

# Study and Practice of Meditation

Tibetan Interpretations of the Concentrations  
and Formless Absorptions

Leah Zahler

Snow Lion Publications

Ithaca, New York

Snow Lion Publications  
P.O. Box 6483  
Ithaca, NY 14851 USA  
(607) 273-8519  
www.snowlionpub.com

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Printed in USA on acid-free recycled paper.

ISBN-10: 1-55939-325-4  
ISBN-13: 978-1-55939-325-6

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Zahler, Leah.

Study and practice of meditation : Tibetan interpretations of the concentrations and formless absorptions / Leah Zahler.

p. cm.

Includes translations from Tibetan.

Includes English translations of Tsoñ-kha-pa Blo-bzañ-grags-pa's Bsam gzugs zin bris and Dkon-mchog 'Jigs-med-dbañ-po's Bsam gzugs chen mo las mdor bsdus te bkod pa bsam gzugs kyi rnam bžag legs bśad bum bzañ.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-1-55939-325-6 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-55939-325-4 (alk. paper)

1. Meditation--Dge-lugs-pa (Sect) I. Tsoñ-kha-pa Blo-bzañ-grags-pa, 1357-1419. Bsam gzugs zin bris. English. II. Dkon-mchog 'Jigs-med-dbañ-po. Bsam gzugs chen mo las mdor bsdus te bkod pa bsam gzugs kyi rnam bžag legs bśad bum bzañ. English. III. Title.

BQ7805.Z35 2009

294.3'4435--dc22

2009003791

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# Tsong-kha-pa's

## *Notes on the Concentrations and Formless Absorptions*

### [THE MAIN TOPICS]

- [I.] The causes through which the concentrations and formless absorptions are attained<sup>a</sup>
- [II.] The entities that are attained<sup>b</sup>
- [III.] The attainers—the persons who are the basis
- [IV.] The signs of the attainment of such

### I. [THE CAUSES THROUGH WHICH THE CONCENTRATIONS AND FORMLESS ABSORPTIONS ARE ATTAINED]

- [A.] The explanation of the means of attaining the first concentration
- [B.] Indication that [the means of attaining] the remaining [concentrations and formless absorptions] are similar to that

#### [A. THE EXPLANATION OF THE MEANS OF ATTAINING THE FIRST CONCENTRATION]

This section has three topics:

- [1.] Ascertainment of the number of mental contemplations
- [2.] Identification of the individual [seven mental contemplations]
- [3.] Opinions on where the ninth path [of release] is included

#### [1. Ascertainment of the number of mental contemplations]

There are the mental contemplations of thorough knowledge of the character, arisen from belief, thorough isolation, joy-withdrawal, analysis, final training, and the fruit of final training.

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<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 2.1, reading 'thob byed kyi rgyu instead of thob byed kyi rgyu. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 170.2.2; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 544.1, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 800.1, agree with this text.

<sup>b</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 2.1, reading *gang thob* instead of *gang gis thob*. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 170.2.2; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 544.1, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, agree with this text.

*Question:* What are the reasons for positing seven mental contemplations?

*Answer:* Since there are three in terms of causal preparations, three in terms of entity, and one in terms of effect, seven are posited.

*Question:* What are posited as the three in terms of cause?

*Answer:* Two [are posited] as causes of generating what has not been generated; one [is posited] as the cause of enhancing what has already been generated. The two—thorough knowledge of the character and arisen from belief—are posited as the first [the causes generating what has not been generated]. [3] [The mental contemplation of] analysis is posited as the second [the cause of enhancing what has already been generated].

*Question:* What are the reasons for positing three in terms of entity?

*Answer:* [The mental contemplation of] thorough isolation is posited as the antidote for the three great objects of abandonment of the lower level; [the mental contemplation of] joy-withdrawal, as the antidote for the three middling [objects of abandonment of the lower level]; the mental contemplation of final training, as the antidote for the three small [objects of abandonment of the lower level].

Moreover, this way of presenting the six preparations is in terms of separating from attachment to the lower level by way of the mundane path having the aspects of grossness/peacefulness, but the preparations for the first concentration are not limited to these six, since, in the preparations for the first concentration, there occur the uncontaminated paths of seeing, meditation, and no more learning which are generated as entities of the not-unable. [Hence, the mental contemplation called the not-unable is a seventh preparation.]

## [2.] Individual identification [of the seven mental contemplations]

**[The mental contemplation of] thorough knowledge of the character.** That which familiarizes with grossness/peacefulness by way of either a mixture of hearing and thinking or either of those, [reflecting] that the Desire Realm, relative to the First Concentration, is gross by reason of involving many afflictive emotions, very great suffering, and a short life-span, whereas the First Concentration, being the opposite of those, is peaceful, is the mental contemplation of thorough knowledge of the character.

*Etymology:* [4] By reason of familiarizing with the individual characters of the two, the Desire Realm and the First Concentration, as gross and peaceful [respectively], it is called [the mental contemplation of thorough knowledge of the character]. It is included within the level of the Desire Realm.

**The mental contemplation arisen from belief.** That which serves as a cause of thorough isolation which reaches [a union of] calm abiding and special insight, having passed beyond hearing and thinking in dependence upon having become well acquainted with grossness/peacefulness by way of [the mental contemplation of] thorough knowledge of the character, is [the mental contemplation arisen from belief].

*Etymology:* By reason of being the mental contemplation which arises in dependence upon having believed in the grossness and peacefulness [of the Desire Realm and the First Concentration, respectively] through hearing and thinking in the context of [the mental contemplation of] thorough knowledge of the character, it is called [the mental contemplation arisen from belief]. It is included within the level of the first concentration.

**The mental contemplation of thorough isolation.** That mental contemplation which is the state that acts as an antidote to the three great objects of abandonment of the Desire Realm in dependence upon having meditated on grossness/peacefulness by way of the mental contemplation arisen from belief is the mental contemplation of thorough isolation.

*Etymology:* By reason of being the mental contemplation that initially isolates the mental continuum from the afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm by way of [having meditated on grossness/peacefulness by way of the mental contemplation arisen from belief], it is called [the mental contemplation of thorough isolation].

**The mental contemplation of joy-withdrawal.** The state that is the mental contemplation that acts as the antidote to the three middling [cycles of] afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm in dependence upon having familiarized with grossness/peacefulness by way of<sup>a</sup> thorough isolation.

*Etymology:* By reason of there being enhancement in body and mind

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<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 4.4, reading *rab dben gyis* instead of *rab dben gyi*. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 170.4.1; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 546.6, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 802.2, agree with this text.

by way of a small [degree of] joy and bliss, included within the level of the first concentration, which are produced from isolation when one is released from the three middling [cycles of] afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm through [having familiarized with grossness/peacefulness by way of thorough isolation], it [is called the mental contemplation of joy-withdrawal].

**The mental contemplation of analysis.** When one has abandoned most of the afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm, one generates an awareness thinking, “I have abandoned them entirely.” At that point, in order to investigate whether or not one has entirely abandoned the afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm, one takes to mind a sign of something attractive included within the level of the Desire Realm and, when one sees that desire is generated for that [object], meditates again on grossness/peacefulness in order to abandon the remaining objects of abandonment. [This] is [the mental contemplation of analysis].

*Etymology:* [By reason of] one’s investigating whether or not one has abandoned the afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm, it [is called the mental contemplation of analysis]. [5]

**The mental contemplation of final training.** The mental contemplation which is the state that acts as an antidote abandoning the three small Desire Realm [objects] to be abandoned by meditation, in dependence upon one’s having become well acquainted with such grossness/peacefulness by way of the mental contemplation of analysis, is [the mental contemplation of final training].

*Etymology:* By reason of being the last mental contemplation in which there are three antidotes that abandon afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm, it [is called the mental contemplation of final training].

**The mental contemplation that is the fruit of final training.** By reason of being the mental contemplation that experiences a path of meditation that is released from the small of the small [cycles of] afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm by way of the mental contemplation of final training, it is [called] the mental contemplation that is the fruit of final training.

[3.] Opinions on where the ninth path [of release] is included

*Question:* Is the ninth path of release, which is released from the ninth

[cycle of ] afflictive emotions pertaining to the lower level, generated as an entity of an actual absorption or a preparation?

*Answer:* In the system of Asaṅga's *Summary of Manifest Knowledge* the ninth path of release, which is released from the ninth [cycle] of afflictive emotions pertaining to the lower level, is necessarily generated as the entity of an actual absorption of the upper level.

In the system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*, there are cases of generating the path of release that is released from the ninth [cycle of ] afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm and the ninth paths of release that are released from the ninth [cycles of ] afflictive emotions pertaining to the First, Second, and Third Concentrations as entities of either an actual absorption or a preparation. From the Fourth Concentration through the Peak of Cyclic Existence, the ninth paths of release that are released from the ninth [cycles of ] afflictive-emotions-to-be-abandoned-by-meditation of their own lower level are necessarily generated as the entities of actual absorptions of [their respective upper levels].

The *Treasury* also gives a reason for asserting such—[namely,] that in general the feeling of the preparations is necessarily equanimity. The feelings of the actual absorptions of the two—the first and second concentrations—have mental bliss (*yid bde*) and the feeling of the actual absorption of the third concentration has the feeling of mental bliss (*tshor ba sems bde*), and therefore, because there are faculties of feeling of dissimilar type, it is difficult to shift faculties [of feeling from equanimity to bliss]; therefore, [6] such [namely, that in the system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*, the ninth paths of release that are released from afflictive emotions pertaining to the Desire Realm and to the First, Second, and Third Concentrations may be generated as entities of either an actual absorption or a preparation] is presented.

Since the feeling of the actual absorptions of the fourth concentration and above is necessarily equanimity, therefore, because the faculties of feeling do not differ in type, it is easy to shift faculties; therefore, such [namely that in the system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*, from the Fourth Concentration through the Peak of Cyclic Existence, the ninth paths of release are necessarily generated as actual absorptions] is presented. Accordingly, [in both systems] the nine uninterrupted paths that abandon the nine [cycles of ] afflictive-emotions-to-be-abandoned-by-meditation of the lower level and the first eight paths of release of those [uninterrupted paths] are necessarily preparations.

*[B.] INDICATION THAT [THE MEANS OF ATTAINING] THE REMAINING [CONCENTRATIONS AND FORMLESS ABSORPTIONS] ARE SIMILAR TO THAT*

According to the explanation for the preparations for the first concentration, so, similarly, is it also for the preparations ranging from [those for] the second concentration to [those for] the peak of cyclic existence.

**The features of dissimilarity.** If [someone having] a Desire Realm basis cultivates the eight [sets of] preparations, there is cultivation with respect to the first mental contemplation [that is, the mental contemplation of individual knowledge of the character] as a mixture of hearing and thinking, but if it is cultivated [by someone having] a Form Realm basis, there are no states arisen from thinking. [If it is cultivated by someone having] a Formless Realm basis, there are also no states arisen from hearing, and it is attained by birth.

The mental contemplations of joy-withdrawal of the first two concentrations have the feelings of joy and bliss, but the mental contemplation of joy-withdrawal of the third concentration has the feeling of bliss, and the mental contemplations of joy-withdrawal of the fourth concentration and [the absorptions] above it are explained as merely seeing abandonment of the objects of abandonment as a good quality, for there are no feelings of joy and bliss included in their levels; and the first mental contemplation that is a preparation for any [of the eight] should be known as included within the lower level.

With respect to the way the preparations having the aspects of grossness/peacefulness abandon the afflictive emotions of the lower level, the Vaibhāṣhika system [asserts] that the preparations must simultaneously abandon the two, the lower level's objects of abandonment to be abandoned by seeing and by meditation, and the Sautrāntika system asserts that they abandon only the lower level's objects of abandonment to be abandoned by meditation. Also, the preparations need not entirely abandon even the lower level's coarse objects of abandonment to be abandoned by meditation; it is like the afflicted intellect of a common being having a Desire Realm basis who attains an actual absorption of the first concentration. Through this, one should also know the remaining levels. [7]

From among the eight [sets of] preparations, the preparations for the first concentration have two [types]—pure and uncontaminated; some assert them as having three [types—the three being pure, uncontaminated,] and having relishing [that is, afflicted]. The five remaining

preparations [that is, the seven preparations excluding the mental contemplations of a beginner and of analysis] of the second concentration and above must be pure.

## II. THE ENTITIES THAT ARE ATTAINED<sup>a</sup>

[This section has four topics:]

[A.] Afflicted [absorptions]

[B.] Pure actual [absorptions]

[C. Uncontaminated absorptions]<sup>b</sup>

[D.] Analysis of the presentation of those [absorptions]

### [A. AFFLICTED ABSORPTIONS]

This section has three topics:

[1.] What bases are afflicted

[2.] By what phenomena they are made afflicted

[3.] How they are made afflicted

#### [1.] What bases are afflicted

There are eight bases that are afflicted: the four pure actual absorptions of the four concentrations and the four pure actual absorptions of the four formless absorptions. Uncontaminated [absorptions] are not bases that are afflicted because they are not capable of being made afflicted.

#### [2.] By what phenomena they are made afflicted

There are four phenomena by which [the pure actual absorptions of the four concentrations and the four formless absorptions] are made

<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 7.2, reading *gang thob par bya ba'i ngo bo la* instead of *gang gis*..Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 171.1.7; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 550.3, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 805.2, agree with this text. (This head corresponds to 2.1, which was emended to *gang thob pa'i ngo bo* instead of *gang gis thob pa'i ngo bo*; see page 329, note b.)

<sup>b</sup> Adding *snyoms 'jug zag med* from 9.4, which has *snyoms 'jug zag med gang zhe na* without a topic head. The question looks like part of the preceding topic, but that is impossible, since pure and uncontaminated absorptions are mutually exclusive. Moreover, the outline for the next topic is given at 9.6 under the heading, "With respect to the fourth" (*bzhi pa la*). All four texts agree at this point in listing the topics as three rather than four and in omitting the third topic, uncontaminated absorptions.

afflicted: attachment to an upper realm, pride, doubt, and [bad] view. Anger is not a phenomenon by which they are made afflicted because someone having a basis of an upper realm does not have anger.

*Question:* If ignorance is a phenomenon by which [the pure actual absorptions of the four concentrations and the four formless absorptions] are made thoroughly afflicted, in what way does [ignorance] make them afflicted?

*[Answer:]* The faculty of ignorance makes [absorptions] have the affliction of doubt. Hence, there is also an explanation that the two, doubt and ignorance, operate together.

### [3.] How they are made afflicted

**How they are made afflicted by desire.** When set in equipoise in any of the eight pure actual absorptions of the four concentrations and [four] formless absorptions, one generates attachment toward the object of observation in those absorptions. When the continuum of the absorption has come into similar association with attachment, [the absorption] is made afflicted by attachment, which has become dominant.

**How they are made [afflicted] by pride.** [8] When set in equipoise in any of those eight [pure actual absorptions of the four concentrations and four formless absorptions], one generates a mind having the aspect of being puffed up [with the thought, “Only] I have attained such an absorption; it has not been [attained] by anyone else.” When the continuum of those absorptions has come into similar association with pride, [the absorption] is made afflicted by pride.

**How they are made [afflicted] by doubt.** When set in equipoise in any of those eight [pure actual absorptions of the four concentrations and four formless absorptions], by the force of obscuration concerning what is and is not a path, one generates doubt wondering whether these [absorptions] are paths of liberation or not. When the continuum of those absorptions has come into similar association with doubt, [the absorption] is made afflicted by doubt.

**How they are made [afflicted] by [bad] view.** While<sup>a</sup> possessing in one’s continuum the first three [bad] views, one attains in one’s continuum

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<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 8.3, reading *ngang nas* instead of *dang nas*, following Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 806.4. P6148, vol. 154, 171.3.2, and Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 551.6 agree with this text.

any of the eight—the pure actual absorptions of the four concentrations and the four formless absorptions.<sup>a</sup> When set in that equipoise, one generates the view which is the conception [of a bad view] as supreme, which observes the first three [bad] views thinking, “The attainment of such an absorption is by the force of those supreme views.”<sup>b</sup> When the continuum of those absorptions has come into similar association with [bad] view, [the absorption] is made afflicted by [bad] view.

The two, the western Vaibhāṣhikas and Asaṅga's *Summary of Manifest Knowledge*, agree in considering the afflicted absorptions to be fourfold in terms of predominant attachment, and so forth. The Kashmīri Vaibhāṣhikas assert [afflicted absorptions] only in terms of predominant attachment.

### [B. PURE ACTUAL ABSORPTIONS]

*Question:* What are the pure actual absorptions?

*Answer:* They are said to be cases of actual absorptions of the concentrations<sup>c</sup> and formless absorptions serving as factors of mundane virtue.

**The reason they are said to be pure.** Because of the mental factor of non-attachment—that is, similar association with the virtuous root that reverses [attachment]—or [because of] reversing attachment—that is, separating from the manifest entanglements of one's own level—they are called pure or thoroughly purified.

**[Divisions.]** When [pure actual absorptions] are divided, there are pure [actual absorptions] concordant with degeneration, concordant with abiding, [9] concordant with enhancement, and concordant with definite differentiation. The seven actual absorptions except for the actual absorption of the peak of cyclic existence have all four of these, but the actual absorption of the peak of cyclic existence has three, excluding that concordant with enhancement.

<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 8.3, reading *gzugs med* instead of *gzugs me*. P6148, vol. 154, 171.3.2; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 551.6, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 806.4, have the correct reading.

<sup>b</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 8.4 (also P6148, vol. 154, 171.3.3; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 552.1, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 806.4), omitting punctuation after *lta ba mchog tu gyur pa*.

<sup>c</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 8.6, reading *bsam gtan dang* instead of *bsam gtan dang po*. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 171.3.5; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 552.3, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 806.6, agree with this text.

## What are the four?

**A pure actual absorption concordant with degeneration** is a pure actual absorption concordant with the generation of an affliction immediately after itself.

The second, [**a pure actual absorption concordant with abiding**, is a pure actual absorption] concordant with the generation of a pure [actual absorption] of its own level without generation of an afflicted absorption immediately after itself.

The third, [**a pure actual absorption concordant with enhancement**, is a pure actual absorption] concordant with the generation of a pure [actual absorption] of a higher level without generation of [a pure actual absorption of its own level] immediately after itself.

The fourth, [**a pure actual absorption concordant with definite differentiation**, is a pure actual absorption] concordant with the generation of an uncontaminated absorption without generation of [a pure actual absorption of a higher level] immediately after itself.

### [C. UNCONTAMINATED MEDITATIVE ABSORPTIONS]

*Question:* What are uncontaminated meditative absorptions?

*Answer:* Meditative absorptions of the concentrations and formless absorptions that are generated as the entity of a supramundane path are called [uncontaminated absorptions]. Moreover, there are uncontaminated paths that are generated as entities of the six levels of concentration and the first three formless absorptions, but there is no uncontaminated path which is generated as an entity of the peak of cyclic existence or of the Desire Realm because the peak of cyclic existence [has] a very unclear movement of discrimination and because a Desire Realm [mind] is an entity of distraction.

### [D.] ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENTATION OF THOSE ABSORPTIONS

[This section has three topics,] the explanations of:

- [1.] The branches of the concentrations
- [2.] The objects of observation and subjective aspects of the formless absorptions
- [3.] The effects of having cultivated those

## The branches of the concentrations

[This section] has three [topics]:

- [a.] The differences between what substantially exists and what imputedly exists<sup>a</sup>
- [b.] Identification of the individual branches
- [c.] The reason for the definiteness of the number

*[The differences between what substantially exists and what imputedly exists]*

When these are divided in terms of name, there are eighteen; these refer to the five branches each in the first and third concentrations and the four branches each in the second and fourth.

*Question:* What are these? [10]

*Answer:* The branches of the first concentration [are] the five: the two, investigation and analysis; the two, joy and bliss, and meditative stabilization. The branches of the second concentration are the four: internal clarity,<sup>b</sup> joy and bliss, and meditative stabilization. The branches of the third concentration are the five<sup>c</sup> mindfulness, introspection, the compositional factor of equanimity, the feeling of bliss, and meditative stabilization. The branches of the fourth concentration are the four: completely pure mindfulness, completely pure equanimity, neutral feeling, and meditative stabilization.

**[The system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*.]** When these branches are condensed into substantial entities, according to the system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*, they are included in eleven substantial entities: the two, investigation and

<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 9.6, reading *btags* instead of *rtags*. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. *rdzas btags* is an abbreviation of *rdzas yod dang btags yod kyi*. P6148, vol. 154, 171.4.6, reads *brtags*. Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 553.5, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 808.1, agree with this text.

<sup>b</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 10.1 (P6148, vol. 154, 171.4.8; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 554.1, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 808.3): *rab dang* is translated throughout as "internal clarity" in accordance with Tsong-kha-pa's own usage in his discussion of that branch at 12.3 (P6148, vol. 154, 172.2.3; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 556.6, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 810.6), where he has *nang rab dang*.

<sup>c</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 10.1, following Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 808.3, in reading *gsum pa'i yan lag lnga* instead of *gsum pa'i yan lag bzhi*. P6148, vol. 154, 171.4.8, and Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 554.1, agree with this text.

analysis; joy; very purified bliss; meditative stabilization; internal clarity; mindfulness; introspection; the compositional factor of equanimity; the feeling of mental bliss; the feeling of equanimity, making eleven.

**How they are included [in those substantial entities]:** The two joys of the first two concentrations are included in the substantial entity of joy; the two blisses of the first two concentrations are included in the substantial entity of the bliss of pliancy; meditative stabilization is included in the substantial entity of meditative stabilization; the mindfulness of the last two concentrations are included in the substantial entity of mindfulness; the two compositional factors of equanimity of the last two concentrations are included in the substantial entity of the compositional factor of equanimity.

**[The system of Asaṅga's *Summary of Manifest Knowledge*.]** According to the system of Asaṅga's *Summary of Manifest Knowledge*, they are asserted as nine substantial entities. They are included in the nine: the two, investigation and analysis; the feeling of mental bliss (*tshor ba yid bde*); meditative stabilization; the compositional factor of equanimity; mindfulness; introspection; the feeling of mental bliss (*tshor ba sems bde*), and the feeling of equanimity.

**How they are included in those [substantial entities].** The joy and bliss of the first two concentrations are included in the substantial entity of the feeling of mental bliss (*tshor ba yid bde*); meditative stabilization, mindfulness, and the compositional factor of equanimity are [treated] similar[ly to the treatment in Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge*]; since internal clarity includes the three—mindfulness, introspection and equanimity—it has no separate substantial entity.

## *The four identifications of the individual branches*

### THE BRANCHES OF THE FIRST CONCENTRATION

**[Investigation and analysis.]** Investigation is imputed to either intention or wisdom that is internal expression which thoroughly examines the mere entity of the meaning. Analysis is imputed to the factor of either intention<sup>a</sup> or wisdom that is internal expression which analyzes in detail the reason for [the meaning]. The Sautrāntikas and above assert that these two arise alternately but do not arise simultaneously. The Vaibhāṣhika system asserts the two, investigation and analysis, as substantially existent minds having the aspects [respectively] of

<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 11.1, reading *sems pa* instead of *sems dpa'*. P6148, vol. 154, 172.1.1; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 555.3, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 809.4 agree with this text.

coarseness and fineness, and they assert that those two, on the occasion of a mere actual absorption of the first concentration, arise simultaneously and do not arise in stages.

**[Joy and bliss.]** With respect to bliss, the system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* asserts that, since it is the bliss that is the mental factor of pliancy, it is not a feeling, but that joy is the feeling of mental bliss (*tshor ba yid bde*). According to the system of Asaṅga's *Summary of Manifest Knowledge*, the single mental factor that is generated in the sphere of one main mental consciousness and experiences refreshment [is posited as] bliss from the point of view of its helping the body—that is, the sense powers together with their bases—[and it is posited as] joy from the point of view of its refreshing mental bliss (*yid bde*), together with its sphere. It is posited as those two from the point of view of [its having] different functions, but they do not have different substantial entities; this is explained in [Yashomitra's] *Commentary on (Asaṅga's) "Summary of Manifest Knowledge."*

**[Meditative stabilization.]** Meditative stabilization is the mental factor of one-pointedness that causes the mind and mental factors that are in similar association with it to be collected on one object of observation.

When treated in this way, the three—the two, investigation and analysis, and meditative stabilization—of the system of Asaṅga's *Summary of Manifest Knowledge* are included in the aggregate of compositional factors, and the two—joy and bliss—are included in the aggregate of feeling. [The four]—the two, investigation and analysis, bliss, and meditative stabilization—of the system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* are included in the aggregate of compositional factors, and joy is included in the aggregate of feeling.

**[The special actual absorption of the first concentration.]**

*Question:* What is this which is called a special actual absorption of the first concentration?

*Answer:* With reference to an absorption of the first concentration, [12] it is called a special actual absorption of the first concentration with respect to a mere separation from attachment to investigation, and since, moreover, from among the five branches of the first concentration, investigation is the coarsest, separation from attachment to investigation occurs without separation from attachment to the other branches. Therefore, with respect to the first [concentration], a special actual absorption of the first concentration is posited, but since, with respect to the branches of the remaining concentrations, there is no

such feature [of one branch being coarser than the others], a special actual absorption is not posited.

#### THE ACTUAL ABSORPTION<sup>a</sup> OF THE SECOND CONCENTRATION

**Internal clarity.** It is explained in Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* that [internal clarity] is the faith of conviction in having definitely emerged from the first concentration of the system of Vasubandhu's *Treasury*. [Internal clarity] is explained in Asaṅga's *Compendium of Ascertainments* as the three—mindfulness, introspection, and the compositional factor of equanimity—that are included within the level of the second concentration.<sup>b</sup> The meaning of internal clarity is that it has thoroughly pacified the distraction of the investigation and analysis of the first concentration,<sup>c</sup> which disturbed one's continuum.

[**The remaining branches.** The explanation of] the three—the two, **joy** and **bliss**, and **meditative stabilization**—is like the explanation of the branches of the first concentration in the individual systems of Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* and Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers*.

#### THE BRANCHES OF THE THIRD CONCENTRATION

From among the five [branches], **mindfulness** is the mental factor, included within the level of the third concentration, which holds on without forgetfulness to the object of observation that is the preceptual instruction of the third concentration; **introspection** is the mental factor, included within the level of the third concentration, which inspects for laxity and excitement; the **compositional factor of equanimity** is the mental factor, included within the level of the third concentration, which is without the inequality of the faults of laxity and excitement; the **feeling of bliss** is a mental factor—[namely,] the experience of refreshment—generated as a concomitant of a single main mental

<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 12.2-3, following Guru Deva's reading, *gnyis pa'i dngos gzhi la*, instead of *gnyis pa'i gzhi la* ("the bases [that is, branches] of the second [concentration]") here and at P6148, vol. 154, 172.2.3 and Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 556.6. *dngos* is written below the line. Whatever the reading, the heading is an example of the notetaker's faulty parallelism, since the corresponding headings for the other three concentrations are in terms of the branches of those concentrations, not in terms of the actual absorption.

<sup>b</sup> Asaṅga, *Compendium of Ascertainments*, P5539, vol. 111, 14.2.1.

<sup>c</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, following Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 811.1, and P6148, vol. 154, 172.2.5, in reading *bsam gtan dang po* instead of *bsam gtan po*. Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 557.1, agrees with this text.

consciousness; **meditative stabilization** is as [explained] above.

*Question:* What is the difference between the joy of the first two concentrations and the bliss of the third? [13]

*Answer:* Although they are similar in being mental factors generated as concomitants of a single main mental consciousness that experiences refreshment,<sup>a</sup> [this experience] is called joy at the time of pacification of the faults of very great fluctuation with respect to the object [and is called] bliss at the time of the third concentration, which pacifies that [joy], but it is not called joy.

The Vaibhāṣhikas assert that the mental factor of bliss of the first two concentrations is the bliss of pliancy.

The Sautrāntikas ask: While there is<sup>b</sup> a pliancy more marvelous than [that of] the first two concentrations in the third and fourth, why have you not also mentioned the bliss of pliancy [as a branch of the third and fourth concentrations—this being absurd]? Having refuted [the position that the bliss of the first two concentrations is the bliss of pliancy, the Sautrāntikas] assert their own system's bliss of the first [two] concentrations as being the mental factor generated as a concomitant of a single main physical consciousness that experiences refreshment—[that is to say, a bliss concomitant with] a sense consciousness.

#### THE BRANCHES OF THE FOURTH CONCENTRATION

From among the four [branches], **completely pure mindfulness** is the mental factor, released from the eight faults of concentration, which holds on without forgetfulness to the object of observation that is the preceptual instruction of the fourth concentration; the **completely pure compositional factor of equanimity** is the mental factor, released from the eight faults of concentration, which is without the inequality of the faults of laxity and excitement; **neutral feeling** is a mental factor generated as a concomitant of a single main mental consciousness, is a feeling of neither refreshment nor anguish, and is a release from the eight faults of concentration which is an experience of neutral

<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 13.1, following Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 811.5 in reading *sim* instead of *sims*. Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 557.5 agrees with this text. P6148, vol. 154, 172.3.2, reads *sem*.

<sup>b</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 13.2, following P6148, vol. 154, 172.3.4; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 558.1, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 812.1, in reading *yod bzhin du* instead of *yad bzhin du*.

[feeling]; **meditative stabilization** is as [explained] above.

*Question:* Why is introspection mentioned as a branch of the third concentration [but] not mentioned as [a branch of] the fourth concentration?

*Answer:* Since, in the fourth concentration, one is released from the eight faults of concentration, there is no need to inspect for laxity and excitement; therefore, [introspection] is not posited as a branch.

**The eight faults of concentration** are the two, investigation and analysis; the two, joy and bliss; the two, suffering and mental discomfort; and the two, exhalation and inhalation, [making] eight. Moreover, with respect to the explanation of investigation, analysis, joy, and bliss as faults of concentration, they are faults in terms of levels other [than their own], [14] but they are not faults relative to their own level.

### *The reason for the definiteness of the number*

*Question:* What is the reason for the branches of the four concentrations being definite as fives and fours?<sup>a</sup>

*Answer:* The branches of the actual [meditative absorptions] of the concentrations are not definite as these [that is, limited to these] because there are many [branches of] actual meditative absorptions of concentrations which are not any of these branches.

*Question:* In terms of what meaning are the branches posited as fives and fours?

*Answer:* In terms of including the main [branches].

*Question:* In terms of what are the main [branches] included?

*Answer:* The main are included in terms of antidotal, benefit, and basis branches.

**[The first concentration.]** The two, the investigation and analysis of the first concentration, are the antidotal branches because they bring about separation from attachment to the afflictions of the lower level.

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<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 14.1, reading *lnga dang bzhir*, as in 14.2, instead of *bzhi dang lngar*. The latter is inaccurate, since the first and third concentrations each have five branches and the second and fourth each have four, and is another example of the notetaker's faulty parallelism. P6148, vol. 154, 172.4.2; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 559.1, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 812.6, agree with this text.

Moreover, the way in which the two, investigation and analysis, act as antidotes is in consideration of their being continuations of the investigation and analysis of the preparations; however, the investigation and analysis of the actual absorption merely act to increase<sup>a</sup> the distance from the lower level but are not actual antidotes that abandon [the afflictions of the lower level]. The two, joy and bliss, are the benefit branches because they are generated from having abandoned the afflictions of the lower level. Meditative stabilization is the basis branch because the antidotal branches—investigation and analysis—and the benefit branches—joy and bliss—are generated in dependence upon it.

**[The second concentration.]** The internal clarity of the second concentration is the antidotal branch because it abandons the investigation and analysis of the first. The way it serves [as this] is similar to that explained above [with regard to the antidotal branches of the first concentration]. The way in which joy and bliss serve as the benefit branches is also similar to [that explained] earlier. Meditative stabilization is also similar to [that explained] earlier.

**[The third concentration.]** The three—the mindfulness, introspection, and the compositional factor of equanimity of the third concentration—are the antidotal branches [because] they abandon the joy of the second concentration. The other [branches] are similar to [those explained] earlier.

**[The fourth concentration.]** The completely pure mindfulness and the completely pure compositional factor of equanimity of the fourth concentration [15] are the antidotal branches, since they abandon the bliss of the third. The feeling of equanimity is the benefit branch. Meditative stabilization is the basis branch.

*Question:* What are the differences among the concentrations in terms of their branches?

*[Answer:]* With respect to the branches of the first two concentrations, there is a difference with respect to the completion or non-completion of meditative stabilization. With respect to the branches of the last two concentrations, there is a difference with respect to the completion or non-completion of help.

*Question:* What is the reason for positing four concentrations?

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<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 14.4, reading *sring* instead of *srid*. P6148, vol. 154, 172.4.6, reads *srid*. Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 559.5, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 813.3, also appear to have *srid* but are not clear.

[Answer:] Four are posited in terms of definite emergence from faculties of feeling: It is explained in Asaṅga's *Compendium of Ascertainments* that the first is posited in terms of definite emergence from the faculty of the feeling of mental discomfort (*tshor ba yid mi bde'i dbang po*); the second is posited in terms of definite emergence from the faculty of the feeling of suffering (*tshor ba sdug bsngal gyi dbang po*); the third is posited in terms of definite emergence from the faculty of the feeling of mental bliss (*tshor ba yid bde'i dbang po*); the fourth is posited in terms of definite emergence from the faculty of the feeling of bliss (*tshor ba bde ba'i dbang po*).<sup>a</sup>

Having treated them that way, the same work calls the joy and bliss of the first concentration the joy and bliss generated from isolation; it calls the joy and bliss of the second concentration the joy and bliss generated from meditative stabilization; and it calls the bliss of the third concentration the bliss that is without joy. Accordingly, the second concentration is posited by way of discarding the investigation and analysis of the first concentration; the third concentration is posited by way of discarding the joy of the second; and the fourth is posited by way of discarding the bliss of the third. Therefore, the concentrations are explained as passing beyond the lower level by way of their branches.<sup>b</sup>

## Analysis of the objects of observation and subjective aspects of the formless absorptions

[**Limitless space.**] From among the four [limitless space, limitless consciousness, nothingness, and the peak of cyclic existence], the object of observation and subjective aspect of limitless space [are as follows]: A person who has attained the fourth concentration, [16] having seen the fourth concentration as gross, [thinks] for the sake of overcoming it, "The fourth concentration is gross, and limitless space is peaceful, and these are just space." The discrimination of form, which is such appearances as blue and yellow; the discrimination of obstructiveness, which is such appearances as buildings and walls; and the discrimination of various appearances such as groves and rivers vanish in dependence upon one's having become well acquainted for a long time with grossness and peacefulness. When one enters an absorption observing the

<sup>a</sup> Asaṅga, *Compendium of Ascertainments*, P5539, vol. 111, 14.1.1–7 (paraphrase).

<sup>b</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 15.7, reading *yan lag gi* instead of *yan lag ga*. P6148, vol. 154, 173.1.2; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 561.3, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 814.6, have the correct reading.

coarse aggregates that are the basis<sup>a</sup> of the name and just space, that is the absorption that is the sphere of limitless space.

**[Limitless consciousness.]** The object of observation and subjective aspect of the sphere of limitless consciousness<sup>b</sup> [is as follows]: A person who has attained an absorption of the sphere of limitless space, having seen the discrimination of the sphere of limitless space as gross, [thinks] for the sake of overcoming it, “Gross,” with respect to limitless space and, “Peaceful” with respect to the sphere of limitless consciousness. In dependence upon having become well acquainted for a long time with grossness and peacefulness, one overcomes the discrimination of limitless space; the discrimination that observes the aggregates of one’s own level that are the basis<sup>c</sup> of the name, [thinking,] “Consciousness is limitless,” is the absorption of the sphere of limitless consciousness.

**[Nothingness.]** The object of observation and subjective aspect of the sphere of nothingness [is as follows]: A person who has attained an absorption of the sphere of limitless consciousness [having seen the discrimination of the sphere of limitless consciousness as gross, for the sake of overcoming it [thinks], “Gross,” with respect to the sphere of limitless consciousness and, “Peaceful,” with respect to the sphere of nothingness. In dependence upon having become well acquainted for a long time with grossness and peacefulness, one overcomes the discrimination of limitless consciousness. [Thinking,] “There is not even any object of observation that has form or is formless,” one enters an absorption observing the coarse aggregates that are the basis<sup>d</sup> of the name; [17] that is the absorption of the sphere of nothingness.

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<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 16.2, reading *ming gzhi'i phung po* instead of *ming bzhi'i phung po*. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 173.1.5; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 561.6, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 815.3, agree with this text. However, in “name and form,” the fourth of the twelve links of dependent-arising, the four mental aggregates are the basis of the name.

<sup>b</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 16.3, reading *rnam shes mtha' yas skye mched kyi dmigs rnam* instead of *nam mkha' mtha' yas skye mched kyi dmigs rnam*. P6148, vol. 154, 173.1.6; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 561.6, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 815.3, agree with this text.

<sup>c</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 16.5, reading *ming gzhi'i phung po* instead of *ming bzhi'i phung po*. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 173.1.8; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 562.3, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 815.5, agree with this text.

<sup>d</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 16.7, reading *ming gzhi'i phung po* instead of *ming bzhi'i phung po*. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 173.2.3; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 562.5, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 816.1-2, agree with this text.

**[The peak of cyclic existence.]** The object of observation and subjective aspect of the sphere of no discrimination and no non-discrimination [is as follows]: A person who has attained an absorption of the sphere of nothingness, having seen the discrimination of the sphere of nothingness as gross, [thinks] for the sake of overcoming it, “The utter non-existence of discrimination is thorough obscuration. Coarse discrimination is an ache that is an effect of illness. That state in which coarse discrimination does not exist and subtle [discrimination] is not non-existent is peaceful; it is auspicious; it is definite emergence.” In dependence upon having become well acquainted for a long time with grossness and peacefulness, [thinking,] “Coarse discrimination does not exist and subtle [discrimination] is not non-existent,” one enters an absorption observing the coarse aggregates of one’s own level that are the basis<sup>a</sup> of the name; that is the absorption of [the sphere of] no discrimination and no non-discrimination.

Accordingly, the sphere of limitless consciousness is posited by way of discarding the sphere of limitless space; the sphere of nothingness [is posited] in dependence upon discarding [limitless consciousness, and] the sphere of without discrimination and without non-discrimination [is posited] in dependence upon discarding [nothingness]. Therefore, the formless absorptions are said to pass beyond the lower level by way of the object of observation.

## Explanation of the effects of having cultivated those [absorptions]

These [effects] are the birth concentrations and the birth formless absorptions. By having cultivated the three [types]—small, middling, and great—with respect to each of the absorptions of the concentrations, one achieves the three [types of] birth in each of the Four Concentrations. Moreover, since most of the factors of the mundane beings of the Concentrations, which are attained through birth there, are fruitional effects of the concentrations that are [actual] absorptions, and the mundane environments of [the Concentrations] are owned effects of [the concentrations that are actual absorptions, these fruitional and owned effects] are birth concentrations. Similarly, with respect to the absorptions of the formless absorptions, by having cultivated the three

<sup>a</sup> Tsong-kha-pa, *Notes*, 17.3, reading *ming gzhi'i phung po* instead of *ming bzhi'i phung po*. Jeffrey Hopkins' emendation. P6148, vol. 154, 173.2.7; Ngawang Gelek Demo, vol. 27, 563.3, and Guru Deva, vol. *tsha*, 816.5, agree with this text.

[types]—small, middling, and great, [18] one achieves the birth of a being of the Formless Absorptions. Since most of the factors attained from birth by sentient beings who are born in [the Formless Absorptions] are fruitional effects of the absorptions of the formless absorptions, [these fruitional effects] are birth formless absorptions.

Concerning the meaning of small, middling, and great: If one has neither intense nor continual application, that is the small [type]; if one has either [intense or continual application, but not both, that is] the middling [type]; if one has both, [that is] the great [type].

### [III.] THE ATTAINERS—THE PERSONS WHO ARE THE BASIS

Except for the sphere of nothingness, the other seven [absorptions are attained by] someone having the basis of either their own level or the level below them, but the sphere of nothingness [is attained by] those having the basis of the three—its own level, the level below it, and the level above it.

### [IV.] EXPLANATION OF THE SIGNS OF ATTAINMENT

It is explained in Asaṅga's *Grounds of Hearers* that signs arise—namely, that the sign of the attainment of the absorptions of the concentrations is, for instance, the appearance that one's body is sinking and that the sign of the attainment of the absorptions of the formless absorptions is, for instance, the appearance that one's body is flying in space.

[This was] put together by the glorious Lo-sang-drak-pa [that is, Tsongkha-pa]. Best of fortune!