni mya ngan ’das || gnyis po ’di ni yod ma yin || srid pa yongs su shes pa nyid || mya ngan ’das zhes bya bar brjod ||*. See also Almogi 2009: 311–312; MacDonald 2009: 146 n. 36. Cf. Nāgārjuna, *Suḥrillekha* 112 (Tenzin 2002: 193; cf. Jamspal 1978: 108): *rten cing ’brel bar ’byung ’di rgyal ba yi || gsung gi mdzod kyi gces pa zab mo ste || gang gis ’di ni yang dag mthong ba des || sangs rgyas de nyid rig pas rnam mchog mthong ||*. Note that *de nyid rig pa* and *rnam mchog* are taken to be attributes of the Buddha. See also Maitreya (ascribed), *Abhisamayālamkāra* 5.21; *Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.154 (Wangchuk 2007: 200–201 n. 11): *nāpaneyam atah kimcid upaneyam na kimcana | draṣṭavyam bhūtato bhūtaṃ bhūtadarśi vimucyate ||*.

the idea, as famously in the *Dharmasaṃgītisūtra*,¹⁴⁵ that “not seeing” (*adarśana: mi mthong ba*) is “correct seeing” (*samyagdarśana: yang dag par mthong ba*). Similarly, the *Bodhisattvapitaka*, for example, also echoes the idea that “seeing all phenomena as they actually are” (*chos thams cad ji lta ba bzhin du mthong ba*) is “not seeing” (*ma mthong ba*) at all.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the *Kāśyapaparivarta* notably holds that the mind—and by extension, in my view, any phenomenal or trans/ultra-phenomenal reality—has not been seen even by the Buddha, is not seen, and will never be seen.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ *Dharmasaṃgītisūtra* as cited in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Bendall 1897–1902: 264.1–2, and reported in MacDonald 1988: 159 n. 1; Keira 2004: 71; MacDonald 2009: 148 n. 41): *adarśanaṃ bhagavan sarvadharmāṇāṃ darśanaṃ samyagdarśanam iti; bcom ldan 'das chos thams cad mi mthong ba ni yang dag par mthong ba'o* ||. Ryusei Keira also identifies a number of Indian sources that allude to the statement in the *Dharmasaṃgītisūtra*, namely, Āryadeva (ascribed), *Madhyamakabhramaghāta*; *Adhīsa, *Satyadvayāvātāra*; Bhāviveka, *Prajñāpradīpa*; Bhāviveka, *Tarkajvāla*; Jñānagarbha, *Satyadvayavibhaṅgaṅgavṛtti*; Śāntaraksita, *Madhyamakālamkāra-vṛtti*; Kamalaśīla, *Madhyamakālokā* (Keira 2004: 70 n. 114), *First Bhāvanākrama & Śālistambhaṅgikā*; Haribhadra, *Abhisamayālamkāralokā*; Dharmamitra, *Abhisamayālamkāraṅgikā*; *Adhīsa (ascribed), *Bodhipathapradīpapañjikā*; Abhayākaragupta, *Munimatālamkāra & Marmakaumudī*. Keira also refers to Kamalaśīla, *Vajracchedikāṅgikā & Avikalpapraveśadhāraṅgikā*.

¹⁴⁶ *Bodhisattvapitaka* as cited in the *Sūtrasamuccaya* (Pāsādika 1989: 143; cf. Keira 2004: 71): *chos thams cad ji lta ba bzhin du mthong ba gang zhe na | 'di lta ste ma mthong ba'o* ||.

¹⁴⁷ *Kāśyapaparivarta* §. 98 (Pāsādika 2015: 63; cf. von Staël-Holstein 1926: 144): *cittaṃ hi kāśyapa nādhyātmaṃ na bahirdhā nobhayam antareṇopalabhyate | cittaṃ hi kāśyapa arūpy anidarśanam apratiṅgham anābhāsam avijñāptikam apratiṅghitam aniketam | cittaṃ hi kāśyapa sarvabuddhair na drṣṭaṃ na paśyanti na paśyīṣyanti [sic] na drakṣyanti* |; Tib. (von Staël-Holstein 1926: 144): *'od srung sems ni nang na yang med | phyi rol na yang med | gnyi ga na yang med cing mi dmigs so* || *'od srung sems ni dpyad du med pa | bstan du med pa | rten ma yin pa | snang ba med pa | rnam par rig pa med pa | gnas pa med pa'o* || *'od srung sems ni sangs rgyas thams cad kyis kyang ma gzigs mi gzigs gzigs par mi 'gyur ro* ||. This is also cited in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, with the *Ratnakūṭa* “and the like” mentioned as the

Such enigmatic epistemological statements have evoked several interpretations by early Indian¹⁴⁸ and Tibetan¹⁴⁹ Buddhist scholars, and by modern scholars as well.¹⁵⁰ My impression is that all of these interpretations seem to fall into one of two categories, namely, what I wish to call an “epistemological” and an “ontological” interpretation. That is, under the former mode of interpretation, an attempt is made to make sense of the pertinent statements by explaining it with a certain epistemological theory. Under the latter mode of interpretation, an attempt is made to explain the statement by pointing out the ultimate unviability of the cognitive mechanism, given its ontological status (or rather lack of an ontological status). The former may be characterized as “common” interpretation, and the latter as “uncommon.” My own impression or contention is that the statements in such Mahāyāna scriptures as the *Dharmasaṃgītisūtra*, *Kāśyapaparivarta*, and

sources (Bendall 1897–1902: 234.2–5), it being wrongly speculated that what was meant was the *Ratnacūḍa* (Bendall 1897–1902: 233, n. 6; Bendall & Rouse 1922: 220). For English translations, see Pāsādika 2015: 154; Bendall & Rouse 1922: 220. It is also cited by Prajñākaramati in his *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* (La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 526.7–10). Cf. Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Bodhicittavivarāṇa* 43 (Lindtner 1997: 39): *mdor na sangs rgyas rnam kyis ni || gzigs par mi 'gyur gzigs mi 'gyur || rang bzhin med pas rang bzhin can || ji lta bur na gzigs par 'gyur ||*.

¹⁴⁸ For various shades of the later Indian interpretations of the idea that “not seeing” (*adarśana: mi mthong ba*) is the “correct seeing” (*samyagdarśana: yang dag par mthong ba*), see Keira 2004: especially, 70–103.

¹⁴⁹ On the difference in Tibetan interpretations of the statement that “no seeing is the best seeing” (*mthong ba med pa ni mthong ba dam pa*) by, for example, Tsong kha pa and Mi pham, see Phuntsho 2005: 181.

¹⁵⁰ In shedding light on Candrakīrti’s position on uncommon Mahāyāna epistemology, especially his understanding of the idea of “not seeing” (*adarśana: mi mthong ba*) as “correct seeing” (*samyagdarśana: yang dag par mthong ba*), MacDonald 2009 takes issue mainly with Dan Arnold, who maintains that “for Candrakīrti, the only ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth” and that “the ordinary world is all that such a Buddha would see.”

Bodhisattvapitaka, and the positions of Buddhist thinkers such as Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, were neither intended to be understood within the confines of traditional Buddhist epistemology, nor were they intended to deny the trans/ultra-phenomenal reality and its gnostic penetration in favor of only cis-phenomenal reality and its perception. The underlying and crucial presupposition in the Mahāyāna behind paradoxical epistemological statements such as “seen by way of not seeing anything” (*ci yang ma gzigs pa’i tshul gyis gzigs pa*) or “seen by way of not seeing” (*ma mthong ba’i tshul gyis mthong ba*) seems to be that at the level of total and absolute freedom from both objective and subjective manifoldness (*niṣprapañca: spros pa dang bral ba*), all phenomena or realities are devoid of apparitional and perceptual/conceptual characteristics or signs (*nimitta: mtshan ma*), without which no cognitive mechanisms and episodes are viable. In other words, when all delusional cognitive subjects (*blo*) and when all illusionary objects (*chos*) vanish in the sphere of true reality characterized by total purity (*dharmadhātuviśuddhimātra: chos kyi dbyings rnam par dag pa tsam*), one can no longer speak in terms of seeing and not seeing. This is what *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 5.8 seems to insinuate.¹⁵¹ The *Ratnaguṇasaṃcaya* thus states that the only possible analogy of seeing phenomena is seeing empty space.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 5.8 (Ye 2011: 82): *astivoṃ ye tu paśyanti nāstivoṃ cālpabuddhayaḥ | bhāvānām te na paśyanti draṣṭavyopasāmaṃ śivam ||*; *blo chung gang dag dngos rnam la || yod pa nyid dang med nyid du || lta ba de ni blta bya ba || nye bar zhi ba zhi mi mthong ||*.

¹⁵² *Ratnaguṇasaṃcaya* 12.10 (Yuyama 1976: 52; cf. Obermiller 1937: 50–51): *ākāśadr̥ṣṭu iti sattva pravāharanti khanidarśanaṃ kutu vimṛṣyata etam artham | tatha dharmadarśanu nidiṣṭu tathāgatena na hi darśanaṃ bhaṇitu śākya nidarśanena ||*; Tib. *nam mkha’ mthong zhes sems can tshig tu rab brjod pa || nam mkha’ ji ltar mthong zhes don ’di brtag par gyis || de ltar chos mthong ba yang de bzhin gshegs pas bstan || mthong ba dpe gzhan gyis ni bsnyad par nus ma yin ||*. Rong zom pa has also cited *Ratnaguṇasaṃcaya* 12.10 in his *Theg tshul* (p. 534.2–4).

4.2.7. Secrecy in the Context of Mahāyāna Philosophical Cosmology

Uncommon ideas of Mahāyāna philosophical cosmology within its treatment of the impure worlds—subsumed under the receptacle world (*bhājanaloka: snod kyi 'jig rten*) and the world of sentient or animate beings (*sattvaloka: sems can gyi 'jig rten / bcud kyi 'jig rten*)—and the pure worlds of *buddha* fields (*buddhakṣetra: sangs rgyas kyi zhing*), though apparently not characterized explicitly as secret or mysterious, may be characterized as such, especially owing to their attributes of infiniteness and inconceivability. Particularly fascinating are the Mahāyāna philosophical ideas of space and time, including those of spatial and temporal orientation. Only a few points can be addressed here.

First, the Mahāyāna idea that there are an infinite number of world systems in the ten quarters seems almost ordinary. What is perhaps extraordinary is the idea, pertaining to what one might call special Mahāyāna spatiology, that there are an 'n' number of world systems in a single atom, an idea that we find in the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*.¹⁵³ The expression “[*buddha*] fields [the total number of which equals the total number of] atoms on the top of a single atom” (*ekarajāgri rajopamakṣetrā: rdul gcig steng na rdul snyed zhing rnam*s) would be, of course, prone to different interpretations. (a) One possible interpretation, which Kaikioku Watanabe in his German translation of the *pāda* seems to adopt, is that it is a kind of “visualizationary feat,” which may or may not correspond with the actual cosmological reality. (b) Another possible interpretation would be that it involves a miraculous or

¹⁵³ *Bhadracarī* 28a (Watanabe 1912: 32; Devi 1959: 86–87): *ekarajāgri rajopamakṣetrā* ... [here I follow the reading of the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* reported by the editors] |; *rdul gcig steng na rdul snyed zhing rnam*s te ||. The German translation in Watanabe 1912: 45: “Auf der Spitze eines einzigen Stäubchens (mir) die (an Zahl) den Stäubchen vergleichbaren (Buddha-)Gebiete (vorstellend mochte ich sie erschauen).” And for an English translation in Osto 2010: 14: “In a single atom, [t]here are worlds equal in number to atoms.”

“thaumaturgical feat” of the Buddha or a *buddha*, and is not a depiction of cosmological reality. (c) It is also likely to be understood as a mere rhetorical or hyperbolic statement that is not to be taken literally. (d) According to Tibetan scholars such as Mi pham, such a cosmological reality can only be explained by a higher kind of Buddhist epistemology.¹⁵⁴ This verse from the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*, most pertinent to the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* as a whole,¹⁵⁵ especially as transmitted in the Tibetan canon,¹⁵⁶ suggests that the idea of an ‘n’ number of world systems in a single atom was meant to be understood as the combined product of the karmic mechanism of (unawakened) sentient beings and the salvific mechanism of awakened beings. Rong zom pa, for example, who cites the verse from the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* on three occasions,¹⁵⁷ explains such a cosmological phenomenon as

¹⁵⁴ For a discussion of Mi pham’s two types of means of conventional valid cognition (*sāṃvyaṅgyavahārikapramāṇa* or *sāṃvyaṅgyavahārikaṃ pramāṇam: kun tu tha snyad pa’i tshad ma*), see Wangchuk 2009: 222–225.

¹⁵⁵ For a discussion of Rong zom pa’s use of the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* (i.e., *sDong po bkod pa / sDong po brgyan pa*) in the sense of the *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* as a whole and not in the sense of a particular scripture within the larger *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*, see Almogi 2009: 245–246 n. 26.

¹⁵⁶ *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (P, Phal chen, vol. Yi, fol. 153a7–8; T, Phal chen, vol. Ka, fols. 200b7–201a1): *spu yi¹ rtse mo gcig la yang || zhing rnams bye ba bsam mi khyab || sna tshogs dbyibs kyang tha dad de || de dag ’dres pa gang yang med ||* (1 spu yi] T, spu’i P). An approximate corresponding Sanskrit text of the first two *pādas* can be found in the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* (Suzuki & Idzumi 1949: 236.9): *romamukheṣu acintiya kṣetrā paśyami nānaviyūhavicitrā* |.

¹⁵⁷ This *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* (= *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*) verse has been cited with slight variants by Rong zom pa three times in his *dKon cog ’grel* (pp. 94.24–95.1; 102.6–7; 120.4–5). For the contexts and details, see the *dKon cog ’grel* (pp. 94.19–95.11): *gnas phun sum tshogs pa bstan pa’i phyir ’og min gyi gnas mtha’ dang dbus med pa na zhes smos te | de la sangs rgyas kyi zhing yongs su dag pa ni chos kyi dbyings rnam par dag pa yin te | ’di ni nges pa don gyi mdo sde las kyang gsungs la | gsang sngags kyi tshul las kyang bzhed de | zhing rnams yon tan so so snang ba yang gdul bya’i skal ba dang | sangs rgyas kyi thugs rje’i dbang gis phyogs dang ris su chad pa med do || de yang ’di ltar | spu yi rtse mo gcig la yang || zhing rnams dbye ba bsam mi khyab || sna*

product of the good fortune of the sentient beings or trainees (*gdul*

*tshogs dbyibs kyang tha dad de || de dag 'dres par gyur pa med || ces gsungs pa lta bu ste | bcom ldan 'das shākya thub pa'i zhing 'di'i gong na yang sangs rgyas gzhan gyi zhing khams gzhan med do zhes brjod par mi bya'o || bcom ldan 'das kyi zhing 'di nyid kyang yongs su ma dag pa'i zhing khams yin no zhes kyang brjod par mi bya ste | gong du bstan pa bzhin du nyi ma dang zla ba'i dkyil 'khor ma dag pa ma yin mos kyi | dmus long rnams kyis mi mthong ba bzhin du | sangs rgyas kyi zhing yongs su ma dag pa ma yin kyang | skal ba med pa rnams kyis dag par mi mthong ba dang | sangs rgyas kyi thugs rje'i sems can khengs pa rnams la ngan cing dbul bar snang ste | dag par snang bas sangs rgyas kyi mdzad pa mi 'grub pa'i phyir ro || de bas na 'og min gyi gnas zhes bya ba 'di yang gnas kyi phyogs blos btsal mi dgos te | chos kyi dbyings rnam par dag pa'i dbang las yon tan gyi khyad par gang du snang ba de nyid rgyal ba'i dkyil 'khor du shes par bya'o ||; ibid. (pp. 101.24–102.7): nges pa'i don gyi mdo sde dang gsang sngags kyi tshul zab mo dag las ni | sems can dang sangs rgyas dbyer med cing phung po lnga sangs rgyas grangs med pa yin par bstan te | ji skad du | sdong po bkod pa'i mdo las | gang zhig bdag dang sangs rgyas rnams || rang bzhin mnyam par rab gnas shing || mi gnas len pa med pa de || de dag bde bar gshegs par 'gyur || gzugs dang 'tshor ba 'du shes dang || rnam par shes pa sems dpa' dag || grangs med de bzhin gshegs pa rnams || de dag thub pa chen por 'gyur || zhes bya ba dang | spu yi rtse mo gcig pa yang || zhing rnams bye ba bsam mi khyab || sna tshogs dbyibs kyang tha dad de || de dag 'dres par gyur pa med || ces bya ba la sogs pa lta bu'o ||; ibid. (p. 120.1–10): de bzhin gshegs pa rnams la ni 'dul ba'i dbang gis snang ba'i sku dang zhing la grang dang tshad nges par gzung ba med de | 'di ltar tang zag gcig gi spu'i rtse mo gcig la yang de bzhin gshegs pa sangs rgyas kyi zhing dang bcas pa grangs med pa bzhugs su rung ste | 'di ltar gong du bstan pa ltar | spu'i rtse mo gcig la yang || zhing rnams bye ba bsam mi khyab || sna tshogs dbyibs kyang tha dad de || de dag 'dres par gyur pa med || ces gsungs pa lta bu'o || zhing de dag ba yang sangs rgyas mi bzhugs pas 'dul na ni sangs rgyas med par snang ngo || gcig gis 'dul na ni gcig bzhugs par snang ngo || mang pos 'dul na ni mang po bzhugs par snang ste | ji skad du | zhing rnams la lar sangs rgyas med || la la'i zhing na sangs rgyas gcig || la lar sangs rgyas mang po'o || zhes gsungs pa lta bu'o ||. The pertinent scriptural verse has also been cited by Klong chen pa in his *Phyogs cu mun sel* (p. 85.17–18) and *Tshangs dbyangs 'brug sgra* (p. 10.14–16). Cf. *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (T, Phal chen, vol. Ka, fol. 203a1–2): *zhing rnams la la sangs rgyas med || la la'i zhing na sangs rgyas bcas || la la'i zhing na sangs rgyas gcig || la la sangs rgyas mang po'o ||.**

bya'i skal ba) and the power of the Buddha's compassion (*sangs rgyas kyi thugs rje'i dbang*), and that it is not spatially or generically confined/finite (*phyogs dang ris su chad pa med pa*). He also points out that one should claim neither that *buddha* fields are confined to Buddha Śākyamuni's nor that any is impure. It may be pointed out that also the hagiography of the famed Tibetan yogin Mi la ras pa illustrates such a concept of spatial mystery¹⁵⁸ when Mi la ras pa miraculously gets into a yak horn without it becoming larger or him becoming smaller.

Second, in addition to the Mahāyāna conception of space, its conception of time—so to speak, “Mahāyāna temporalogy”—too, would come across as inexplicable and mysterious from a pre-/non-Mahāyāna perspective. Setting aside the common Buddhist conceptions of time by various Buddhist systems such as about what time is, the ontological status of time, the smallest possible unit and span of time, the rejection of time as a creator of the world, and so on, what seems uniquely characteristic of Mahāyāna temporalogy is its insistence on the unreality/non-essentiality/non-substantiality, relativity, and variability or non-fixity of time and events in time. For example, it has been stated that one person's moment or instant can be another person's aeon (*kalpa: bskal pa*),¹⁵⁹ and that a *bodhisattva* who possesses a command over his mind or has “obtained the intellectual-emotional ability to accept/face the fact that phenomena are characterized by non-origination” (*anutpattikadharmakṣāntyadhigata: mi skye ba'i* (or *ma skyes pa'i*) *chos la bzod pa thob pa*), according to the *Mahārahasyopāyakaśālyasūtra*¹⁶⁰ and *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra*,¹⁶¹ can

¹⁵⁸ *Rus pa'i rgyan can* (alias gTsang smyon He ru ka), *Mi la'i rnam mgur* (pp. 585.6–588.18); *ibid.* (p. 586.10–12): *g.yag ru cher ma song zhing rje btsun gyi sku chung du ma song bar me long gi nang gi gzugs brnyan bzhin yangs cha dang bcas te g.yag ru'i dog sa na bzhugs nas ras chung pa la mgur 'di gsungs so ||*.

¹⁵⁹ See again Rong zom pa, *dKon cog 'grel* (p. 205.13–16).

¹⁶⁰ *Mahārahasyopāyakaśālyasūtra* (P, dKon brtsegs, vol. 'I, fol. 24b3–7; T, dKon brtsegs, vol. Cha, fol. 99b4–7): *rigs kyi bu mi skye ba'i chos la bzod pa thob pa'i byang chub sems dpa' ni | 'dod na zhag bdun gyis kyang byang chub mngon par rdzogs par 'tshang rgya bar yang 'gyur| 'dod na bskal pas kyang*

shorten or elongate the apparent duration of time or events at will.

byang chub mngon par rdzogs par 'tshang rgya bar 'gyur| 'dod na bskal pa brgyas kyang byang chub mngon par rdzogs par 'tshang rgya bar 'gyur| 'dod na bskal pa stong gis kyang byang chub mngon par rdzogs par 'tshang rgya bar 'gyur| 'dod na bskal pa 'bum gyis kyang byang chub mngon par rdzogs par 'tshang rgya bar 'gyur te| byang chub sems dpa' de ni sems can rnam's yongs su smin par bya ba'i phyir 'dod na bsam¹ bzhin du srid pa len cing 'gro bar yang byed do|| (¹ bsam] T, bsams P). Rong zom pa does not specify his source, but compare the following statements found in his *Theg tshul* (p. 455.16–23): *dus kyang rmi lam na dus chu tshod gcig tsam yang ma 'das par | bskal pa'am bskal ba las lhag pa'i tshe thub par rmi'ang dus yun ring mo 'das pa'ang myed la | byang chub sems dpa' rnam's zhag bdun gyis bskal pa chen po 'da' bar byin gyis rlob's ste | zhag bdun kyang blo'i snang ba tsam bskal pa chen po'ang blo'i snang ba tsam ste | dus yun ring mo thung ngur bsdus pa myed do || zhag bdun la bskal pa grangs myed par byin gyis rlob ste | de'i tshe'ang dus thung ngu dus ring por bsrings pa myed do || de bzhin du 'khor ba thog ma myed pa'i dus can du 'dod pa rnam's kyang | blo dus ltar 'khrul pa tsam du zad do ||*.

¹⁶¹ *Vimalakīrtinirdeśasūtra* 5.§13 (Study Group 2006: 60; Study Group 2004b: 236): *punar aparaṃ bhadantaśāriputra santi sattoā apramāṇasaṃsāravainayikāḥ | santi saṃkṣiptasaṃsāravainayikāḥ | tatrācintyavimokṣapratīṣṭhito bodhisattvo 'pramāṇasaṃsāravainayikānāṃ sattoānāṃ vainayikavaśam upādāya saptarātraṃ kalpam atikrāntam ādarśayet | saṃkṣiptasaṃsāravainayikānāṃ sattoānāṃ vainayikavaśam upādāya kalpaṃ saptarātraṃ atikrāntam ādarśayet | tatrāpramāṇasaṃsāravineyāḥ satvāḥ saptarātraṃ kalpam atikrāntaṃ saṃjānīran | saṃkṣiptasaṃsāravineyāḥ satvāḥ kalpaṃ saptarātraṃ atikrāntaṃ saṃjānīran |*; Tib. (Study Group 2004b: 236): *btsun pa shā ri'i bu gzhan yang 'khor ba tshad med pas 'dul ba'i sems can dag kyang yod| 'khor ba bstung pas 'dul ba dag kyang yod de | de la rnam par thar pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa la gnas pa'i byang chub sems dpa' ni 'khor ba tshad med pas 'dul pa'i sems can rnam's 'dul ba'i dbang gi phyir zhag bdun yang bskal pa 'das par ston te | 'khor ba bstung bas 'dul ba'i sems can rnam's la ni bskal pa'ang zhag bdun gyis 'das par ston to || de la 'khor ba tshad med pas 'dul pa'i sems can rnam's ni zhag bdun la'ang bskal pa 'das pa snyam du shes so|| gang 'khor ba bstung bas 'dul ba'i sems can de dag ni bskal pa'ang zhag bdun gyis 'das par shes so ||*. Rong zom pa makes an explicit, albeit only a brief, reference to this passage, for which, see his *dKon cog 'grel* (p. 173.11–12).

Third, the special Mahāyāna spatialogy and temporalogy considered in the preceding paragraphs seem to presuppose that any notion of a fixed spatial and temporal conception and orientation is determined by grasping at a self (*ātmagrāha*: *bdag tu 'dzin pa*); without this no spatial and temporal specification and orientation are possible, an idea seemingly put forward by the *Mahāyānasamgraha*.¹⁶²

4.3. Bodhisattvayāna: Who Are the Possessors of Secrets?

The question as to who are the possessors of secrets according to the Bodhisattvayāna may be discussed here by resorting to the idea of the three kinds of juvenile (*bāla*: *byis pa*) and their counterparts, namely, juvenile in old–young juxtaposition (*rgan gzhon gyi zlas phye ba'i byis pa*), juvenile in wise–fool (or better, expert–laity) juxtaposition (*mkhas blun gyi zlas phye ba'i byis pa*), and juveniles in noble–ordinary juxtaposition (*skye 'phags kyi zlas phye ba'i byis pa*).¹⁶³ The tacit assumption behind this concept is that in each of these three pairs, the former member is always characterized by a certain kind of cognitive, emotive, and conative maturity as opposed to the latter member, who is characterized by a kind of cognitive, emotive, and conative immaturity or naivety. One may state that the former members have access to some knowledge/wisdom, expertise, or insights that remain concealed to the latter members. In other words, one who has epistemic access to a certain entity, reality, activity, or quality can be considered a possessor of some kinds of secrets. Competent and

¹⁶² Asaṅga (ascribed), *Mahāyānasamgraha* 10.§3 (Lamotte 1973: 85): *bdag tu 'dzin pa med pa'i phyir || gnas la tha dad yod ma yin ||*. Klong chen pa, for example, cites these two *pādas* in his *Phyogs bcu mun sel* (p. 80.15–17), *Grub mtha' mdzod* (p. 191.10–12), and *Chos dbyings mdzod 'grel* (p. 358.1–2).

¹⁶³ Khu nu bla ma, *Ngag srgon 'grel pa* (p. 123.1–2): *byis pa shed ma bye ba skye 'phags mkhas blun rgan gzhon gyi zlas phye ba'i byis pas...!*; Kun bzang rnam rgyal, *Ngag srgon yang 'grel* (p. 359, s.v. *byis pa*); cf. *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *byis pa 2*): *skye 'phags mkhas blun gyi zlas phye ba'i so skye phal pa'am! blun po!*.

wholesome Mahāyāna teachers would naturally be seen as possessors of Mahāyāna trade secrets.¹⁶⁴

Specifically in the Mahāyāna context, the *prthagjana-ārya* juxtaposition is significant. Within the wide *prthagjana-ārya* spectrum, varying degrees of epistemic validity and cognitive accessibility have been presupposed, which is based on what I have called “a relativity theory of the purity and validity of perception.”¹⁶⁵ According to this theory, someone who has better and broader cognitive insight into a certain entity, reality, activity, or quality would always have access to some elements of secrecy, mastery, or mystery that remain hidden to one who has poorer and narrower cognitive insight. In principle, nothing would remain secret to someone who is omniscient, but even for an *arhacchrāvaka* or a *pratyekabuddha*, both of who are said to still be subject to “four causes of nescience” (*mi shes pa'i rgyu bzhi*),¹⁶⁶ infinite types and numbers of entities, realities, activities, or qualities remain as secrets and mysteries. As a general rule, one may state that the more cognizant an individual is, the more mundane and supramundane secrets he or she possesses that lie concealed to less cognizant persons. It is thus not difficult to imagine why the thrust of the **Śiṃśapavanasūtra* that we have examined would appeal to those who believe that the Buddha was (or a *buddha* is) omniscient.

Employing the Buddhist concept of the three kinds of fetters (*saṃyojanatraya: kun tu sbyor ba gsum*),¹⁶⁷ one may also state that

¹⁶⁴ *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (P, Phal chen, vol. Hi, fol. 178b6; T, Phal chen, vol. Cha, fol. 206a7): *byang chub sems dpa'i gsang ba'i gnas thams cad ni dge ba'i bshes gnyen gyi mdzod na 'dug pa'o* ||.

¹⁶⁵ Wangchuk 2009.

¹⁶⁶ For explanations of the “four causes of nescience” (*mi shes pa'i rgyu bzhi*) on account of which even an *arhacchrāvaka* or a *pratyekabuddha* is said to be unable to teach in the manner in which the Buddha teaches, see, for examples, Klong chen pa, *Legs bshad rgyal mtsho* (pp. 332.14–333.10); Kun dpal, *bDud rtsi'i thig pa* (p. 143.3–14).

¹⁶⁷ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya* ad *Madhyamakāvātāra* 1.6 (Skt. Gokhale et al. 2019: 167.2–11; Tib. La Vallée Poussin 1912: 16.3–17). See

one who is bound by the three kinds of fetters would not be a possessor of secrets, that is, (a) if one is afraid and thus not interested or motivated in knowing the secrets, (b) if one erroneously believes that one already has access to all the secrets, and (c) if one is skeptical or doubtful about the very existence of secrets.

Normally, ordinary sentient beings (*pr̥thagjana*: *so so'i skye bo*) are said to have no access to secrets that are accessible only to the Noble Ones (*ārya*: *'phags pa*), and according to *Ratnāvalī* 2.9, as we saw above, the secrets of emptiness and illusoriness remain inaccessible to *pr̥thagjanas*. Śāntarakṣita goes a step further.¹⁶⁸ According to him, one can state that the full secret of the non-essentiality of phenomena (*dharmanairātmya*: *chos la bdag med pa*) is possessed by no one other than the Buddha. Even *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, let alone the highest among celestial sentient beings, such as Viṣṇu, Śiva, and Brahmā, have no access to the secret or mystery of *dharmanairātmya*! The idea that even great *śrāvakas* such as Mahākāśyapa did not fathom the depths of

also Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. *kun tu sbyor ba gsum: trīṇi saṃyojanāni*): (1) *'jig tshogs la lta ba (satkāyadr̥ṣṭi)*, (2) *tshul khirms dang brtul zhugs mchog tu 'dzin pa (śīlaorataparāmarśa)*, and (3) *the tshom (vicikitsā)*. For a useful explanation, see Mi pham, *mKhas 'jug* (p. 269.3–10): *yang 'jig lta dang | tshul khirms brtul zhugs mchog 'dzin the tshom gyi kun sbyor gsum spang bas | rgyun zhugs su 'gyur bar gsung ba ni | de ma yin pa'i rgyun zhugs kyis spang bya yang yod mod kyis 'di gsum lam bgrod pa la 'gro mi 'dod pa dang | lam nor ba dang | lam la the tshom skyes pas gegs byed pa lta bu'i kun sbyor yin pas gtso bo 'di gsum spangs na gzhan yang spang bar don gyis mtshon nas gsungs pa'o ||*; *Tshig mdzod chen mo* (s.v. *kun sbyor ba gsum*): *mthong lam gyis spang byar gyur pa'i kun tu sbyor ba gsum ste | 'jig lta kun btags kyis thar pa la skrag nas 'gro mi 'dod pa'i kun sbyor dang | tshul khirms dang brtul zhugs mchog 'dzin gyis lam ma yin pa la lam du 'dzin pas lam nor gyi kun sbyor | lam la the tshom byas nas thar pa'i gegs byed pas the tshom gyi kun sbyor bcas gsum mo ||*.

¹⁶⁸ Śāntarakṣita, *Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 95 (Ichigō 1985: 326): *yang dag bdud rtsi dag pa 'di || thugs rje dag pa'i rgyu can gyi || de bzhin gshegs pa ma gtogs par || gzhan gyi longs spyod rna yin no ||*; *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti ad Madhyamakālaṃkāra* 95 (Ichigō 1985: 326).

Mahāyāna teachings, or, know all the secrets that were known to the Buddha, has been used by Mahāyāna apologists.¹⁶⁹ Following the *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*,¹⁷⁰ one may also maintain that four types of persons, namely, *prthagjanas*, *śrāvakas*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and those *bodhisattvas* “who have newly entered the [Greater] Vehicle” (*navayānasamprasthita*: *theg pa la gsar du zhugs pa*), have no access to the secrets of the *tathāgatagarbha*. Mi pham, for example, reiterated that even a highly advanced *bodhisattva* such as one on the tenth stage, let alone a *bodhisattva* who is a beginner, is said to barely fathom them as if trying to perceive a visible object in the night (*mtshan mo'i gzugs mthong ba ltar*).¹⁷¹ In other words, for him, the secret or mystery of the *tathāgatagarbha* remains concealed even to highly developed *bodhisattvas*; it is the Buddha or a *buddha* alone who possess the *tathāgatagarbha*'s actual secret.

4.4. Bodhisattvayāna: Whether Secrets Should be Concealed or Revealed?

It is clear that non-Mantric Mahāyāna teachings that are unsuitable with regard to persons, times, and occasions should be kept secret. The *Mahāyānasūtrālaṅkāra* provides five activities on account of which a *bodhisattva* is like a relative (*bandhu*: *rtsa lag*) of sentient beings, and one of the five is keeping to himself teachings deemed inappropriate to be disclosed or exposed to sentient

¹⁶⁹ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.52 (Bhattacharya 1960: 198; La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 443, added as a note): *mahākāśyapamukhyaiś ca yad vākyaṃ nāvagāhyate | tat tvayānavabuddhatvād agrāhyaṃ kaḥ kariṣyati ||; ngag gang 'od srung chen po la || sogs pas gting dpogs ma gyur pa || de ni khyod kyis ma rtogs pas || gzung ba min pa su zhig byed ||.*

¹⁷⁰ Asaṅga/Sāramati (ascribed), *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā ad Ratnagotravibhāga* 1.153 (Johnston 1950: 74): *samāsata ime catvāraḥ pudgalās tathāgatagarbhadarśanaṃ praty acakṣuṣmanto vyavasthitāḥ | katame catvāraḥ | yad uta prthagjanaḥ śrāvakaḥ pratyekabuddho navayānasamprasthitaś ca bodhisattvaḥ |.* For an English translation, see Takasaki 1966: 296.

¹⁷¹ For several references to Mi pham on the idea of the unfathomability of the *tathāgatagarbha* even for a *bodhisattva* on the tenth stage, see Wangchuk 2019: 309–310 n. 132.

beings.¹⁷² By contrast suitable Mahāyāna teachings should not be kept secret. In the Mahāyāna context, as in secular and pre-/non-Mahāyāna ones, *ācāryamuṣṭi* is looked upon negatively.¹⁷³ The *Mañjuśrīvikurvāṇaparivartasūtra*, a Mahāyāna scripture, clearly disapproves of the practice of *ācāryamuṣṭi*.¹⁷⁴ In no way is a *bodhisattva* supposed to display the “tightfistedness of a teacher” (*ācāryamuṣṭi*: *slob dpon gyi dpe mkhyud*), a point made explicit by the *Bodhisattvabhūmi* on three occasions.¹⁷⁵ Also from the Tibetan translation of the *Drumakinnararājapariprcchāsūtra* we learn that a *bodhisattva* observes eighty jewels of *cittotpāda* (*sems bskyed pa rin po che brgyad cu*) in order to guarantee the genealogy of the Three Jewels, and one of these is the “jewel thought” free of

¹⁷² Maitreya (ascribed), *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra* 19.14ab (Lévi 1907: 162): *anarhadeśanāṃ ye ca satvānāṃ gūhayanti hi* |. See also Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. *gsang byed*): *gsang dag ston par mi 'os pa || sems can rnam la gsang byed cing ||*.

¹⁷³ *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* (Waldschmidt 1950: Part 2, p. 197, §. 14): *na tatrānanda tathāgatasya dharmeṣv ācāryamuṣṭir yaṃ tathāgataḥ praticchādayitavya manyeta kaccin me pare na vidyur iti* |.

¹⁷⁴ *Mañjuśrīvikurvāṇaparivartasūtra* (T, mDo sde, vol. Ta, fol. 377a6–b1; B, vol. 46, p. 666.7–12): *thos pa la ser sna med cing chos la slob dpon gyis [B; gyi T] dpe' mkhyud med de zang zing med par chos ston pa ni legs pa'o || chos la ser sna byed cing chos la slob dpon gyis [B; gyi T] dpe' mkhyud byed de zang zing dang 'brel ba'i sems kyis chos ston pa ni legs pa ma yin pa'o ||*.

¹⁷⁵ *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Takahashi 2005: p. 93.2–3, cf. Wogihara 1930–36: p. 41.27–28): *na ca tena kauśalyenonnatim gacchati | na pareṣāṃ ācāryamuṣṭim karoti* |; Tib. (P, fol. 28a3; B, vol. 73, p. 579.6–8): *mkhas par gyur pa des kyang khengs par mi 'gyur la | gzhan dag la yang slob dpon gyi dpe mkhyud mi byed do ||*; Wogihara 1930–36 (p. 363.13–14): *na ca teṣāṃ antike dharmamātsaryam karoti na cācāryamuṣṭim* |; Tib. (P, fol. 216b17; B, vol. 73, p. 990.20–21): *de dag la chos kyī ser sna yang mi byed la slob dpon gyi dpe mkhyud par [P; kyang B] mi byed do ||*; Wogihara 1930–36 (p. 106.16–18): *sarveṣāṃ ca deśayati | nirantaram sarvaṃ ca deśayati | dharmamātsaryam akurvan nācāryamuṣṭim dharmeṣu karoti* |; Tib. (P, fol. 67a6–7; B, vol. 73, p. 664.4–): *chos la ser sna mi byed pa dang | chos rnam la slob dpon gyis dpe mkhyud med [P; mi byed B] par thams cad la ston cing rgyun mi 'chad par thams cad la ston to ||*.

ācāryamuṣṭi.¹⁷⁶ The ethicality issue connected with *ācāryamuṣṭi* becomes even clearer if we contrast it with the issue of the status and role of Dharma in Buddhism in general, and of, in particular, “giving teaching” (*dharmadāna*: *chos kyi sbyin pa*), which is lauded in Buddhist sources as the best form of gift or generosity.¹⁷⁷ The stinginess or selfishness associated with *ācāryamuṣṭi* and the generosity associated with *dharmadāna* stand in stark contrast to one another.

The notion of secrets themselves in no way implies that any particular information in and of itself should be considered either worth keeping secret or transmitting to others. This is true in particular with regard to matters of personal privacy. The individuality of a person, or personal identity, defined by an instinctive, arbitrary, and vague notion of self, permits one to draw borders between oneself and others. Personal secrets are thus nothing but certain information privy to oneself—that one possesses and keeps *concealed* by not communicating them to others, whether verbally or non-verbally. The bottom line when it comes to the ethicality of secrecy or transmissibility, according to Buddhist philosophy, is that it is the positivity or negativity of the intention behind, and the ramifications of, concealing or revealing certain personal information that make secrecy and transmissibility irreproachable or reproachable, while they themselves are actually ethically neutral. In other words, the ethicality of secrecy or transmissibility is governed by the benevolence or malevolence of intent and the beneficial or ill effects on oneself and others when concealing or revealing any information. If Bodhisattvic prudence concludes that their exposure would undermine the safety and well-being of sentient

¹⁷⁶ *Drumakinnararājaparipṛcchāsūtra* § 4F (Harrison 1992: 79): *chags pa'i sems med pas slob dpon chos la dpe mkhyud med pa'i sems rin po che dang* |.

¹⁷⁷ *Akṣayamatīnirdeśasūtra* (B, vol. 60, p. 360.18–19): *gzhan yang chos kyi sbyin pa ni gang sbyin pa thams cad kyi mchog ni chos kyi sbyin par rig nas chos kyi sbyin pa yongs su gtong ba'o* ||. According to Norman 1997: 116, Aśoka inscriptions do mention the term *dhammadāna*. See also Schmithausen 2000: 126 n. 37.

beings and the doctrine of the Buddha, even Śrāvakayāna teachings deserve to be kept secret. If their concealment might undermine the safety and well-being of sentient beings and the doctrine of the Buddha, even Mantrayāna teachings should not be kept secret. Such an ethical principle is formulated by Nāgārjuna as follows:¹⁷⁸

If poison would benefit someone,
Give him even poison!
If exquisite food would not benefit [him],
Do not give it to him!

Obviously a *bodhisattva* is expected to have not only the sagacity to know what kinds of secret should be concealed or revealed, from whom or to whom, under what circumstances, but also have the ability to keep secrets (*gsang thub pa*), which can be seen as a mark of reliability, and more generally of ethical-ascetical integrity. His discretion will guide him to follow the ethical rule of permitting or prohibiting as demanded by place, time, and type of person.

In sum, the answer from a Bodhisattvayāna perspective to the question regarding whether secrets should be kept would be that should the concealment of secrets be beneficial, one should conceal them, and should the revealment of secrets be beneficial, one should reveal them. Such decisions and actions, however, presuppose that a *bodhisattva* is endowed with the necessary discriminating insight (*prajñā: shes rab*) and compassion (*karuṇā/krpā: snying rje*) so as to decide wisely. Naturally, the greater the *prajñā* and *karuṇā*, the less the likelihood of making wrong decisions and taking wrong actions.

4.5. Bodhisattvayāna: To Whom Should Secrets Be Revealed?

Needless to say, from a Bodhisattvayāna perspective the right kind of teacher with the right qualifications and motivation,

¹⁷⁸ Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī* 3.63 (Hahn 1982: 84): *gang la dug ni phan 'gyur na || de la dug kyang sbyin par bgyi || kha zas mchog kyang mi phan na || de la de ni sbyin mi bgyi ||*; cf. Wangchuk 2007: 55.

giving the right kind of teaching to a disciple with the right faculties, at the right time and in the right sequence would be positively evaluated as ideal, and the reverse as reproachable. Although it is not confined to the Mahāyāna context, one may still presuppose that the secrets should not be revealed to those who are untrustworthy and thus are incapable of keeping secrets (*gsang thub pa*), a quality considered a virtue, and in fact one of the thirty major physical signs of a great man (*mahāpuruṣa: skyes bu chen po*) is said to be an effect of keeping secrets.¹⁷⁹ All those who are considered suitable receptacles (*bhājana: snod*) of Mahāyāna teachings can be considered the same persons suitable for revealing Mahāyāna secrets to. In addition to the prerequisites for a recipient delineated by Vasubandhu in his *Vyākhyāyukti*, as presented above in the Śrāvakayāna context (and applicable also here), various Mahāyāna authors have attempted to identify with greater precision such suitable recipients, among the more famous, Āryadeva, Śāntideva, and Candrakīrti. According to Āryadeva,¹⁸⁰ Mahāyāna secrets should be revealed only to (a) those who are unbiased/unprejudiced (**sthalastha: gzur gnas / gzu bor gnas pa*) rather than biased/prejudiced; (b) those who are intelligent (**buddhimat/buddhimant: blo ldan*) rather than foolish; (c) those who are interested/industrious (**arthin/prārthin: don gnyer*

¹⁷⁹ *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā* (B, vol. 31, p. 197.11–13): *gsang ba'i tshigs bsrungs pas na mdoms kyi sba ba sbubs su nub par gyur ste | de ni sras mang ba'i snga ltas yin no ||*; *Pañcaviṃśatisāhasrikā* (B, vol. 28, p. 535.8–9): *gsang ba'i tshig yongs su bsrung pas | gsang ba'i gnas sbubs su nub pa ste | de ni bu mang po'i snga ltas so ||*; *Mahāyānopadeśamahāyānasūtra* (B, vol. 59, p. 809.13–14): *gsang ba'i gnas spubs su nub pa ni sngon gsang ba'i tshig bsrungs shing 'khrig pa'i chos spangs pas grub bo ||*.

¹⁸⁰ Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka* 12.1 (Lang 1986: 110): *gzur gnas blo ldan don gnyer ba'i || nyan po snod ces bya bar bshad || smra po yon tan rnam gzhan du || mi 'gyur nyan po la yang min ||*. The corresponding Sanskrit text is not extant. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 111. See also the Tibetan translation of Candrakīrti's *Catuḥśatakavṛtti ad Catuḥśataka* 12.1 in Tillemans 1990: vol. 2, pp. 87.1–3.17. For an English translation of the pertinent commentaries by Candrakīrti and Dharmapāla, see Tillemans 1990: vol. 1, pp. 115, 87.

ba) rather than disinterested/lazy. Śāntideva¹⁸¹ for his part states that secrets should not be given to those who have no respect (*nirgaurava: ma gus pa*) for the teaching or the teacher but only to those who do (*gaurava: gus pa*). In addition, following him, the right secrets should be revealed to the right receptacle; that is, secrets consisting in profound and vast teachings should not be given to persons of meager (*alpa: dman pa*) cognitive faculties,¹⁸² but only to those with sharp faculties who can digest and benefit from the teachings. Conversely, those who are receptacles of vast teachings (*udāradharmapātra: rgya chen chos kyi snod gyur pa*) should not be fed inferior teachings.¹⁸³ Candrakīrti in his *Madhyamakāvātāra* elegantly illustrates to what kind of recipient the teaching of *śūnyatā* or the absolute truth/reality (*paramārthasatya: dam pa'i don gyi bden pa*) should be given.¹⁸⁴ In

¹⁸¹ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 5.88 (Bhattacharya 1960: 74; La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 145.8–9): *dharmam nirgaurave svasthe na śiroveṣṭite vadet | sacchatradaṇḍasāstre ca nāvagunṭhitamastake ||*; Tib. *ma gus pa la chos mi bshad || mi na bzhin du mgo dkris dang || gdugs dang 'khar ba mtshon thogs dang || mgo bo g.yogs pa dag la min ||*.

¹⁸² Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 5.89 (Bhattacharya 1960: 74; La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 146.4–10): *gambhīrodāram alpeṣu na strīṣu puruṣam vinā | hīnotkrṣṭeṣu dharmeṣu samam gauravam ācaret ||*; Tib. *dman la zab dang rgya che dang || skyes pa med par bud med min || dman dang mchog gi chos rnam la || mtshungs par gus pas kun tu spyod ||*.

¹⁸³ Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 5.90ab (Bhattacharya 1960: 75; La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 146.13): *nodāradharmapātram ca hīne dharme niyojayet |*; Tib. *rgya chen chos kyi snod gyur pa || dman pa'i chos la sbyar mi bya ||*.

¹⁸⁴ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātāra* 6.4–5 (Li 2015: 3): *prthagjanatve 'pi niśamya śūnyatām pramodam antar labhate muhurmuḥ | prasādajāsṛāvīlajātalocanas tanūruhotphullatanuś ca jāyate || yas tasya sambuddhadhiyo 'sti bījam tattvopadeśasya ca bhājanam saḥ | ākhyeyam asmai paramārthasatyam | tadanvayās tasya guṇā bhavanti ||*; Tib. (La Vallée Poussin 1907: 78): *so so skye bo'i dus na'ang stong pa nyid thos nas || nang du rab tu dga' ba yang dang yang du 'byung || rab tu dga' ba las byung mchi mas mig brlan zhing || lus kyi ba spu ldang bar gyur pa gang yin pa || de la rdzogs pa'i sangs rgyas blo yi sa bon yod || de nyid nye bar bstan pa'i snod ni de yin te || de la dam pa'i don gyi bden pa bstan par bya || de la de yi rjes su 'gro ba'i yon tan 'byung ||*. See also the *Subhāṣitasamgraha* (Bendall 1903:

short, Madhyamaka ontological secrets or mysteries should be revealed, so to speak, to a śūnyatophile, and not to someone who suffers from śūnyatophobia.

Candrakīrti indicates that the secrets or mysteries of the Buddha or a *buddha* cannot be revealed to those who have not previously accumulated basic wholesome virtues (*sngon dge ba'i rtsa ba ma bsags pa rnams*) and thus who do not possess resolute trust (*adhimukti/adhimokṣa: lhag par mos pa*), but they can be revealed to those who possess such trust, for they would have had occasion to accumulate immense merit.¹⁸⁵ We have seen above that according to the *Mahāyānasūtrālamkāra*, too, a *bodhisattva* is not supposed to disclose secrets to those who are unworthy to receive them. Mi pham's commentary on this adds some details to it.¹⁸⁶ Those who are not worthy to receive secrets are said to be "those with meager mental capacity" (*blo chung ba rnams*); those secrets which should not be revealed are the "profound and vast Mahāyāna teachings" (*theg pa chen po'i chos zab cing rgya che ba*) and the "areas/domains of inconceivability" (*bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i gnas rnams*). The

387.17–25) and La Vallée Poussin 1910: 275–276 n. 3, where the Sanskrit text of *Madhyamakāvātāra* 6.4–5 is cited.

¹⁸⁵ Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātāra* [11.39] (La Vallée Poussin 19012: 403.2–5): *bde bar gshegs pa ma lus phyogs shing sangs yul dag na || pha rab rdul gyi rdul rnams bdog par gyur pa ji snyed pa || byang chub mchog rab dam par gshegs pa'i bskal pa'ang de snyed de || 'on kyang khyod kyi gsang ba 'di nyid bsnyad bgyis ma lags so ||*; *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya* (La Vallée Poussin 19012: 403.13–16): *'di ni sngon dge ba'i rtsa ba ma bsags pa rnams kyis lhag par mos par bya bar dka' ba'i phyir na bsnyad par bya ba ma yin te | 'ga' zhig tu de la lhag par mos par byed pa rnams la bsod nams gzhal du med bsags par bya ba'i phyir bshad do ||*.

¹⁸⁶ Mi pham, *bDud rtsi'i dga' ston* (p. 586.6–12): *byang chub sems dpas sems can blo chung ba rnams la gang dag bstan par mi 'os pa theg pa chen po'i chos zab cing rgya che ba dang bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i gnas rnams bstan na skrag cing spong bar 'gyur bas | de rnams sems can de dag rnams la gsang bar byed cing mi ston pa ni 'jig rten na rtsa lag ste gnyen nam nye du'i tshogs kyis nye du gzhan gyi srog dang srid la gnod par 'gyur ba'i gtam gsang bar byed pa lta bu'o ||*.

reason for not revealing such secrets to such individuals is that if one does so they, out of fear, would shun them.

According to the *Upāyakauśalyasūtra* and *Mahārahasyopāyakauśalyasūtra*, as we have seen above, secret teachings dealing with *upāyakauśalya* should not be given to those sentient beings who are endowed with scanty basic wholesome virtues (*sems can dman pa dge ba'i rtsa ba chung ngu rnams*), *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*. The reasons suggested by Mahāyāna sources often seem to be that sentient beings are not always able to confront reality as it is or realities as they are, especially realities that one considers unpleasant and painful or profound, as the Mahāyāna idea of three kinds of *kṣānti* illustrates. Especially one's pain and suffering and the pain and suffering that one sees around oneself are not easy to confront, accept, and cope with, either emotionally or intellectually. Āryadeva muses that someone who is not able to emotionally and intellectually cope with the knowledge of the sum of the pain and suffering in *saṃsāra* would die immediately if (s)he were to learn it.¹⁸⁷

4.6. Bodhisattvayāna: Why Keep Secrets?

When considering the question as to why one should, from the Bodhisattvayāna perspective, keep or reveal a secret, it seems worthwhile not to lose sight of a few points. First, the Buddha, who himself is believed to have discovered, so to speak, a secret, something ambrosia-like (*bdud rtsi lta bu'i chos*), was not particularly keen on revealing it to other sentient beings because of its profundity and impenetrability, and so possible futility, detrimentality, or abuse,¹⁸⁸ but he did in the end let it out, albeit

¹⁸⁷ Āryadeva, *Catuhśataka* 7.15 (Lang 1986: 74): *saṃsāraduḥkhaṃ jānīyād yadi bālo 'pi sarvaśaḥ | gacched atyantato nāśaṃ saha cittena tatkṣaṇam ||*; Tib. *gal te byis pa'ang rnam kun tu || 'khor ba'i sdug bsngal shes 'gyur na || skad cig de la sems dang ni || lhan cig gtan du 'jig par 'gyur ||*. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 75.

¹⁸⁸ Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī* 2.18 (Hahn 1982: 46–47): *sambudhyāsmān nivṛtto 'bhūd dharmam deśayituṃ munih | durjñānam atigāmbhīryāj jñātoā dharmam imam janaiḥ ||*; Tib. *chos 'di zab phyir skye bo yis || shes par dka' bar thugs*

only hesitatingly, and at the request of Śakra and Brahmā. His hesitation cannot be interpreted negatively as a sign of selfishness, and thus comparable to *ācāryamuṣṭi*. On the contrary, it reveals, in my view, the Buddhist attitude towards teaching. If there is no suitable recipient who can understand and derive benefit from it, giving teaching, whether solicited or unsolicited, is a futile exercise. It reminds one of a popular Tibetan saying: “If there is no listener, the expounder is like a [barking] dog” (*nyan mkhan med na bshad mkhan khyi dang ’dra*). Second, the motive behind revealing or concealing the teachings of the Buddha may become clear if we understand the Buddhist conception of the teaching of the Buddha, namely, as a means of ministration and salvation (*curatio et salvatio*), and particularly as a medicine. The teaching of the Buddha is conceived of as a powerful medicine. Just as there are certain risks involved in administering any powerful drug, revealing or prescribing Buddhist teachings is considered to be a tricky matter. Nāgārjuna, for example, compares one who has wrongly understood (*durjñāta*: *log par bzung ba = log par shes pa*) the teachings to one who has improper eating habits (*durbhukta*: *kha zas bza’ nyes pa*), thereby undermining his health and happiness, and someone who has correctly understood (*samyajñāta*: *legs par shes pa*) the teachings to one who eats properly (*subhukta*: [*kha zas*] *bza’ legs [pa]*), thereby contributing to good health and happiness.¹⁸⁹ From the viewpoints of those who set store by the Śrāvakayāna, Bodhisattvayāna, and Mantrayāna and their

chud de || des na thub pa sangs rgyas nas || chos bstan pa las log par ’gyur ||; *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24.12 (Ye 2011: 422): *ataś ca pratyudāvṛttaṃ cittaṃ deśayituṃ muneh | dharmam matvāsya dharmasya mandair duravaḡāhatām ||*; Tib. *de phyir zhan pas chos ’di yi || gting rtogs dka’ bar mkhyen gyur nas || thub pa’i thugs ni chos bstan las || rab tu log par gyur pa yin ||*. See also Schmithausen 2000: 120 n. 3, where other primary and secondary sources on the topic have been provided. The primary sources there include the *Vinayavastu* (cited by Candrakīrti in his *Śūnyatāsaptatvṛtti* (Erb 1997: 215–216 [Tibetan text]), *Aṣṭasahasrikā*, and *Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra*. See also the *Milindapañha* (Pesala 2001: 125–126) on the “reluctance of the Buddha.”

¹⁸⁹ Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī* 2.19–23 (Hahn 1982: 46–49).

doxographical hierarchies, the higher the vehicle, the more powerful and riskier does the “Dharmic medicine” prescribed by the vehicle become. Based on such a presupposition, one understands why it can be highly risky and irresponsible to indiscriminately administer any Dharmic medicine to some “patient” suffering from some “disease” resulting from cognitional-emotional defilements (*kleśa: nyon mongs pa*), and all the more if that Dharmic medicine is prescribed by an incompetent physician (or “quack”) with arbitrary doses, durations, and manner administered. Though all possible wrong motives and practices cannot in reality be ruled out, the ideal motives for concealing or revealing secret teachings is surely to maximize the benefit, safety, and security of those who receive teachings, those who impart teachings, and the teachings themselves, and to minimize the risks, dangers, and damage for the sentient beings involved. Thus the Buddha, who has been regarded as a physician *par excellence* (*varavaidya: sman pa'i mchog; bhiṣagvara: sman pa dam pa*), an omniscient physician (*sarvajñavaidya: sman pa thams cad mkhyen pa*), a great physician (*mahābhiṣaj/ mahāvaidya: sman pa chen po*), and so on in a number of sources,¹⁹⁰ or any teacher who follows him, will not act

¹⁹⁰ It is beyond the scope of the present contribution to provide an exhaustive list of sources where the Buddha has been described as a great physician. Some sources may be given here: (a) *Ratnaguṇasamcaya* 32.6ab (Yuyama 1976: 131; Obermiller 1937: 123): *vaidyottamo jagati rogacikitsakārī prajñopadeśa kathito ayu bodhimārgo* |; Tib. 'gro ba'i nad gso mdzad pa sman pa'i mchog gyur pas || shes rab bstan pa byang chub lam ldan 'di gsungs te ||. (b) *Mahārahasyopāyakaśalyasūtra* (P, fol. 38b2–6; T, fol. 118a4–b2): rigs kyi bu | 'di lta ste dper na | sman pa nad thams cad rab tu zhi par bya ba la legs par¹ bslabs pa ni | nad med bzhin du sems can nad pa rnams kyi mdun du sman tsha ba dag gi ro myang bar² byed cing bsngags pa rjod³ par yang byed | rab tu bsngags pa rjod⁴ par yang byed de⁵ | nad pa rnams kyi de mthong nas sman tsha ba de dag 'thung bar byed | yongs su longs spyod par⁶ byed cing | de dag nad de dag las yongs su thar par⁷ 'gyur ba de bzhin du | rigs kyi bu de bzhin gshegs pa sman pa'i rgyal po chen po nyon mongs pa'i nad thams cad las yongs su thar ba | chos thams cad la sgrib pa mi mnga' ba brnyes pa'ang⁸ las dge ba dang mi dge ba 'di'i 'bras bu rnam par smin pa ni 'di yin no zhes las kun tu ston par mdzad cing | ji ltar na sems can rnams las kyi sgrib

irresponsibly by proffering or withholding medicine regardless of the circumstances. To be sure, the idea that a practitioner should see himself (*bdag nyid*) as a patient (*nad pa*), one's spiritual teacher (*dge ba'i bshes gnyen*) as a physician (*sman pa*), teaching or instruction (*gdams ngag*) as medicine (*sman*), and the practice (*nan tan nyams su blang ba*) itself as recovering from illness (*nad 'tsho ba*) can be found in various versions in sundry sources.¹⁹¹ In

*pas*⁹ 'jigs shing skrag pa dang | *lus kyi las dang* | *ngag gi las dang* | *yid kyi las yongs su dag par 'gyur snyam nas* | *bsam bzhin du las kun tu ston par yang mdzad do* || (¹ par] T, bar P; ² bar] T, par P; ³ rjod] T, brjod P; ⁴ rjod] T, brjod P; ⁵ de] T, om. P; ⁶ par] T, bar P; ⁷ par] T, bar P; ⁸ pa'ang] T, ba yang P; ⁹ pas] T, bas P). (c) Aśvaghōṣa, *Saundarananda* 10.55 (Johnston 1928: 72): *anarthabhogena vighātadr̥ṣṭinā pramādadaṃṣṭreṇa tamoviṣāgninā | ahaṃ hi daṣṭo hr̥ḍi manmathāhinā vidhatsva tasmād agadaṃ mahābhiṣak* ||; Tib. (*mDzes dga' bo*, p. 103): *don med gdengs ka dang ni rnam 'jig mig ldan pa* || *bag med mche ba dang ldan mun pa'i dug me can* || *yid srub sbrul gyis bdag gi snying ni 'bigs par 'gyur* || *de phyir sman pa chen po dug 'joms sman tsol mdzod* ||. For an English translation, see Johnston 1932: 58. (d) Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Acintyastava* 51 (Lindtner 1997: 170; Tola & Dragonetti 1985: 18): *iti māyādir̥ṣṭāntaiḥ sphuṭam uktoā bhiṣagvarah | deśayām āsa saddharmam sarvadr̥ṣṭicikitsakam* ||; Tib. (Lindtner 1997: 28): *de ltar sgyu ma la sogs dpe* || *sman pa'i mchog gis gsal bstan nas* || *lta ba thams cad 'gog byed pa'i* || *dam pa'i chos ni bstan pa lags* ||. For an English translation, see Lindtner 1997: 29; Tola & Dragonetti 1985: 32. (e) Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 2.57 (Bhattacharya 1960: 27; La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 69.17–18): *tatra sarvajñavaidyasya sarvaśalyāpahāriṇaḥ | vākyaṃ ullaṅghayāmiti dhiṅ mām atyantamohitam* ||; Tib. *de la sman pa thams cad mkhyen* || *zug rngu thams cad 'byin pa yi* || *bka' ltar mi byed sems pa ni* || *shin tu gti mug smad pa'i gnas* ||. See also Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. *sman pa thams cad mkhyen*). (f) *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 7.24 (Bhattacharya 1960: 121; La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914: 256.14–257.4): *kriyām imām apy ucitām varavaidyo na dattavān | madhureṇopacāreṇa cikitsati mahāturān* ||; Tib. *gso dpyad phal pa 'di 'dra ba* || *sman pa mchog gis ma mdzad de* || *cho ga shin tu 'jam po yis* || *nad chen dpag med gso bar mdzad* ||. See also Negi 1993–2005 (s.v. *sman pa mchog*).

¹⁹¹ *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (P, Phal chen, vol. Hi, fol. 181a4–5; T, Phal chen, vol. Cha, fol. 209b2–4): *rigs kyi bu khyod kyis bdag la nad par 'du shes bskyed do* || *dge ba'i bshes gnyen la ni sman pa'i 'du shes dang* | *gdams ngag la ni sman gyi 'du shes dang* | *nan tan nyams su blang ba la ni nad 'tsho ba'i 'du*

particular, the idea that one should view one's teacher as akin to a physician is found in several sources.¹⁹² Exercising caution before revealing a secret is important not only for the revealer of the secret but also for the potential recipient. To employ the analogy of therapy, one who reveals secrets corresponds to a physician, the recipient to his patient, and the instruction to medicine.¹⁹³

shes bskyed par bya'o ||. This can be found cited in a number of Indian sources, among them the *Sūtrasamuccaya* (Pāsādika 1989: 103), *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, *Mahāsūtrasamuccaya*, and *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā*. See also the *Puṇyasamuccayasamādhisūtra* (B, vol. 56, p. 247.3–7): *de la chos la ni sman gyi 'du shes bskyed par bya'o* || *mkhan po dang slob dpon rnams la ni ston pa'i 'du shes bskyed par bya'o* || *des bdag la ni nad pa'i 'du shes bskyed par bya'o* || *des chos kyi gdams ngag ston pa la ni sman pa'i 'du shes bskyed par bya'o* || *des sems can thams cad la ni nad pa'i 'du shes bskyed par bya'o* ||; *Sāgaramatiparipṛcchāsūtra* (B, vol. 58, p. 260.6–9): *bdag la sman pa'i 'du shes bskyed de* | *chos la sman gyi 'du shes dang* | *chos nyan pa la nad pa'i 'du shes dang* | *de bzhin gshegs pa la skyes bu dam pa'i 'du shes dang* | *chos kyi tshul la yun ring du gnas pa'i 'du shes bskyed la* |.

¹⁹² See, for example, *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra* (P, Phal chen, vol. Hi, fol. 180a3; T, Phal chen, vol. Cha, fol. 208b5): *dge ba'i bshes gnyen ni* | *nyon mongs pa'i nad las thar par byed pas sman pa lta bu'o* ||.

¹⁹³ *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* (Suzuki & Idzumi 1949: 464.9–10): *ātmani ca te kulaputra āturasamjñōtpādayitavyā kalyāṇamitreṣu vaidyasamjñā anuśāsanīṣu bhaiṣajyasamjñā pratipattiṣu vyādhinirghātanāsamjñā* |; *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* as cited in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Bendall 1897–1902: 36.3–4): *ātmani ca te kulaputrāturasamjñōtpādayitavyā* | *kalyāṇamitreṣu ca vaidyasamjñā* | *anuśāsanīṣu bhaiṣajyasamjñā* | *pratipattiṣu vyādhinirghātanāsamjñā* |. For an English translation, see Bendall & Rouse 1922: 38. See also the *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra* as cited in the *Sūtrasamuccaya* (Pāsādika 1989: 103.1–5): *rigs kyi bu khyed kyis bdag nyid la ni nad pa'i 'du shes bskyed par bya'o* || *dge ba'i bshes gnyen la ni sman pa'i 'du shes dang* | *gdams ngag la ni sman gyi 'du shes dang* | *nan tan nyams su blang ba la ni nad 'tsho ba'i 'du shes bskyed par bya'o* ||. See also the *Sāgaramatisūtra* as cited in the *Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Bendall 1897–1902: 355.9–11): *ātmani vaidyasamjñām utpādyā dharme bhaiṣajyasamjñām dharmāsravaṇikeṣv āturasamjñām tathāgate satpuruṣa-samjñām dharmanetryām cirasthitikasamjñām utpādyā ...*; Tib. (B, vol. 64, pp. 1468.6–9): *bdag la sman pa'i 'du shes bskyed de* | *chos la sman gyi 'du shes dang* | *chos nyan pa la nad pa'i 'du shes dang* | *de bzhin gshegs pa la skyes bu*

Third, the motivation behind concealing or revealing Buddhist teachings will become clearer if we consider the soteriological model of the Four Noble Truths (or Four Truths accessible to Noble Ones only), which has often been compared to the fourfold diagnostic-therapeutic scheme of medicine, made explicit in a number of Indian Buddhist sources, the first and foremost being the *Vyādhyādisūtra* from the *Samyuktāgama* (translated into Chinese).¹⁹⁴

dam pa'i 'du shes dang | chos kyi tshul la yun ring du gnas pa'i 'du shes bskyed la |. For an English translation, see Bendall & Rouse 1922: 312–313.

¹⁹⁴ The *Vyādhyādisūtra* (or rather its Pāli version) has not been transmitted in the Pāli *Samyuttanikāya*, but it has been cited in some Sanskrit commentarial sources, namely, Yaśomitra's *Abhidharmakośavyākhyā* (already noted in La Vallée Poussin 1903: 580); Śamathadeva's *Abhidharmakośopāyikā* (noted in Wezler 1984: 318; Klebanov 2011: 11). A comparison of the four-*satya* model to the fourfold diagnostic-therapeutic scheme is also drawn in the *Śrāvabhūmi* (noted in Klebanov 2011: 11) and the *Śrutamayībhūmi* of the *Yogācārabhūmi*, Aśvaghōṣa's *Saundarananda* 16.40–41, and *Ratnagotravibhāga* 4.52, all three sources noted in Wezler 1984: 311, 321. Of these, the last two sources may be cited here. Aśvaghōṣa, *Saundarananda* 16.40–41 (Johnston 1928: 116): *yo vyādhitō vyādhim avaiti samyag vyādhēr nidānaṃ ca tadauśadhaṃ ca | ārogyam āpnoti hi so 'cireṇa mitrair abhijñair upacaryamāṇaḥ || tad vyādhisaṃjñāṃ kuru duḥkhasatye doṣeṣv api vyādhinidānasamjñāṃ | ārogyasamjñāṃ ca nirodhasatye bhaiṣajyasamjñāṃ api mārgasatye ||*; Tib. (*mDzes dga' bo*, pp. 152–153): *gang zhig nad dang de yi rgyu dang ni || sman dang gso spyad yang dag shes 'gyur na || mngon shes grogs dang lhan cig gso spyad bzhin || ring min de yis nad las nad med thob || de'i phyir sdug bsngal bden par nad 'du shes || nyon mongs rnams la nad kyi rgyur 'du shes || 'gog pa'i bden par nad med nyid 'du shes || lam gyi bden par sman gyis 'du shes gyis ||*. For an English translation, see Johnston 1932: 92–93. Maitreya (ascribed), *Ratnagotravibhāga* 4.52 (Johnston 1950: 106): *vyādhir jñeyo vyādhihetuḥ praheyah svāsthyaṃ prāpyaṃ bheṣajaṃ sevyam evam | duḥkhaṃ hetustannirodho 'tha mārgo jñeyaṃ heyah sparśitavyo niṣevyaḥ ||*; Tib. (P, fol. 70b6–7; B, vol. 70, p. 1107.19–21): *nad ni shes bya nad kyi rgyu ni spang bya la || bde gnas thob bya sman ni bsten par bya ba ltar || sdug bsngal rgyu dang de dgog pa dang de bzhin lam || shes bya spang bya reg [= rig B] par zhing bsten par bya ||*. For an English translation, see Takasaki 1966: 367.

Fourth, the entire mode of and motivation for concealing or revealing Buddhist teachings seems to be structured along didactical-pedagogical lines. Just as a skilled pedagogue is able to impart the right kind of knowledge to the right kind of pupils, at the right time, in the right sequence, and so on, a Mahāyānic teacher is expected to reveal the right kind of Buddhist teaching to the right kind of disciples, at the right time, in the right sequence, and so on. The example of teaching language or grammar is very fitting here. The way in which the Tibetan Buddhist literary genres of *lam rim*, *bstan rim*, and *sngon 'gro* are structured to cater for three types of persons (*skyes bu gsum*), namely, superior (*rab/mchog*), middling (*'bring*) and inferior (*dman pa*), bears a strong resemblance to the didactical-pedagogical scheme suggested, for example, in Āryadeva's *Catuḥśataka*. Some Mahāyāna scriptures also intimate that the whole issue of tentative (*neyārtha: drang ba'i don*) and definitive (*nītārtha: nges pa'i don*) sense of the Buddhist teachings is actually, and primarily, a propaedeutic-therapeutic scheme as well as a hermeneutic one.

Fifth, according to the *Bodhisattvabhūmi*, the motive for keeping secrets is certainly not in order to deceive but rather to bring sentient being to spiritual maturity. That text lists and explains twenty-seven “means of instigating the maturation [of sentient beings]” (*paripākopāya: yongs su smin par bya ba'i thabs*), and one of these is called the “explication or communication of teachings secretly” (*guhya dharmākhyāna: gsang ste chos brjod pa*). It is explained as follows:¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ *Bodhisattvabhūmi* (Wogihara 1930: 82.16–18): *tatra guhyadharmākhyānaṃ katamat | yā bālaprajñānāṃ sattoānāṃ atyudāragambhīrārthadharmapratichādanatā uttānasupraveśasukhopāyāvātāradharmadeśanatā |*; Tib. (B, vol. 73, p. 632.16–19): *de la gsang ste chos brjod pa gang zhe na | sems can byis pa shes rab can rnam la | shin tu rgya che zhing zab pa'i chos bcabs te | gsal zhing 'jug par sla la | thabs sla bas 'jug pa'i chos ston pa gang yin pa'o | |*. If I understand the passage correctly, easy teachings should be revealed cautiously first to ordinary but intelligent sentient beings by (temporarily) concealing difficult (i.e., profound and vast) teachings from them. The English translation in Engle 2016: 149, however, reflects a different understanding: “Regarding this [topic], what is ‘imparting

Of these [twenty-seven means], what is the “explication or communication of teachings guardedly (or [while mindful of what] to keep secret”)? That [method of] teaching [under which] extremely vast and profound teachings are concealed from those sentient beings who are immature [or ordinary but] who possess the acumen/insight, and [instead] teachings that are transparent, easily accessible, that is, accessible by simple means, are taught [to them].

This passage reveals (a) what kind of teachings are to be kept secret, (b) from whom they are to be kept secret, and (c) why. Although in general one may always question the underlying motives for concealing certain secrets from certain persons or institutions, it is important to understand that the fundamental Buddhist (and more specifically, Mahāyāna) idea that the Buddhist teachings and any secrets associated with them have been viewed as antidotes to saṃsāric ills. But the difficulty is that nothing can be considered to be intrinsically benign or malign, depending on the circumstances, anything may turn out to be benign or malign. While the motive from a Mahāyāna perspective for revealing the Buddhist Doctrine is to benefit sentient beings, there is no guarantee that its revelation will have the desired effect. If not administered to the right person, on the right occasion, in the right dose, and so forth, Saddharmic medicine can bring ruin to sentient beings. Such an idea can be found in both strands of Mahāyāna Buddhism, namely, what I am wont to call the Mañjuśrī-Nāgārjuna and Maitreya-Asaṅga traditions.¹⁹⁶ We

secret Dharma? It is the act of teaching a Dharma subject that is not revealed to beings whose wisdom is undeveloped due to its extremely wide and deep meaning [by presenting] that subject in a manner that is clear, easily understood, and [provides] an easy means of realization.”

¹⁹⁶ Sāgaramegha, *Bodhisattvabhūmivyākhyā ad Śīlapaṭala* (Hadano 1993: 143): *gzhan yang | 'byor pa gang gis bdag nyid 'chi ba phan par mthong || de ni snying brtse'i bdag nyid ldan pa rnam kyī yin || gang phyir dge slong drug cu la sogs shi bar 'gyur || mdo sde gnyis las de ni thub pas ma gsungs sam || mdo sde gnyis las gsungs pa ni shing gi phung po lta bu'i mdo las chos kyī*

have seen above that the *Ratnāvalī*, belonging to the Mañjuśrī-Nāgārjuna tradition, states that if it benefits, one should administer even poison, but if it harms, one should not even provide good food or medicine.¹⁹⁷ The source presupposes that there is nothing that is intrinsically beneficent or maleficent, and the assumption that one should disclose all secrets indiscriminately to persons on all occasions would thus be deemed totally unwise. Similarly, Sāgaramegha, in his *Bodhisattvabhūmividyākhyā*, alludes to a Buddhist account according to which sixty monks, after hearing a certain teaching (*dharmaparyāya: chos kyi rnam grangs*), attained release, sixty vomited warm blood, and sixty abandoned their monkhood.¹⁹⁸ As explained by Mi pham in his commentary on the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālamkāra*,¹⁹⁹ if secrets consisting in the “profound and vast Mahāyāna teachings” (*theg pa chen po'i chos zab cing rgya che ba*) and in “areas/domains of inconceivability” (*bsam gyis mi khyab pa'i gnas rnams*) are revealed to unworthy recipients, they would, out of fear, reject them. This would be like developing disgust for or

rnam grangs 'di bshad pa na dge slong drug cu ni len pa med par zag pa rnams las sems rnam par grol lo || dge slong drug cu ni kha nas khrag dron mo skyugs so || dge slong drug cu ni bslab pa phul nas nyams par gyur te | 'di skad du ston pa'i bstan pa la brtson bar bgyi ba ni bcom ldan 'das dka' lags so || bde bar gshegs pa dka' ba lags so zhes kyang zer to zhes 'byung ste |.

¹⁹⁷ Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī* 3.63 (Hahn 1982: 84).

¹⁹⁸ Sāgaramegha, *Bodhisattvabhūmividyākhyā ad Śīlapāṭala* (Hadano et al. 1993: 143): *gzhan yang | 'byor pa gang gis bdag nyid 'chi ba phan par mthong || de ni snying brtse'i bdag nyid ldan pa rnams kyi yin || gang phyir dge slong drug cu la sogs shi bar 'gyur || mdo sde gnyis las de ni thub pas ma gsungs sam || mdo sde gnyis las gsungs pa ni shing gi phung po lta bu'i mdo las chos kyi rnam grangs 'di bshad pa na dge slong drug cu ni len pa med par zag pa rnams las sems rnam par grol lo || dge slong drug cu ni kha nas khrag dron mo skyugs so || dge slong drug cu ni bslab pa phul nas nyams par gyur te | 'di skad du ston pa'i bstan pa la brtson bar bgyi ba ni bcom ldan 'das dka' lags so || bde bar gshegs pa dka' ba lags so zhes kyang zer to zhes 'byung ste |.* For some similar ideas and sources, see 'Ba' gzhung, *dBu ma'i spyi don* (pp. 255.11–356.4).

¹⁹⁹ Mi pham, *bDud rtsi'i dga' ston* (p. 586.6–12).

resistance against the only life-saving drugs available, thereby undermining any chance of healing.

Revelation of secrets or mysteries means revelation of truths or realities that may not always be pleasant or convenient, and not everyone may wish or dare to hear them. As mentioned above, Āryadeva states that should an ordinary worldly being (*bāla: byis pa*) come to know the (intensity and extent of) saṃsāric pain and suffering, he or she would die then and there.

4.7. Bodhisattvayāna: How Should Secrets Be Concealed/ Revealed?

Inasmuch as the underlying Bodhisattvayāna principle behind any volitional concealment or revealment of a secret can be said to avoid causing harm to sentient beings to the best of one's capacity (*yathāśaktyā yathābalaṃ: ci nus ci lcogs kyis*), and inasmuch as the Buddhist teachings are meant to serve as a means of ministrations and salvation (*curatio et salvatio*), the best way to reveal or conceal a secret, from a Bodhisattvayāna perspective, goes hand in hand with knowing and implementing the various kinds of skillfulness in means (*upāyakauśalya: thabs la mkhas pa*) in general.²⁰⁰ From a Bodhisattvayāna perspective, the decisive point is undoubtedly to ensure that the intention and action of revealing or concealing a secret, like any other action of a *bodhisattva*, be wholesome.²⁰¹

²⁰⁰ Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka* 7.12 (Lang 1986: 56): *kasya cij jāyate śiṣyaḥ kasya cij jāyate guruḥ | vinayaty abudhān sattvān nānopāyair upāyavit ||*; Tib. *la la'i slob mar 'gyur ba ste || la la yi ni bla mar 'gyur || thabs rig sna tshogs thabs kyis ni || ma rtogs sems can rtogs par byed ||*. Note the English translation of *Catuḥśataka* 7.12ab (Lang 1986: 57): "A student emerges for a certain [teacher]; a teacher emerges for a certain [student]." Here, *śiṣya* and *guru* have been taken to be the logical subjects of the verb *jāyate*. The Tibetan translators, however, obviously took *bodhisattva* (i.e., *upāyavid*) to be the logical subject of the verb, and the translation would run something like: "[Occasionally a *bodhisattva/upāyavid*] comes into existence as a disciple of someone; [occasionally he] comes into existence as a master of someone."

²⁰¹ Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka* 5.5 (Lang 1986: 54): *saṃkalpād bodhisattvānām śubhaṃ vā yadi vāśubhaṃ | sarvaṃ kalyāṇatām eti teṣāṃ vaśyaṃ yato manaḥ*

Ārvadeva, for example,²⁰² expresses a great deal of optimism in a *bodhisattva*'s ability to benefit a sentient being when he states that just as a patient who is not cured by a skilled physician is rare, so too is a sentient being who does not profit from the instruction of a capable *bodhisattva* rare. Along the same line of thought, one may state that a capable *bodhisattva* would decide to conceal or reveal a secret judiciously, and however he decides should redound to the good of the sentient being.

One of the guiding principles for concealing or revealing, then, is consideration for the sentient beings. That is, the *bodhisattva* who possesses the secret should be considerate of the recipient's capacities, proclivities, and priorities. First, as already alluded to, it has been taken for granted that sentient beings are of three kinds, namely, those with inferior (*dman pa*), middling ('bring), and superior (*mchog/rab*) ability, and that the right kind of secrets should be revealed to the right type of person. The secrets of

||; Tib. *bsam pas byang chub sems dpa' la || dge ba'am 'on te mi dge'ang rung || thams cad dge legs nyid 'gyur te || gang phyir yid de'i dbang gyur phyir ||*. Compare the following translation in Lang 1986: 54: "Because of the bodhisattvas' intention [of benefiting others], everything—whether virtuous or non-virtuous [when done by non-bodhisattvas]—incurs only good, since their minds are under control." If I understand the verse correctly, "whether virtuous or non-virtuous [when done by non-bodhisattvas]" is not what the text wishes to say. The main point here, in my view, is that (verbal and physical) actions of *bodhisattvas* themselves (and not of non-*bodhisattvas*), even when they appear to be wholesome or unwholesome, or even neutral, all turn out to be wholesome on account of the wholesome intention. This is also how Tibetan commentaries consulted obviously understand the verse. See, for example, Red mda' ba, *Tshig don gsal ba* (pp. 115.7–116.11); Bod sprul, *Klu dbang dgongs rgyan* (p. 63.10–14); gZhan dga', *bZhi brgya pa'i mchan 'grel* (pp. 39.18–40.2). See also the English translation of rGyal tshab rje Dar ma rin chen's (1364–1432) *Legs bshad snying po*, his commentary on the *Catuḥśataka*, in Ruth 2008: 136–137.

²⁰² Ārvadeva, *Catuḥśataka* 5.13 (Lang 1986: 56): *ji ltar sman pa mkhas gyur pas || nad pa sgrub med dkon de bzhin || byang chub sems dpa' stobs rned nas || gdul bya ma yin sin tu dkon ||*. The Sanskrit text of *Catuḥśataka* 5.13 has not been transmitted. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 57.

giving (*dāna: sbyin pa*) should be revealed to a recipient with inferior capacity; the secrets of ethical-ascetical discipline (*śīla: tshul khrims*) to one with middling capacity (*'bring*), and the secrets of liberating insight (*prajñā: shes rab*), which leads to the attainment of nirvānic quiescence, to the one with superior capacity.²⁰³ Reversing or muddling the type or sequence of teachings and the type of recipients would be detrimental to the recipients, cause the teachings to go to waste, and undermine the *bodhisattva's* own ethical-ascetical integrity.

Second, again following Āryadeva,²⁰⁴ whether a *bodhisattva* should reveal or conceal a secret would not only be determined by the recipient's cognitive ability alone but also by their emotive proclivities. Those secrets that most speak to a recipient should be revealed first. Thus, those who desire merit should not be administered (from the very outset) the medicine of emptiness, lest the medicine turn toxic.²⁰⁵ Third, from a Mahāyāna perspective, sentient beings also have their priorities. To those whose priority is the attainment of a higher saṃsāric existence, the secrets behind craving for *dharma* should be revealed, not secrets that lead to the attainment of *nirvāṇa* and quelling of their thirst. But for those whose priority is the attainment of *nirvāṇa*,

²⁰³ *Catuḥśataka* 8.14 (Lang 1986: 82): *sbyin pa dman pa la gsungs shing || 'bring la tshul khrims gsungs pa ste || mchog la zhi ba gsungs gyur pa || des na rtag tu mchog tu byos ||*. The corresponding Sanskrit text has not been transmitted. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 83.

²⁰⁴ Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka* 5.10 (Lang 1986: 56): *yad yad yasya priyaṃ pūrovaṃ tat tat tasya samācaret | na hi pratihataḥ pātraṃ saddharmasya katham cana ||*; Tib. *gang zhig gang la gang dga' ba || de yi de de sngar spyod bya || nyams par gyur pa dam chos kyi || snod ni cis kyang ma yin no ||*. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 57. The Sanskrit text of *Catuḥśataka* 5.10 cited in the *Prasannapadā* and *Subhāṣitasamgraha* has also been recorded in La Vallée Poussin 1910: 323 n. 1.

²⁰⁵ Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka* 8.18 (Lang 1986: 84): *śūnyatā puṇyakāmena vaktavyā naiva sarvadā | nanu prayuktam asthāne jāyate viṣam auśadham ||*; Tib. *bsod nams 'dod pas stong pa nyid || kun tshe brjod par bya min te || gnas ma yin par sbyar ba'i sman || dug tu 'gyur ba ma yin nam ||*. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 85.

revealing the secrets behind craving for *dharma* would be counterproductive and thus to be avoided.²⁰⁶ A wise *bodhisattva* is said to know the secrets behind first averting unwholesome deeds and thereby avoiding being born in a lower mundane existence, and then the secrets behind overcoming the (notions of) Self (e.g., realizing *pudgalanairātyma*) and thereby attaining the goal of *nirvāṇa*, and ultimately knowing the secrets behind averting all views (e.g., realizing *dharmanairātmya*) and in the end achieving Buddhahood.²⁰⁷ In short, one might state that whether a *bodhisattva* reveals the secret of existence, of non-existence, of both, or of neither, the result should be beneficial rather than detrimental for the recipient.²⁰⁸

With regard to the question as to how secrets should be revealed or concealed from a Bodhisattvayāna perspective, two kinds of analogy that we repeatedly find in Mahāyāna sources seem to best drive home the point, namely, the analogy of propaedeutic-therapeutic and pedagogic-didactic methods. First, in addition to the comparison of the Buddhist soteriological model of the Four Noble Truths (or Four Truths accessible to the Noble Ones only) to the fourfold diagnostic-therapeutic scheme of medicine that we have seen above, one often encounters the idea—for example, in the *Lankāvatārasūtra*—that just as a physician gives medicine to a

²⁰⁶ *Catuhśataka* 8.17 (Lang 1986: 84): *chos chags de bzhin gshegs rnam kyis || mtho ris 'dod pa rnam la gsungs || thar pa 'dod rnam la de nyid || smad 'gyur gzhan du smos ci dgos ||*. The Sanskrit text of *Catuhśataka* 8.17 is not available. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 84.

²⁰⁷ Āryadeva, *Catuhśataka* 8.15 (Lang 1986: 82): *vāraṇaṃ prāg apuṇyasya madhye vāraṇaṃ ātmanaḥ | sarvasya vāraṇaṃ paścād yo jānīte sa buddhimān ||; bsod nams min pa dang por bzlog || bar du bdag mi bzlog pa dang || phyi nas lta ba kun bzlog pa || gang gis shes de mkhas pa yin ||*. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 83.

²⁰⁸ *Catuhśataka* 8.20 (Lang 1986: 84): *sad asat sadasac ceti nobhayam ceti kathyate | nanu vyādhivaśāt pathyam auśadham nāma jāyate ||; yod dang med dang yod med dang || gnyis ka min zhes kyang bstan te || nad kyi dbang gis thams cad kyang || sman zhes bya bar 'gyur min nam ||*. For an English translation, see Lang 1986: 85. *Catuhśataka* 8.20 is cited by Candrakīrti in his *Prasannapadā* (La Vallée Poussin 1913: 372.4–6).

patient according to the nature of the disease, so do *buddhas* (and *bodhisattvas*) teach sentient beings according to their dispositions.²⁰⁹ Second, the ways in which a *buddha* or *bodhisattva* would reveal his trade secrets have been compared to the pedagogic-didactic methods of a grammar teacher, as is made clear by, for instance, the *Mahārahasyopāyakaśālyasūtra*²¹⁰ and the *Ratnāvalī* ascribed to Nāgārjuna.²¹¹ Finally, the need to

²⁰⁹ *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* 2.123 = 10.406 (Nanjio 1923: 49, 316): *āture āture yadvad bhiṣag dravyaṃ prayacchati | buddhā hi tadvat sattvānāṃ cittamātraṃ vadanti te ||; nad pa dang ni nad pa la || sman pas rdzas byin ji lta bar || de bzhin sangs rgyas sems can la || sems tsam nyid du gsungs pa yin ||*. For an English translation, see Suzuki 1932: 44. *Laṅkāvatārasūtra* 2.123 or 10.406 is cited by Klong chen pa in his *Padma dkar po* (sMad cha, p. 82.7–9): *ji ltar nad pa nad pa la || sman pas rdzas rnams gtong ba ltar || de bzhin sangs rgyas sems can la || sems tsam du yang gsungs par mdzad ||*. He mistakenly identifies “Maitreya” as the source.

²¹⁰ *Mahārahasyopāyakaśālyasūtra* (P, fol. 38a6–b1; T, fol. 118a1–4): *rigs kyi bu 'di lta ste | dper na yi ge dang | grangs dang | lag rtsis¹ legs par bslabs pa'i slob dpon ni | byis pa rnams bslab² pa'i don du byis pa rnams bod pa'i tshul gyis | yi ge'i phyi mo dag klog tu 'jug par zad³ de | de ni de la mi shes pa dang sgrib pa med mod kyi | 'on kyang byis pa rnams kyis bdag la thos nas ci nas | kyang yi ge dang | grangs dang | lag rtsis dang | bgrang ba dag⁴ gi rjes su slob cing | byang bar bya ba de'i ched du yi ge'i phyi mo dag klog tu 'jug pa de bzhin du | rigs kyi bu de bzhin gshegs pa chos thams cad la legs par bslabs pa de yang⁵ ji lta ji ltar sems can gzhan dag gi las yongs su dag par 'gyur ba de lta de ltar gsung zhing | de lta de ltar las nye bar ston par yang mdzad do || (1 lag rtsis] T, lag rtsis dang P; 2 bslab] T, bslabs P; 3 zad] T, zed P; 4 ba dag] T, bdag P; 5 de yang] P, de'ang T).*

²¹¹ Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī* 4.94 (Hahn 1982: 128–129): *yathaiiva vaiyākaraṇo mātrkām api pāṭhayet | buddho 'vadat tathā dharmam vineyānām yathākṣamam ||; brda sprod pa dag ji lta bur || yi ge'i phyi mo'ang klog 'jug ltar || de bzhin sangs rgyas gdul bya la || ji tsam bzod pa'i chos ston to ||*. The Sanskrit text of *Ratnāvalī* 4.94 and an English translation of it can be found in Lindtner 1997: 329. The verse is cited with some variants by Klong chen pa in his *Padma dkar po* (sTod cha, p. 418.14–16): *brda sprod rig pa ji lta bu || yi ge'i phyi mo'ang slob 'jug ltar || de bzhin sangs rgyas sems can la || ji tsam bzod pa'i chos ston to ||*. He here mistakenly indicates the source as the [Mahā]parinivāṇasūtra.

communicate with a foreigner in a foreign language, so to speak, in order to reveal secrets in a language comprehensible to the recipient, has been famously explicated by Ārvadeva.²¹²

5. Secrecy in Vajrayāna

We shall now examine the idea of secrecy in the context of Vajrayāna (or Mantranaya/Mantrayāna), which may be seen as the culmination of the idea of secrecy and mystery that one finds in Buddhism. This is perhaps not surprising inasmuch as the degree of secrecy seems to be directly proportional to the degree of sacrosanctity, Vajrayāna having been generally regarded as being superior to and more sacred than Śrāvakayāna and Bodhisattvayāna. As in the cases of secrecy in secular, Śrāvakayāna, and Bodhisattvayāna contexts, I shall discuss the idea of secrecy in Vajrayāna by trying to answer (1) whether there are such things as secrets in Vajrayāna at all, (2) what the secrets are, (3) who the possessors of secrets are, (4) whether secrets should be concealed or revealed, (5) to whom secrets should be revealed or from whom concealed, (6) why secrets are supposed to be concealed or revealed, and (7) how such secrets are supposed to be concealed/revealed.

Given the diversity and richness of extant sources pertinent to the topic, I cannot claim to do full justice to either the topic or the material, particularly Sanskrit sources. One can also find discussions of secrecy in Vajrayāna in secondary sources to varying degrees and in various contexts, one such contribution specifically devoted to the topic being an article (“The Problem of Secrecy in Indian Tantric Buddhism”) by Ronald Davidson. As it

²¹² Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka* 8.19 (Lang 1986: 82): *nānyayā bhāṣayā mlecchaḥ śakyo grāhayitum yathā | na laukikam ṛte lokāḥ śakyo grāhayitum tathā ||; ji ltar kla klo skad gzhan gyis || gzung bar mi nus de bzhin du || 'jig rten pa yi ma gtogs par || 'jig rten gzung bar nus ma yin ||*. Candrakīrti cites *Catuḥśataka* 8.19 in both his *Madhyamakāvatārabhāṣya* (La Vallée Poussin 1912: 120.18–121.2) and *Prasannapadā* (La Vallée Poussin 1913: 370.4–5). The Sanskrit text of *Catuḥśataka* 8.19 has also been cited in La Vallée Poussin 1910: 314 and Lindtner 1997: 343.

will become obvious that the focus, thrust, and approach of Davidson's article are different from those of mine, no attempt has been made here to address issues raised by him.

5.1. Vajrayāna: Whether There Are Such Things as Secrets

Although it is perhaps superfluous to discuss whether there are such things as secrets in Vajrayāna at all, I wish to nonetheless discuss the idea of Vajrayāna as a "Secret Vehicle" (*gsang ba'i theg pa*). First, the attestation of the Tibetan term *gsang ba'i theg pa* in sources in Tibetan language is secured.²¹³ The corresponding Sanskrit expression *guhyaṃ* has come to light.²¹⁴ We may contend that at least *ad sensum*, the expression *guhyaṃ* is also implied by some Tantric scriptures, such as the *Vajraśekharatantra*,²¹⁵ *Durgatipariśodhanatantra*,²¹⁶ and *Guhyaṃ*-

²¹³ The Tibetan term *gsang ba'i theg pa* has been employed and explained, for example, by the *ITa pheng* (Karmay 2007: 169.17–18) ascribed to Padmasambhava and in the writings of the eleventh-century Tibetan scholar Rong zom pa. See, for examples from the latter, *dKon cog 'grel* (p. 55.10); *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (p. 345.12); *Theg pa'i bye brag* (pp. 38.15, 39.19).

²¹⁴ See, for example, Szántó 2016: 4, where the expression *tantrāṇi guhyāṇodgatāni* can be found in a quotation from a Cambridge University Library manuscript (Or. 155). I would like to thank Harunaga Isaacson for drawing my attention to this source.

²¹⁵ *Vajraśekharatantra* (P, rGyud, vol. Nya, fol. 207b5; T, rGyud, vol. Ja, fol. 58a5): *phyi dang¹ gsang ba'i theg pa gsum || dam chos khyod kyis gzung bar bya ||* (¹ dang] *em.* nang PT); *ibid.* (P, rGyud, vol. Nya, fol. 208a8; T, rGyud, vol. Ja, fol. 59a3–4): *phyi dang² gsang ba'i theg pa gsum || dam pa'i chos ni gzung bar gyi ||* (² dang] T, nang PT). The passage in the *Vajraśekharatantra* containing these two *pādas* (the first of the two occurrences) is cited by Rong zom pa in his *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (p. 317.4): *phyi nang [= dang] gsang ba'i theg pa gsum || dam pa'i chos ni rab tu gzung ||*. Note the Tibetan tendency to read *nang* instead of *dang*! For a discussion of the citation and its variant readings, see Wangchuk 2007: 308–309 n. 90.

²¹⁶ *Durgatipariśodhanatantra* (Skorupski 1983: 146.18): *saddharmam pratigrhṇāmi bāhyaṃ guhyaṃ triyānikam ||*; Tib. (p. 147.20): *phyi dang gsang ba theg pa gsum || dam chos so sor gzung bar bgyi ||*; cf. Wangchuk 2007: 114 n. 44.

tilakatantra (or *Guhyamañtilakasūtra*).²¹⁷ At any rate, “exoteric” or “external” (*bāhya*: *phyi*) is said to refer to all the non-Mantric vehicles (i.e., Śrāvakayāna, Pratyekabuddhayāna, and

²¹⁷ *Guhyamañtilakatantra*/*Guhyamañtilakasūtra* (T, fol. 60a5; P, fol. 84b5): *phyi dang gsang ba theg pa gsum* || *dam chos so sor gzung* [P; *gsung* T] *bar bgyi* ||. Rong zom pa in his *dKon cog 'grel* cites the two *pādas* from the *Guhyamañtilakatantra* (*gSang ba'i thig le nor bu'i rgyud*) as a scriptural source for the idea of four vehicles (*theg pa bzhi*). See the *dKon cog 'grel* (p. 47.1–7): *theg pa bzhir yang bstan te* | *gsang ba'i thig le nor bu'i rgyud la sogs pa'i padma'i rigs kyi sdom pa gzung ba'i skabs las* | *phyi nang [= dang] gsang ba'i theg pa gsum* || *dam pa'i chos kyang rab tu gzung* || *zhes gsungs pa lta bu ste* | *phyi'i theg pa ni* | *mtshan nyid kyi theg par bsdus pa mtha' dag go* || *gsang ba'i theg pa gsum ni* | *bya ba'i rgyud dang* | *spyod pa'i rgyud dang* | *rnal 'byor gyi rgyud de* | *'di gsum ni sku gsung thugs kyi gsang ba bstan pa yin te* | *'di dag gi don ni 'og nas rgyud kyi dbye ba bstan pa'i skabs su 'chad pas der rig par bya'o* ||. This passage was cited in Wangchuk 2007: 115 n. 51, but no attempt was made there to trace the source and discuss it. According to the translator's colophon, the *Guhyamañtilakasūtra*, as it is called there, was translated by Sa paṇ Kun dga' rgyal mtshan in collaboration with Paṇḍita Sugataśrī. Sa paṇ in his colophon seems to suggest that he was aware of an earlier translation but could not find it, and thus he and Sugataśrī translated it themselves. The translator's colophon of the *Guhyamañtilakasūtra* states (T, fol. 102a1–3; P, fol. 115a8–b1): *dam pa'i rgyud 'di gangs can 'di na sngon* || *rnam pa kun tu bsgyur ba ma rnyed nas* || *mkhas pa bde bar gshegs pa'i dpal dang ni* || *sgra rig kun dga' rgyal mtshan bdag gis bsgyur* || *dam pa'i bkas bskul nas ni gus pa yis* || *dpal ldan sa skya'i gtsug lag khang du bsgyur* || *dge ba 'di yis sems can thams cad kyis* || *gsang don rtogs nas sangs rgyas sar 'gro shog* ||. It is, however, unclear whether Rong zom pa, who lived earlier than Sa paṇ, was citing from an existing translation or was translating and citing directly from the Sanskrit text, or else was citing from a secondary source, such as from Vilāsavajra's *Nāmamantrārthāvalokinī*, which cites the pertinent *pādas* without identifying its source (Tribe 2016: 249.21): *saddharmaṃ pratigrhṇāmi bāhyaṃ guhyaṃ triyānikam* |; Tib. (P, rGyud 'grel, vol. Si, fol. 41b4–5; D, rGyud, vol. Khu, fol. 36a2): *phyi dang gsang ba'i theg pa gsum* || *dam pa'i chos kyang gzung bar bgyi* ||. For a discussion of the line *phyi dang gsang ba'i theg pa gsum* occurring in Tantric sources and Rong zom pa's understanding of it, see Wangchuk 2007: 308–309 nn. 90–91, 114 n. 44, 115 n. 51.

Bodhisattvayāna) and “secret/esoteric” (*guhya: gsang ba*) to Vajrayāna (or Mantranaya/Mantrayāna).

Second, the existence of the strand of Mahāyāna Buddhism called the “Secret Vehicle” (*gsang ba’i theg pa*) should in itself be taken as an indication that there are indeed such things as secrets in it. We may thus take a somewhat closer look at some of the sources that explicitly characterize the Vajrayāna as such a vehicle.²¹⁸ Rong zom pa, for instance, explains that “[the Vajrayāna] is to be kept extremely secret, and hence it is taught as being the “Secret Vehicle:”²¹⁹

[The type of secret] which is inappropriate to know (*rtogs su mi rung ba*), consisting [as it does] of so [profoundly] real and amazing types of [Mantric] conduct, is not able or suitable to be the domain of [ordinary] people of the world and [followers of] lower vehicles, and is thus to be kept secret [from

²¹⁸ Padmasambhava, *lTa pheng* (Karmay 2007: 169): *de ltar tshul ‘di ni rdzogs pa chen po mthar phyin pa’i don | yi ge ‘khor lo tshogs chen gyi sa la lhun gyis ‘jug pa ste | skyes bu blo rtsal rab kyis ye nas sangs rgyas pa’i don la ye nas sangs rgyas par rig nas | gom pa drag dal du ‘gro ba yin gyi phal gyis bya ba ni ma yin no || phal gyis thos te ji ltar bsams kyang bden zhing zab par yid ches par mi ‘gyur ro || yid ma ches pa dang phal gyi blo la go dka’ zhing bden pa dang zab par ma shes pa’i nyams dang sbyar nas | kun kyang de dang ‘dra snyam nas yo rdzun zhes skyes bu rab la yang skur ba ‘debs shing | sun ‘byin pa’i blo skye bar ‘gyur bas rab tu gsang ba’i phyir yang gsang ba’i theg pa zhes bka’ stsal to ||*. See Cantwell & Mayer 2012: 91, where *yang* preceding *gsang ba’i theg pa* has been misunderstood as an integral part of the term and hence rendered as “ultra secret vehicle.” Although an expression such as *yang gsang bla na med pa’i theg pa* is possible, both semantically and syntactically, *yang* here should mean “also” and not “ultra.” The pertinent syntax should be as follows: “Also because of *x* it is called the ‘Secret Vehicle’.”

²¹⁹ Rong zom pa, *dKon cog ‘grel* (p. 55.8–10): *rtogs su mi rung ba ni ‘di lta bu’i don dang rmad du byung ba’i spyod pa dag ‘jig rten pa dang theg pa ‘og ma rnam kyi spyod yul du mi rung bas | gsang bar bya ba yin pa’i phyir gsang ba’i theg pa zhes bya’o ||*.

them,] and thus [the vehicle that teaches such doctrines] is called Secret Vehicle (*gsang ba'i theg pa*).

Similarly, in the context of explaining the seventh of the fourteen Vajrayānic cardinal transgressions, namely, the disclosure of secret teachings to unworthy recipients, Rong zom pa states:²²⁰

As for not disclosing secret teaching to unworthy [individuals], it is as taught in the following: [Only] if one carries out activities for the benefit of sentient beings, by means of the lower vehicles, until a mind that cognizes such [a Vajrayāna view] arises [in them] will sentient beings be tamed, and not be ruined. Thus [Vajrayāna] is to be kept extremely secret, and hence it is taught as the Secret Vehicle.

Third, here the question is not why the contents of the “Secret Vehicle” should be kept secret from certain individuals (to which we shall return below), but rather why these are secrets in the first place. Tāranātha, for example, in a commentary on a Tantric practice manual,²²¹ suggests that the contents of the “Secret Vehicle” are secrets owing to their (a) superiority (*mchog tu gyur pa*) or superb quality (*ches bzang ba*), (b) impenetrability or cognitive inaccessibility or the difficulty in gaining cognitive access to them (*rtogs par dka' ba = khong du chud par dka' ba*), and (c) rarity (*rnyed par dka' ba*).²²²

²²⁰ Rong zom pa, *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (p. 345.6–10 = Wangchuk 2007: 324 n. 169): *skal pa med pa la gsang ba mi bstan pa ni | yang 'di lta bur rtogs pa'i blo ma skyes kyi bar du theg pa 'og ma nas 'gro ba'i don byas na gdul bya chud mi za bas rab tu gsang ba'i phyir gsang ba'i theg pa zhes bka' stsal to zhes gsungs pa lta bu'o ||*. The English translation is cited here from Wangchuk 2007: 324 with slight modifications.

²²¹ Tāranātha, *bDe mchog sgrub thabs rnam bshad* (p. 11.15–17): *ci'i phyir gsang ba zhe na mchog tu gyur zhing ches bzang bas | rtogs par dka' | khong du chud par dka' | rnyed par dka' ba'o ||*.

²²² *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fols. 59b5; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fol. 42b1–2): *sangs rgyas 'byung ba rnyed par dka' || mi yi lus kyang rnyed par dka' || gsang sngags 'byung ba rnyed par dka' || dad pa phun sum tshogs par dka' ||*.

Fourth, it may be pointed out that one cannot presuppose the same degree of secrecy attributed to all the four or six Tantric systems or classes (*rgyud sde*) of the Vajrayāna. The assumed degree of secrecy can be thus in general said to be directly proportional to the place in the assumed hierarchy of the Tantric systems or classes held by them. Having said that, one does, however, get the impression that those theories, practices, and scriptural and textual sources that deal with the Yoginītantric system or class tend to be treated with greater discretion or confidentiality. The reason behind this seems obvious. From a conservative Buddhist perspective, the Yoginītantric theories and practices that deal with what I am wont to call “Physiology-based Mantric soteriology,” which may involve sexual-yogic practices, are bound to appear more outrageous and thus risk being misunderstood and misused. As we shall see below, this was obviously the reason why, for example, the translation and dissemination of Yoginītantric scriptures and works were prohibited or restricted by imperial decree in Tibet. Yet, from another perspective, of the five kinds of Buddhist soteriology that Rong zom pa, for example, presents, the Buddhist Mahāyoga soteriology is based on a confrontation or “fight” model, the two practices of sexual copulation (*sbyor ba*) and ritual mactation (*bsgrol ba*), which violate social convention and taboo, tending to be seen as either extremely outrageous or at least problematic.

5.2. Vajrayāna: What Are the Secrets?

According to the Vajrayāna, everything that is specifically or characteristically Mantric is deemed secret. Everything that is associated with Buddhist *guhyantra* can be said to be wrapped in secrecy. What is meant by the term *tantra* is somewhat complicated. Of one possible scheme to explain the concept of *tantra* in general (i.e., outside the context of explaining a specific *tantra*), namely,²²³ in terms of (a) the “topics/themes” (*dnegos po*),

²²³ Rong zom pa, *dKon cog 'grel* (p. 51.14–16): *gzhung 'chad ba'i skabs ma yin pa rgyud ces bya ba'i mtshan tsum ston pa'i tshes ni | dnegos po dang | ngo bo*

(b) “nature” (*ngo bo*), (c) “subdivisions/classification” (*dbye ba*), (d) “etymology” (*nges tshig*), and “scope” (*ldang tshad*), we may take a brief look at the classification proposed by Rong zom pa. He proposes three ways of classifying,²²⁴ namely, “classifying on the basis of the application of the terminology” (*ming gi sgra 'jug pa'i sgo nas dbye ba*), “classifying on the basis of [which] features of the philosophical views and practice/conduct [are emphasized]” (*lta spyod kyi khyad par gyi sgo nas rnam par dbye ba*), and “classifying on the basis of the primary and secondary [Tantric scriptures]” (*rtsa ba dang yan lag gi sgo nas dbye ba*). We shall confine ourselves only to the first. According to him, in terms of the application of the terminology,²²⁵ the term *tantra* “refers to six topics in terms of the signified and the signifying expression” (*don dang tshig gi sgo nas dngos po drug la 'jug*), namely, three in terms of the *abhidheya*, the to-be-signified (*don gyi sgo nas*)—(a) “substratum *tantra*” (**ādharatantra*: *gzhi'i rgyud*), (b) “means *tantra*” (*upāyatantra*: *thabs kyi rgyud*), and (c) “fruition *tantra*” (*phalatantra*: *'bras bu'i rgyud*)—and three in terms of *abhidhāna*, the signifying expression (*rjod par byed pa'i sgo nas*)—(d) “that which appears/occurs as sound” (*sgrar snang ba*), (e) “that which resonates as sound” (*sgrar grags pa*), and (f) “that which occurs as signs/symbols” (*brdar gyur pa*) or “that which is associated with scriptures/texts/manuscripts/books”

nyid dang | dbye ba dang | nges tshig dang | ldang tshad lta bu'i sgo nas bstan na tshig 'brel bar 'gyur ro ||.

²²⁴ Rong zom pa, *dKon cog 'grel* (pp. 58.21–60.20).

²²⁵ Rong zom pa, *dKon cog 'grel* (pp. 58.21–59.6): *ming gi sgra 'jug pa'i yul gyi go nas dbye ba ni | don dang tshig gi sgo nas dngos po drug la 'jug ste | de la don gyi sgo nas ni gzhi'i rgyud ces bya ba rigs la 'jug pa dang | thabs kyi rgyud kyi rgyud ces bya ba bsngags dang phyag rgya la sogs pa bslab pa'i dngos po lam gyi mtshan nyid dang | 'bras bu'i rgyud ces bya ba thun mong dang mchog gi dngos grub kyi mtshan nyid rnam gang zag gcig gi shes rgyud la rgyu rkyen 'bras bu'i tshul du 'brel bar gnas pas | rgyud ces bya ba 'brel ba'i don du grub pa yin mod kyi | 'on kyang spyi ming yan lag la 'jug pas dngos po gsum du 'gyur ro || rjod par byed pa'i sgo nas so | gong du bstan pa'i sgrar snang ba dang | de nyid skal ba mnyam pa'i rgyur byas pa sgrar grags pa'i mtshan nyid dang | de'i brdar gyur pa glegs bam du gtogs pa rnam te | de bas na ming gdags pa'i yul rnam pa drug yin no ||.*

(*glegs bam du gtogs pa*). Such a scheme, though to a less elaborate degree, can to some extent also be found in some Indian sources.²²⁶ All of these can be said to have remained secret or are deemed secret. To follow the scheme of “eleven Tantric topics” (*rgyud kyi dngos po bcu gcig*) proposed by Mi pham, we can speak of (1) secret view (*gsang ba'i lta ba*), (2) secret meditative absorption (*gsang ba'i ting nge 'dzin*), (3) secret conduct (*gsang ba'i spyod pa*), (4) secret Mantric configuration (*gsang ba'i dkyil 'khor*), (5) secret empowerments/initiations (*gsang ba'i dbang*), (6) secret Mantric pledges/precepts (*gsang ba'i dam tshig*), (7) secret meditative practices (*gsang ba'i sgrub pa*), (8) secret worship or paying of obeisance (*gsang ba'i mchod pa*), (9) secret beneficial and

²²⁶ As an example, one may mention the scheme in the *Mahāyānapathakrama* by a certain Subhagavajra and translated into Tibetan by Gayādhara and Shākya ye shes. See Subhagavajra, *Mahāyānapathakrama* (P, fol. 217b5–7; D, fol. 193a1–3): *rgyud ces bya ba ni 'brel ba'i phyir rgyud de | de yang gzhi dang | thabs dang | 'bras bu rnam pa gsum 'brel pa'i phyir ro || dbye ba rnam pa gnyis te | tshig gi rgyud dang | don gyi rgyud do || tshig ni sgra'o || don la rnam pa gsum ste | gzhi'i rgyud dang | thabs kyi rgyud dang | 'bras bu'i rgyud do || de la gzhi'i rgyud ni bden pa gnyis kyi rang bzhin du gnas pa'o || thabs ni sgrub pa'i rim pa gnyis so || 'bras bu ni² sku gnyis te | chos kyi sku dang | gzugs kyi sku'o || de bas na gzhi la brten nas thabs bsgoms 'bras bu thob pas na 'brel pa'i phyir rgyud ces de la bya'o || (1 ba'i] D, pa P; ² ni D, om. P). To be sure, *rgyu'i rgyud* and *gzhi'i rgyud* on the one hand *thabs kyi rgyud* and *lam gyi rgyud* on the other seem interchangeable. See also Wangchuk 2007: 226, where references to Ratnākaraśānti's *Guṇavātī* (i.e., his commentary on the *Mahāmāyātāntra*) and Kṛṣṇa's (or Kāṇha's) *Yogaratnamālā* (i.e., his *pañjikā* on the *Hevajratāntra*) are given. *Guhyasamājantra* 18.34–35 (Matsunaga 1978: 115): *prabandhaṃ tantram ākhyātaṃ tat prabandhaṃ tridhā bhavet | ādhāras prakṛtiś caiva asaṃhāryaprabhedataḥ || prakṛtiś cākṛter hetur asaṃhāryaphalaṃ tathā | ādhāras tadupāyaś ca tribhis tantrārthasaṃgrahaḥ ||*; Tib. (T, rGyud, vol. Ca (95), fols. 84b7–85a2; P, rGyud, vol. Ca, fol. 159b2–5): *rgyud ni rgyun zhes bya bar grags || rgyun de rnam pa gsum 'gyur te¹ gzhi dang de bzhin rang bzhin dang || mi 'phrogs pa yis rab phye ba || rnam pa² rang bzhin rgyu yin te || de bzhin mi 'phrogs 'bras bu'o || gzhi ni thabs zhes³ bya ba ste || gsum gyis rgyud kyi don bsdus pa'o || (1 te] T, de P; ² rnam pa] P, gzhi dang T; ³ zhes] P, shes T). See also Hodge 2003: 538 n. 2.**

salvific activities (*gsang ba'i phrin las*), (10) secret gestures/signs (*gsang ba'i phyag rgya*), and (11) secret Mantric formulae (*gsang ba'i sngags*). Whether specified as secrets or not, these are, by definition, meant to be kept secret. In short, all the Mantric secrets may be subsumed under "special substances, conduct/practice, and secrets consisting of profound content" (*gsang sngags kyi thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzas dang spyod pa dang zab don gyi gsang ba*).²²⁷

Looking at the typologies of secrets proposed by the commentators of the **Guhyagarbhatantra* might help us get an impression of the various kinds of secrets discussed in the Vajrayāna context. Instead of going into details of each, which would spring the bounds of the present work, I wish to focus in the following on Rong zom pa's typology of the Mantric secrets in a tabular form:²²⁸

²²⁷ sMin gling lo chen, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 354.1–2): ... *gsang sngags kyi thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzas dang spyod pa dang chos zab don gyi gsang ba...*; mKhan po Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug sngogs* (p. 193.3–4).

²²⁸ Rong zom pa, *dKon cog 'grel* (pp. 55.4–56.4): *de la gsang ba'i don ni | spyir rtogs par dka' ba dang rtogs su mi rung ba'ang 'jug ste | 'dir yang de bzhin no || de la rtogs pa dka' ba ni | dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas rnam kyi dgongs pa ni dam par gyur pa 'di lta bu gang zag skal ba med cing blo ma sbyangs pa rnam kyi blos rtogs par dka' bas gsang ba zhes bya'o || rtogs su mi rung ba ni 'di lta bu'i don dang rmad du byung ba'i spyod pa dag 'jig rten pa dang theg pa 'og ma rnam kyi spyod yul du mi rung bas | gsang bar bya ba yin pa'i phyir gsang ba'i theg pa zhes bya'o || de bas na gsang ba thams cad 'di dag tsam du 'dus pa las | gsang ba ni gab pa'i gsang ba dang sbas pa'i gsang ba rnam pa gnyis yin te | de ltar yin par gzhung 'di nyid las | khong nas gab sbas don 'byin pa || zhes gsungs pa lta bu'o || de la gab pa'i gsang ba yang phul du byung ba'i lta ba yin la | sbas pa'i gsang ba yang rmad du byung ba'i spyod pa'i sgo yin par mngon te | 'di nyid las | gsang ba'i gsang ba ma rtogs par || sbas pa'i gsang ba la mngon par 'chel nas zhes gsungs pa'i phyir ro || sngon gyi mkhan po rnam kyi gsungs pa'i rang bzhin gyi gsang ba dang | gab pa'i gsang ba dang | sbas pa'i gsang ba dang | gzhan la mi bstan pa'i gsang ba zhes bya ba rnam pa bzhir phye nas gsung pa'ang der 'dus pa'i phyir ro || rang bzhin gyi gsang ba la yang | ye nas gsang ba dang | ngo bo nyid kyi gsang ba dang | gud na med pa'i gsang ba rnam su phye ste | gab pa'i gsang ba la yang slob dpon gyi dgongs pa dang | yi ge dkyus kyi dbang gi sgo gnyis su phye ba dang | sbas pa'i gsang ba la yang | tshig sbas dang yig sbas kyi tshul rnam pa*

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(1) a secret that remains concealed (<i>gab pa'i gsang ba</i>) = difficult to fathom (<i>rtogs par dka' ba</i>) = cannot be known = extraordinary views (<i>phul du byung ba'i lta ba</i>) = mystery	(1.1) a natural secret (<i>rang bzhin gyi/gyis gsang ba</i>)	(1.1.1) a primordial secret (<i>ye nas gsang ba</i>)
		(1.1.2) an essential secret (<i>ngo bo nyid kyi gsang ba</i>)
		(1.1.3) an unseparated secret (<i>gud na med pa'i gsang ba</i>), i.e., a secret not separate from the obvious?
	(1.2) a secret that remains concealed (<i>gab pa'i gsang ba</i>)	(1.2.1) master's intention (<i>slob dpon gyi dgongs pa</i>)
		(1.2.2) text's content (<i>yi</i>)

gnyis dang | gzhan la mi bstan pa'i gsang ba la yang | gsang ba'i yul dam med pa dang | dam ma 'dres pa dang | dam nyams pa rnams la gsang ba'i dmigs spyi gsang bzhi | bar gsang bzhi ste brgyad | gsang bar 'os pa dang gsang bar gnyer gtad pa gnyis te rnam pa bcu po 'di dag bstan pa ni | 'di dag ni gzhan la mi bstan pa'i gsang ba'o || zhes gsungs pa de dag ni | de dag don la 'gal ba yod pa ma yin na yang | bdus na gab sbas gnyis su 'dus par snang la | 'di nyid kyis gzhung las kyang de ltar 'byung ba dang | bla mas kyang de ltar gsungs pas de dag tsam du shes par bya'o ||; Dam tshig mdo rgyas (p. 350.8–19): gsang ba'i man ngag phyi rol tu mi bstan pa ni | spyi gsang bzhi dang | bar gsang bzhi | gsang ba 'os pa dang | gnyer gtad pa ste | dmigs bcu po 'di dag ni gzhan la mi bstan pa gsungs so || de la yang spyi gsang bzhi ni | tshogs kyi dkyil 'khor gsang ba sgrub pa'i dus su | rdo rje slob dpon dang rdo rje mched dang | 'du ba'i gnas dang | 'du ba'i dus dag der ma chud pa thamd cad la gsang bar gsungs te | 'dir yang tshogs bsgrags par gyur pa dang | gsang sngags thun mong du gyur pa na lhag par nyes pa mi 'gyur ro || gzhan yang yi dam gyi lha dang | sngags dang phyag rgya dang | lta ba zab mo dang | spyad pa brlabs po che rnams ni bar gsang bzhi zhes grags te | de yang lta spyod gnyis ni snod du ma gyur pa la gsang | lha dang sngags dang phyag rgya ni kun la mi bstan te dngos grub nyams par 'gyur ro || gsang bar 'os pa ni rang gi blos brtag cing gsang bar bya ba rnams so || gnyer gtad pa ni bla ma dang grogs kyi bsgo ba'o ||.

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		<i>ge dkyus</i>)
(2) a concealed secret (<i>sbas pa'i gsang ba</i>) = should not be known (<i>rtogs su mi rung ba</i>) = amazing conduct/practice = (<i>rmad du byung ba'i spyod pa</i>) = secrecy	(2.1) a concealed secret (<i>sbas pa'i gsang ba</i>)	(2.1.1) mode of encrypted words (<i>tshig sbas kyi tshul</i>)
		(2.1.2) mode of encrypted letters/syllables (<i>yig sbas kyi tshul</i>)
	(2.2) a secret not disclosable to others (<i>gzhan la mi bstan pa'i gsang ba</i>) (4+4+2 = 10)	(2.2.1) four general secrets (<i>spyi gsang bzhi</i>) (i.e., <i>rdo rje slob dpon</i> , <i>rdo rje mched</i> , <i>'du ba'i gnas</i> , and <i>'du ba'i dus</i>)
		(2.2.2) four intermediate secrets (<i>bar gsang bzhi</i>) (i.e., <i>yi dam gyi lha</i> , <i>sngags dang phyag rgya</i> , <i>lta ba zab mo</i> , and <i>spyod pa rlabs po che</i> ²²⁹)
(2.2.3) worthy of keeping secret (<i>gsang bar 'os pa</i>) (i.e., according to one's own discretion)		
		2.2.4. entrusted secrets (<i>gsang bar nyer gtad pa</i>) (i.e., entrusted by one's masters and friends)

²²⁹ Rong zom pa refers to a certain *gSang ba'i dmigs pa bstan pa*, which teaches that profound views (*lta ba zab mo*) and daring conduct are to be kept secret, and hence are not meant for common practice. See the *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (p. 331.4–17). The *gSang ba'i dmigs pa bstan pa* could not be identified.

A typology of three kinds of secrets has been commonly credited to Līlavajra/Vilāsavajra; a typology of four kinds to Vimalamitra; and a typology of two to Rong zom pa and Klong chen pa.²³⁰ The **Guhyagarbhatantraṭīkā*, attributed to Līlavajra/Vilāsavajra, classifies secrets into (1) *rang bzhin gyi/s gsang ba*, (2) *sbas pa'i gsang ba*, and (3) and *gab pa'i gsang ba*, and under the first, four kinds of secrets—namely, (1a) *ye nas gsang ba*, (1b) *rang bzhin gyis gsang ba* (proper), (1c) *ngo bo gsang ba* (as in the commentary) or *ngo bo nyid kyis rab tu gsang ba* (as in the **Guhyagarbhatantra* itself), and (1d) *shin tu gsang ba* (utter)—are subsumed.²³¹ The typology of four

²³⁰ Third rDo grub, *gSang snying mdzod lde* (p. 22.8–19): *so so'i bshad na gsang ba'i don ni spar khab tu rang bzhin sogs gsum dang | bi ma las mi bstan pa'i gsang ba bsnan te bzhir phye na'ang 'dir rgyud nyid las | khong nas gab sbas don 'byin pa || zhes pa ltar gab sbas gnyis su 'du bar rje rong klong gnyis bzhed pa ltar bshad de | gab pa'i gsang ba ni | gnas lugs rang bzhin gyi rgyud dang | de la ltos pa'i lam 'bras rnams zab cing gting dpag dka' bas shing tu dbang rnon ma gtogs pa gzhan gyis rtogs mi nus pa'o || sbas pa'i gsang ba ni | gsang ba bla med kyi lta sgom spyod pa'i gnad thun min rnams snod min la rnam pa thams cad du sba dgos pas der bzhag ste | 'di gnyis rtogs dka' ba dang | rtogs su mi rung ba'i khyad par gyi dbye bar bshad do ||.*

²³¹ Līlavajra/Vilāsavajra, **Guhyagarbhatantraṭīkā* (P, rGyud 'grel, vol. Bu, fols. 131b5–132a6; K_[58], vol. 'A, pp. 397.2–398.5): *de la gsang ba la gsum ste | (1) rang bzhin dang | (2) sbas pa dang | (3) gab pa'o || de la (1) rang bzhin gyis gsang ba ni | gzhung nyid las | e ma'o ye nas gsang ba'i chos || sna tshogs snang la rang bzhin gsang || ngo bo nyid kyis rab tu gsang || gzhan du min las shin tu gsang || zhes 'byung ste | (1a) ye nas gsang ba ni | gnyis su med pa rang byung¹ gi ye shes yon tan ril lhun gyis grub pa de | rang chas su yod kyang ma shes pa kho na la bya'o || (1b) rang bzhin gyis gsang ba ni | de nyid rang snang ba'i dngos po ril mi zad pa rgyan gyi 'khor lor rang rgyud du gnas pa | brtags pas bsgribs pa'o || (1c) ngo bo gsang ba ni | rang bzhin gyi rgyud kyi ngo bo nyid | yul sems rgyu 'bras dang | bden pa gnyis po las grol ba de | rang snang ba'i phyir rang gi ngo bo nyid yul du bya bar ma dmigs pa kho na'o || (1d) shin tu gsang ba ni | 'bras bu'i rgyud bsgrub par bya ba ste | gud na med kyang | nyon mongs pa dang | shes bya dang | lta pa'i sgrib pas gzhan du tshol yang | rang rig pa las² snang ba kho na'o || (2) sbas pa'i gsang ba ni | spyod pa'i khyad par lnga gsum dang | tā na gā na³ dang bya ba med pa la sogs pa | lta spyod 'brel pa dang | 'jug par gsungs pa de dag | sngags kyi man ngag*

kinds of secrets credited to Vimalamitra can be found in the **Guhyagarbhapīṇḍārtha*.²³² In short, to follow the exegetes of the **Guhyagarbhatantra*, all those “secrets” that are subsumed under “secrets that remain concealed” (*gab pa'i gsang ba*) qualify to fall under “mystery,” whereas all the “concealed secrets” (*sbas pa'i gsang ba*) would be “secrets” proper.²³³ The former is described as “that which is difficult to know” (*rtogs par dka' ba*) and the latter as “that which is inappropriate to know” (*rtogs su mi rung ba*).

*med pa dang | sgra bzhin spyod pa rnams kyis spyad na | shin tu nyes pa che
bas | brdar sbas nas bstan⁴ dgos pa ste | gzhung las kyang | kha cig lta ba
mnyam gnas kyang || zhes pa la sogs pa dang | mnyam pa'i don nyid ma rtogs
par || zhes⁵ pa la sogs pa'i don gyis | gsang phyir brda dag⁶ sna tshogs gsungs
|| zhes pa 'byung ba'o || (3) gab pa'i gsang ba ni | rgyud kyid don phun sum
tshogs pa dang | rang bzhin gyi don rnams 'khrul pa dang | ras⁷ chod pa rnams
la gab pa de dang de | tshad ma gnyis kyid bdag pos 'byin pa'o || (1 byung] K,
'byung P; ² las] P, la K; ³ tā na gā na] em., tan gan K, stan 'gan P; ⁴ bstan]
K, gtan P; ⁵ zhes] K, ces P; ⁶ brda dag] K, gdam ngag P; ⁷ ras] K, cha P).*

²³² Vimalamitra (ascribed), **Guhyagarbhapīṇḍārtha* (P, rGyud 'grel, vol. Mu, fol. 2a6–b; K_[120], vol. 80 (Wu), pp. 37.4–38.1): *rang bzhin gab dang sbas¹ pa dang || bstan min zhes bya'i rang bzhin ni || mnyam pa nyid dang dgongs pa'i don || mdzad spyod gsang ba'i theg pa nyid || rnam bzhi gsang ba zhes pa'i mtshan || (1 sbas] K, rbas P).* The verse is rather cryptic. But as far as I understand, (1) the ontological reality characterized by “uniformity/identity” (*samatā: mnyam pa nyid*) is a “natural secret” (*rang bzhin gyis gsang ba*); (2) the “intended meaning/purpose” (*abhiprāyārtha: dgongs pa'i don*) of Tantric scripture/s is “the secret that lies hidden” (*gab pa'i gsang ba*); (3) Mantric activities and conduct (*mdzod spyod*) are “concealed secrets” (*sbas pa'i gsang ba*); (4) the Mantrayāna itself is a “not-to-be revealed secrets” (*mi bstan pa'i gsang ba*). Rong zom pa seems to have known the **Guhyagarbhapīṇḍārtha*'s classification of the four types of secrets. See the pertinent passage from his *dKon chog 'grel* cited above.

²³³ Monier-Williams 1899 (s.v. *guhya*); Guenther 1984: 4. His rendering of *garbha* (*snying po*) as “matrix” (i.e., womb) may be subject to question. If the term **guhya* and *tathāgatagarbha* are parallel, then it would not be correct to render *garbha* as “matrix” or “womb” but rather as the “essence.”

5.3. Vajrayāna: Who Are the Possessors of Secrets?

In the Vajrayāna context, one may maintain that the keepers or possessors of secrets are first and foremost (a) the (initial and subsequent) teachers (*deśaka: ston pa po / 'chad pa po*), specifically, teachers of *tantras* (*tantradeśaka: rgyud 'chad pa po*). By “initial teachers,” I mean figures such as the Vajradhara, the Ur-Buddha, and by “subsequent teachers,” Mantric masters, or *vajrācāryas*, who are, according to the *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*, for example, said to hold secrets.²³⁴ Naturally, (b) the audience or listeners (*śrotrbhūta/karṇabhūta: nyan pa por gyur pa*), who form the excellent retinues (*paricārasampad: 'khor phun sum tshogs pa*), may also be considered possessors of the Mantric secrets. All the more significant, however, seems to be the (c) “reciter/compiler-cum-codifier” (*saṃgītikṛt/saṃgītikāra/saṃgītikāraka: yang dag par sdud pa po*)²³⁵ of the Vajrayāna doctrines, commonly identified with

²³⁴ *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fol. 56b4–5; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fol. 40b3): *dper na dpal ldan rdo rje 'chang* || *gsang ba thams cad mthun*¹ *par 'dzin* || *de bzhin du ni slob ma*² *yang* || *'dir ni sngags kyi gsang ba 'dzin* || (¹ mthun] P, 'thun T; ² ma] P, dpon T).

²³⁵ Noteworthy, the Tibetan translators have rendered *saṃgītikāra* as *yang dag par sdud par byed pa* and *yang dag par sdud pa po* (*Mahāvvyutpatti* (Sakaki 1916–25: no. 2762; Fukuda & Ishihama 1989: no. 2762) and Negi 1993–2005), thereby accentuating the act of “collecting/gathering” and even “codifying” rather than the act of “reciting” and “rehearsing” (from memory) the teachings received from the Buddha. This is true also in the rendering of *saṃgīti* in the title, for example, of the *Dharmasaṃgītisūtra* (e.g., Hirano 1966: 449; Lindtner 1997: 287), where it is rendered as *yang dag par sdud pa*. The element of “singing” (*saṃgīti*) seems to be lost in the Tibetan rendering. However, elsewhere *saṃgīti* has been rendered as *yang dag par bgro ba*, as in the rendering of the title *Saṃgītiparyāya* (Edgerton 1953: s.v. *Saṃgīti-paryāya*) and as *yang dag par brjod pa*, as in the rendering of the title *Nāmasaṃgīti* (Negi 1993–2005: s.v. *mtshan yang dag par brjod pa*). The Tibetan renderings of *saṃgīti* as *yang dag par bgro ba* and *yang dag par brjod pa* are indeed closer to the Sanskrit meaning of *saṃgīti*. It appears, however, that the Tibetan translators were more focused on the context and the purpose of such a *saṃgīti* than on the literal meaning of the word. The purpose of a *saṃgīti* in the present context, where qualified members of the ordained community gathered (and some of

Vajrapāṇi, who is often called Guhyakādhipati (gSang ba'i bdag po), the "Lord of Secrets," also interpreted as "Lord of the *guhyakas*," where *guhyakas* is a class of beings similar to (sometimes identified with) *yakṣas*. Vajrapāṇi is believed to be the *saṃgītikṛt* of the teachings of the thousand *buddhas* (*gsang rgyas stong gi bka'i bsdu ba po*) (of the fortunate aeon). Tibetan scholars often mention the *Tathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśasūtra* and *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* as sources, not always directly but sometimes, it would seem, via Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālaṃkāraloka*, as Bu ston Rin chen grub, for example, clearly does.²³⁶

whom, for example, Ānanda, recited teachings that he had heard from the Buddha and retained in his memory), was really seen as "collecting" or "bringing together" teachings that the Buddha taught at different phases of his life, on different occasions, in different places, and to different addressees, and indeed in a way to "codify" them. So it seems that the translators consciously opted for the so-called "translation of the spirit" or "translation according to the spirit" (*don 'gyur*) rather than the "translation of the letters, or literal translation" (*tshig 'gyur*). Thus in the Buddhist context, a *saṃgītikṛt/saṃgītikāraka* is a "reciter/compiler-cum-codifier" of the Buddha's teachings that have been received and retained in memory. Some basic information on *saṃgīti* and *saṃgītikāra* can be found, for example, in Edgerton 1953 (*s.v. saṃgīti* 3) and Buswell & Lopez 2014 (*s.v. saṃgītikāra*).

²³⁶ *Bu ston chos 'byung* (p. 134.8–11): 'bum ṭik tu'ang phyag na rdo rje ni | sangs rgyas stong gi bstan pa sdud pa bor gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab par bshad cing phyag na rdo rje dbang bskur ba'i rgyud las kyang, phyag rdor sdud pa por bshad pas phyag rdor gyis byams pa la sogs pa rnam la 'di skad ces bsdus par bzhed do ||. For an English translation, see Obermiller 1932: 101. In his translation, Obermiller appears to have interpreted the 'Bum ṭik here as referring to the *Bṛhaṭṭikā*, which is called the *Yum gsum gnod 'joms* in Tibetan, the authorship of which is disputed. The *Bṛhaṭṭikā* does not seem to refer to Vajrapāṇi as the *saṃgītikāra* of the teachings of the one thousand *buddhas* of the *bhadrakalpa*. In any case, Obermiller has identified the pertinent passage in Sanskrit found in Haribhadra's *Abhisamayālaṃkāraloka* (Wogihara 1932: 5.6–14; Tucci 1932: 6.7–16): *tathāgataguhyānirdeśādhikāreṇa sarvathā bhādrakalpikasarvatathāgatānāṃ rūpakāyasaddharmakāyarakṣāyāṃ kṛtādhikāratvād vajrapāṇyabhiṣekādaupratyarpitaśāsanatvāc cānyeṣāṃ viśeṣavacanābhāvād aḍakavatīnivāsī daśabhūmiśvaro mahāvajradharaḥ sarvalokānugrahāya prajñāpāramitāsūtra-*

Indeed, Vajrapāṇi is the main figure in both the *Tathāgatācintya-guhyānirdeśasūtra* and *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*. In the former,²³⁷

ratnasamgītiṃ pratyadhīṣṭavāntam āryamaitreyādīmahābodhisattvagaṇam evaṃ ityādy āheti pūrvācāryāḥ. anye tv atraiva parīndanāparivarte yattheyyam jambūdvīpe prajñāpāramitā pracariṣyatīyādīnā pratyarpitaprajñāpāramitatvād āryānandaḥ samgītikāra iti manyante |; Tib. (D, fol. 4b4–6; Bṭ, vol. 51, pp. 898.20–899.8): *de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba bstan pa'i dbang du byas nas | bskal pa bzang po'i de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi gzugs kyi sku dang | dam pa'i chos kyi tshogs bsrung ba la rnam pa thams cad du bdag por byas pa yin pa'i phyir dang | phyag na rdo rje dbang bskur ba la sogs pa las bstan pa gtad pa yin pa'i phyir dang | gzhan rnams kyi khyad par brjod pa med pa'i phyir lchang lo can na bzhugs pa sa bcu'i dbang phyug rdo rje 'dzin pa chen pos | 'jig rten thams cad rjes su gzung pa'i phyir shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa'i mdo sde rin po che sdud par gsol ba 'debs pa | 'phags pa byams pa la sogs pa byang chub sems dpa'i tshogs rnams la 'di skad ces bya ba la sogs pa gsungs pa yin no zhes sngon gyi slob dpon rnams 'chad do ||*

²³⁷ *Tathāgatācintyaguhyanirdeśasūtra* (T, dKon brtsegs, vol. Ka, fols. 150b6–151b2; Bκ, vol. 39, pp. 297.16–298.20): *de nas byang chub sems dpa' zhi ba'i blo gros kyis gsang ba pa'i bdag po lag na rdo rje la 'di skad ces smras so || gsang ba pa'i bdag po khyod ni de bzhin gshegs pa'i zhabs 'bring¹ ba nye ba na 'dug pa yin na gsang ba'i² bdag po de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba'i gnas gang nyan thos dang | rangs sangs rgyas thams cad kyi sa'ang ma yin na | de ma yin pa'i sems can tha mal lta smos kyang ci dgos pa la brtsams³ te | khyod spobs par gyis shig | de skad ces smras pa dang | gsang ba pa'i bdag po lag na rdo rjes cang mi smra bas khas blangs so || de nas byang chub sems dpa' zhi ba'i blo gros kyis gsang ba pa'i bdag po lag na rdo rjes cang mi smra bas khas blangs par rig nas bcom ldan 'das la 'di skad ces gsol to || bcom ldan 'das gang dag thos pas byang chub sems dpa' sems dpa' chen po rnams rab tu dga' bar 'gyur⁴ te | byang chub kyi phyogs kyi chos rnams yang dag par sgrub pa dang | de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba yongs su rdzogs par bgyi⁵ ba'i slad du brtson par bgyid par de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba 'khor 'di la 'chad par gsang ba pa'i bdag po lag na rdo rje spro bar mdzad du gsol | de skad ces gsol pa dang | bcom ldan 'das kyis gsang ba pa'i bdag po lag na rdo rje la 'di skad ces bka' stsal to || gsang ba pa'i bdag po byang chub sems dpa'i gsang ba dang | de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba 'khor 'di nyan par 'dod de khyod la ngas bskul gyis | de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba las brtsams⁶ te 'khor 'dir spobs par gyis shig | de skad ces bka' stsal pa dang | gsang ba pa'i bdag po lag na rdo rjes bcom ldan 'das la 'di skad ces gsol to || bcom ldan 'das 'di ltar sangs rgyas kyi mthu dang | sangs rgyas kyi byin gyi rlabs kyis byang chub sems dpa'i gsang ba rnams dang | de bzhin gshegs*

Bodhisattva Śāntimati (Zhi ba'i blo gros), the principal interlocutor in both the *Tathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśasūtra* and *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*, beseeches Vajrapāṇi to have the readiness-cum-confidence (*pratibhāna: spobs pa*), so to speak, to reveal “secrets of the *tathāgatas*” (*de bzhin gshegs pa'i gsang ba*) and “secrets of the *bodhisattvas*” (*byang chub sems dpa'i gsang ba*), for he has been a close attendant of the Buddha, and no one else, not even *śrāvakas* or *pratyekabuddhas*, let alone other ordinary sentient beings (*sems can tha mal pa*), possesses such secrets. Vajrapāṇi silently consents. Śāntimati then requests the Buddha to authorize Vajrapāṇi to do so. The Buddha does authorize Vajrapāṇi and Vajrapāṇi, in turn, expresses his willingness.

The idea that Vajrapāṇi is the *saṃgītikṛt* of the teachings of “one thousand and two *buddhas* of the fortunate aeon” (*bskal pa bzang po'i sangs rgyas stong rtsa gnyis*) is, of course, invariably linked with the etiology of the one thousand and two *buddhas*, a topic which is, however, beyond the scope of this present article. By the way, the total number of the *buddhas* (i.e. 1002) actually includes *Dharmacinta (Chos sems pa), who had resolved to play the role of a *saṃgītikṛt*, and *Dharmamati (Chos kyi blo gros), who had resolved to play the role of a **saṃcodaka* (“requester”) of the teachings of one thousand *buddhas*. I wish to merely point out that this etiology can be found in the fifth chapter of the *Tathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśasūtra*, which is narrated by Vajrapāṇi himself.²³⁸ Although the pertinent passage in the chapter does not employ the term *saṃgītikṛt*, the resolve that he made to become the Vajrapāṇi of all of the one thousand *buddhas* is explicit and

pa'i gsang ba rnams la gang cung zad 'jug par bgyi ba tsam zhig bstan pa bdag gis bstan par bgyi'o || (1 zhabs 'bring] Bκ, zham ring T; 2 ba'i] Bκ, ba pa'i T; 3 brtsams] Bκ, rtsoms T; 4 'gyur] T, gyur Bκ; 5 bgyi] Bκ, bgya T; 6 brtsams] Bκ, la rtsoms T).

²³⁸ See the fifth chapter (i.e., *Yul 'khor srung gi sngon gyi tshul*) in the *Tathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśasūtra* (T, dKon brtsegs, vol. Ka, fols. 172a7–184a2; Bκ, vol. vol. 39, pp. 332.15–351.12).

unambiguous.²³⁹ The *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*, which obviously presupposes the *Tathāgatācintyaḡuhyānirdeśasūtra*, alludes neither to the etiology of the one thousand *buddhas* and Vajrapāṇi resolving to be their Vajrapāṇi nor to the idea that he is a *saṃgītikṛt*. Significantly, however, Vajrapāṇi here claims that the *maṇḍala* called the *vajrābhiṣeka* (*rdo rjes dbang bskur ba*), which is characterized as the “secret of all secrets” (*gsang ba’i yang ches gsang ba*) and the “supreme secrets” (*gsang ba dam pa*), was taught by the Bhagavat to him alone, and that at the time of the Buddha’s *parinirvāṇa* the Buddha entrusted the teaching to him.²⁴⁰ Tantric sources for the idea that Vajrapāṇi is the *saṃgītikṛt* of Tantric

²³⁹ *Tathāgatācintyaḡuhyānirdeśasūtra* (T, dKon brtsegs, vol. Ka, fol. 183a3–b4; Bκ, vol. 39, pp. 349.20–350.21): *zhi ba’i blo gros | de nas gzhon nu stong po de dag gis byang chub sems dpa’ gzhon nu chos sems dang | chos kyi blo gros dang de gnyis la ‘di skad ces smras so || rigs kyi bu khyed gnyis kyis smon lam ji lta bu zhig btab | chos sems pas smras pa | grogs po dag bdag ni khyed thams cad kyi lag na rdo rjer gyur te | nang na spyod cing de bzhin gshegs pa’i gsang ba thams cad las phyi rol du ma gyur la phyi nang gi sangs rgyas kyi chos thams cad nyan pa dang | mos pa dang | rtogs pa de ltar bdag smon lam ‘debs so || [...] zhi ba’i blo gros btsun mo ma smad pa zhes bya ba’i pang pa nas rdzus te byung ba’i khye’u chos kyi sems pa zhes bya bar gyur pa de ni gsang ba pa’i bdag po lag na rdo rje ‘di yin te | de’i tshe de’i dus na khye’u chos sems pa zhes bya bar gyur to ||.*

²⁴⁰ *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fol. 153a6–b3; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fol. 103b3–7): *de nas byang chub sems dpa’ phyag¹ na rdo rjes byang chub sems dpa’ zhi ba’i blo gros la ‘di skad ces smras so || kye sems dpa’ chen po rdo rjes² dbang bskur ba zhes bya ba’i dkyil ‘khor yod de | bcom ldan ‘das kyis de kho bo gcig pu la bshad do || yongs su mya ngan las ‘das pa chen po’i tshe bstan pa dang gsang ba’i³ yang ches gsang ba gsang chen dam pa⁴ nyan thos dang rang sangs rgyas thams cad kyis kyang rnam par mi rig na | gzhan ‘jig rten pa rnam kyis lta smos kyang ci dgos pa gsang ba dam pa ‘di yang kho bo la gtad de | zhi ba’i blo gros mchog tu gsang ba chen po’i dkyil ‘khor gang zhe⁵ na ‘di lta ste | rdo rjes⁶ dbang bskur ba zhes bya’o || ‘dis rgyu ba dang mi rgyu ba dang bcas pa ma lus pa ‘di mtha’ dag khyab ste | zhi ba’i blo gros ‘dis sangs rgyas kyi zhing yang ma khyab pa med do || (1 phyag] T, lag P; 2 rjes] T, rje P; 3 ba’i] P, ba T; 4 dam pa] P, dam T; 5 zhe] T, shes P; 6 rjes] P, rje T).*

teachings are abundant.²⁴¹ A careful study of the evolution of the figure Vajrapāṇi would perhaps shed some light on the evolution of the Vajrayāna itself.²⁴²

²⁴¹ Here I provide a single example. See Bhavabhaṭṭa, *Cakrasaṃvaraviṣṭi* (Pandey et al. 2002: 2.17–18): *itaś ca bhagavatī vajravārāhy adhyeṣikā | vajrapāṇiḥ saṃgātā | sāmānyena pratyarpitaṃ śāsanatvāttasya |*; Tib. (Pandey et al. 2002: 139.4–6): *‘di’i phyir bcom ldan ‘das rdo rje phag mo ni zhu ba po’o || phyag na rdo rje ni sdud pa po ste | de yang thun mong du bstan pa gtad pa nyid kyi phyir ro ||*. Note, however, that the term *saṃgāṭr* is used here instead of *saṃgītikāra* or *saṃgītikāraka*.

²⁴² A few words may be said about Vajrapāṇi. First, it goes without saying that from the perspective of the general Mahāyāna, Vajrapāṇi is usually regarded as the *saṃgītikṛt* of the (Mahāyānic) *Sūtrapīṭaka*. See, for example, Eckel 2008: 147; *lDe’u chos ‘byung* (p. 169.5–7); *Bu ston chos ‘byung* (p. 134.2–11). Second, an interesting idea that could be beneficial for a study of the evolution of the figure of Vajrapāṇi is that the figures of Ānanda, Samantabhadra, and Vajrapāṇi have been merged and identified as one. See, for example, the *lDe’u chos ‘byung* (pp. 169.7–170.12). The rationale behind such an attempt seems to be the idea of the “excellent retinue” (*‘khor phun sum tshogs pa*), the continua of which are said to be not separate from the continuum of the “excellent teacher” (*ston pa phun sum tshogs pa*). Obviously, one of the sources employed by the *lDe’u chos ‘byung* for this was the *Vajrapadaḡarbhasaṃgrahaṡāṅjikā*. The authorship of this commentary appears to be uncertain; see Martin 2016 (s.v. *Yaśobhadra). At any rate, see the *Vajrapadaḡarbhasaṃgrahaṡāṅjikā* (P, rGyud ‘grel, vol. Tsa, fols. 75b7–76a2; D, rGyud, vol. Ga, fol. 64a7–b1): *‘dir kun dga’ bo ni byang chub sems dpa’ chen po kun du bzang po ste | phyag na rdo rje yin la¹ gzhan ma yin gyi rdo rje ‘chang chen po kho na’o || gzhan du na mdo sde la sogs² pa’i chos kyi phung po brgyad khri bzhi stong dang | rdo rje theg pa yang de bzhin gshegs pa’i drung nas chad pa dang lhag pa med par lan cig thos nas ‘dzin par ga la nus | ‘di ni bcom ldan ‘das kyis thun mong ma yin pa’i gsang ba zhes bya ba’i rnal ‘byor chen po’i rgyud du gsungs pa | de nas gzhan yang thams cad mkhyen pa’i ‘khor phun sum tshogs pa bshad par bya’o || (1 la] D, la yang P; 2 la sogs] D, lags P). Third, to follow Rong zom pa’s explanation of the term *vajrasattva* occurring in the longer title of the **Guhyaḡarbhataṅtra* from the perspectives of various Tantric and non-Tantric Mahāyāna Buddhist systems, the notion one has of Vajrapāṇi cannot be treated in isolation from those of Vajrasattva,*

The concept of the “initiator setting” (*nidāna: gleng gzhi*)²⁴³ of a Buddhist scripture, both Tantric and non-Tantric, often featuring a constellation of “five clusters of excellence” (*phun sum tshogs pa lnga*), discloses Buddhist conceptions of the Buddha or a *buddha*, sentient beings, place, time, and scriptures or doctrines. The exegetes of the Tantric scriptures, such as of the **Guhyagarbhatantra*, often explain such a *nidāna* from both common and uncommon perspectives, and if we examine the uncommon explanation, we realize that the excellent assembly or audience (*'khor phun sum tshogs pa*) is considered to be inseparably one (*dbyer med pa*) with Samantabhadra, the excellent teacher (*ston pa phun sum tshogs pa*)²⁴⁴ and that both teacher and assembly have been viewed as Samantabhadra, in the sense of ontological reality, and thus as atemporal and aspatial, and not as individual *buddhas* confined to a particular continuum, time, and place. Such an idea, in my view, is crucial for understanding not only the phenomena of Mantric teachings in general but also for understanding the idea of secrecy that Tantric teachings presuppose. Similarly, we also learn that the *saṃgītikṛt* of the Tantric teachings is not seen as an individual whose continuum is different or separate from the excellent teacher.²⁴⁵ Such an idea can be found also in such Buddhist Tantric scriptures extant in Sanskrit as the

Vajradhara, Samantabhadra, and so on. See his *dKon cog 'grel* (pp. 52.14–54.11).

²⁴³ Of the several meanings or usages of the word *nidāna*, the term in our context is in the sense of “beginning, introduction” (Edgerton 1953: *s.v. nidāna* 3).

²⁴⁴ For an explanation of *ston pa phun sum tshogs pa*, see Rong zom pa’s *dKon cog 'grel* (pp. 91.21–94.19) and for *'khor phun sum tshogs pa*, see *ibid.* (pp. 116.6–122.7).

²⁴⁵ The idea that the *saṃgītikāra* of the Tantric teachings is a *tathāgata* and thus not different from the excellent teacher can be found mainly in the context of commenting on the “exordium” (*prastāva/prastāvanā: gleng bslang ba*) of a Tantric scripture. See, for example, Rong zom pa’s *dKon cog 'grel* (pp. 62.4–17, 90.7–91.20, 122.14–123.21). The basic idea is expressed thus (*ibid.* p. 91.9–10): *sdud pa po yang de bzhin gshegs pa nyid yin par khas blangs par 'gyur ro* ||.

*Hevajatantra*²⁴⁶ and *Samputatantra*,²⁴⁷ which have often been cited by Tibetan scholars.

5.4. Vajrayāna: Whether Secrets Should Be Concealed or Revealed

The question as to whether secrets should be concealed or revealed can never be answered with a categorical affirmation or negation, for it is always contingent on a number of factors, and this is true not only of the Vajrayāna but perhaps of every case of secrecy. It is, however, undeniable that nowhere is the need for secrecy more emphasized than in the Vajrayāna context. I wish to discuss the question by way of four points. First, one is bound to find numerous Buddhist Tantric sources that explicitly state that Vajrayāna teachings ought to be kept or practiced in secret. One may, for example, mention here the *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*²⁴⁸ and *Cakrasaṃvaratantra* (or *Laghusaṃvaratantra*).²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ *Hevajatantra* II.ii.39–40a (Snellgrove 1959: 48–51): *vyākhyātāham ahaṃ dharmah śrotāham suguṇair [= svaguṇair?] yutaḥ || sādhyo 'haṃ jagataḥ śāstā loko 'haṃ laukiko 'py ahaṃ ||*; Tib. 'chad pa po nga chos kyang nga || rang gi tshogs ldan nyan pa nga || 'jig rten ston pa bsgrub bya nga || 'jig rten 'jig rten 'das pa nga || lhan cig skyes dga'i rang bzhin nga ||. Note that the Tibetan rendering reads 'jig rten 'das pa (lokottara) for Sanskrit laukika.

²⁴⁷ *Samputatantra* 1 (Skorupski 1996: 241.5–7): *bhagavān āha | saṃgītikāradēśakayor abhedah syāt | atha vādhiḡatam eva vaineyajanavaśāt | deśaka eva saṃgītikāradakah syāt | deśako 'ham ahaṃ dharmah śroto 'haṃ svaguṇair yutaḥ |*; Tib. (p. 241 n. 10): *bcom ldan 'das kyi s bka' stsal pa | sdud par byed pa dang 'chad pa po dag dbyer med par 'gyur ro || yang na rtogs pa nyid ni gdul bya'i skye bo'i dbang du byas nas 'chad pa po nyid dang sdud par byed pa yin te | 'chad pa po nga chos kyang nga | rang gi tshogs ldan nyan pa nga |.*

²⁴⁸ *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fols. 222b4–223a1; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fols. 147b6–148a1): *sngags pa des kyang gzungs sngags chen po'i dkyil 'khor 'di rin po che za ma tog bzhin du rtag tu bsrung bar bya'o' || de ci'i phyir zhe na | 'jam dpal sems can gang sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnam la ma gus pa'i rang bzhin can dang slob dpon gyi skyon 'bru ba dag yod pa'i phyir te | 'jam dpal de dag la ni chung ngu na ni² gtam du'ang³ bzlas par mi bya | glegs bam yang bstan par mi bya na⁴ | nan gyis⁵ dkyil 'khor du*

*dbang bskur ba dang klog tu gzhug pa dang ltar⁶ gzhug pa lta ci smos | 'jam dpal de dag la ltar⁷ gzhug pa dang tshig tu dbyung⁸ ba ni byang chub sems dpa' de'i 'khrul pa yin te | 'jam dpal byang chub sems dpa'i bag med pa chen por rig par bya'o || de ni 'khrul pa chen po dang shin tu kha na ma tho ba chen po yin no || 'jam dpal sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' chen po la slu ba ni sla'i⁹ | gzung¹⁰ kyi sngags kyi tshig 'di dag spong ba de¹¹ ni de lta ma yin no || (1 bya'o] T, bgyi'o P; 2 ni] T, om. P; 3 du'ang] T, du yang P; 4 na] T, om. P; 5 nan gyis] P, om. T; 6 ltar] T, bltar P; 7 ltar] T, bltar P; 8 dbyung] T, 'byung P; 9 sla'i] P, bla'i T; 10 kyi] T, om. P; 11 de] T, om. P). See also *ibid.* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fols. 224b7–225a6; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fol. 149a4–b1): 'jam dpal de nas slob dpon gyis cho ga snga ma bzhin du slob ma yongs su gzung¹ bar bya ste | byang chub kyi sems sgom² pa 'grub³ pa la dkyil 'khor 'di dang phyag rgya bstan par bya'o⁴ || de ma yin pa gzhan pa⁵ la ni glegs bam yang bltar gzhug par mi bya'o || 'jam dpal gal te byang chub sems dpa'i spyad pa gsang sngags kyi sgo spyod pa'i byang chub sems dpa' dam tshig mi shes pa'i sems can la dkyil 'khor bstan tam phyag rgya bstan na | des sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnam bslus par 'gyur ro || mtshams med pa lnga'ang byas par 'gyur ro || 'jam dpal byang chub sems dpas mtshams med pa lnga byas pa ni sla'i⁶ | dam tshig mi shes pa dang lus yongs su ma sbyangs pa dang | byang chub kyi sems sgom⁷ pa ma grub pa la ston pa ni de lta ma yin te | 'jam dpal sems can de dag gi mdun du ni nams kyang tshig tu brjod par mi bya'o || de ci'i phyir zhe na | sems can sdig can de dag ni sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa' rnam la drin du mi gzo ba dang dad pa med pa yin pa'i phyir ro || (1 gzung] T, bzung P; 2 sgom] T, bsgom P; 3 'grub] T, grub P; 4 bya'o] P, bya T; 5 pa] T, om. P; 6 sla'i] P, bla'i T; 7 sgom] T, bsgom P).*

²⁴⁹ *Laghusamvaratantra* 31.14ab (Pandey et al. 2002: 517): *aprakāśyam idaṃ guhyaṃ gopanīyaṃ prayatnataḥ* |; Tib. (Pandey et al. 2002: 693): *gsang ba 'di ni mi bshad cing || rab tu 'bad de sba bar bya ||*. See *ibid.* 26.13cd (Pandey et al. 2002: 487): *aprakāśyam idaṃ guhyaṃ gopanīyaṃ prayatnataḥ* ||; Tib. (Pandey et al. 2002: 611): *gsang pa 'di ni mi bstan cing || rab tu 'bad de bstan par bya ||*. For an English translation, see Gray 2007: 269. The editors of the Tibetan translation record no variant here and do not comment on the discrepancy between the Sanskrit text and the Tibetan translation. This discrepancy has been pointed out in Gray 2007: 269 n. 28: “Mardo’s translation, *rab tu 'bad de bstan par bya* (‘should be vigorously disclosed’) is clearly mistaken.” That it could possibly be a “transmissional error” rather than a “translational error” did not occur to David Gray. The Tibetan translation of the *Laghusamvaratantra* transmitted in the *sTog bka' 'gyur* indeed reads correctly as (T, rGyud, vol. Ka, fol. 29b4–5): *gsang ba 'di ni mi bstan cing || rab tu 'bad de sba bar*

Second, the question as to whether secrets should be concealed or revealed can also be answered by examining the cardinal transgression (*mūlāpatti: rtsa ba'i ltung ba*) that the divulging of Mantric secrets to unsuitable recipients, for wrong motives, and on improper occasions is supposed to entail.²⁵⁰ (a) Of the several sources that contain the fourteen-*mūlāpatti* scheme, I wish to mention here only the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra*, a Tantric scripture of the Yogatantric system that considers non-disclosure of secret teachings (*guhyākhyāna: gsang ba sgrog pa*) to immature sentient beings (*aparipācitasattva: yongs su ma smin pa'i sems can*) as the seventh of the fourteen basic Mantric precepts,²⁵¹ by violating

bya ||. This demonstrates again that, in the case of the *bKa' 'gyur*, it is not enough to consult the xylographic editions of the sDe dge, lHa sa, Peking, and sNar thang, upon which the edition in Pandey et al. 2002 is based.

²⁵⁰ According to the *Sthūlāpatti* ascribed to one Aśvaghōṣa (and now increasingly to Vāpilladatta), these form two of the eight “gross transgressions” (*sthūlāpatti: ltung ba sbom po*) of the Mantric precepts, namely, “revelation of secret doctrines” (*guhyadharmaprakāśana*) and “teaching secrets to unsuitable receptacles” (*ayogyabhājanane guhyadeśana*). For critical editions of the Sanskrit text of the *Sthūlāpatti* included in the *Advayasamgraha*, see Szántó 2013: 5–6 & Mikkyō-seiten Kenkyūkai 1988: 44 = 191). Compare the Tibetan translation of the *Sthūlāpatti* ascribed to Aśvaghōṣa (P, rGyud 'grel, vol. Tshi, fol. 220b6–7; D, rGyud, vol. Zi, fol. 179b7): *gsang ba'i chos ni gang gsungs pa || blo ngan gsang bar mi byed na || rmongs pa'i rnal 'byor pa de la || sbom po'i ltung ba bzhi par¹ 'gyur ||* (¹ par] D, bar P); *ibid.* (P, rGyud 'grel, vol. Tshi, fol. 221a1–2; D, rGyud, vol. Zi, fol. 180a2): *gang zhig snod min sems can la || phyi yi² chos mos de la yang || gsang ba'i chos ni yang dag ston || de la sbom po brgyad par 'gyur ||* (² yi] D, yis P). Cf. “The Lists by Aśvaghōṣa/Vāpilladatta” (Szántó 2013: 3): *abhājanasya bāhyadharmābhiratasya guhyam dharmam deśayataḥ sthūlāpattir bhavati* |.

²⁵¹ *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* 17.14ab (Dwivedi & Samdhong 1992: 130): *aparipācitasattveṣu guhyam naiva prakāśayet* |; Tib. (Dwivedi & Samdhong 1992: 267): *yongs su ma smin sems can la || gsang ba dag ni bstan mi bya ||*. In Rong zom pa's *Dam tshig mdo rgyas*, where the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* is cited, the two *pādas* read slightly differently (p. 339.13–14): *yongs su ma smin sems can la || gsang ba'i chos rnams smra mi bya ||*. For a discussion

which one incurs a cardinal transgression. (b) The *Durgatipariśodhanatantra*, another Tantric scripture of the Yogatantric system, teaches, according to Rong zom pa, a scheme of seven basic precepts, albeit not all in one cluster, the seventh and last basic precept being “non-disclosure of secrets” (*gsang ba mi bstan pa*).²⁵²

of the fourteen basic Mantric precepts taught in the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* within the context of the maintenance of *bodhicitta*, see Wangchuk 2007: 320–327. See also Aśvaghōṣa/Vāpilladatta, *Vajrayānamūlāpattisaṃgraha* (Szántó 2013: 2): *aparipācitasattveṣu guhyākhyānāt tu saptamī ||*; Tib. (P, rGyud 'grel, vol. Tshi, fol. 22a4; D, rGyud, vol. Zi, fol. 179b1): *yongs su ma smin sems can la || gsang ba sgrog pa bdun pa yin ||* (¹ sgrog] P, sgrogs D). Cf. *Vajrayānamūlāpattisaṃgraha* 3c contained in the *Advayavajrasaṃgraha* (Szántó 2013: 2; cf. Mikkyō-seiten Kenkyūkai 1988: 42 = 193): *guhyākhyāne jane 'pakve*. Note that the reading *pakṣe* found in the latter edition has been improved to *'pakve* in the former.

²⁵² Rong zom pa in his *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* maintains that the *Durgatipariśodhanatantra* prescribes “seven basic Mantric precepts” (*rtsa ba'i dam tshig bdun*), though not “in one cluster” (*tshoms gcig tu*), and that the seventh, “not divulging secrets” (*gsang ba mi bstan pa*), is taught in the context of another proclamation of Mantric pledges, in the following words (p. 515.17–18): *gang khyod kyis su'ang rung ba la smras na phyag na rdo rje nyid kyis rdo rje rab tu 'bar bas khyod kyi mgo 'gas par 'gyur ro ||*. In my study of the *bodhicitta* concept, I noted (Wangchuk 2007: 306 n. 81): “This citation has not been located in the versions of the *Durgatipariśodhanatantra* consulted by me.” Embarrassingly, however, I now see that these lines are in fact contained in the earlier translation of the *Durgatipariśodhanatantra*—that is, the one translated by Śāntigarbha and Jayarakṣita and revised by rMa Rin chen mchog—designated as “Version A” (Skorupski 1983). The pertinent lines read (Skorupski 1983: 359.18–21): *om rigs kyi bu khyod kyis dkyil 'khor 'di ma mthong ba'i mdun du smra bar mi bya'o || gal te khyod kyis su yang rung ba la smras na ni phyag na rdo rje nyid kyis rdo rje 'bar zhing rab tu 'bar bas khyod kyi mgo bkas par 'gyur ro || om vajrasamaya dṛdha huṃ a |*. The later Tibetan translation by Devendradeva and Chag lo tsā ba Chos rje dpal, designated as “Version B” (Skorupski 1983), and the corresponding Sanskrit text are as follows (Skorupski 1983: 291.23–30): *'di ni khyod kyi dam tshig gi rdo rje yin te | gal te khyed 'ga' zhig la smras na spyi bo 'gems par 'gyur ro || [...] rdo rje sems dpa' deng khyod kyi || snying la yang dag zhugs par mdzod || gal te tshul 'di*

From the perspective of the rNying ma classificatory scheme of the Mantric ethical-ascetical precepts into (a) “general Mantric precepts” (*spyi’i dam tshig*), (b) “specific Mantric precepts” (*khyad par gyi dam tshig*), and (c) “additional Mantric precepts” (*lhag pa’i dam tshig*), presupposed, for example, by the Mahāyoga system, all Buddhist precepts relating to secrecy—from the Vinaya (or *prātimokṣa*) and *bodhisattva* precepts all the way up to the seventh of the fourteen basic Mantric precepts prescribed by such Yogatantric scriptures as the *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra*—are subsumed under the general Mantric precepts of the Mahāyoga system. The fifth of the five basic Mantric precepts prescribed, for example, by the **Guhyagarbhatantra*,²⁵³ is subsumed under the specific Mantric precepts of the Mahāyoga system. As an example of the additional Mantric precept of the Mahāyoga system that directly involves secrecy, one may mention the Mantric precept of “not pouring the milk of a white lioness into a container contaminated with poison.”²⁵⁴

smras na ni || de mna thag tu dral te gsheg ||; Skt. (Skorupski 1983: 290.18–25): *ayaṃ te samayavajro mūrdhniṃ te sphārayed yadi toṃ kasyacid brūyāḥ | [...] tatredaṃ śapathahṛdayam¹ | vajrasattoṃ svayaṃ te ’dya hṛdaye samavasthitaḥ || nirbhīdya tatksaṇaṃ yāyād yadi brūyā imaṃ nayam ||*.¹ The printed edition reads *śayathā hṛdayam* but I follow here the reading suggested by Harunaga Isaacson, who, however, pointed out that the feminine *śapathāhṛdayam* is not unattested.

²⁵³ **Guhyagarbhatantra* in 22 Chapters (P, rGyud, vol. Wa, fol. 127b3; D, rNying rgyud, vol. Kha, fol. 130a1–2): *bla ma mi spang bla ma bkur || sngags dang phyag rgya rgyun mi gcad || yang dag lam du zhugs la byams || gsang ba’i don phyir¹ smra mi bya ||* (¹ phyir] P, nyid D). This verse is reproduced in Rong zom pa’s *dKon cog ’grel* (p. 223.12–13) and *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (p. 349.9–11), the readings found there being closer to those of the Peking edition of the **Guhyagarbhatantra* in 22 Chapters.

²⁵⁴ The idea that one should not pour a lioness’s milk into an inappropriate vessel is found in the principal Anuyoga Tantric scripture called **Vajravyūhatantra* (*rDo rje bkod pa’i rgyud*) aka *Kun ’dus rig pa’i mdo* of which there are two versions, a longer version in seventy-five chapters (P452; D829) and a shorter version in thirty-three chapters (P454; D831). See the **Vajravyūhatantra* in 75 Chapters (D, rNying rgyud, vol. Ka, fol. 256a5; P, rGyud, vol. Dza, fol. 243b7): *seng ge dkar mo’i ’o ma*

Third, we may state that in the case of the history of the transmission of the Vajrayāna in Tibet, the matter of restricting or prohibiting random translation and dissemination of Tantric scriptures, invariably resulting in the improper revelation of secrets, was not merely confined to the “religious rules and regulations” (*chos khrims*), as prescribed by Tantric scriptures themselves, but was expanded to cover “political rules and regulations” (*rgyal khrims*) as well. Unauthorized translation and dissemination of Tantric scriptures was prohibited by royal decree.²⁵⁵

dag || gser snod ma yin blugs mi bya ||; **Vajravṛyūhatantra* in 33 Chapters (P, rGyud, vol. Wa, fol. 40b6; D, rNying rgyud, vol. Kha, 41b3–4): *seng ge dkar mo'i 'o ma dag || dug can snod du blug pa min ||*. Rong zom pa in his *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (p. 362.3–4) has obviously cited the *Kun 'dus rig mdo bdus pa*, as follows: *seng ge dkar mo'i 'o ma dag || dug can snod du blug pa min ||*. For a study of the metaphors or similes of the milk of a lioness, see my forthcoming article, “The Trope of a Lioness’s Milk in Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Literatures.”

²⁵⁵ *Madhyavyutpatti* (Ishikawa 1990: 4.27–37): *gsang sngags kyi rgyud rnams gzhung gis gsang bar bya ba yin te | snod du ma gyur pa rnams la bshad cing bstan du yang mi rung la | bar du bsgyur zhing spyod du gnang gis kyang | ldem po dag tu bshad pa ma khrol nas sgra ji bzhin du 'dzin cing log par spyod pa dag kyang byung | sngags kyi rgyud kyi nang nas thu zhing bod skad du bsgyur ba dag kyang byung zhes gdags kyi | phyin chad gzungs sngags dang rgyud bla nas bka' stsal te | sgyur du bcug pa ma gtogs pa | sngags kyi rgyud dang | sngags kyi tshig thu zhing bsgyur du mi gnang ngo ||*. For a critical edition of the passage and a German translation, see Simonsson 1957: 260–261. In this *Madhyavyutpatti* passage, the “esoteric” or “inner” (i.e., more “secret”) Tantric scriptures and works are singled out. The *dBa' bzhed* is, however, more specific. See the *dBa' bzhed* (Facsimile, fol. 24b5–7): *tan tra las ma hā yo ga mu stegs dge ba la gzugs pa'i slad du gtsang rme med par bstan pa chos kyi dbyings ji lta ba ni ma rtogs par log par bzung du dogs te ma bsgyur | sngags g.yog nus pa yang bod la mi 'byung [= ma byung] nas ma bsgyur | bram ze rnam dge ba la gzugs pa'i don du kri ya [= yā] gsungs pa dang | u pa [= bha] ya bod la 'tsham par gsol te bsgyur |*. For an English translation of the passage, see Wangdu & Diemberger 2000: 88–89. The *dKar chag 'phang thang ma*, one of the three earliest catalogues of (mainly) Buddhist scriptures and treatises in Tibetan translation, confirms that

Fourth and finally, it would be wrong to ignore the fact that even in the Vajrayāna context not giving Mantric teachings to suitable receptacles or not giving the teachings requested but something else amounts to committing a gross albeit venial transgression.²⁵⁶ The previously discussed miserliness associated with *ācāryamuṣṭi* is reproachable also according to the Vajrayāna, while the generosity associated with *dharmadāna* is considered irreproachable at all levels of Buddhist axiology.

5.5. Vajrayāna: To Whom Should Secrets Be Revealed?

As in the cases of Śrāvakayāna and Bodhisattvayāna, it becomes clear that Buddhist teachings, including Mantric teachings, should be concealed from unsuitable individuals but should be revealed to suitable ones. As we shall see below, Tantric scriptures such as the *Vajrapānyabhiṣekatantra* clearly show that the analogy of administering medicine is applicable also in the Vajrayāna context. We cannot perhaps know for sure whether, and to what extent, and how correctly and successfully this general guideline was adhered to and implemented in reality. We can, though, suspect some discrepancy between ideality and reality, between theory and practice. In any case, being fundamentally dismissive of the idea of Mantric secrets, or of any other secrets for that matter, seems to be tantamount to suggesting that one can or should reveal everything to everyone at all times and in all places, as if one could administer any type of medicine to all individuals

there existed a sperate “register of Tantric [scriptures/treatises of] esoteric [content/nature]” (*sngags nang pa'i 'gyur byang*). See the *dKar chag 'phang thang ma* (Kawagoe 2005: 45): *sngags nang pa'i 'gyur byang gzhan na bzhuḡs* |. For a discussion on this statement, see Almogi 2020: 22–23 n. 16. For some more sources on the prohibition of the dissemination of unrestrained Yoginī Tantric scriptures, see my forthcoming “The Three Royal Decrees (*bka' bcad gsum*) in the History of Tibetan Buddhism” (§4, particularly, n. 29).

²⁵⁶ mNga' ris paṅ chen, *sDom gsum rnam nges* (p. 19.7–8): *snod ldan slob mar gsang sngags mi ston dang || dad ldan chos 'dri ba la chos gzhan ston ||*. See also sMin gling lo chen, *dPag bsam snye ma* (pp. 367.17–18, 358.1–1–4); mKhan po Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug sngogs* (p. 196.11–13).

indiscriminately, even to those who are not ill. If Vajrayāna is more secretive and restrictive with Mantric teachings, it is because of its belief that Mantric means and methods are more efficient but also riskier.

Every Tantric system or scripture can be expected to have its own idea of an ideal Mantric master and a Mantric disciple. As an example, I may mention here the *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*, a Kriyātantric scripture, which provides a list of qualifications of a suitable recipient of the Mantric secrets.²⁵⁷ Most of the attributes listed here are attributes of an intelligent and decent human being, and of a Buddhist who is interested in realizing Vajrayāna teachings. In the same Tantric scripture, we can find a list of attributes of a person to whom Mantric secrets should not be disclosed.²⁵⁸ Of all the prerequisites of a potential recipient of

²⁵⁷ *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fols. 45b1–6; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fol. 33a4–8): *rig dang gzo ni phun sum tshogs || gsal zhing dul la brtson pa dang || shes rab ldan brtan byas gzo dang || dkon mchog gsum la gzhol ba dang || gzugs mdzes yan lag yongs rdzogs dang || gang dag theg chen dga' ba dang || byang chub sems dpa' kun la yang || yang dag rtag tu gus gnas dang || pha la gus dang ma la gus || bla ma mchod la rab brtson dang || gang dag pha rol don spyod la || snying nas rtag tu 'jug pa dang || gang dag drang zhing des pa dang || g.yo sgyu¹ med cing² chos brtson dang || lus dang ngag dang yid dag pa || de dag nye bar brtags³ gzung bya || gang dag snying nas 'jig rten 'di || 'jig rten pha rol yid ches dang || bram ze rgyal rigs rje'u rigs dang || dmangs⁴ rigs gang dag chos brtson zhing⁵ || sngags kyi theg pa rtogs 'dod pa || de dag bsgrims te gzung⁶ bar bya || (1 sgyu] T, om. P; 2 cing T, cing ni P; 3 brtags P, rtag T; 4 dmangs] T, rmangs P; 5 zhing] T, dang P; 6 gzung] T, bzung P).*

²⁵⁸ *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fols. 45b–46a2; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fol. 33a8–b3): *nyan thos theg pa can rnams min || rang sangs rgyas kyi theg can min ||¹ zhar ba lag zha za ma dang || sgur po 'on pa mi thung dang || gang dag sna leb gyur pa dang || de bzhin mig yon gnong bag can || 'jung dang byas pa mi gzo dang || mkhas bsnyems² sems dang g.yo can dang || sngags kyi theg pa skyid chen gyi || theg pa la ni ma mos pa || de dag nam yang gzung mi bya || de dag bstan 'dir skal ba med || bstan bcos³ mi shes mi gzung ste || thor bu thor bu⁴ 'dzin pa dang || de bzhin bla ma mi gus dang⁵ || smad pa de dag ring du spang || gang dag yan lag ma tshang dang || rkang zha dag dang 'theng po dang || yan lag lhag par gyur pa rnams || mkhas pas*

Mantric teachings, however, two seem to stand out. First, it is the generation of *bodhicitta*—the resolve to become a *buddha* for the benefit of all sentient beings—which has been considered indispensable by a number of Tantric scriptures, most notably by the *Vajrapānyabhīṣekatantra*.²⁵⁹ Second, generation of *bodhicitta*

bsgrims te yongs su spang || (¹ rang sangs rgyas kyi theg can min ||] P, om. T; ² bsnnyems] T, snyems P; ³ bcos] T, chos P; ⁴ thor bu thor bu] P, tho bu tho bu T; ⁵ dang] P, pa T). See also *ibid.* (T, rGyud, vol, Tha, fols. 220b3– 221a3; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fols. 146a8–b5): ‘*jam dpal ma ’ongs pa’i dus na sems can sdig can gang tshul ’di la yid mi ches pa dag yod de* | ‘*jam dpal the tshom*¹ *mang ba pa dang rnam par rtog pa sna tshogs kyi rang bzhin can dang mi dge ba’i bshes gnyen gyis rab tu zin pa dang pha la ma gus pa dang ma la ma gus pa dang slob dpon dang bla ma la smod pa dang* | *bla ma’i skyon ’bru ba’i sems can de dag la ni ye shes chen por dbang bskur ba’i gzungs sngags kyi dkyil ’khor ’di lag tu’ang*² *’chang du mi gzhug go* || *rna lam du yang grag par mi bya’o* || ‘*jam dpal de dag gi mdun du ni gtam yang mi bya’o* || *glegs bam du bris pa’ang*³ *de dag gi mdun du dbye bar yang*⁴ *mi bya ste* | *sems can sdig pa can de dag gis spong ba cung zad byas pas kyang ngan song sems can dmyal bar ’gro bar ’gyur*⁵ *du ’ong ngo* || ‘*di skad du ’di ni sangs rgyas kyis gsungs pa ma yin no zhes zer te* | *de dag ni bdag kyang phung*⁶ *la gzhan dag kyang phung bar byed do* || *de ltar byed pa’i sems can de dag la ni gsang sngags gyi dngos grub med do zhes kho bo*⁷ *smra’o*⁸ || *sangs rgyas dang byang chub sems dpa’ rnam kyang rtag tu rgyab kyis phyogs par ’gyur te* | *de dag rgyab kyis phyogs par gyur nas*⁹ *nges par ’byin pa dang gsang sngags kyi dngos grub gtan med do* || (¹ tshom] P, tsom T; ² tu’ang] T, tu P; ³ pa’ang] T, pa yang P; ⁴ yang] T, om. P; ⁵ ’gyur] T, myur P; ⁶ phung] T, phud P; ⁷ bo] P, bos T; ⁸ smra’o] P, smra na T; ⁹ nas] P, na T).

²⁵⁹ *Vajrapānyabhīṣekatantra* (T, fol. 224a3–6; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fol. 14bb5–7): ‘*jam dpal gang dag byang chub kyi sems sgom pa la zhugs pa dang gang gi tshe de dag gi byang chub kyi sems grub par gyur ba de’i tshe* | ‘*jam dpal byang chub sems dpa’i spyod*¹ *pa gsang sngags kyi sgo spyod pa’i byang chub sems dpa’ de dag ye shes chen por dbang bskur ba’i gzungs sngags kyi dkyil ’khor ’dir*² *gzhug par bya’i* | *gang dag g*³ *byang chub kyi sems rdzogs par ma gyur pa de dag ni gzhug*⁴ *par mi bya ste* | *de dag ni*⁵ *dkyil ’khor yang ltar mi gzhug go* || *de dag la ni phyag rgya dang gsang sngags kyang bstan par mi bya’o* || (¹ spyod] T, spyad P; ² ’khor ’dir] T, du P; ³ gi] P, gis T; ⁴ gzhug] T, zhugs P; ⁵ ni] P, gis T); Wangchuk 2007: 159 n. 289). Cf. Rong zom pa, *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (p. 305.17–22): *de ltar yang phyag na rdo rje dbang bskur ba’i tantra las* | ‘*jam dpal byang chub kyi sems sgom pa la zhugs pa dang* | *byang chub*

alone is not adequate. One must have an interest in (or regard for) the Vajrayāna. This, too, is only too reasonable. Why should anyone insist on revealing Vajrayāna secrets to a person who is contemptuous of Vajrayāna? It would be pure recklessness.

Tibetan sources that address the question as to whom Mantric secrets should be revealed and from whom to be concealed—depending on the type of secret, the occasion or context, and the person—are too numerous to possibly do full justice to them here. A few examples may be mentioned that may provide a representative view of the matter. The *sDom gsum rnam nges* by mNga' ris paṅ chen Padma dbang rgyal and the commentaries on it by sMin gling lo chen and mKhan po Yon dga' speak of five target groups (*yul rnam pa lnga*) from whom Mantric secrets should be concealed,²⁶⁰ namely, (a) “those who are not mature as receptacles, that is, *icchantikas*” (*'dod chen po = log sred can*) (*snod kyis ma smin pa log sred can*); (b) “those who are not mature on account of [initiatory] ritual procedures having not been

kyi sems grub par gyur ba de'i tshe dkyil 'khor 'dir gzhug par bya'i | rdzogs pa ma gyur ba de dag ni gzhug par mi bya ste | de dag ni dkyil 'khor bltar yang mi gzhug go || de dag la ni phyag rgya dang gsang sngags kyang bstan par mi bya'o zhes gsungs te | gsang ba bstan pa'i snod kyis rdo gzhi yang byang chub kyis sems dang ldan pa nyid yin no ||.

²⁶⁰ sMin gling lo chen, *dPag bsam snye ma* (pp. 353.18–354.2): *bdun pa ni | snod dang cho ga ma byas ma rdzogs dang || nyams dang zab mos 'jigs lngar gsang sgrogs bdun || zhes pa ste | [a] snod kyis ma smin pa logs sred can dang | [b] cho ga ma byas pas ma smin pa bum dbang ma thob pa dang | [c] cho ga ma rdzogs pas ma smin pa mchog dbang gsum ma thob pa dang | [d] nyams pas ma smin pa rtsa ltung byung nas 'gyod pas phyir mi 'chos [= 'chos pa] dang | [e] zab mos 'jigs pa nyan rang sogs dbang po ma smin pas zab don la skrag pa ste | de ltar yul rnam pa lnga la 'dul ba'i dus dang bstan bya de la ltos pa'i snod kyis skabs ma yin par gsang sngags kyis thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzas dang spyod pa dang chos zab don gyi gsang ba bsgrags pa | des kyang go bzhin ma dad pa skyes na rtsa ltung bdun pa'o ||; mNga' ris paṅ chen, *sDom gsum rnam nges* (p. 18.19–20): *snod dang cho ga ma byas ma rdzogs dang || nyams dang zab mos 'jigs lngar gsang sgrogs bdun ||; mKhan po Yon dga', Rig 'dzin 'jug sngogs* (pp. 192.17–193.5). mKhan po Yon dga' characterizes the *icchantika* as *rgyu 'bras la yid mi ches pa'i* (“one who does not believe in the cause-effect (i.e., karmic) [mechanism]”).*

performed, that is, those who have not obtained the vase-initiation" (*cho ga ma byas pas ma smin pa bum dbang ma thob pa*); (c) "those who are not mature on account of the incompleteness of the [initiatory] ritual procedures, that is, those who have not obtained three supreme initiations (i.e., *guhyaḅhiṣeka*, *prajñājñānāḅhiṣeka*, and *caturthāḅhiṣeka*)" (*cho ga ma rdzogs pas ma smin pa mchog dbang gsum ma thob pa*); (d) "those who are not mature on account of the degeneration [of basic Mantric precepts], that is, those who have not restored [basic Mantric precepts] with remorse after cardinal transgressions have occurred" (*nyams pas ma smin pa rtsa ltung byung nas 'gyod pas phyir mi 'chos pa*); and (e) "those whose faculties are not mature, that is, those who are terrified of the profound teachings (or reality)" (*dbang po ma smin pa zab don la skrag pa*), for example, *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*.²⁶¹ According to the *Dam tshig gsal bkra* (or *Dam tshig phra rgyas*) ascribed to Vilāsavajra, one should not reveal Mantric secrets to (a) "those whose Mantric precepts have degenerated" (*dam [tshig] nyams [pa]*), (b) "those who have perverted Mantric precepts" (*dam [tshig] las log pa*), (c) "those who have no Mantric precepts" (*dam [tshig] med [pa]*), and (d) "those who have not seen the Mantric configuration" (*dkyil 'khor ma mthong [pa]*).²⁶²

The idea of "entrusting" (*parīdanā*: *yongs su gtad pa*) a scripture or doctrine to someone, an idea not confined to the Vajrayāna, begs the question as to to whom Mantric teachings should be revealed.

²⁶¹ Even a saying in Tibetan captures the idea that Mantric secrets should be concealed from the *hīnayānikas*. See Padma tshe dbang, *gTam dpe'i bang mdzod* (pp. 206–207): *gsang sngags gsang ba ma yin te | blo chung theg pa dman la gsang |* ("Even though Tantra is not a secret, it is kept secret from the Hīnayāna, [harboring] persons of limited understanding").

²⁶² sMin gling lo chen, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 367.11–14): *gnyis pa gsang ba mi smra ba la | yul ni phra rgyas las | dam nyams dam las log pa dang || dam med dkyil 'khor ma mthong dang || 'dres dang ma 'dres thams cad la || zhes pas gang gsang bya la ltos nas de rnams kyi bye brag dbye shes par bya'o ||*. The exact meanings of *'dres pa* and *ma 'dres pa* are not quite clear, but the expressions *nang 'dres pa'i mched* and *shin tu 'dres pa'i mched*, which occur elsewhere, seem to suggest "acquainted" and "unacquainted" (or perhaps "all combinations and pure forms [of each])."

Without pretending to do full justice here to the topic, I would like to focus on the idea of *parīndanā* as explicated in the exegetical literature surrounding the **Guhyagarbhatantra*. The idea as conveyed, for example, by the **Māyopadeśaparakāśadīpa* (aka the *Khog gzhung gsal sgron*) attributed to Vimalamitra is that the Mantric secrets or secret Mantric teachings were entrusted to (a) Vajrapāṇi, the “reciter/compiler-cum-codifier” (*saṃgītikṛt/saṃgītikāra/saṃgītikāraka: sdud pa po*) of secret Tantric teachings; (b) to women (*bud med*) who are *yoginīs* (*rnal 'byor ma*), and (c) *yogins* with eyes [of insight] (*rnal 'byor mig ldan*).²⁶³ In this case, it is not so much the “surface” meaning but rather, so to speak, the “deeper” meaning which seems to better express the idea of Mantric secrets and their recipients in its ultimate sense, which is of immense interest. The crux of Mantric secrets or mysteries seems to be crystalized in the notion of the “Three Inconceivable Secrets/Mysteries” (*gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa gsum*), namely, the “Secret of Body” (*kāyaguhya: sku yi gsang ba*), the “Secret of Speech” (*vāgguhya: gsung gi gsang ba*), and the “Secret of Mind” (*cittaguhya: thugs kyi gsang ba*), that we have seen above, and which seem equatable, respectively, with “Adamantine Body” (*kāyavajra: sku'i rdo rje = sku rdo rje*), “Adamantine Speech” (*vāgvajra: gsung gi rdo rje = gsung rdo rje*), and “Adamantine [Nature of] Mind” (*cittavajra: thugs kyi rdo rje = thugs rdo rje*). Again, to follow the *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*, a Kriyātantric scripture and hence presumably a rather conservative Buddhist Tantric scripture, the secret of Vajrayāna soteriology lies in the realization that not only are one’s body (*kāya: lus*), speech (*vāc: ngag*), and mind (*citta: sems = manas: yid*), so to speak, “intra-indistinguishable” but also the body, speech, and mind of an ordinary sentient are “inter-indistinguishable” from those of higher beings, of—let us say—a *tathāgata*. According to the *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*, a *mantrin* should think that his *vāc* and

²⁶³ Vimalamitra (ascribed), **Māyopadeśaparakāśadīpa* (P, fol. 546b7–8; Bṛ, vol. 43, p. 1130.2–4): *gtad pa'i ngo bo rnam pa gsum || sdud pa po dang bud med sogs || rnal 'byor mig can la sogs pa'i || rtogs dang bsrung dang gdam pa yi || tha snyad tsam du gtad ces bya ||*.

manas are mutually indistinguishable, and that both, again, are indistinguishable from the body or form of a deity (*devatāmūr̥ti/devatārūpa: lha'i gzugs*).²⁶⁴ One notices that the secret

²⁶⁴ *Vajrapāṇyabhīṣekatantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fol. 175a1–b4; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fol. 118a7–b5): 'jam dpal de la rigs kyi bu'am rigs kyi bu mo dkyil 'khor mthong ba | byang chub tu sems bskyed pa | yid snying rje dang ldan pa | thabs la mkhas pa | gsang sngags kyi sgo yi ge'i tshul¹ bstan pa la mkhas pas 'di snyam du ngag ma gtogs² par yid med | yid ma gtogs³ par ngag med | yid ma gtogs⁴ par lha'i gzugs med de | yid nyid ngag yin la | ngag nyid yid yin no ||⁵ lha'i gzugs nyid kyang yid yin la | ngag nyid kyang lha'i gzugs yin no snyam du bsam par bya'o || de ltar tha dad du bya ba med par mos na sngags pas yid rnam par dag pa thob bo || yid rnam par dag pa dang ldan pa de gang gi tshe rnam pa thams cad du rtag par bdag gi lus dang lha'i gzugs su | bdag gi ngag dang lha'i ngag tu | bdag gi yid dang lha'i yid du mtshungs par mthong ba de'i tshe mnyam par bzhag⁶ pa yin no || gang tshe kun tu⁷ thams cad du || sngags pa mnyam par bzhag gyur pa⁸ || de tshe lus la sogs pa yid⁹ || mnyam nyid gnas la zhugs par 'gyur¹⁰ || mnyam nyid gnas la gnas pa yi || yan lag bskyod pa ji snyed dang || tshig tu brjod pa ji snyed pa || de snyed sngags dang¹¹ phyag rgya yin || sngags pa kun tu¹² dgra med cing || rtag tu mi g.yo bde bar gnas || dbang phyug kun gyi go 'phang thob || 'dod pa 'byor pa'i gnas la gnas || de bsil yongs su gdung ba med || bzod dang ldan pa'i tshul khrims bsdams¹³ || (1 sgo yi ge'i tshul] P, tshul T; 2 gtogs] T, rtogs P; 3 gtogs] T, rtogs P; 4 gtogs T, rtogs P; 5 no ||] T; zhing P; 6 bzhag] P, gzhag T; 7 tu] T, du P; 8 bzhag gyur pa] T, gzhag gyur na P; 9 yid] P, yis T; 10 'gyur] P, gyur T; 11 sngags dang] T, gsang sngags P; 12 tu] T, du P; 13 bsdams] P, sdom T); cf. *Dam tshig mdo rgyas* (p. 306.4–22): gzhan yang yid rnam par dag pa gang gis sgo gsum lha'i sku gsung thugs su mnyam par sbyor ba'i tshe | yan lag bskyod pa ji snyed pa'ang phyag rgya yin la | tshig tu brjod pa ji snyed pa'ang gsang sngags yin zhing | tshul khrims bsdams pa'ang de nyid yin par gsungs te 'di skad du | 'jam dpal de la rigs kyi bu'am rigs kyi bu mo dkyil 'khor mthong ba | byang chub tu sems bskyed pa | yid snying rje dang ldan pa thabs la mkhas pa | gsang sngags kyi yi ge'i tshul bstan pa la mkhas pas 'di snyam du | ngag ma gtogs par yid med | yid ma gtogs par ngag med | yid ma gtogs par lha'i gzugs med de | yid nyid ngag yin ngag nyid yid yin la lha'i gzugs nyid kyang yid yin la ngag nyid kyang lha'i gzugs yin no snyam du bsam par bya'o || de ltar tha dad du bya ba med par mos na sngags pas yid rnam par dag pa thob bo || yid rnam par dag pa dang ldan pa de gang gi tshe rnam pa thams cad du rtag par bdag gi lus dang lha'i gzugs su | bdag gi ngag dang lha'i ngag tu | bdag gi yid dang lha'i yid du mtshungs par mthong ba de'i tshe mnyam par bzhag pa yin no || gang gi tshe kun tu thams cad du ||

of Vajrayāna soteriology lies in realizing that *devatās* (*lha*), *mantras* (*sngags*), and *mudrās* (*phyag rgya*), which may indeed be regarded as the bedrock of the Mantrayāna, are essentially and indistinguishably one. In other words, Vajrayāna soteriology presupposes the indistinguishability and identity of *kāyaguhyā/kāyavajra*, *vāgguhya/vāgvajra*, and *cittaguhyā/cittavajra* of a *sattva* and of a *vajrasattva*. Or, as formulated by Rong zom pa, Vajrayāna soteriology is all about realizing that “all mundane (*laukika*) and supramundane (*lokottara*) phenomena are *ab initio* and indistinguishably awakened in the sphere or [triangular orb] (*maṇḍala*) of the adamantine body, speech, and mind (*kāyavākittavajra*)” (*‘jig rten dang ‘jig rten las ‘das pa’i chos thams cad dbyer med par sku gsung thugs rdo rje lta bu’i dkyil ‘khor du ye nas sangs rgyas pa*).²⁶⁵ At least with regard to the identity of *kāyaguhyā*, *vāgguhya*, and *cittaguhyā*, we find obvious traces of its evolution starting from Sūtric scriptures such as the *Daśabhūmikasūtra* and *Tathāgatācintyaguhyānirdeśasūtra* all the way through Tantric scriptures such as the *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* up to higher Tantric scriptures such as the *Guhyasamājatantra*.

According to the uncommon understanding of the idea of “entrusting,” it is not the case that Tantric scriptures such as the **Guhyagarbhatantra* have been entrusted to a few chosen *bodhisattvas*, but rather that they have been entrusted to all

sngags pa mnyam par bzhag gyur pa || de tshe lus la sogs pa yi || mnyam nyid gnas la zhugs par ‘gyur || mnyam nyid gnas la gnas pa yi || yan lag bskyod pa ji snyed pa || tshig tu brjod pa ji snyed pa || de snyed sngags dang phyag rgya yin || sngags pa kun tu dgra med cing || rtag tu mi g.yo bde bar gnas || dbang phyug kun gyi go ‘phang ‘thob || ‘dod pa ‘byor ba’i sa la gnas || de bsil yongs su gdung ba med || bzod dang ldan zhing tshul khirms bsdams || zhes gsungs so ||.

²⁶⁵ Rong zom pa, *sNang ba lhar sgrub* (bKra o dpal dbyangs 2018: 326.3–5): *gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa’i tshul las | ‘jig rten dang ‘jig rten las ‘das pa’i chos thams cad dbyer med par sku gsung thugs rdo rje lta bu’i dkyil ‘khor du ye nas sangs rgyas pa yin pas | da lam gyis sgrub pa lta bu ni ma yin no || zhes ‘byung*

sentient beings, who are in reality *ab initio* awakened.²⁶⁶ Sentient beings (that is, all individuals) are regarded as the legitimate owners, possessors, “entrustees,” and protectors of these Mantric secrets. For someone who realizes such secrets and is capable of teaching them properly, “a natural completion of authorization/initiation/empowerment” (*dbang rang bzhin gyis rdzogs pa*) is supposed to take place, and such a person is said to be “not different/separate from [Buddha] Samantabhadra.”²⁶⁷ Such a person is called a “second *vajrasattva*” (*rdo rje sems dpa’ gnyis pa*).²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Rong zom pa, *dKon cog ’grel* (p. 245.5–8): *de bzhin gshegs pa nyid la zhes bya ba ni | yongs su btad pa thun mong ma yin pa ste | ’khor gyi byang chub sems dpa’ ’ga’ zhis la gtad pa ni ma yin gyi sems can thams cad ye nas sangs rgyas pa yin pas ma ’ongs pa’i gang zag tu gtogs pa la gtad do zhes bya ba’i don no ||*.

²⁶⁷ **Guhyagarbhatantra* in 22 Chapters (P, rGyud, vol. Wa, fol. 129b6–7): *de bzhin gshegs pa thams cad kyi | phyag rgya gsang chen nges pa ’di || rtogs nas smra bar gang byed pa || de nyid nga yin dbang yang rdzogs ||*; Rong zom pa, *dKon cog ’grel* (p. 246.12–16): *de lta bu’i mtshan nyid kyi gzhung ’di la ma ’ongs pa’i rnal ’byor pa gang zhis gis tshul bzhin rtogs nas gzhan la ma nor bar yang smra bar byed pa de ni | kun tu bzang po nyid dang tha mi dad pa yin zhis | dbang yang rang bzhin gyis rdzogs pa yin pas | de dag gis gzhung ’di yongs su zungs la mi nub par gyis shig ces yongs su gtad pa mdzad pa yin no ||*.

²⁶⁸ Rong zom pa, *mNyam sbyor ’grel pa* (pp. 618.20–619.4): *gsang ba’i theg pa sna tshogs gsungs pa’ang rang gi rdo rje sems dpa’ ngo shes shing mthong bar bya ba tsam la gdams ngag mdzad pa de bas na | gang zhis rang gi bde bas nga sgrub pa || dngos grub mchog gi nga ni brtan par mdzad || ces gsungs te | nga ni rdo rje sems dpa’ ’o || rdo rje sems dpa’ ni rang gi bde ba’o || rang gi bde ba ni sems kyi mtshan nyid do || sems kyi mtshan nyid ni sems can dang sangs rgyas gnyis med pa’o || gnyis su med pas na brtan pa’i phyir rdo rje sems dpa’ ’o || de bas na rang gi bde ba la gnas pas rdo rje sems dpa’ ’grub pa zhes kyang bya ste | de mngon du gyur pas na rdo rje sems dpa’ gnyis pa zhes kyang bya ste | de tsam la brtan par mdzad ces kyang bya’o ||*; cf. *ibid.* (pp. 492.24–493.2): *sangs rgyas kun gyi rdzu ’phrul che || zhes bya ba la sogs pa ni dpal rdo rje sems dpa’ gnyis par gyur nas sangs rgyas kyi mdzad pa thams cad ston par byed pa’o ||*.

5.6. Vajrayāna: Why Keep Secrets?

The primary motives for concealing or revealing Mantric secrets may be summarized as maximizing the safety and security of the (a) recipient of the secrets, (b) possessor and discloser of the secrets, and (c) the secret teachings themselves. In other words, giving secret teachings to someone who is not a suitable recipient—for example, someone who detests Tantric teachings—is like pouring some priceless medicine into a container contaminated with poison, and thereby undermining the spiritual safety of the recipient, the discloser, and the Mantric teachings. The popular analogy of a lioness's milk makes this clear. The *Vajramālātantra*, for example, states:²⁶⁹

Just as lioness's milk
Is not to be kept in earthenware,
So should Mahāyoga Tantric scriptures
Not be given to those who are not [suitable]
receptacles.
[If given], the disciple will die instantaneously,
And be impaired in this and yonder existences.
If Mantric instructions
Are disclosed to those who are not [suitable]
receptacles,
The Mantric master will incur loss of spiritual
accomplishments.

Also the **Guhyagarbhatantra* in 80 Chapters states:²⁷⁰

For example, a lioness's milk
Is kept only in a golden vessel.

²⁶⁹ *Vajramālātantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Ca, fol. 247a4–5; P, rGyud, vol. Ca, fol. 233a2–3): *ji ltar seng ge'i 'o ma ni || sa yi snod du gzhas¹ mi bya || de bzhin rnal 'byor chen po'i rgyud || snod min dag la sbyin mi bya || slob ma skad cig de la 'chi || 'di dang pha rol tu ni phung || snod min man ngag rab bshad na || slob dpon dngos grub nyams par 'gyur ||* (1 gzhas] T, bzhag P).

²⁷⁰ **Guhyagarbhatantra* in 80 Chapters (D, rNying rgyud, vol. Kha, fol. 298b6; P, rGyud, vol. Wa, fol. 299b5–6): *dper na seng ge'i 'o ma ni || gser gyis phyis bus 'dzin 'gyur gyi || snod gzhan dag tu blugs pa ni || snod kyang 'chag¹ la 'o ma'ang 'bo² ||* (1 'chag] D, chag P; 2 'bo] D, bo P).

If [it is] poured into another vessel,
The vessel will break and milk will spill out.

sMin gling lo chen and mKhan po Yon dga' make it clear that the cardinal transgression of disclosing secrets occurs only if the recipient understands the meaning and a feeling of aversion or distrust (*ma dad pa*) arises.²⁷¹ This implies that the motive for not prematurely disclosing secrets to an unsuitable person is always its negative outcome, such distrust of or aversion towards the teachings as to undermine the chances of benefiting from the teaching. In other words, revelation of Mantric secrets can be irreproachable only if the safety or security of sentient beings and Mantric teachings can be guaranteed.

The perceived riskiness of the Mantric methods become clearer once we understand Vajrayānic soteriology in relation to Bodhisattvayānic soteriology. As I mentioned earlier, the higher the Tantric system, the faster and more efficient the soteriological means, but naturally also the riskier. Vajrayāna teaching is often understood as “profound, sacrosanct, and risky” (*zab cing gnyan la khe nyen che ba*). The Tibetan expression *khe nyen che ba* can be understood as “highly risky,” inasmuch as if things go well, the benefit or profit (*khe bzang/sang*) is great, but if they go awry, the danger (*nyen kha*) or loss (*gyong*) is equally as great. The immense potential benefit or detriment (*phan gnod*) and gain or loss (*khe gyong*) attributed to Mantric teachings accounts for the extreme riskiness also ascribed to them. Not all Tantric systems and Mantric soteriological models are regarded as equally safe or risky. In general, the higher the system, the riskier are its teachings. The type of Mantric soteriological model and techniques, too, affects the degree of risk and vulnerability. For example, in terms of applicability, what I regard as the physiology-based Mantric soteriology,²⁷² and particularly the

²⁷¹ sMin gling lo chen, *dPag bsam snye ma* (p. 354.1–2): ... *gsang sngags kyi thun mong ma yin pa'i rdzas dang spyod pa dang chos zab don gyi gsang ba...*; mKhan po Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug sngogs* (p. 193.3–4).

²⁷² For an explanation of the physiology-based and psychology-based Mantric soteriologies, see Wangchuk 2007: 223–225.

method which makes use of “lower apertures” (*adhodvāra*: ‘og gi sgo), that is, the body of others, as an efficient strategy (**paradehopāyasamyukta*: gzhān lus thabs ldan)—as opposed to the use of the “upper aperture” (*ūrdhavadvāra*: steng gi sgo), that is, one’s own body (*svadehopāyasamyukta*: rang lus thabs ldan)—is seen as riskier. The potential riskiness of Tantric teachings is illustrated by the ability of a snake in a bamboo pipe to go only in one of the two directions.²⁷³ In other words, a Vajrayānic practitioner can only either ascend to the highest state of Vajradharahood or plunge into the abyss of Vajranaraka; there is no third exit.²⁷⁴

As to why one is supposed to keep Mantric secrets, I wish to briefly discuss why Mantric secrets such as the “Three Inconceivable Secrets/Mysteries” (*gsang ba bsam gyis mi khyab pa gsum*) that I mentioned above, namely, the “Secret of Body” (*kāyaguhya*: sku yi gsang ba), the “Secret of Speech” (*vāgguhya*: gsung gi gsang ba), and the “Secret of Mind” (*cittaguhya*: thugs kyi gsang ba), remain secret or mysterious to one. The idea of the “four causes of nescience” (*mi shes pa’i rgyu bzhi*) and the three kinds of “remoteness or distance” (*viprakarṣa/viprakṛṣṭa*: bskal ba) that we saw in the Bodhisattvayāna context could be used to answer this question. But in the Vajrayāna context, one reason as suggested by

²⁷³ ‘Brom ston pa et al. (ascribed), *bKa’ gdams pha chos* (p. 192.2–3): *theg pa chen mo gsang sngags kyi lam ’di sbrul snyug dong du bcug pa dang ’dra ||*; Po to ba, *dPe chos rin spungs* (p. 329.7–12): *sbrul smyug ces pa ni | dper na | sbrul smyug dong du bcug pa de | yang na yar zang thal du ’ong | yang na | mar zang thal du ’bud de | bar nas g.yas g.yon du ’khyog tu med pa ltar | sngags la ’jus pa rnams kyang | yang na tshe gcig yar zang thal sangs rgya | yang na | tshe gcig gis mar zang thal la dmyal bar ’gro ste | bar ma dor mi sdod gsung | des na sngags ’di khe nyen shin tu che gsung |*; *Ma ni bka’ ’bum* (p. 1026.7–9): *gsang sngags kyi chos ni thun mong ma yin pas | rnam smin legs nyes gnyis ka drag la myur bas | dper na sbrul smyug dong du bcug pa dang ’dra bas yar ’gro mar ’gro gnyis las med do ||*

²⁷⁴ A ro, *Theg chen rnal ’byor* (Thiesen 2009: 208): *gsang sngags skye sa gnyis ni rdo rje dmyal dang sangs rgyas sa yin gzhān ni med ||*. It has to be seen if the Sanskrit word for *rdo rje dmyal ba* can be traced. In the Tibetan translation of Mahāmati’s commentary on the *Suhṛllekha*, we do find the expression *dmyal ba’i rdo rje*. See his *Vyaktapadāṭikā* (Tenzin 2002: 224.11).

the **Guhyagarbhatantraṭīkā*, for example, is “because one is interrupted or cut off by the four kinds of mystery/secret” (*gsang ba bzhis chod pa’i phyir*).²⁷⁵ Another interesting concept that may explain why or how immanent secrets or mysteries remain as such is that although all sentient beings are *ab initio* and intrinsically characterized by the four *buddha* bodies (*catuḥkāyātma*: *sku bzhi’i bdag nyid*) and although the four *kāya*s (i.e., *nirmāṇakāya*, *saṃbhogakāya/sāṃbhogikakāya*, *dharmakāya*, *svābhāvīkākāya*) are immanent and manifest during the four states of existence (*catasraḥ avasthāḥ*: *gnas skabs bzhi*)—namely, the

²⁷⁵ The expression *gsang ba bzhis chod pa* or *gsang ba bzhis chod de* occurs also in later sources, for example in the writings of Mi pham and the Third rDo grub, but the earliest source that I could trace is the **Guhyagarbhatantraṭīkā*, which employs this expression on two occasions. See the **Guhyagarbhatantraṭīkā* (P, rGyud ’grel, vol. Bu, fol. 145a2–4; K, vol. ’A, p. 433.5–434.1): *rang bzhin gsang ba’i snying po ’bras bu khyad par can di lta bu | gsang ba bzhis chod pa’i phyir | rdo rje ’dzin pa’i zhal dang dbang ma mthong ma thob¹ pas mngon du byed² mi nus pas lam stegs gzhan la blo sbyangs pa ston pa’i³ phyir | lam gyi rgyud dang thun mong pa’i chos rnams bshad du gsol zhes zhus pa’o ||* (¹ thob] K, thos P; ² byed] K, om. P; ³ ston pa’i] K, mtha’i P). See also *ibid.* (P, rGyud ’grel, vol. Bu, fol. 145b2; K, vol. ’A, pp. 434.6–435.1): *de nyid gang dag gsang ba bzhis chod de | nyam thag pa dang¹ gzhan du tshol ba de dag la yang snang ngo ||* (¹ dang] K, nas P). I have consulted here only two editions, but the readings found in the 133-volume *rNying ma bka’ ma* edition are so different that I suspect that the latter contains annotations incorporated into the main text. As to what exactly the four secrets/mysteries are is unclear. We have seen that the **Guhyagarbhatantraṭīkā* proposes only three kinds of secret/mystery, although the first of the three is further subclassified into four. The *gsang ba bzhi* in question seems to refer to the four expressed by the **Guhyagarbhatantra* in 22 Chapters (P, rGyud, vol. Wa, fol. 110b1; D, rNying rgyud, vol. Kha, fol. 112a7–b1): *e ma’o ye nas gsang ba’i chos || sna tshogs snang la rang bzhin gsang || ngo bo nyid kyis rab tu gsang || gzhan du min la shin tu gsang ||*. The four may be listed as follows: (a) *ye nas gsang ba*, (b) *rang bzhin gyis gsang ba*, (c) *ngo bo nyid kyis gsang ba*, and (d) *gzhan du mi bstan pa’i gsang ba*. Although commentators make distinctions among the first three, these appear to be synonymous or quasi-synonymous. One can understand why the first three can be subsumed under *gab pa’i gsang ba* and only the fourth under *sbas pa’i gsang ba*.

waking state (*jāgradavasthā*: *sad pa'i gnas skabs*), dreaming state (*svapnāvasthā*: *rmi lam gyi gnas skabs*), deep/sound-sleep state (*suṣuptāvasthā*: *shin tu gnyid log pa'i gnas skabs*), and the fourth state (*turyāvasthā*: *bzhi pa'i gnas skabs*)—their nature remains obscured owing to specific factors and conditions present during each of the four states.²⁷⁶

5.7. Vajrayāna: How Should Secrets Be Concealed/Revealed?

In general, there is no such thing as a leak-proof secret, and hence there ought to be no absolute means and methods of guaranteeing absolute secrecy. This would apply in particular to secrecy in the Vajrayāna. Corresponding to the greater elements of secrecy and greater need for secrecy in it, we can expect to find more ways proposed for concealing Mantric secrets. First, one general measure seems to be to ensure that one of the grossest transgressions of “proclaiming Mantric secrets” (*guhyaākhyāna*: *gsang ba sgrog pa*) is not committed, namely, causing “Mantric teachings to be proclaimed in public” (*gsang ba khrom bsgrags*), which became proverbial in Tibet.²⁷⁷ One of the strictest measures

²⁷⁶ Mi pham, *'Od gsal snying po* (pp. 400.17–401.9): *mdor bsdus na gnas skabs bzhi'i sgrib pa ste* | (a) *sad pa'i tshes na tshogs drug gi shes pa yul la rgyu ba rags shig gsal ba'i tshul gyis tha mal gyi snang ba sna tshogs par 'dzin pas snang srid rnam dag sgyu 'phrul drwa ba sprul pa sku'i rang bzhin la sgrib* | (b) *rmi lam gyi tshes rlung sems tsam gyi snang ba sna tshogs rang snang 'al 'ol du shar ba la zhen pas ye shes rang snang longs spyod rdzogs sku'i rang bzhin la sgrib* | (c) *gnyid 'thug gi tshes sems byung gi rgyu ba log nas ci yang dran med mun pa lta bu'i ngang du 'phyan pas mi rtog chos sku'i rang bzhin la sgrib* | (d) *snyoms 'jug gi tshes rags pa'i byung tshor mtha' dag bde ba'i ros bcom nas gnas pa la der 'dzin zhing zhen pas zung 'jug ngo bo nyid sku'i rang bzhin la sgrib pa'i tshul gyis 'khrul par 'khor mo yug tu 'phyan nas rang gnas sku bzhi'i don mthong bar mi 'gyur ro ||*. The source of the idea of “four states” (*catasrah avasthāḥ*: *gnas skabs bzhi*) was obviously the *Vimalaprabhā*. See, for example, Negi 2006: no. 904 (pp. 172–173). Here, Mi pham employs the terms *sad pa'i tshes* (for *jāgradavasthā*); *rmi lam gyi tshes* (for *svapnāvasthā*); *gnyid 'thug gi tshes* (for *suṣuptāvasthā*); and *snyoms 'jug gi tshes* (for *turyāvasthā*).

²⁷⁷ Cüppers & Sørensen 1998: 271 no. 10391: *gsang ba khrom bsgrags*. See also *Adhīsa (ascribed), *A ti sha'i gsung 'bum* (p. 472.20–23): *snying gtam*

was to insist on what is known as “one-to-one transmission” (*chig brgyud*),²⁷⁸ evidently in the sense that a specific Mantric teaching is transmitted to another single person. Apparently, what is called “experiential instruction” (*nyams khrid*) that a Mantric master may give to one disciple at a time (i.e., in absolute privacy) is not considered *chig brgyud* because such a master might have many disciples, each of whom is receiving the same “experiential instruction” privately. Though contested within the Sa skya tradition, the introduction of the concepts of “exposition for the assembly” (*tshogs bshad*) and “exposition for disciples” (*slob bshad*) of the Lam 'bras teachings may be seen as an attempt made by that tradition to strike a balance between restricting and relaxing access to secret Mantric doctrines. The basic idea of *nyams khrid*, which is not confined to one tradition, is that a secret instruction number two—so to speak, lesson number two—cannot be given unless a concrete result of instruction/lesson number one in the form of direct experience can be observed.²⁷⁹

*dgra la 'chad na glen pa yin | gsang gtam khrom du sgrog na glen pa yin ||
gter brgya lam du byed na glen pa yin || bla ma'i man ngag dang yon tan zong
du 'tshong na log 'tsho khrel med yin | gsang sngags khrom du sgrog na nyams
pa yin | snying gtam mi thub pa'i mis nang mi mi 'ong | gsang gtam mi thub
pas gros phugs mi 'ong |.*

²⁷⁸ For examples of the practice of *chig brgyud* in the Lam 'bras transmission, see Stearns 2001: 10, 47; for ones in the transmission of the rDo rje phur pa teachings in Tibet, see Li 2018: 79, 213, 232.

²⁷⁹ Compare, however, the modes of “meditation according to conviction [standards]” (*mos sgom*) and “meditation according to completion [standards]” (*nges rdzogs*) in the tradition of the **Guhyagarbhatantra*. According the former, one goes through the various phases or processes of meditation without waiting to obtain perfection. According to the latter, one can go on to the next phase or process only after one has gained perfection with regard the former phase or process. For a succinct distinction between the two, see rDo rje dbang phyug, *sDom byang rdo rje snying po* (p. 16.12–15): *mtshan nyid gsum gyi nang gses kyi || ting 'dzin gang zhig rnal 'byor lnga || tshad du 'khyol sgom nges rdzogs dang || mtshan nyid gsum gyi nang gses kyi || ting 'dzin gang zhig rnal 'byor lnga || tshad du ma 'khyol spyi'i nam [= rnam] tsam || mos pas sgom pa mos sgom mo ||.*

Second, another possible way of concealing a Mantric secret is to resist the temptation of trading or selling it.²⁸⁰ Third, the concept of a threefold mode of transmission of Tantric teachings, which is said to be a unique technical term (*brda chad*) of the rNying ma tradition,²⁸¹ seems to harbor corresponding modes of concealing Tantric teachings—namely, “mental (i.e., mind-to-mind) transmission typical to the Victorious Ones” (*rgyal ba la dgongs pa’i brgyud pa*), “gesticulatory transmission typical of the *vidyādhara*s” (*rig ’dzin brda’i brgyud pa*), and “aural (i.e., mouth-to-ear) transmission typical of [subsequent types of] individuals” (*gang zag snyan gyi brgyud pa*)—inasmuch as they are clearly three transmissional modes of secret Tantric teachings. The first mode, a kind of telepathic mode of transmission, leaves no room for leakage of secrets. The second mode presupposes that secret teachings can be transmitted only to those who know how to decode encoded signs. The idea of non-verbal communication or transmission of information is not unknown to earlier Buddhist sources, inasmuch as such a mode of communication is often attributed to a *pratyekabuddha*.²⁸² The idea of aural transmission

²⁸⁰ Sangs rgyas gling pa (revealed), *bKa’ thang gser phreng* (p. 462.16–17): *gsang sngags dag la the tshom yid gnyis spang* ། ། *gsang sngags nor du mi btsong spel mi bya* ། །.

²⁸¹ rDo grub bsTan pa’i nyi ma, *gSang snying mdzod* (p. 5.11–14): *dang po ni* ། *bshad rgyud rgya mtsho las* ། *rgyal ba sems dpa’ rnal ’byor pa* ། ། *dgongs pa rig pa rna bar brgyud* ། ། *ces pa ltar gsum ste* ། *gsang sngags snga ’gyur ba’i brda chad thun mong ma yin pa’o* ། །. The **Māyāsamudratantra* (sGyu ’phrul rgya mtsho’i rgyud), which is regarded as an explanatory Tantric scripture (*vyākhyātantra*: *bshad pa’i rgyud*) of the **Guhyaagarbhatantra*, has served as the locus classicus for the idea of the threefold mode of transmission. See the **Māyāsamudratantra* (Tb, vol. Za, fol. 3b5; Tk, vol. Ba, fol. 171a1): *rgyal ba¹ sems dpa’ rnal ’byor pa* ། ། *dgongs pa rig² pa rna bar brgyud³* ། ། (1 ba] *em.*, ba’i TbTk; 2 rig] Tb, rim Tk; 3 brgyud] Tb, brgyad Tk).

²⁸² See, for example, the *Karmaśataka* (T, mDo sde, vol. Ha, fol. 111a6–7; P, mDo sde, vol. Su, fol. 82a2–3): *dga’ ba skyes nas rang sangs rgyas de la bza’ ba dang bca’ ba gtsang ma bzang po mang po phul lo* ། ། *bdag nyid chen po de dag ni lus kyis chos ston par byed kyi tshig gis chos¹* [T; om. P] *ston par mi byed de* ། *des der bsod snyoms de blangs nas de nyid du steng gi nam mkha’ la song ngo* ། ། (1 chos] T, om. P). See also Rong zom pa, *dKon cog ’grel* (p. 45.5–19):

(*snyan brgyud*), that is, a mouth-to-ear transmission, can be found in various Tibetan traditions and can also be traced in Indian sources, for example in Kuddāla's *Acintyādvayakramopadeśa*.²⁸³ The kind of aural transmission that Mantric traditions speak of do not seem to be equatable with the oral tradition in general, such as the oral transmission of, say, the *Prātimokṣasūtra*. The expression “warm steaming breath of the *dāki[nī]s*” (*dā ki'i zhal gyi drod rlangs tho le ba*)²⁸⁴ conveys elements of intimacy, privacy, and immediacy, and one can picture a *dākinī* whispering secret Mantric teachings into one's ears such that one can feel her warm breath!

Fourth, the use of “secret signs” (*chomaka/chomā: brda*), the “symbolical letters of the *dākinīs*” (*mkha' 'gro'i brda yig*) (as in the gTer ma tradition), “oblique language” (*saṃdh[y]ābhāṣa/bhāṣā: gsang ba'i skad = dgongs pa'i skad*),²⁸⁵ and the like should be seen as means of protecting Mantric secrets. There ought to be numerous examples of secrets signs, symbols, gestures, and coded language that have been employed to conceal Mantric secrets. The use of coded language can be found in the context of the twenty

yang pra [= shrā] ba ka ni sgrog cing thos par byed pa'i tshig ste | rang sangs rgyas ltar ngag gi sgo nas chos mi ston pa ma yin gyi | rang gis thob pa'i 'bras bu gzhan la sgrog cing thos par byed pas pra [= shrā] ba ka zhes bya ste | [...] yang na nyan thos ltar rang gis thob pa'i 'bras bu gzhan thob [= thos] par mi byed kyi | ngag gi sgo nas chos mi ston pas rang sangs rgyas zhes bya'o ||; lTa phreng 'grel pa (p. 313.4–6): rang sangs rgyas zhes bya ba ni | rang gi 'bras bu thob pa la | nyan thos ltar dge' ba'i bshes gnyen las nyan par mi byed la mngon par thob pa'i chos de | ngag gi sgo nas gzhan la thos par mi byed pas de skad ces bya'o ||.

²⁸³ Kuddāla, *Acintyādvayakramopadeśa* 98ab (Isaacson 2015: §1): *bhadrapādena kathitaṃ karṇāt karṇaṃ mukhān mukhaṃ |*; Tib. (Bṭ, vol. 26, p. 282.1–2): *snyan nas snyan dang zhal nas zhal || bzang po'i zhal snga nas kyis gsungs ||.*

²⁸⁴ Mi pham, *Chos rgyal dgyes pa'i zhal lung* (p. 698.5): *rgyu dang 'bras bu gsang sngags theg pa che || tshang la ma nor rig 'dzin brgyud pa'i lung || dā ki'i zhal gyi drod rlangs tho le ba || mtsho skyes rgyal ba'i bstan pa rgyas gyur cig ||.*

²⁸⁵ Seyfort Ruegg 2016: 278 n. 63.

additional Mantric precepts (*lhag pa'i dam tshig*) of the rNying ma tradition such as “not [putting] what is pure in impure containers” (*ma dag snod du dag pa min*), which actually means “not revealing secret Mantric teachings to those who are unfit receptacles” (*snod min la gsang chos mi ston pa*).²⁸⁶

Fifth, one way of concealing a Mantric secret teaching that has already been written down would be to obscure it by reshuffling the text in such a way that the original sequence is not obvious to the uninitiated persons. This method, I am told, can already be traced in the Ārya school of the tradition of the *Guhyasamājantra*. Sixth, in the case of the transmission of the Vajrayāna in Tibet, one of the measures taken to preclude the improper revelation of Mantric secrets has been to restrict or prohibit translation of highly esoteric Tantric scriptures. Seventh, we have already seen the Buddhist analogies of therapeutic and propaedeutic-pedagogic methods. The Vajrayāna clearly continued to use the same analogies. The goal and motive remain the same: to benefit sentient beings. The means have changed. One feature of the Vajrayāna, the incipient form of which can be traced within earlier stages of Buddhism, is that peaceful means are limited in their efficacy and that extraordinary circumstances and extraordinarily malicious and gruesome sentient beings require extraordinary measures. Despite enormous risks involved, such a line of thought seems to have appeared commonsensical, logical, and ethical. Despite possessing the surgical expertise and drastic means needed to perform on a patient and yet letting the patient die because actually doing so seems so drastic would seem foolish and unethical. So Tantric scriptures such as the *Vajrapānyabhiṣekatantra* clearly endorse four means, each of which require being employed in the correct manner.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁶ mKhan po Yon dga', *Rig 'dzin 'jug ngogs* (pp. 203.2–204.10).

²⁸⁷ *Vajrapānyabhiṣekatantra* (T, rGyud, vol. Tha, fols. 190b3–191b2; P, rGyud, vol. Da, fols. 127b7–128a8): *drag po shin tu sdang sems can*¹ || *bka' lung las ni 'gal byed cing* || *srog kyang shin tu 'phrog byed la* || *sangs rgyas rnams kyang mi g.yel bar*² || *de la phan par shes nas su* || *bskal pa bye ba du mar ni* || *sems dmyal rnams su skye ba yi* || *sdug bsnal mang po 'dir*³ 'gyur

Eighth and finally, from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, it can be said that outwardly one is supposed to live according to the Śrāvakayāna teachings, inwardly as a *bodhisattva* following the Bodhisattvayāna teachings, and secretly as a Mantric *yogin* following the Vajrayāna teachings. Such a *modus vivendi* follows the concept of “three vows/precepts” (*saṃvāra: sdom pa*), namely, *prātimokṣasaṃvara*, *bodhisattvasaṃvara*, and *mantrasaṃvara*.²⁸⁸

zhes⁴ || ji ltar sman pas sems can gyi || nad rnams gso bar byed pa bzhin ||
 gzir bas bdag la nyes pa med || mkhas pas⁵ rnam par spangs ma yin⁶ || de ltar
 sems ni mnyam bzhag⁷ cing || snying rje'i yid dang ldan pa yis || byang chub
 sems ni brtan byas te⁸ || de la chad pas gcod⁹ pa brtsam || ji ltar sman pa
 mkhas pa yis || nyes de¹⁰ yal bar mi 'dor bzhin¹¹ || thabs dang shes rab¹² mkhas
 pa yang || mi byed mkhas na'ang nyes dang bcas || ji ltar sman pa mi mkhas
 pa || thabs dang shes rab bral ba yis || nad pa yal bar 'dor byed cing || gso
 ba'i cho ga mi byed pa || de bzhin shes¹³ dang bral ba yis || gal te gso bar
 brtson na yang || thabs dang shes rab bral ba la || sangs rgyas rnams ni
 bsngags mi mdzad || nad pa nad pa rnams la ni || sman pas¹⁴ ji ltar sman byin
 pa || tsha dang kha dang bska ba yang || 'jig rten smod par mi byed pa || de
 bzhin 'dul ba'i bye brag gis || ci rigs pa ni gso bar bya || sdang ba'i sems can
 rnams la ni || byas te sangs rgyas rnams mi smod || 'das pa'i dus na sngon
 byung ba || shin tu rmad byung rgyal ba byung¹⁵ || de bzhin gshegs pa'i
 gsung rab las¹⁶ || 'gro ba'i chos ni 'di 'dra ste || shin tu sdang sems drag po yi
 || sems can thams cad de tshe byung || shin tu drag po mthong nas ni || 'jam
 po nyid du mi sbyor ro¹⁷ || shes rab thabs kyi snying stobs can || rdo rje sems
 dpa' de bzhin gshegs || rdo rje'i snying stobs khros gyur pa || sems can rnams
 la phan byed pa || de nas pha rol gnon pa yis || sems can khams ni du ma
 gnon¹⁸ || sdig med nan gyis stobs gyis su || thams cad dbang du dgod par bya
 || pha rol gnon pa'i rigs¹⁹ tshul gyis || ji ltar byang chub 'dod byas nas ||
 sems can khams ni du ma dag || thams cad dbang²⁰ du dgod par byas || rdo rje
 slob dpon chen po yis || log 'dren bgegs rnams de ltar dgod || byang chub sems
 dran bsgom byas na²¹ || skyon gyis gos par mi 'gyur ro || (1 can] P, pa T; 2
 bar] T, ba P; 3 'dir P, 'dis T; 4 zhes] P, te T; 5 pas] P, pa T; 6 spangs ma yin]
 P, sbyangs pa yi T; 7 bzhag] P, gzhag T; 8 te] P, la T; 9 gcod] P, gcad T; 10
 de] T, te P; 11 bzhin] T, zhing P; 12 rshes rab] T, ye shes P; 13 shes] T,
 gshegs P; 14 pas] T, pa P; 15 byung] P, 'byung T; 16 las] P, la T; 17 ro] P, te T;
 18 gnon] P, rnams T; 19 rigs] P, rim T; 20 dbang] P, dpang T; 21 bsgom byas
 na] P, bsgrim byas nas T).

²⁸⁸ For a study of the “three vows/precepts” in Tibetan Buddhism, see Sobisch 2002.

Particularly as a practitioner of Vajrayāna, it has been considered best to live the life of a hidden *yogin* (*sbas pa'i rnal 'byor*), that is, by concealing one's body, speech, and mind.²⁸⁹

6. Epilogue

What I have attempted in this paper is to examine the idea of secrecy in four different contexts, namely, in the secular world, Śrāvakayāna, Bodhisattvayāna, and Vajrayāna. In each case, I tried to answer seven questions, namely, (1) whether there are such things as secrets, (2) what the secrets are, (3) who the possessors of secrets are, (4) whether secrets should be concealed or revealed, (5) to whom secrets should be revealed or from whom they should be concealed, (6) why secrets should be kept or concealed, and (7) how secrets should be concealed/revealed. (1) Whether we like it or not, the existence of secrets is presupposed in all the above four contexts. In general, while within the three Buddhist vehicles, later ones presuppose the idea of secrecy found in former ones, the degree of secrecy is greater in the later ones. (2) As for the secrets themselves, we may state that one can speak of two kinds of secrets, namely, ones with an attached positive value and others with an ascribed negative value. Accordingly, (3) possessors of secrets, too, may be of two kinds. Normally, possessors of negative secrets, for example an illness, are those who feel guilty, ashamed, or vulnerable. Possessors of positive secrets are those who hold the keys to various kinds of “trade secrets.” (4) In general, if the secret has a negative value, one is supposed to reveal it. If the secret has a positive value, one is supposed to conceal it. (5) Regardless of whether the secret has a positive or negative value attached to it, one should conceal it from unsuitable persons. This is particularly true of secrets that have a positive value. (6) In all cases, the motives for concealing or revealing a secret are decisive. Positive secrets in particular may

²⁸⁹ See, for example, dPal sprul, *Dam pa'i snying nor* (p. 4.1–5): *da ni rang tshul sbas pa'i dus la bab || lus sbas dben pa'i ri la gcig pur sdod¹ || ngag sbas smra ba ma mang 'brel thag chod || sems sbas rang skyon kho nar cer re ltos || sbas pa'i rnal 'bor zer na de la zer || (1 sdod] em., stod Text).*

be compared to medicine. Administering wrong medicine to a wrong patient at a wrong time and in wrong doses would be dangerous and irresponsible. (7) Especially in the Buddhist context, positive secrets are mainly Buddhist teachings. Buddhist teachings have been compared to medicine at all levels. Vajrayāna teachings above all may be compared to medicines that require a prescription. Some medicines are so powerful and risky that they can only be administered under the strict supervision of doctors. This is how the pertinent Buddhist traditions seem to view the matter of secrecy. That there is no such thing as secrets or that one may or should always reveal everything to everybody seems not only irrational and irresponsible from the perspective of Buddhist sources but also contrary to common sense. The message of *Ratnāvalī* 3.63, as we have already seen, is: If it benefits, give even poison. If it does not benefit, do not give even medicine. This may serve as a general guideline for dealing with secrecy of all types, at all levels, and at all times.

Abbreviations & Bibliography

(a) Abbreviations

- B_K = Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig zhib 'jug lte gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang (collated). *bKa' 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*. 109 vols. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 2006–2009.
- B_T = Krung go'i bod kyi shes rig zhib 'jug lte gnas kyi bka' bstan dpe sdur khang (collated). *bsTan 'gyur dpe bsdur ma*. 120 vols. Beijing: Krung go'i bod rig pa'i dpe skrun khang, 1994–2008.
- D = sDe dge *bKa' 'gyur* and *bsTan 'gyur* Edition, 103 & 213 vols. Catalogue nos. according to Ui, Hakuju, Munetada Suzuki, Yenshō Kanakura, & Tōkan Tadaet. 1934. *A Complete Catalogue of the Tibetan Buddhist Canons (Bkaḥ-ḥgyur and Bstan-ḥgyur)*. Sendai: Tōhoku Imperial University (aided by Saitō Gratitude Foundation).
- K_[58] = *rNying ma bka' ma rgyas pa*. 58 vols. Kalimpong: Dupjung Lama, 1982–1987.
- K_[120] = *rNying ma bka' ma shin tu rgyas pa*. 120 vols. Chengdu: mKhan po 'Jam dbyangs, 1999.
- P = Peking (Qianlong) *bKa' 'gyur* Edition, 108 vols. and Peking *bsTan 'gyur* Edition, 225 vols. Catalogue nos. according to Suzuki, Daisetz T. 1962. *The Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition: Catalogue & Index*. 2 vols. Tokyo: Suzuki Research Foundation.
- T = sTog *bKa' 'gyur* Edition, 109 vols. Catalogue nos. according to Skorupski, Tadeusz. 1985. *A Catalogue of the sTog Palace Kanjur*. Bibliographia Philologica Buddhica Series Maior 4. Tokyo: International Institute for Buddhist Studies.
- Tb = *mTshams brag rnying ma rgyud 'bum*. 46 vols. Thimphu: National Library, Royal Government of Bhutan, 1982.
- Tk = *rNying ma rgyud 'bum gting skyes dgon pa byang gi bris ma*. 36 vols. Thimphu: Dingo Khyentse Rimpoche, 1973–1975.

(b) Primary Sources: Indic

- Abhidharmakośakārikā* = Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośakārikā*. See Gokhale 1946.
- Abhidharmakośabhāṣya* = Vasubandhu, *Abhidharmakośabhāṣya*. See Pradhan 1967; Tib. P5591, D4090.
- Abhidharmakośaṭīkopāyikā* = Śamathadeva, *Abhidharmakośaṭīkopāyikā*. Tib. P5595; D4094.
- Abhisamayālamkāra* = Maitreya (ascribed), *Abhisamayālamkāra*. See Stcherbatsky & Obermiller 1929.
- Abhisamayālamkārarāloka* = Hariḥhadra. *Abhisamayālamkārarālokā Prajñāpāramitāvyaḅhyā*. See Wogihara 1932–1935; Tucci 1932; Tib. D 3791; B₁, vol. 51.
- Acintyādvayakramopadeśa* = Kuddāla. *Acintyādvayakramopadeśa*. Tib. B₁, vol. 26.
- Acintyastava* = One Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Acintyastava*. See Lindtner 1997; Tola & Dragonetti 1985.
- Akṣayamatīnirdeśasūtra* = *Akṣayamatīnirdeśasūtra*. Tib. B₁, vol. 60.
- Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā* = *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā Prajñāpāramitā*. Tib. B₁, vols. 29–31.
- Bhadracarī* = *Bhadracarīprañidhāna*, *Bhadracarīprañidhānaḅāthā* or *Samantabhadracaryāprañidhānarāja*. See Watanabe 1912; Devi 1959.
- Bodhicaryāvatāra* = Śāntideva, *Bodhicaryāvatāra*. See La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914; Bhattacharya 1960.
- Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā* = Prajñākaramati, *Bodhicaryāvatārapañjikā*. See La Vallée Poussin 1901–1914.
- Bodhicittavivarāṇa* = One Nāgārjuna (ascribed), *Bodhicittavivarāṇa*. See Lindtner 1997; Kano & Li 2017.
- Bodhisattvabhūmi* = Asaṅga (ascribed), *Bodhisattvabhūmi*. See Wogihara 1930–36; P5538; Tib. B₁, vol. 73; cf. also Takahashi 2005.

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Bodhisattvabhūmivākyā = Sāgaramegha, *Bodhisattvabhūmivākyā* (*ad Śīlapāṭala*). See Hadano et al. 1993.

**Buddhapiṭakasūtra* = *Buddhapiṭakaduḥśīlanigrahasūtra*. Tib. P886; T36.

Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra = *Buddhāvataṃsakasūtra*. Tib. P761; T10.

Cakrasaṃvaravivṛti = Bhavabhaṭṭa. *Cakrasaṃvaravivṛti*. See Pandey et al. 2002.

Catuḥśataka = Āryadeva, *Catuḥśataka*. See Lang 1986; Tillemans 1990.

Caturdāraśāstrasamādhisūtra = *Caturdāraśāstrasamādhisūtra*. Tib. Bṭ, vol. 56.

Drumakinnararājapariprcchāsūtra = *Drumakinnararājapariprcchāsūtra*. Tib. See Harrison 1992.

Durgatipariśodhanatantra = *Durgatipariśodhanatantra*. See Skorupski 1983.

Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra = *Gaṇḍavyūhasūtra*. See Suzuki & Idzumi 1949.

Gāthāśataka = Vararuci, *Gāthāśataka*. See Hahn 2012.

**Guhyagarbhapīṇḍārtha* = Vimalamitra (ascribed), **Guhyagarbhapīṇḍārtha*. Tib. P4755; K_[120], vol. 80 (Wu), pp. 33–123.

**Guhyagarbhatantra* (in 22 Chapters) = **Guhyagarbhatantra*. Tib. P 455; D 832.

**Guhyagarbhatantra* (in 80 Chapters) = **Guhyagarbhatantra* (*gSang ba snying po de kho na nyid nges pa aka sGyu 'phrul brgyad cu pa*). Tib. P457; D834.

**Guhyagarbhatantraṭīkā* = Līlavajra/Vilāsavajra. **Guhyagarbhatantraṭīkā* (*Rin po che spar khab*). Tib. P 4718; not found in D; K_[58], vol. 23 ('A), pp. 389–620.

Guhyamañītilakatantra = *Guhyamañītilakasūtra* aka *Guhyamañītilakatantra*. Tib. P125; T453.

Guhyasamājatantra = *Guhyasamājatantra*. See Matsunaga 1978; Tib. P81; T408.

Hevajratatantra = *Hevajratatantra*. See Snellgrove 1959.

- Jñānālokālaṃkārasūtra* = *Jñānālokālaṃkārasūtra*. See Study-Group 2004; Kimura et al. 2004.
- Karmaśataka* = *Karmaśataka*. Tib. P1007; D304.
- Kāśyapaparivarta* = *Kāśyapaparivarta*. See Pāsādika 2015; von Staël-Holstein 1977.
- Kṛṣṇayamāritantra* = *Kṛṣṇayamāritantra*. See Dwivedi & Samdhong 1992.
- Laghusaṃvaratantra* = *Laghusaṃvaratantra* aka *Cakrasaṃvaratantra*. See Pandey et al. 2002; Tib. T334.
- Lankāvatārasūtra* = *Lankāvatārasūtra*. See Nanjio 1923.
- lTa pheng* = Padmasambhava, *Man ngag lta ba'i 'phreng ba*. See Karmay 2007.
- Madhyamakālaṃkāra* = Śāntarakṣita, *Madhyamakālaṃkāra*. See Ichigō 1985.
- Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti* = Śāntarakṣita, *Madhyamakālaṃkāravṛtti*. See Ichigō 1985.
- Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya* = Candrakīrti, *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya*. See La Vallée Poussin 1912. For the Sanskrit text of first chapter of the *Madhyamakāvātārabhāṣya*, see Gokhale et al. 2019.
- Mahābhārata* = *Mahābhārata*. See Sukthankar et al. 1933–1966.
- Mahāparinirvāṇamahāsūtra* = Habata 2013 [an edition of the larger *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* translated from the Sanskrit]; cf. Waldschmidt 1950.
- Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* = The larger *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* translated into Tibetan from the Chinese. Tib. P787; T333; cf. Waldschmidt 1950.
- Mahārahasyopāyakaśalyasūtra* = *Mahārahasyopāyakaśalyasūtra*. Tib. P760.38; T11.38.
- Mahāyānapathakrama* = Subhagavajra, *Mahāyānapathakrama*. Tib. P4540; D3717.

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- Mahāyānasamgraha* = Asaṅga (ascribed), *Mahāyānasamgraha*. See Lamotte 1973.
- Mahāyānasūtrāṃkāra* = Maitreya (ascribed), *Mahāyānasūtrāṃkāra*. See Lévi 1907.
- Mahāyānopadeśamahāyānasūtra* = *Mahāyānopadeśamahāyānasūtra*. Tib. Bκ, vol. 59.
- Mañjuśrīvikurvāṇaparivartasūtra* = *Mañjuśrīvikurvāṇaparivartasūtra*. Tib. T90; Bκ, vol. 46.
- **Māyāsamudratāntra* = **Māyāsamudratāntra* (sGyu 'phrul rgya mtsho'i rgyud). Tb, , vol. Za; Tk, vol. Ba.
- **Māyopadeśaprakāśadīpa* = Vimalamitra (ascribed), **Māyopadeśaprakāśadīpa* (aka *Khog gzhung gsal sgron*). Tib. P4739; Bτ, vol. 43.
- Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* = Nāgārjuna. *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. See Ye 2011.
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- Nītiśāstra* = Masūrākṣa. *Nītiśāstra*. Tib. P5827; D4335.
- Nyāyabindu* = Dharmakīrti, *Nyāyabindu*. For an edition of the Sanskrit text, see Stcherbatsky 1918. For an edition of the Tibetan translation, see Stcherbatsky 1904; La Vallée Poussin 1908.
- Nyāyabinduṭīkā* = Vinītadeva, *Nyāyabinduṭīkā*. See La Vallée Poussin 1908.
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- Puṇyasamuccayasamādhisūtra* = *Puṇyasamuccayasamādhisūtra*. Tib. Bκ, vol. 56.
- Rājanitiśāstra* = Cāṇakya, *Cāṇakyaṛājanitiśāstra*. Tib. D4334; P5826.
- Ratnagotravibhāga* = Maitreya (ascribed), *Ratnagotravibhāga*. See Johnston 1950; Tib. P5525; Bτ, vol. 70.
- Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā* = Asaṅga/Sāramati (ascribed), *Ratnagotravibhāgavyākhyā*. See Johnston 1950; Takasaki 1966.
- Ratnaguṇasaṃcaya* = *Prajñāpāramitārātnaguṇasaṃcayagāthā*. See Yuyama 1876; Obermiller 1937.
- Ratnāvalī* = Nāgārjuna, *Ratnāvalī*. See Hahn 1982.
- Sāgaramatipariṣcchāsūtra* = *Sāgaramatipariṣcchāsūtra*. Tib. Bκ, vol. 58.
- Samputatantra* 1 = *Samputatantra* Chapter One. See Skorupski 1996.
- Samskṛtāsamskṛtaviniścaya* = Daśabalaśrīmitra, *Samskṛtāsamskṛtaviniścaya*. Tib. P5865; D3897.
- Saundarananda* = Aśvaghōṣa, *Saundarananda*. See Johnston 1928; Johnston 1932; Tib. see *mDzes dga' bo*.
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- Sthūlāpatti* = Aśvaghōṣa (ascribed), *Sthūlāpatti*. See Szántó 2013; Mikkyō-seiten Kenkyūkai 1988; Tib. P3304; D2479.

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- Upāyakauśalyasūtra* = *Upāyakauśalyasūtra*. Tib. P927; T59.
- Vajramālātantra* = *Vajramālābhīdhānatantra*. Tib. P82; T410.
- Vajrapadagarbhasaḡgrahapañjikā* = *Yaśobhadra(?), *Vajrapadagarbhasaḡgrahapañjikā*. Tib. P2107; D1391.
- Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra* = *Vajrapāṇyabhiṣekatantra*. Tib. T456; P130.
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- Vinayavibhaḡga* = *Vinayavibhaḡga*. Tib. P1032; T3.
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- Vyākhyāyukti* = Vasubandhu, *Vyākhyāyukti*. See Lee 2001.

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Ethical Challenges and Hermeneutical Solutions: A Comparative Study with Special Reference to Rabbinic Literature

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“Religions reform themselves by
interpretation and adjustment to one another.”
~ Radhakrishnan¹

Foreword

This study has its origins in a conference that took place in Namdroling Monastery, a Tibetan-Buddhist monastery in South India (Mysore district), in July 2017. It was organized by Dr. Orna Almogi and financed by the Khyentse Center for Tibetan Buddhist Textual Scholarship at the University of Hamburg. The subject of the conference was “Scholarship between Faith and Reason,” including questions as to how past and contemporary religious thinkers deal with problematic text passages in their own canonical scriptures, and what are the various exegetical techniques that permit an “acceptable” reinterpretation of such passages. In my presentation, I addressed this question by beginning with a brief reference to examples in Buddhist literature and then concentrated on my own tradition of Jewish biblical, rabbinic, and other literature. As I after the conference gave the matter further thought, I saw this as a very central subject in rabbinic hermeneutics, a highly complex one, with wide-ranging applications and implications.

¹ Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007: 313.

In this essay I shall deal with a few key texts and endeavour to reveal the methodologies employed in “Koshering”(!) them. I shall also try to reconstruct the ideological underpinnings that justify such an approach, one in which the plain reading (*Peshat*) of the text is abandoned in favour of a new understanding of it, one that satisfies a sort of meta-halachic ethical overriding principle that gives direction to the exegete.

I am fully aware that this is actually a very wide-ranging field. I have not dealt with the same problems in other religions, such as Christianity and Islam, since, as stated above, this whole study began within a very specific framework, with Buddhism and, for myself Judaism, being the main focus of discussion. Although my brief and modest address of the issue in the contest of Buddhism during the conference proved to be a fruitful ground for discussion and exchange, not being an expert in the field, I have left out this portion in the published version. But I wish to urge others to continue and broaden this area of comparative study.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to Dr. Almogi and her colleagues for the wonderful opportunity afforded me by this memorable conference in the remarkable venue and atmosphere of the Namdroling Monastery.

Daniel Sperber, Nov. 2017

1. Preamble

Nearly all faiths have their roots and sources in “sacred texts.” These texts frequently include statements that are highly unacceptable to the contemporary member of that faith. Consequently these faiths have had to develop mechanism for (re-)interpreting those problematic passages to make them palatable to the members of modern society. Or as David W. Chappell, in his study “Hermeneutic Phrase in Chinese Buddhism,” succinctly formulated it:²

² David W. Chappell, “Hermeneutic Phrase, in Chinese Buddhism.” In *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald S. Lopez Jr., Honolulu, 1988: 175. Text

At various times and in different ways, each of these [Chinese] traditions approaches scripture seeking either (1) to find a subjectively satisfying and crisis-resolving interpretations, or (2) to integrate with the established tradition, or (3) to systematically propagate the new religion [for our purposes: tradition]. What are these commentarial mechanisms (*hermeneia*)³—which to the “outsider” may appear to

within square brackets (here and in other passages cited below) is supplemented or substituted by the present author.

³ The “commentarial mechanisms” are usually called exegesis or hermeneutics. The subject of hermeneutics, its history, and various applications require a study in its own right. The subject is complex and wide-ranging and has a considerable literature. Some of the major proponents and explicators were F. Schleiermacher, W. Dilthey, M. Heidegger and M. Weber, Hans Georg Godamer, etc. An interesting study on the subject is that of Andrzej Wiercinski, *Hermeneutics between Philosophy and Theology: The Imperative to Think the Incommensurable*, Münster: Lit Verlag, 2010. See also Jean Grondin, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1994.

David Chappell (1988: 175) writes:

Hermeneutics has traditionally involved the application of certain techniques or devices for the interpretation of texts, such as a line-by-line analysis or the applications of a set of questions or categories to the text. A familiar example of the latter is the mediaeval quest for a text’s literal, moral, allegorical, and mystical meanings.

He goes on (*ibid.*: 176) to show how this actually works with “new religions” (We have substituted the word “tradition” for his “religion.”):

1. If we assume that new [traditions] arise in a period of *crisis*, when individuals actively seek a more viable way to resolve conflict and affirm personal worth, the first stage of a new [tradition] involves the discovery of a new interpretation and practice that will resolve the sense of personal [or: national] crisis in an ultimately satisfying way.

be sophisticated apologetics⁴—and how are they ideologically legitimated?⁵

2. Scriptures are used to legitimize the new interpretation and practice, usually in a process of *integration with the established tradition*. As a result a new coherent world view is formed, and the new principles are elaborated and extensively illustrated by scripture. Exegesis in this phase attempts to show how the new interpretation is supported and authenticated by the authoritative tradition.

3. Finally, a phase of *systematic propagation* of the [tradition] begins, in which the new interpretation is streamlined, superfluous or controversial feature are omitted or explicitly rejected, catechisms are produced, and program of practice are institutionalized. This simplification or reductionism take place out of a concern to indoctrinate new members and to establish the superiority of this new orthodoxy over other paths, rather than showing how they can be integrated.

For further examination of the relationship between exegesis and hermeneutics, and, perhaps even more significant, the relationship between hermeneutics and truth, see the essay by Philibert Secretan, "Hermeneutics and Truth," in *Exegesis: Problems of Method and Exercises in Reading (Genesis 22 and Luke 15)*, eds. François Boron and Grégoir Rouilles (transl. Donald G. Miller, Pittsburgh Penn., 1978: 249–264), and the three chapters (*ibid.*: 265–339) by Paul Ricour, entitled "The Task of Hermeneutics," "The Hermeneutic Function of Distanciation," and "Philosophical Hermeneutic and Biblical Hermeneutics." See also the valuable bibliography in *ibid.*: 467–469 (which, of course, now needs much updating). This version appeared as *Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series 21*, and the whole volume is extremely enlightening, and also provocative.

⁴ See R.J. Werblowsky, *Beyond Tradition and Modernity: Changing Religions in a Changing World* (London, 1976: 86–87), who writes, in perhaps a somewhat cynical fashion:

In the Hindu case secularization can, in the nature of things, never mean the separation of the state from a non-existent church; it will mean the extrusion of traditional religious rules, structures, practices and ideas from the life of the society in which they had been lodged. The state,

instead of being charged with preserving the sacred heritage, is now charged with preventing the latter from interfering with the ordering of society as conceived by modern values. This can be accomplished in diverse ways. Objectionable religious customs (e.g., animal sacrifice, *devadasi*) would be attacked by modernist reformers for being incompatible with the 'true' spirit of religion, i.e., the attack is launched in the name of what is held to be a superior and more authoritative value-system. Certain social institutions may be declared to be 'mere' customs that have grown in history and that can therefore also be abolished in the course of history. *On the other hand human ingenuity knows no limits to the wrong-headed resourcefulness and sophisticated perverseness with which it can rationalize any tradition or custom:* a study of the literature and the agitation generated by the 'holy cows' can serve as a very instructive exercise in this respect. Since time immemorial the caste system has been considered to be of the essence of Hinduism. Already the laws of Manu (second century, B.C.) lay down—according to Dandekar (quoted by D. E. Smith, ed. *South Asian Politics and Religion*, 1963: 294)—that obedience to caste rules is the very essence of *dharma*. We are not concerned here with the role of the concept of *karma* as an instrument of rationalization of this particular *dharma*—Weber called it 'the unique Hindu theodicy of the existing social, that is to say caste, system'—but with the *dharma*-character of the system as such. This particular 'essence of *dharma*' is of interest to the student of religion because it is endorsed—for very different reasons, of course—by both Hindu conservatives and anti-Hindu critics. The late Dr. B. R. Ambedkar insisted that caste was inseparable from Hinduism. Hence social progress had to be non-Hindu. It is not surprising that Buddhism should have lent itself as the most natural 'Indian' (i.e., non-Western) idiom of *harijan* protest, and as recently as 1973 the Dalai Lama administered initiation to 4000 *harijan* at a mass conversion ceremony in New Delhi. When a descriptive sociologist, Dr. Stinivas, opines (D. E. Smith, *ibid.*, 1963: 297) that 'if and when caste disappears, Hinduism will also disappear,' then orthodox Hindus as

In 1982, Owen Fiss, Professor Emeritus of Law of Yale University, published an essay in the *Stanford Law Review* 34, entitled “Objectivity and Interpretation,” which was subsequently (1984) criticized by Stanley Fish, a Professor of English at John Hopkins University, in the *Stanford Law Review* 36/6 (July 1984: 1325–1347).⁶ The opening of Fish’s article characterizes Fiss’ theory, which, although, as stated above, is criticized by Fish, is nonetheless most relevant to our inquiry. He writes as follows:

On the first page of his essay *Objectivity and Interpretation* Owen Fiss characterizes interpretation as “neither a wholly discretionary nor a wholly mechanical activity,” but a “dynamic interaction between reader and text” of which meaning is the

well as anti-Hindu critics will heartily agree. Objections would come from Hindu religious reformers—of the type of Ram Mohan Roy, Dayanand Sarasvati, or Swami Vivekananda—bent on proving that caste was not essential to religion. In due course Gandhi, too, adopted the position that caste was simply a custom that had nothing to do with religion proper, and S. Radhakrishnan even undertook to provide a Hindu philosophical justification for rejecting the caste system: since all individual souls are part of the same Ultimate Reality, it was only logical that the ultimate unity of all beings in the Absolute should be reflected in social equality. [My emphasis, D.S.]

⁵ On the subject of hermeneutics, its definition and parameter, and the methodology of comparative hermeneutics, see Michael Pye’s challenging article entitled “Comparative Hermeneutics in Religion,” in *The Cardinal Meaning: Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics Buddhism and Christianity*, eds. Michael Pye and Robert Morgan, The Hague/Paris, 1973 (*Religion and Reason* 6): 9–58. In yet another article in the same volume, that of Karel Werner, “Authenticity and the Interpretation of Buddhism” (pp. 161–193), the question dealt with is “How do we know when a new interpretation of the Buddhist tradition is a valid one?” (p. 161), a basic question that can be equally applied to other religions. (See below pass., especially sections 3 and 5).

⁶ This article was brought to my attention by my son David Sperber, to whom I am most thankful for it.

“product” (p. 739). This middle way, he asserts, “affords a proper recognition of both the subjective and objective dimensions of human experience”⁷ (*ibid.*). The alternatives Fiss rejects will be familiar to all students of both literary and legal interpretation. The “wholly mechanical” alternative is the view, often termed positivist, that meaning is a property of—is embedded in—texts and can therefore be read without interpretive effort or intervention by a judge or a literary critic. The “wholly discretionary” alternative is the opposite view, often termed subjectivist, that texts have either many meanings or no meanings, and the reader or judge is free to impose—create, legislate, make up, invent—whatever meanings he or she pleases, according to his or her own whims, desires, partisan purposes, etc. On the one view, the text places constraints on its own interpretation; on the other, the reader interprets independently of constraints. Fiss proposes to recognize the contributions of both text and reader to the determination of meaning by placing between the two a set of “disciplining rules” derived from the specific institutional setting of the interpretive activity. These rules “specify the relevance and weight to be assigned to the material” and define the “basic concepts and procedural circumstances under which the interpretation must occur” (p. 749). They thus act as constraints on the interpreter’s freedom

⁷ In Fiss’ own words:

Interpretation, whether it be in the law or literary domain, is neither discretionary nor a wholly mechanical activity. It is a dynamic interaction between reader and text; and meaning the product of that interpretation. It is an activity that affords a proper recognition of both the subjective and objective dimensions of human experience, and for that reason has emerged in recent decades as an attractive method of studying all social activity.

and direct him to those meanings in the text that are appropriate to a particular institutional context.

Although Fish rejects the concept of those “disciplining rules”—which, though admitting of some measure of subjectivity in interpretation of sacred texts,⁸ also impose certain constraints upon the interpreter’s freedom—for our purposes I feel Fiss’ description of such a concept is wholly relevant to our discussion.

2. The Buddhist Case: Selected Examples

In order to put our discussion in a broader context, I wish to first present some select examples from the Buddhist tradition. I am fully aware of my limitation in this area of study, but I nonetheless felt the need to address the issue from the Buddhist perspective due to the special circumstances under which the present article came about, by availing myself of secondary literature. John B. Henderson identifies six basic premises found in a variety of Eastern and Western faiths concerning the status of sacred writings, and the faith-members relationship to them:⁹

- (1) Cosmic comprehension of the canon.
- (2) The canon is well-ordered and coherent according to some cosmological or pedagogical principles.
- (3) The canon is self-consistent.¹⁰
- (4) The classic canons are profound.

⁸ Here I would like to call attention to Fish’s note (p. 1325 n. 5), where he points to a distinction made by many historians—which he himself rejects—“between a *text* as something that requires interpretation, and a *document* as something that wears its meaning on its face and therefore can be used to stabilize the meaning of a text.” It is for this reason I have used the terminology of “Sacred Texts” rather than “documents.”

⁹ John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucian and Western Exegesis*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991.

¹⁰ Compare the notion that Vedas are infallible. This is established in verse 1 of Jaimini’s *Mīmāṃsā Sūtra*, for which see the *Mimansa Sutra of Jaimini*, translation and introduction by Pandit Mohan Lal Sandal, Allahabad, 1925: 3.

- (5) They are moral.
- (6) Superfluities and useless repetitions do not exist in the canon.¹¹

¹¹ As a random example of this in the Jewish tradition, see Nachmanides (Catalonia, 1194–1270), who, in his comments on the thirteen rules of R. Ishmael, wrote:

The book of the Torah of God is perfect there being no superfluous or deficient letter, all were written with wisdom.

See, for example, Abraham Hirsch Rabinowitz, *The Jewish Mind in its Talmudic Expression*, Jerusalem, 1978: 102. We may further add that which is found in *B. Baba Kama* 64a, *B. Shavuot* 19a, *B. Menachot* 10a, *B. Berachot* 46a; they taught in the name of R. Yishmael the following: Every chapter that was once mentioned [in the Bible] and repeated, it was only repeated to teach us something new [i.e. additional].

See also *B. Sanhedrin* 34a where we read in the name of Abbaye (fl. Babylonia, ca. 320–338 C.E.) that from one verse we may deduced several legal deductions, but one deduction is not deduced from two separate verses. He bases himself on the verse in *Psalms* 62:12, “God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this [...]” that is, God has not spoken twice to teach us one thing (cf. Rashi ad loc.). For if that were the case, one verse or statement would be superfluous, and that cannot be. (See the comment of Yisachar Tamar, in his *Alei Tamar: Seder Moed*, vol. 1, Alon Shvut, 1992: 190; Reuven Margalio, *Margalio ha-Yam*, vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1958: 144–145, to *Sanhedrin* *ibid.* for a detailed discussion of this issue, which we shall not further expand upon here.)

In *B. Hulin* 60b we read in the name of R. Shimon ben Lakish (Palestine mid. 3rd cent. C.E.) that there are many verses in the Bible that would appear to be completely superfluous, so much so that they could be burned (cf. *B. Shabbat* 115a) but one may not destroy any biblical text. Rashi adds that it would appear to be unseemly to include them in the sacred writings and they are *gufei Torah*—essential parts of the Law. Rashi adds: very important lessons are dependent upon—that is, may be deduced from—them. There follow examples from *Deuteronomy* 2:23, *Genesis* 21:33, and *Numbers* 21:26. Here again we see the basic rabbinic premise that nothing in the Bible is superfluous.

A classical example of this is the Jewish tradition of how the rabbis explain the biblical phrase “Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother’s

Henderson demonstrates persuasively that such principles may be found in Judaism, Christianity, and Eastern Religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism. Needless to say, sacred texts abound in what appear to be superfluities, internal contradictions, and directives that to the modern society would seem to be immoral and/or amoral. To deal with such challenges, the faithful develop commentarial techniques, each faith with its own commentarial direction, and perhaps, more accurately, each commentator or school of commentary with his/its own rules of interpretation.

Here we shall not examine all six premises, but limit ourselves to no. 5 alone, that the sacred texts are moral. Before we look at specific examples, let us first give some basic background

milk," which appears three times in the Bible (*Exodus* 23:19, *ibid.* 34:26, and *Deuteronomy* 14:21). Since these repetitions may seem superfluous, R. Yishmael interpreted them as follows: one for a prohibition of eating, one for a prohibition of receiving any benefit therefrom, and one for a prohibition against cooking (*B. Hulin* 115b). See Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 19, New York, 1959: 219–226. (This interpretation is also found in parallels in *B. Kiddushin* 57b; *Y. Avodah Zarah* 5:12, and *Mechilta* to *Exodus* 23:19, etc.)

The rabbis found a kind of homiletical source for this basic concept that there is nothing superfluous in the Scriptures in *Deuteronomy* 32:47: "For it is not an empty thing for you [...]," on which the *Sifrei* ad loc. (ed. Finkelstein, Berlin, 1939, sect. 336: 385–386) writes:

There is nothing literally empty (*reikam*)—perhaps purposeless—in the Torah. For if you examine it you will receive recompense in this world and the next.

There follows a series of verses which would appear to be superfluous, but from which the Sages deduced meaningful lessons. See also *Torah Temimah* of R. Baruch ha-Levi Epstein, ad loc.: 496 n. 91.

Furthermore, when a biblical text did not make real sense within its context, the rabbis applied it to a different context, thus arriving at its relevant meaning. This hermeneutic technique is called "*im aino inyan le* [...]" (*teneihu inyan le* [...])" (see Rashi to *B. Pesahim* 21a, *B. Yoma* 33b, etc.). See on this in detail in *Entziklopediah Talmudit*, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 1949: 25–27. Let these comments suffice for what is a much broader subject for discussion.

information on Buddhist hermeneutics. Buddhist scriptural exegesis has always been driven by the soteriological needs of the tradition. From early on it distinguishes between teachings of *definitive meaning* (*nītārtha*) and such of *provisional meaning* (*neyārtha*), which require *further interpretations*. The *Neyyatha sutta* of the Pāli Canon, for example, states the following:¹²

Monks, these two slander the Tathagata. Which two?
He who explains a discourse whose meaning needs to be inferred as one whose meaning has already been drawn out. And he who explains a discourse whose meaning has already been fully drawn out as one whose meaning needs to be inferred. These are the two who slander the Tathagata.

Later one finds the doctrine of the Two Truths (or: Two Modes of Reality), the conventional or relative (*saṃvṛti*) truth/reality and the ultimate (*paramārtha*) truth/reality. The Buddhist concept of *upāyakaṣālya*—skilful means¹³—is yet another common theme in

¹² *Neyyatha Sutta: A Meaning to be Inferred* (AN 2.25), translated from the Pāli by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. *Access to Insight* (accessed on 15.12.2019) at <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an02/an02.025.than.html>.

¹³ *Upāyakaṣālya* is a concept emphasizing that practitioners may be referred to specific methods or techniques that fit them individually—depending on the circumstances—in order to gain liberation. The implication is that even if a technique, or view, is not ultimately “true” in the highest sense, it may still be an *expedient* practice to perform, or a view to hold, as it may bring the practitioners closer to true realization. The exercise of skill to which it refers, the ability to adapt one’s message to the audience, has been of central importance already in the Pāli Canon. See also Richard F. Gombrich, *How Buddhism Began: The Conditioned Genesis of the Early Teaching*, London, 1996: 17, 22–23, and 24–25 n. 27 for a discussion of this issue in the context of Early Buddhism.

Peter Gregory, in his *Chinese Cultural Studies: Doctrinal Classification* (*Chinese Buddhist Encyclopedia* at www.Chinabuddhismencyclopedia.com) explains the following:

The doctrine of *expedient means* provided the main hermeneutical device by which Chinese Buddhists could systematically order Buddha’s teachings in the

Buddhist hermeneutics, and holds that Buddha sometimes taught doctrines that have provisional meaning as a skilful teaching strategy. This is well illustrated in a famous parable in the *Lotus Sūtra* about a man with many children who were playing in a burning house. They would not listen to his warnings at first, being totally absorbed in their play, so he changed his approach and instead told them that he had some wonderful toys for them outside, and that they shall come out to see them. Knowing what each child liked, he told some that he has deer carts for them, others horse-carts, and some bullock-carts. And, of course, they all rush out of the burning house only to discover that after all the man has only bullock-carts for them to ride in. At the cost of a slight disappointment, in this way they all escaped from the

classificatory schemes. It enabled them to arrange the teachings in such a way that each teaching served as an expedient measure to overcome the particular shortcoming of the teaching that preceded it while, at the same time, pointing to the teaching that was to supersede it. In this fashion, a hierarchical progression of teachings could be constructed, starting with the most elementary and leading to the most profound.

Edward Conze, in his *Short History of Buddhism* (London, 1958) formulates it thus:

“Skill in means” is the ability to bring out the spiritual potentialities of different people by statements or actions which are adjusted to their needs and to their capacity for comprehension.

See further on *upāyakaūśalya* the *Saddharma-Pundarīka on The Lotus of True Law*, transl. H. Kern, Oxford, 1884, chap. II: 30–59; Donald S. Lopez Jr. in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, edited by him, Honolulu, 1988: 50–55, 63–66, etc. On *neyārtha*, see Étienne Lamotte, *ibid.*: 16–20; Michael M. Broido, *ibid.*: 73–76, 80–83, 90–100. On *nītārtha* see Broido *ibid.*: 73–76, 78–83, 90–100, etc. See also Willis Stoesz, “The Buddha as Teacher.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* XLVI/2 (1978): 139–158, especially 149.

burning out.¹⁴ He is also said to have taught many different things to different people, depending on their ability to understand.¹⁵

The tradition sets forth four rules of Buddhist exegesis called “four reliances:”¹⁶

1. Rely on the Doctrine (*dharma*), not on the person (*pudgala*).
2. Rely on the meaning (*artha*), not the words (*vyañjana*).
3. Rely on definitive meaning (*nītārtha*), not on provisional one (*neyārtha*).
4. Rely on gnosis / liberating insight (*jñāna*), not on ordinary perception (*vijñāna*).

¹⁴ H. Kern, *Lotus of the True Law*, Dover, 1963: 72ff.

¹⁵ Thus in the *Lankāvatārasūtra* “he disclaims the *Samdhinirmocana* type of discourse, saying that he only resorted to it to render the picture of ultimate reality less frightening to the neophyte, to avoid frightening him or letting him misconstrue it as nihilism.” See Robert A.F. Thurman, *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 46/1 (1978): 23.

Thurman (*ibid.*: 22) writes:

The methods he used towards this end [i.e. the evocation of liberation in living beings] were as various as are living beings themselves, as it would not serve his purpose to preach a single message dogmatically. Rather, he exercised what is known as his “skill in liberative technique” (*upāyakaśālyā*) which is defined in the tradition as including all sorts of supernormal powers and knowledge such as clairvoyance about past experiences, present inclinations, and future destinies of disciples, but most importantly including an unimpeded eloquence in “turning the wheel of the Dharma,” or instructing disciples in the nature of the supreme reality.

See further Peter N. Gregory, “Chinese Buddhist Hermeneutics: The Case of Hua-yen,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51/2 (1983): 231–249, for a positive critiques of Thurman’s articles.

¹⁶ See, for example, Lopez 1993, introduction. Cf. *Mahāvīyūtpatti* (Sakaki), nos. 1545–1549. For a detailed analysis of these “reliances,” see Thurman *ibid.*: 25ff.

The necessity for such hermeneutic techniques is very understandable when we fully appreciate that all of Buddha's statements (or those attributed to him), having been spoken by the Awakened One, the "Teacher of Men and Gods" as he is also called, have scriptural status. And yet, they frequently appear to contradict one another. In this regard Thurman (*ibid.*: 23) states:

How is one to decide these questions? To completely reject as false any teaching of the Buddha is traditionally a grave sin, known as "abandonment of the doctrine" (*dharmaprahāṇa*). And yet, a practitioner must settle on one method, technique, or discipline. One can hardly set out to win liberation and enlightenment, or even to live properly in an ethical sense until one has decided which of these teachings is right, and what ways lead to their realization. Thus, it is clear that the hermeneutical enterprise in this tradition is an essential part of *praxis* on whatever level, an essential vehicle on the way of enlightenment. We should note that since the various scriptural passages are contradictory on the surface, scriptural authority alone will not fully settle the hermeneutical questions, since the scriptures are in a sense the basis of discussion. In the final analysis, rationality (*yukti*), inference (*anumāna*), or philosophical logic (*nyāya*) become the highest authority (*pramāna*) for deciding which scriptural passage is ultimately valid.

These exegetical guidelines enabled exegetes throughout the generations to "reinterpret" Buddhist texts containing Buddha's teachings—that is these accepted to be by him himself, or those taught by him to another in person and subsequently communicated by that person in an equitable manner.¹⁷

In all so many case the canon contains rules which are stridently unethical. Let us take, for an instance, a glaring case discussed in

¹⁷ See further, Arvind Sharma, *Hermeneutics and Hindu Thought: Towards a Fusion*, Springer, 2008.

detail in Michael M. Broido's article "Killing, Lying, Stealing and Adultery: A Problem of Interpretation in the Tantras."¹⁸ Broido writes (*ibid.*: 71):

In the *Abhidharmakośa* of Vasubandhu we find a list of ten *karmapathas*, ten kinds of action which are not only unethical in themselves but will surely lead to undesirable results. The first four are killing (*prāṇātipātaḥ*), stealing (*adattādana*), illicit love (*kāma mithya*), and lying (*mṛṣavāca*). Yet in the tantras there are many passages which if taken literally tell us to do just these or very similar things. Clearly, then, we have a pressing problem of interpretation: is it a hermeneutical problem?

In the *Kālacakratantra*, for instance, we find a list of six apparently recommended actions or activities, linked with the six [Buddha] families [*kula: rigs*] into which the adepts are divided.¹⁹

In his article Broido present various interpretations offered by the tradition and discusses the methodology applied. But these would not be discussed here as the above example was merely brought by way of introducing the subject and highlighting the sort of challenges interpreters of sacred Buddhist texts encounter.²⁰

¹⁸ Michael M. Broido, "Killing, Lying, Stealing and Adultery: A Problem of Interpretation in the Tantras," in Donald S. Lopez, Jr., (ed.), *Buddhist Hermeneutics*. The Kuredo Institute for the study of Buddhism and Human Values: Studies in East Asian Buddhism 6, Honolulu, 1988: 71–118.

¹⁹ See Broido *ibid.*: 71, for a table depicting the correlation between the six Buddha families and the six activities. It is interesting to compare this with the *Kāmasūtra*'s list of reasons that justify adultery, which include many that are far more political than erotic. See Wendy Doniger, *The Mare's Trap: Nature and Culture in the Kamasutra*, New Delhi, 2015: 62–63, and cf. *ibid.*: 13–14.

²⁰ For a further example of reinterpretative technique, see the Jātaka tale no. 522 in *The Jātaka or Stories of the Buddha's Former Births* (C.R. Cowell (ed.), vol. 5, transl. M.T. Francis, London, 1957, Book XVII: 75–76). As a

Finally, I would like to provide one more example, this time from a Zen Buddhist source, as reported in Paul William in his introductory book on Mahāyāna Buddhism,²¹ which I believe reflects the same kind of problem and exegetical solution (*ibid.*: 167–168):

There is a Zen saying that if one meets the Buddha on the road one should kill him. It is tempting to see this as another Japanese exhortation to holy violence, but the lesson is inspired, perhaps, by yet another *sūtra* contained in the *Ratnakūṭa* collection. In this *sūtra* a group of virtuous Bodhisattvas are depressed at the thought that no matter how moral they are in this life their spiritual progress will be hindered by the immoral deeds they did during their infinite past lives, “killing their fathers, mothers or Arhats; destroying Buddhist temples or *stūpas*; or disrupting the Saṃgha.” As a skilful means in order to help these Bodhisattvas let go of the conception of Self which is at the root of their spiritual anguish, Mañjuśrī [lit. “He Who Is Noble and Gentle”], the Bodhisattva particularly associated with wisdom, took up a sharp sword and lunged towards the Buddha with the intention of killing him. The sword is Mañjuśrī’s sword of wisdom, his principal iconographic feature in Buddhist art. The Buddha deflected this apparently murderous intent. The point of lesson was, it seems, two-fold. First, the Buddha who appears before the assembly is empty of inherent existence, and he is thus ‘killed’ when he is seen this way. Second, since all things lack inherent

sort of parallelism in Tantric Hinduism, I would like to refer the reader to Wendy Doniger’s *The Mare’s Trap: Nature and Culture in the Kamasutra*, New Delhi, 2015: 150, where she discusses the “Tantras, a large body of texts composed between c.650 and 1800 C.E.”

²¹ Paul William, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*, London and New York, 1989.

existence if the Bodhisattvas can gain an insight into emptiness, their past wicked deeds can be understood as ultimately illusory and no real barrier to spiritual progress. Recognizing the moral dangers of this teaching, the *sūtra* adds that those in the assembly whose spiritual progress was mediocre, through the Buddha's power, failed to see Mañjuśrī with his sword and hear the Buddha's teaching on the subject.²²

3. How Rabbinic Judaism Deals with Such Challenges

We now move into my own field,²³ Judaism, to examine how our great commentators dealt with moral conundrum. We shall limit

²² *Suṣṭhitamatipariprcchā Sūtra*, in Garma C. C. Chang, ed., *A Treasury of Mahāyāna Sūtras*, Pennsylvania, 1983: 65ff.

²³ Of course, this question could be applied to many other religions facing the same challenges posed by some questionable passages in their sacred texts. As a somewhat random example I shall cite a paragraph from Brian Murdoch's fascinating book *The Mediaeval Popular Bible: Expansions of Genesis in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2003: 151):

Jacob's role as a trickster begins, of course, with his deceit of his brother Esau by impersonating him and bringing food to his blind father, Isaac, and claiming his blessing. It has already been made clear in the prophecy while Esau and Jacob are struggling in the womb that the younger shall prevail (*Genesis* 25:23), and Esau has, in legalistic terms, already surrendered his birthright voluntarily (if foolishly) in *Genesis* 25:29–34 in exchange for a hot meal. In his version of the *Golden Legend*, Caxton deliberately places the birthright story immediately before the final trickery and tells us that they belong together, and others link or even merge the incidents (Caxton, 1900, vol. 1: 208ff.). At all events, Jacob, (abetted by his mother Rebecca, the first of several proactive women in this patriarchal narrative), has consolidated matters with a trick played upon his father as well as his brother, and it is interesting to see how ancient and medieval writers cope with the deceit. *To exonerate Jacob at all, greater emphasis has to be placed on the*

prophecy, on Esau's contempt for his birthright (rather than Jacob's taking advantage of weakness), and on additions such as whether Esau had already had too much from his father. Medieval exegesis either comments that the blind Isaac could see the future, or allegorises the conflict as the supplanting of the Old Testament by the New, the Jews by the Christians, and so on. None of this is much reflected in the vernacular texts. [My emphasis, D.S.]

(See Hans Martin von Erffa, *Ikonomie der Genesis*, Stuttgart 1989–1995, vol. 2: 248–254. On the blindness that sees the future but not the present, see, for example, the *Glossa Ordinaria: quae ventura errant praevidit, et qui praesens asserterit, necivit* (PL 113:51, citing Gregory the Great on Ezechiel).

On what he called “proactive women,” Murdoch comments (*ibid.* n. 7):

Cullen Murphy sees deception, subterfuge and trickery as a persistent theme in the role of women in the Old Testament: *The Word According to Eve* (London: Allen Lane, 1998): 113–123. As the subsequent discussion of selected feminist responses to the point makes clear, any unified response (rather than a simple acknowledgement of the fact of biblical deception by women and by men) is unlikely to be reached. Rebecca is, however, clearly a strong woman. See Lieve Teugels, “‘A Strong Woman, Who Can Find’? A Study of Characterization in Genesis 24,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* lxiii, 1994: 89–104.

Needless to say, such examples could be greatly reduplicated; but this is far beyond the scope of this particular study.

We should however, add a further explanation of this specific example in what Murdoch wrote (*ibid.*: 149–150):

Many elements of the stories of Jacob (especially) and also of Joseph, however, pose rather different problems for medieval vernacular writers, and hence for our view of the medieval vernacular Bible, precisely because so much depends upon that all-too-human deceit. Jacob appears first as the deceiver of Esau, but in his journeying to escape the wrath of his brother, he is himself deceived by Laban in the matter of his marriage. Jacob's revenge comes with a

somewhat opaque trick by which he gains for himself more sheep than Laban had bargained for, but when he flees again, he manages to recapture what looks like the moral high ground by yet another trick on the part of his wife Rachel, who has, however, stolen Laban's household gods. In the next biblical generation, Joseph, as favoured by God as Jacob was, but considerably less devious, is tricked by Potiphar's wife into wrongful imprisonment.

The question of audience sympathy has to be handled carefully in some of these cases, and it is necessary to keep a watchful eye on the discrepancy between the tale and the telling, and on what we might now refer to as 'spin' in the presentation of these biblical narratives to a vernacular audience. *Jacob, Israel, is (almost) invariable presented positively, but his deeds are by no means always straightforward.* (See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, London, 1981, and his *Genesis*, New York, 1996. See also the review of the first by David Lodge, "Readings and Lessons" (1982), *Write On: Occasional Essays*, Harmondsworth, 1988: 160–168.) Joseph's position is quite different; having been sold by his brothers, he is falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, so that he is more clearly the victim. Indeed, *even when Joseph himself plays the deceiver, in a simple trick at the expense of Benjamin and his brothers at the end of his story, no real blame attaches to him.* All these games of deceit (with the possible exception of Jacob's complicated animal husbandry) provide for an understandable narrative interest—Joseph and Potiphar's wife are sometimes, indeed, treated in a separate novella—but there are also theological implications which make their way from the commentaries into the more literal vernacular presentations of the Bible, whilst other aspects seem to demand (or inspire) originality on the part of the vernacular writers. Of course there are plenty of other later incidents which provide narrative interest—the rape of Dinah, Reuben and Bilhah, Onan, Judah and Tamar—but those closely associated with the two last patriarchs are especially worthy of consideration in medieval writings. (Recent studies of other sections in the vernacular include M. R. Godden, "The Trouble with Sodom: Literary

ourselves primarily to the question of the various methods of

Responses to Biblical Sexuality," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* lxxvii, 1995: 97–119, and Daniel Anlezark, "An Ideal Marriage: Abraham and Sarah in Old English Literature," *Medium Aevum* lxxix, 2000: 187–210.) [My emphasis, D.S.]

Similarly, in Buddhism sacred "myths" have to be interpreted. Such as, for example, the temptation of Buddha by Māra and his three daughters. See *Samyutta Nikāya's Māra-samyutta* 4.3.1–23. See the illustration of the "temptation of Buddha," from Borobudur (Java), late eighth century C.E., in Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *History of Indian and Indonesian Art*, Karl W. Heisermann, 1927, Dover reprint, New York, 1967, illustration no. 353; and his narrative of the temptation in his *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, second revised ed., New York, 1964: 32–34, and illust. D. See also Ananda W. P. Guruge, "The Buddha's Encounter with Mara the Tempter: Their Representation in Literature and Art," *Sri Lanka Journal of Buddhist Studies* 2, 1988: 1–17; Rhys Davids' interpretation, in his *Buddhism: Being a Sketch of the Life and Teachings of Goutama, the Buddha*, London, 1925: 36–40; and T.O. Ling, *Buddhism and the Mythology of Evil*, London, 1962: 94.

The myth is also briefly referred to in "The Travels of Fa-Hian, from 400 C.E. [or Fo-Kwō-Ki], chapter 32, in *SI-YU-KI: Buddhist Records of the Western World*, translated from the Chinese of Huen Tsiang, 629 C.E., by Samuel Beal, vol. 1, 1968: LXII–LXIII, London, 1884. But see also A.K. Coomaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*, Cambridge Mass., 1935: 81 n. 96; cf. his *Buddha and the Gospel of Buddhism*, New York, 1916, II: 5.

And, incidentally, on this theme in Judaism, see on the temptations of Abraham, in Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 1, Philadelphia, 1909: 276–279, and *ibid.* vol. 5, Philadelphia, 1925: 249–250 nn. 234–235; and in Christianity on the temptations of Christ by Satan, as found in *Matthew* 4:1–11, *Mark* 1:12–13, and *Luke* 4:1–13. See Andrew Martin Fairbairn, "The Temptation of Christ," *Studies in the Life of Christ*, 1881: v. But here again this is a digression, which merits its own study and analysis. There is a very considerable literature on this subject, which is far beyond the scope of this study.

For the "trials of Moses," see *Hebrews* 11:24–26, and Sandro Botticelli's famous "Temptations of Moses: Bearer of the Written Law," on the south side of the Sistine Chapel, from 1482.

dealing with the problem of *lex* (or *ius*) *talionis*, “an eye for an eye,” which would appear to be contrary to the established rabbinic interpretation, which seeks to show that “the [Torah’s] ways are the way of pleasantness” (*Proverbs* 3:17).

For it is a basic premise in Jewish legal thinking that a duality occasioned by the conflict between law and the sense of justice, or the natural feeling for what is right, which has dogged many a secular systems of law over the ages, is simply unacceptable in *halachah* (Jewish Law).²⁴ For *halachah* and morality must be in harmony. As the verse in *Deuteronomy* 4:8 states, “And what great a nation is there that hath statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day.” And when there appears to be a discordancy between the sacred text—that is, the Written Law—the Oral Law comes, as it were, to reveal the inner meaning of the Written Law. These two stand together, not as two separate entities—codices—but as dyadic unity termed *Torah*.²⁵

Thus, for example, the rabbis identified the four species of the *lulav*, rejecting those that are thorny, as it is inconceivable that the *Torah* would require us to take species that would prick and scratch one’s hands, since “its ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace” (*Proverbs* 3:17; *B. Sukkah* 32a and 32b).²⁶ What this means is that the rabbis determined the nature and details of a biblical commandment (*mi-de-Oraita*) on the basis of an

²⁴ Here we have limited ourselves to the field of biblical Law, *halachah*. But, of course, the Bible presents other types of “ethical challenges” in many of the stories, for example, in *Genesis*. See the analysis of the Jewish and Christian attitudes to the narrative in *Genesis* 34 (the story of Dina and the Shechemites and Shimon and Levi’s response), in Elliot Horowitz’ excellent study entitled “Genesis 34 and the Legacies of Biblical Violence,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence*, ed. Andrew R. Murphy, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011: 163–182. But this opens up a very wide-ranging area of research.

²⁵ See, for example, Abraham Hirsch Rabinowitz, *The Jewish Mind in its Talmudic Expression*, Jerusalem, 1978: 61–112.

²⁶ On this principle and its broader application, see *Entzyklopediah Talmudit*, vol. 7: 712–715.

“external” moral value, indicated in a non-Pentateuchal, and non-halachic verse! But what could they do with the famous verse in *Exodus* 21:24 which addresses the question of damages, stating that in someone knowingly harms another, “payment” shall be an “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” etc. (*lex talionis*),²⁷ and so too in *Leviticus* 24:20 and *Deuteronomy* 19:21.

²⁷ The concept of *lex talionis* goes back at least to the period of Hammurabi (died ca. 1750 B.C.E.), where we find, “If a man put out the eye of another man, his eye shall be put out. If he breaks another man’s bones, his bones shall be broken.” (G.R. Driver & J.C. Miles, *The Babylonian Laws*, vol. 2, Oxford, 1955: 77, sect. 196; cf. vol. 1, Oxford, 1952: 406–413). Mare van de Microop, in his *King Hamurabi of Babylon: A Biography*, Malden Ma., 2005: 132, suggests an indirect influence on the *Twelve Tables* (VIII.2) of Roman Law. If someone breaks limb unless he compounds for compensation with him, there shall be retaliation. (See A. Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law*, Philadelphia, 1953: 730, s.v. *talio*, with bibliography.)

Christianity, as is well known, strongly opposed this notion of *lex talionis*. The very famous statement in the *Sermon on the Mount*, recorded in *Matthew* 5:38:42 states explicitly that Jesus said:

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic[a], let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

And in the *Sermon on the Plain* in *Luke* 6:27–31, we read:

But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic[a] either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

Such a form of retribution appeared to the rabbis to be cruel and morally unacceptable. In fact, they interpreted these texts as positing monetary payment.²⁸ Needless to say they found both hermeneutic and logical reasons justifying such an interpretation.

Let us look at the hermeneutical discussions²⁹ found in rabbinic literature to justify not accepting the Biblical verses literally. The fullest discussion is found in *B. Baba Kama* 83b–84a when the *Gemara* seeks to explain why the *Mishnah* (*ibid.* 8:1) requires only

See the lengthy and detailed discussion in Herman L. Strack & Paul Billerbeck, *Das Evangelium nach Mathäus, erläutert aus Talmud und Midrasch* (being vol. 1, of their New Testament commentaries), Munich, 1922: 337–353.

Such passages call to mind the notion of non-violence central to Buddhism and other Indic religions, on which, however, we could not dwell here. An interesting passage that particularly caught my attention is found in an apocryphal Buddhist text entitled *Sūtra of Forty-Two Sections* (*Ssu-shi-erh-chang-ching*, 四十二章), which was allegedly translated into Chinese around 67 C.E. by the Indian Monk Matanga and Chu-fa-lan, but apparently composed/compiled in Central Asia or China and seems to have Confucian influence. For this passage, see the translation found in *The World's Great Religions*, London, 1959: 66–67.

²⁸ *B. Baba Kama* 83b–84a; *Mechilta, Masechet Nezikin* 9, ed. Horowitz-Rabin, 2nd edition, Jerusalem, 1960: 277, etc.

²⁹ There is much literature on rabbinic hermeneutics, some of which is referred to in the notes below. I have not taken into account new “postmodern” interpretative approaches (which, for the main part are beyond me). See, for example, Oeter Ochs, “Postcritical Scriptural Interpretations in Judaism,” in *Interpreting Judaism in a Postmodern Age*, ed. Steven Kepnes, New York and London, 1996: 55–81; Martin S. Jaffee, “Halakhah as Primordial Tradition: A Gadamerian Dialogue with Early Rabbinic Memory and Jurisprudence,” in Kepnes 1996: 85–117; Elliot R. Wolfson, “From Sealed Book to Open Text: Time, Memory, and Narrativity in Kabbalistic Hermeneutics,” in Kepnes 1996: 147–178. Each of these articles contains additional bibliographic references pertaining to this subject. For the most recent discussion on this subject, see Paul D. Mandel, *The Origins of Midrash: From Teaching to Text*, Leiden/Boston, 2017, which, inter alia, surveys the various classical views on the nature of rabbinic interpretation (pp. 148–168).

monetary payment for damages incurred to fellow humans, as opposed to “an eye for an eye.”³⁰

³⁰ The legal evaluation as to what constitutes a punishment suited to a specific type of crime was clearly dependent upon the socio-cultural context within which it took place. With societal changes came changes in that evaluation. So what might have been considered an appropriate punishment at one period of time, and within a certain kind of historical and sociological context, might well be deemed as inappropriate at a different period. Thus, for a parenthetical example (which I learned from my brother Victor some fifty years ago), horse-theft was punished by hanging at the gallows in England up until the early 19th century. The last man to be recorded as having been hung for this crime in England was John Smith alias Hughes, a gypsy, on March the 19th, 1825.

Hence, returning to our main theme, in biblical times “an eye for an eye” could well have been taken literally, as at that time this was deemed as an appropriate punishment, and certainly constituted a strong deterrent. (On biblical punishment as a deterrent, see, e.g., P. Dickstein, “*Hitpathut ha-Mishpat ha-Pelili be-Yisrael Ad Tekufat Hatimat ha-Talmud*,” *Ha-Mishpat ha-Ivri* 1 (1926), Tel Aviv, 195–198. For other views on the function of punishment, see N. Rackover, “*Hashpaat ha-Teshuvah al ha-Anishah*,” *Mehkarim be-Halachah u-be-Mahshevet Yisrael*, Bar-Ilan, 1994: 183.) However, later on, as regard for the respectful status of the individual—even a criminal—developed (*kevod ha-beriyot*) and was given great emphasis, “an eye for an eye” was seen as cruel and inappropriate. As a consequence, the hermeneutic mechanisms of exegetical reinterpretation came into play. So much so, that even when discussing inflicting capital punishment, that is, the death penalty, the Rabbis of Old interpreted the biblical phrase in *Leviticus* 19:18, “Love thy neighbour as thyself,” as indicating that one should “chose for him a more pleasant death penalty (*mitah yafah*—*B. Pesachim* 72a, *B. Ketubot* 37b, *B. Sotah* 8b, *B. Baba Kama* 51a, *B. Sanhedrin* 45a, 52ab). And this hermeneutic methodology was understood to be part of the divine intent, and that it was precisely for this reason that the biblical text was, as it were, so “encoded” as to admit of such dynamic changes in exegetical interpretations, interpretations that had complete legitimacy. (See in greater detail below, section 6.)

Seen from the purely historical perspective, we can describe the developmental process of this concept in Jewish Law as follows. In the rabbinic period (ca. 50–440 C.E.) the rabbis instituted a whole stringent system of criteria for the acceptability of testimony which might result in

Why then, surely the Scripture said “an eye for an eye”? Should we not assume that really means an eye for an eye? No. For the *beraita* stated: Shall we assume

corporal or capital punishment. Thus, for example, what was required was: two male adults, not related to one another nor to the accused, without any bias, either positive or negative towards the accused, who had warned him or her as to the seriousness of the crime/sin and the severe penalty that it would incur, and that that warning had to be given directly to the accused close to the actual criminal act, etc.—all of which made it virtually impossible for a court to give a ruling on corporal or capital punishment. This rabbinic trend towards the avoidance of actually incurring such punishments, was, on the one hand, an indication of their compassion towards a sinner, and also the fear of punishing an innocent person, but, on the other hand, had the adverse effect of not deterring people from perpetrating such sinful criminal acts, as they knew that they would never be seriously punished. See, for example, *B. Makkot* 7a (= *M. Makkot* 1:10) according to which R. Eleazar ben Azariah (early 2nd cent. C.E.) said that a *Sanhedrin* (supreme court) that executes once in seventy years is regarded as tyrannical (*hovlanit*), and R. Akivah and R. Tarfon said that if they had been in the *Sanhedrin* no one would ever have been executed; the Talmud (*ibid.*) explains their reasoning and how they would have discounted any testimony given. In this regard R. Shimon ben Gamliel retorted that “They would have increased the shedding of blood in Israel.” (See further *B. Sanhedrin* 37b, how Shimon ben Shetah, fl. 1st cent. B.C.E., exclaimed that he was constrained by the laws of evidence to exact punishment to a criminal whose crime was clearly evident to him.) Indeed, the great mediaeval Spanish authority R. Shlomoh ben Adret (known by his acronym Rashba, ca. 1235–1310) in his responsum no. 393 in vol. 3 (Jerusalem, 1997: 214), cites *B. Baba Metzia* 30b, where it is stated that “Jerusalem was only destroyed because [its judges] ruled [only] according to biblical law,” and consequently “people of little knowledge sunder the barriers of the world, bringing disaster to the world.” (See S. Ishon, “*Yissum Anishat ha-Torah be-Hok ha-Pelili*,” *Emunah Itecha* 116 (2007): 55–61, for a discussion of this issue.) Consequently, the rabbis had to institute alternative deterrents, and then justify them through complex exegetical techniques, which would “reveal” that these were, in fact, *also* the original biblical intent. (See Rashba *ibid.*)

that if he blinded the eye [of his neighbour], one should blind him, or if he cut off his hand, we cut his hand off; or if he broke his leg, we break his leg? No, for it says, “And he that killeth any man [shall surely be put to death]” (*Leviticus* 24:17), and it says “And he that killeth a beast shall make monetary compensation, a beast for a beast” (*ibid.* verse 18). Just as the killing (literally “smiting,” *makeh*) of a beast incurs monetary compensation, so too “smiting” (*makeh*) a man incurs monetary compensations. However, if you would wish to argue, that surely it says, “Moreover ye shall take no monetary compensation (*kofer*) for the life of a murderer, which is guilty of death [...]” (*Numbers* 35:31)—that means not taking monetary compensation for a murderer, but you may do so for someone who has had his limbs damaged in an incurable fashion.

The discussion continues in this vein, testing various interpretations and arguments countering them, and then a number of additional arguments are cited such as that of R. Dostai ben Yehudah:

“An eye for an eye” means money. Should you say it should be taken literally, what then would you do if the damaged person had a large eye and the damager a small one? [...]

Similarly R. Shimon bar Yochai asks what you would do if a blind man blinded a seeing person, etc. His argument is further buttressed by reference to yet another Scriptural verse, “Ye shall have one manner of law [...]” (*Leviticus* 24:22)—“a law equal to all” meaning that the punishment for a blind person damaging someone’s seeing eye should be the same as that of a seeing person who did such damage. The counter-argument offered is that such punishment be administered when possible. But when not possible, monetary retribution be imposed. But the argument continues moving to an interpretation by De-Bei R. Yishmael, who cites verse 20 in that same chapter: “[Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, as he hath caused a blemish in a man], so

shall be *done to him*," but literally "shall be *given unto him*" (*ken yinaten bo*), and they argue "there is no giving (*netinah*) other than with money." However, the discussion continues by asking what one does with verse 19 (*ibid.*), "And if a man cause of blemish in his neighbour [...]" (*yiten mum be-amito*), would you say this means he did monetary damage? And the answer given is that there is a superfluity here:

For it says (*ibid.*), "And if a man cause of a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him." Why then later in verse 19, does it again say "as he hath done, so shall it be done to him"? From this superfluous repetition we learn that the Scripture is speaking of monetary compensation.

Several other suggestions are forwarded, but finally Rav Ashi prefers the following argument:

The Scriptural text uses the term *tahat* (*for*, i.e., an eye *for* an eye) here (also in *Exodus* 21:25) and also regarding an ox. Here (in *Exodus* 21:36) it says "*he shall surely pay ox for [tahat] ox [...]*" Just as *tahat* in the case of the ox is monetary compensations, so too in the other areas of damages, it means monetary compensation.³¹

³¹ See also *Mechilta de-Rashbi*, ed. E.Z. Melamed, Jerusalem, 1955: 189, to this verse, lines 30–31:

Just as *tahat* mentioned below [means that] one only pays with money], so too *tahat* mentioned here, also [means that] one pays only with money.

See M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 17, New York, 1956: 200 n. 684 for additional references.

The word *tahat* is equivocal, in that it could indicate an exact recompense, that is, an ox for an ox, or equivalent recompense, that is, monetary. This may perhaps be compared with the Indian hermeneutic notions *tatparya*, the intention of the speaker, where the knowledge of his intention becomes necessary in the case of an equivocal expressions and can best be determined by reference to other factors which will clarify

(This hermeneutic methodology is called *gezerah shavah*, an equal or identical category, that is, an analogy between the laws established on the basis of verbal congruities in the texts; see Jastrow, *Dictionary*, p. 232b, s.v. גזירה.)³²

the meaning of the word(s). In a sense, this is what the *gezerah shavah* does. See the following note.

³² *Gezera Shavah* is one of the hermeneutic rules used by the rabbis of antiquity. It is one of Hillel's seven rules (*Tosefta Sanhedrin* 7:11, ed. Zuckerman: 427; *Avot de R. Natan*, ed. Schechter, version 1, chapter 37: 110, etc.); one of the thirteen principles of R. Yishmael (*Torat Kohanim* ad fin.) or the thirty-six of R. Eliezer ben R. Yossi ha-Gelili (ed. H. Enelow, no. 7: 18). See *Entzyklopediah Talmudit*, vol. 5, cols. 546–564, for a full survey of its various uses. It has further been discussed by S. Lieberman, in his *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, 2nd edition, New York, 1994: 58–62. He calls it “the strangest term,” noting that “[n]o convincing explanation of the etymology and the exact meaning of the name has been suggested until now.” He translates it “unhesitatingly” as *synkrisis pros ison*, “a comparison with the equal.” (In notes 87, 105, 119, he further refers us to the studies of L. Blau, Bacher, and Daube, etc., on this and other hermeneutic rules. See most especially D. Daube, “Rabbinic Methods of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric, in *Collected Works of David Daube*, ed. C.M. Carmichael, vol. 1, *Talmudic Law*, Berkeley, 1992: 333–355, and especially pp. 351–352.)

This same methodological approach was used in another such disturbing case. For in *Deuteronomy* 25:11–12 we read as follows:

When men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets (*bi-mevushav*, i.e., his testicles). Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity [her].

Surely, she should be admired rather than most cruelly punished for coming to the aid of her husband! The Talmud, in *B. Baba Kama* 28a, seeks partially to alleviate our perplexity by saying that this is the case only if she had been able to save her husband in another fashion (*al yedei davar aher*). But if this was her only alternative she is not punished. But the same text also begins by telling us that *ve-kaztotah et kappah* “thou shalt cut off her hand,” actually means giving monetary compensation

(*mamon*). And how do the rabbis arrive at such a conclusion? By a *gezerah shavah*:

It says here “*thine eye shalt not pity* [her]”; and it says elsewhere (*Deuteronomy* 19:21; in the case of false witnesses) “*And thine eye shalt not pity*” (but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot). Just as in that case [it means] monetary compensation, so too here [it means] monetary compensation.

And since we have already learned that “an eye for an eye” means monetary compensation, so too, because of the identity of the phrase “*thine eye shalt not pity*,” we deduce that here too, rather than cutting off a hand, she pays monetary compensation. It is perhaps somewhat paradoxical that one deduces this element of merciful exegesis from phrases that seem to indicate the opposite tendency.

The author of the *Torah Temimah*, R. Baruch ha-Levi Epstein, in his comments to *Deuteronomy* 25:12 n. 181, adds that the biblical term *ve-katzotah*, “and you shall cut off,” is an unusual spelling. For grammatically the text should have had *ve katzatzta*—bringing numerous biblical parallels to prove his point. He suggests that the abbreviated form used here hints to a different Hebrew root *katzer*, *ketz* in rabbinic parlance (cf. *B. Baba Metziah* 67a) meaning “equivalent value.” His suggestion is very clever but linguistically questionable. The source for the Talmudic passage quoted above is in *Sifrei Deuteronomy*, sect. 293, ed. L. Finkelstein Berlin, 1939: 312 (see his references to later rabbinic literature).

In using these hermeneutic techniques the rabbis were carrying out the spirit of rabbinic directive as stated by R. Yehudah, *B. Sanhedrin* 36b, that one may not appoint as member of the *Sanhedrin* (the supreme court) a judge [who is known to be] cruel. (Here again this is derived from a verse in *Deuteronomy* 13:9 that states “[...] neither shalt thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him”! See our remark above on the paradoxical nature of this hermeneutic exegesis.) For a highly detailed analysis of all the different kinds of *gezerah shavah*, see Hayyim Hirschensohn, *Sefer Birur ha-Middot*, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 1931: 3–127.

Perhaps the concept of *gezerah shavah* can be compared with the Indic concept of *liṅga*, which is a sort of second “help-mate” to explain a secondary meaning of a word, or collection of words (*śruti*), inferred

We have skipped several sections of this long somewhat contorted passage, with its variety of different attempts to justify the veering away from a literal understanding of the verses. We note the argument that a literal understanding would on occasions be illogical,³³ or that it would create inequality of justice, or that there

from another word or collection of words. *Linga* is of two kinds: when the inferential sense can be inferred without the help of any other, and secondly—for our purpose of more relevance—when it is so inferred. As Kisori Lal Sarkar explained:

When the meaning of a word or expression is not clear on the face of it and its latent force or suggestive power has to be brought out by suggestive power of some other word or expression. This is called *Linga*.

See the *Mimamsa Sutra of Jaimini*, translation and introduction by Pandit Mohan Lal Sandal, Allahabad, 1925: XVII–XIX. For a discussion on the Mīmāṃsā hermeneutical techniques, see Sandal’s very detailed introduction.

³³ This point requires some further elaboration. See, for example, David Kraemer, *The Mind of the Talmud: An Intellectual History of the Bavli*, New York/Oxford, 1980, chap. 6: 139–170, entitled “The Bavli on Truth.” There (p. 148) he demonstrates, on the analysis of numerous texts from the Babylonian Talmud (=Bavli) that “Human reason may precede scripture”!, or as he continues to explain (*ibid.*: 149):

“[W]e can know what the scripture *may mean* only after we first know the lessons of human reason. Apply reason first, then ask what we do not yet know. It is the details that have not yet been defined that scripture may relate to. But, again, the possible meanings of scripture are known only after human reason has been applied.

And for a yet deeper understanding of this complex, almost paradoxical, notion, he writes (*ibid.*: 156):

It is imagined, according to this assumption, that the Torah is a kind of grand divine code, and it is up to the rabbis to figure out the precise meaning of each detail of the code. The Torah, in other words, does not “speak in the language of human beings.” (See *Sifrei Numbers* 112, ed. Horowitz, Jerusalem, 1966: 121.) To the contrary, it is so infused with

are apparent superfluities in the various texts which demand interpretations, or the use of the interpretation of one term through an identical one in a slightly different context. But they all are the result of a premise that the scriptural text could not be so cruel as to demand such a primitive, unethical punishment.

The hermeneutical methodologies may be varied,³⁴ but the foundational premise is common to them all, namely that the

the divine that no element of it should escape scrutiny or fail to yield a teaching. But at the same time that the Torah is thus mystified, it becomes largely dependent on the contribution of human reason and its alternative scriptures before it can mean anything at all. Those very same authors who transformed the status of the written Torah, therefore, were the ones who sought to equate with it the Torah of the Sages, [in the Oral Law]. Doing so they enhanced, as never before, the status of both.

³⁴ See the detailed exposition of these hermeneutic arguments in the *Malbim* (R. Meir Leibush, 1809–1879), in his *Ha-Torah ve-ha Mitzvah* to the *Mechilta*, Exodus 21, sect. 85, and 91, and to the *Sifra*, Leviticus 24, sect. 249 (ed. Jerusalem, 1956, vol. 1: 350, 352; 1957, vol. 2: 1001–1002). In his introduction to the *Sifra*, entitled *Ayelet ha-Shahar* (first published in Budapest 1860 and included in the second volume of the Jerusalem ed. pp. 455–492), *Malbim* presents six-hundred and thirteen rules whereby the exegetical methods of the Rabbis of Old were fully worked out. The number 613, of course, seeks to correspond to the tradition that there are 613 positive and negative commandments in the Bible (*Pentateuch*). He writes (in the beginning of this treatise (in rhyming verse) that “the revealed and the hidden [...] the written Torah and the handed down explanations (*Torah ha-Mesurah*) are interconnected, and together are complete, the simple meaning (*Peshat*) and exposition (*Derash*) are interlinked and not to be disconnected.” By the above he means to tell us that “the exposition of the rabbis is, in point of fact, the literal meaning of the biblical verse in the depths of its formulation and the foundations of the Hebrew language.”

The Or Ha-Hayyim (Hayyim ibn Mosheh ibn Attar, 1696–1743), on the other hand, sees the unity of the written and oral laws in a different light. He writes (in his commentary to *Leviticus* 13:37, Venice, 1742):

It is true that the entire word of Torah was told to Moses, and no Sage can know more than he knew. And though one join all the generations of Israel, from the giving of the Torah until the time when the earth shall become filled with knowledge (cf. *Isaiah* 11:9) together, there is nothing new of which Moses was unaware. The difference is, however, that G-d gave Moses the Written and Oral laws, and the Lord, Blessed be He, in His wisdom noted in the Written Law the entire Oral teaching that he had told to Moses *but he did not inform Moses where all he had given him orally was hinted in the written Torah*. It is the task of the Children of Israel, toilers in Torah, to bestow a place in the Written Torah upon all the *Halachot*, mysteries and expositions told to Moses at Sinai. This is the reason why you find that the Tannaim compiled *Torat Cohanim—Sifra*) and *Sifrei*, etc. All their exposition of the verses *is by means of the Halachot*, which they enshrined in the perfect Written Law of G-d. And until this day, the sacred task of the student of Torah is to examine the verses carefully and resolve them by means of the statements which are the Oral Law.

According to this view the Oral Law is the basis for the true understanding of the Written Law. There are additional elements in this complex issue, which are beyond the scope of this study. See, for example, Abraham Hirsh Rabinowitz, *The Jewish Mind in the Talmudic Expression*, Jerusalem, 1978: 100–104.

We should further take note of the passage in *Y. Berachot* 1:4 (7, 36), where R. Yohanan (died ca. 270) said the following:

The words of Sages are related to the words of the Torah, and beloved like the words of the *Torah* [as it is written in *Canticles* 7:10], “and the roof of thy mouth like the best wine for my beloved that goes down sweetly [causing the lips of those that are asleep to speak].”

Shimon ben Va (=Aba) in the name of R. Yohanan [said]: The words of the Sages are related to the words of the *Torah*, and even more beloved than the words of the Torah, [as it is said, *Cant* 1:2], “[Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth] for Thy love is better than wine.”

sacred text must be in accordance with the primal principle that “its ways are the ways of pleasantness,” and hence cannot nurture cruelty. There is, then, a presumption of a meta-halachic value that posits an interpretation resulting in a teaching that is in accordance with this primal value.

So too, in a long passage that Avraham Ibn Ezra (1084–1164) brings in his commentary to *Exodus* 21:24 (ed. Asher Weiser, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 1977, p. 152), which records a polemic discussion on this same issue between R. Saadya Gaon (882–942) and the Karaite Ben Zuta.³⁵ There we read that R. Saadya states clearly that:

Cf. *Sanhedrin* 11:4, *Y. Avodah Zarah* 2:8, with slight differences. The Hebrew for “for thy love,” *dodecha*, is from *dod*, relative, hence, may be understood to mean “is more related [...]” (Cf. *Canticles Rabba* ad loc.)

Louis Ginzberg, in his magisterial *A Commentary on the Palestinian Talmud*, vol. 1, New York, 1941, to *Y. Berachot* (Hebrew, *ibid.*: 148–149), first explains *dodecha* in the sense of relatedness. However, he then offers a different approach, suggesting we read, as it were, *dadecha*, meaning “thy breasts,” the point being made that both the Written Law and the Oral Law are like the milk suckled from equal breasts belonging to the same body. He brings a number of sources to strengthen out his suggestion. I might add that there may be a further word-play on the Greek *duo*—two from the Hebrew *dod*, referring to the duality of these two “laws,” which are also dyadically unified. See also Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Theology of Ancient Israel*, vol. 3, Jerusalem, 1990 (Hebrew, 27–28, 45–47). This is expressed, for example, in *Sifrei Haazinu* 307, ed. L. Finkelstein, Berlin, 1939: 339: “[...] So too the Torah is all one unified whole, comprising of Bible, *Mishnah*, *Talmud*, *Halachot* and *Haggadot*.” In other words: all these elements, including the rabbinic ones, are part of this unified whole. Cf. *Numbers Rabba* 13:16, etc.

³⁵ This was a part of his polemic discussion against the Karaites who accepted the literal meaning of the verse, “an eye for an eye.” So we read in that same passage:

Said Ben Zuta to him [to Saadya], “Surely it is written elsewhere, as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again” (*Leviticus* 24:20). And the Gaon [i.e., Saadya] replied to him, “We have a *beit* instead of *al* (i.e., *bo* “to him” equals *alav*—upon him, cf. *Psalms* 15:3, *Malachi* 2:16, etc.). That means: “a punishment shall be put upon

[...] In principle we cannot interpret the *mitzvot* of the Torah in a complete manner if we do not rely upon the words of the Sages, for just as we received the [Written] Torah from our forefathers, so too we received the Oral Torah, and there is no difference between them.³⁶

him." And Ben Zuta responded to him, "as he hath done, so shall it be done to him" (*ibid.*, verse 20). And the Gaon answered, "Behold Samson said, 'As they did unto me, so have I done unto them' (*Judges* 15:11). And Samson did not take their wives and pass them on to others; he only did unto them what they were deserving." And Ben Zuta retorted, "And if the smiter was a poor person, what would be his punishment?" And the Gaon Answered, "If a blind man blinds a seeing men, what should be done to him? For the poor man may become rich and be able to pay, but the blind man will never be able to pay. So the principle is that we can never interpret the *mitzvot* of the Torah in a complete manner [...].

Ben Zuta's full name was Ben Zuta abu Alsurt or Abu'l Surri ibn Zuta, and he was a 10th-century Karaite exegete. Elsewhere Ibn Ezra gives him as an example of those Zadokites who do not know language—that is, grammar. "For they do not know [Hebrew] grammar, for in their country they do not hear [Hebrew], just like Ben Zuta, who errs in all his commentaries." See Weiser's note to *Exodus* 2:2, p. 15 n. 16. This is somewhat surprising as he lived in Jerusalem. See Jacob Mann, *Texts and Studies in Jewish History and Literature*, vol. 2, Philadelphia, 1935: 58, 67; *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, Jerusalem, 1971, vol. 1: 576, for additional bibliography. See further the long and involved discussion of Eliyahu Nicomodio, in his *Keter Torah* (from 1362) to *Exodus* 21:24 (ed. Ramleh, 1972: 143–144), who gives a variety of interpretations for this and the related verses.

³⁶ See M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 17, New York, 1956: 261. Indeed, this was the view of the *Baitosim*, as recorded in *Megilat Taanit* chapter 4; Kasher (*ibid.*: 128, sect. 448), with his discussion on p. 260, where he cites Azria de Ross's *Meor Enayim* which says that this is also Philo's position. (See Philo, *Spec.* 3:181–183; Erwin R. Goodenough, *An Introduction to Philo Judaeus*, New York, 1963: 128–129; cf. *idem*, *The Jurisprudence of the Jewish Courts in Egypt*, New Haven Conn., 1929: 135–142.) See also Adolf

Berger, *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Roman Law*, Philadelphia, 1953, n. 730, s.v. Talio.

Some legislators deserve censure when prescribing for malefactors punishments that do not resemble the crime, such as monetary fines for assaults, disenfranchisement for wounding or maiming another, expulsion from the country and perpetual banishment for willful murder or imprisonment for theft. For the commonwealth that pursues truth, inequality and unevenness are repugnant. Our law exhorts us to practice equality when it ordains that the penalties inflicted on offenders must correspond to the crime. People's property should suffer if a wrongdoing adversely affected their neighbor's property, and their bodies if the offense was a bodily injury, the penalty being determined according to the limb, part of sense affected, while if his malice extended to taking another's life, his own life is deserving to be the forfeit.

This seems similar to the views of R. Eliezer ben Hyrcanus, who interprets the verse literally (*B. Baba Kama* 84a) against his colleagues. However, later Amoraic authorities reinterpret his words as meaning monetary compensation. But they understand his opinion to be that the valuation of the damage is according to the value of the *damager's eye and not that of the damaged*, and is on this point that he disagrees with all the other authorities. This is how Rabbah (or in variant readings: Rava) understood R. Eliezer's view. (See *B. Baba Kama* 84a.) See further M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 17, New York, 1956: 127 to *Exodus* 21:24, and nn. 444 and 445, from the *Mechilta* (and the note ad loc. pp. 127–128), and *ibid.*: 261. See also R. Hananel ad loc., in B.M. Lewin, *Otzar ha-Geonim*, vol. XII (to *Baba Kama*), Jerusalem, 1993: 85.

However, we should note that Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (transl. M. Friedländer, London, 1942, part 3, chapter 41: 344), writes, most surprisingly:

The punishment for him who sins against his neighbour consists in the general rule that there should be done unto him exactly as he has done; if he injured anyone personally, he must suffer personally [...]. And he who mutilated a limb of his neighbour, must himself lose a limb. "And he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again" (*Leviticus* 24:20). You must not raise

an objection from our practice of imposing a fine in such cases. For we have proposed to ourselves to give here the reason for the precepts mentioned in the Law, and not for that which is stated in the Talmud. There is, however, an explanation for the interpretation given in the Talmud, but it will be communicated *viva voce*.

Also Maimonides' son, R. Avraham, was unwilling to reveal the explanation, as he writes in his commentary to *Leviticus* (*ibid.*). This enigmatic statement, which appears to contradict his rulings in his Code, and which troubled his commentators, has most recently been discussed in detail by Rabbi Elia Matusof, in his *Ayin Tahat Ayin, Le-Shitat ha-Rambam be-Sefer "Yad Hazakah,"* New York, 2014: 3ff., who cites the relevant sources, and who offers an interesting, but problematic and speculative solution to this apparent contradiction. He says that "an eye for an eye" refers to money when the damage is done to "his neighbour." It is, then, only with regard a fellow Jew that corporal punishment is exchanged for monetary payment. However, with regard to idolaters the verse should be taken literally, because mere monetary payment will not keep a wealthy idolater from inflicting damage on another's limbs. And since the *Guide for the Perplexed* was written in Arabic and accessible to the scrutiny of the non-Jewish masses, he could not express this explicitly. (See his summary in English, pp. 13–14.) (We should, however, point out that Maimonides' Arabic speaking neighbours were Moslems, and not idolaters. But, nevertheless, they were not Jews.) And for an interesting aside, see Isaac Abravenal (Spain 1437–1508), who in his commentary to *Deut 23:20*, states that Christians are not *nochrin*, idolaters, but can be considered *ahim*, brethren!

Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel*, New York, 1986: 187–188, argues strongly that the biblical phrase "an eye for an eye" was never meant to be taken literally. Samuel Belkin, *Philo and The Oral Law: The Philonic Interpretation of Biblical Law in Relation to the Palestinian Halakah*, Cambridge Mass., 1940: 97–98, notes that elsewhere Philo wrote "It is foolish to visit displeasure on the servant rather than the actual authors, for the hands did not commit the outrage" (*Spec. Laws 2: 245*, at *Exodus 21:15*). And since the hand is merely an instrument, it should not be punished no more than the sword itself be punished; rather the person should be punished in the form of monetary compensation. See Michael Leo Samuel, *Torah from Alexandria: Philo as a Biblical Commentator*, vol. 2: *Exodus*, New York, 2014: 163–164.

See further also David Weiss Halivni, *Peshat and Derash*, New York and Oxford, 1991: 85–88; Yehudah Copperman, *Li-Fshuto shel Mikra*, Jerusalem, 1974, for a full examination of the concept of *Peshat*; Y. Maori, “The Approach of Classical Jewish Exegetes to *Peshat* and *Derash* and its Implications for Teaching Bible Today,” *Tradition* 21/3 (1984): 40–53; M. Arend, “*Peshuto Shel Mikra* and Halachic Probability: Remarks on Y. Copperman’s Essay,” *HaMaayan* 15/1 (1975): 59–63; M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 17, New York, 1956: 286, 312.

See further S. Atlas, *Netivot ba-Mishpat ha-Ivri*, New York, 1978: 83–129. A listing of articles on the subject of *lex talionis* is to be found in N. Rakover, *Otzar ha-Mishpat* 2 (1990), Jerusalem, nos. 4338, 4346, 4352, 4364, etc. See also Aaron Kirschenbaum, *Equity in Jewish Law: Formalism and Flexibility in Jewish Civil Law*, Hoboken N.J. and New York, 1991: 28–32. In his examination of this issue he writes (p. 29):

[...] equitable interpretations of statutes are not regarded as intrusions or “reinterpretations” of the text based upon extrinsic considerations. On the contrary, many equitable interpretations are products of the interpreters search for “true,” original, and authentic meanings of the passage [...].

See further the discussion of these concepts in Max Kaddushin, *The Rabbinic Mind*, 3rd edition, New York, 1972: 98–130, and also Mosheh Arend, “*Baayat ha-Peshat be-Horaat ha-Mikra*,” *Daat* 46 (1977): 42–54.

And Kirschenbaum writes (*ibid.*: 32):

To the rabbis of the Talmud and to Maimonides, a literal interpretation of *An eye for an eye* represents bad law, and is totally foreign to sacred scripture.

Copperman’s formulation is slightly different. He states that the *Peshat* tells us what “ought to be” (*ha-raui*), that is, that really a person deserves to have his eye taken out; but the *halachah* rules what is “desirable” in the eyes of the law (*ratzui*), namely that monetary compensation be given (see *ibid.*: 70ff.). Cf. Quine-Dworkin’s principle below. Finally, see David Daube’s extensive study entitled “*Lex Talionis*,” *Studies in Biblical Law*, Cambridge, 1947: 102–153. See also Yehudah Ratzahbi, *Perushei Rav Saadya Gaon le-Sefer Shemot*, Jerusalem, 1998: 116.

See further Kasher (*ibid.*), citing *Kuzari* 3:46–47; Ralbag ad loc. Indeed, this polemic continues into the time of the *Rishonim* in their responses to the “*minim*.” See *Tosafot ha-Shalem: Otzar Perushei Baalei ha-Tosafot al*

This had already been expressed, albeit in a different and more philosophical manner by Philo of Alexandria. Harry Austryn Wolfson, in his classic exposition of Philo (vol. 1: 115–116), describes his “allegorical” method thus:³⁷

In his attempt to interpret Scripture in terms of philosophy, Philo assumes that scriptural texts have a twofold meaning, a literal (*rhété*) [*Cant.* 3:28; *Abr.* 36:200] or obvious (*phanera*) [*Abr. ibid.*] meaning and an underlying meaning (*hyponoia*) [*Cant. ibid.*; cf. Plato *Republic* 2:378 d]. The underlying meaning he describes by a variety of terms, among them also the term allegory (*allégoria*) [*Plant.* 9:36 et pass.], and to interpret a text according to its underlying meaning is therefore described as to allegorize (*allegoria*) [*Mign.* 37:205]. The underlying meaning of a text as well as the allegorical interpretation of it is said by him to be “obscure to the many” [*Abr. ibid.*], to be clear only to “those who can contemplate bodiless and naked facts” [*Abr.* 41:236], to appeal only to “the few who study soul characteristics rather than bodily forms” [*Abr.* 29:147], and to be dear to “men who are capable of seeing” [*Plant.* 9:36]. “Allegory” is also described by him as something “which loves to hide itself” and into which one has to be “initiated” [*Fug.* 32:179]. All this, as we have seen, means that only those who are qualified both by natural abilities and moral character and by preliminary training are to be

Torah, Neviim u-Ketuvim, ed. Yaakov Gelis, vol. 8, Jerusalem, 1990: 223–224, nos. 1, 3. The founder of Karaism, Anan, appears to have taken the verse literally, but argues that since one can no longer inflict corporal punishment one must distance oneself from the criminal. See Leon Nemoy, *Karaite Anthology*, New Haven and London, 1952: 13–14. As to Philo’s position on this issue, see Loeb ed., transl. F.H. Colson, vol. 7, “*The Special Laws*,” 3:171–198, pp. 582–599.

³⁷ Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, 2nd edition, Harvard, 1948, vol. 1.

instructed in the method of the allegorical interpretation of Scripture.

Of these two methods, the literal and the allegorical, the allegorical is made use of by Philo without any reservation. Everything in Scripture, from names, dates, and numbers to the narration of historical events or the prescription of rules for human conduct, is to him subject to allegorical interpretation. But as for the literal method, it is to be used, according to him, with certain reservations. One general rule laid down by Philo is that no anthropomorphic expression about God is to be taken literally. As proof-text for this general rule he quotes the verse (*Numbers* 23:19) "God is not as man," which is taken by him to contain the general principle that God is not to be likened to anything perceptible by the senses [*Immut.* 13:62]. And so, for instance, he says, the verse "and Cain went out from the face of God" (*Genesis* 4:16) is to be taken "in a figurative sense," since, if taken literally, it is "greatly at variance with truth" [*Post.* 1:1]. If the question is raised why Scripture makes use of such anthropomorphic expressions, the answer given by him is that such expressions "are introduced for the instruction of the many" [*Immut.* 11:54] and out of regard "for the ways of the thinking of the duller folk," so that "it is for training and admonition, not because God's nature is such, that these words are used" [*Immut. ibid.*].

After a detailed examination of his allegorical methodology he summarizes as follows (*ibid.*: 138):

This is the conception of Scripture with which Philo started. The principle that Scripture is not always to be taken literally and that it has to be interpreted allegorically came to him as a heritage of Judaism; his acquaintance with Greek philosophic literature led him to give to the native Jewish allegorical method of

interpretation a philosophic turn. The example of the Greek allegorical method, of course, helped and encouraged him and served him as a model. But it is conceivable that his allegorical method could have become philosophical even without such models.

We see here a clear position stating that there are many levels of understanding of the biblical text. Wolfson further adds (*ibid.*):

When the Palestinian type of Judaism, many centuries later, came in contact with philosophy, the native Jewish conception of the freedom of the interpretation of Scripture led it to develop a philosophical method of allegorical interpretation of Scripture which has many striking resemblances to that of Philo not only in its general character but also in many details.

Likewise Rambam, understanding that the text may mean something other than its literal sense, could clearly state that “it is known from rabbinic tradition (*mi-pi ha-shemuah lamdu*) that it is money.” This is explained more explicitly in Seforno (*ad loc.*), who wrote: This is what the law truly ought to be, that is: measure for measure.³⁸ And the [Oral] tradition (*Kabbalah*) came [to teach

³⁸ The passage first explains the exegetical justification for such an interpretation, and then ends as follows:

And even though these interpretations are apparent from the Written Torah itself (i.e., they can be deduced from comparisons with other verses in the Scriptures), all of them expounded by Moses at Mount Sinai, and they are all our halachic practice, and so our forefathers saw that this was to practice in the court of Joshua and in the court of Shmuel ha-Ramati (the prophet Samuel), and all courts that functioned from the days of Moses our teacher until the present day.

See the detailed discussion on this Maimonidean passage in M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 17, New York, 1956: 258–259. Kasher (*ibid.*) also calls our attention to a passage by R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam (in “*Likkutim mi-pi R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam*” by Y. Shimon Eppenstein, in *Le-David Tzvi* (Hoffmann), Berlin, 1914: 133–134):

“An eye for an eye”—The plain meaning of the verse is self-evident. And in the tradition of our Sages (*u-be-Kabbalat Hazal*) it is explained that the verse means the *value* of a tooth for a tooth, and so for all of them. And there is support for this tradition of the Sages with proofs from the Scripture and from analogy (*ha-hekeish*), and R. Saadya Gaon wrote them out in his commentary. And the proof is from the word “wound for a wound” (*Exodus 21:25*). And already (the Scripture) indicated this earlier and similar such that one is only obligated to payment, and this is what is written (in *Exodus 21:18–19*), “And if men strive together (and one smite another with a stone, or his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed [...]). He shall pay only for the loss of his time and shall cause him to be thoroughly [...]” (i.e., through monetary compensation, but no physical punishment).

From the above it is clear that Rambam (and his son) were acquainted with Saadya’s argumentation.

However, Maimonides, in his *Guide for the Perplexed* (transl. M. Friedländer, 2nd edition, London 1904, part 3, chap. 41: 344), writes as follows:

And he who mutilated a limb of his neighbour, must himself lose a limb. “As he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again” (*Lev. 24:20*). You must not raise an objection from our practice of imposing a fine in such cases. For we have proposed to ourselves to give here the reason for the precepts mentioned in the Law, and not for that which is stated in the Talmud. I have, however, an explanation for the interpretation given in the Talmud, but it will be communicated *viva voce*. Injuries that cannot be reproduced exactly in another person, are compensated for by payment; “only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed” (*Exod. 21:19*).

Cf. Seforno cited below, and see *Torah Shelemah* (*ibid.*: 261–262), which explains that according to this view—followed by others, cited in Rabbenu Hananel (in *Otzar ha-Geonim vol. 12 to Baba Kama*, ed. B.M. Lewin: 85)—one should punish in the exact measure for measure. It is only because we cannot carry this out practically in an exact [...] that we have resort to monetary compensation. Kasher suggests that this is the

us] that he should pay with money, because of our inability to assess [accurately the damage], and lest we err and add to the measure (i.e., punish more than is required), and thus sin.³⁹

We find a similar phenomenon in the interpretation of the above-mentioned verse in *Deuteronomy* 25:11–12:

11. And when men strive together one with another, and the wife of the one draweth near for to deliver her husband out of the hand of him that smiteth him, and putteth forth her hand, and taketh him by the secrets.

12. Then thou shalt cut off her hand, thine eye shall not pity her.⁴⁰

What appeared to be the plain and straightforward meaning of verse 12 is not in doubt,⁴¹ and is even strengthened by the

real understanding of R. Eliezer's view (or at least that it is how they understood it), that is, that *ayin* [*tahat ayin*] *mamash* (i.e., is to be taken exactly, literally), but he, too, realized that pragmatically this could not be carried out (*i efsar le-tzamtzem*). See, however, our "charitable" interpretation below.

³⁹ See Yehudah Copperman, *Kedushat Pshuto Shel Mikra*, Jerusalem, 2009, pp. 161–164, with further analysis.

⁴⁰ This view was interpreted by the *Sifrei Deuteronomy*, sect. 293, ed. Finkelstein–Horowitz, Berlin, 1940: 312, in two ways. Firstly, compensation for bodily injury involving an insulting action, according to the law of *boshet*, complementing the laws as delineated in *Exodus* 21:19–25 (see *B. Baba Kama* 86b); for *he-hehezika bi-mevushav* "pulleth forth her hand and taketh him by secret parts" is a prime example of a deeply insulting, and damaging, action. But a second way in which this verse was understood in *Sifrei* (*ibid.*) is that this is not an example of *boshet*, but one of a life-threatening action, and so *ve-katzota et kapah* is understood to be taken literally as a means of saving a threatened life by wounding the attacker, preferably one of his limbs, but if necessary taking his life. (Cf. *Exodus* 21:23, Rambam, *Hilchot Hovel u-Mazik* 1:9, idem, *Hilchot Rotzeah* 1:7–8, on the law of *rodef*, the pursuer.) See the extended interpretation in R. Shimshon Rephael Hirsch, Commentary (ad loc.), transl. I. Levy, *Deut.*, New York, 1971: 517–520 (and cf. *ibid.*: 451–452, to *Exodus* 21:23: 313–314.)

summation “thine eye shall not pity her.” Nonetheless, here the rabbis also interpreted it as meaning monetary payment (*mammon*).⁴² Here, too, we find a hermeneutical justification by reference to *Deuteronomy* 19:21, which we have seen above to have been interpreted as referring to monetary compensation. But is this not circular reasoning?⁴³

Again, I believe the rabbis—or at least the majority of them—could not entertain accepting the literal meaning of these texts, since it went against all they understood to be moral values that underlie the *halachah*. Hence, they were forced to hermeneutically interpret them differently, in accordance with the principle that “its ways are the ways of pleasantness,” and not those that they viewed as barbaric.

I believe we may see a continuation of the policy of such “charitable interpretation” in the way the *Rishonim* interpret Talmudic texts. Thus in the first *Mishnah* of the second chapter of *Niddah*, we read regarding a man who continuously examines his penis (to see whether he had a seminal emission), “let it be cut off.” The Talmud then inquires (*B. Niddah* 13b) whether the *Mishnah* meant this as a curse (*letuta*), or to be taken literally as the law (*dina*). The Talmud then brings a proof that this is meant to be taken literally from a statement in *B. Sanhedrin* 58b, where we are told that Rav Huna ruled that someone “who raised his hand against his neighbour,” even if he did not actually hit him, should have his hand cut off, referring to the verse in *Job* 38:15, “[...] and the high arm is broken.” Despite the fairly clear meaning of both sources, the Meiri to *Niddah* (p. 50) writes:⁴⁴

⁴¹ And so it was understood by the Karaite Eliyahu of Nicomodio, in his *Keter Torah* (from 1362), ed. Ramleh, 1972, *Deut.* p. 57.

⁴² R. Yehudah, *Sifrei Deuteronomy*, sect. 293, ed. Finkelstein Horowitz, Berlin, 1940, p. 312 with references.

⁴³ See R. Baruch Halevi Epstein, *Torah Temimah to Deuteronomy* *ibid.*: 405 n. 12, where he seeks to justify this “non-literal” interpretation.

⁴⁴ Meiri, *Niddah*, ed. A. Sofer, New York, 1949.

And they explained [i.e., the *Mishnah*] in the *Gemara* (*ibid.*, 13b) that that which they said “let it be cut off” is not intended to be the law (*dina*) but to be understood as a curse (*letuta*).

Likewise in *Sanhedrin* (*ibid.*), the Meiri wrote with regard to cutting off the hand of one who raised his hand against his neighbour that: There are those who explain it as meaning that he punished him demanding monetary compensation to the value of a hand. However, as the editor (*ibid.*, n. 3) rightly noted there is no clear conclusion in the Talmudic *sugya* that this is the case, and that the text should *not* be taken literally. The Meiri takes the position of the Ritva ad loc. (as the editor noted, *ibid.*) despite the fact that R. Tarfon seems to take the *Mishnah* literally (*B. Niddah* *ibid.* and *Y. Niddah* 1:2). However, the *Yerushalmi* cites *havraiah* (members of the academy) who relate that R. Tarfon would curse one who carries on thus, hence, not taking the *Mishnah* literally that he would have his genitals excised, but finding a curse sufficient. And Rashi to *Sanhedrin* *ibid.* explicitly interprets Rav Huna as having demanded a fine, while *Tosafot* ad loc. explains Rav Huna’s action as a unique case, since the man was a continuous batterer.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See *B. Baba Kama* 37a, the case of Hanan Bisha, who attacked someone, but R. Huna only fined him. The term used for his attack is *tukta*, which means to hit, give a blow; see *M. Baba Kama* 8:6. This unsavoury character appears also in *B. Baba Kama* 115a, and *B. Bechorot* 50b. Cf. *Tosefta Niddah* 2:18, and R. David Pardo, *Hasdei David* ad loc., Jerusalem, 1971: 195–196, and Y. Tamar, *Alei Tamar* to *Y. Niddah* *ibid.*, 1983: 325. Cf. *B. Sanhedrin* 46a that at times the rabbi would punish very severely, “not because the person was really culpable, but the circumstances required it (*ela-she-ha-shaah tzericha le-chach*).” See Responsa of the Rivash, R. Yitzhak ben Sheshet (1326–1407), ed. David Metzger, vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1993, no. 251: 320–322, on the authority of the courts to give extraordinary punishments. He takes the Rav Huna story literally.

We should further point out that it seems most unlikely that the rabbis would inflict serious corporal punishment basing themselves on a midrashic derivation from a verse in Job—*divrei kabbalah* (see *B. Hagigah* 10b, *B. Niddah* 23a; however, cf. *B. Baba Kama* 2b). It is also known that

the Sages of the Talmud often exaggerated punishments in order to keep people away from transgression, but did not mean to be taken literally (Rivash, response no. 171; Yitzhak Yosef, *Ein Yitzhak*, vol. 1, Jerusalem, 2009, no. 80: 151–155, with numerous examples, though this one is not cited).

On the other hand we do have evidence of such an extreme form of punishment, derived from the same verse in Job. Thus, in *Sefer Hasidim*, ed. R. Margalioth, Jerusalem, 1957, no. 49: 108–109, we read:

And he said to him that did the wrong, “Wherefore smiteth thou thy fellow?” (*Exodus* 2:13). He did not actually hit him, but merely raised his hand against him, and therefore was called a *rasha* (wicked one, one who “did the wrong”). And the rabbis said: “Anyone who punches his neighbour in the jaw, it is as though he has punched the *Shechinah* (*B. Sanhedrin* 58b; *Zohar Genesis* 57a; *Zohar Hadash Ruth* 79b). This means: anyone who slaps a fellow Jew’s cheek, it is as though he “put a knife to thy throat” (*Proverbs* 23:2), that is, it is as though he hits the *Shechinah*. And he has no means of amendment other than cutting off his hand, as it is said, “And the high arm shall be broken” (*Job* 38:15). [...]

So too, ruled R. Meir mi-Rothenberg in his *Responsa*, ed. Prague no. 81, namely that one who beats his wife “should be excommunicated, whipped, and punished in all kinds of suppression, and have his hand or his leg cut off.” See A. Grossman, *He Shall Rule Over You: Medieval Jewish Sages on Women*, Jerusalem, 2011: 198–199, 201 [Hebrew], who suspects that this was more a threat than actual cutting off of a hand (*ibid.*: 194 n. 86). He also points out (p. 198) that it is not clear that this is part of the original *Sefer Hasidim*. Nevertheless, he cites another passage in the Wistinetzki edition of *Sefer Hasidim*, Frankfurt am Main 1924, no. 631: 169, where we are told that a certain R. Mordechai broke his own arm by closing the door on it, because he had punched a Jew, citing the verses in *Job* 31:21–22, “If I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless [...] let my arm fall from mine shoulder-blade [and mine arm be broken from the bone].” But this is an extreme case of *teshuvat ha-mishkal*, which cannot be discussed here. There is considerable literature on this subject; see, for instance, Yitzhak Baer, *Ha-Megamah ha-Datit-Hevratit shel “Sefer Hasidim,”* Jerusalem, 1938: 18–20.

However, see the responsum in *Zichron Yehudah*, by R. Yehudah the son of the Rosh, ed. A.Y. Havatzelet, Jerusalem, 2005, no. 79: 73, on cutting off the hands of one who attacked a judge (and cf. response of Rosh, *Klal* 18, *Siman* 13, and *Shulhan Aruch Even ha-Ezer* 177:5, on mutilation as a punishment).

We might point out in parenthesis that such radically brutal punishments involving cutting off hands and feet, for example, were apparently practiced in the seventh century C.E. in India, according to *Ta-T'ang-Si-Yu-Ki*. For there we read that:

[...] when a man fails in fidelity or filial piety, then they cut his nose or his ears off, or his hands and feet [...].

See *Si-Yu-Ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World, transl. from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*, by Samuel Beal, London, 1884: 84.

The Rosh (R. Asher), in his response *Klal* 18:13, relates the case of a Jewish woman who committed adultery with a non-Jew, and the court cut (off) her nose as a punishment, and “so that she should be repugnant to her adultery, and this testimony is cited by the Rema in *Shulhan Aruch Even ha-Ezer* 177:5. However, the *Besamim Rosh* (Berlin, 1793, sect. 192) cites R. Shimshon beR. Avraham (?) who states that such practice is unacceptable. And though *Besamim Rosh* is a forgery, here it reflects mainstream Jewish ethical thinking. (See Z.W. Zicherman, *Otzar Plaot ha-Torah: Bereishit*, Brooklyn, 2003: 522–523, and n. 87.)

See also responsum of Rosh, *Klal* 17, *Siman* 8 (in the addition in ed. Venice 1607) concerning one who blasphemed God’s name in Arabic before two witnesses that his tongue be cut out. (See Z.W. Zicherman, *Otzar Plaot ha-Torah, Leviticus*, New York, 2016: 1134, who notes that this part of the responsum was omitted in later editions. It is found in the latest edition, ed. Y.S. Yudlov, Jerusalem, 1994: 83.)

Perhaps in this way we can understand the views expressed by a number of *Rishonim* to explain the verse in *Genesis* 38:24, where we are told that Judah, when he found out that Tamar was pregnant, ruled that she should be “taken out and burned.” For R. Yehudah ha-Hasid, cited in *Paneah Raza* ad loc. stated:

God forfend that she be taken out to be burned [...] “And let her be burned” is to be interpreted that they brand her cheeks as a sign that she was a prostitute, as was the custom in their times.

So too, the Rambam in *Hilchot Issurei Biya* 21:23 does not mention a punishment of cutting off a man's hand for caressing his penis. Rabbenu Hananel already explained Rav Huna's action as monetary punishment.⁴⁶

Furthermore, on the verse in *Numbers* 31:7, "And they [the Israelites] warned against the Midianites as the Lord commanded Moses [...]," *Sifrei* ad loc. (p. 210) writes:⁴⁷

They surrounded it from [all] four sides. R. Nathan says: He gave them one fourth side [open] so that they could escape.

So too, in the name of R. Yitzhak of Vienna. This tradition is also brought by R. Yaakov Baal ha-Turim ad loc., in the name of R. Yehudah ha-Hasid. However, Mahri Katz in his comments to *Paneah Raza* writes:

Heaven forbid that such words came out of the holy mouth [of R. Yehudah ha-Hasid] [...].

See M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah* ad loc. (vol. 6 (tome 7), Jerusalem, 1938, n. 96), which cites all these sources, concluding that those witnesses give clear testimony that this was, indeed, the opinion of R. Yehuda ha-Hasid. Perhaps, he, too, wished to soften the severity of the punishment through "charitable interpretation," even though branding itself is very cruel, but still less than burning to death. Furthermore, R. Eliezer Ashkenazi (1513–1584) in his *Gedolim Maasei ha-Shem* (Venice, 1583, *Va-Yeishuv*, chapter 36), states that Judah in his ruling acted just as do the Ishmaelites in our (i.e., his) day, namely that prostitutes are punished by being branded on the forehead. They then cover their faces to hide the sign of their shame. And that is the meaning of the verse *ibid.* 38:15, that relates how Judah saw that Tamar has covered her face, and therefore suspected that she was a prostitute who was covering her branded forehead. Branding was used in medieval Europe for heretics and prostitutes (see, e.g., Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition*, vol. 2, New York, 1955: 182; George P. Howard, *A History of Matrimonial Institution*, London, ca. 1923: 169–178, etc.).

⁴⁶ R. Reuven Margalio, *Margalio ha-Yam to Sanhedrin*, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 1958: 14, citing a fragment published by S. Assaf, *Ish ha-Torah ve-ha-Maaseh*, *Sefer Yovel le-chvod ha-Rav Ostrovsky*, Jerusalem, 1946: 71.

⁴⁷ *Sifrei*, ed. Horowitz, 2nd edition, Jerusalem, 1966 (first ed. Leipzig 1917).

So too in *Midrash Tannaim* (to *Deuteronomy* 20:12, p. 121):⁴⁸

“[And if it will make no peace with thee (after being warned), but will make war against thee], then thou shalt besiege it.” – Surround them on [all] four sides.

R. Nathan says: One gives them a way to escape.

R. Natan’s view is also to be found in *Targum Yonatan* ad loc.: “[...] and they surrounded them on three sides.”⁴⁹

Now, normally, when there is an anonymous statement followed by an attributed one, the assumption is that the anonymous one is the majority opinion, and the attributed one a sole opinion. Consequently the *halachah* should follow the anonymous majority view. Yet the Rambam (Maimonides) in *Hilchot Melachim* 6:7 rules:

When one attacks a city to capture it, one does not surround it on [all] four sides, but [only] three, and one leaves a place to escape for whoever wishes to save his life, as it is written, “And they warred against the Midianites as the Lord commanded them” (*Numbers ibid.*). From our tradition [*mi-pi ha shemuah*] we have learned that this is what they were commanded.

The Ramban (Nahmanides), in his notes to Rambam *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, “forgotten positive commandments” no. 5 (sect. 2, p. 42), writes as follows:⁵⁰

We were commanded that when we besiege a city, we should leave one of the sides un-besieged, so that if they wish to escape they should have a way to do so. And from this we learn to behave with compassion even with our enemies during wartime, and it is also strategically advisable that we leave them a way of escape so that they will not strengthen their resolve against us, as it is written, “And they

⁴⁸ *Midrash Tannaim*, ed. David Tzvi Hoffmann, Berlin, 1908–1909.

⁴⁹ See J. Lewy, *Chaldäisches Wörterbuch über die Targumim*, Leipzig, 1881: 318.

⁵⁰ Ramban, *Sefer ha-Mitzvot*, ed. Jerusalem, 1969.

warned against the Midianites as the Lord commanded them [...].” In the *Sifrei* they interpreted [the verse]: They surrounded them on three sides. R. Natan says: Give them a fourth way to escape. And this was not only a *mitzvah* for the hour [they fought against] Midian, but is a commandment for all generations in all elective wars (*milhamot reshut*). And so wrote the Rav [=Rambam] in his great compilation in *Hilchot Melachim u-Milhamotehem*.

The Ramban here is not quoting the *Sifrei* but paraphrasing it, and it is not clear what was the original reading he had before him. The Semag, *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, by the Tosafist R. Moshe of Coucy also rules thus, basing himself on the same verse in *Numbers*, quoting no source (as is usual with him).⁵¹

We shall not follow up with later sources, such as *Midrash ha-Gadol*, *Midrash Meor ha-Afelah*, etc., for what we have already shown suffices to demonstrate how all our halachic sources rule compassionately in accordance with what appears to be the minority view of R. Natan.

It has been suggested (*Sifrei Numbers ibid.*, editor’s note to line 13) that perhaps these authorities had a different reading in the *Sifrei*, where this constituted the majority opinion. But this is most unlikely since the *Sifrei* text is borne out by *Midrash Tannaim* referred to above, and R. Natan is explicitly mentioned in the Ramban.

That there is no real indication that the actual verse directing us to R. Natan’s view is distinctly evident from the fact that the Rambam had to add that we learn this *mi-pi ha-shmuah*. Once again, then, we have an example of how “charitable interpretation”—for that must be the basis of the rabbinic “tradition”—sought to add an element of morality and compassion into the practical application of warfare, which is, of

⁵¹ R. Moshe of Coucy, *Sefer Mitzvot Gadol*, part 2, positive commandment no. 18 ad fin., Brooklyn, 1959, fol. 117b. Likewise, *Sefer ha-Hinuch, Mitzvah* 527, ed. Ahavat Shalom, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 1998: 258; see also *ibid.*, editor’s note 3.

necessity, cruel, as the Rambam's added comment very clearly expresses.

We might perhaps add, as a possible homiletic source for R. Natan's view, that the verse ends "as the Lord commanded Moses." This phrase is basically superfluous since the chapter begins with, "And the Lord spoke to Moses saying [...] and Moses passed God's words on to the people." (And as we have noted above, there cannot be superfluous words in the Torah.) In the subsequent verses which describe how God's orders are carried out, there is no explicit mention that their actions were in accordance with God's command to Moses. What then does this phrase add? Perhaps R. Natan (or his earlier source) understood it as teaching that such military actions must include the element of compassion, for since God is merciful, so must we be merciful, that is, *imitatio dei* (see *Exodus* 34:6, *B. Shabbat* 133b, *Y. Pea* I ad init., and in a different formulation in *Targum Yonatan* to *Deuteronomy* 20:10), and it is this that is hinted at by this additional phrase.⁵²

⁵² Here we have employed a very common method used in rabbinic exegesis of biblical verses. See, for example, Rashbam's commentary to the opening of *Genesis* (as cited by Maori *ibid.*: 47), and see his note 37 (*ibid.*: 52):

Most of the *halakhot* derive from superfluities in the text or the changes from the language in which the simple sense apparent of Scripture can be written to language from which the main point of a *derashah* can be derived; e.g., "These are the generations of heaven and earth in their being created [*bhbr'm*]" (*Genesis* 2:4), and the Sages interpreted by *derash*—through Abraham (*b'brham*) from the lengthiness of the expression, since there was no need to say "*bhbr'm*."

He further writes in his commentary to *Genesis* 37:2 (Maori *ibid.*):

The essence of Torah is to teach and inform us, through the hints of *peshat*, the *haggadot*, *halakhot* and *dinim*, by means of extended phraseology, and with the aid of the thirty-two principles of R. Eliezer the son of R. Yose the Galilean and of the thirteen principles of R. Yishmael.

R. Baruch halevi Epstein, who also frequently uses this methodology, in his *Torah Temimah to Leviticus 31:7*: 374 n. 9, also discusses this same question. I quote him in full:

It is not clear why the Rambam ruled in accordance with R. Natan, in opposition to the Sages. It is also not well clarified what he meant saying that it was derived *mi-pi-ha-shmuah*, “from the mouth of tradition,” for where is such a thing hinted at? And from where did R. Natan derive his *novum* (*hiddush*)?

Perhaps we may suggest a possible source from that which we find in *Y. Sheviit* 6:1, that Joshua sent three explicit warnings before entering into the land [of Canaan], the first: who wishes to run away may do so [...]. And, behold, it is in no way clear how did Joshua knew to act thus. And we are forced to assume that he learned to do so from Moses, who acted thus in the wars he directed. So clearly, this is in accordance with R. Natan’s view that he left a place through which the enemy could escape. And on this *beraita* [in *Y. Sheviit*] did R. Natan base his ruling, and since that [*Sheviit*] *beraita* is anonymous and is in accordance with R. Natan’s view—circular reasoning?!—for this reason Rambam ruled accordingly. And this is what he meant by *mi-pi-ha-shmuah*, namely, from Joshua’s actions they learned that this was how Moses acted.

And the reason that the fourth side is left open is because they would not do so leaving no ways for escape, the enemy out of despair would fight to the end of their strength making the task of overcoming them more difficult, and this would not be the case if they were left with a chance of escape.

Compare what we cited above from the Rambam. And on *Y. Sheviit* 6:1, see *Y. Tamar, Alei Tamar*, vol. 2, Givataim: 83.

In *Targum Yonatan ibid.* the word parallel to that of *Y. Sheviit* is “*pulin*.” This word appears a number of times in the *Targumim*, such as *Exodus* 9:7, 9:27, 10:16; *Numbers* 16:12. The meaning turns to be clear from the contexts, namely, a messenger, but the etymology is unclear. S. Krauss, in his *Griechische und Lateinische Lehnwörter in Talmud, Midrash und Targum* (vol. 2, Berlin, 1899: 425b, s.v. פּוּלִין), suggests *diploi = duunvires*, which Löw rightly rejects on the spot. J. Levy, in his *Chaldäisches*

Recently, Adiel Schremer, in his thought-provoking essay *Towards Critical Halakhic Studies* (pp. 36–37),⁵³ gave yet another example of this phenomenon:

In a famous *baraita*, found in the Tannaitic midrash on *Leviticus*, the *Sifra* [=Torah Cohanim; Metzora Parsheta 5:12], and in both Talmudim, the Babylonian Talmud [*B. Shabbat* 64b] and the Palestinian Talmud [*y. Gittin* ad fin.], Rabbi Aquiva rejects the traditional accepted and authoritative interpretation of *Lev.* 15:33, according to which the words והדוה בנדחה are understood to mean that during her menstrual period a woman must actively take measures to be filthy and repulsive in her husband's eyes.⁵⁴ That accepted interpretation was held by "The Early Sages" (זקנים)

Wörterbuch über die Targumim (vol. 2, Leipzig, 1881: 256b, s.v. פולין), lists the references, but offers no etymology. I found no clear references in Jastrow *ibid.*, and Kohut, *Aruch Completum*. The Yerushalmi text we have cited has פריסטיגות, while a close parallel in *Leviticus Rabba* 17:6 (ed. Margalioth, p. 386 line 2) has: פרוזודוגמאות. (See my *A Dictionary of Greek and Latin Legal Terms in Rabbinic Literature*, Ramat Gan, 1984: 157, s.v. פרוזודוגמא, for full references and variant readings.) This corresponds to the Greek **prostagma* (=prostagé): decree (*ibid.*). But פולין, in all the loci that we have found it in the *Targum* clearly does not mean decree, but some kind of messenger, who were sent to deliver (*de-shadar*) a message. I would tentatively suggest relating the word to the Greek *phulé*, which has a secondary meaning: representative of a tribe. (See *A Greek–English Lexicon*, by H.G. Liddell, R. Scott, and H.S. Jones, New Edition, Oxford, 1940: 1961b, s.v. *phulé* II. 2.) Thus *pulim* (Aramaic plural form) would mean representative envoys.

⁵³ Adiel Schremer, *Towards Critical Halakhic Studies*, New York, 2010 (Tikvah Working Paper 0410).

⁵⁴ Cf. *B. Yevamot* 87b where the verse in *Proverbs* 3:17 "its ways are the ways of pleasantness" (cf. above sect. 3 ad init.) is cited as the halachic justification for developing a certain permit for a wife in order that her husband not find her repulsive (Rashi *ibid.*). Similarly, this argument—*mimasei a-gavrai hu*—is found *ibid.* 15a in a different halachic context, utilizing the same verse.

(הראשונים), a technical term in classical rabbinic texts which indicates the antiquity of the tradition. In contrast to the opinion of these Early Sages, Rabbi Aquiva reasoned that, “If so, she will be considered unfitting by her husband, and he might be inclined to divorce her.” As such a result was considered undesirable by Rabbi Aquiva, he re-interpreted the words of the Torah so as to mean that a woman must adorn herself during her menstrual period.⁵⁵

Now, consider Rabbi Aqiva’s argument. He does not base himself on any Scriptural text. Neither does he claim that the manner by which the Early Sages understood the words of the Torah is simply wrong. Rather, he claims that such an understanding as held by the Early Sages, that is, accepted by the tradition up to his own days, might yield undesirable results. He is then putting forward a new understanding of the Torah, which is based on, and motivated by, his understanding of the institution of marriage and his value judgment concerning divorce. By no means are these considerations presented by the *midrash* as stemming from the Torah! Rather, they reflect Rabbi Aquiva’s perceptions of that which is good and right, and these perceptions shape, in turn, his *halakhic* stance.

⁵⁵ See Rambam, *Hilhot Issurei Biah* 11:19; A woman is permitted to adorn herself during the period of her impurity (*bi-yemei nidatah*), so that she should not be disgusted by her husband. See *Y. Gittin* 9:11, according to which one may divorce one’s wife even if she spoiled his meal, and R. Akiva adds: even if he found another more beautiful than her. Hence, explain the commentators, she must be permitted to adorn herself during the days of her period, lest he find someone else to satisfy his taste. See further *Mareh ha-Panim* and *Sheyarei Korban* ad loc. See also Moshe Halbertal, *Interpretative Revolutions in the Making*, Jerusalem, 1994: 16–17.

And though we have by no means exhausted the sources,⁵⁶ I believe we have clearly demonstrated the continuing policy of “charitable” non-literal interpretation of Talmud (i.e., canonic) texts to mitigate the cruelty that they would appear to record, and thus encourage a more humane approach.

However, here we may ask ourselves, why the Torah formulated these rulings in such a *misleading* fashion. Surely, if the intent was so different from the formulation, the Scriptures should have expressed themselves in an unequivocal fashion, to meet its own ethical principles. One possible answer is that the text was meant to be understood in different ways at different times, each interpretation being fitting to the socio-cultural standards of the time. Thus, at an earlier stage stronger cautionary incentives might be required, as society evolved and a different set of moral standards developed the text was to be understood differently. And this, indeed, was the view of R. Naftali Zvi Yehudah Berlin, the Netziv, in his commentary to the *Pentateuch*, namely, that many verses are to be interpreted at two different levels: (1) the meaning intended for the generation in the wilderness and (2) that

⁵⁶ Additional sources may be found in Kasher *ibid.*: 263–270. One of the examples he cites (on p. 266) is how the rabbis interpreted the verse in *Exodus* 21:6, which states that the Jewish slave who has his ear bored with an awl shall serve his master for ever (*ve-avado le-olam*). The rabbis interpreted *le-olam* (forever) as meaning “until the Jubilee year” (*B. Kiddushin* 15a; see Kasher *ibid.*: 41–42 and his nn. 139–142). The Rashbam agrees that the *Peshat* of the verse means “throughout all his life,” and so, too, the Gaon of Vilna in his *Aderet Eliyahu*. Nonetheless, the rabbis interpreted *le-olam* as “up to the Jubilee year,” which could actually be the following year. Thus, the rabbis shortened the period of slavery even of one who wished to remain under his master’s domination. See also Kasher’s continuing discussion of the Rambam’s view on this issue that when there is no Jubilee the word *olam* is taken in its literal sense, and the slave remain in servitude until his dying day. But subsequent dissenting opinions argued that when there is no Jubilee year, there can be no voluntary continuance of slavery (*Shaagat Aryeh ha-Haddashot*, by R. Arie Leib, with notes by his son Asher, Vilna 1874, sect. 15, on the basis of *B. Eruvin* 33 and *B. Kiddushin* 15a, Kasher *ibid.*).

intended for all subsequent generations. (See his introduction to *Leviticus*.)

Furthermore, there is a basic assumption in rabbinic thinking that the Torah is an “encoded text” in which there are embedded a multitude of meanings.⁵⁷ Judaism expressed this complex notion⁵⁸

⁵⁷ This is a crucially important notion for the understanding of rabbinic thinking. It has been admirably analyzed by Barbara A. Holdrege, in her pioneering *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (New York, 1996: 361–366), in a section entitled “Interpretation of the Torah.” Because of its importance and clarity of exposition, I shall cite considerable portions of that section, for which see the Appendix. Holdrege goes on to discuss the nature of Kabbalistic hermeneutics (*ibid.*: 366–375). On the forty-nine ways of declaring something pure and forty-nine impure, see M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah* (vol. 17, New York, 1956: 305–307).

The notion that words can have multiple layers of meaning finds a parallel in Indic hermeneutics. For their rhetoricians identify three *ṛttis* in words: *Abhidhā* (primary potency of a word), *Lakṣaṇā* (secondary potency), and *Vyañjanā* (tertiary potency). These three *ṛttis* produce three types of meanings: *vācyārtha* (directly expressed, literal meaning), *lakṣyārtha* (indirectly expressed, figurative meaning), and *vyaṅgyārtha* (implied meaning), which latter has a capacity of suggestiveness of implications differing from and beyond the former two. Similarly, Buddhism employs a number of hermeneutic methodologies for the understanding of texts, such as *abhiprāya* or contextual meanings used for decoding a passage, *abhisam̐dhi* for decoding a sacred source, etc. But here we have exceeded the bounds of this study. There is a considerable bibliography on these methods of hermeneutics, such as: P.C. Muraleemadhavan (ed.), *Indian Theories of Hermeneutics*, Bharatiya Book Corp., 2002; Krishna Roy, *Hermeneutics: East and West*, Allied Publ. Ltd., 1993; Hari Mahon Jha, *Trends of Linguistic Analysis in Indian Philosophy*, Varanasi, 1981; Kunjunni K. Raja, *Indian Theories of Meaning*, Madras, 1963; Korada Subrahmanyam, *Theories of Language: Oriental and Occidental*, New Delhi, 2008; Jai Singh, *Verbal Testimony in Indian Philosophy*, Delhi, 1990; and A. Amaladass, *Indian Exegesis: Hindu-Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Chennai, 2003.

⁵⁸ See Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, in the introduction to his *Igrot Moshe, Orah Hayyim* (vol. 1, New York, 1959), who distinguishes between “*ha-emet le-horaah*,” truth as to adjudication, and “*ha-emet klapei shmaia*,” the real

by saying that when Moses went up to heaven to receive the Torah [our sacred text], the angels showed him for every single detail forty-nine facets to forbid something and forty-nine facets to permit it,⁵⁹ while other sources speak of seventy possible

truth or “the truth that is in heaven.” For a deeper understanding of Rav Feinstein’s position, see R. Shabtai ha-Cohen Rappaport, “*Zichru Torat Mosheh Avdi: le-Darcho shel Hgr”a Feinstein be-Pesikah be-Sheelot Zemaneinu*,” *Mamlechet Kohanim ve-Goi Kadosh: Kovetz Maamarim le-Nishmat David ha-Cohen H-”yd* (Jerusalem, 1989: 367–384, and especially 379). See also Yaakov Blidstein, “*Ha-Emet shel ha-Dayyan ke-Chli Pesikah*,” *Dinei Yisrael* 24 (2007: 120–122). This by no means exhausts the subject, but those references point to various ways of understanding the issue.

⁵⁹ See *Ritba* (13th–14th cent.) to *B. Eruvin* 13b; *B. Gittin* 6b; *Midrash Psalms* 12:7 (ed. Buber, pp. 104–108). Moses Nahmanides, The Ramban (1194–1270), basing himself on a Midrash, wrote (*Peirushei ha-Torah le-Rabbeinu Mosheh ben Nahman [ha-Ramban]*, ed. H.D. Chavel, Jerusalem, 1959: 3) as follows:

Fifty levels of understanding were created in the world, and they were all conveyed to Moses, apart from one, as it says, “You have made me slightly less than angels” (*Psalms*, 8:6).

(Cited from E. Wolfson, *Al Derech Ha-Emet*, Jerusalem, 1978: 109–112; M. P. Weisblum, *The Hermeneutics of Mediaeval Jewish Thought: Understanding the Linguistic Codes of Rashi and Nahmanides*, Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter, 2007: 106; and *ibid.*: 99–228.) This passage is based on *B. Rosh ha-Shanah* 21b, which relates (in the name of Rav or Shmuel, mid 3rd cent. C.E.) that “fifty gateways of understanding (*shaarei binah*) were created in the world, and all were given to Moses, less one,” and then the verse in *Psalms* 8:6 is cited. Ramban, in the continuation of that passage seems to say that with these fifty gateways of understanding the world was created (see Chavel ad loc.).

Ramban (*ibid.*: 3–4; Weisblum pp. 107–108) states as follows:

And they have the tradition that according to the Kabbalah the numbers [of the levels of understanding] are fifty, less one. And it is possible that the level is known exclusively to the exalted Creator, who did not convey it to his creations. And do not look at their expression ‘were created in the world’ [apparently referring to all fifty]

interpretations of the Torah, like seventy sparks emitted from an anvil struck by a hammer.⁶⁰

because that refers to the majority, and the one stage was not created. And this number is indicated in the Torah in the explanation regarding the Counting of the Omer and the Counting of the Jubilee Year, when I shall state a *Sod* in that connection, when I reach that point, may it be the will of the Holy One, blessed be He.

See Chavel's notes ad loc. with references to related sources. See further Haviva Pdaya, *Ha-Ramban: Hitalut Zeman Mahzori ve-Text Kadosh* (*Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text*) (Tel-Aviv, 2003: 135–142), on the “fifty gateways to understanding.” And see also *Mishnat R. Eliezer* (ed. H.G. Enelow, New York, 1933: 45–46, in editor's notes). On the word *taamim* (fifty *taamim*) or *panim*, or *middot* meaning in some sources “meanings,” “levels of Understanding,” etc., see B.Z. Bacher, *Erchei Midrash* (transl. A.Z. Rabinowitz, Tel-Aviv, 1923: 45–46 sect. 9, 193–196 sect. 9 = W. Bacher, *terminologie*, vol. 1: 66ff., vol. 2: 157). We could here further expand upon this fascinating subject, but this will suffice.

⁶⁰ See, for example, M. Rosenzweig, “*Eilu va-Eilu Divrei Elohim Hayyim: Halakhic Pluralism and Theories of Controversy*,” M. Sokol ed., *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy*, Northvale, N.J. 1992: 104–118; Avi Sagi, *The Open Canon: On the Meaning of Halachic Discourse*, London, 2007, etc. I have discussed this in considerable detail in chapter 3 of my (forthcoming) book *The Many Paths of Nostra Aetate: The Revolution and its Achievements*, Jerusalem.

An interesting homiletic “extension” of this notion is to be found in R. Baruch ha-Levi Epstein's comment in his *Torah Temimah* to *Deuteronomy* 27:8. There the Scriptural verse directs that when the Children of Israel cross over the Jordan into the Land of Israel, they should set up great stones covered with plaster, “And thou shalt write upon the stones all the words of this law very plainly” (*kol divrei ha-torah ha-zot ba'er heiteiv*). And upon these last two words the *Mishnah* in *M. Sotah* 7:1 explains: “In seventy tongues.” Epstein begins by stating that various commentators explained that these “seventy tongues” were so that all the nations of the world—traditionally in rabbinic thought, seventy—could know what was written in the Torah. However, he notes that it is almost impossible to imagine this whole text with seventy translations inscribed on a stone, however, immense though it might be. And he therefore suggests that perhaps “Torah” here only applies to the Ten Commandments.

This notion that the Torah has multifaceted meanings runs throughout the history of rabbinic exegesis. Thus Prof. Nahum Sarne, in his *Studies in Biblical Interpretation* (p. 133), writes:⁶¹

This doctrine of the multiple senses of Scripture is clearly and specifically enunciated in the Talmud in two statements: the first is, "One text may yield several meanings" (that is, simultaneously), an observation that accompanies a proof-text citation of *Psalm* 62:12: 'One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard.' The other exegetical rule is, "A biblical text may not depart from its straightforward meaning." This principle occurs three times in the Talmud (*Shabbat* 63a; *Yevamot* 11, *Bava Batra* 24a). Rashi [1040–1105] combined both of them. In his introduction to *Canticles*, he declares, "a single biblical text may yield several meanings, but (in the long run) the text may not depart from the *sensus literalis*" (the plain, straightforward meaning). This statement is another way of saying that the latter must take preference over all other interpretations. To state this specifically in connection with *Canticles*

As an alternative explanation, he suggests that "seventy tongues" is to be understood as in the *Zohar Leviticus, Raayah Mehemna* 20a, that the "seventy tongues are the seventy aspects of Torah." (R. Reuven Margalio, in his note 18 to this *Zohar* passage refers us to *B. Sanhedrin* 17a and his discussion in his *Margalio ha-Yam to Sanhedrin*, vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1958: 38–39, namely that a member of the Sanhedrin must be able to purify the reptile through numerous arguments, one hundred and fifty according to *B. Eruvin* 13b, etc.) Epstein continues to demonstrate that the Hebrew word *Lashon*—tongue or language— in rabbinic parlance can also mean "aspect" or "meaning." According to this, "*ba'er heitiev*"—"very plainly"— is explained by the *Mishnah* as meaning that the text could be understood in seventy different ways. And although this may not be the *Peshat*, the plain meaning of the biblical verse, nor even of the Mishnaic statement, it does reflect the basic rabbinic notion of multiple meanings to the Scriptural text.

⁶¹ Nahum Sarne, *Studies in Biblical Interpretation*, Philadelphia, 2000.

seems to me to be especially significant. These two modes of exegesis have come to be known in Hebrew as *Peshat* and *Derash*.⁶²

Furthermore, there is a widely accepted notion of *Pardes*⁶³ (literally: orchard), understood through its acronym as follows: *Peshat*—literal understanding; *Remez*—literally hint, that is, somewhat oblique interpretation; *Derash*—homiletical exegesis; and *Sod*—literally secret, that is, esoteric mystical insight.⁶⁴ These are hierarchically arranged (usually as *Peshat*, *Derash*, *Remez*, *Sod*) as different levels of understanding of the same basic sacred (biblical) text, all of which are legitimate explications, that is, truthful.⁶⁵ And on occasions, these various levels may even

⁶² On Rashi's notion of *Peshat* and *Derash*, see B. Gelles, "Partnership of 'Peshat' and 'Derash' in Rashi's Exegesis," *Rashi et la Culture juive en France du Nord au moyen âge*, ed. Gilbert Dahan et al., Paris 1997; E.E. Urbach, "How did Rashi Merit the title 'Parshandata'?", *Rashi*, Paris 1933; M.P. Weisblum *ibid.*: 27–97 (with additional bibliographic references).

⁶³ From the Persian, whence Greek, and of course the English "paradise."

⁶⁴ Mosheh Halbertal, in his essay *Seter ve-Galui: Ha-Sod u-Gevuloteuh ba-Masoret ha-Yehudit bi-Yemei ha-Benayim* (*Yeriot* 2, eds. E. Reiner, Y. Ta-Shma, G. Efrat, 2001: 33–34), explains that *sod*, that is, the esoteric approach to biblical exegesis, constitutes an additional level of interpretation broadening the legitimate "understanding" of the text in an almost infinite degree, so that what one reads in the text may have a variety of meanings some of which appear to be extremely distant from the literal meaning. He continues to say that in this way new notions, often called from outside sources, be they magical, astrological, or otherwise become, as it were, assimilated, becoming part of the Jewish (mystical) tradition. He demonstrates (pass.) this from the writings of Avraham ibn Ezra, Ramban and others, and discusses the broader implications of this approach. Here again, this is a vast and complex field, and is beyond the scope of this study.

⁶⁵ On the notion of *Peshat* and *Derash* and the relationship between them, see David Weiss Halivni, *P'shat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis*, New York and Oxford, 1991; Yehudah Copperman, *Li-Fshuto shel Mikra*, Jerusalem, 1974; idem, *Kedushat Peshuto shel Mikra*, Jerusalem, 2009; Y. Maori, "The Approach of Classical Jewish Exegetes to *Peshat* and *Derash* and its implications for teaching Bible Today,"

Tradition 31/3 (1984): 40–53; M. Arendt, “Peshuto shel Mikra and Halachic Probability: Remarks on Y. Copperman’s Essay,” *HaMaayan* 15/1 (1975): 59–63; S. Atlas, *Netivot ha-Mishpat ha-Ivri*, New York, 1978: 83–129; M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 17, New York, 1956: 286–312, section entitled “Pshuto shel Mikra.”

We should further note this ideological “trend” continued into the 19th century in a direct response to the Reform Movement in Western Europe and the *Haskalah* Movement in Eastern Europe, a number of great commentaries were written to the *Pentateuch*, all aimed at showing the inseparable unity between the Written and the Oral Law, ultimately blurring, or even denying the distinction between *Peshat* and *Derash*. They are *Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabbalah*, by R. Yaakov Tzvi Mecklenberg, Leipzig, 1839; *Ha-Torah ve-ha-Mitzvah*, by R. Meir Loeb (Leibush) Malbim, Breslau, 1844; the Commentary of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, 1867–1878; and *Torah Temimah*, by R. Baruch ha-Levi Epstein, Vilna, 1904. In many ways they continue the way forged by R. Eliyahu of Wilna, in his *Aderet Eliyahu*, Halberstaam, 1839–1840, some going even further than him. Thus Mecklenberg summed up his view as follows:

Apart from our faith in the truth of the Oral Law we are duty bound not to rest in our studies until we have understood the complete inner unity of the Written and the Oral Law, so that there is in our mind and conviction not the slightest difference between the truth of the *Peshat* and that of the *Derash*.

While the Malbim goes so far as to declare that “the *Derash* alone is the *Peshat*” —*ha-derash levado hu ha-peshat*. See Dayan I. Grunfeld’s introduction to Isaac Levy’s translation of Hirsch’s commentary, *Genesis* (2nd edition, Jerusalem, 1972: x et seq.) for a characterizing of the various approaches of these scholars. See also Yehudah Cooperman’s introductory pamphlet to Mecklenberg (*Pirkei Mavo le-Peirush Ha-Ketav ve-ha-Kabbalah al ha-Torah*, Jerusalem, 1986.)

This, too, is too broad a subject to be discussed here, as it touches upon the great polemic discussion between the Orthodox and the Reforms movements during that period, and on which there is a considerable literature.

Perhaps *Peshat* and *Derash* can be compared with the Buddhist notion of Two Truths (or: Two Modes of Reality). A.K. Warder, in his *Indian Buddhism* (Delhi, 1980: 150–151), explains:

The interpretation of the schools distinguishes everyday language as literally “concealing” (*saṃvṛti*) from philosophical language as “ultimate” (*paramārtha*) to interpret any text in the *Tripitika* we have first to settle whether it is of the latter kind, which they called “pacing its meaning drawn out” (*nītārtha*), i.e. to be taken as it stands, as an explicit and definitive statement, or of the former kind, which they called “having its meaning requiring it to be drawn out” (*neyārtha*), i.e. which requires to be restarted to relate it to the philosophical standpoint of an ultimate truth.

Here we shall briefly, and somewhat superficially, touch upon this important, but somewhat bewildering, Buddhist concept, namely *The Two Truths* doctrine. This has a long and complex history, multiple variations, regional differences from India to China and onwards, and a mind-boggling medley of variants, both philosophical and mystical. There is a considerable bibliography on this subject, and I shall only give reference to certain selected items, so that this is by no means a comprehensive list: Linda Brown Holt, “From India to China: Transformations in Buddhist Philosophy,” *The Journal of Traditional Eastern Health and Fitness*, 1955; Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development*, New York, 1959; K.N. Jayatilleke, *Early Buddhist Theory of Knowledge*, London, 1963; T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism: A Study of the Mādhyamika System*, London, 2013; Guy Newland, *The Two Truths in the Mādhyamika Philosophy of the Gelukba Order of Tibetan Buddhism*, New York, 1992; Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition*, Princeton N.J., 1995 (with a fine bibliography).

The Buddhist doctrine of the Two Truths (or: Modes of Reality) differentiates between two levels of truth (*satya*)—the “conventional” or “relative” truth (*saṃvṛtisatya*) and the “ultimate” truth (*paramārthasatya*). Conventional truth may be interpreted as “obscurative truth” or “that which obscures true nature,” and as a result it is constituted by appearances of mistaken awareness. Conventional truth would be the appearance that includes a duality of apprehender and apprehended and the objects perceived within it. Ultimate truth is free from the duality of apprehender and apprehended. This distinction between the two truths was most fully developed by Nāgārjuna (ca. 2nd cent. C.E.) of the Madhyamaka school.

When Buddhism came to China from Gandhāra (an area in today's Afghanistan and Pakistan) and India in the first/second century C.E., it was initially adopted to Chinese culture and Neo-Taoist concepts were assimilated into Chinese Buddhism. Various philosophers developed a variety of variations on the Two Truths doctrine and integrated it into the Twofold Mystery Daoist doctrine, according to which human society is inevitably hierarchical. (Livia Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition*, Princeton, 1992: 144.)

We have digressed somewhat, but I believe the comparison between *Peshat* and *Derash* with the "Two Truths Doctrine" is of interest. We might also find a somewhat similar notion found in Christian exegetical thinking. Thus St. Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274), in his *Questiones quodlibetales* (ed. P. Mandonnet, Paris, 1926, VII, 14: 275), writes:

Any truth can be manifested in two ways, by things or by words. Words signify things and one thing can signify another. The Creator of things, however, can not only signify anything by words, but can also make one thing signify another. That is why the Scriptures contain a twofold truth. One lies in the things meant by the words used—that is the literal sense. The other in the way things become figures of other things, and in this consists the spiritual sense.

This is further explained by E.H. Gombrich, in his *Symbolic Images* (*Gombrich on the Renaissance*, vol. 2, London, 1972: 14), as follows:

The allusion here is to the things which are mentioned in the narrative of the Bible and which are seen as signs or portents of things to come. If the Scriptures tell us that Aaron's rod 'brought forth buds, and bloomed blossoms, and yielded almonds' (*Numbers*, xvii.8) this could be interpreted as foreshadowing the cross, the almond itself providing a symbol, its shell being bitter like the passion but its kernel sweet like the victory of the redemption.

But St. Thomas warns us not to take this technique as a method of translating unambiguous signs into discursive speech. There is no authoritative dictionary of the significance of things, as distinct from words, and in his view there cannot be such a dictionary:

It is not due to deficient authority that no compelling argument can be derived from the spiritual sense, this lies rather in the nature of similitude in which the spiritual

contradict one another. Thus, as we have seen above, though the simple straightforward biblical text talks of “an eye for an eye,” etc. (*Exodus* 21:23–26, etc.), rabbinic exegesis interprets that passage as monetary remuneration,⁶⁶ and this is understood to be the “correct” (i.e., truthful) meaning of the passage.⁶⁷

sense is founded. For one thing may have similitude to many; for which reason it is impossible to proceed from any thing mentioned in the Scriptures to an unambiguous meaning. For instance the lion may mean the Lord because of one similitude and the Devil because of another.

St. Thomas, as will be perceived, again links this lack of a definite meaning of ‘things’ with the doctrine of metaphor. But where metaphors are conceived to be of divine origin this very ambiguity becomes a challenge to the reader of the Sacred Word. He feels that the human intellect can never exhaust the meaning or meanings inherent in the language of the Divine. *Each such symbol exhibits what may be called a plenitude of meanings which meditation and study can never reveal more than partially.* [My emphasis, D.S.]

⁶⁶ But see M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 17, New York, 1956: 261. We should, however, not oversimplify the issue. Thus, Rambam (i.e. Maimonides) justifies this “non-literal” interpretation by stating in *Hilchot Hovel u-Mazik* 1:2 as follows:

“Eye for eye”—from tradition (*mi-pi ha-shemuah*) they learned that [the verse] is speaking that “for” (*tahat*) denotes payment in money.

In other words, he posits an oral tradition (*mi-pi ha-Shemua*) directing the manner in which to interpret this verse (or these verses). Cf. Rambam *ibid.* 2:11; *Shulhan Aruch*, *Hoshen Mishpat* 420:17; Maharal mi-Prague, *Gur Aryeh* to *Leviticus* *ibid.*; and Yehudah ha-Levi, *Kuzari* 3:47. (For a detailed analysis of this issue see M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah* *ibid.*: 258–270; Copperman *ibid.*: 68.) Similarly we saw above the view of R. Avraham ben ha-Rambam (S. Eppenstein, *Likutim, Le-David Tzvi, Sefer ha-Yovel le-R.D. Tzvi Hoffmann*, Berlin, 1914, Kasher, *ibid.*: 259), who wrote quite explicitly:

“An eye for an eye”—the plain meaning of the text (*pshuto shel mikra*) is of itself self-evident [...].

See further the more recent discussions of R. Yehuda Breuer, “An eye for an Eye,” (*Ayin Tachat Ayin*) [Hebrew], *Alei Etzion* 17 (2012): 95–108; a response by Menahem ben Yashar in *Megadim* 24, 1995: 135–138, and a counter-response by Breuer in *Megadim* 25 (1996): 139. I have discussed this and related issues in considerable detail in my book, entitled *The Importance of the Community Rabbi*, Jerusalem: Urim, 2020, Appendix 6: 275–286.

⁶⁷ See the interesting study of James E. Davis, *Lex Talionis in Early Judaism and the Exhortation of Jesus in Matthew 5:38–42*, New York, 2005. See also David Daube’s comments in his essay “Rabbinic Modes of Interpretation and Hellenistic Rhetoric” (first published in *HUCA* 22, 1949: 239–264, and republished in the *Collected Works of David Daube*, vol. 1, *Talmudic Law*, ed. Calum M. Carmichael, Berkeley, 1992: 340–341):

Secondly, Hillel claimed that any gaps in Scriptural law might be filled in with the help of certain modes of reasoning—a good, rhetorical theory. Cicero has much to say about “ratiocination.” By which “from that which is written there is derived a further point not written,” while Auctor ad Herennium defines “ratiocination” as the method to be applied where “the judge has to deal with a case not falling under a statute of its own, yet covered by other statutes in view of a certain analogy.”

Thirdly, the result of such interpretation was to be of the same status as the text itself, was to be treated as if directly enjoined by the original lawgiver. This view also can be paralleled. Of a certain institution, Gaius tells us that it is called “statutory” because “though there is no express provision about it in the statute (the XII Tables), yet it has been accepted through interpretation as if it had been introduced by the statute. Another time he even omits the “as if,” representing as laid down by the XII Tables a rule in reality deduced from that code by its interpreters. As is well known, the term *ius civile* was occasionally employed for the body of law evolved by interpretation. This reflects a stage where the law evolved by interpretation was so different from, and so much fuller than, the statute law to which it attached that it had practically buried the latter and usurped its place. [My emphasis, D.S.; the numerous references in his footnotes are omitted.]

The degree to which the rabbinic hermeneutical rules were influenced by Hellenistic rhetoric and Alexandrian methods of interpretation is discussed by Daube in the aforementioned essay and in his study “Alexandrian Methods of Interpretation and the Rabbis,” *Collected Works* *ibid.*: 357–376 (first published in *Festschrift Hans Lewald*, Basel, 1953: 27–44, and also in *Essays in Greco-Roman and Related Talmudic Literature*, ed. H.A. Fischel, New York, 1977: 165–182). See also S. Lieberman, *Greek in Jewish Palestine / Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York, 1994: 47–82, a chapter entitled “Rabbinic Interpretations of Scripture”), where he writes that “The Soferim [...] engaged in the same activity which was pursued by the Alexandrian scholars” (p. 47). This issue, however, is, beyond the scope of this study.

We might further note a partial parallel in Buddhist hermeneutics found in some Tantric sources. See, for example, Robert A.F. Thurman, “Vajra Hermeneutics,” Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (ed.), *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, Honolulu, 1988: 137–138. We may also call attention to the passage in the ancient Buddhist text *The Questions of King Melinda*, from ca. the first century B.C.E. (transl. from the Pāli by T.W. Rhys Davis, Oxford 1890, part 1: 209):

10. There is the non-inclusive expression, O king, whose meaning is non-inclusive, and the non-inclusive expression whose meaning is inclusive; there is the inclusive expression whose meaning is non-inclusive, and the inclusive expression whose meaning is inclusive. And the meaning, in each case, should be accepted accordingly. And there are five ways in which the meaning should be ascertained—by the connection, and by taste, and by the tradition of the teachers, and by the meaning, and by abundance of reasons. And herein “connection” means the meaning as seen in the Sutta itself, “taste” means that it is in accordance with other Suttas, “the tradition of the teachers” means what they hold, “the meaning” means what they think, and “abundance of reasons” means all these four combined.

The translator comments (*ibid.* n. 1) as follows:

This is much more obscure in Pāli than in English. In the Pāli the names of each of the five methods are ambiguous.

See further the eighty-two dilemmas and their solution in part I and part II (Oxford 1894). The *Melinda Pāñha* purports to record a dialogue

4. The Principle of Charity

We shall now turn our attention to a very important study by Moshe Halbertal entitled *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*,⁶⁸ where (pp. 27ff.) he writes on “Canon and the Principle of Charity.” There he explains what Willard Quine has called “the principle of charity,”⁶⁹ being an “interpretive method that would yield an optimally successful text.” He continues (p. 28):

Ronald Dworkin⁷⁰ extends Quine principle of charity in interpretation to the second level. Dworkin claims that the choice between competing interpretations is governed by the criterion of which interpretation shows the work in the best light. In legal interpretation the standard for the best possible interpretation is not aesthetic *but moral*. *We will select the interpretation that makes the best moral case of the legal material*. According to Dworkin, even those who claim that we must discover the original intention of the legislator, base their opinion on the belief that this is the best possible way of reading a legal text. The writer’s intention does not provide an independent criterion for establishing the meaning of the text; Dworkin rejects that standard and argues that those who adopt it do so for political reasons. In their view, this is the only way that the legal system can achieve stability and be freed from the arbitrariness of the interpreter—the judge. Their prime guiding principle of interpretation is a value judgment concerning the

between the Buddhist sage Nāgasena and the Indo-Greek king Menander I of Bactria, who is noted for having become a patron of Buddhism.

⁶⁸ Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*, Cambridge Mass. and London, 1977.

⁶⁹ See W.V.O. Quine, *World and Object*, Cambridge Mass., 1960: 58–59.

⁷⁰ See Christine Hayes, “Legal Truth, Right Answers and Bad Answers: Dworkin and the Rabbis,” *Dinei Yisrael* 25 (2008): 73x–121xx.

optimal interpretative strategy, not an objective standard for interpretation.⁷¹ Moreover, according to

⁷¹ A somewhat similar approach was put forward by David Bastow, in his interesting essay "Continuity and Diversity in Early Buddhism," in M. Pye and R. Morgan (eds.), *The Cardinal Meaning: Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics Buddhism and Christianity*, The Hague and Paris, 1973. There (p. 104) he writes:

a) A religion contains at any one time a mass of traditional material of indeterminate extent, perhaps including texts, doctrines, rituals etc.

b) Since his material is rich enough to support an indefinite number of different interpretations, every member of the religion, or every sect or age, must choose and develop such an interpretations. He or it does this by trying to 'make the most of' the material; treating it in a way which produces what is most true, or moral, or beautiful, or spiritually significant, or moving. Of course if he can find nothing profoundly moral, true, etc. in it, he will not be or remain a member of the religion.

c) His relation to the traditional material will then be determined by the nature of the interpretation of it which he has found. The important consideration is the kind of truth accorded to the traditional material by the interpretation. This is important because the nature of one's commitment to source material depends on the kind of truth one accords to it. [...]

To return to the religious case, it can be seen that only under certain interpretations will the member commit himself to the textual details of the traditional material. If he sees it as important to him for the lofty moral insights or the profound philosophical truths it contains, he may quite consistently appropriate the insights and develop them on his own account, independently of the traditional material; for that is how such insights should be treated. Judgments about whether an interpretation is really consistent with the tradition, and therefore whether a person who adopts such an interpretation is really a member of the religion, are therefore primarily evaluative judgments; does the interpretation get at the deep truth

Dworkin, in reconstructing the writer's intention we attempt to present it in the best possible light. Interpretation is thus closely linked to evaluation, and value serves as the ultimate standard for interpretation.⁷² [My emphasis, D.S.]

He then goes on (p. 29) as follows:

In the case of a sacred text the speaker is God and it is thus by definition perfect; not only can no contradictions exist but the text is the best possible. Such an assumption naturally influences the way the text is read in relation to other sources that seem less perfect in comparison. Reading a holy text requires using the principle of charity as generously as possible in interpreting it, since it is inconceivable that such a text could err. We apply the principle of charity in our reading of a holy text not only to ensure its meaningfulness, when literal interpretation creates an impression of meaninglessness, *but also to ensure that it corresponds to the highest criteria of perfection. In the case of the Scriptures, there is an a priori interpretative commitment to show the text in the best possible light.* Conversely, the loss of this sense of obligation to the text is an undeniable sign that it is no longer perceived as holy. Making use of the principle of charity, the following principle can be stipulated: the degree of canonicity of a text corresponds to the amount of charity it receives in its interpretation. The more canonical a text, the more generous its treatment. [My emphasis, D.S.]

contained in the traditional material, or is it concerned solely with the superficial and unimportant aspects of this material. [...].

See also the continuation of his somewhat discursive discussion.

⁷² See also R. Dworkin, *Law's Empire*, Cambridge Mass., 1985: 58–63.

A conscious expression of the principle of pure charity in reading of Scripture is found in Maimonides' declaration in the *Guide to the Perplexed*:

Know that our shunning the affirmation of the eternity of the world is not due to a text figuring in the Torah according to which the world has been produced in time. For the texts indicating that the world has been produced in time are not more numerous than those indicating that the deity is a body. Nor are the gates of figurative interpretation shut in our faces or impossible of access to us regarding the subject of the creation of the world in time. For we could interpret them as figurative, as we have done when denying His corporeality (II, 25).

In point of fact, this "principle of charity" may already be found, albeit in a different formulation and within a Christian context, in the writings of Erasmus (1466–1536). Thus, for example, we read in his *Ratio*:⁷³

In the same way, to use Scripture properly it is not enough to isolate four or five little words (*quattuor aut quinque decorsisse verbula*); rather one must investigate the sources of what is said. Frequently the meaning of a passage depends on what came before. It depends on who is speaking, to whom, when, on what occasion, with what words, and in what frame of mind; what precedes the passage in question and what follows it (*a quo dicatur, cui dicatur, quo tempore, qua occasione, quibus verbis, quo animo, quid praecesserit, quid consequatur*). Only in the context of these questions can what is meant be understood from

⁷³ I quote from Kathy Eden, *Hermeneutics and the Rhetorical Tradition: Chapters in the Ancient Legacy of the Humanistic Reception* (New Haven and London, 1997: 74–77), which brings the exact bibliographic references. In her revealing book, Eden also traces the antecedents of such an approach in classical literature, for example, Cicero, Quintilian, Augustine, etc.

what is said (*quid sibi velit quod dictum est*). In this matter, there is the further rule that the meaning which we elicit from obscure words respond to the whole of Christian doctrine (*ad orbem illum doctrinae Christianae*), to the whole of Christ's life (*ad illius vitam*), and finally to natural equity (*ad aequitatem naturalem*). [...]

And elsewhere he goes further to explain:

But if this law doth seem to be something repugnant to the equity of nature (*aequitate naturali*), we must see then, whether that which is written as concerning this law by the Evangelists and Apostles in their writings, may receive some other interpretation or meaning (*interpretanda sint*) than that, which is according to the open words of the law. And I would that it should be lawful for us to do in this case, as we are told to do in other places of the Scripture. And likewise, I would that we should discuss, and examine what times, to whom, and for what occasion (*quando, quibus, qua occasione*), it was spoken, and peradventure, we shall find out the right understanding (*veram germanamque sententiam*) thereof.

So he characterizes his exegetical theory, qualifying hermeneutics as a method to recover a *sensus magis germanus*, a "meaning more original" or "more familiar," familiarity being a sense of at-homeness, and interpretation aims at understanding the *sensus germanus*, not with the signification of the "Moses' words, or *verba*, but with his *mens*, or intention."⁷⁴ And as Eden formulates it (*ibid.*: 66):

In its effort to negotiate between fixed legal statute and the infinite variety and particularity of human experience, *equity* (*epieikaia*) institutionalizes the principles of intentionality and *integrity* or wholeness

⁷⁴ See K. Eden *ibid.*: 72–73.

both in judging legal and ethical actions *and in interpreting legal documents*. [my emphasis, D.S.]

Or in the words of Basil (ca. mid 4th cent. C.E.):

“Equity subordinates the words of law to the legislator’s intentions” (*ibid.*: 45), [...] thus blurring, or even erasing, the discrepancy between *scriptures* and *voluntas*, or *sententia* (*ibid.*: 87).

So perhaps we may call his exegetic ideology the principle of equitable interpretation, which may constitute a corrective to what might appear to be the plain understanding of the text.

Referring to Halbertal (*ibid.*: 30–32), we note that he then shows that there is an opposing view, in our Jewish sources, one in which:

[...] the reader must suspend his moral judgment facing the sacred text. The reader is not required to redefine his moral principles completely, but is forbidden to accommodate the text to these principles in the face of a contradictory commandment of God. It is the text that must determine the interpreter’s concept of charity. He cannot postulate a conception of justice or truth that he formulated before his encounter with the text and still interpret the text in the best possible light. The holiness and authority of the text is so all-encompassing that it alone determines the concepts of good and evil, truth and falsity; no other criterion exists by which it can be interpreted.

This would appear to be R. Eliezer’s position, referred to above. Hence argues Halbertal (*ibid.*):

Interpretation of Scripture is thus divided into two opposing attitudes toward the principle of charity in interpretation. One claims that its nature as a sacred text demands absolute abstention from the principle of charity, since the text alone determines what is charity. [...]

These two contrary positions on reading Scripture “with charity” share one assumption: what is written in Scripture is truth. The dispute between [them] resides in their respective solutions to problems of apparent contradiction between Scripture and truth. In these cases, should Scripture be accommodated to the readers’ beliefs about truth, or should those beliefs be accommodated to the meaning of Scripture?

I believe that in the areas of *halachah* at any rate—but not necessarily in the area of philosophy also discussed by Halbertal—the overarching position is the use of the Quine-Dworkin “principle of charity” in order to reach the best possible *moral* interpretation. And if this be the tendency of the overwhelming majority of early rabbinic Sages, and subsequent authorities throughout the following generations,⁷⁵ this should

⁷⁵ David Weiss Halivni, in his *Peshat and Derash: Plain and Applied Meaning in Rabbinic Exegesis* (New York and London, 1991, pass.), has a somewhat different explanation as to rabbinic deviation from literal understanding of the Biblical text, which I find somewhat problematic. Nonetheless, my suggestions do not necessarily contradict his approach, but merely supplement it. It is in this way we may best understand the statement found in *B. Sanhedrin* 71a:

We have learned: The stubborn and rebellious son (*Deuteronomy* 21:18–21) never was and never will be. And [if so] why was it written [in the Scriptures]? To be discussed and [for this discussion] to receive a reward (*derosh ve-kabel sachar*). According to whom [was this statement made]? According to R. Yehudah, and if you wish I will say, R. Shimon. For we have learned that R. Shimon said: Can it be that because he ate a *tarteimar* (a large amount) of meat and drank half a *log* of Italian wine that his father and mother take him out to be stoned?! No, this never happened, and never will happen. And, if so, why was it written [in the Scriptures]? To be discussed and [for this discussion to] receive a reward. [...] And according to whom is that which we learned that: The condemned city (*Deuteronomy* 13:13–19)—*ir ha-nidahat*—

never was and never will be. And [if so], why was it written [in the Scriptures]? To be discussed and [for this discussion to] receive a reward, according to R. Eliezer. For we have learned: R. Eliezer said: Any city that has even a single *mezuzah* (the inscription fastened to the door post containing *Deuteronomy* 6:4–9, 11:13–21) may not become a condemned city. Why? Because the verse states that “And thou shalt gather all the spoil of it into the midst of the street thereof, and shalt burn with fire [the city and all the spoil thereof, every whit]” (*ibid.* 13 verse 16). And since, there is a *mezuzah* there, it cannot be (i.e., the city cannot be condemned), for it is written “[Ye shall utterly destroy all the places [...] and burn their groves with fire. [...] Ye shall not do so unto the Lord your God” (*ibid.* 12:2–4). (From which latter verse we learn that one may not burn or destroy the name of God, and his names are mentioned several times in the *mezuzah*; cf. *B. Sanhedrin* 56a, etc.)

On this notion of *derosh ve-kabel sachar*—discuss and receive a reward—see Reuven Margalio (Margalio *ha-Yam*, Jerusalem, 1958: 36–37, no. 12 to *B. Sanhedrin* 71a), who refers us to *Y. Nazir* 7:2, *Zohar Balak* 197a, and the interesting passage in *Sefer Hassidim* attributed to R. Yehudah he-Hasid (d. 1217) (ed. J. Wistinetzki & J. Freimann, 2nd edition, Frankfurt a.M., 1924: 439, no.1831, and ed. M.A. Gutman, Brooklyn-Elad 2015: 450):

According to him who says the rebellious son and the condemned city and the leprous houses, and similar such, never were, [...] [but] discuss and receive reward, why then were they written? Because it is impossible not to learn from them some *mitzvot*. [Thus], the rebellious son [teaches us] [...] that when a man sees his son going on an evil path, it would have been better that Absalom be killed in his youth than that through him many souls were killed, and so nothing is written in vain, as it is written, “For it is not a vain thing for you, because it is your life” (*Deuteronomy* 32:47), as it is [further] written, “They are all plain to him that understandeth” (*Proverbs* 8:9).

See additional references in Margalio and Gutman *ibid.* This, then, is the reiteration of the principle that no text in the Bible is irrelevant, and if it seems to be so, we must search for the additional message and meaning it was intended to convey. (See above section 2.)

constitute the metaphorical “guidepost” orienting our direction in *psikat halachah*, towards one in which “its ways are the ways of pleasantness.”⁷⁶

Here, I would like to explain my understanding of the theological rationale for the reinterpretation of biblical texts. For if we truly believe that our Torah is a divine formulation, and that in the words of the Maimonidean inspired *piyyut*, *Yigdal*, “God will not change His law for any for all eternity,” then we must also accept that it was intended to be understood/interpreted for all generations in accordance with their contemporary situations: that is to say, encoded or encapsulated within it are all true past, present, and future understandings. To use a simile: a given scene, let us say of inanimate objects, alters its appearance throughout the day or with the various seasons, with the changing light. A reel of photographic film will accurately and

⁷⁶ Returning to the “eye for an eye” issue, we may also comment that the lopping off a person’s limb might constitute a punishment that would warn off others from acting in this fashion, but it hardly helps the injured party. Monetary compensation is, therefore, not only a means of repentance (*teshuvah*) and expiation (*kappara*) (see Rakover’s article referred to above note 36) but also serves as a form of social amelioration (*tikun olam*), and is therefore a more satisfactory and ethical way of “interpreting” the biblical text.

Indeed, this is also the rationale behind *takanot ha-shavim*, the rule that a thief who stole a beam and built it into his house, does not have to return it, but only to give the equivalent of its monetary value. For the rabbis were clearly aware that most people would not take apart the roof of their apartment in order to return a stolen beam. So despite the fact that this is what biblical law really requires, the rabbis saw no point in trying to keep to this law as it is biblically, since the thief will neither be repentant, nor will the original owner of the beam have any sort of satisfaction, monetary or otherwise. It is far better to permit or obligate the thief to make a monetary compensation, enabling him to rectify and compensate the person from whom he stolen. Indeed, this is obviously at the basis of all the cases of damages, namely, that punishment should also be compensatory to the damaged. See in detail in my *The Importance of the Community Rabbi*, Jerusalem: Urim, 2020: 147–153, section entitled “encouraging Repentance.”

faithfully record these appearances, though each frame will be different. And not only changes in time, alter appearances, and perspectives, but also variations of angles, differation of lenses, etc. "Reality," then, in itself is new and can never be seen by the same person at two different moments (a theme made chillingly evident in the film *Rashomon*, and also in Durrell's *Alexandria quartet*).⁷⁷ So by analogy, coevally a variety of interpretations of a single text may be both truthful and legitimate.

That, I believe, is what the rabbis intimated when they said that there are multiple facets to the Torah,⁷⁸ like sparks flying off the hammered anvil, the anvil being the Torah, and the glittering sparks, those manifold comprehensions, at a bewildering variety of levels, which brilliantly illuminate the single anvil-text.⁷⁹

5. The Ideological Justification for Apparent Deviation from "Tradition"

Let us now seek to understand the ethico-ideological justification for such "charitable interpretation." But a prior question is: surely this process of "reinterpretation" is diametrically opposed to the basic value of "tradition" — *massorah* or *masoret* in Hebrew? How can one, in effect, contradict the primary understanding, or perhaps meaning, of a sacrosanct text? Surely this is in direct opposition to a fundamental basis of religious faith, namely, the firm acceptance of the sacred text, which constitute the base-line of "religious tradition." And indeed, this has been argued most recently by the Rabbinic Council of America (RCA) and the

⁷⁷ Durrell's tetralogy of novels, published between 1958 and 1960, offers the same sequence of events through several points of view, allowing individual perspectives of a single set of events, as the author explains in the Preface to the second volume of the quarter, *Balthazar* (1958). It is, therefore, an explanation of relativity and the notions of continuum and subject-object relation.

⁷⁸ *Midrash Psalms* 12:7, *B. Shabbat* 88b, *B. Sanhedrin* 34a, etc.

⁷⁹ That is why, for instance, R. Yitzhak bar Yossi Mehozaah could every day say *milin hadetin be-Oraita*, literally "new words"—that is, explanations, interpretations—in the Torah (*Zohar* 1, 63b).

Orthodox Union (OU), two very prominent Jewish national religious institutions, with regard the recent move in orthodox Jewish communities to ordinate women rabbis, which according to them “is at odds with *halacha* (Jewish Law) and our *mesorah* (tradition).”⁸⁰ But no attempt was made by these authorities to define the nature of tradition.

In 1981 Edward Shils published a classic study on this question entitled *Tradition*. In his introduction he seeks to give a descriptive analysis of the concept. Thus he writes (*ibid.*: 3):⁸¹

As a temporal chain, a tradition is a sequence of variations on received and transmitted themes, in the contiguity of presentation and departure, and in descent from a common origin.

And he adds (*ibid.*: 14):

A sense of identity and a sense of filiation with earlier recipients of a tradition are different things from the actual reception of a tradition.

As to the difference between an “intellectual tradition”—in his words—and a religious/ideological one, he writes (*ibid.*: 16–17):

A distinction is sometimes made between sacred texts like the Pentateuch, the Gospels, and the Koran and the interpretations which have grown up around them such as the Talmud, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the commentaries on the Koran as well as the written record of sayings of the companions of the Prophet. The anonymous incrustations of tales about the central figures in the text—Jesus, Moses, Mohammed, and Buddha—are also *tradita*. The latter categories are sometimes referred to as “traditions,”

⁸⁰ See my *Redefining the Rebbetzin: Women with Leadership Authority According to Halachah*, Jerusalem: Urim, 2020, where I cite R. Hershel Schechter’s article in *Hakirah* 11 (2011): 15–23; the Statement of the Moetzes Gedolei Ha-Torah of America, Feb. 25, 2010; the Statement of the RCA on May 7, 2013, etc.

⁸¹ Edward Shils, *Tradition*, Chicago, 1981.

in order to distinguish them from the revealed or otherwise authoritative sacred texts around which they have been formed. Text and tradition here correspond to primary declaration and derivative interpretation. This was the standpoint taken by the Council of Trent when it pronounced both Scripture and the tradition of interpretative commentary on Scripture to be authoritative.

From the standpoint which I take here both declaration and interpretation are traditions. The physical artifacts—manuscripts—are traditions. The sacred text itself is a tradition. The “tradition” is accumulated understanding of the text; the text would be only a physical object without interpretation. The sacredness of the text sets it apart, but it would make no sense without an interpretation; yet the interpretation which makes it what it is, is regarded as different from the text. [...]

In many usages of the term “tradition” there are implicit delimitations of the substantive content of tradition. They imply that traditions are “genuine traditions” only if their substantive content is respectful of traditionality; [...].

But, as he rightly points out, even “genuine traditions: respectful of traditionality” of necessity involve “innovation,” and even if it might be the intention of the recipient to adhere strictly to the stipulation of what he has received the state of affairs is still complex (*ibid.*: 45):

[...] “strictness” itself opens questions which are not already answered and which must be answered. If it is a moral or a legal code, or a philosophical system, the very attempt by a powerful mind to understand it better will entail the discernment of hitherto unseen problems which will require new formulations; these will entail varying degrees of modification. Attempts to make them applicable to particular cases will also

enforce modifications. Such modifications of the received occur even when the tradition is regarded as sacrosanct *and the innovator might in good conscience insist that he is adhering to the traditions as received.* [My emphasis, D.S.]

Shils further explains this, as follows, while showing a deep respect for the notion of “tradition” (*ibid.*: 213):

Traditions are indispensable; they are also very seldom entirely adequate. Their sheer existence disposes those who possess them to change them. The person who possesses a tradition and who depends on it is also impelled to modify it because it is not good enough for him, even though he could never have accomplished for himself what the tradition has enabled him to do. We could say that traditions change because they are never good enough for some of those who have received them. New possibilities previously hidden are perceivable when a tradition enters into a new state.

A tradition does not change itself. It contains the potentiality of being changed; it instigates human beings to change it. There are endogenous changes, changes which originate within the tradition and are carried out by persons who have accepted it. Such a change is not “forced on them” by external circumstances; it is an outgrowth of their own relationship to the tradition. Endogenous changes are usually held to be improvements by those who make them. These “improvements” are not always accepted as such by successors or by contemporaries. [Cf. *ibid.*: 328–330.]

Further, in a chapter entitled “Why Traditions Change: Endogenous Factors,” Shils writes (*ibid.*: 216):

Sometimes the “defects” in the tradition [which we might add may be the result of cultural change] might be seen immediately on presentation; the

perception of the defects might indeed be part of the tradition itself. Often they are perceived only after long study and painstaking research by a person who at first did not perceive them. Sometimes the perception of the shortcomings of the perceived tradition is aided by the presence of another competing tradition but this is not by any means invariably so, except insofar as the tradition of the criteria of rationality, coherence, precision, and empirical veracity may be regarded as distinct from the tradition of substantive beliefs.

The development of Talmudic thought up to early modern times represents a development of a tradition of belief which occurred mainly through this kind of rational criticism, clarification, and rationalization. Of course, the postulates of the tradition—the divine inspiration of the Pentateuch and the obligation of the Jewish people to live according to the Law contained there—remained unchallenged. The task of understanding the Law required that its consistent application to known and conceivable situations be worked out. This entailed a continuous process of differentiation and generalization, by analogy and deduction, through imagining instances hitherto undealt with and in responding to problems put by applicants for rabbinical guidance and constructing correct, i.e. analogously and logically consistent, solutions. It involved bringing together and ordering the diverse views of learned rabbis in the various centers throughout the Islamic and Christian worlds where rabbinical learning was cultivated.

Codifications occurred from time to time through the work of al-Phasi, Maimonides, Jacob ben Asher, and Joseph Karo. These changed the tradition in the same comprehensive way which occurs in legal codification, i.e. readjustments in some of the elements occurred in consequence of their

rationalization; in some cases they were subsumed under a rubric which they had not been placed under before. They were given a logical relationship with each other that they had not had before. New situations were taken into account by extension of the old rules through analogy and generalization.

The changing of literary and artistic traditions is not a matter of rationalization or correction of the existing stock of valid tradition within the framework which some features of that tradition impose. The innovative work may lie very much within the tradition. It is an innovation with the intention of attaining the adequate expression of a superior insight by imagination or observation, a superior sensitivity [to a variety of conditions and situations].

So "interpretation" does not necessarily replace or correct the previous existent traditions; it does, however, change it by either adding to it, or by altering the understanding of that tradition, in accordance with newly emerging developments of moral sensitivity, etc.

We shall not further enlarge upon this critical subject, which has been so thoroughly and authoritatively discussed by Shils. Let this suffice to enable us to state what might seem to be obvious, that tradition is constantly evolving, and it does so, *inter alia*, through the medium of interpretation.

So returning to our main theme of a rabbinic justification for reinterpreting a sacred text through the medium of "charitable interpretation," this may be "reconstructed," as it were, out of a number of scattered rabbinic statements which, when fitted together, constitute what may be termed the meta-halachic basis for such charitable exegetic exposition. However, in order to understand the first proof-text we shall bring, we must preface our explanation by stating that the rabbis posited that there are two different aspects to the perception of God: that of stern and intractable justice (*middat ha-din*) and that of mercy, loving

kindness, and leniency (*middat ha-rahamim*).⁸² The first is called in biblical parlance *Elokim*, and the second the Tetragrammaton YHVH, which we enunciate as *Ha-Shem* (literally “The Name”).

In *Genesis* 1:1 we read:

In the beginning God—*Elokim*—created the heaven and the earth.

In the following thirty four verses, which describe the seven days of creation, the name *Elokim* occurs twenty seven times. However, in chapter 2 verse 4, we read:

These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the *Lord God—Ha-Shem Elokim*—made the earth and the heavens.

The Rabbis of Old (in *Genesis Rabba*, ed. Theodor Albeck 12:15, p. 113 et alia) explained this change in nomenclature as follows: God first began creating the world in according with His aspect of stern justice—*middat ha-din*, that is, as *Elokim*. But then He realized that the world could not survive under such conditions, for Mankind is weak and imperfect and if he would be subject to strict judgement to his infractions of the Law, he would not survive such judgement.⁸³ God therefore coupled to it His aspect

⁸² These two aspects of the Divine have been discussed in detail by E.E. Urbach, in his *Haza"l: Pirke Emunot ve-Deot* (The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs), Jerusalem, 1969: 396–407, especially pp. 400–401, 405–406); A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God: 1. The Names and Attributes of God*, Oxford and London, 1927: 17–40, 67–71, 181–196 (Justice), 196–208 (Goodness), etc; George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, Cambridge Mass., 1927, vol. 1: 386–400.

⁸³ See, for example, *Genesis Rabba* 12:15 (ed. Theodor-Albeck, pp. 112–113):

So spoke the Holy One blessed be He: If I create the world *be-middat ha-rahamim*, there will be but sinfulness. [If] *be-middat ha-din*, the world will not survive. Therefore I will create it both with *middat hadin* and *middat ha-rahamim*; and hopefully it will survive—*Hashem Elokim*.

of mercy and leniency—*Ha-Shem*—so that Mankind might survive. Indeed it was for this same reason that when God created Man He did so with this aspect of His identity, as it is written (in *Genesis* 2:7) “And the *Lord-God—Ha-Shem Elokim*—formed man out of the dust of the ground [...]” Indeed, in the following chapters (2 and 3) we find repeatedly this combination of the names of God.⁸⁴ We see then that the rabbis saw in the changes in the scriptural nomenclature of God in *Genesis* chapters 1 and 2 the key to understanding that the Will of God was to prefer the

See parallel in *Midrash Canticles*, ed. Grünhut 39b. Cf. *Genesis Rabba* 8:3: 59; Urbach *ibid.*: 405.

Rabbi Baruch Ha-Levi Epstein (1860–1942), in his *Torah Temimah*, to *Genesis* 1:1 (p. 22), calls out attention to the passage in *Genesis Rabba* 1:7 (ed. Theodor Albeck: 4) in the name of R. Yitzhak, who begins with the verse from *Psalms* 116:160, “Thy word is true from the beginning [...]” stating:

From the beginning of the creation of the world “Thy word was true” — “In the beginning *Elokim* created [...]” (*Genesis* 1:1), and “*Ha-Shem Elokim* is true [...]” (*Jeremiah* 10:10), and therefore, “and everyone of Thy righteous judgements endureth for ever” (*Psalms* *ibid.*).

Epstein notes that the commentators found difficulty in explaining the connection between these verses and the verse in *Genesis* 1:1, and therefore he suggests that the author of the *Midrash* have wished to hint to the fact that the name *Elokim* comes to indicate the aspect of stern justice—*middat ha-din* actually has the status of “truth,” that is, of true judgement, which, as we has pointed out, we frail humans do not have the capacity to sustain.

⁸⁴ See Rashi (R. Shlomoh b. Yitzhak, 1040–1105) to *Genesis* 1:1. For his sources see *Rashi ha-Shalem*, vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1986: 3 n. 6; *Yelamdenu* in *Yalkut Talmud Torah*, etc. See M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1927: 33–34, no. 109; vol. 2, Jerusalem, 1929: 198 n. 82, with additional references. Furthermore, as Rashi points out “He placed the aspect of Mercy first and coupled to it the aspect of stern justice.” See *Tanhuma Tazria* 9, etc.; *Rashi ha-Shalem* *ibid.*: 3 n. 7. All these sources are from the early rabbinic period, that is, the first five centuries of the Common Era.

concept of *Mercy* over *Strict Justice*, and consequently this serves as a directive to Mankind's behaviour.⁸⁵

⁸⁵ Here I take the liberty of comparing these two aspects of God, Merciful and the Wrathful or Stringent, with similar Islamic notions. I am referring to Toshihiko Izatsu's *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (2nd edition, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, 1984, in his chapter 9, entitled "Ontological Mercy," pp. 116–140). I shall cite at length the beginning of that chapter (pp. 116–117):

The two preceding chapters will have made it clear that there is a difference of ranks among the Divine Names, and that a higher Name virtually contains in itself all the Names of lower ranks. If such is the case, then it is natural for us to suppose that there must be in this hierarchy the highest, i.e., the most comprehensive, Name that contains all the rest of the Names. And in fact, according to Ibn 'Arabī, there actually is such a Name: 'Merciful' (*Rahmān*). The present chapter will be devoted to a detailed consideration of Ibn 'Arabī's thought concerning this highest Name, its nature and its activity.

From the very beginning, the concept of Divine Mercy was a dominant theme in Islamic thought. The Qoran emphasizes constantly and everywhere the boundless Mercy of God shown toward the creatures. The Mercy of God is indeed 'wide'; it covers everything. Ibn 'Arabī, too, greatly emphasizes the boundless width of Divine Mercy. 'Know that the Mercy of God extends to everything, both in actual reality and possibility.' (Fusūs al-Hikam, Cairo ed. 1321 A.H., Afifi critical ed. Cairo, 1946, 1365 A.H.: 222/177. Ibn 'Arabī was born in 1173 and died in 1240; he became a Sufi mystic of the Zahiri school.)

However, there is one important point at which his understanding of 'mercy' (*rahmah*) differs totally from the ordinary common-sense understanding of the term. In the ordinary understanding, *rahmah* denotes an essentially emotive attitude, the attitude of compassion, kindly forbearance, pity, benevolence, etc. But, for Ibn 'Arabī, *rahmah* is rather an ontological fact. For him, *rahmah* is primarily the act of making things exist, giving existence to them. It is bestowal of existence, with, of course, an

overtone of a subjective, emotive attitude on the part of the one who does so.

God is by essence 'overflowing with bounteousness' (*fayyād bi-al-jūd*), that is, God is giving out existence limitlessly and endlessly to everything. As al-Qāshānī says, 'existence (*wujūd*) is the first overflowing of the Mercy which is said to extend to everything.' ('Abd al-Razzāq al-Qashani, *Sharh al Qāshānī 'alā Fusūs al Hikam*, Cairo, 1321 A.H. p. 221. These are Qāshānī's comments to Ibn 'Arabi.)

Such an understanding of *rahmah* gives a very particular coloring to the interpretation of the ethical nature of God which plays an important role in the Qoran and in Islam in general. This is best illustrated by Ibn 'Arabī's interpretation of the concept of Divine 'wrath.'

As is well known, the Qoran, while emphasizing that God is the Merciful, stresses at the same time that He is also a God of Wrath, a God of Vengeance. The God of the Qoran is God of justice. He shows unlimited love and compassion toward the good and pious, but that does not prevent Him from inflicting relentless punishment and chastisement upon those who do wrong, those who refuse to believe in Him and obey Him.

Ibn 'Arabī, too, admits God's wrath' (*ghadab*). For him, however, *ghadab* is not an ordinary emotion of anger. It is, like its counterpart, *rahmah*, something of an ontological nature. Moreover, it is put in a subordinate position in relation to *rahmah*, for *ghadab* itself is but an object of the boundless *rahmah* of God.

The very existence of Wrath originates from the Mercy of God for the Wrath. Thus His Mercy precedes His Wrath. (Ibn 'Arabi, *ibid.*: 222/177.)

This statement would seem to need an explication. Here is what al-Qashani says about it:

Mercy pertains essentially to the Absolute because the latter is by essence 'Bounteous' (*jawād*) ... Wrath, however, is not of the essence of the Absolute. On the contrary, it is simply a negative property that arises from the absence of receptivity on the part of some of

Thus, when in *Exodus* 34:6 we read:

And the Lord (*Ha-Shem*) passed by before him (i.e., Moses), and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord (*Ha-Shem, Ha-Shem*),⁸⁶ God (*El*) merciful and gracious (*raham ve-hanun*) [...].

Sifrei Ekev (sect. 49, pp. 114–115) comments:⁸⁷

Just as God is called merciful and gracious, so too should you be merciful and gracious [...].⁸⁸

the things for a perfect manifestation of the effects of existence and the various properties of existence.

The absence of receptivity in some of the things for Mercy entails the non-appearance of Mercy (in those things), whether in this world or the Hereafter. And the fact that Divine Mercy is prevented from overflowing into a thing of this kind because of its non-receptivity is called Wrath in relation to that particular thing....

Thus *it is patent that Mercy has precedence over Wrath* with regard to the Absolute, for Wrath is nothing but the actual non-receptivity of the locus which is (supposed to receive) Mercy in a perfect form. (al Qāshāni *ibid.*: 222.) [My emphasis, D.S.]

On the various categories of Mercy, *Rahman* and *Rahim*, see *ibid.*: 122–123. Admittedly, we have here strayed somewhat from the main theme of this study, but the comparison, with its similarity and difference, is so interesting that I could not restrain myself from pointing it out.

⁸⁶ See *Sifrei Deutonomy* 27: Everywhere that *Ha-Shem* is mentioned this refers to His aspect of Mercy. See *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 22, Jerusalem, 1967: 60–61 n. 57, for numerous parallel sources.

⁸⁷ *Sifrei Ekev*, ed. L. Finkelstein, 2nd edition, New York, 1969.

⁸⁸ See *Torah Shelemah* (*ibid.*: 61 no. 58), and in editor's note (*ibid.*) for numerous parallels. Actually, this interpretation was bolstered by a principle of hermeneutic logic, namely, that biblical verses must make sense. Now several such verses declare that one must "cleave" to the Divine Presence (e.g., *Deuteronomy* 4:4, 10:20, 11:22). But can a human being "cleave to the divine"? Surely God is like "a burning fire" (*Deuteronomy* 4:24, cf. *B. Sanhedrin* 64a, *B. Ketubot* 111b). Clearly, then,

these verses must mean that one should cling to his attributes (*middotav*), that is, his attributes of mercy and lovingkindness.

It is in just this same spirit that the rabbis struggled to find halachic solutions to what appeared to them to be biblical laws which could be viewed as unethical. A case in point is that of the *mamzer* (a child illegitimate by Jewish Law), who is stigmatized through no fault of his own. Indeed, the tragic and even unfair stigmatization of the *mamzer* was already recognized and openly admitted by the Sages of Old. Thus, in *Leviticus Rabba* 32:8 (ed. Margalio: 754–755), we read on the verse in *Ecclesiastes* 4:1 as follows:

Of Israel which comes upon them with the power of the Torah, and sends them away. And [it does so] by force of the verse in *Deuteronomy* 23:3, “A *Mamzer* shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord,” “and they have no comforter” (*Ecclesiastes ibid.*). Said the Holy One blessed be He, “I have to comfort them. For in this world they have dross, but in the world to come [they will be regarded as pure].

In this instance as well, the rabbis found unique ways to allow permissive circumstances. Let us see the degree to which the rabbis were prepared to push the limits in this effort. They established that “a woman whose husband had gone to a country beyond the sea and remained there for a full year of twelve months, if she gave birth within twelve months, the child is legitimate for we attribute it to the possibility that the baby remained in the mother’s womb for twelve months” (*B. Yevamot*, 8ab). After twelve months, the child would be considered illegitimate by most sources. (See G.M. Gould and W.L. Pyle, *Anomalies and Curiosities in Medicine*, Philadelphia, 1896: 68–72, on protracted gestation.)

A remarkable example of the practical application of this principle is cited by Marc C. Angel, in his *Loving Truth and Peace: The Grand Religious Worldview of Rabbi Benzion Uziel* (Northvale N.J. and Jerusalem, 1999: 111–112), which I quote fully:

Rabbi Uziel’s concern to mitigate the possibility of a child being declared a *mamzer* is demonstrated in a remarkable case. A married woman left her husband without having received a Jewish divorce, a *get*. In the eyes of Jewish law, therefore, she was still considered to be legally married to him. She then went to live with another man and had a

baby ten months after having left her husband. The question arose: What is the status of the baby? The answer, of course, depends on who the father is. If the father is her husband, then the child is legitimate. If, however, the new partner is the father, then the child is a *mamzer*.

A simple analysis of the case would lead one to conclude that the child, indeed, is illegitimate. After all, the woman herself admitted that the child had been born ten months after she had left her husband. And during those ten months, she had been living with her new partner, who presumably fathered the child.

Yet, Rabbi Uziel found a way to declare the child to be legitimate. He drew on a halachic notion that pregnancies sometimes last longer than nine months—as long as twelve months (see the Rema on *Even ha-Ezer* 4:13). Thus, it can be argued that the child was actually fathered by the woman's husband before she had left him. Even though the woman had demonstrated immoral behavior by living with another man while still legally married to her husband, and even though she and her partner considered the child to be theirs, the halakhah considers the child to belong to her husband—and the child is, consequently, not a *mamzer* (*Mishpetei Uziel, Even ha-Ezer*, Jerusalem, 5724, no. 12). Rabbi Uziel's halachic ingenuity freed this child from a lifelong stigma. [Cf. *Shaarei Uziel*, vol. 2, *Mishpetei Yatom ve-Almanah*, Jerusalem, 1991: 217.]

The author of *Halachot Gedolot* uniquely indicated that even if the child would be born after twelve months it would be considered legitimate, as we may assume that the father returned to his house secretly, unless he admits that he was not there with his wife. Furthermore, “if a woman gained a reputation as an adulteress and everyone is gossiping about her, we are not concerned that her children are illegitimate since the majority of the acts of cohabitation are ascribed to the husband” (*B. Sotah* 27a). Similarly, “even if she claims that her fetus is not from her husband, she is not to be believed to stigmatize him” (*B. Yevamot* 47a). So too, for an illegitimate child to be excluded from the community, it must be certain that it is illegitimate, for “a questionably illegitimate child may come [into the community]” (*B. Kiddushin* 77a). The rabbis developed a different language through which they revealed for themselves leniencies

Thus, Mankind could not survive *middat ha-din*, and since it is God's Will that Mankind survive, he coupled his *middat ha-rahamim* to *middat ha-din*, and directed Mankind, as it were, to follow His example. This implies, or perhaps more correctly dictates, that we interpret "strict" and "stern" biblical directives in a more accommodating fashion, and it is to this end that the exegetical hermeneutics come into play. It should be noted that in *B. Gittin* 59b Rav Yosef replies to Abbaye (fl. Babylonia, ca. 320–338 C.E.) saying:

All the Torah is [directed to] ways of peace—*darchei shalom*—as it is written, "Her ways are the ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (*Proverbs* 3:17).

Clearly Rav Yosef is referring primarily to the end of the verse, but there is a strong relationship between "ways of pleasantness" and "paths of peace," since they complement one another.⁸⁹ Indeed the principle "its ways are the ways of pleasantness" is a generic one which covers the entire halachic system. This, for example, is expressed in the section of *Massechet Sukkah* 32a, which deals with the identification of the four species of the *lulav*. The *Gemara* there rejects two possible identifications, the oleander

and even permits in those situations where the formalistic law might tend toward stringency in other circumstances. For in such cases, kindness and justice cry out for a solution that is both logical and humane.

I have dealt with this subject in considerable detail with numerous additional examples and a rich bibliography in my book *The Importance of the Community Rabbi: Leading with Compassionate Halachah*, Jerusalem: Urim, 2020: 123–133, section entitled "Conflict between Legal Formalism and Morality," and I thus shall not duplicate the material here. But the overall message is very clear.

⁸⁹ See also *Y. Eruvin* 3:2 and its parallel *ibid.* 7:9 for a tale illustrating the positive effects of *eruvei hatzerot*, the symbolic act creating a common courts between different dwellings, bringing peace and goodwill between neighbours, and utilizing this same verse, again with the stress on its second part. See on this the comment of Y. Tamar, in his *Alei Tamar, Moed*, vol. 1, Alon Shvut, 1992: 166.

tree as the “boughs of thick trees (*anaf etz avot*)” (*Leviticus* 23:40) and the *kufra* plant as the “palm tree (*kapot temarim*)” (*ibid.*). This is because these plants are thorny and it is inconceivable that the Torah would require us to take species that would prick and scratch one’s hands,⁹⁰ since “its ways are ways of pleasantness, and all of its paths are peace” (*Proverbs* 3:17), as the *Gemara* explains there⁹¹ (as mentioned above at the beginning of section 3).

⁹⁰ Yet another example of this reasoning may be found in a responsum of the Radbaz (R. David ben Zimra, 1479–1573), sect. 1032. There he discusses the question whether a person is obligated to help save someone else at the risk of losing a limb. He rules that if it is close to certainty that this is what will happen to him if he does so, he is not obligated to do so, because it is not reasonable to assume that the Torah would require a person to maim himself by losing a limb, for “its ways are the ways of pleasantness” (*Proverbs* 3:17).

⁹¹ See also *B. Yevamot* I 5a, 87b; *B. Gittin* 59b; *Tosafot* to *Yevamot* 2a, s.v. *Ve-Ahot*. See Maharashdam’s (Rabbi Shmuel de Medina, 1506–1584) use of this in his Responsa, *Hoshen Mishpat* 259: “The agreement of the majority constitutes that ‘its ways are ways of pleasantness and all of its paths are peace.’ They therefore stated that their words are upheld when all are in agreement and united as one unit, and one of them cannot retract and destroy its quality of truth and peace [...]” In this regard he follows in the footsteps of Rabbi Eliyahu ben Binyamin Halevi (first half of the 16th century) in his book *Zekan Aharon*, Constantinople, 1534: 143, where he writes: “The minority must follow in the direction taken by the majority, for if not, the absolute truth of the law will never emerge, and that is why the Torah warned to ‘follow the majority,’ whose ways are ways of pleasantness and whose paths are paths of peace.” See Eliezer Bashan, “*Deracheha Darkei Noam*,” *Deot* 48 (1966): 171–176, and particularly 172–173. Aaron Kirschenbaum, in his article “Subjectivity in Rabbinic Decision-Making,” in *Rabbinic Authority and Personal Autonomy* (ed. Moshe Sokol, Northdale, N.J. and London, 1992: 78–82), gave further examples of the application of this principle. We may add from a totally different area of *halachah* that the rules of neighbourly relations (*hilchot shecheinim*) may be understood according to the Rosh’s statement (*Shut ha-Rosh*, *Kelal* 108:10) that the rules dictating distance between neighbours is also based on the principle of *darkei noam*. See now Yitzhak Rones, “*Ha-Hovah le-Afsher Hangashat Binyan Megurin le-Neichim*,” *Le-*

Shichno Tidreshenu: Kovetz Maamarim be-Hilchot Shecheinim, Ha-Machon ha-Gavoah le-Torah: Bar-Ilan University, 2013: 116–117. See also the Responsa of the Radbaz, 1052 and 1079, on the principle “in order to promote peace” (*mipnei darkei shalom*). See Rabbi Yehudah Unterman, “*Darkei Shalom ve-Hagdarotav*,” *Or Mizrah* 15 (1965–1966): 27–32, and in *Kol Torah* 2, pamphlet 6 (1966): 3–7, as well as in *Morashah* I (1971): 5–10, in which he asserts that this principle is implemented *a priori* and not just *ex post facto*, and that its existence derives from the deep study of Torah ethics as a fundamental obligation. See also the critique of Rabbi Hayyim David Halevy, *Aseh Lecha Rav* (Tel Aviv: Ha-Va’adah le-Hotza’at Sifrei ha-Gaon ha-Rav Hayyim David Halevy, 1978–1989, sect. 33: 83–87), where he asserts that it is only implemented *ex post facto*, as he does as well in his article, “*Darkei Shalom be-Yahasim Bein Yehdim le-She’ainam Yehdim*,” *Tehumin* 9 (1988): 71–81. On this issue of supporting gentiles economically, visiting the gentile sick, and burial of gentiles—*mi-pnei darkei shalom*—see *Shulhan Aruch Yoreh Deah* 335:9, *ibid.*, 380:5, based on *B. Gittin* 61a. See B. Goldberg, *Penei Baruch: Bikur Holim ke-Hilchato*, Jerusalem, 1985: 8–9 n. 37; H.B. Goldberg, *Bein Yisrael la-Nochri: Yoreah Deah*, Jerusalem, 1994: 452–453 n. I, 456, etc. But this is a slightly different application of these principles. For more on this issue, see Aryeh Carlin, “*Darchhei Noam Ve-Darkei Shalom*,” *Divrei Sefer*, Tel Aviv: Mahberot Le-Sifrut, 1952: 125–134; Eliezer Bograd, “*Mi-Pnei Darkei Shalom*,” Doctoral Thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1977; Alter Hilvitz, “*Le-Biur ha-Sugya ‘Mi-Pnei Darkei Shalom’ be-Yahas la-Goyim*,” *Sinai* 100 (1987): 328–358; Hayyim Pardes, “*Mi-Pnei Darkei Shalom*,” in *Sefer Hagai: Zikaron le-Arba’a mi-Talmidei Yeshivat Nir Kiryat Arba*, Hevron, 1985: 467–474; Shmuel Tanhum Rubinstein, “*Takanot she-Hitkinu Hazal mi-Pnei Darkei Shalom*,” *Torah Sheba’al Peh* 21 (2000): 60–66; and *Entziklopediah Talmudit* 7, Jerusalem, 1956, 715–724. See further the illuminating remarks of Daniel Z. Feldman, *The Right and the Good: Halakhah and Human Relations*, 2nd edition, New York, 2005: 73–95, and in my essay in *Women and Men in Communal Prayer: Halachic Perspectives*, Jersey City N.J., 2010: 150–153.

Yehudah Copperman, in his *Kedushat Pshuto shel Mikra* (vol. 2, Jerusalem, 2009: 235–237), shows how Rabbenu Bahya uses this principle in a number of different halachic contexts. See his commentary to *Leviticus* 14:44–46, where he explains the order in which the bible lists the different forms of leprosy in accordance with this principle, and he refers us further to his commentary to *Genesis* 7:11; *ibid.*, 1:6, and on pp. 336–339; and to his commentary to *Numbers* 16:1 and *Leviticus* 16:6.

The fact that a verse in *Proverbs* can determine the details of a law of biblical status, even though normally we do not derive laws of biblical authority from non-Pentateuchal sources (i.e. Prophets and Hagiography), is in itself most significant.⁹²

A fine example of the use of this notion of “its ways are the ways of pleasantness and all of its paths are peace,” is to be found in *Rambam Hilchot Megillah ve-Hannukah* 4:14. There he rules (basing himself on *B. Shabbat* 23b), as follows:

If he had before him [the choice of] *ner beito*, literally his “house candle,” i.e., the Shabbat candle, and the Hannukah candle, the Shabbat candle has precedence, for the name of God may be erased to make peace between husband and wife [see *Numbers* 5:23]. Great is peace, for the whole Torah was given to bring peace to the world, as it is said “its ways are the ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace” (*Proverbs* 3:17).

The Talmudic source only gives the reason of *shlom beito*, that the Shabbat candle banishes the stress or discomfort of sitting together during the Shabbat meal in darkness (Rashi ad loc., based on *B. Shabbat* 25b). The Rambam adds the quotation from *Proverbs* to emphasize the requirement of individual comfort, and also uses this verse as a fitting means to end *Seder Zemanim*. However, Feldman (*ibid.*: 52–53) refers us to R. Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, who explains that Rambam is not claiming that the Shabbat candles are more important than Hannukah candles or than *Kiddush*. For he argues that their rabbinic origins would place them on an equal, or even a lesser, footing than the latter *mitzvot*. “Rather, the result of the fulfilment of this *mitzvah*, *shalom* is more all-encompassing than the others. This is evidenced by the Rambam’s concluding his words by noting that ‘the entire Torah is given to make peace [...]’ As this is the case, showing precedence to the cause of peace is consistent with the goals of all *mitzvot*, and thus is the course of action that will reap the most spiritual benefit” (Ha-Maor 50, no. 6: 311).

⁹² See *B. Niddah* 23a, *B. Hagigah* 10b; *B. Baba Kama* 2b; and *Entzyklopediah Talmudit* (vol. 7, Jerusalem, 1956, 112–114) is in itself most significant. See Menachem Elon, *Ha-Mishpat ha-Ivri: Toldotav, Mekorotav, Ekronotav* (*Jewish Law: History, Sources, Principles*), Jerusalem, 1973, vol. 2: 323–326. And cf. the responsum of the Radbaz (R. David ben Zimra, 1497–1573) no.1052, that one is not obligated to maim oneself in order to save the life of a colleague, quoting this same verse (Elon *ibid.*: 820–821 n. 62).

Yet another example of this halachic phenomenon is to be found in *B. Yevamot* 87b in a complex discussion concerning the laws of levirate marriages. Without going into the details of this intricately involved argumentation, the final stage of the argument that determines the ruling is based on our verse in *Proverbs*. Here again, a very serious ruling directly related to the laws of forbidden marriages—of biblical authority—has been determined by this verse from *Proverbs*. (See the various interpretations by Rashi and Ritva ad loc., who explains that we must avoid making the wife discreditable—*mitganah*—to her husband, and for we must aim at a *peaceful* and *pleasant* relationship between husband and wife, thus taking into account both parts of the verse.)⁹³

On the basis of the above, R. Kook used this principle as an element in his advice and ruling according to which one should not use raw *hazeret* as *maror* (bitter herbs) in the Seder night meal, because of its extreme sharpness, but rather “grate it up and leave it awhile to weaken its extreme sharpness, until there remains only a slight bitter taste, and then it will be easier to eat.” (See his responsum in *Orah Mishpat*, Jerusalem, 1985, no. 124.⁹⁴)

This notion expresses itself in a slightly different form in the writings of R. Meir Simchah ha-Cohen of Dvinsk, both in his *Or Sameah* and his *Meshech Hochmah*. Thus, in *Or Sameah* to Rambam, *Hilchot Evel* 3:8, he explains why the Torah permitted an ordinary *Kohen* to become impure to his deceased brother:

[...] Because a person's soul is in pain [at the death of a close relative], and if he (i.e., the *Kohen*) would not be permitted to deal with [his relative's] burial, there

⁹³ See Responsa *Kochav mi-Yaakov* by R. Yaakov Waedenfeld (Bilgurai, 1933, vol. 2, sect. 41), who uses this principle as an additional reason to permit a woman whose late husband's brother was an apostate not to require *halitzah*.

⁹⁴ This responsum was analyzed by Y. Zoldan, in an article entitled “*Deracheha Darkei Noam'—Ke-Nimuk. Le-Hafagat Merriut ha-Maror be-Pesach*,” in M. Tzvi Neriah, A. Stern and N. Gotel (eds.), *Birurim be-Hilchot ha-Rayah*, Jerusalem, 1992: 263–269.

could be no greater anguish for him than that. And therefore the Torah did not prohibit the *Kohen* from acting against man's natural temperament.

And in the *Meshech Hochmah* to Genesis 9:7, he explains why women are exempt from the mitzvah of procreation thus:

It would appear to me most likely that the Torah exempted women from the mitzvah of procreation, and obligated only men, because God's commandments and His ways are "ways of pleasantness and pathways of peace," and He did not burden Israel with that which the body cannot support [...] [i.e., because of the pains of birth-pangs].

In a number of places he supports his conjecture by referring to the case of the *lulav* mentioned above.⁹⁵

Indeed, this principle—that the *halachah* must provide ways of pleasantness—appears in many places in the Talmud, in different and varied halachic discussions, and each is like a detail that is removed from the general principle in order to teach the specific rule.⁹⁶ Subsequently, the Radbaz (1480–1572) wrote in a

⁹⁵ On this passage see the comments of R. Yaakov Hayyim Sofer, in his *Menuhat Shalom* 12, Jerusalem, 2003: 170. On the halachic implications of the pain during birth, see Rambam to Leviticus 12:7, referring to *B. Niddah* 31b. See further Yitzhak Cohen, *Or Sameah-Halachah u-Mishpat*, Beer Sheva, 2013: 269, and also his discussion *ibid.*: 262–265; Yehudah Copperman, *Kedushat Pshuto shel Mikra*, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 2009: 236–238. See further *B. Yevamot* 65b, on the wife of R. Hiyya, on the basis of which the Maharshal, R. Shlomoh Luria, in *Yam Shel Shlomoh* to *Yevamot* 6:44, ruled that a woman who suffers greatly in childbearing may make use of birth-control methods. Cf. *ibid.* 1:8, for his position on contraception. See *Bah* to *Even ha-Ezer* 5, catchword *Ve-ha-Ishah*; similarly this was used as an element in the permissive ruling of R. Shalom Messas, in his *Tevuot Shemesh*, Jerusalem, 1981, no. 151: 306; and the extensive discussion in David M. Feldman, *Birth Control in Jewish Law*, New York and London, 1968: 211ff. See also there the section entitled "Leniency to Prevent Stress and Suffering."

⁹⁶ See Eliezer Berkowitz, n. 1, and *Entziklopediah Talmudit* 3. See also, Rabbi Baruch Halevi Epstein, *Torah Temimah*, *Exodus* 20:24 n. 171, on "an

responsum (*Orah Hayyim* 37, Salonika, 1595) that “most of the enactments of the rabbis were in the spirit of mercy and concern for the welfare of the community, which they derived from the verse ‘its ways are ways of pleasantness’.”⁹⁷

This principle plays a prominent role in the ruling of R. Uziel.⁹⁸ Thus, for instance (*ibid.*: 108–109):

When the Jewish man acknowledged that he is the father of a child from a non-Jewish mother, Rabbi Uziel stated that the man had a humanitarian obligation to support the child. If he had married the non-Jewish woman, then he had accepted the civil responsibilities of child support; he could not resort to halakhah to help him find a way out of this obligation. Rabbi Uziel concluded by saying that “the Torah and the sages did not exempt the father from child support, since in the final analysis the child is a product of this father. He caused [the child] to be brought into the world. He is obligated to raise and sustain him, at least to the same extent of sustenance he owes to other dependents for whom he is responsible; indeed his responsibility [to the child] takes priority.” “*This is the way of Torah whose ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace*” (*Mishpetei Uziel, Even ha-Ezer*, Jerusalem, 5724 [1963–1964] no. 4). It would be unconscionable to exempt a Jewish man from financial support for this children born of a non-Jewish woman. Because the Torah’s

eye for an eye, etc.” (I found Dan Seter’s book, entitled *Darchei Noam*, 2nd edition, 2000, somewhat disappointing.)

⁹⁷ Samuel Morell, in his *Studies in the Judicial Methodology of Rabbi David Ibn Abi Zimra* (Radbaz) (New York and Oxford, 2004: 112), gives a number of examples where Radbaz’s rulings are in accordance with the guiding principle of this verse that “Its ways are ways of pleasantness.”

⁹⁸ Marc C. Angel, *Loving Truth and Peace: The Grand Religious World-view of Rabbi Benzion Uziel*, Northvale N.J., Jerusalem, 1989.

ways are pleasant and peace loving, it could not sanction such a morally repugnant situation.⁹⁹

Another case dealt with a man who was suffering, apparently, from prostate problems. He was informed that his illness could only be cured through an operation that would leave him impotent. Since halakhah generally forbids acts of sterilization, was this man permitted to undergo this medical procedure?

After a discussion of the relevant texts, Rabbi Uziel concluded that the operation was permitted in this case. "And this should be done without delay since there is no other cure [...]" It is preferable to advance [the date of the procedure] to save and free him from pains which distract him from Torah, and which [cause him] a life of anguish and suffering, so as to return him to a life of quiet and peace in the ways of Torah and *mitzvot*, whose *ways are ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace*" (*Mishpetei Uziel, ibid.* no. 6). It was a moral obligation to heal the man from his illness as soon as possible, even though the act of sterilization was generally forbidden. The Torah wants us to live by its words, not to suffer unnecessarily by them.

A related question concerned a man who underwent necessary surgery which left him sterile. Was he allowed to continue his marriage with his wife? The Torah forbids the marriage of a castrated man or one whose genitals are damaged so that he is impotent. Rabbi Uziel asserted that the prohibition refers only to one who willingly mutilated himself or had himself mutilated; it does not refer to one born sterile nor to one who had to undergo surgery for health

⁹⁹ Cf. Nahum Stepansky, *Ve-Aleihu Lo Tibol: Mi-Hanagotav ve-Hadrachotav shel R. Shlomoh Zalman Auerbach*, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 2013: 67–68, on helping a non-Jew.

reasons. Therefore, the man in question was allowed to continue his marriage with his wife, “and this is what the dictates of the law and truth teach, about which it is written that her ways [i.e., the ways of Torah] are ways of pleasantness” (*Mishpehetei Uziel*, *ibid.*, no. 7). [My emphasis, D.S.]

The critical point of this rather lengthy and detailed discussion of the principle of *darchei noam* is that we should always seek ways—exegetical and hermeneutical—to arrive at “pleasant” and “humane” solutions for such halachic situations which, at first blush, would appear to be “unpleasant” or “inhumane.” The rabbis used a very broad spectrum of methodological argumentation in order to achieve this end in a very wide variety of what might appear to be unrelated challenges.

This, then, is a generic metahalachic principle that may legitimate a “charitable interpretation.”¹⁰⁰ That this is a generic directive of metahalachic status explains yet another phenomenon that is found in rabbinic exegesis, one which may best be understood on the above basis, namely, that the *halachah* rests on a foundation of fundamental positive values. For there is one important commandment that is mentioned in the morning daily prayers: “the fruits of which a man enjoys in this world, while the principle remains for him in the World to Come” (*Mishnah Pe’ah* 1:1)—the commandment to visit the sick. Maimonides establishes in *Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Evel* 14:1 that “it is a positive commandment of the rabbis to visit the sick.” In the *Shulhan Aruch, Yoreh De’ah* 335:1, Rabbi Yosef Karo formulates it as follows: “It is a commandment to visit the sick” (omitting the words “of the rabbis”). Yet, what is the *source* of this commandment? The *Gemara* in *Sotah* 14a cites the following statement of Rabbi Hama bar Hanina: “What does the text ‘You shall walk after the Lord your God’ (*Deuteronomy* 13:4) mean? Is it possible for a human being to walk after the *Shechinah*, for has it not been said: ‘For the Lord your God is a devouring fire’ (*ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ See on this in my *The Importance of the Community Rabbi*, Jerusalem: Urim, 2020: 46–51.

4:24)? But [the meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. [...] Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: 'And the Lord appeared unto him [i.e. Abraham] by the oaks of Mamre' (*Genesis* 18:1), so do you also visit the sick."¹⁰¹ In comparison, *Baba Kama* 100a and *Baba Metziah* 30b cite the following teaching of Rabbi Yosef: "'And you shall show them the way wherein they must walk' (*Exodus* 18:20)—'wherein they must walk' refers to visiting the sick." Tractate *Nedarim* 39b provides an additional source: "Resh Lakish said: Where is visiting the sick indicated in the Torah? In the verse, 'If these men die the common death of all men, or if they be visited after the visitation of all men' (*Numbers* 16:29). How is it implied?—Raba answered: [The verse means] if these men die the common death of all men, who lie in a sick bed, and men come in and visit them." And *Midrash ha-Hefetz* on *Genesis* 48:1 states: "And it came to pass after these things that one said to Yosef: 'Behold, your father is sick.' And he took with him his two sons, Manasheh and Ephraim"—from here we derive the obligation to visit the sick.

Note the degree to which the Sages of Old made great efforts to find a source or hint in the Torah for the commandment of visiting the sick, which is such a special commandment (see Maimonides, *Sefer ha-Mitzvot* 2) as to blur the boundary between

¹⁰¹ It is interesting to note Hizkuni's argument in his commentary to *Genesis* 18:1. There the Bible relates how God revealed himself to Abraham in the plains of Mamre as he sat at the door of his tent in the heat of the day. Rashi, ad loc.— basing himself on the Talmud in *B. Baba Metziah* 86b (cf. *Midrash Tanhuma* ed. Buber, ad loc.) that this was three days after Abraham had circumcised himself (cf. *Genesis* 17:24) when one feels most pain—states that it was then that God came to visit him in his sickness. Hizkuni adds that this is the only time in the Bible that God is said to appear to someone without afterwards speaking to him (cf., e.g., *Genesis* 12:7, 17:1); it is the only one out of twenty times that the words *Va-Year ha-Shem*—"and God appeared"—is not followed by *Va-Yomer*, "and He spoke"). Hizkuni asks rhetorically "Why then did He appear, if not to visit him [in his sickness]!" And, of course, we must pattern our ethical behaviour on that of God's (as noted above).

halachah and *aggadah* in these teachings.¹⁰² Apparently, the rabbis understood that there must be such a commandment, because it is

¹⁰² On this phenomenon, see what my father and teacher of blessed memory, Rabbi Shmuel Sperber, wrote in *Ma'amarot*, Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1978: 178. On *Halachah* derived from *aggadah*, see Y. Beeri (Kolonder), *Ha-Midrash ke-Halachah*, Tel-Aviv, 1960. Prof. S.K. Mirsky wrote an interesting series of articles entitled "*Mekorot ha-Halachah ba-Midrashim*," *Talpioth* 1/2 (1944): 218–247; 21/2 (1945): 348–374; 2/3–4 (1946): 348–374. They were according to the order of *Shulhan Aruch Orah-Hayyim*. Regrettably, he did not get beyond sect. 128. R.M. Gifter, also published there (1/3–4 (1944): 551–561) an article entitled "*Ha-Halachah be-Midrash R. Eliezer Beno shel R. Yosi ha-Gelili*." See also David Sabbato, "*Halachah ve-Aggadah ba-Mishnah: Tafkidan shel ha-Hatimot ha Aggadiot ba-Mishnah*," *Netuim* 18 (2013): 39–68. R. Yeruham Leiner, in his *Tiferet Yeruham* (edited by his son Yaakov Leiner, Brooklyn, 2008: 558–566), also delved into this subject. See also Avraham Arzi, "*Shiluv Aggadah ba-Halachah be-Mishnat Rabbi Eliezer ben Hurcanus*," *Shanah be-Shanah*, 1936. This issue was also dealt with at length by Maharatz Chajes, in his *Darkei Horaah*, part 2, chap. 7, in *Kol Sifrei Maharatz Hayyut*, vol. 1, Jerusalem, 1958: 243–252. Recently, Yair Loberbaum dealt with this subject in an article entitled "Reflections on the Halakhic Status of Aggadah," *Dinei Yisrael* 24 (2007): 29–64.

Here we may add that the rabbis made a clear distinction between *halachah* and *aggadah*, so much so that they ruled (in *Y. Pea* 2:6, *Y. Hagigah* 1:8) that one does not derive *halachot* for *haggahot* (cf. *Y. Horayot* 3:5). See the exhaustive analysis of this principle in B. Lifshitz, "*Aggada' u-Mekomah be-Toldot Torah she-Baal-Peh*," *Shenaton ha Mishpat ha-Ivri* 22, Jerusalem, 2001–2003: 233–328. See also Responsa *Noda Yehudah Tinyana, Yoreh Deah* 161:

But the *Midrashim* and the *Aggadot* their main aim is [to teach] ethics, and their hints and parables are all for the [ethical] basis of religion (*ikar ha-dat*), but their main intent is not for halachic rulings, and hence we do not learn from them how to rule halachically. [...]

The Rivash (sect. 171, 77a) discusses how the rabbis would exaggerate the punishments in order to prevent a person from sinning, bringing examples from *B. Erachin* 15b, and *B. Shabbat* 105b. See further Responsa of Rambam, ed. Blau, vol. 2, no. 458, etc.; for the attitude of the *Geonim* to *aggadah vis-à-vis halachah*, see Lifshitz *ibid*: 249–253.

This was also the position of the *Geonim*. See, for example, *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, ed. Albeck, *Hilchot Sefer Torah* 60a (R. Sherira Gaon); *Otzar ha-Geonim*, ed. B.M. Levin, *Hagigah, Perushim* 14a: 59–60 (Hai Gaon), *ibid.*: 4 (Shmuel ben Hofni), etc. See also Rambam's explicit statement to R. Pinhas ha-Dayyan (*Igrot ha-Rambam*, ed. Blau, no. 458: 739) as well as his responses elsewhere (to R. Ovadiah ha-Ger, ed. Shilat, vol. 1: 236–237, etc.):

All those statements are of a haggadic nature, and one does not raise questions in matters of *haggadah*. [...] For they are not a part of our tradition (*kabbalah*) and there is in themselves neither forbidden nor permitted (i.e., one cannot learn from them such rulings). [...]

The situation changes somewhat during the medieval period where we find that in the Ashkenazi tradition a sharp distinction was not made and *halachot* were derived from *aggadot*. (See A. Grossman, "Kidush ha-Shem be-Meot 11–12," *Peamim* 75 (1998): 39.) Again, this is too broad a field to be dealt with here. On this principle and when it is applied see further Y. Tamar, *Alei Tamar, Yerushalemi Zeraim*, vol. 1, Givatayim, 1979: 373–374 on Y. Peah; *Entziklopediah Talmudit*, vol. 1, Tel Aviv, 1947: 62.

However, see R. Ovadiah Yosef, *Yabia Omer*, vol. 9, Jerusalem, 2002, *Yoreah Deah* 10:8: 285–286, according to which this principle is only applicable in a case where the *aggadah* contradicts a Talmudic ruling. But in other cases one can certainly derive *halachot* from aggadic texts. See the numerous sources to which he refers us, especially Rabbenu Tam, in his *Sefer ha-Yashar* (ed. S.F. Rosenthal, Berlin, 1898, sect. 45:3: 81), who writes:

Anyone who is not conversant with *Seder Rav Amram Gaon*, and *Halachot Gedolot*, and tractate *Soferim* and *Pirke de-R. Eliezer*, and [Midrash] *Raba* and the Talmud, and the other books of *aggadah*, can undermine the words of [our] earlier authorities and their customs, but they must depend (i.e., accept) their words which do not contradict our Talmud and augment [it]. And, indeed, many of the customs that we practice are based on their words. [...]

R. Ovadiah touched upon this subject in yet a number of additional responses in *Yabia Omer*. See vol. 1, *Yoreah Deah* 4:8–9; vol. 2, *Hoshen Mishpat* 12:3; vol. 9, *Even ha-Ezer* 2:10; vol. 8, *Even ha-Ezer* 1:6; vol. 4, *Even ha-Ezer* 8:1; vol. 7, *Even ha-Ezer* 2:10; vol. 8, *Even ha-Ezer* 21:2; *ibid.*, *Hoshen Mishpat* 12:3; vol. 9, *Even ha-Ezer* 16; vol. 10, *Orah Hayyim* 56:4/17; *ibid.*, *Yoreh Deah* 24. Furthermore, there is another principle that one does not

demanded by basic ethics—and that it is therefore impossible that it not be implied in one way or another in the biblical text. And so, they sought to reveal the source of the commandment in those teachings, which are certainly not clearly and overtly derived from the biblical text. Nonetheless, according to some opinions, the commandment is even a Torah obligation.¹⁰³

And now moving to yet quite a different context, in *Exodus* 32:19 we read how Moses destroyed the Tablets of the Law when he saw the Children of Israel dancing around a Golden Calf. Subsequently he was told by God to make a second set of those tablets, containing the Ten Commandments (*ibid.* 34:1). And when the narrative is retold in *Deuteronomy* 10:1–2 Moses declares that he was told to rewrite the tablets “which thou brakest” (*asher shibarta*). There are different opinions among the Rabbis of Old as to whether Moses’ action was positive or negative. Those who saw it as positive interpreted the words *asher shibarta* as though it was written *ashrei she-shibarta*, “blessed are you, that you broke them.”¹⁰⁴

Now the rabbis pointed out that in the first set of the Ten Commandments the word, or notion, “good” does not occur,

derive *halachot* from what happened before the Torah was given at Sinai (*Y. Moed Katan* 3:5; *Tosafot Moed Katan* 20a; *B. Yoma* 28b; for a full discussion, see *Entziklopediah Talmudit*, *ibid.*: 296–297; but see final note, *ibid.*, no. 35, and M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 7, tome 8, New York, 1950, to *Genesis* 50:10: 1872–1873 n. 33).

Nonetheless, we find many examples where the *halachah* is derived from *aggadah*, which relates to an early biblical (pre-Sinaitic) episode. See my discussion in *The Importance of the Community Rabbi*, Jerusalem: Urim, 2020: 144–147, where I give two examples, which I shall not duplicate here.

¹⁰³ See *Halachot Gedolot*, Asei 36; *Sefer Mitzvot Gaddol*, Asei 5, etc.

¹⁰⁴ See, for example, *B. Shabbat* 87a; *Y. Taanit* 4:4; *B. Yevamot* 62a; *Targum Yonatan* ad loc., etc. Also see M.M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 21, Jerusalem, 1964: 130–132, nos. 185–187, and his copious notes with numerous additional source-references *ibid.* This, too, is a subject that deserves a study in its own right.

whereas it does in the second set (see *B. Baba Kama* 54b–55a). For in the first set it says (in *Exodus* 20:12), “Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long [...],” while in the second set (in *Deuteronomy* 5:16) it says, “Honour thy father and thy mother, as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it *may go well with thee* [...].” And the rabbis asked (*ibid.*) why this element of goodness was not mentioned in the first set. The answer given was “Because they [the first set] were doomed to be destroyed.”¹⁰⁵

Simply understood, we might say that what would not survive could not contain the element of goodness and wellbeing. But a deeper understanding of this passage may be revealed by reference to a passage in *Mishnat R. Eliezer* (pp. 265–266):¹⁰⁶

In four ways were the latter tablets preferable (*yeteirot*) to the first ones. [...] In the first one the image of Moses did not radiate within them; but in the later tablets the image of Moses radiated within them.

What this homily is telling us is that the first tablets, which were written by the hand of God, did not include the human element necessary for them to be pragmatically relevant to human beings. Their stringency would not allow for the survival of mere humans with their feeble nature.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, they could not contain notion of “well-being.” And it was for just this reason that their

¹⁰⁵ See *Torah Shelemah*, vol. 16, New York, 1955: 94, no. 308, and the additional material referred to *ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Mishnat R. Eliezer*, ed. H.G. Enelow, New York, 1933.

¹⁰⁷ This is a recurrent theme in the liturgy of the New Year (Rosh ha-Shanah) Day of Atonement. Thus, for example, in the famous *U-Netaneh Tokef* prayer, we read: For they (i.e., mankind) cannot be cleansed innocent in Your eyes [being judged in the manner of strict judgement (*lo yizku be-einecha ba-din*). See *Mahzor le-Yamim Noraim*, vol. 1, *Rosh ha-Shanah*, ed. Daniel Goldschmidt, Jerusalem, 1970: 169. On the writing of this poetic prayer—*piyyut*—see Y.S. Spiegel, “*Birur be-divrei ha-paitan ‘U-Teshuvah u-Tefillah u-Tzedakah Ma’avirim at Ro’a ha-Gezerah’ ve-al Kefifut ha-Paitanim le-Halachah*,” *Netaim* 8, 2002: 23–42.

destruction could be viewed as a positive act. But the second set of commandments had in them the radiating image of Moses, the human element of mercy and leniency, and could therefore contain the notion of “well-being.”

Such rabbinic homilies, and many others, make it abundantly clear that ultimately it is the Will of God, carried out in accordance with that will by man, that gives directions to commentarial tendentiousness. Such hermeneutic exegesis fulfils the ultimate will of God.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Of necessity we have dealt all too briefly with what is a very broad and complex rabbinic notion. But just to give an example of a corollary of this notion we may call attention to the fact that the rabbis established a principle that we obligate people to follow behavioral guidelines that are apparently beyond the letter of the law (*lifnim mi-shurat ha-din*), based on the verse “And you shall do that which is right and good” (*Deuteronomy* 6:18). I have discussed this principle in considerable detail in my book *The Importance of the Community Rabbi*, Jerusalem: Urim, 2020: 98–112, in a chapter entitled “Beyond the Letter of the Law.” There I gave numerous examples of the legal application of this principle. See, for example, Rabbi Moshe Isserles (Rema), *Hoshen Misphat* 11:2; see also, Elon, *Ha-Mishpat ha-Ivri*: 176–180.

There we also discuss the degree to which the judge is *obligated* to go beyond the letter of the law. At this stage we should point out that this is the subject of considerable controversy among the *poskim* (decisors). In Talmudic times there seems to have been a clear distinction between the *law* and the *advice* to go beyond it, as opposed to an *obligation*. Thus, for instance, in *B. Ketubot* 50a we read that R. Eleazar gave an order to feed daughters from the “movables” (*metaltelin*) that were part of their dead father’s estate, even though the conditions of the *ketubah* only obligate that they receive their sustenance from “immovable” (*karkaot*) of the estate. R. Shimon ben Eliakum then argued: “Rabbi, I know that you acted not according to the Law, but out of the spirit of mercy, but [I fear] lest your disciples will see [your practice] and adopt it as law for future generations.” R. Shlomoh Luria, the Maharshal (ca. 1510–1573) explains that R. Eleazar did not want to force his views on the heirs, but only to persuade them with words. But R. Shimon ben Eliakum objected even to this, lest future generations see this as an enforceable ruling.

Yet another oft-found rabbinic theme should be understood in the same ideological context. Jewish tradition knows of two types of law, the Written Law, that which appears in the Bible (for the most part), and the Oral Law, which is not to be found explicitly in biblical texts. It would then appear, simply said, that Oral Law is the result of rabbinic exegesis, that is, it is the “creation” of the rabbis, a human creation rather than a divine one. But numerous rabbinic sources indicate the belief that the Oral Law was given *together with, and at the same time as* the Written Law, which means that it is of similar status. Thus, *Midrash Canticles Rabba* 5:14 declares in the name of Hananiah, the son of the brother of R. Yehoshua (2nd cent. C.E.), the following:

Between each statement [of the Ten Commandments]
there were written [numerous] sub-sections and
details of the Torah.

While R. Yohanan (d. 279 C.E.), basing himself on the verse in *Canticles ibid.*, stated as follows:

Just as between each big wave there are many little
waves, so too between each statement there were

In later periods, however, this distinction was blurred among certain authorities, who saw the element of *obligation* to be paramount. Thus, the Raviah (R. Eliezer ben R. Yoel ha-Levy, ca. 1140–ca. 1245, cited in *Hagahot Maimoniyot* to *Hilchot Gezeilah* 1:7) obligates returning a lost object to its former owner even after *yiush*—that is, even when the owner had given up hope of getting it back, if the finder is rich. While the Rosh (R. Asher ben Yehiel, ca. 1250–1327), to *Baba Metzia*, chap. 2, disagrees, ruling that we do not force him to do so, and so too the Rema (R. Moshe Isserles, ca. 1529–1572, *Hoshen Mishpat* 12:2). The Bah (R. Yoel ben Shmuel Sirkes, author of the *Bayit Hadash Bah*, ca. 1561–1640), on the other hand, disagrees with the Rema, stating explicitly that “it is the practice in all the courts of Israel to force the rich man to act in a proper and correct fashion, even though this is not the [real] law.” And so too ruled the *Tzemah Tzedek* (Responsum no. 89), the *Hatam Sofer Yoreh Deah* no. 239 (and cf. Rema to *Hoshen Mishpat* 250:7). See on this Shimon Federbush, *Ha-Musar ve-ha-Mishpat be-Yisrael*, Jerusalem, 1979: 74–86, especially pp. 85–86, for his clear and extensive discussion of this subject. (Cf. *B. Berachot* 5b for a partially related example.)

written the sub-sections and details of Torah. (See Y. *Shekalim* 6:1, 49d.)

And an additional tradition states that during the forty days Moses spent at the top of Mount Sinai, he received, besides the two tables of the Law, all the Torah—the Bible, Mishnah, Talmud, and Haggadah—and even whatever a wise scholar might innovate in the future was revealed to him.¹⁰⁹

These and other such rabbinic statements seek to establish a premise that the result of rabbinic exegesis actually constitute legitimate and binding interpretations that were, so to say, encoded in the original scriptural text, and homiletically speaking were already given to Moses at Sinai. Hence, the absolute validity even of late rabbinic interpretation, given that it is developed in accordance with the hermeneutic parameters established by those same rabbis. This might sound like circular reasoning, but it was seen as completely logical in rabbinic eyes. Even the multiple variety of comprehensions mentioned above were also seen as having complete validity.

Finally, I should like to add yet another level of understanding to this issue, however, one in a more homiletic vein. The Talmud in *B. Sanhedrin* 59b relates how R. Shimon ben Halafta once, when walking along the wayside, was beset by lions. Being fully aware of the danger, he recited the verse in *Psalms* 104:21, “The young lions roar after their prey [and seek their meat from God],” and two pieces of meat [miraculously] came down from heaven. One of them he gave to the lions who immediately satisfied their hunger, and left him alone, and the other he brought to the *beit midrash*—the House of Study. He then inquired, “Is this piece of meat pure (i.e. kosher) or impure (i.e. not kosher)?” The reply he received was, “Nothing impure comes down from heaven.” The

¹⁰⁹ See Louis Ginzberg, *The Legends of the Jews*, vol. 3, Philadelphia 1954: 141 and *ibid.* vol. 6, Philadelphia 1946: 60 for sources. See further E.E. Urbach, *Hazal: Pirkei Emunot ve-Deot (The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs)*, Jerusalem, 1969: 317–319 (with Philonic antecedents and anti-Christian polemic intent).

Talmud there continues to relate how Rav Zeira asked a similar question, and the answer he received was the same.

Later on in the same tractate (67b) we read how Rav Hanina and Rav Oshiah every Friday before Shabbat could immerse themselves in the “laws of creation” (*hilchot yetzirah*, presumably, in the book of *Yetzirah*), and through a manipulation of the holy names of God there was created for them a fine calf, which they ate. The Talmud does, however, not relate to us whether they slaughtered it or not—Did it require slaughtering, it being of celestial origin rather than a natural one, or was it in any case a calf that required slaughtering? The *Shlah* (*Shnei Luchos ha-Brit* by R. Yishaiah ha-Levi Horowitz, Amsterdam, 1648–1649, *Va-Yeshev* 70) wrote that an animal created through *Sefer Yetzirah* does not require to be slaughtered, and so too rules *Seder ha-Dorot* (by R. Yehiel Heilprin, Karlsruhe, 1769, letter *shin*, Shimon ben Halafta, sect. 2, 182), basing themselves on the principle that “nothing impure comes down from heaven.”¹¹⁰

I believe the same basic notion expresses itself in quite a different halachic context. Thus, the Talmud in *B. Berachot* 22a states as follows:

It was taught [*in a beraita*]: R. Yehudah ben Betaira said, “Words of Torah cannot be rendered impure.”

The statement is based on the exegesis of a biblical verse, namely, *Jeremiah* 23:29, “Are not all my words as fire, declares the Lord.” So argues the Talmud, “just as fire cannot be rendered impure, so too the words of the Torah cannot be rendered impure.” And on this basis the Rambam in *Hilchot Sefer Torah* 10:8 ruled:

All those who are impure, even menstruating women and even Gentiles, are allowed to hold the Torah scroll and read from it, *for words of Torah cannot be rendered impure.*

¹¹⁰ See further halachic discussions listed in *Ha-Daf ha-Yomi* 955, Elul 5777 [2016–2017], to *Sanhedrin* *ibid.*: 4; and cf. *Zohar Tzav* 31b; *ibid. Pinhas* 253a; *Tikkunei ha-Zohar* 419 (41b); R. Margalio, *Margalio ha-Yam*, vol. 2, Jerusalem, 1958: 34.

And so too rules the *Shulhan Aruch*, in *Yoreh Deah* 282:9.¹¹¹ The first discussion brings no source, while the second one has an exegetical basis. But, I believe, they both have an underlying assumption, namely, that which comes down from heaven, that is, has a celestial God-given source, cannot be impure—faulty, imperfect.¹¹² Hence, if the words of Torah *appear* to be morally unacceptable, as it were “impure,” it must be that the fault lies in our understanding, not in the text of the Torah. We are, therefore, obligated to examine our assumptions and *reveal* the *true* meaning of the text.

6. Conclusion

What, however, constitutes “truthful and legitimate” interpretation, as opposed to a false one, and who is qualified to give the authoritative interpretation, is a very challenging question.¹¹³ And indeed this is a question which challenges all

¹¹¹ See my discussion in my essay “Congregational Dignity and Human Dignity: Women and Public Torah Reading,” in *Women and Men in Communal Prayer: Halachic Perspectives*, ed. C. Trachtman, New Jersey, 2010: 65–73.

¹¹² Perhaps in an associative manner for much the same reason the Talmud in *B. Pesahim* 8a stated that *sheluhei mitzvah*—those emissaries sent out to carry out a *mitzvah*—will not be harmed [in the process of carrying out their task, since they are acting as emissaries of heaven].

¹¹³ Obviously, exegesis and interpretation must be controlled by certain limitations. There appear to have been divergent views among the early Tannaite authorities as to the extent of those limits. R. Yishmael appears to have had a rather restrictive position, despite what we earlier saw to be his view as “an eye for an eye.” For in the *Sifrei Deuteronomy* 122 (ed. Finkelstein, p. 180) we read:

[...] From this R. Yismael would say: In three places the *halachah* (i.e. the Rabbis) *okefet* the *Scriptures* (Mikra). The Torah says: and he shall spill its blood and cover it with earth (*Leviticus* 17:13), and the *halachah* said: anything that causes plants to grow. The Torah says: And he shall write her a book of divorce (*Deuteronomy* 24:1), and the *halachah* said: anything that is detached from the ground. The Torah

religious exegetical traditions.¹¹⁴ We can only hope, that by following the classical homiletic parameters with true intellectual

says, with an awl (*Exodus* 21:6), and the *Halachah* said: with anything [i.e. anything that pierces].

The critical question here is how we understand the word *okefet*. It was generally understood to mean “circumvent,” “bypass,” or “belie,” suggesting that the rabbis could circumvent the *halachah* according to some, while R. Yishmael limits their ability to do so to these three cases. Most recently Amit Gvaryahu, in an article entitled “Trusting words: does Halachah really circumvent Scripture?” (*Journal of Jewish Studies* 68/2 (2017): 260–283), convincingly argues that here *okefet* does not mean “uproot” Scripture, but rather “augment” or “expand” (*ibid.*: 278–281), which indeed makes good sense in the context of his examples, each of which expands the literal meaning of the Biblical word; thus, earth becomes anything that causes growth, not anything detached from the ground, awl, anything sharp. Thus, according to his interpretation, even the expansion of practical halachic possibilities is, according to R. Yishmael, greatly limited. Here again, we have only touched upon a much more far-reaching subject, namely, the limitations placed upon the rabbis in their exegetical interpretations.

¹¹⁴ The same question is posed in Karel Werner’s essay entitled “Authenticity in the Interpretation of Buddhism,” in M. Pye and R. Morgan (eds.), *The Cardinal Meaning. Essays in Comparative Hermeneutics: Buddhism and Christianity*, The Hague and Paris, 1973: 161–193. The opening statement reads as follows (pp. 161–167):

This paper is addressed to the question: ‘How do we know when a new interpretation of the Buddhist tradition is a valid one?’, and the implications of the question are more complex and more diversified than might be expected at first glance. It is concerned with discovering or formulating criteria for assessing the validity of new interpretations of the Buddhist tradition. Yet, what is Buddhist tradition? Buddhism has behind it a 2,500 years long history of development, evolution, modification and periodic reinterpretation brought about by changing historical circumstances and by its spreading further and further into countries where it was stimulated by its encounter with and penetration of different civilizations and cultural traditions. In the last few decades it has

reached and has started establishing itself, with unmistakable signs of further modifications and some new attempts at new interpretations, even in the sphere of our Western civilization.

From the historical point of view all these stages and trends going under the name of Buddhism belong to the Buddhist tradition. Of course a historian is not concerned with the validity of subsequent interpretations of a particular religious tradition by the professed followers of that tradition. He will only take proper notice of the influence from outside and the changes within the tradition as compared with its previous stages and forms and will analyse and describe them.

The concept of validity which we have to use when trying to answer the posited question implies evaluating and judging the religious tradition in question and its new interpretations on the basis of its own intrinsic nature and within the scope of the message it originally wanted to convey. This might suggest that an answer would best be given by one who would himself be committed to this same tradition. In which case for Christianity the question should be attempted by a Christian, for Buddhism by a Buddhist. [...]

But a little later (p. 162) Werner writes:

The natural conclusion seems to be, therefore, that the one who attempts to answer the title question should not be personally committed to the religion on whose interpretations he has to pass judgment; or that he should be as liberal a follower of it as possible, allowing for the widest acceptable differences within its tradition and not allowing his personal preferences to influence his criteria of validity for differing interpretations.

And similarly in the same volume David Pailin confronts the same question (pp. 127–159), concluding as follows (p. 159):

How do we know when a new interpretation of Christianity is a valid one? I suggest that the answer for the Christian believer is “When the interpretation starts from material found in the Christian religious tradition

integrity, and with *siyyata de-shemaya*, we will not be “severing the shoots” (cf. *B. Hagigah* 15a) but remain firmly rooted in our sources, allowing a healthy growth of those “shoots.” For our Torah is like a deeply implanted “tree of life to them that hold fast unto her” (*Proverbs* 3:18).

(which, however, can only be vaguely defined) and provides a true understanding of ultimate reality.”

However, his first sentence is formulated thus (p. 159):

But how do we verify a claim about the nature of ultimate reality?

And I would add: What is a “true understanding” of it?

Appendix

Barbara A. Holdrege, *Veda and Torah: Transcending the Textuality of Scripture* (New York 1996), the chapter “Interpretation of the Torah” (pp. 361–366):¹¹⁵

Rabbinic Hermeneutics: One of the basic tenets of the rabbinic tradition is that God did not intend for the Sefer Torah to stand on its own, but rather he intended for it to be interpreted. The very manner in which the Torah scroll is written—that is, the fact that it is written only with consonants and with no vowels, no accents, and no punctuation points to the openness of the closed text, which calls for interpretation. The text is closed in that its consonantal form is fixed and cannot be altered in any way. However, since the consonants alone are given, without the vowels, the text remains open in that it is possible to vocalize the words in a number of different ways, giving rise to a variety of possible interpretations without violating the written letter of the text. There is of course a tradition concerning the proper way to vocalize the text, but there are variations within this tradition, opening the way to multiple interpretations. The text is closed in another sense, in that it is considered to be a kind of cryptogram written in the secret language of God, which conceals as much meaning as it reveals. The style of the narrative accounts of the Sefer Torah is laconic and minimalist, full of lacunae. The legal sections of the Sefer Torah are also obscure and ambiguous in places, making it difficult to determine the precise meaning and application of certain laws.

¹¹⁵ Note that the transliteration of Hebrew was standardized to match that employed in the present article and that the footnotes were cited only in part.

Although the writer text is thus closed, both in the sense that its form is fixed and its meaning at times is concealed, the very hiddenness of the written text invites interpretation.

The rabbis maintain that the tradition of interpreting the written "code" of Torah is itself God-given and derives from the original revelation at Mount Sinai. In addition to the Written Torah, God gave Moses an Oral Torah, an oral tradition of interpretation of the written text. The process of interpretation, which assumes paramount importance in the rabbinic tradition, is thus viewed as a direct continuation of the original revelation and as an extension of the text itself, not something separate from it. Through the interpretive process the closed text is opened up, the potentiality of meaning contained within it is unfolded, and the text is transformed from a bounded system into an unbounded, ongoing process mediated by the sages. (Cf. Susan A. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory*, New York 1982: 39, 49.)

The hermeneutical process is thus understood as a means of drawing out and unfolding the meaning contained in seminal form in the Sefer Torah. At the time of the revelation at Mount Sinai the vast tree of primordial wisdom, which contained the total knowledge of creation, descended onto earth and became concentrated in the seed expressions of the Book of the Torah. The sages who interpret and expound the words of the Torah thus insist that they are not generating any new knowledge. They are simply transforming potentiality into actuality; they are elaborating and making explicit different aspects of the knowledge already implicit in the Sefer Torah. It is through the Oral Torah that the tree of knowledge contained in the seed expressions of the

Written Torah unfolds and bears fruit. The value of the Oral Torah in drawing out or “extracting” the meaning of the Written Torah is emphasized in a parable in Seder Eliyyahu Zuta, which compares God to a king who gave his two servants each a measure of wheat and a bundle of flax. While the foolish servant did nothing at all with the wheat and flax, the wise servant baked bread from the wheat and spun a cloth from the flax. “When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave the Torah to Israel, He gave it to them only as wheat, to extract from it fine flour, and as flax, to extract from it a garment. (*Seder Eliyahu Zuta*, ed. Friedmann, 2nd edition, Jerusalem 1960, sect. 82.)

The process of Interpretation is viewed as serving different purposes depending on the interpreter’s conception of Torah. If the Midrashist is focused on the exoteric text of the Torah, then he adopts the methods and principles of halakhic Midrash in order to clarify the meaning and application of the commandments, and he uses the methods of aggadic Midrash in order to draw out the ethical, theological, and metaphysical import of the narrative, nonlegal portions of the text. If, however, the interpreter maintains that the Torah also constitutes the blueprint revealing the structure and laws of creation, then the process of interpretation becomes a means of cracking the code of the exoteric text in order to fathom the “secrets of the Torah” (*sitrei torah, razei torah*). Both of these hermeneutical approaches are found in the rabbinic tradition, although they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. These two approaches are exemplified, respectively, by the Tannaitic schools of R. Ishmael and R. Akiba, which, as Abraham Heschel has emphasized, developed fundamentally different approaches to the hermeneutical task. The more pragmatic school of R. Ishmael maintained that “the Torah speaks in the

language of human beings" (*Sifrei Numbers* sect. 112, *B. Berachot* 31b.), while the more mystically inclined school of R. Akiba found transcendent significance in every word and letter of the Sefer Torah. (Cf. A.J. Heschel, *Torah in ha-Shamayim be-Aspaklariah shel ha-Dorot*, London 1902–1965.)

In suggesting that the Torah is customary human speech, the school of R. Ishmael was not denying the divine status of the Sefer Torah as the Word of God. On the contrary, the thirteen hermeneutical principles of R. Ishmael, like the interpretive methods of the school of R. Akiba, proceed from the fundamental assumption that the Torah in its entirety is divine and therefore constitutes a perfect and complete unity, in which there are no errors, no contradictions, and no superfluous words or letters. R. Ishmael's assertion that the Torah speaks in the language of human beings was essentially an assertion of the primacy of the exoteric text, which is rendered in a language comprehensible to human beings—albeit laconic and obscure at times—and which can be interpreted through recourse to normal modes of human reasoning and logic. The thirteen principles of R. Ishmael were thus based primarily on logical inference. His principles include, for example, *qal wa-homer*, an a fortiori argument from a minor to a major premise, or vice versa' *gezerah sawah*, an inference based on word analogy; and the principle that the meaning of an obscure word or passage may be deduced through examining its larger context (*me-inyano*). [...]

In aggadic Midrashim from the classical Amoraic period onward, the school of R. Akiba's emphasis on the significance of every detail of the Torah has its counterpart in what Howard Eilberg-Schwartz has termed an "atomistic understanding of language." As part of their attempt to "recover" the divine Author's

hidden intentions encoded within the Torah, the sages would break down the canonical text into its basic linguistic units—individual words—and these units into their constituent elements—the Hebrew letters—and then would manipulate the text through various hermeneutical devices, including analysis of the numerical value (*gematria*), shape, and sound of the letters, transposition of letters, splitting of words, alternative readings (*'al tiqre*), etymologies, and other types of linguistic operations. In such hermeneutical maneuvers every word and letter of the Torah, as the fundamental components of the divine language, is ascribed manifold significations that must be “unpacked.” (See Howard Eilberg-Schwartz, “Who’s Kidding Whom? A Serious Reading of Rabbinic Word-Plays,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 55/4, 1987: 765–788.) Such interpretive strategies are particularly emphasized in aggadic Midrashim, in which, free from the restraints imposed on halakhic formulations and at the same time limited by the broader parameters of rabbinic discourse, the Midrashist could exercise his limited freedom to explore the subtleties and delights of the art of interpretation and to tease out multiple meanings from a single word or verse. (See Judah Goldin, “The Freedom and Restraint of Haggadah,” in *Midrash and Literature*, edd. G.H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, New Haven 1986: 63.)

In contrast to the monosemantic perspective of Aristotle, who asserts that “if it be said that ‘man’ has an infinite number of meanings, obviously there can be no discourse; for not to have one meaning is to have no meaning,” the rabbis extol the glories of polysemy and maintain, on the contrary, that if there were a singular, determinate meaning of the Torah there could be no discourse. To insist on univocality would be to end discourse with God through the

interpretive process, and such an end is inconceivable. (Aristotle, *Metaphysica*, Gamma 4, 1006 h, 6–10.) A Talmudic periscope compares the words of the Torah to a fig tree with an unending supply of figs, or to a mother's breast whose flow of milk is inexhaustible, for the more one studies them the more meaning (*ta'am*, literally, "relish") one finds in them. (*B. Eruvin* 54 a–54 b.) Another Talmudic tradition suggests that it is possible to generate "mounds upon mounds" (*tillie tillim*) of expositions on every single stroke (*qotz*) of every letter of the Torah. [*B. Eruvin* 21b.] The multifaceted meanings ascribed to the Torah received formal articulation in two traditions concerning the number of possible modes of expounding the Torah. According to one tradition there are forty-nine ways of interpreting the Torah, while according to a second tradition there are seventy modes of exposition. (*Numbers Rabba* 13:15.) The latter notion recalls the tradition that every utterance that issued from God's mouth at Mount Sinai was heard simultaneously in seventy languages (*B. Shabbat* 88b etc.), establishing an implicit connection between the Sinai revelation and the hermeneutical process: just as in the process of revelation God's Word was heard in seventy languages, so in the process of interpretation the divine Word is expounded in seventy ways.

A number of passages in rabbinic texts suggest that interpretation of the Torah is not only a continuation of the original revelation but also serves as a means of replicating the wondrous events of the Sinai theophany. An aggadah that appears in several classical Amoraic Midrashim relates how when certain sages interconnect the verses of the Torah (Pentateuch), *Nevi'im*, and *Ketuvim*, flames of fire blaze forth around them and "the words of the Torah are joyful as on the day they were given at Sinai ... in

fire. (*Leviticus Rabba* 16:4 etc.) The Talmudic story in Hagigah 14b of R. Johanan b. Zakkai and his disciples expounding *ma'aseh merkabah* similarly invokes the language and imagery of the Sinai event to describe the miraculous phenomena that accompany their expositions: fire descends from heaven, and angel (rather than God) speaks from the fire, and hosts of angels assemble to hear the expositions, like people assembling to witness a wedding between a bridegroom and bride. (*B. Sukkah* 28a.) Several Midrashim emphasize how the faces of the sages who study and expound Torah shine with its light, suggesting an analogy with the radiant countenance that Moses received at Sinai. The Israelites' experience at the Sinai theophany is also paradigmatic for the Torah scholar: just as God revealed his glory (*kavod*) and the Shechinah to the people of Israel, so the divine glory and the Shechinah are said to abide with those who engage in Torah study.

Praying from the Depths: Themes of Struggle and Uncertainty in Pre- Modern Accounts of Jewish Prayer

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1. Introduction

In a homily on prayer published posthumously in 2012, the late Rabbi Shimon Gerson Rosenberg (Shagar; 1949–2007) addresses the phenomenon of praying while struggling with doubt.¹ Basing himself on the writings of the legendary Nineteenth Century Hasidic master Nachman of Bratslav, Shagar expounds on the spiritual challenges and opportunities that can arise from grappling with “alien thoughts” (a common phrase in late rabbinic writings)² which may distract a person during the course of his (or her) prayers. According to Shagar, these “alien thoughts” encompass religious doubts:

In several places the concept of “alien thoughts” has been interpreted to refer to idolatrous impulses (*hirhurim*), and accordingly these can be presented as doubts about matters of faith that arise when one prays, when suddenly he confronts the question of whether there is even someone who is listening to the prayer? [...] in fact, the root of most “alien thoughts” derives from bewilderment about the existence of a deity who hears the prayers of man.

¹ Rosenberg 2012: 329–331. The English translations provided below are mine.

² See Piekarcz 1978: 269–279.

Instead of encouraging the pray-er to expel the “alien thoughts” from his (or her) mind, Shagar argues that these flashes of skepticism should elicit a different kind of reaction:

The investment of one’s entire being in prayer, described in this teaching as a sacrifice or even as death, means the willingness to accept the doubt that arises for the pray-er during the course of his prayer—to know how not to respond to it, but also not expel it from his thoughts in order to return to the routine act of praying—but rather live with it. And then a wondrous process may materialize: When a person’s theological doubt occurs alongside the prayer, it transforms in a paradoxical manner into a stimulus that enables him to attain even more profound faith. Precisely the pray-er’s foregoing the need for certainty, and willingness to allow doubt its place, elevates faith to its heightened and worthy station.

Unlike traditional rabbis who considered “alien thoughts” highly disruptive, Shagar calls for allowing them to inhabit one’s psyche. More, on his account these equivocal sentiments can even be processed in a manner that can enhance one’s spiritual quest.

At first blush, Shagar’s analysis seems thoroughly postmodern.³ In a discourse marked by widespread skepticism about storied traditions and truisms, the nature or purpose of religious practices, including prayer, needs to be reevaluated. Most people cannot blindly worship or pray to a god on terms that do not correspond to their notions of faith.

In a pre-modern world, by contrast, one may surmise that devotional practices were approached with different axioms about faith. Steadfast convictions presumably anchored spiritual life, and contrarian impulses were meant to be dispelled. For instance,

³ The nature of religion in a post-modern world is a central theme in Rabbi Shagar’s writings. See, for example, the subtitle of another one of his works, *Faith Shattered and Restored: Judaism in the Postmodern Age*.

various medieval thinkers maintained that clouds of uncertainty can be lifted through systematic rational inquiry. A vivid expression of this outlook is the following passage from the writings of Saadia Gaon, the father of medieval Jewish philosophy:⁴

It is clear, then, that the person who speculates begins with a great many things that are all mixed up, from which he continually sifts nine out of ten, and then eight out of nine, and then seven out of eight, until all confusions and ambiguities are removed and only the pure extract remains. If, therefore, he were to stop in his investigations upon reaching the fifth or the fourth stage or whatever station it be, the number of uncertainties resolved by him would be in proportion to the stations he has put behind himself, and he would still be left with a number proportionate to the stations before him. Should he hold on to what he has accomplished, there is hope that he may come back to it and complete the process. If, however, he does not retain it, then he would be compelled to repeat the entire process of reasoning from the beginning.

For Saadya, faith rests on sturdy, unshakeable ground. Many other classical sources envision resolute faith of a similar kind.⁵ Yet, alongside the even-keeled certitude reflected in this impressive body of material, other sources offer more spiritually wrought accounts of faith. Indeed, significant portraits of religious figures confronting difficulty, anxiety, and indeterminacy in their spiritual quest exist within biblical, rabbinic, and medieval writings, even if they do not share the skeptical or nihilistic edge of some later

⁴ *Sefer ha-Emunot yeha-De'ot*, Introduction, Chapter 3. The translation from Hebrew is mine.

⁵ To be sure, the grounding of faith upon systematic rational inquiry is primarily found in medieval Jewish philosophical writings.

depictions. For the modern reader, these perhaps less familiar sources are of paramount interest.⁶

In the present context, I wish to explore how several forms of struggle and uncertainty (if not theological doubt) surface in a selection of texts relating to prayer, which is especially notable given the relatively fixed nature of traditional liturgy, and the standardization of this rite in normative Jewish practice. My exemplars are deliberately drawn from diverse works and periods and represent different manifestations of this phenomenon in prayers of petition as well as praise, in order to reflect the varieties of discourses that are contained in pre-modern writings. More than carving out room for vulnerable encounters, the texts examined below—to a certain extent anticipating the sentiments of Shagar—all magnify ways this phenomenon shapes, and even potentially enhances, religious life. Beginning with the biblical book of Habakkuk, I will proceed chronologically to subsequent case studies from rabbinic and medieval literature.

2. Habakkuk's Prophetic Prayer

Likely composed around the beginning of the 6th century BCE,⁷ Habakkuk consists of three chapters, which can be subdivided into two units. Chapters 1 and 2 record an extended exchange between the prophet and God; and Chapter 3 is comprised of a psalmic hymn. Both units can also arguably be characterized as (very different kinds of) prayers. The first unit opens as follows:⁸

⁶ This topic is a broad one that touches on theological, epistemological, and legal issues, and it is a desideratum to explore its various dimensions. Several works explore certain aspects of this topic, and contain helpful references to earlier studies and sources. See, e.g., Weiss 2016; Morrow 2006); and Laytner 1977.

⁷ For more background on the dating of Habakkuk, see Vanderhooft 2011: 352–353; and Ahituv 2007: 4–5.

⁸ The translation is taken from *The Jewish Study Bible* 2014: 1216–1221, with a couple of modifications. See notes 9 and 26.

The matter which was seen⁹ by the prophet Habakkuk. How long, O Lord, shall I cry out and You not listen, shall I shout to You, "Violence!" and You not save? Why do You make me see iniquity [why] do You look upon wrong? Raiding and violence are before me, strife continues and contention goes on. That is why decision fails and justice never emerges; for the villain hedges in the just man—therefore judgment emerges deformed. [...] (Hab 1:1–4).

Notwithstanding the header which refers to a prophetic vision,¹⁰ the first unit does not present an oracle from God that is transmitted by a prophet (the standard form of prophecies). Instead this unit records Habakkuk's visceral outcries to God in the face of injustice, followed by God's successive responses. Nevertheless, the first unit's framing reveals, or transforms, the nature of this discourse, and signals its lasting import.¹¹ As Ehud Ben Zvi has stated, "It is particularly significant that a book that contains mainly human speech is considered to be "the (prophetic) pronouncement that Habakkuk, the prophet saw (i.e., perceived in a revelation/vision)."¹² Or, formulated differently, what is mediated by Habakkuk's loaded exchange with God consists of (or constitutes) prophetic content.

⁹ I have rendered the words "*Ha-masa asher hazah*" as "the matter which was seen." The *Jewish Study Bible* offers a looser translation, "The pronouncement made," and Ehud Ben Zvi notes that "a more literal translation of the v. would be 'the (prophetic) pronouncement that Habakkuk, the prophet, saw (i.e., perceived in revelation/vision).'" See *ibid*: 1216.

¹⁰ The biblical term *masa* seems to refer to a vision in Isa 13:1. Scholars debate its semantic here. See the summary of scholarship in Lortie 2017: 146–147.

¹¹ Some scholars characterize the superscription as an editorial addition. See, e.g., Ahituv 2007: 21. Still, it reflects the editor's conception and framing of the subsequent material.

¹² See *The Jewish Study Bible* 2014: 1215. The scriptural quote in my translation reads "The matter which was seen by the prophet Habakkuk."

A Talmudic tradition proclaims the legacy of Habakkuk in other terms—as a model of an intensive and intimate pray-er who persistently cajoles and implores God through his prayers.¹³ The leap from prophet to pray-er reflected in this tradition has a certain appeal since prayer (=man communicates with God) and prophecy (=God communicates with man) can be thought of as mirroring modalities that here intersect. Thus, Habakkuk, who initiates the exchange, can be seen as a pray-er who evokes a divine response, or a dialogic partner in a prophetic revelation from God.¹⁴ Moreover, certain prophets at times serve as intercessors and pray-ers, a point I will return to shortly. Either way, the Talmudic tradition underscores the religious import of Habakkuk's charged exchange with God, singling him out as a precursor for the charismatic first-century BCE sage, Honi "the Circle-drawer."¹⁵

Turning to the content of the first unit, initially Habakkuk bursts forth with an outcry about God's absence, despite the oppression that has transpired within Judean society,¹⁶ as cited above. When

¹³ See *b. Ta'an.* 23a. Compare with the other rabbinic references in note 15.

¹⁴ On the surprising idea of a partnership between God and man in revelation, see the thesis of Yochanan Muffs about Moses' participatory role in revealing the divine attributes, as elaborated upon by Gary Anderson. See Anderson 2017: 28.

¹⁵ While rabbinic tradition refers explicitly to Habakkuk's posture/stance in 2:1 as Honi-like, this verse seems integrally connected to Habakkuk's prior dialogue with God in Chapter 1, and his subsequent interaction in Chapter 2. Arguably, they should all be understood, for the rabbis, as integrated phases of a persistent "prayer."

Even as the Talmud holds up Habakkuk as a paradigm for Honi, rabbinic literature contains criticisms of both figures. Thus, the Mishnah (3:8) and the Talmudic passage record the critical, but admiring, response of Simeon b. Shetah to Honi's methods. See also *y. Ta'an.* 3:10. A later midrashic passage describes Habakkuk in terms that are drawn from the Honi narrative (without mentioning the latter), and is openly critical. See Midrash Psalms 7:17. See also 77:1; Yalkut Shimoni 562:2. For additional analysis, see Weiss 2016: 46–47; and Angel 2010: 3–9.

¹⁶ It is unclear who is responsible for the oppression described in the opening verses. See Ahituv 2007: 22. Note that Habakkuk's complaint

God responds with a dire prediction of Babylonian ascendancy,¹⁷ Habakkuk intensifies his protest on high and expresses outrage about God's betrayal of divine principles of justice:

You, O Lord, are from everlasting; My holy God, You never die. O Lord, You have made them a subject of contention; O Rock, You have made them a cause for complaint. You whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil, Who cannot countenance wrongdoing, Why do You countenance treachery, And stand by idle while the one in the wrong devours the one in the right? [...] (Hab 1: 12–13).

Habakkuk cannot fathom how God can allow the wicked to thrive (his first complaint), especially not the mighty kingdom of Babylon that will crush Judea (his second complaint). His latter protest climaxes with the fisherman parable, the crescendo of Chapter 1.¹⁸

The first unit of Habakkuk bears an obvious resemblance to an important pattern that one can discern elsewhere in prophetic writings. In a classic article, Yochanan Muffs explores the prototypical function of prophets as intercessors on behalf of Israel/Judea, who parry with, and challenge, the divine decree. Rather than viewing this phenomenon as an all too human deviation from the classical prophetic role, Muffs persuasively argues that this is an essential part of their divine mandate. God, as it were, anticipates and even invites prophets to act as intercessors on behalf of the people, and to stand stubbornly and precariously in the breach to try and fend off the punitive streak of divine wrath. While more strident in tone and more relentless in interrogating

emphasizes his own frustration in having to witness this corrupt and oppressive society. See *ibid*: 23.

¹⁷ According to most scholars, Hab 1:5–11 is a response from God. See, e.g., Floyd 1991: 399. But see Gutnick, 2014: 11, 41–60. On how these verses would function as a response, see Gowan 1976: 35–37. While explicating the divine answer, Gowan rightly draws attention to Habakkuk's preceding posture. See *ibid*: 37–38.

¹⁸ Hab 1:14–17.

the nature of theodicy,¹⁹ Habakkuk encapsulates a version of this prophetic tradition.

But several features of Habakkuk's exchange are anomalous in comparison to other exemplars of this discourse. Unlike the other intercessors who are reacting to God's instructions to prophesy doom or issue damning pronouncements, Habakkuk initiates contact with God. Moreover, in contrast to all other intercessory prophets, the stirring exchange between Habakkuk and God is not merely an episode or phase in Habakkuk's prophetic career, but its defining core.²⁰ Indeed, the "prophetic" content of Habakkuk's discourse is all embedded in his dialogic articulation of principles of divine justice, as well as the divine responses that it elicits. The above two features relate to, or perhaps derive from, a third one, which is a poignant departure from other intercessor-prophets. Habakkuk is entirely in the dark about God's will or plan. It is the agitation of feeling deserted and desperate that sparks Habakkuk's "prophetic" discourse.²¹

Indeed, an anxiety of uncertainty—which transpires on several levels—pervades Habakkuk's exchange with God, and fuels it. Most obviously, Habakkuk is uncertain about the precarious fate of the Judeans. At a more cosmic level, Habakkuk is uncertain about the mechanisms of divine justice, and how they correspond to the dismal reality that he observes and the looming ascent of the enemy. On a providential level, Habakkuk's desperate words reflect apprehensiveness about God's involvement in Judea's

¹⁹ Theodicy, of course, is another motif that surfaces elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, such as in Job and sections of Jeremiah (e.g., Jer 12). To invoke Yehezkel Kaufmann's memorable formulation, Habakkuk is a "prophetic Job" (see the citation and reference in Weiss 2016: 46). In Habakkuk, the theodicy is articulated by a prophet who bemoans the plight of the many, as part of his pointed dialogue and emphatic prayers.

²⁰ Remarkably, the exchange between Habakkuk and God constitutes the entirety of the first unit of this biblical book.

²¹ Habakkuk's lack of special prophetic foreknowledge contributes toward his image as one who primarily reaches out to God through dialogue and prayer.

plight, or even attentiveness to his intercession. Recall Habakkuk's anguish and exasperation at the deafening silence from on high at the opening of the book: "How long, O Lord, shall I cry out and You not listen, shall I shout to You, 'Violence!' and You not save?" (Hab 1:2).²²

Punctuating this pervasive theme is the enigmatic and pregnant pause recorded in the opening verse of Chapter 2, in advance of God's response which is the denouement of the first unit: "I will stand on my watch, take up my station at the post, and wait to see what He will say to me, what He²³ will reply to my complaint" (Hab 2:1). Commenting on this verse, the *Jewish Study Bible* records an open-ended gloss equivocating whether it intends to express patience or impatience.²⁴ But the verse may well convey neither sentiment; rather it may reflect Habakkuk's tense edginess on the heels of his brazen words about what, or perhaps if, God will reply.²⁵

When the divine response arrives, it emphatically affirms the propriety and efficacy of Habakkuk's prayers of Chapter 1 by announcing an enduring prophetic message of redemption: "Even if it (redemption) tarries, wait for it still; For it will surely come, without delay. [...] The righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab 2:3–

²² Habakkuk's prayer, then, is fueled in part by his struggles to connect with God. Beyond being sanctioned by a prophet's license to intercede, his prayer's legitimacy, and ultimate legacy, derive from the sincerity of his outcry.

²³ The literal translation of the word is "I will reply," but my translation follows the line of scholarly interpretation that construes this term as a respectful way to refer to God. See the discussion in Ahituv 2007: 39. The alternate interpretations of this term may influence how one understands Habakkuk's stance in this verse.

²⁴ See Ben Zvi's gloss in the *Jewish Study Bible* 2014: 1217.

²⁵ Perhaps Habakkuk has transgressed the permissible modes of discourse and forfeited his standing before God. Strikingly, Vanderhooft 2011: 354–355, describes Habakkuk as a contrarian relative to other prophets (albeit for other reasons).

4).²⁶ This prophecy both reassures Habakkuk but also calls for patience and faith on his part, as well as on the part of the Judeans. Habakkuk's fraught and penetrating exchange pierces the providential veil, even if secondary layers of mystery still remain. In marked contrast to the explosive exchange of the first two chapters, Chapter 3 has an entirely different tone. Scholars have long conjectured about whether the liturgical psalm of Habakkuk Chapter 3 is an integral part of the book or a discrete, and perhaps older, section, which was added later. Even on the latter hypothesis, the deliberateness of the layout of the redactor seems evident.²⁷ Balancing the turbulent spiritual journey of the first unit, Chapter 3 is anchored in bedrock faith:²⁸

A prayer of the prophet Habakkuk. In the mode of
Shigionoth.²⁹ O Lord! I have learned of Your renown; I

²⁶ I have modified the *Jewish Study Bible*'s translation of this verse. Among various interpretations by scholars, see the influential alternate interpretation of Janzen 1980: 53–78.

Over time this verse has become central for Christian thought. See Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:12; Hebrews 10:36–39; and subsequently in the writings of Luther (see the reference in Vanderhooft 2011: 355–356). The rabbis, in a presumably polemical passage (*b. Makk.* 24a), also underscore its significance. See Steinmetz 2005: 133–187. In later Jewish thought, this verse is adduced as a call to intensify redemptive hope among the faithful, even if salvation does not materialize at an anticipated date (“the longer the delay the more fervently we hope”). See *Epistles of Maimonides* 1993: 115.

²⁷ A rabbinic tradition describes this chapter as a prayer for atonement for the sinful complaints of the first two chapters. See note 15. Even without going this far (indeed, the argument above is that the first two chapters are prophetic and paradigmatic, not sinful), one can appreciate the counterbalance between the two units of the book.

²⁸ See Vanderhooft (2011: 355), who also argues that these units are related, but on different grounds. He argues that the former describes the chaotic threat to the cosmos of the enemy, and the latter God's promise to defeat this threat and restore cosmic order.

²⁹ In commenting on this obscure term, the *Jewish Study Bible* translation notes “meaning uncertain; perhaps ‘psalms of supplication’; cf. Ps. 7.1.”

am awed, O Lord, by Your deeds. Renew them in these years, Oh, make them known in these years [...] (Hab 3:1–2).

A reverential declaration of God’s majestic theophany calibrates the raw, audacious tone of the first unit, but does not erase its traces. Critically, the Bible (and the rabbis) records for posterity a prophetic discourse, or prayer, shot through with uncertainty. Situated within this tenuous setting, a bold spiritual persona presses forward with a determined plea and opens a pathway for God’s revelation and intervention.

3. Talmudic Praise

Unlike the extraordinary, spontaneous pleas of Habakkuk, Jewish prayer mostly adheres to a more regulated set of liturgical practices, which have evolved over the centuries. A prime exemplar of this is the *Amidah*, a central prayer in the daily liturgy. Comprised of a carefully arranged sequence of blessings, the *Amidah* begins with several formal benedictions of praise to God that follow a fixed template.³⁰ Yet, a telling Babylonian Talmudic

The gloss of Ben Zvi adds “[...] it has something to do with a musical aspect of the performance of the psalm [...]. According to a certain traditional Jewish interpretation, this phrase [...] should be translated, ‘... for erroneous speech/utterances.’ This reading reflects a particular understanding of the claims made by the human speaker in these dialogues (contrast with Job 42.8).” See *The Jewish Study Bible* 2014: 1219–1220. A certain traditional Jewish interpretation alludes to the rabbinic tradition referred to in notes 15 and 28, which construes this difficult term homiletically, as a plea for atonement (from the word *shagag*, to transgress accidentally) for the strident and provocative tone of Chapters 1 and 2.

³⁰ The *Amidah* is comprised of three sections of blessings: praise, requests, and gratitude. According to halakhic convention, the former and latter sections have a fixed template, while the middle section allows for more personal elaboration. See a summary of the laws in Maimonides *Hilkhot Tefilah* 1:2–4, 6:2–3, 9:7. Elsewhere, the Babylonian Talmud emphasizes how the praises of the opening benediction must adhere to a set formula. See *b. Ber.* 33b. Nevertheless, many variants and liturgical poems (*piyyutim*) were composed for the blessings of praise over the centuries,

passage (*b. Yom. 69b*) complicates this dichotomy by exposing the subjective side of even the most standard formulas of prayer.

The crux of this passage focuses upon the litany of praise that opens the first benediction of the *Amidah*, “Blessed art Thou, God, our Lord and Lord of our ancestors, Lord of Abraham, Lord of Isaac and Lord of Jacob, the Lord who is *the great, the mighty, and the awesome* [...]” (emphasis added). While this blessing was presumably only standardized during the early rabbinic period,³¹ it invokes a set of adjectives of praise that appear in Moses’s farewell address as descriptions of God’s prowess: “For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe” (Deut 10:17). Rabbinic tradition notes that similar or identical adjectival clauses resurface in later biblical books: Jeremiah describes God as “the great and the mighty” (Jer 32:18; but not “awesome”); Daniel describes God as “the great and the awesome” (Dan 9:4, but not “mighty”); and Nehemiah describes God in the exact Mosaic formula as “The great, the mighty, and the awesome” (Neh 9:32):

- Moses: “the great, the mighty, and the awesome”
(Deuteronomy 10:17)
- Jeremiah: “the great, the mighty” (Jer 32:18)
- Daniel: “the great, the awesome” (Dan 9:4)
- Nehemiah: “the great, the mighty, and the awesome”
(Neh 9:32)

In accounting for this composite record, the rabbis assume that the Mosaic litany was known to all subsequent biblical figures and knowingly adopted by them. Nevertheless, the subtle differences in formulations, according to the rabbis, reflect deliberate emendations made at later phases of biblical history by Jeremiah

clearly reflecting different perspectives on the propriety of embellishing and adapting the content of this section. See Scholem 1954: 60–61.

³¹ For a helpful overview, see Heinemann 2007: 72–76; and Langer 2003: 127–156.

and Daniel, followed by a climactic restoration of the original formula by Nehemia (which the rabbis date as the latest of these sources). Since the rabbis identify Nehemia as one of the “Men of the Great Assembly,” a legendary late Second Temple institution that served as a precursor to the leadership of the rabbinic movement,³² they are associating their own liturgical practice with this final editorial act. What justifies the complex legacy of this liturgical litany of praise, according to the rabbis, is the principled dedication of future generations to follow the traditional template balanced with their need to pray honestly and earnestly.

The earliest version of this rabbinic teaching is recorded in the Jerusalem Talmud, which is restated in a somewhat altered form in a Palestinian Midrash centuries later.³³ A better known version (which may also be an adaptation of the Jerusalem Talmudic passage) is recorded in the Babylonian Talmud (*b. Yom. 69b*):³⁴

- (1) As Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: Why are they [the Sages of those late Second Temple generations] called the Men of the Great Assembly? Because they returned the crown (i.e., the complete litany of praise in the opening benediction of the *Amidah*) to its former glory.
- (2) Moses came and said: “The great, the mighty, and the awesome God” (Deuteronomy 10:17).
- (3) Jeremiah came and said: Gentiles are carousing in His sanctuary; where is His awesomeness? He did not say “awesome” (see Jer 32:18).

³² For an exploration of certain aspects of this legendary institution and its relationship to rabbinic authority, see Tropper 2013: 23–68.

³³ See *y. Ber. 7:3* and Midrash Psalms 19:2, which contrast in various ways with the *b. Yom. 69b* passage. I hope to elaborate further on these synoptic sources in another context.

³⁴ The translation of *b. Yom. 69b* is based upon www.sefaria.org, with my own modifications.

- (4) Daniel came and said: Gentiles are enslaving His children; where is His might? He did not say “mighty” (see Dan 9:4).
- (5) The Men of the Great Assembly came and said: On the contrary, this is His might that He conquers His inclination in that He exercises patience toward the wicked. And these acts also express His awesomeness: Were it not for the awesomeness of the Holy One, blessed be He, how could one people, survive among the nations? (see Neh. 9:32).
- (6) And the Rabbis (i.e., Jeremiah and Daniel),³⁵ how could they do this and uproot an ordinance instituted by Moses? Rabbi Elazar said: Because they knew of the Holy One, blessed be He, that He is truthful, consequently, they did not speak falsely about Him.³⁶

The lead paragraph (1) records a discrete, if elliptic, etiological tradition about the etymology of the title “Men of the Great Assembly,” adduced here to introduce and frame the rest of the passage, which further illuminates its meaning (see (5)). The core of this passage, Paragraphs (2)–(5), surveys the different Scriptural formulations of the adjectival clause of praise of God in diachronic order (according to the rabbis). Paragraph (2) records the original Mosaic formulation that includes all three adjectives, “the great, the mighty, and the awesome,” to describe God’s attributes. Praying with a fragmentary version of the traditional formula, Jeremiah (Paragraph (3)) and Daniel (Paragraph (4)) omit adjectives of praise that are seemingly incongruous with the oppressing gentiles’ humiliating profanation of the Temple³⁷ and their cruel subjugation

³⁵ See Rashi ad loc. This characterization of the prophets is absent from the parallel Yerushalmi source.

³⁶ An alternative recension of this passage (see, e.g., the Munich manuscript) reads “they did not speak falsely to him (*lo*, instead of *bo*).”

³⁷ The term “awesome” is linked to the Temple in other contexts, as well. See, e.g., Lev 19:29.

of the Jews, which they respectively witnessed. The later generation of Nehemia and the Men of the Great Assembly manage to restore the original Mosaic formula, despite these or similar tribulations (Paragraph (5)).

The Talmud's reconstruction (or synthesis) of a brief history of this foundational formula—in both its interim and final phases—offers crucial insights into the way (collective)³⁸ struggle and uncertainty can even inflect the liturgical section of praise of the *Amidah*. Moreover, revising or reframing the litany of praise that prefaces this prayer based on these sentiments (re)orients the pray-er's overall approach to God. The pray-er now faces God through the prism of their plight.

What justifies the audacious emendations of Jeremiah and Daniel is their conception of prayer and praise as demanding truthfulness, or if you will, transparency³⁹ (see Paragraph (6)). According to the Bavli, prayer cannot be solely based upon a coined formula, even if it is a traditional litany "instituted" by Moses.⁴⁰ Its recitation must (also) reflect the voice of the contemporary pray-er, and ring truthful, from his (or her) subjective perspective. So the prophetic masters only adopt portions of the traditional praise scripted by Moses, praying in a manner that corresponds with their authentic conception of, and struggles with, the immanent God. They only selectively extol God, glaringly omitting salient terms on account of their unanswered questions.⁴¹ As leaders, they publicly recite

³⁸ Presumably, the prophetic emendations are only justified in light of collective struggles. Likewise, Habakkuk's discourse is centered on public struggles. See note 70.

³⁹ Prayer demands that the (subjective) truth is expressed about God (at least in the course of praising God), or, perhaps more to the point, the pray-er be truthful or transparent about his or her perception of God. For a modern elaboration and extension of this theme, see Hartman 2011.

⁴⁰ Certain recensions of this line (reflected in several manuscripts) do not use this institutional language.

⁴¹ Importantly, the revisions are limited to omissions, as a result of an inability to formulate praise that seems inapposite. But the dramatic

and record a seared, partial formula of praise; and as spiritual masters, they bequeath an instructive legacy of truthfulness and doubt as structuring man's communications with, and even service of, God.

At a later phase, according to the rabbis, the perforated praise of the prophets is repaired by Nehemia and the Men of the Great Assembly, and the Talmud celebrates their great act of restoration. Nevertheless, the passage notably never criticizes Jeremiah and Daniel for their inability to pray faithfully in the manner of the Men of the Great Assembly. Perhaps these prophets did not anticipate the novel interpretation of the assembly; perhaps it did not resonate or fit with the sufferings of their particular circumstances; or perhaps they were not sufficiently swayed by it altogether. While the rabbis (and subsequent normative practice) champion the resolution of the Men of the Great Assembly, they also preserve the checkered praise of the prophets and underscore its impressive pedigree. Moreover, the Bavli remarkably concludes this pericope by circling back to the emendations of these prophets (paragraph (6))—who are tellingly labeled “rabbis”—and articulating their profound justification.⁴²

It is important in this vein to step back and appreciate that the entire Talmudic passage is a rabbinic invention, based on a bold, original construction of a pastiche of biblical verses. Rather than simply noting that the standard liturgy of praise that opens the *Amidah* is based on a Mosaic formula (which is repeated in Nehemia), the rabbis draw attention to minor differences that surface elsewhere in the Bible, and offer an audacious and astounding account of this fuller literary record. Choosing to underline the alternate formulations of Jeremiah and Daniel—which can easily be glossed over, or relegated to the bins of biblical

lacuna in the formula makes a powerful statement of bewilderment, agony and perhaps even protest.

⁴² In a similar vein, the Bavli's concern is how to justify overriding a Mosaic legislation or tradition, and it is not troubled by any theological affront that may be implicit in the prophetic emendations. Contrast this with the Palestinian parallels.

trivia—the rabbis use these variants as a transcript of struggle and uncertainty, demanding integrity in praising God even at the price of uprooting an ordinance instituted by Moses and recording a potential affront to God.

Even as the rabbis justify the approach of Jeremiah and Daniel, the passage privileges the Men of the Great Assembly's ability to restore the Mosaic prayer (Paragraph (5), foreshadowed in Paragraph (1)).⁴³ But here, too, the rabbinic presentation is carefully nuanced. Rather than painting Nehemia merely as a pious replicator of the Mosaic praise, the rabbis distinguish between the semantics of the original (Mosaic) and ultimate (*Amidah*) formula, notwithstanding their textual identity. More than restoring the original litany, the Men of the Great Assembly, in the rabbinic account, invest it with a new meaning that can endure for the ages. In the rabbinic rendering, Nehemia and the Men of the Great Assembly do not deny that liturgical praise must reflect the lived (collective) tribulations of those who pray. But their critical insight is that traditional formulae are supple enough that they allow for novel renderings which cohere with contemporary struggles. God's attributes, depicted in a string of adjectives, denote one kind of providence in a period of dominance, and another, perhaps even more sublime form, in more trying circumstances.⁴⁴

Whereas the Men of the Great Assembly earn their title by redeeming a traditional liturgical formula, the passage may also gesture at other aspects of their greatness (which presumably serve

⁴³ The notion that the Bavli here preserves two legitimate approaches, but privileges the later, is emphasized by Rabbi Isaac Hutner. He advances a different explanation from those suggested above as to why the approach of Jeremiah and Daniel differs from that of the Men of the Great Assembly. See *Pahad Yitshak* 1984: 64–71. I thank Professor Lawrence Kaplan for this reference.

⁴⁴ Rather than understood in their most plain sense as adjectival terms that describe God's heroic power, might and awesomeness can also be reflected in God's restraint and gravity. For God endures the ignominy of enemies without retribution, but also silently stymies their most predatory instincts.

as a paradigm for future pray-ers and prayer). By offering a dynamic prayer couched in a traditional vocabulary, the Men of the Great Assembly discover new spiritual frontiers.⁴⁵ Through their simultaneous commitments to fealty and authenticity, they identify thus far unrecognized dimensions of God's attributes which have theological as well as ethical implications.⁴⁶

Moreover, praying with this revelatory perspective surely alters the experience of prayer.⁴⁷ Praying faithfully in dire circumstances, an exposed and vulnerable subject finds a present and faithful God.⁴⁸ The struggle of the pray-er to offer praise to God from within his (or her) plight is then not just brooked, but ultimately enables—following in the footsteps of Habakkuk—a different kind of spiritual encounter.

If the soaring divine praises of the *Amidah's* opening formula would seem to supersede the all too human agitations of the subjective pray-er,⁴⁹ the Bavli insists that they can only be formulated from the latter's vantage point. Negotiating the dialectical values of spiritual honesty and traditional fidelity, the rabbis present a layered approach. The prophets were justified in dimming (or interrupting) their praise in their drive for transparency. A superior response, however, is advanced by the Men of the Great Assembly. Preserving the integrity of the original form while renewing its meaning, they thereby steer their struggles

⁴⁵ Their approach may model how a tradition should ideally respond to historical changes: The traditional form should be faithfully upheld, while new spiritual meanings are teased out over time.

⁴⁶ The theological motif is expressed elsewhere. See, e.g., Mekhilta of Rabbi Yishmael, *Shira Parsha* 8 (on Exod 15:11). The ethical motif derives from the principle of *imitatio Dei*. With respect to "mightiness," see *m. Abot* 4:1.

⁴⁷ The pray-er indicates where God is not manifest, and discovers that God dwells in the place that he (or she) inhabits.

⁴⁸ God may also now be manifest as a more "accessible," and less domineering, presence.

⁴⁹ See the parallel Palestinian sources.

into a heartfelt litany of praise, and inch closer to an ever-present God.

4. Petitionary Prayer in Provence

Shifting from formulations of praise to petitionary prayers enters a realm where the relevance of struggle and uncertainty is clear. Nevertheless, a striking medieval teaching extends the origin and scope of these sentiments in a manner that is both unsettling and instructive. Rather than merely accommodating or channeling these emotional responses, they are drawn out and deepened. Moreover, this teaching differs from both of the earlier exemplars in that the source of the struggles is, to a certain extent, reflexive.

The teaching is recorded in a pithy, but loaded, gloss of Rabbi Abraham b. David of Posquieres (the “Raabad”), a prominent medieval rabbinic authority. Addressing the question of whether one needs to continue to fast and pray after a crisis has been resolved in short order, Raabad demurs from the ruling of Maimonides (and other rabbinic authorities) and answers (mostly) in the affirmative (as explained below). Their alternate perspectives are based upon their divergent interpretations of a couple of primary sources in rabbinic literature, which are necessary to briefly review by way of background.

Tractate *Ta’anit* discusses the protocol for fasting and praying when a drought occurs during the rainy season. After an initial dry spell, individuals are mandated to fast.⁵⁰ If the drought persists, the rabbinic court declares a series of public fast days of increasing stringency, up to a maximum of thirteen.⁵¹ The observance of the fast days includes elaborate prayers petitioning for rain.⁵² Later in the tractate, the Mishnah extends a similar protocol to other public

⁵⁰ *M. Ta’an.* 1:4. The individuals in question are presumably elders of the community. For a further discussion, see Levine 2001: 136–140, 157–159. In *t. Ta’an.* 2:12, however, the term refers to any individual.

⁵¹ *M. Ta’an.* 1:5–6. There is a subsequent phase as well. See *m. Ta’an.* 1:7. See also *m. Ta’an.* 3:1–2 for a different scenario with a modified protocol.

⁵² *M. Ta’an.* 2:2–4.

emergencies, such as a plague, famine or a siege.⁵³ Other rabbinic sources also describe an individual fasting and petitioning God for deliverance from a personal crisis, such as an illness or other dangers.⁵⁴

A couple of rabbinic passages address the normative rule that applies when an underlying crisis is resolved over the course of a fast day. The Tosefta states that if an individual fasts for an ill person who soon recovers, or a danger that quickly passes, he (or she) must complete the fast and continue the petitionary prayers.⁵⁵ By contrast, the Mishnah concludes that a public fast day is terminated in such a scenario, assuming the reversal transpires relatively early on in the day (i.e., by noon, or according to an alternate view, before sunrise).⁵⁶ The Mishnah supports this ruling by citing a precedent where it rained before noon during a public fast day, and a leading sage instructed the community to break their fast and eat a festive meal. Afterwards, the people prayed a special prayer of gratitude, in lieu of their earlier petitionary prayers.

Based upon the alternate conclusions of the Tosefta (=continue to fast) and Mishnah (=terminate the fast before noon),⁵⁷ Maimonides distinguishes between the fast and prayers of an individual and the public:⁵⁸

⁵³ *M. Ta'an.* 3:4–8.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Maimonides *Hilkhot Ta'anit* 1:9, which draws on various earlier rabbinic sources. See the sources listed in *Mishneh Torah: Sefer Zemanim* 2016: 487.

⁵⁵ *T. Ta'an.* 2:12.

⁵⁶ *M. Ta'an.* 3:9. A *braitta* recorded in *b. Ta'an.* 25b contains a third opinion with a later cutoff in the day.

⁵⁷ A minority of medieval commentators harmonize between these tannaitic sources, by limiting the Tosefta to a case where the reversal transpires later on in the day (following the respective cutoff points). See the *Ra'ah* on *b. Ta'an.* 10b, and *Ra'avyah* 851 (cited by *Mordechai* 620).

⁵⁸ Maimonides *Hilkhot Ta'anit* 1:15–16. The translation is based upon www.chabad.org, with my own modifications.

When an individual was fasting for a sick person and the latter recovered, or because of a distressing situation and the difficulty passed, he should complete his fast. [...]

When a community is fasting for the sake of rain and it begins to rain before noon, the people should not complete their fast. Instead, they should eat, drink, and gather together to read the Great *Hallel* (prayer of Thanksgiving). [...] Similar [rules apply] if [a community] was fasting because of a distressing situation and the distress passed, or because of a harsh decree and the decree was nullified: [If this occurred] before noon, they do not complete their fast [...].

While Maimonides does not explicate the precise reason for this distinction, perhaps it derives from an essential difference (i.e., the different natures of an individual and public fast),⁵⁹ or a pragmatic calculation (i.e., a need to relax stringent rules with respect to the masses).⁶⁰ Other rabbinic authorities echo Maimonides' rulings.⁶¹

Dissenting from the Maimonidean division between an individual and communal fast, the Raabad stakes out an altogether different approach. The salient distinction for the Raabad turns on the type of underlying crisis that triggered the (individual or communal) fast in the first place. A fast necessitated by a drought (as described in the Mishnah) is suspended upon downfall of rain because the petition has been answered, and the crisis resolved. However, the case of rainfall is exceptional. The primary rule that governs all

⁵⁹ An individual fast day is initiated by a pledge in advance of its commencement (see *b. Ta'an.* 12a); while a public one is based on a rabbinic decree (see Levine 2001: 40–41). Their different natures may have implications for whether a fast can be suspended midway.

⁶⁰ The Magid Mishnah (Hilkhot Ta'anit 1:16) explains that a public fast day is suspended due to the burden on the masses, or that it is prospectively enacted on condition that it can be canceled.

⁶¹ See, e.g., various commentaries on *b. Ta'an.* 10b and 25b, including Rashi, Ramban, Ritva, the Rosh, etc. This distinction is already implicit in Alfasi.

other emergencies (as articulated in the Tosefta) mandates that a fast continue even after the underlying crisis has been resolved:⁶²

Said Abraham (=Raabad): the author (=Maimonides) thinks that one should distinguish between an individual and a community, but we say that *both an individual and a community should complete a fast even after a trouble has passed, except when the fast is on behalf of rain, for no trouble ever completely passes* except for a drought [...] (emphasis added).

The linchpin for understanding the Raabad's position is his startling explanation for the Tosefta's ruling that one must continue to fast and pray. While other commentaries explain the Tosefta's underlying rationale based on the inability to repeal a personal pledge midway,⁶³ or, alternatively, the unacceptable temerity of making a conditional commitment to God,⁶⁴ according to the Raabad one must persist in fasting and prayers because one still faces menacing threats that demand more petitioning. As the Raabad explains, the petitioner's sense of being fully delivered from an existential crisis is illusory. Health, peace and stability are inherently fragile, for "no trouble ever completely passes"⁶⁵—so the petitioner's fast and prayers must carry on.

The Raabad thus focuses upon a new dimension of struggle and uncertainty in the phenomenology of (fasting and) prayer. Rather than the act of praying audaciously (i.e., Habakkuk), or wrestling with injustice in grappling with an ominous reality (i.e., Habakkuk and the Talmud), it is man's confrontation with his naked condition that evokes these aspects of prayer. According to the Raabad, a

⁶² Gloss of Raabad on Hilkhhot Ta'anit 1:15.

⁶³ See Magid Mishnah (Hilkhhot Ta'anit 1:16).

⁶⁴ See Rashi on *b. Taan.* 10b.

⁶⁵ This "empirical fact" is meant to inform the subjective, and normative, response of human beings. Conversely, a normative mandate may also drive this process. See the penultimate paragraph of this section. There are variant formulations of the Raabad's position in Provençal halakhic writings, which I plan to explore in another forum.

person (or group) is perpetually vulnerable, and perpetually in need.⁶⁶ Invariably and ineluctably, he (or she) must re-assume the role of a petitioner.⁶⁷

Critiquing the approach of the Raabad on theological grounds, Rabbi Asher ben Jehiel (the “Rosh”), another leading medieval authority, implies that being riddled with gnawing anxieties about lurking perils betrays a lack of faith.⁶⁸ When a petition is answered, the Rosh asserts, the petitioner should have faith that God’s response will be sufficient. But clearly the Raabad rejects the spiritual premise of this critique.⁶⁹ A religious personality arguably cannot, and according to the Raabad, need not extinguish his (or her) uncertainties. On the contrary, he (or she) must resume petitioning to surmount any residual risks. Religious fealty does not demand faith and certitude, for the Raabad, but a realization of one’s profound dependence born out of uncertainty.

Given the Raabad’s alternate theological premise, however, the limited scope of his teaching requires explanation. Recall that the Raabad is addressing the specific situation of a person (or a community) who is fasting and offering petitionary prayers in response to an identifiable crisis. Even if the emergency appears to subside, the Raabad maintains that he (or she) should continue fasting and praying because of potential hazards. But if humans are perpetually in a precarious state, they should presumably be petitioning for providential care all the time, irrespective of

⁶⁶ The struggle reflected in this source is not a function of difficulties with God’s providence, but arises due to the vulnerable existential condition of human beings. In modern Jewish thought, a strikingly similar theme is elaborated upon by the late Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, which I plan to explore in another forum.

⁶⁷ Continually facing an uncertain landscape, the intrinsic posture of the person who prays is that of a petitioner grappling with potential risks.

⁶⁸ Rosh Ta’anit 1:6.

⁶⁹ A related debate may be reflected in diverse Talmudic traditions about whether one can be confident that a positive turn signifies a favorable divine response to fasting and petitionary prayers. Compare *y. Ta’an. 3:11* with *b. Ta’an. 25b*.

whether they had knowingly confronted a discrete peril and undertaken a fast (with its accompanying prayers) or not?

While the Raabad does not explicitly relate to this question, one can propose an outline of an answer that seems implicit in his teaching. Evidently for the Raabad the obligation to fast and pray when confronting an existential danger encompasses a spiritual mandate to reflect more soberly on one's exposed, perennial condition. This mandate becomes even more acute, or necessary, when a crisis appears to be fleeting and settled.

Urgent prayer in the face of peril should thus awaken a person to their perpetual vulnerability, and, in turn, their ultimate dependency on divine support. At the same time, offering such a prayer is a person's primary spiritual recourse in light of this humbling realization. In other words, petitionary prayers are simultaneously a poignant reminder of, and a vital response to, our profound insecurities.

5. Conclusion

It should be evident by now that the pivotal role of struggle and uncertainty in shaping prayer is not just a modern trope, but is clearly attested in classical Jewish sources. Indeed, all three sources examined above revolve around, or thematize, different aspects of this phenomenon. In the biblical source, Habakkuk's prayer grows out of his anguish due to the abject state of the nation. Voicing a piercing cry of incredulity regarding the absence of divine justice, Habakkuk boldly confronts God. After venturing into this uncharted spiritual terrain, he stands still and awaits God's uncertain response to his insistent prayers. As represented in the Talmudic source, other prophets struggle in praising God in the shadow of a ravaged Temple and amid a subjugated people, and are skeptical about the relevance of certain divine attributes in light of this grim reality. Overcoming their doubt, the Men of the Great Assembly never gainsay the validity of these struggles. Lastly, the Raabad homes in on a kind of existential angst that undergirds petitionary prayers. Encompassing the outraged and the daring; the fractured and the mended; the endangered and the perpetually

exposed, struggle and uncertainty dominate these varied accounts of prayer.⁷⁰

While the normative practice of Jewish prayer over the centuries has mostly adopted set forms and standardized routines, texts like the ones surveyed above summon the vulnerable subject to

⁷⁰ In a related vein, all three sources emphasize the communicative or expressive dimension of prayer, and situate it within a kind of dialogic framework—another feature that is often associated with modern accounts of prayer (i.e., the thought of Martin Buber). This is most apparent in Habakkuk's successive petitions, and the responses that he demands and receives. In the Talmudic source, this dimension surfaces in more subtle and surprising ways even within benedictions of praise (which are usually presumed to be unilateral expressions from man to God). Jeremiah and Daniel remonstrate by way of their fragmentary litany, while the Men of the Great Assembly express themselves by investing set words with new meanings. Finally, after the urgent prayers of Raabad's petitioner are answered straightaway by God, he leans in further when he recognizes the extent of his (or her) vulnerability (here the reciprocity is thus unstated, but palpable). Expressing the subjective and often fraught experience of the pray-er, dialogic prayer encompasses and is enlarged by doubt and uncertainty.

Recovering this early discourse on uncertainty in prayer is also instructive for the ways it diverges from its modern incarnation. As reflected in the opening citation from Rabbi Shagar, the modern pray-er typically grapples with personal difficulties. Notably, however, in all three classical sources evaluated above the struggles revolve around collective concerns. Habakkuk is outraged by Judea's suffering at the hands of the Babylonians. Jeremiah, Daniel and the Men of the Great Assembly, as represented in the Talmud, wrestle with the ruined state of the Temple or the people. Finally, the Raabad extends the mandate to continue fasting and praying recorded in the *Tosefta* to public fasts and prayers undertaken by a community in distress. In all, these texts challenge the modern supplicant to expand his (or her) circle of concern and internalize the plight of others to the point of it engendering a meaningful spiritual struggle.

supplicate from within his (or her) particular predicament and mediate their struggles through prayer. They rally a pray-er to protest and persist; encourage him to approach God candidly; inspire him to forge new pathways forward; and embolden him to face his frailty and neediness. Moreover, the sentiments they promote can even impact the core of traditional prayer. In lieu of the harmonic expressions of faith that are transcribed in a meticulous liturgy, they rouse the pray-er to channel this medium to meaningfully address the immediacy of his situation (i.e., by funneling a supreme formula of praise through a pray-er's distress, amplifying the pitch of his petitions, etc.). Collectively, these texts enable, and demand, a more soulful and stirring prayer.

At the same time, these early discourses contribute to the spiritual value of struggle and prayer by helping to better orient this phenomenon. Even while conveying the intensity of Habakkuk's prayers, the book cautions about the need for patience on the part of the pray-er, and its redaction emphasizes the importance of his (or her) striking a proper balance between different modalities of prayer. The Talmud, in turn, validates the importance of sincerity in praising God, but also intimates that a pray-er's more exalted aspirations should be to explore the theological foundations of tribulations in order to achieve greater spiritual insight. Finally, the Raabad underscores the imperative to reflect on the deeper roots of one's vulnerabilities, even or especially, when confronting trying circumstances.

Finally, all three texts signal the potential spiritual gains that can emerge out of the crucible of such a prayer. For Habakkuk, intensive prayer can morph into a prophetic medium. For the Talmudic rabbis, it potentially offers a platform for new spiritual comprehension. While for the Raabad, it provides a shelter for the fragile petitioner, nudging him to lean in further. More than registering the fact of spiritual struggles, these texts indicate ways they can inform and transform the act of prayer.

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The Birth of “Mahāyāna Buddhism”: How Shaku Sōen Changed Modern Buddhist Studies

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1. Introduction

Following European discovery of “Buddhism” around 1820,¹ Eugène Burnouf published in 1844 the first textual research of Indian Buddhist history, which launched modern Buddhist Studies.² There subsequently emerged a discussion as to which scriptures, those in Sanskrit or those in Pāli, are the “original ones.” By the mid-1870s, most scholars of Indian and Buddhist Studies came to share the opinion,³ as Robert Childers declared in the preface to the first English dictionary of Pāli, that the “Pali or southern version of the Buddhist Scriptures is the only genuine and original one.”⁴

It was about this time that Japanese scholars first came into contact with modern European Buddhist Studies. When Nanjō Bun'yū 南條文雄 and Kasahara Kenju 笠原研寿 stayed in London in 1876, T. W. Rhys Davids, the founder of the Pali Text Society, suggested them to study Pāli, probably because he supposed it is “the only

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¹ Almond 1988: 7–14.

² Burnouf 1844, Lopez 2012.

³ Almond 1988: 24–28.

⁴ Childers 1909 xi.

genuine and original” language of the Buddhist scriptures. They, however, rejected his suggestion in favour of studying Sanskrit at Oxford.⁵ In 1882 Christian missionaries made use of Max Müller’s statement that “this doctrine of Amitābha and all the Mahāyāna doctrine is a secondary form of Buddhism, a corruption of the pure doctrine” in order to attack Japanese Buddhism for their Christian propaganda in Japan, which provoked an angry response among Japanese Buddhists. As a result, until the mid-1880s there were no Japanese studying Pāli.

At about this point, a Japanese monk named Shaku Sōen 釋宗演 (1860–1919) traveled to study in Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka) and thus became one of the first Japanese to study Pāli. Shaku Sōen later became chief abbot of Engakuji 圓覺寺 in Kamakura 鎌倉 and also the teacher of the famed Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙. Although some recent studies have depicted Shaku Sōen as either someone who sought to return to the origins of Buddhism⁷ or someone who advocated the orthodoxy of Japanese Buddhism in reaction to European Buddhist Studies,⁸ his overall understanding of Buddhism does not allow such simplification. Especially, the fact that Shaku Sōen actively studied contemporary publications on Buddhism by European scholars and spread his ideas in English language leads us to his global and intellectual activities. In this article, basing myself on Shaku Sōen’s writings during his sojourn in Ceylon,⁹ I examine both the influence modern Buddhist Studies had on him and his own influence on modern Buddhist Studies,

⁵ Nanjō 1979: 127.

⁶ Müller 1881: 365.

⁷ See Jaffe 2004.

⁸ See Snodgrass 2003.

⁹ Shaku Sōen published *Seinan no Bukkyō* (The Buddhism of the Southwest) in 1889 and *Seirontōshi* (Chronicles of the Island of Ceylon) in 1890. After his death *Seiyū nikki* (Diary of a Journey to the West), his diary from his time in Ceylon, was published in a facsimile edition in 1941. For further details on these publications, see below, Selected Bibliography. His letters sent from Ceylon to Fukuzawa Yukichi have been reproduced in Konno 1987.

and show that it was Shaku Sōen who created the concept of “Mahāyāna Buddhism” as a compound used in modern Buddhist Studies.¹⁰

2. Shaku Sōen’s Study in Ceylon

On 31 March 1887, Shaku Sōen alighted at Colombo harbour in Ceylon. Having completed his basic training in Zen at Engakuji at the youthful age of twenty-five and studied at Keiō Gijuku 慶應義塾—a private school founded by Fukuzawa Yukichi 福澤諭吉, one of the most influential thinkers in modern Japan—he had received financial support from Fukuzawa and others for this trip.

Having spent the night in Colombo, Shaku Sōen then travelled south and arrived at Galle on the morning of 2 April, where he made his way to the residence of Edmund Gooneratne—a Ceylonese administrator of the colonial government and a Buddhist revivalist, who would become Shaku Sōen’s patron. Gooneratne had for some time been taking a great interest in Japan and so had been corresponding with Nanjō Bun’yū. At Gooneratne’s home Shaku Sōen met another Japanese monk, Shaku Kōzen 釈興然, who had arrived in Ceylon about half a year earlier.

On 7 April, Shaku Sōen went with Shaku Kōzen to Ranwelle monastery in the village of Kataluwa near Galle. For more than two years, until 1889, Shaku Sōen studied Pāli under Kōdāgoḍa Paññāsekharā, a renowned scholar-monk. On 7 May—which in 1887 coincided with the New Year day in the Buddhist calendar, being also the day of the Buddha’s birth, enlightenment, and death—Shaku Sōen was ordained as a novice monk (*sāmaṇera*) of the Rāmāñña school, one of the three major Buddhist orders in Ceylon, receiving the ordination name of Paññāketu, upon which he changed his Japanese robes into Ceylonese ones. This was the

¹⁰ Shaku Sōen and other Japanese monks who studied in Ceylon have been discussed in Jaffe 2004: 79–84, Okuyama 2004, 2008, and Yamaguchi 2010. There are also many studies of the World’s Parliament of Religions in which Sōen was covered, including Snodgrass 2003 and Harding 2008. However, Shaku Sōen’s connections with modern Buddhist Studies have not previously been examined.

beginning of his study in Ceylon for two and a half years.

The fiftieth anniversary of Queen Victoria's coronation fell on 28 June 1887, and in order to worship the Buddha's relics at the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, which were being opened to public view for this occasion, Shaku Sōen travelled to Kandy via Colombo with Gooneratne's financial assistance. In Colombo he met Hikkaḍuve Sumaṅgala of the Buddhist college Vidyodaya Pirivena, who was revered by both Ceylonese and overseas Buddhists, as well as the young Anagārika Dharmapāla, who would soon establish the Mahā Bodhi Society in 1891 and thus become the leader of "Protestant Buddhism." These encounters show that Shaku Sōen witness with his eyes the revival of Buddhism in Ceylon.



Figs. 1–3: Ranwelle monastery: top: Buddha hall, bottom left: Bodhi tree, bottom right: monks' residence (© Norihisa Baba)

After his return to Japan, Shaku Sōen had few direct involvements with “Southern Buddhism,” but his encounter with it clearly left an impact on him: he called his residence “Laṅkā Cave” (“Ryōgakutsu” 楞伽窟), wrote Pāli calligraphy in the Sinhalese script, visited Rhys Davids in London in 1906, and remained proud throughout his life of the fact that he had studied Pāli in Ceylon.

3. Influence from European Buddhist Studies

When he set out for Ceylon, Shaku Sōen took with him a copy of the *Foguo ji* 佛國記 (*A Record of Buddhist Kingdoms*) by Faxian 法顯, a Chinese monk who had spent about two years in Ceylon in the early fifth century. But the copy he took with him was not one printed in Japan but rather an English translation accompanied by the original Chinese text which was published in England in 1886 shortly before his departure.¹¹ This is illustrative of the fact that Shaku Sōen’s understanding of Buddhism was based to a considerable extent on nineteenth-century European publications on Buddhism.

Indeed, Shaku Sōen followed various opinions of European scholars of which he learned through books written in English. In 1889, while in Ceylon, he wrote *Seinan no Bukkyō* (*The Buddhism of the Southwest*) in which he described Brian Houghton Hodgson’s discovery of Buddhist manuscripts and Eugène Burnouf’s research on them,¹² both of which marked the origin of modern Buddhist Studies. In this book, moreover, Shaku Sōen mentioned William Jones, Henry Thomas Colebrooke, Christian Lassen, and other Indologists and explained James Prinsep’s work in deciphering the Aśoka Edicts and George Turnour’s research on the *Mahāvamsa*. Shaku Sōen also actively used European publications: he quoted a line from the European edition of the *Divyāvadāna* (which was discovered in Nepal) published by Neil and Cowell in 1886,¹³ and discussed *nirvāṇa* with quotations from an article by Max Müller

¹¹ Shaku 1889: 34. The English translation was that by Legge 1886.

¹² Shaku 1889: 82–83.

¹³ Shaku 1889: 30.

and Childers's *Dictionary of the Pali Language* (as Rhys Davids' Pali-English dictionary was not yet published at that time).¹⁴ Most importantly, he accepted the view shared by European scholars such as Robert Childers that Pāli was the original language of the Buddha. He wrote as follows:¹⁵

“Sanskrit” is called the “language of Brahman” (*bongo* 梵語), for all the scriptures of Brahmanism are recorded in this language. “Pāli” is called the “language of the Buddha” (*butsugo* 佛語), for all the sermons delivered by Śākyamuni during his lifetime were spoken in this language.

And:¹⁶

I came to this island with the sole purpose of gaining instruction in the Pāli language, the original language in which Śākyamuni preached with his broad and long tongue.

Shaku Sōen also rejected the traditional Japanese understanding that a single sound (Itton Seppō 一音說法) uttered by the Buddha was heard by listeners in their own language. Basing himself on Horace Hayman Wilson, the first Boden professor of Sanskrit at Oxford University, he stated that Pāli was the dialect of Magadha.¹⁷ Also worth noting are his following comments on the Pali Text Society established by Rhys Davids in 1881:¹⁸

Several years ago, the Pali Text Society (Society of Buddhist Scriptures) was founded in London, England, with T. W. Rhys Davids (B.A.) taking charge of its editing and publication duties. Members include His Royal Majesty the King of Siam, erudite Western scholars of Buddhism, and eminent monks and

¹⁴ Shaku 1889: 47–48.

¹⁵ Shaku 1889: 66.

¹⁶ Shaku 1889: 63–64.

¹⁷ Shaku 1889: 68–71. In modern academic point of view, this idea is not correct. See von Hinüber 1994.

¹⁸ Shaku 1889: 64–65.

laymen of Southwestern Buddhism. In fact, E. R. Gooneratne, a government official on this island who supports our study here, has been made honorary secretary of the Society. When considered on this basis, it is my opinion that Buddhism will spread westwards in the near future.

As this comments show, the establishment of the Pali Text Society convinced Shaku Sōen that Buddhism would spread to the West in the near future. On the basis of this conviction, he later sent to the United States his disciples Suzuki Daisetsu, Senzaki Nyogen 千崎如幻, and Shaku Sōkatsu 釋宗活,¹⁹ who became the first generation of teachers to propagate Buddhism among non-Asian Americans.

4. The Classification of Buddhism

Eugène Burnouf broadly divided Buddhism in Asia into “Buddhisme septentrional,” which used Buddhist scriptures translated from Sanskrit into Chinese and Tibetan, and “Buddhisme méridional,” which used the Pāli scriptures. This classification subsequently became established in English as “North(ern) Buddhism” and “South(ern) Buddhism.” This twofold classification also spread to Japan via English-language writings, and Shaku Sōen employed the same framework, sometimes rephrasing it from a Japanese perspective as “Northeastern Buddhism (*Seinan Bukkyō*)” and “Southwestern Buddhism (*Tōhoku Bukkyō*).” At times he also referred to “Southwestern Buddhism” as “Western Buddhism (*Seihō Bukkyō*).”

But whereas Burnouf had proposed the twofold division into Northern Buddhism and Southern Buddhism on the basis of

¹⁹ Shaku Sōen brought Senzaki Nyogen to the U.S. in 1905, and left him there in 1906. In this year, Shaku Sōkatsu, a Dharma heir of Shaku Sōen, also came to the U.S. with his students. He went back to Japan in 1910 leaving in the U.S. Sasaki Shigetsu 佐々木指月, who founded the Buddhist Society of America (now the First Zen Institute of America) in New York in 1930.

differences in the original language of their respective scriptures, Shaku Sōen surmised that the original language of the scriptures of Northern Buddhism too had been Pāli, just as is the case of Southern Buddhism. Interestingly, he presented this view in a letter to Fukuzawa Yukichi, as follows:²⁰

The regions where this Pāli language is currently used are primarily the three countries of Siam, Burma, and Ceylon. In addition, it is also said to be used in places such as Cambodia and Rāmañña. People in these regions assert that this language (Pāli) is the true language of Śākyamuni. It is true that the Buddhist Canon of these three countries is written in this language. As you know, there are two kinds of Chinese translations of Buddhist scriptures, old and new. I consider those called old translations to have been [originally transmitted] in Pāli and those called new translations to have been [originally transmitted] in Sanskrit.

This shows that Shaku Sōen was the first figure who pointed out the difference of source language of Chinese translations between the old ones (Kyūyaku 旧訳) and the new ones (Shin'yaku 新訳). In his point of view, there were no linguistic grounds for dividing Northern and Southern Buddhism in their early stage, since both were considered to have been transmitted from the “Buddha’s language” of Pāli.²¹ This means that Shaku Sōen espoused a view that fundamentally undermined the twofold division of Buddhism prevalent at the time among European scholars of Buddhism.

Why, then, did Shaku Sōen continue to employ the twofold division into Northern and Southern Buddhism? He did so because, having studied Buddhism firsthand in Ceylon, he reinterpreted this division as being based not on differences in the original

²⁰ Konno 1987: 213. Originally, *Jiji shinpō* 時事新報, 22.11.1887.

²¹ In light of present-day Buddhist Studies, the source language of early Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist texts was neither Sanskrit nor Pāli but another language such as Gāndhārī. In the sense that it was “not” Sanskrit, however, Shaku Sōen’s indication is still valid.

language of the scriptures but on differences regarding the doctrines, practices, and the scriptures themselves. With respect to the doctrines, he took up the twelvefold chain of dependent arising and stated that Southern Buddhists “do not discuss the Buddha vehicle or Bodhisattva vehicle,”²² and he also commented that because their “basic tenets” are “impermanence, emptiness, suffering, and no-self,” they confine themselves to “self-benefit.”²³ As for the practices, Shaku Sōen suggested that Southern Buddhism only follows the “Mūlasarvāstivāda precepts”²⁴ and lacks the “Bodhisattva precepts” (i.e. those of the *Brahmajālasūtra* (Mahāyāna) and *Yogācārabhūmi*).²⁵

Further on the issue of Buddhist scriptures Shaku Sōen points out that the Pāli scriptures “are limited to the *Āgamas* taught by Śākyamuni over twelve years at the Deer Park”²⁶ and therefore they do not include any Mahāyāna scriptures.²⁷ He correctly provides an outline of the Pāli texts, stating that they “consist of the Three Baskets (*piṭakattaya*) assembled by the Great Arhats and their commentaries (*aṭṭhakathā*).”²⁸ He also points out that Buddhaghosa was the greatest author in the history of Ceylonese Buddhism²⁹ and regards the compilation of historical chronicles in Pāli, such as the *Dīpavaṃsa* and *Mahāvāṃsa*, as a commendable aspect of

²² Shaku 1889: 55.

²³ Shaku 1889: 59: “Because Southwestern Buddhism has impermanence, emptiness, suffering, and no-self as its basic tenets, its aspirations stop at self-benefit and do not extend to converting others.”

²⁴ In modern academic point of view, Southern Buddhism does not follow the Mūlasarvāstivāda precepts but rather the Theravāda ones. See below, paragraph 7.

²⁵ Shaku 1889: 67.

²⁶ About how the Zen (Chan) School adopted this idea from the Tendai (Tiantai) School, see Yanagi 2015: 49–142.

²⁷ Shaku 1930: 61.

²⁸ Shaku 1889: 69.

²⁹ Shaku 1889: 75–76.

Ceylon.³⁰

In this way, Shaku Sōen transformed the twofold division of Northern and Southern Buddhism into one indicative of two stages in terms of doctrines, practices, and scriptures. In other words, he redefined this modern division of Buddhism as a synchronic one, which could stop the discussion on which Buddhism keeps the “original” scriptures. Therefore, while he continued to adhere to the twofold division, he rephrased Southern Buddhism as “Hīnayāna Buddhism” (Shōjō Bukkyō 小乗佛教) and Northern Buddhism as “Mahāyāna Buddhism” (Daijō Bukkyō 大乘佛教).³¹ In this regard, he explained that Buddhism in Ceylon, Siam, Burma, and Cambodia is “Hīnayāna,” while “Mahāyāna Buddhism” prevails in “China, Korea, Mongolia, Manchuria, Tartary, Tibet, etc.”³²

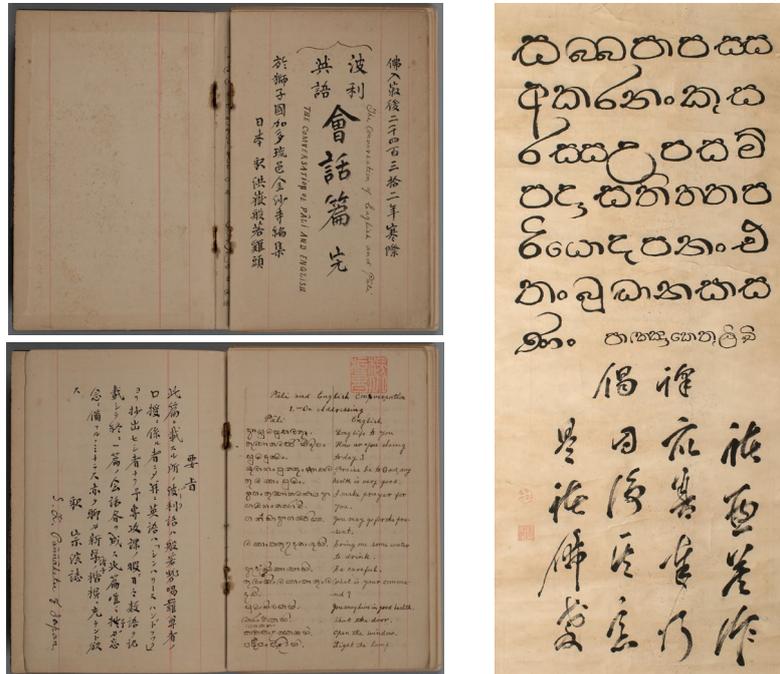
Notably, this twofold division of Shaku Sōen’s is different from the traditional binary of “Mahāyāna” and “Hīnayāna,” because in the tradition this pair of terms had merely referred to differences regarding doctrines, practices, and scriptures. Shaku Sōen, in contrast, uses the new binary of “Hīnayāna Buddhism” and “Mahāyāna Buddhism” by combining the traditional binary of “Mahāyāna” and “Hīnayāna” with the modern division of “Northern Buddhism” and “Southern Buddhism,” which had historically existed and were geographically distinct. Other Japanese who learnt Pāli abroad around the same time as him had a different understanding of Buddhism. Shaku Kōzen, who had gone to study in Ceylon slightly before Shaku Sōen, for example, believed the Buddhism of Ceylon to represent a pure form of Buddhism, while Ikuta (Oda) Tokunō 生田 (織田) 得能, who

³⁰ Shaku 1889: 80.

³¹ Shaku 1889: 41. He refers here to “the Mahāyāna Buddhism of the northeast [...] the Hīnayāna Buddhism of the southwest.”

³² Shaku 1930: 61–62. Jaffe (2018: 46) says that “Sōen includes within the category of Southwestern Buddhism the forms of the religion found in Tibet, India, Burma, Siam, and Annam,” but this statement seems based on the author’s misunderstanding of Japanese.

went to study in Siam, to give another example, understood Buddhism in terms of a threefold division into Northern, Southern, and Eastern Buddhism.³³



Figs 4–5: top left: Shaku Sōen’s notebook for Pāli conversation, bottom left: Shaku Sōen’s Preface to the notebook for Pāli conversation, right: Shaku Sōen’s writing of Pāli (one verse from the so-called *Sabbabuddhānam pātimokkhuḍdesagāthā* with its Chinese correspondence) (© Norihisa Baba)

Shaku Sōen’s twofold division was no mere change of wording, but also had an epoch-making effect. By the time that Shaku Sōen went to study in Ceylon, European scholars of Buddhism had begun to regard the framework of Northern Buddhism as problematic. In a lecture Rhys Davids gave in 1881, he suggested that it was inappropriate to posit Northern Buddhism as a single category:³⁴

³³ Okuyama 2008.

³⁴ Rhys Davids 1881: 189.

It is correct to speak, as is so often done, of Northern and Southern Buddhism as the only two great divisions into which Buddhism had been divided. There was a unity in Southern Buddhism; but there has been no such unity in Northern Buddhism.

If one takes this understanding of Rhys Davids into account, Shaku Sōen's twofold division opened up the theoretical possibility of bestowing anew on Northern Buddhism a doctrinal unity under the rubric of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

5. The Movement for a One-and-Only Buddhism

In the view of Shaku Sōen, who had substituted "Mahāyāna Buddhism" for "Northern Buddhism" and "Hīnayāna Buddhism" for "Southern Buddhism," Northern and Southern Buddhism represent two stages in terms of doctrines, practices, and scriptures. This shows that, in his interpretation, "Northern Buddhism" and "Southern Buddhism" had changed into two complementary concepts.

In point of fact, Shaku Sōen's aim was to master both "Mahāyāna Buddhism" and "Hīnayāna Buddhism." While declaring on the one hand that he would live his whole life in accordance with "the basic tenets of the Mahāyāna,"³⁵ he also stated that one of the objectives of his studies in Ceylon was to gain "a thorough understanding of the spiritual peace of mind of Hīnayāna Buddhism."³⁶ Thinking that both are complementary to each other, Shaku Sōen aimed to promote exchange and integration between them. In a letter to Fukuzawa Yukichi, he wrote:³⁷

My voyage to this country was, first, to investigate the realities of Western Buddhism and, secondly, to inform people of the west (i.e., Ceylon), too, of the existence of Buddhism in Japan, to open up contacts between them and us in the future, to encourage

³⁵ Shaku 1889: 42–43.

³⁶ Shaku 1889: 63–64.

³⁷ Konno 1987: 214. Originally, *Jiji shinpō*, 22.11.1887.

thoughts of solidarity among Buddhists, and to purge clean the Buddhism of Asia.

The expression “open up contacts between them and us” was probably influenced by ideas expressed by Fukuzawa, who made “independence and self-respect” his guiding principles, sought to deepen his thinking by mingling through “human intercourse” with other people of different views.³⁸

Having witnessed the harsh realities of colonial rule in Ceylon, after his return to Japan Shaku Sōen published his *Seirontōshi* (*A Gazetteer of the Island of Ceylon*) in 1890, the year in which the Imperial Diet was established in Japan as one outcome of the Freedom and People’s Rights Movement. At the end of this book, putting words into the mouth of a Ceylonese “old man” of eighty, Shaku Sōen calls Buddhism “the strict father who rescued people’s rights from the prison of Indian castes” and ends the book as follows:³⁹

I think that the first steps in plans for India’s independence in the future should certainly make use of Buddhism. I think that making use of Buddhism will entail merging the Mahāyāna and the Hīnayāna, amalgamating Northern and Southern Buddhism, and promoting a movement for a one-and-only Buddhism. I think that in order to undertake a movement for a single Buddhism, first Northern and Southern Buddhists should open the way to contacts between them, understand their respective circumstances through frequent communication, inspections, overseas study, and pilgrimages, and exchange knowledge between them. [...] Now is the time. It is the time to rally Northern and Southern Buddhism to form a single organization, to set up a well-ordered and magnificent Dharma camp, and to thereby completely thwart hostile countries overconfident of

³⁸ See Watanabe 2010: 432–435.

³⁹ Shaku 1930: 63–64.

victory, nay, false creeds of foreign provenance. [...] Buddhism has two methods of converting people, assimilation and refutation. I ask you to start first with refutation.

Here Shaku Sōen goes one step beyond “solidarity among Buddhists” and proposes to “rally Northern and Southern Buddhism to form a single organization”⁴⁰ and thereby denounce “false creeds of foreign provenance,” obviously specifically referring to Christianity.⁴¹ Even more surprising is the fact that he refers to the “movement for a one-and-only Buddhism (Yui’itsu Bukkyō 唯一佛教)” as the first stage in “plans for India’s independence.” Shaku Sōen was probably the first Japanese to make public plans for Indian independence.⁴²

6. Dissemination in English

Aiming to integrate Northern and Southern Buddhism, Shaku Sōen’s immediate task was to bring back to Japan the precepts of Southern Buddhism and the Pāli language. Because he wanted to fully ordain as a monk (*bhikkhu*) in Siam, he left Ceylon and arrived in Bangkok in July 1889. Bearing a letter of introduction from his teacher Paññāsekharā, he went to the monastery of Vajirañāṇavarorasa, a son of King Rāma IV who had in 1833 founded the Thammayut order for the reformation of Siamese Buddhism before he had defrocked and ascended the throne in

⁴⁰ This expression was probably influenced by Henry Olcott, who visited Japan in 1889 and advocated the unification of Northern and Southern Buddhism. Shaku Sōen was an avid reader of the writings of Olcott. Moreover, he frequently quotes from Olcott’s *Buddhist Catechism* in his diary kept during his stay in Ceylon.

⁴¹ After attending the 1893 World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, Shaku Sōen began to preach that a true religion, be it Christianity or Buddhism, was one that taught love, but during his stay in Ceylon there was no evidence of any such tendency in his thinking.

⁴² Okawa Shūmei 大川周明, a Pan-Asianist Japanese, joined Indian Independence movement in the 1910’s, which is about twenty years later than Shaku Sōen’s publication of this plan.

1851. At that time, Vajirañāṇavarorasa was the Deputy Patriarch and was engaged in the compilation of the Royal Thai Edition of the Pāli Canon published in 1888–1893, and later became the Patriarch of the Thammayut order in 1892.

Unfortunately, Shaku Sōen arrived after the rainy season retreat (*uposatha*) had begun, and Vajirañāṇavarorasa refused him permission to stay at his monastery on the grounds that there were no vacant rooms. In a letter to a friend, Shaku Sōen wrote of Vajirañāṇavarorasa that “he is at root a member of the royal family [...], is quite authoritarian, and is after all not free from worldly affairs,” and he went so far as to call Siam a “barbarian country.”⁴³ In the end, partly because of his increasingly worsening financial situation, Shaku Sōen arrived back in Japan in October 1889 via Hong Kong and Shanghai without having a full ordination in the South Buddhist tradition. In 1892, at the age of thirty-four, he became chief abbot of Engakuji. In 1893 he attended the World’s Parliament of Religions in Chicago, where he met the philosopher Paul Carus, to whom he sent his disciple Suzuki Daisetsu in 1897.

In 1900, about ten years after Shaku Sōen’s sojourn in Ceylon, Suzuki published his first scholarly publication, an English translation of the *Dasheng qixin lun* 大乘起信論 titled *Açvaghosha’s Discourse of the Awakening of Faith in the Mahāyāna*.⁴⁴ Notably, in the “Translator’s Preface” he employed the new binary of “Hīnayāna Buddhism” and “Mahāyāna Buddhism” created by Shaku Sōen.⁴⁵

While the canonical books of the Hinayana Buddhism have been systematically preserved in the Pali language, those of the Mahayana Buddhism are scattered promiscuously all over the fields and valleys of Asia and in half a dozen different languages.

⁴³ Shaku 1930: 72, 74.

⁴⁴ Snodgrass (2003: 260–261) points out that through his English translation of the *Dasheng qixin lun* Suzuki, having studied under Carus, made the shift away from a “popular believer” and turned into a Buddhist scholar who had mastered the rules of academic discourse.

⁴⁵ Suzuki 1900: xi.

In his book—translated into English by Suzuki and published in 1906—Shaku Sōen explains that there are two forms of Buddhism: “Mahayana Buddhism” and “Hinayana Buddhism.”⁴⁶ Suzuki himself propounded these two classificatory concepts even more forcefully in his *Outlines of Mahāyāna Buddhism*, published in 1907. As the binary concept of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism began to be used in English publications, it gradually came to replace the division into Northern and Southern Buddhism, and the designation “Mahāyāna Buddhism” became established. The starting point—or at least one of the starting points—of the term “Mahāyāna Buddhism” in Japanese and English discourse today lies in Shaku Sōen’s period of study in Ceylon.⁴⁷

7. From “Hīnayāna Buddhism” to “Theravāda Buddhism”

In his excellent article, Perreira elucidates that there had been no recognition of “Theravāda” as a branch of Buddhism in Ceylon and Southeast Asia in the nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Japanese materials also support his findings. In 1885, in response to a question about the Buddhist orders of Ceylon from Nanjō Bun’yū, who had mentioned the Sthāvīriyanikāya (J. Jōzabu 上座部) and Sarvāstivāda (J. Sabbatabu 薩婆多部), Gooneratne replied that he did not understand the question.⁴⁹ Moreover, Japanese

⁴⁶ Shaku 2004: 71–73.

⁴⁷ In *Outlines of the Mahāyāna as Taught by Buddha*, which was Kuroda Shintō’s pamphlet distributed by the Japanese delegation at the World’s Parliament of Religions, the Mahāyāna is explained in terms of “doctrine.” In addition, Ashizu Jitsuzen of the Tendai sect, who presented a paper at the Parliament, was probably following Ikuta Tokunō’s perspective when he divided Buddhism into Southern, Northern, and Eastern Buddhism. However, probably influenced by Shaku Sōen, he also divided Buddhism into South Hinayana, North Mahayana, and East Mahayana, but he did not use the terms “Mahayana Buddhism” and “Hinayana Buddhism.”

⁴⁸ Perreira 2012.

⁴⁹ “How many of the Sthāvīriya, Sarvāstivāda, and other schools are there currently in Ceylon? This question is not clear.” *Nōjunkai Zasshi* 能潤会雜誌 7: 35. Cf. Okuyama 2008: 31.

contemporary of that time, coming across no conception of “Theravāda” in Ceylon and Siam, pointed instead to similarities between Southern Buddhism and Sarvāstivāda. For example, Shaku Sōen wrote that “it should be known that Southwestern Buddhists [observe] the precepts of the Mūlasarvāstivāda.”⁵⁰ Two years later Ikuta (Oda) Tokunō wrote that, while he did not know from which of the twenty schools of the Hīnayāna Thai Buddhism derived, it was closest to the Sarvāstivāda.⁵¹

Origins of the adoption of “Theravāda” as the designation of the ancient Sri Lankan Buddhist school lie in the preface to the *Vinaya Pitaka* written by Hermann Oldenberg in 1879 and in an article by T. W. Rhys Davids about the schools of Indian Buddhism published in 1891. Importantly, both scholars refer to the *Da Tang xiyuji* 大唐西域記, which calls the Ceylonese Buddhist branch *Shangzuobu* 上座部.⁵² Its Sanskrit form is supposed to be “Sthāvīriyanikāya,” of which “sthāvīriya” means “of elders” and “nikāya” means monastic order, as *Shangzuobu* means.⁵³ The first French translation of the *Da Tang xiyuji* was published in 1858, and the English one in 1884.⁵⁴ Knowing through these translations that a Sri Lankan Buddhist sect bears “elder(s)” in the name, Oldenberg

⁵⁰ Shaku 1889: 67. To think about the reason why Shaku Sōen wrongly regarded Pāli Vinaya as “the precepts of the Mūlasarvāstivāda, it is noteworthy that his friend, Shaku Kōzen, was the disciple and nephew of Shaku Unshō 釈雲照 (1827–1909), an influential Japanese monk who kept the Mūlasarvāstivāda precepts. On Japanese tradition of the Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya and Shaku Unshō, see Clarke 2006.

⁵¹ Ikuta 1891: 50. According to Okuyama (2008: 34 n. 2), Ikuta left Japan to study in Thailand in February 1888 and returned in July 1890.

⁵² T2087, 51.934a. As for the meaning of the term *Shangzuobu*, see Deeg 2012. The correct Pāli form of *Shanzuobu* or Sthāvīriya(-nikāya) would be Theriya, not Theravāda. See also Gethin 2012.

⁵³ This Sanskrit form appears in a 10th-century inscribed vase most probably from Chittagong (Battacharya 1993: 335.2). I deeply appreciate my colleague and friend, Ryosuke Furui, for informing me about this reference.

⁵⁴ Julien 1858; Beal 1884.

and Rhys Davids equated the term “Theravāda (or, -vādin)” found in Ceylonese historical chronicles with this *Shangzuobu*.⁵⁵ This means that the Chinese term *Shangzuobu* encouraged the rebirth of the ancient term “Theravāda.”⁵⁶

As the classification of Buddhism into Mahāyāna Buddhism and Hīnayāna Buddhism spread in the English-speaking world at the beginning of the twentieth century, opposition to the derogatory term “Hīnayāna Buddhism” naturally grew stronger among Buddhists in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. According to Perreira, the designation “Theravāda Buddhism” was devised as a substitute for “Hīnayāna Buddhism” by the English monk Ānanda Metteya (Allan Bennett) in 1908. At the first conference of the World Fellowship of Buddhists, held in Colombo in 1950, not long after Sri Lanka’s independence, “Theravāda Buddhism” was adopted as the official designation of Southern Buddhism at the instigation of G. P. Malalasekara, a Sri Lankan scholar and founder president of the World Fellowship of Buddhists.⁵⁷ This process shows that the dissemination in English of the new binary concept of Buddhism proposed by Shaku Sōen prompted the creation of a new designation, “Theravāda Buddhism,” in modern English discourse.

Our conclusion that Shaku Sōen played a crucial role in the formation of the pair of terms-cum-concepts “Mahāyāna Buddhism” and “Theravāda Buddhism” as the designations of the two main forms of Buddhism leads us to skepticism on the view that modern discourse about Buddhism was produced in the West—emphasized by some scholars such as Almond (1988).⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Oldenberg 1879: XLI; Rhys Davids 1891. Since Theravāda is counted as one of 18 *nikāyas*, it is also the name of this monastic order. See Oldenberg 1879: 37 (*Dīpavaṃsa* Ch. 5, v. 51).

⁵⁶ In Japan, Takakusu Junjirō was referring to “Jōzabu” (= Shangzuobu) already in 1900 (Takakusu 1900: ix).

⁵⁷ The description found in this paragraph is based on Perreira 2012.

⁵⁸ Hallisey (1995: 32) correctly points out that “while Almond refers to an image of the Orient, he makes no attempt to reconstruct Buddhist thought and practice in nineteenth-century Asia.”

Norihisa Baba: The Birth of “Mahāyāna Buddhism”

Even though the beginning phase of modern Buddhist Studies might be considered as a European Epoch, Asian Buddhists who learned English scholarship had significant impact on the discourse of Buddhist Studies. The process discussed in the present paper gives us a glimpse into the global intellectual exchange during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.

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Asset Markets, the Agency Problem, and Gifts to the Early Medieval Buddhist Saṅgha in India

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1. Introduction

Buddhism as a religion historically appeared in India sometime in the 5th century BCE. It was based on the teachings of Śākyamuni, commonly known as Gautama Buddha. His teachings were part of the Śramaṇic movement and represented a non-Vedic approach to understanding reality. Having been born in a princely family and experienced luxury, he is said to have tried extreme asceticism in order to achieve liberation from suffering but rejected it in favour of the “middle way.” Ultimately, he went to Buddhagayā, where he became awakened.

Since Śākyamuni Buddha rejected the path of extreme asceticism, he permitted and arguably encouraged a controlled living environment for the ordained community of monks and nuns, who were his main addressees. Such an environment of monastic life involves ethical-ascetical discipline, though not extreme austerities. The need to ensure a favorable environment for attaining release from *saṃsāra* without crossing the line into extreme austerities led to some interesting tensions within the monastic code of conduct.¹ Particularly relevant for our discussion is the initial

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¹ See, for example, Schopen 1994c, which discusses the provision of servants who may well have been slaves in an environment supposedly free of caste biases.

discouragement of ownership of property²—with a few exceptions of ownership of certain items indispensable for living an ascetic life, such as a begging bowl and robes³—which in practice went farther (Schopen 1995: 105ff.). Communal ownership rules, that is, what the Saṅgha was allowed to own, were even more permissive (Schopen 2000).

The Buddhist texts lay down rules for the organization of monastic communities and deal with issues of ownership and proper use of possessions. Generally speaking, rules for individuals can be prescriptive and left to the individual to follow or not. However, when individuals live in groups, the actions of one individual can affect the well-being of others. Hence rules need to take into account the likely behavior of group members and incorporate rules that elicit appropriate individual behavior. Groups also need to plan for their sustainability and continuity in an uncertain world. Finally, groups need to consider the effect of rules on the behavior of non-group members and their impact on the well-being of the group. In this paper, I look at descriptions and prescriptions found in Buddhist texts regarding gifts to the monastic community (Saṅgha). I focus on one aspect in particular, namely, the extent to which gifts may not have effected full transfer of ownership in these gifts to the Saṅgha. By looking at the social and economic context in which the Saṅgha operated, I try to explain the formulation of statements in Buddhist texts regarding gifts. I present some information about the relevant texts as well.⁴

² Oldenberg 1882 as cited in Schopen 1995: 104.

³ Horner 1938: 56. “The Buddhist *bhikkhu* has to renounce his worldly possessions before he is ordained, and after his ordination he should own no private property, but should regard his bowl and robe and other requisites as being the communal property of the Order, lent to him for his use.”

⁴ For the primary sources (Pali, Sanskrit, Chinese, and Tibetan) referred to or cited in the present papers I have relied on various English publications by modern scholars. The references to primary sources provided in the present paper are thus solely based on these modern studies.

2. Texts

The Pāli Buddhist Canon consists of what is known as the Tipiṭaka, or the Three Baskets: the Suttapiṭaka containing discourses supposedly uttered by the Buddha, the Vinayapiṭaka containing codes of monastic conduct, and the Abhidhammapiṭaka containing scholastic Buddhist philosophy. The Chinese and Tibetan Buddhist Canons differ in their content and organization. In the present paper I am mainly concerned with the Vinaya, of which there seem to exist today six different versions, in full or in part, namely, that of the Mahāvihārin/Theravādin (available in Pāli), those of the Sarvāstivādin, Mahīśāsaka, Mahāsāṅghika, and Dharmaguptaka (available mostly in Chinese translations from the 5th century⁵), and that of the Mūlasarvāstivādin (henceforth MSV, available in Tibetan translation).

The Mahāvihārin/Theravādin Vinaya is supposed to go back to the 1st century BCE, although extant manuscripts are from a much later date (Clarke 2014). The MSV is available in more or less complete form in a Tibetan translation from the 9th century. Certain sections of the MSV are to be found in the Chinese Buddhist Canon; this translation dates back to the 8th century. Moreover, parts of the original MSV were discovered in 1931 in Gilgit in what is now Pakistan, in classical Sanskrit. A wide variety of dates have been proposed for the MSV from the 1st century CE (Schopen 2004) to the 6th/7th centuries (Clarke 2014). Clarke (2015) suggests that there may even have been multiple Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya-s. The Tibetan Derge edition of the MSV contains 4000 folios in 13 volumes. It contains not only the actual rules for monastic conduct, but also many heroic, comic and fantastic stories. In addition to the MSV itself, there is also a summary or handbook of its rules, called the *Vinayasūtra*, authored by Guṇaprabha, who, it has been suggested, may have lived between the 5th and the 7th century (Schopen 1994b).

⁵ Ende 2016.

3. The Problem: Continuing Donor Rights

The issue at hand relates to the nature of gifts. When we think of a gift, we envisage a transfer of ownership of the donated item from the donor to the recipient at a given point in time. Prior to the donation, all rights over the gift reside with the donor and none with the recipient; subsequent to the donation, all rights reside with the recipient and none with the donor. This is also suggested by the language that accompanies such donations. Thus, Gregory Schopen (1996: 111) points out that the verbs used to describe these donations are *dadāti*, “to give,” and *niryātayati*, “to present.” Both of these verbs suggest complete transfers (see Fig. 1 for a graphic representation). However, Schopen in his many articles on the MSV, argues that durable gifts, such as land and cloth, to the Saṅgha as viewed by the MSV were not events, localized at a single point in time. Rather, they created an extended bond between the donor and the Saṅgha. According to him, this bond entailed rights as well as obligations for both parties. Let us look, first, at the evidence for continuing rights for the donor in the donated item past the donation date.

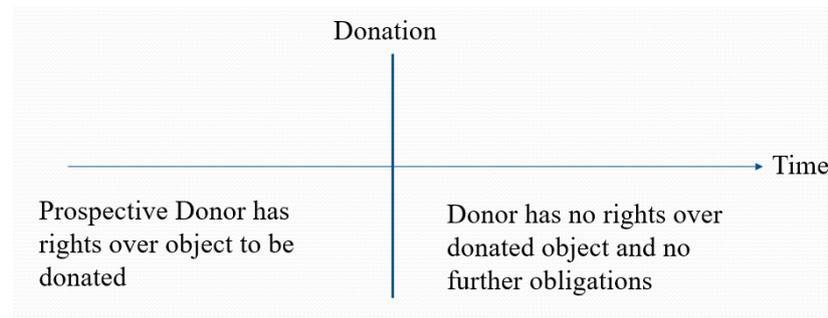


Fig. 1: Model 1 of Donor Rights

The *Kṣudrakavastu* suggests that donors can demand that their donations (in this case, plates) actually be used.⁶ This implies that

⁶The relevant passage from the *Kṣudrakavastu* (T, Ta 78a5–79a2 / D, Tha 52b6–53a6), as translated in Schopen 1996: 114 (excluding the Tibetan phrases), reads as follows:

donors have continuing rights on their donations. Here the text does note that merit is acquired only if the monks actually use the donations; hence a reason for the continuing interest of donors in their gifts would be to ensure that the gifts are used and they accrue merit. While this works as an explanation, I am still justified in asking if there was a material basis for this rule. Presumably, the Vinaya could have allowed merit to accrue as soon as the monks accepted the item, if the situation justified such a rule.

There is another place, though, where there is no justification. Schopen (1996: 105) cites the *Sayanāsanavastu* (the fifteenth section

When devout brahmins and householders gave dishes to the monks the monks would not accept them. The brahmins and householders said: "Noble Ones, when the Buddha, the Blessed One, had not yet appeared in the world, then those belonging to other religious groups were the ones worthy of receiving reverential gifts. Now, however, since the Buddha, the Blessed One, has appeared in the world you are the ones worthy of receiving reverential gifts. If you will not accept them how can we, being deprived of provisions of merit for the journey, go from this world to the other world? You must accept these!

The monks reported this matter to the Blessed One, and the Blessed One said: "For the sake of the Community dishes should be accepted!"

When the Blessed One had said that dishes should be accepted for the sake of the Community the monks, after they had accepted them, put them in the store-room and left them there and continued to eat in the same way from their bowls. The devout brahmins and householders saw that and said: "Noble Ones, are there no dishes that we gave? The monks said: "Gentleman, they remain in the store-room."

They said: "Noble Ones, could we not have stored them in our own houses? Did we not give them to you? When they are used then for us there is the merit that comes from use, but still you put them in the store-room!" The monks reported this matter to the Blessed One, and the Blessed One said: "Dishes which are given by donors must be used!"

of the MSV) to show that Anāthapiṇḍada (an important merchant and lay disciple of Śākyamuni Buddha), even though he has donated the grove of Jetavana, still has the right to determine what sort of construction is done on this land.⁷ In fact, the Buddha establishes the requirement to request permission from Anāthapiṇḍada to build on the land. Anāthapiṇḍada duly permits the building: “I authorize pious brahmins and householders to do a meritorious work that depends on me for the sake of the Community.” In a Kuṣān inscription from Mathurā (Schopen 1996: 84–85), there seems to be a similar case of a *vihāra* (“monastery”) donated by merchants, which was used by Nāgadatta, a monk donor, who is reported to have set up an image “in the *vihāra* belonging to the timber merchants in his [i.e., Nāgadatta’s] own shrine” (*kaṣṭhī[k]īy[e vihāre svakā[yaṃ ce]ti[ya]kuṭiyam*).” In this case, we are not told if permission was obtained from the timber merchants.

In another story in the *Vinayavibhaṅga*, the Buddha insists that gifts of bedding made by a donor should be stored in the *vihāra* for which he donated them (the *vihāra* itself being also donated by the same person). In this case, the donor himself is not the one asserting his rights in the disposition of the property, but still we see that the Vinaya wants to ensure that there is a proper accounting of donated items in such a way that the donor will be able to easily find them.⁸

In yet another incident related in the *Kṣudrakavastu*, we have a householder, who had a *vihāra* built, equipped it with all the requisites and gave it to the Saṅgha. Later, this householder is arrested by the king. The monks presumably fearing the negative implications for themselves as occupants of the arrested donor’s *vihāra*, abandon it, leading to its plunder by thieves, who take advantage of its abandonment. When the donor is eventually released by the king, he comes to the monks to complain about the abandonment of the *vihāra* and the theft of the jewels in it. The Buddha at the end of this episode sets out rules for abandonment

⁷ Schopen 1996: 105, citing *Śayanāsanavastu*, Gnoli 33.9–33.25; T, Ga 283a4–b4 / D, Ga 209a7–b5.

⁸ *Vinayavibhaṅga* (D, Ja 15a3–15bl) as cited in Schopen 1996: 101.

of *vihāras* and provides that the bedding, seats, utensils, and other items in the *vihāras* must be stored for a specified period of time for eventual repossession by the donor.⁹

Again, in the *Śayanāsanavastu*,¹⁰ we have the following amazing story requiring monks to ensure that donated *vihāras* not be kept empty even if their continued use would entail serious inconvenience to the monks:

The devout had had many *vihāras* built, but few monks entered into the rainy season retreat in Śrāvastī, and they stood empty. For the donors there was no merit resulting from use (*dānapatīnāṃ paribhogānvayaṃ puṇyaṃ na bhavati*). And they were inhabited by ne'er-do-wells (*vātaputra*). The Blessed One said: "All *vihāras* must be assigned (*uddeṣṭavya*). To each one individually two or three or four, depending on how many there are. All must be used (*sarve paribhōktavyāḥ*). One should stay in one place in the morning, in another at mid-day, at another in the afternoon, and one should pass the night in yet another!"

In another case in the *Kṣudrakavastu*, we have a donor complaining that an expensive cloth that he had given to the Saṅgha had been ruined by improper use, saying: "Now you have gotten *my* cloth all dirty." The matter involved mats being left full of dust and not beaten. The Buddha lays out the exact procedure for beating such mats:¹¹

The Blessed One said: "They should be beaten with one of the cloths." When the monk beat them with a good cloth, the Blessed One said: "They should be beaten with one of little value." The monk in charge of

⁹ Schopen 1996: 109, quoting *Kṣudrakavastu* (T, Ta 343a2–344b1 / D, Tha 230a2–231a2); see also Guṇaprabha, *Vinayasūtra* 35.29ff.

¹⁰ Schopen 1996: 113, quoting *Śayanāsanavastu*, Gnoli 35.1–10; T, Ga 284b4–285a2 / D, Ga 210a7–210b3.

¹¹ *Kṣudrakavastu* T, Ta 242a.1–243a.2 / D, Tha 159b.3–160a.6, as cited by Schopen 1996: 117 n. 70.

physical properties beat them with one of little value and when it was old and ruined and incapable of being mended, and he threw it away, the Blessed One said: “You should cut it into small pieces and strips and tie it to a piece of wood, then the mats are to be beaten with that.” When that became completely useless and he threw it away the Blessed One said: “Even when it is completely useless the cloth should not be thrown away. You should mix it with dung or mud and use it as a filler for cracks in the pillars or holes in the wall. The merit of the donor will then be multiplied over a long period of time.”

Even though a justification for the procedure is noted here and, of course, efficient utilization of the Saṅgha’s assets is desirable, the point to be noted is that this occurs following a complaint by the donor.

In this example, we also see the donor referring to his gift as if it still belonged to him, that is, “my cloth.” This genitive construction in referring to the relationship between the donor and the gift is another indication that a donation is perhaps not a complete transfer of the item to the Saṅgha, but rather is evidence of continuing rights for the donor. Schopen (1996: 83) brings several other examples of this. For example, he cites the inscription on the Tor Dherai potsherds: ¹² *“shahi-yola-mirasya viharasvamisya deyadharmo yaṃ prapa svakiya-yola-mira-shahi-vihare saṃghe caturdiśe acaryanam sarvastivadinam pratigrahe,”* which he translates as: “This hall for providing water is the religious gift of the Shahi Yola-Mira, the Owner of the Monastery, to the Community of the Four Directions, for the acceptance of the Teachers of the Sarvāstivādin Order, in his own—Yola-Mira, the Shahi’s—monastery.” The

¹² Tor Dherai is the location of a monastery situated on an old caravan route from the Indus Valley through the Bolan Pass into what is now Afghanistan. A large number of potsherds written in Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī scripts was found there in the winter of 1926–1927 by Sir Aurel Stein. Konow (1929) deciphered one of the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, which is presented here.

genitive case *shāhi-yola-mirasya* is used to refer to Yola Mira Shahi; he is called the *vihārasvāmin*, the “lord” or owner of the monastery;¹³ the *vihāra* is described as his own (*svakīya*); nevertheless the item that is being given, the hall, which is presumably in this his “own” *vihāra*, is called a *deya* or a gift. To make things more complicated, this Yola Mira Shahi is clearly not a monk, the term “*shāhi*” presumably referring to a local governor or chief.¹⁴ In other words, this seems to be a case of a lay person making a gift of a hall in a monastery in which he himself is described as having some kind of ownership. Another case Schopen brings is that of a late 2nd or early 3rd century sealing from Intwa, which reads “*mahārāja-rudrasena-vihāre bhikṣu-saṃghasya*,” and which he translates as “of the Community of Monks in the Monastery of the Great King Rudrasena,” or “... in the Great King Rudrasena’s Monastery.”¹⁵

The evidence presented up to this point suggests, then, a second kind of model regarding the connection of the donor with his/her gift. This is shown in Fig. 2. The picture that we have now is that of gifts binding the donor and the corporate recipient in such a way that the donor has continuing rights over the item donated. The next section will suggest a way to understand this unusual situation, namely, as a solution to a managerial problem.

¹³ Schopen (1996: 81 n. 2) suggests that *vihāra* always seems to refer to some kind of building, but with a variety of sizes and construction materials.

¹⁴ Schopen (1996: 83 n. 6) cites Konow (1929) to this effect. According to Tandon (2012), this refers to a Parata king mentioned in inscriptions of Shāpūr I and Narseh, two Sassanian kings.

¹⁵ Examples of such references to gifts suggesting continuing rights of donors through genitive constructions do exist in the Mahāvihārin Vinaya as well, such as in *Suttavibhaṅga* iii. 102.5 cited in Schopen 1996: 86, where a monk says to a lay brother “That monk who lives in your *vihāra* (*tuyhaṃ vihāre*) is an Arhat.”

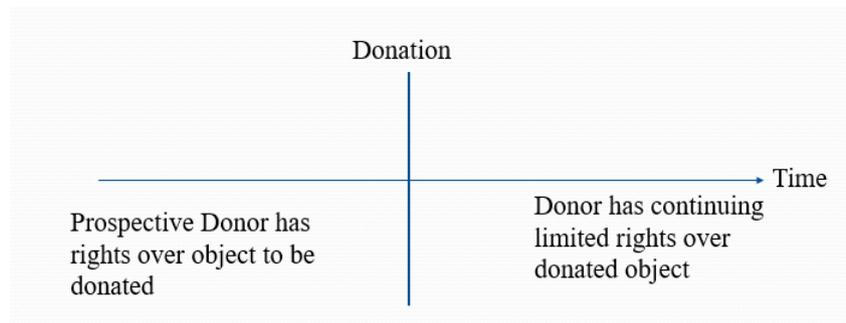


Fig. 2: Model 2 of Donor Rights

4. A Solution: The Agency Hypothesis

In the beginning, the Buddha charged his disciples to wander about and not settle in a single location.¹⁶ At this point in time, the monk was supposed to have very few personal possessions and depend on merely four things: begging food, using rags for robes, dwelling at the foot of a tree, and using urine as medicine. The only exception to this itinerant lifestyle was supposed to be during the rainy season (*varṣa*), when wandering around without a fixed place of residence would have been impractical. Monks were advised to enter a rainy season dwelling, which would be a place where the monk would stay with his friend and acquaintances and where alms-food would be available without extensive travel, that is, near towns or villages. During these early years, the buildings in which the monks lived may have been simple huts to be evacuated and dismantled at the end of the rainy season. Eventually, the rainy season retreat was institutionalized and the monks abandoned their eremitical ideal and settled down to a sedentary, cenobitic life. Although in the beginning reference is made to the “Saṅgha of the four quarters” — that is, the entire community of ordained Buddhist monks — as permanent, individual monastic dwellings arise, we hear of individual Saṅgha-s, such as the Saṅgha of Vaiśālī or the Saṅgha of Śrāvastī. In this paper, we use the word Saṅgha in both senses, but mostly in the sense of individual settlements.

¹⁶ This description follows Prebish 1975: 4ff.

Over time, these settlements became large, complex establishments, but without a priori codes of conduct or highly specified hierarchies. The codes evolved as and when needs arose, as is obvious from the MSV and Pāli Vinaya. The Saṅgha was probably highly decentralized—we do not find different ranks of monks, as in the Catholic tradition.¹⁷ Prebish (1975), citing Dutt (1960), lists eleven different building structures that were eventually part of the Saṅgha settlement (storeroom, kitchen, warehouse, etc.). He also lists three different categories of offices which he calls a monastic hierarchy—permanent, temporary, and miscellaneous. However, it is clear from his list that we are not talking of a real hierarchy—the offices are functional and simply represent a division of labor. For example, there are officers connected with the commissariat, such as the *bhattuddesaka* (Pāli; Sanskrit *bhaktoddeśaka*), the apportioner of food; officers connected with lodgings and wardrobe, such as the *cīvarabhājaka*, the distributor of robes; temporary officers, such as the *navakammika* (Pāli; Sanskrit *navakarmika*), the superintendent of buildings and repairs; and miscellaneous officers, such as the *muṇḍasenāsanavārika* (Pāli; Sanskrit *muṇḍaśayanāsanavārika*), the officer of lodgings not in use. He does, however, list two superintendents—the superintendent of workers and the superintendent of novices—but these are only two, and of these the first one probably represents authority over non-monastic workers. So it would seem that there was a very simple pecking order: householders (who were external to the Saṅgha), novices, and full-

¹⁷ Prebish (1975: 55 n. 9*) discusses a difference in the wording of a *saṅgha avāśeṣa* / *saṅgha atīśeṣa dharma*, which pertains to what a monk needs to do when he is having a large *vihāra* built. In comparing the Mahāsāṃghika and the Mūlasarvāstivādin Prātimokṣa *sūtras*, he points out that the former talks about a *vihāra* being built for the monk himself, while the latter discusses a *vihāra* intended for the Saṅgha. This suggests a development of the Saṅgha from a location of individual huts to a place where large huts were built for a group. The Mūlasarvāstivāda Vinaya, I will argue later (section 7), is a later text.

fledged monks. Any greater stratification was only in terms of spiritual achievement, not in terms of power.¹⁸

As a result of this decentralization, many kinds of managerial problems probably arose, which may well have required external mechanisms for their solution. One of these problems would have been misuse of property for purposes unintended by their donors and inappropriate with respect to the ultimate objectives of the Saṅgha. Such activities are detailed in the various publications of Gregory Schopen and others. This is what is termed as an “agency problem” in the economics and finance literature. This was first laid out by Stephen Ross (1973). As he describes it, an agency relationship arises between two parties “when one, designated as the agent, acts for, on behalf of, or as a representative for the other, designated the principal, in a particular domain of decision problems.”¹⁹ In our case, the principal is the Saṅgha or the community as a whole, whom we can represent in the person of the Buddha. The Buddha has created the Saṅgha as an instrument for the spread of his ideas regarding *nirvāṇa*. For his goals to be achieved, he needs the organization to work efficiently. Unfortunately, he cannot perform all the actions that are necessary for the Saṅgha to function well, especially after his *mahāparinirvāṇa* or extinction. For this purpose, he needs to appoint managers (who will have their own goals and desires, their own shortcomings and failings). As we will elaborate later, the Saṅgha developed a whole list of officials. However, on a day-to-day basis, the actual utilization of the assets was done by the monks themselves. So we can think of the managers, and then the monks, as the agents, who are acting for the Buddha, who is the principal.

In another version of the agency problem, the principal is the *dānapāti*, the donor, who desires merit (*puṇya*). This merit can be

¹⁸ Dutt (1962) describes this flat organizational structure thus: No locus of authority competent to be a source of law existed in the (cenobitical) Saṅgha: all its members stood in relation to the collective body on a footing of perfect equality. The elders could advise and instruct, but not direct or compel; each member was a refuge unto himself (*atta-saraṇa*).

¹⁹ Ross 1973: 134.

obtained by giving alms to the Saṅgha for the benefit of the monks. As the *Kṣudrakavastu* notes, in the utterance put into the mouth of donors, “[w]hen they are used then for us there is the merit that comes from use” (see above, n. 5). Thus, in this view, the merit accrues to the donors only when the gifts are appropriately used. The *Aṅguttaranikāya* (A.iv,392–395) also notes that the best recipients of gift (*dāna*) that procures merit are those closest to liberation—*sotāpannas* (Stream-Enterers), *anāgāmis* (Non-Returners), *arahants* (Worthy Ones), *paccekabuddhas* (Solitary Awakened Ones), and *sammasambuddhas* (Fully Awakened Ones), in increasing order of desirability. According to this, the agent would be the monk. Either way, the gift has to fall in the right hands and be used in the right way. How can the Buddha or the donor ensure this? How could the moral hazard problem be resolved?²⁰

I suggest that this moral hazard problem could be mitigated by providing continuing rights to donors in the objects that they donated. Although much more can be said about this, I will, for now, only bring one piece of evidence (as provided in Silk 2008). Quoting from the *Karmaśataka* (Tibetan version), a collection of stories (of which Silk says “this text gives the strong impression of belonging to the Mūlasarvāstivādin-s”), Silk describes the case of a wealthy merchant of Benares, who builds a monastery to benefit monks rather than forfeit his wealth to the state upon his death. In addition to building the monastery, though, he appoints a *vaiyāpṛtyakara bhikṣu*, a sort of manager. As Silk notes (*ibid.*: 190), “this *vaiyāpṛtyakara* is appointed by the lay owner of the monastery, rather than by the monks of the community.” Clearly, the donor does not believe the community monks will do a good job of managing the monastery.

This solution, which we could characterize as the internal monitor solution, is clearly not optimal. Silk goes on to document several episodes where the administrators themselves engage in malfeasance. One of them is from the *Dafangbian fobaoen jing* (大方便佛報恩經), which was later translated into Tibetan. According to

²⁰ “Moral hazard” refers to the danger that the agent will pursue his/her own goals to the detriment of the principal’s desired objectives.

Silk, it is possible that the text was compiled in China from Indian materials. The *Dafangbian fobaoen jing* narrates the following (as translated in *ibid.*: 178):

[I]n the time of the Semblance Teaching, there was a brahmin, and he built a monastery and supported the monastic community. At one time there was a donor who presented a large amount of butter and oil. Then a [party of] visiting monks arrived. At that time the administrative *weínà* became very hateful. He despised the fact that a large number of visiting monks had arrived. So he concealed the butter and oil, and would not give them out.

The administrator goes on to revile the visiting monks, and the Buddha, in relating this story to his chief disciple Ānanda, notes that the offence in this case was one of reviling fellow monks. However, it is very likely that what was happening here was also a bit of embezzlement, which is borne out by another version of the same tale in the *Karmaśataka*. In this version, a group of 77,000 monks appoints a Tripīṭaka master as their rainy season retreat administrator (*vaiyāpṛtyakara*). This administrator goes off to find donors to fund the expenses of this large monastic group (as translated in *ibid.*: 182):

At that time, a boat-full of 500 merchants had returned from the sea, having accomplished their mission. At a spot not distant from that mountain they unloaded their cargo, and settling down the merchants saw the crowd of monks living atop that mountain. Seeing this, they were very happy. The administrative monk approached them, and when they saw him they said: “Venerable, where are you going?” The Tripīṭaka master said: “The 77,000 monks who live atop that mountain are passing the rain retreat in reliance on me. For their sake I am going to exhort donors and benefactors.” The merchants said: “Venerable, we don’t want you to be troubled at all. We want to provide all the requisites they need,” and they gave him a large amount of cash. They said: “Venerable,

from today on you shall provide all that the monks require, and if they ask for this cash, that's fine, and if they do not ask for it, or if they ask for more than this, we will provide that too. And at the time of the end of the rain retreat, we want to offer meals as well." When they had spoken thus, the administrator took the cash, and returned to the monastery. But when he looked at the cash, he grew greedy, and buried that cash in the ground. He served the monks with poor quality food and drink.

In this story, we see that the administrator is clearly depicted as stealing the donor's money for his own purposes. In another *Karmaśataka* story (no. 41, as reported in Silk 2008: 194) "a man, becoming an administrative monk, makes use as a single individual of the wealth of the monastic community and so on, and hoards it. Later, when he is struck by illness, he gives that wealth to his relatives."

It is clear that there is a problem of resource management in these large monastic establishments, particularly resources that are provided by donors. This problem is sought to be managed by an internal expedient, that is, the appointment of administrators, but this turns out to create another agency problem. An external solution to this agency problem, then, is to create external monitors in the form of the donors themselves. This is accomplished by doing what we documented above, namely, giving the donors continuing rights in the movables or the immovable that they donate to the Saṅgha.

While the discussion of managerial issues in the corporate Saṅgha context suggests that continuing donor rights might have been a solution to a monitoring and an asset efficiency problem, it turns out that the situation is more complex. Not only did donors have rights in the disposition of the donated item beyond the date of the donation, but they also had continuing obligations as well! We will present the evidence for this in the next section, before going on to suggest a further explanation.

5. The Nature of the Problem: Donor Obligations

We now present evidence for continuing donor obligations with respect to the donated item. For example, in the *Śayanāsanavastu*,²¹ the donor is asked to make the donated *vihāra* “productive” by providing for the needs of the resident of the *vihāra*, which he does by giving the resident clothing (as translated in Schopen 1996: 92):

When that householder had had a *vihāra* built, he had not given anything to it. It remained entirely empty. When the householder saw that he went to the first *vihāra* and said to the Elder: “Noble One, my *vihāra* remains empty. Not a single monk lives there.”

The Elder of the Community said: “Sir, it should be made productive (*utsvedya*).”

The householder said: “But Noble One, it has been built on sterile saline soil. How is it to be made productive?”

“Householder, I did not mean it in that sense, but rather that there is no acquisition (*lābha*) there.”

The householder said: “Noble One, whoever now lives in my *vihāra*, to him I present cloth.”

Even though the donor has already made a gift of the *vihāras*, he is directed to make the *vihāras* “productive” by providing something for the monks who are to reside in the *vihāra* (in this case, clothing). In the *Śayanāsanavastu*, again, we see that when a section of the monastery is falling into disrepair, the Buddha says: “The donor should be encouraged to make repairs. If just that succeeds, it is good. If it does not succeed then they are to be repaired with Community assets.”²² Clearly, there is no contractual obligation for the donor to make the repairs, but just as clearly, there is an expectation that he will contribute to the upkeep of buildings that s/he has donated.

²¹ *Śayanāsanavastu* (Gnoli) 37.6–38.13; T, Ga 286a6–287b2 / D, Ga 211b1–212a (as cited in Schopen, 1996).

²² Schopen 2004: 27, citing *Śayanāsanavastu* (Gnoli) 35.7.

Earlier, in presenting the story from the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the householder *vihāra* donor's arrest, we focused on the fact that the Saṅgha had to follow procedure in abandoning a *vihāra* and, furthermore, had an obligation to return the contents of the *vihāra* supplied by that same donor if the *vihāra* was abandoned. However, we get additional interesting information from that incident that further clarifies the connection of a donor to his/her gift (Schopen 1996: 109). In the midst of his reproach to the monks, the donor householder says as follows: "But, Noble Ones, even if I had been seized in the court of the king, why did all of you run away? Since my relatives were not seized would they not have provided your requisites?" In other words, even the relatives of the donor would feel themselves responsible for the provision of living expenses for the inhabitants of the *vihāras* that he had previously donated! If the relatives are supposed to feel such an obligation, clearly the donor himself would also feel a similar obligation.

We see from another story in the *Vinayavibhaṅga* that this expectation is not only from the donor and his relatives during his lifetime, but also from his heirs *after* his death:²³

A devout and good householder with meritorious inclinations lived in a rural hamlet. He had a *vihāra* for the Community built in the forest that had lofty gateways and was ornamented with open galleries on the roof, latticed windows, and railings. It captivated both the heart and eye, was like a stairway to the heavens, and had exquisite couches, benches, and furnishings. The householder provided robes, alms, and all the needs of the sixty monks who lived there. But later that householder died. Since he had a son the monks went to him and said: "Seeing, Sir, that your father had provided robes, alms and all the needs of sixty monks, are you able as well to provide us, the sixty monks, with robes, alms and all our needs?" The son said: "Noble Ones, while there are some who might look after a hundred, a thousand, or even a

²³ Schopen 2004: 304, quoting *Vinayavibhaṅga* (D, 184a1).

hundred thousand, since there are others, myself included, who have difficulty making ends meet, I am not able to do it." The monks then left that *vihāra*.

Although in this case, the son begs off from providing support, he does not deny his obligation to maintain the efficacy of his father's gift.

In yet another case in the *Vinayavibhaṅga*, Schopen (1996: 100)²⁴ reports the case of "a householder who had built two *vihāras* and it was his usual practice to distribute cloth to each of the monks who had entered the rainy season retreat in them." Another example from the *Vinayavibhaṅga* has the donors explicitly acknowledging their obligation to maintain their previous donation of a *vihāra*:²⁵

If even the *vihāras* of we who are still living, abiding, continuing and alive fall into ruin like this, how will it be for the *vihāras* of those who are dead? We should give a perpetuity to the Community for building purposes.

These new examples suggest our third and final model for the relationship between a donor and his/her gift.

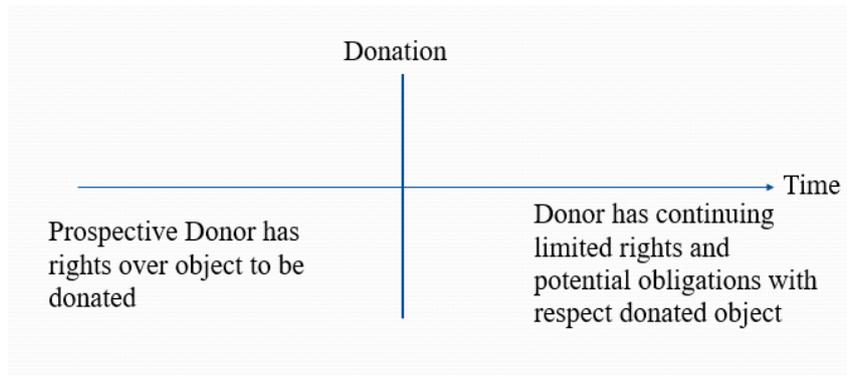


Fig. 3: Model 3 of Donor Rights

²⁴ Citing *Śayanāsanavastu* (Gnoli 40.13–41.6; T, 289a4–290a1 / D, 213a7–213b7).

²⁵ Schopen 1996: 101, quoting *Vinayavibhaṅga* (D, 154b.3ff).

Why does the Vinaya presuppose and, to some extent, impose such a continuing relationship between donor and the Saṅgha? As far as the rights of donors are concerned, it is possible that they come from clauses that the donors themselves have inserted in the gift contract for their own personal reasons. However, it is not clear why they would have made such conditions. Why should donors have obligations beyond their initial donation? In the following I suggest an explanation for this unusual gift-based relationship between a donor and the Saṅgha.

6. A Solution: The Asset Market Hypothesis

The explanation for this aspect of the ongoing relationship between a donor and the Saṅgha involving continuing donor obligations is that it is a solution to a local problem that existed in the time and place where the MSV was composed. I call this the Asset Market Hypothesis. As an organization with a lot of monks who had more or less severed their ties with their families (notwithstanding the evidence that this was not complete), the Saṅgha had ongoing needs to lodge, feed, and clothe its monks. There is evidence that the monastic establishment was conscious of these needs, and Vinaya rules may well have been devised to fulfill these requirements.²⁶ Most of the funds for these activities came from donors. It is not inconceivable that there were time as well as material mismatches in terms of donations and needs. This is shown graphically in Fig. 4.

²⁶ Schopen (1994a: 56–57) discusses the rights to the remains of dead monks and to their relics. He suggests that the progression of the text concerning the funeral of Śāriputra (*Kṣudrakavastu*, T, 354a5–368a5) involves first “monastic control of the relics of extraordinary monks; but then monastic rights to the offerings that the presence of such relics generates.” This appropriation of resources is arguably related to the monasteries’ need for funds. Schopen also points out that the text makes a connection between the availability of relics for veneration, and trade and commerce.

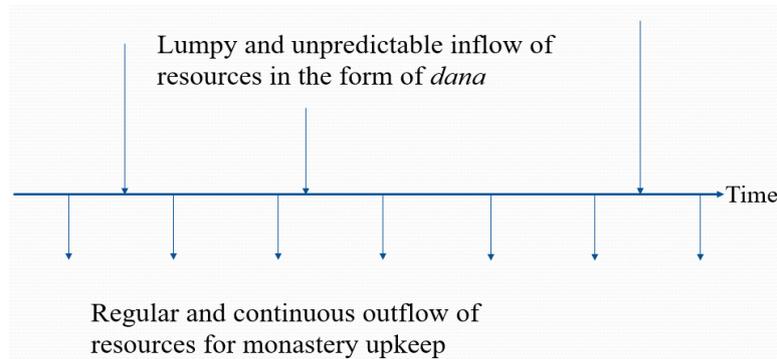


Fig. 4: Problem of Cashflow Mismatch

One way to resolve these problems would be to develop an endowment fund, not dissimilar to the endowment funds that Universities and other arts-related non-profit organizations accumulate. These funds could consist of financial assets, such as gold, silver and various forms of money or in the form of real assets, such as land. I do find evidence that monasteries did have such funds consisting of financial assets and that they used laymen to manage these funds through lending and investing. However, in the absence of liquid and well-organized capital markets, use of such endowment funds would have had their own costs. Reliable laymen who could be used to manage such funds may also not always have been available. There is also a principal-agent problem at work here; the persons managing the endowments may not return the funds.²⁷

The Saṅgha also had land in the form of large donations. However, in the absence of liquid land markets or liquid markets for other kinds of real assets, it would have been difficult for the Saṅgha to realize cash as and when necessary for the running of the monasteries. A requirement or at least encouragement of the provision of continuing funds for the upkeep of *vihāras* would resolve this problem to some extent, since the onus would be transferred from the monastery to the lay donor. However, even if

²⁷ See the *Vinayavibhaṅga* (D, Cha 154b.3–155b.2), cited in Schopen 1994b: 529.

there were an effort to require the provision of upkeep funds, such a requirement could not practically be enforced without driving away donors. Providing donors of *vihāras* with continuing rights in the objects of their donations would encourage them to provide upkeep funds. Similarly, a doctrine that utilization of donated items is required for the acquisition of donative merit ensures that donors keep track of the state of their donated materials.

This second hypothesis explains both characteristics of gifts to the Saṅgha as described in the MSV—continuing donor rights and continuing donor obligations. However, this solution depends upon the supposition of illiquid land and capital markets. Analysis of this question requires a discussion of when and where the MSV was redacted. It is to this issue that we now turn.

7. Dating Issues

While there seem to be differing opinions regarding the exact dating of the MSV, the seeming consensus is that it is late or post-Gupta. According to Ulrich Pagel (2014: 14), the MSV is “a source for the study of Buddhist monastic life in northern India from the second/third century onward.” The specific issues that I cite from the MSV do not seem to appear in the Pāli Vinaya, suggesting, at the very least, a post-Mahāsāṃghika/Sthāvira-split dating for the MSV.²⁸ Pagel’s description of discriminatory customs duties in the MSV—levied on Buddhist monks but not on Hindu ascetics—seems to suggest a time period subsequent to the Guptas, who, though Hindu, were quite tolerant of other sects. Since Harṣa, who

²⁸ Schopen (1996: 86) does note that there are passages in the Mahāvihāra Vinaya that either “suggest or assert the private ownership of Buddhist monasteries.” However, the case that he cites, from the *Suttavibhaṅga* and the *Cullavagga* (ii,174.4 and iii,65.38) refers to continuing rights of the private lay owner, not obligations. Schopen does say that he has not studied the Pāli Vinaya carefully for other occurrences of such lay ownership. On the other hand, Schopen (1997b: 206) cautions against assuming that all the Vinaya-s go back to an ur-Vinaya. He suggests that there may well have been different Vinaya texts responding to different needs in different locations and times.

succeeded the Guptas, was also positive towards Buddhists, this suggests an even later epoch, unless the MSV is referring to Śaśāṃka (re. ca. 590–625 CE), ruler of the neighboring Gauda kingdom of Bengal, a contemporary of Harṣa, and a supposed oppressor of Buddhism (Sharma 2005). (Of course, the Pāla kings of the 8th to 12th century in the Gangetic plain, including Bengal, were major supporters of Buddhism.) Schopen (1997a: 24) is even more definite and says: “It is not until the time of the commentaries of Buddhaghosa, Dhammapāla, and others—that is to say, the fifth to sixth centuries C.E.—that we can know anything definite about the actual contents of this canon.” Finally, both Ulrich Pagel and Malcolm Voyce relate the contents of the MSV to the Hindu *Dharmasūtras*, such as the *Nāradaśmṛti* and the *Yajñavalkya Śmṛti*, which are probably late-Gupta at best.

Some evidence as to the dating of the MSV Vinaya, relative to other Vinaya-s, is brought by Prebish (1975: 55 n. 9*). As pointed out earlier, in his comparative study of the Mahāsāṃghika and the Mūlasarvāstivāda *Prātimokṣa sūtras*, he discusses a difference in the wording of a *saṅgha āvaśeṣa/saṅghātīśeṣa dharma*, which pertains to what a monk needs to do when he is having a large *vihāra* built. Prebish points out that the former talks about a *vihāra* being built for the monk himself, while the latter discusses a *vihāra* intended for the Saṅgha. Relying on Frauwallner (1956) who believes that the monastic life “gained greater importance only in the course of time,” Prebish suggests that the monk referred to in the MSV Vinaya must be a monastic officer, acting in the role of a building superintendent. Hence he concludes the MSV *Prātimokṣa* must have become finalized at a later date than those in which no monastic officers are hinted at (i.e., the Mahāsāṃghika *Prātimokṣa*).

It is worth noting, as well, that the Mahāsāṃghika *Prātimokṣa* is in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, while the MSV *Prātimokṣa* is in classical Sanskrit. By comparing the language of the Mahāsāṃghika text to the Mathurā inscriptions edited by Heinrich Lueders and Klaus Janert, which date from the 1st century BCE to the end of the 1st century CE, Prebish (1975) ascribes the date of final compilation of this text to this period. What this implies, then, is a *terminus a quo*, or earliest possible dating, of the MSV text, at least the *Prātimokṣa*

component. Burrow (2001) also says as much. According to him, “The Sanskritisation of Buddhist literature is particularly complicated since it took place gradually and beginning by a compromise between Sanskrit and the Middle-Indian dialects of early Buddhism ended in the adoption of pure classical Sanskrit.” He goes on to categorize four different kinds of Buddhist Sanskrit, the first being what he calls mixed Sanskrit, which he says was used by the Mahāsāṃghika school and consisted of a partially Sanskritized Prakrit.²⁹ The second kind, he says, were used by the Sarvāstivādin from an early period. According to him (*ibid.*: 61), “The language of these works has of necessity incorporated wholesale the vocabulary and syntax of the original Māgadhī, but allowing for this and for some false Sanskritisations which are to be expected, it is free from the barbarisms of [mixed Sanskrit].” The third type, he says, must be distinguished from the second. In this third type of Sanskrit, works of the Sarvāstivādin were written. These works were not translations but were rather composed independently at a period much later than the canonical literature. While closer to classical Sanskrit, they still did not satisfy the canons of Paṇinean grammar, and the vocabulary is characterized by vernacular and provincial words. The final variety is pure classical Sanskrit, in which works of Aśvaghōṣa would fall. The MSV would seem to be of this variety and hence, once again, no earlier than the 2nd century CE.

8. Urban Decay in India

This late dating can be linked with the ample evidence collected by R. S. Sharma (1987) on urban decay in India around the same period. Referring to the archaeological evidence, he notes (*ibid.*: 59): “Urbanism in eastern UP and Bihar reached its climax during the period from 300 BCE to 300 CE. In the fourth to sixth centuries, the disintegration of urbanism is visible at Kausambi, Bhita, Rajghat,

²⁹ This stratum included some hypercorrections, such as the use of *bhikṣusya* instead of the Sanskrit *bhikṣoḥ*. However, according to Edgerton (1954), it seems that such hypercorrections may have been later emendations.

Vaishali, Kumrahar and Champa. At Sravasti, Ganwaria, Mason, Khairadih, Manjhik Chirand, Katragarh, Buxar, Sonpur and Rajgir, the Gupta phase in urbanism is almost unrepresented. Excavated sites in Orissa and West Bengal show the beginnings of urbanization around 300 BCE and its end around 300 CE." After looking at the literary evidence that supports urban decay in this period, he comments that between 600 and 1000 CE, gold coins were almost absent in India and that in contrast to the earlier period, there was a general dearth of metallic currency in post-Gupta times. Since coins are necessary for trade, the lack of currency indirectly indicates urban decline and directly suggests a lack of active markets. Romila Thapar (2002) too, notes a visible termination of commerce during this period.

Sharma (2006), furthermore, notes the move to a semi-feudal economy that consisted of local economies operating on the Jajmani system, a kind of formal barter that did not involve currency and trade. He ties this to the development of a sort of feudalism during the Gupta period. His observations were summarized by Upinder Singh (2009: 473) as follows: "According to Sharma, the political essence of feudalism lay in the administrative organization of kingdoms being based on land. Its political essence lay in the institution of serfdom. Peasants were tied to the land owned by intermediaries, to whom they paid rent in kind and labor. The economy was essentially self-sufficient, and goods were produced mainly for local use and not for the market. Several feudal features were listed by Sharma: royal grants of land; the transfer of fiscal and judicial rights to the beneficiaries; the grant of rights over peasants, artisans, and merchants; an increased incidence of forced labor; a decline in trade and coinage; payment of officials through land revenue assignments; and the growth of the obligations of the *sāmantas* (subordinate or feudatory rulers)." This feudalistic scenario laid out by Sharma suggests a lack of interconnectedness between different regions, which, in turn, would make portfolio investments, on the one hand, more difficult, while the system of land grants, on the other hand, would seem to make land sales more difficult. Both these elements would aggravate the cashflow mismatch problem for the monasteries.

Chattopadhyaya (1997) and Kulke (1997) put forward an alternate paradigm to Sharma's feudalism theory, suggesting that what was happening was really the beginning of an intensive period of state formation and that land grants were part of a strategy adopted by rulers to legitimize their power, which, far from segmenting the state, played an integrative role in the politics and societies of that time. While this is a different take on the data, the implications for our hypothesis are not necessarily different. The economics of markets could very well be the same, even if the political interpretation of the data differs.

Thaplyal (1996) discusses the growth and florescence of guilds from 600 BCE to 600 CE. From around 500 BCE to the end of the Mauryan Empire (around 300 CE), there is ample evidence that guilds gradually increased in importance and flourished. After the demise of the Mauryan Empire, in spite of the political fragmentation, guilds seem to have continued to flourish. In addition to references from Buddhist scriptures, such as the *Mahāvastu*, there are many epigraphs referring to donations by guilds of various kinds—potters, masons, gem-cutters, bankers-cum-merchants, caravan merchants, etc. Evidence from Pliny regarding trade with the Roman Empire, as well as numismatic evidence, suggests that trade flourished.³⁰

From 300 CE onwards, however, most of the evidence is in the form of references in law books such as the *Nāradaśmṛti* (500 CE) and the *Bṛhaspatismṛti* (500 CE); however, these references may simply be due to a need to comment on and reiterate definitions and conditions laid out by earlier law books, such as the *Manusmṛti* (50 BCE) and the *Yajñavalkya Smṛti* (200 CE). Sachindra Maity (1957, Chap. 8) brings examples of guilds cited in Kalidasa's *Raghuvamśa* (5th cent. CE) and in Varahamihira's *Bṛhatsamhita* (mid-6th cent. CE). However, these literary examples, too, might have been influenced by conditions of a prior age. Another literary witness is

³⁰ Pliny, as cited in Maity 1957: 139, and numismatic evidence adduced in *ibid.*, Chap. 9.

the *Vāsudevahiṅḍī*, a Jain work from the mid-6th century CE, which has a lot of references to trade, caravans, and business.

Maity (1957: 158), writing of the Gupta period (300 CE to 550 CE), does suggest that guilds “received deposits of public money and paid regular interest on them.” His evidence comes from various sources, two being the *Nāradaśmṛti* and the *Brhaspatiśmṛti* that we have already referred to. However, there is epigraphic evidence that various royal personalities (Uṣavadāta, son-in-law of the Saka satrap, Nahapāna; Chandragupta II; and Kumāragupta I) invested money with guilds (Maity 1957: 158). One of the Gupta-era inscriptions, published by John F. Fleet, also talks about Devaviṣṇu, a Brahmin from Indrapura, who deposited permanently a certain sum of money for the perpetual maintenance of a lamp in the temple of the Sun with the guild of the oil-men of Indrapura. While this suggests the ability of at least some individuals (and Buddhist monasteries) to invest funds and use the proceeds, there does seem to have been a decrease in trade and the vitality of markets during the Gupta period. According to R. S. Sharma (1987), this might have been related to the decay of the Kuṣān Empire (early CE to 300 CE). Around 225 CE, the Kuṣāns split into the Western and the Eastern Kuṣāns and were later attacked by the Persians and then the Huns. The Kuṣāns had formed a bridge between India and the West and China and promoted trade. Their defeat led to the decline of trade and markets for specialized arts. This in turn caused the decline of urban areas, which depend upon production in excess of needs. The evidence provided above suggests that there may have been conditions during the Gupta period that are consistent with our asset-market hypothesis. But what about the geographical locus? Was the MSV composed in areas where markets were in decline during the period that we have posited for its composition?

Schopen (1999: 292ff.) suggests that the events described in the MSV occurred in the Northwestern part of India, based on the reference to Vajrapāṇi Buddha, who is often found in Gandhāran art, during the Kuṣāna period. The other and seemingly more definitive evidence has to do with the “prediction” of the construction of Kaniṣka’s famous *stūpa* and his identification as a future patron of Buddhism (Pagel 2014: 17 n. 5). Nevertheless, as

Pagel (*ibid.*: 18 n. 5) points out, “it is perfectly conceivable that the presence of such a landmark monument in Kashmir was well-known beyond its borders.” He (*ibid.*) concludes that “Schopen [...] deals in probabilities linked to circumstantial evidence and calculations of plausibility—not in chronological certainties.” Clarke (2015), in order to explain divergent translations into Chinese, posits that the MSV had two different traditions, one known to Guṇaprabha (5th–7th cent.) in Mathurā and the other, known to Yijing (義淨; 635 CE – 713 CE) in Nālandā. Although the location of the traditions need not definitively establish the location of the redaction of the original text, it is probable that it occurred somewhere in North Central India (near Nālandā/Mathurā). The areas where Buddhism flourished during this time included not only Northwestern India, but Madhyadeśa, that is, Bihar, eastern Uttar Pradesh, Orissa and Bengal as well. The evidence above is consistent with the notion that urbanization and commerce were likely affected in these areas during the Gupta period. If my interpretation is correct, and the MSV was composed during the Gupta period, then we have additional reason to accept the theory that the MSV attitude to gifts was influenced by the need to have continuing, rather than sporadic, donations of money and resources.

9. Concluding Thoughts

In this paper, I provide evidence of an unusual aspect of the MSV Vinaya towards donors. Instead of treating gifts as one-time events, localized at the time of the donation, the MSV seems to recognize donor rights in the disposition of the gifts even at later points in time. At the same time, the Vinaya encourages donors to not only provide one-time gifts, but also to cover ongoing expenses connected with their durable gifts. I suggest that this may be due to two different reasons—one, to reduce agency costs pertaining to misuse of gifts by ordinary monks and administrators by encouraging donor oversight; and two, to bridge the gap between inflows of gifts, which may have been sporadic, and monastery requirements, which would be continuous.

I marshal literary, archaeological, and linguistic evidence suggesting that the rules of the MSV may have been composed at a time of urban decay when liquid markets did not exist—maybe not even for commodities and goods and even less so for assets such as land. As such, the need for the Saṅgha to assure themselves of regular provisions of clothing and repairs to buildings was paramount. Requiring and encouraging an ongoing relationship with donors was a key part of this strategy. My theory could also be interpreted as evidence for a late dating of the MSV. Furthermore, it suggests that monastic decision-makers were aware of the economic and social environment in which they lived and modified Vinaya rules to ensure their survival. From a juridical point of view, such an approach to explaining aspects of the Vinaya could provide guidance to contemporary monastic leaders that have to deal with implementing Vinaya rules in a changing world. One of the things to note is that our explanations for the special character of gifts are tied up with the nature of the recipient, namely, a corporate body with ongoing resource requirements and a perennial cashflow-matching problem. If this is true, we should not find these special aspects of gifts in Buddhism when they are exchanged between individuals.

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Faith in Ideology versus Academic Rationality: A Case Study

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1. Introduction

Research is an important aspect of University education. Students joining higher education at the post-graduate level are expected to pursue research as a natural culmination of their academic pursuit. Academic research entails an open and objective enquiry into a subject matter that is free from any personal or ideological biases and prejudices. A researcher's personal faith and adherence to a particular ideology or religion could be major hurdles, especially when the research topic concerns that very ideology or religion. Personal faith often does not allow a researcher to raise questions or doubts regarding his/her beliefs, whereas ideological bias could affect the research objectivity. Generally, for a faithful follower of a given religious tradition, everything proclaimed in its scriptures is well said, and thus there is no need for an enquiry. Such a person is often oblivious of conceptual or philosophical contradictions, textual inconsistencies, and historical developments. For him/her, scriptures are to be learned and practised, and not researched. Moreover, faith may also hinder his/her ability to fully understand and appreciate other systems of beliefs.

In my career as a University teacher of Buddhist literature in Pāli and Sanskrit at the Savitribai Phule Pune University in the Indian state of Maharashtra for more than twenty years, I have often found my students grappling to understand and pursue modern critical research on Buddhism. Their struggle begins with finding answers to basic questions, such as what research is or why one should pursue it. Challenges we face while training our students in modern research and its methodology are manifold. These are

mainly linked to the type of studentship, in general, and students' motivation behind pursuing higher education in Buddhist Studies, in particular. In the following, in order to underline some of the challenges, I shall present a case study based on our experience at the Department of Pali of the Savitribai Phule Pune University and share some of the measures taken to tackle them. Although I am aware that our situation is unique and the means we have adopted are in no way universally applicable, I am presenting them here with a hope that it would help us better understand the tension between faith, on the one hand, and academic rationality, on the other. Let me begin by explaining the academic scenario and the type of studentship we have in Pune.

2. The Nature of Students' Demography

The Savitribai Phule Pune University is one of the premier state-run academic institution located in the city of Pune, well-known as "the city of learning." It has 612 affiliated colleges, and 307 recognised research institutes.¹ It is a traditional university having its jurisdiction over three districts of Maharashtra—namely, Nagar, Nashik, and Pune. At present, the Department of Pali is the only centre in the jurisdiction of the University where courses in Pāli and Buddhist Sanskrit literature, the two main literary Indic sources of Buddhism, are offered from elementary to advanced levels. Although Pāli was being taught at the University since its establishment in the year 1949, the independent Department of Pali was established in 2006 to commemorate two important events in the history of Buddhism. The first is the 2550th year of the Buddhist era and the second is the 50th anniversary of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's historic embrace of Buddhism in 1956, together with his millions of followers from oppressed social classes.

Although Maharashtra has the largest number of Buddhist population in India, until the turn of the new millennium people in Pune were hardly aware of the facilities available to them for

¹ For details, see http://www.unipune.ac.in/university_files/about_university.html.

learning Pāli and Buddhist Sanskrit at the Savitribai Phule Pune University. This was mainly because prior to 2006 Pāli was merely taught as one of the subsidiary subjects of the Department of Sanskrit and Prakrit Languages, and the information about the courses in Pāli was scarcely publicized. From the year 2000 onward the situation began to change. As a result of our outreach initiatives and mouth to mouth publicity done by our students, we became successful in attracting local students, along with a small number of foreign students mainly from the monastic colleges of Burma, Vietnam, and Korea. The increase in the level of education and the sense of religio-cultural identity in the Ambedkarite Buddhist community has been another major factor responsible for this change. Educated members of the Ambedkarite community, who were financially well-settled, began to turn to formal study of Buddhism in search of its “authentic” teachings. The emerging sense of Buddhist identity urged them to study Buddhist scriptures in order to better understand their religion and culture. Popularization of the Vipassanā meditation across different sections of society and the growing interest in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition—especially among educated elites, both Buddhists and non-Buddhists—also resulted in overall enthusiasm about studying Buddhism and its literature. Since the year 2000 we have been witnessing a steady growth in the number of students, which increased from a single digit in 2000 to 325 in 2019.

This students’ population can be primarily classified into three groups: (i) The majority of our students are Buddhists who are followers of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. They are affiliated with different socio-religious organizations, such as the Buddhist Society of India (Bhāratīya Bauddha Mahāsaṅgha) and the Triratna Buddhist Community. (ii) The second group is that of Vipassanā practitioners (mainly from the tradition of the Vipassanā master S. N. Goenka), which includes some of the Ambedkarite students’ community as well as students from non-Buddhist background. (iii) The third group consists of students belonging to the various monastic communities from India and abroad. Our Indian lay students come from different professional and social

backgrounds. There are government officials, factory workers, medical practitioners, engineers, software professionals, teachers, counsellors, autorickshaw drivers, politicians, housewives, and retired people as well. Most of them are members of various social organizations and lead a very active social life. The majority of our students join the university at a fairly late age, 40 to 50 years old on average. In general, the number of young students joining the Department is fairly low since the career opportunities in the field of Buddhist Studies are scarce. However, in recent years we have been witnessing a slow but steady growth in their number. Especially individuals associated with progressive social movements following the ideology of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, Mahātmā Jotibā Phule, and Rājarṣī Śāhū are turning to Buddhism as a source of inspiration and guidance.

3. Challenges Faced by Students while Confronting Modern Scholarship

Since most of our older students resume academic studies after a substantial gap in time, sometimes even after more than twenty years, they find it difficult to get accustomed to the learning environment. It is no doubt tough becoming a student after spending many years outside the academia, be it as successful professionals or housewives. At this juncture of their lives, they are mostly not in a position to devote their entire energy and time to research, while conducting in-depth research as a part-time activity is nearly impossible. Moreover, the acquiring of the required research methodology under these circumstances also poses a challenge. As for our younger students, most of them come from a rural background. The majority of them comes from a rather low socio-economic background with very little or no prospects of support for higher education. These students come to the university without sufficient academic training behind them. Another weakness is their lack of knowledge of English or any other foreign language of academic importance. In fact, many of them even do not have a good grasp of their mother tongue. They are wanting in extensive reading of both academic and non-academic materials. Moreover, most of them have generally no

training in systematic writing, which makes the entire process of acquiring new linguistic and research skills far more difficult. While these practical difficulties could be overcome with some individual efforts and training, the main hurdles are of psychological and attitudinal nature, as summarised in the following.

3.1. False Notion of Research and Its Purpose

The most fundamental problem in this regard is not having a correct notion of what research is and failing to understand its purpose. For most of our students, research simply means compilation and explanation of the scriptures' content with the help of existing literature. They consider it to be a sophisticated means for proving certain standpoints cherished by their tradition or supported by their beliefs. To them, research means neither critically evaluating a text or a concept nor finding solutions to intriguing textual or conceptual problems. As a result, they neither understand the need of critically studying Buddhist literature and philosophy nor do they appreciate the methodology prevalent in modern scholarship.

3.2. Dearth of Research Motivation

Another obstacle that comes in the way of academic research is the intention with which our students study Buddhism. In the case of many monastics, the main aim is to simply get a university degree and knowledge of modern languages, which would make them qualified Buddhist teachers in their own countries/regions. For a majority of the Vipassanā meditators, whose main goal is liberation, the study of Buddhist texts is merely a source of inspiration and of additional information about the practice of meditation. For Ambedkarite Buddhists, it is a means to understand the religious tradition to which they belong. They sincerely believe that such a study will help them become better Buddhists, on the one hand, and explore their cultural roots, on the other. They often look upon the study of Buddhism as an important aspect of their cultural identity. Thus, for students belonging to any of these groups, the pursuit of an academic

study of Buddhism is mainly motivated by concerns and needs that are related to their lives as Buddhists in a broader sense rather than finding solutions to research problems.

3.3. Narrow Research Outlook

Another difficulty in the academic pursuit of Buddhist Studies is the narrow research outlook on the part of the students. As an academician, one is expected to take a broad and all-inclusive approach in one's research. Widening the scope of one's knowledge with the help of extensive reading on a variety of topics or by attending various academic events is necessary for conducting a high-quality research. Versatility and resourcefulness are important qualities of a researcher. For undertaking a comparative or historical study one needs to have knowledge of different languages and diverse philosophical or religious traditions. One must have interest in learning new things and enthusiasm to acquire multiple skills relevant to one's study. However, due to limited interests on the part of our students there is a general reluctance among them to learn something that is not directly related to their area of study. They do not understand the importance of acquiring knowledge of different fields or methodologies as complementary to their research in the long run. Moreover, older students often experience an additional psychological barrier, as they find it difficult to use and master modern equipment and technology.

3.4. The Sense of Biases and Prejudices

Since the majority of our students from all the three groups mentioned above join the university at a fairly late age, they already have some firm notions about the Buddhist tradition to which they belong. At the same time, they are often less or even ill-informed about other traditions. Students from the Ambedkarite Buddhist community still carry bitter memories of their past oppression by caste Hindus, which has made them emotionally repulsive to everything related to Hinduism. Even within the Ambedkarite fold, students would have strong biases for the standpoint of the particular organization they are affiliated

with and prejudices against that of other organizations. Similarly, monastic students from both the Theravāda and Mahāyāna traditions possess great pride for their own school, while having lot many misgivings about the other, which makes their approach to the study of Buddhism dogmatic. This not only stands in the way of an objective inquiry regarding their own tradition, but also stops them from making sincere efforts to understand others' positions. In general, such an approach badly affects their research potential as it discourages openness to diverse ideas and impartial assessment of the research material.

3.5. Submission to Personal or Textual Authority

Ambedkarite Buddhists and Vipassanā practitioners have strong faith in Dr. Ambedkar and S. N. Goenka, who are respectively their authority in any matter of Buddhist Studies. Accordingly, writings of Dr. Ambedkar and Goenka, as well as discourses delivered by the latter during meditation retreats, form the "scriptural corpus" for their respective followers. Whenever these students come across ideas that contradict these authorities, most of them are shocked and find them extremely difficult to understand and accept. While some of the more mature students make efforts in this direction, the orthodox among them are quite reluctant to do so and often go to the extent of rejecting these ideas outright. Many a times such a strong and uncritical commitment to a personal or scriptural authority is merely based on one's emotional affinity toward them and has no firm backing of an in-depth study. Such blind faith in a teacher or a scripture does not allow one to question and critically study in an unbiased manner either the ideas of one's own tradition or those of others'. This hampers rationality considerably and ultimately affects the students' academic rigour and objectivity.

3.6. Hold of Exclusivism

Among the practitioners of Vipassanā and members of the various monastic communities, there is a strong feeling of exclusivism. Members of these groups consider their own tradition to be the only pure and original one and thus are not

open to ideas from other Buddhist traditions, considering them to be polluted. This exclusivistic attitude is often inculcated and nurtured by the respective traditions themselves. Goenka often used to say in his discourses that the practice of Vipassanā taught by him is the Vipassanā taught by the Buddha himself, which has been preserved in its pristine pure form until this present day.² Although his intention might be to merely impress upon his disciples the authenticity of his meditative technique and to caution the practitioners from mixing it with any other practice, such cautions are often counter-productive in as much as they lead to orthodoxy as well as mar the openness to differences, which is essential for impartial research. The members of the Ambedkarite community, too, hold that the Buddhism presented by Ambedkar is the only pure and original form of Buddhism, whereas the rest are its distorted versions, full of interpolations from other teachers and traditions. In the introduction to his magnum opus *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, Ambedkar raises doubts regarding the clarity and the consistency in the traditional narration of the Buddha's biography and the faithful transmission of his teachings without any interpolations or corruptions.³ Such statements are often interpreted as a caution not only against following but even against studying other traditions of Buddhism. Students having such an exclusivistic attitude disregard the fact that, like every other phenomenon, religious traditions evolve and undergo modifications over time. They ignore factors such as regional and cultural diversity and political and economic circumstances, all of which played an important role in shaping different Buddhist traditions. Such students usually do not cherish or honour plurality of ideas and the overall dynamic nature of Buddhism. As a result, they only wish to look at what, in their view, is authentic Buddhism and ignore the rest.

² DVD of 10 day Vipassanā Discourse (English), at the end of the 10th day discourse.

³ Ambedkar 1974: Introduction, xli ff.

3.7. Influence of Ideology

Members of the Ambedkarite Buddhist community approach Buddhism more as a social doctrine. In view of Dr. Ambedkar's strong emphasis on hard-core rationality and denial of metaphysical or mystical ideas, they become rather uncomfortable when studying traditional Buddhist literature, which talks about past lives, rebirth, reincarnation, and heavens and hells. Due to their anti-Brahmanic sentiments, these students tend to treat such passages as later interpolations by Brahmins. For the same reason, the Mahāyāna scriptures, including Tantric ones, are also looked upon by them with suspicion. For Vipassanā practitioners, Theravāda Buddhism is the only true form of Buddhism. According to them, true understanding of Buddhism could be achieved only through the practice of meditation. Since Goenka always considers the study of texts secondary to the practice of meditation, his followers often treat academicians inferior to meditators. One of our Ph.D. students reportedly said to his supervisor that she could neither understand Buddhism nor be able to genuinely supervise him unless she practises Vipassanā. I personally have been once told that without having practised Vipassanā, one cannot correctly translate the Tipiṭaka. Such undermining of academic study results in disrespect for scientific research methods and disciplined inquiry.

3.8. Lack of Questioning and Critical Approach

Questioning is said to be the primary step of any research. The Buddha, in many of his discourses, inculcated the spirit of enquiry among his disciples. However, students coming from monastic communities and those who are meditators always treat questioning equal to a spiritual doubt (*vicikitsā*). They cannot distinguish between a factual and rational investigation, on the one hand, and doubt or indecision resulting from mental delusion, on the other. Dr. Ambedkar throughout his struggle against social inequality and injustice challenged scriptural and personal authorities that directly or indirectly defended these vices. His emphasis on rationality, in general, and his own rational appraisal of Hinduism as well as traditional Buddhism, in

particular, display the spirit of questioning. However, in the case of Ambedkarite Buddhists this spirit seems to diminish when studying Dr. Ambedkar's own writings and ideology. Any questioning of his works or ideas is treated as an indication of distrust and disrespect toward him. This stops students from asking sharp questions, and sometimes even from asking any questions at all.

4. Possible Solutions to Overcome These Challenges

The problems outlined above are very challenging and demand special attention. Over a period of time we have realized that more than finding solutions to academic problems, our students are interested in seeking answers to questions concerning their lives. In other words, they are more inclined to the applied side of the study of Buddhism rather than to its purely theoretical aspects. Hence, research in Buddhist Studies could be made more meaningful and engaging for those who belong to the Buddhist tradition, or those who turn to it as an alternative way of life, by bringing theory and practice together in a harmonious manner. It is our experience that when students who are not interested in pure textual research are encouraged to take up topics of research that are connected to their immediate concerns, they certainly feel motivated to pursue research with full academic rigour.

We encourage our students to explore research areas that are close to their heart. We help them identify theoretical or practical problems that can be turned into specific research question. One of our students, who is a Vipassanā meditator and teacher, studied textual sources of Goenka's tradition of Vipassanā meditation for his doctoral research. He wanted to find out the truth behind Goenka's claim of purity and authenticity of his tradition. Another student, who is a painter and art teacher belonging to the Ambedkarite community, is studying the correlation between traditional Buddhist literature and art, with the intention to develop modern Buddhist art and its theory based on the writings of Dr. Ambedkar. He was motivated by Dr. Ambedkar's wish that his book *The Buddha and His Dhamma*

should inspire artists' creative imagination.⁴ Another monk student from Myanmar is doing research on the literary contribution of the important Burmese monk-scholar Ven. Janakābhivaṃsa, who flourished in the first half of the twentieth century and was an excellent educator and Buddhist reformer. It is noteworthy that this student belongs to the same tradition as the Burmese monk and is highly impressed by his teaching methodology and moral character. We observe that students get highly motivated when they are working on topics that are close to their heart and carry some meaning for them as practising Buddhists.

We believe that if we could educate our students in the fundamentals of academic research and impress upon them the value of learning different methods and skills and help them connect the knowledge they have gained with their ongoing research, they would certainly abandon their narrow outlook and make efforts to widen the horizon of their knowledge. Having identified potential researchers, we groom them by teaching research methodology and allied subjects as a part of their training as M.Phil. and Ph.D. students. We also enable them with a first-hand research experience by involving them in different research projects.

In order to give academic exposure to our students, we invite top scholars from different areas of Buddhist Studies to the Department under various schemes, such as the Khyentse Foundation India Visiting Professorship Program. Under this program scholars of international repute offer courses in the area of their specialization. These courses expose our students to new trends in research and related methodology and help them develop broader perspective on Buddhist Studies by widening the scope of their knowledge. The courses are certainly proving to be a good training ground for our students in rational and critical thinking. Moreover, while designing our syllabus, we have taken special care to include in it different areas of Buddhist Studies. We also organize special programmes, such as study excursions to

⁴ Chitnis 1981: 50.

various Buddhist archaeological sites, religious centres, and academic institutions, in order to develop among students a broader outlook on Buddhist Studies. These measures help students overcome barriers of individual biases and prejudices and approach academic research with an open mind.

Our monastic students, though weak in both English and modern research methodology, often have strong basis gained through their traditional education. This proved to be an important asset while carrying out research in the field of Buddhist Studies. If they are properly trained in English and research methodology, they could certainly make excellent use of their traditional education in their research. Moreover, students with a strong basis of meditative practice definitely have better understanding of topics related to mental cultivation. Their developed mental capacities often prove helpful in closely and thoroughly pursuing academic study. Ambedkarite students have a strong inclination for rational and critical analysis, which is inspired by Dr. Ambedkar's own way of thinking. This, if further developed, could be directed to properly address important research questions. Thus students of all three groups have certain strengths that could balance out their weaknesses. As an academic institute we help our students to overcome their weaknesses by providing them training in the aspects in regard to which they are lagging behind.

Our students from all three groups have a strong commitment towards Buddhism, and it is this commitment that brings them to the academia even after a long gap. What is most needed in the case of these students is to balance their faith (*saddhā*) with analytical insight (*paññā*), that is to say, their commitment needs a touch of critical thinking. We urge our students to balance and complement their strong faith in Buddhism with critical thinking and objectivity. Rather than asking them to give up their faith, we tell them to channel it in such a way that it complements their research by being a motivating force. People like Bhikkhu Anālayo, Bhikkhunī Dhammānā, and Ven. K. L. Dhammajoti, who are scholars as well as Buddhist practitioners, are presented to them as excellent role models in this regard. Despite being

faithful followers of Buddhism, they have maintained high level of rationality and objectivity in their research. They have struck perfect balance between their Buddhist practice and rigorous academic research by not allowing their faith to override their critical thinking. We also make use of examples from the lives of the Buddha and Dr. Ambedkar to highlight the importance of critical thinking and questioning. Slowly but surely these efforts are paying off. Instead of being a hurdle to academic research the faith of students is steadily transforming itself to a conviction in the study of Buddhism.

My own understanding of research has undergone many changes over the last 20-odd years. Initially I strongly believed that it is impossible to conduct objective research in Buddhist Studies if one is a faithful follower of a certain Buddhist tradition. Faith and reasoning appeared to be two different poles that could never meet. However, lately I have realized that if faith is properly channelled and balanced with analytical thinking, it could even prove to be complementary to academic research. Especially while pursuing research on religious texts or traditions, mere rationality devoid of a genuine desire to understand a particular tradition may make a researcher unsympathetic towards his/her subject-matter. Those scholars who are not open to Buddhism are often found short of efforts to understand its intricacies. As Lal Mani Joshi rightly puts it, without the attitude of sympathetic empathy towards the ideas and ideals of the Buddhist tradition, a scholar of Buddhism is likely to misunderstand and misinterpret his subject.⁵ Thus, just as both faith and analytical insight are essential for harvesting the fruit of liberation, in the same way these are also essential qualities for a fruitful academic research.

⁵ Joshi 2008: 7.

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