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# **The Path from Metaphor to Narrative: Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*<sup>1</sup>**

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## 0. INTRODUCTION

We are attempting here to establish three interrelated theses: The first is that “path” functions as an organizing structure for Buddhist thought in general. The second is that the path both unifies Buddhist thought and distinguishes it from other religious systems. The third is that narrative structures, such as the path, condition experience in the senses of providing structure, organization, and meaning.

## I. FROM METAPHOR TO NARRATIVE

### *Path as Metaphor*

The image of “path” and its related image of “journey” have served as powerful literary metaphors in several different cultures.<sup>2</sup> George Lakoff has argued extensively that metaphors are formative for human thought and that some metaphors are foundational—they are at the basis of many other metaphoric constructions. The path is one of those foundational metaphors that structure thought about many areas of human endeavor.<sup>3</sup> It is directly related to the metaphor “life is a journey,” found for example at the opening of Dante’s *Inferno*, where the protagonist describes the not uncommon feeling that life is not unfolding as one had expected—“In the middle of life’s journey, I found myself in a dark wood. . . .”<sup>4</sup> The idea that there is a proper path that one should follow is found in the images of the Tao, and the Ten Oxherding Pictures, as well as Shandao’s “white path,” familiar to those who study the Pure Land tradition. In other words, although the term “path literature” has been used in a narrow sense that corresponds to the Tibetan bibliographic categories of *lam rim* and *bstan rim*,<sup>5</sup> it can be used with a

broad, inclusive meaning, one that allows us to look for the similarities among a wider range of Buddhist texts.<sup>6</sup>

The path has provided not just a useful literary metaphor for Buddhism generally, but also structures the expression of Buddhist teachings in a variety of ways. Buswell and Gimello contend, for example, that path, *mārga*, “is a theme central to the whole of Buddhism.”<sup>7</sup> Fundamental to these discourses is the extension of the metaphor of path into the threefold system of ground, path, and goal.<sup>8</sup> This threefold structure is used to formulate the human condition as given—ground, an ideal form toward which human life can be oriented—goal, and the way by which one can move from the former to the latter—path. Yael Bentor has summarized how Lce-sgom-pa (ca. 1140 or 1150 to 1220 CE<sup>9</sup>) explains the transformative function of initiation using the same metaphoric structure. In her summary, she describes the effects of initiation

in terms of the disciples’ basis, path, and fruit. The basis is the disciples’ body, speech, and mind. In terms of the path, the four initiations endow disciples with the ability to engage in the four practices on the path to enlightenment. . . . The fruit of these practices is an awakened or enlightened being, a buddha endowed with the four bodies.<sup>10</sup>

### *Path as Narrative*

What I am suggesting here is that the path has been employed in Buddhist literature not simply as a familiar literary trope. Instead we find that the path provides a narrative structure, in the sense that it is not only found as a topic in much Buddhist literature, but also gives structure for Buddhist thought. In this latter function it is narrative in the sense of organizing events into a meaningful order, an order that is not just orderly in one way or another, but a progressive sequence in which there is a causal relation implicated. “Starting here, you do this, and it gets you to there.”

#### *A Narrative in What Sense?*

narrative ≠ fiction

Narrative has been variously defined by different authors, but here I would like to note first that narrative should not be taken to mean fiction. Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg divide narrative into empirical and fictional, and the empirical again into historical and mimetic. In the historical they include such works as Herodotus and Thucydides, who themselves “carefully distinguish their work from Homeric epic.”<sup>11</sup>

Thus, although many historians seem to be irritated with Hayden White's discussion of the role of narrative in historiography, White's analysis is quite congruent with a perspective on historiography that dates back to Herodotus and Thucydides. Indeed, some recent work on narrative argues that it is fundamental to human thought.<sup>12</sup>

#### narrative as an analytic concept

Although different analyses of narrative have highlighted different aspects, for our purposes here, I would like to focus on two: plot and authorial voice. This is in keeping with the minimal definition of narrative offered by Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, according to which there are two elements constitutive of narrative. "By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller."<sup>13</sup> "Narrative" as an analytic tool, rather than as a rubric for the categorization of works of literature, then would focus minimally on these two—the story and the story-teller.

#### *"the story": plot structure, or progressive sequence*

Narrative organizes events into meaningful, that is, causally linked, sequences. However, not only can narrative structure be used to report a causally linked sequence of events, as in historical writing or journalism, but it can also be used to describe a causally linked sequence of events, as in a novel, or to prescribe a causally linked sequence of events. It is this last, prescriptive function of narrative that interests me here. Before turning to the path, however, let us consider as a pleasantly mundane example, a recipe. Now, recipes are not usually categorized as narratives, but I think that it is instructive for our purposes to consider a recipe as a particularly highly formalized kind of narrative. Usually, a recipe will inform us first what the ingredients are, and then give directions that lead us through the steps needed to convert those ingredients into a dish of some kind.

This way of thinking is so basic to human cognition that it seems to me that the narrative structure itself implies causal connections between the events described. If in following a recipe one encounters an unfamiliar step ("refrigerate overnight," for example), one will tend to believe that this instruction is purposeful, that is, that the step is causally significant for attaining the intended goal. Thus, constructing a narrative in itself creates an understanding of the events as a causally linked sequence.

“the story-teller”: author’s voice<sup>14</sup>

One of the qualities of Gampopa’s text is that it is written in an informal and almost conversational style, despite which his own voice is not a strong presence. Gampopa does not express himself in the first person, and this would seem to be in keeping with an intention to present an authoritative summary of the stages of the path. In other words, he is not telling us “Gampopa’s version of the path,” but rather sharing his understanding of the path. Thus, the author’s voice in this case is not found in any particularly personal quality nor in the tone of the narrative, but rather in the conversational repetition of the presentation. Like a good public speaker he keeps his readers informed of where they are in the narrative sequence, but does so with the easy tone of intimacy, rather than a highly structured repetition of outline points. To take an example almost at random, at one point he says, “This ends my discussion of the formation of an enlightened attitude.”<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the most “first person expression” is to be found in the opening invocation, which reads:

I prostrate to the noble Manjushri in youthful form.  
 I pay homage to the Victorious Ones, their followers, the holy Dharma,  
 and to the lamas who are their foundation.  
 This noble teaching, which is like a wish-fulfilling jewel,  
 Will be written for the benefit of myself and others by depending on  
 the kindness of Mila and the Lord Atisha.<sup>16</sup>

The reference to Mañjuśrī places Gampopa’s work in the discourse of wisdom (*prajñā*), while the references to Milarepa and Atiṣa highlight his personal lineage.

*Structure of the Path*

We can note that the path is built up of a series of semiotic oppositions, ones that are similar to Saussure’s oppositions. Such oppositions are not static, but partially stable, and therefore partially unstable. It is this very instability, one stage opening onto another, that allows for constituting the path as dialectic and progressive, one that ends with the hypostatized absolute of awakening.<sup>17</sup>

ground

The term “ground” identifies the starting point of the path. In the case of the path to awakening this is a description of the basic human condition, that of being a common foolish person (*prthagjana*).

### path

While in one usage, the term “path” refers to the entire structure including ground and goal, in another it has a more limited referent—the route one follows upon leaving the ground until one reaches the goal. Fortunately, context should keep these two usages clear. The path is not simply a list of activities taken one after another, but rather is a description of an intentional set of behaviors. Because these have a purpose the activities constitute a progressive sequence that should lead one to the goal. To use the philosophic term, the path has a teleology.

### goal

Obvious to anyone familiar with Buddhist thought, the goal is identified in a variety of ways—release (nirvana) and awakening (*bodhi*) being perhaps the most familiar. One of the specialized areas of Buddhist thought involves attempting to describe what it means to be a buddha and what kinds of actions a buddha performs. An example of such a discussion is the distinction drawn between nirvana with remainder (*sopādhiśeṣanirvāṇa* or *kleśanirvāṇa*) and nirvana without remainder (*anupādhiśeṣanirvāṇa*). Similarly related to the topic of the goal are discussions regarding *tathāgatagarbha* and the relation between this concept and cessation of suffering or cessation of being.<sup>18</sup>

## II. GAMPOPA AND THE JEWEL ORNAMENT OF LIBERATION

### *Gampopa*

Gampopa (sGam po pa Bsod nams rin chen, 1079–1135) plays a key role in the establishment of the Kagyud (bKa’ brgyud) tradition. W. Blythe Miller describes the Kagyud prior to Gampopa as “initially fairly tolerant of individual expression and unconventional behavior [the result of] a number of factors including geographic isolation, close connections to siddha dōha literature, loose or even antagonistic ties with institutional norms, a soteriology of naturalness (*mahāmudrā*), and a mode of composition called *nmyam gur* (creative songs of experience).”<sup>19</sup> Gampopa trained under the famous Milarepa (Mi la ras pa), from whom he received training in the three of the traditions of practice formative for almost all later Tibetan Buddhism—those of Vajravārāhī, *mahāmudrā*, and the six yogas of Naropa. Vajravārāhī,<sup>20</sup> one of whose heads is in the form of a sow’s head, is a female tantric deity of wrathful appearance, the consort of Heruka, and is now popular throughout Tibetan Buddhist practice. The *mahāmudrā* system is said to descend

through the lineage of *mahāsiddhas* from Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, and Milarepa to Gampopa, and teaches a radical nonduality of ordinary and awakened mind.<sup>21</sup> The six yogas are a systematization of practices now used as part of the Kagyud three year retreat. The six are inner heat (*gtum mo*), illusory body (*sgyu lus*), dream yoga (*rmi lam*), clear light (*'od gsal*, cf. *prabhāsvara*), intermediate state (*bar do*), and transference (*'pho ba*). Gampopa “synthetically organized this lineage into something resembling a full-fledged religious tradition with a strong monastic bent.”<sup>22</sup>

### *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*

The *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* (*Thar pa rin po che'i rgyan*) is an early instance of path literature; it became a classic text in part because it was written in an accessible style, and because it is presented as a concise overview of the entirety of the Mahāyāna teachings. It is considered to be the union of early Kadampa (bKa' gdams), a monastic system rooted in the sutras, and *mahāmudrā*, which is considered a tantric teaching. According to Dan Martin, it was a disciple of Milarepa, Dwags-po Lharje (1079–1153), “who made the yogic contemplative teachings and practices of his predecessors enter the world of monastic discipline by ‘joining the two streams’ of Bka'-gdams-pa teachings from Atiśa with his spiritual inheritance from Mi-la-ras-pa.”<sup>23</sup> This union makes it controversial in that it presents a form of *mahāmudrā* that does not require tantric initiation first.<sup>24</sup>

The *Jewel Ornament* is organized into twenty-one chapters, which trace the path of practice from its foundations to its completion in the activities of full buddhahood (see Appendix). These chapters can be grouped in such a fashion as to reveal the underlying organization of the text in terms of ground (chaps. 1–3), path (chaps. 4–19), and goal (chaps. 20–21).

## III. FUNCTIONS OF PATH AS NARRATIVE

### *Scholastic Character of Path Literature*

One of the things that characterizes works such as Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament* is a scholastic dimension. That is, the work serves as a means of organizing a very large body of doctrine into a coherent form. In considering similar Pāli texts (*Netti* and *Peṭakopadesa*) George Bond has suggested that the gradual path serves a hermeneutic function as well.

By providing a comprehensive view, from the starting point of someone caught in the round of samsara up to and including the stage of a fully awakened buddha, the gradual path provides everyone—whether lay adherent or monastic or yogi—a location in an overall cosmology.<sup>25</sup>

### *Systematic*

Bond is working specifically within the description of Indian religious culture proposed by Louis de la Vallée Poussin. This understanding of Indian religious culture presents it as involving two forms—one in service of mundane goals sought by “men in the world” and the other in the service of supramundane goals sought by renunciates.<sup>26</sup> In Bond’s interpretation, the gradual path as a hermeneutic provides a means of unifying this dual framework of mundane and supramundane goals.<sup>27</sup> “The notion of the gradual path to *nibbāna* allowed [such texts] to subsume mundane goals under the supramundane goal and to explain how the truth of the *dhamma* relates to all people.”<sup>28</sup> Bond goes on to discuss how the image of the gradual path functions to unify otherwise diverse teachings. “By superimposing the pattern of the gradual path onto the *dhamma*, these . . . texts find the hierarchy of means and ends necessary to relate the *dhamma* to a variety of people and yet to maintain the belief in one ultimate goal and one ultimate meaning of the *dhamma*.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Synthetic*

In creating a smooth, comprehensive narrative, part of what a text such as the *Jewel Ornament* is doing is synthetic. That is, Gampopa is drawing together a large number of expositions from many different sources and forming them into a unified presentation. This synthesis gives the reader the impression that there is an overall unity in the understanding of the different aspects of the path. This harmonizing or levelling of differences appears to be a common rhetorical strategy that strengthens a particular viewpoint by presenting it as uncontested. Konchog gives a list of forty different primary sources that Gampopa cites in the course of the *Jewel Ornament*—that are available in English translation. Guenther lists about 125 Sanskrit and Pāli texts, as well as many more Tibetan texts cited in the work. Thus, in creating a single, unified presentation of the path, Gampopa both systematizes and synthesizes a wide variety of teachings as found in many sources.

### *Polemic Function*

Although a text such as Gampopa's gives the impression of a single unified understanding of the path, it is in fact one version of how the path can be conceptualized. Looking at the *Lamp of the Teaching* by Rog Bande Sherab (1166–1244), a similar text from the Nyingma tradition, we find a system of nine “vehicles” being presented. Like other instance of path literature, it lays out a hierarchical categorization of different teachings, in much the same way that the texts discussed by George Bond do, and as the Japanese founder of Shingon esoteric tradition, Kūkai, does in his work (see below). Although Rogban's might be considered a bibliographic work, the progressive levels of texts correspond to higher and higher teachings and attainments. By placing the Nyingma Great Perfection as the highest, we can read this as a polemic intent as well as a scholastic organizational one.

When making such a claim, however, we need not be too cynical about understanding the intent of such organizing systems. The cynical approach is to see the motivation as directed toward putting one's own teachings at the top, while a more charitable interpretation<sup>30</sup> is to consider that the author believed the hierarchy of the organization to actually represent the hierarchy of teachings, and that is why the author accepts those teachings. While the arrow of causation goes from sectarian commitment to hierarchical organization in the cynical interpretation, that is reversed to go from hierarchical organization to sectarian commitment in the more generous understanding.

### *Narrative as Creating Shared Imaginal Space*

Kai Mikkonen explicates the relation between narrative and travel, and doing so provides a metaphoric structure for considering issues of time and causality in narrative. “The different stages of travel—departure, voyage, encounters on the road, and return—provide any story with a temporal structure that raises certain expectations of things to happen.”<sup>31</sup>

In addition to temporality and causality, however, the metaphor of travel also suggests that narrative constitutes an imaginal space within which the narrative/travel takes place. Considering narrative in the context of Christian praxis, Michal Dinkler asserts that storytelling “fulfills a performative function, not only mirroring reality, but creating it.”<sup>32</sup> Unlike travel, however, narrative does not have to take

a strictly chronological organization, but instead allows one to start in the middle of things (*in media res*).<sup>33</sup>

Using Gérard Genette's term "anachronies" Mikkonen points to the tension created by the discrepancy between the "order of telling," that is, the "assumed clarity and concreteness of the temporal (and even physical) order of the story" and the "order of travel experience."<sup>34</sup> In other words, where the experiential order of travel follows a strictly chronological sequence, the order in which the story is told may not. The narrative as such may begin in the middle and work back and forth toward the beginning and the end.

Much of the path literature functions in a similar fashion, only it is the subject who locates him/herself in the middle of the narrative. By the time a practitioner picks up a text such as Gampopa's, they probably no longer identify with the description of the starting point (unless they belong to a tradition such as Jōdo Shinshū that considers the status of a foolish ordinary person as the inescapable condition of human existence in this *sāha* world). In the terms used, many practitioners will have already formed the intent of awakening (*bodhicitta*), though may well not presume that it is perfected. In this fashion, the narrative structure of the path literature shapes the self-understanding of practitioners by telling them how to think about the past from which they have come, defining and structuring that personal past as the ground.

To take a related example, Kūkai outlines a ten-part progressive structure in two works: *Ten Stages of the Development of the Mind*, which he then rewrote in a highly abridged version as *Precious Key to the Secret Treasury*.<sup>35</sup> This latter work has often been seen as solely polemical, that is as promoting the practice of Shingon as the highest form. While polemics were no doubt part of Kūkai's intent, the ten stages also provide a description of the path.<sup>36</sup> This sequence runs from animal to buddha, and anyone engaged in the religio-philosophic practices of his day could locate themselves within his ten-part structure. He starts with the mind of an ordinary person, which is like that of a ram. Next comes the mind of a foolish child, then that of a young fearless child, to the minds of the Vaiśeṣika and Sāṃkhya, to that of *pratyekabuddhas*, to bodhisattvas. The last of the ten minds is "the mind of secret adornment," that is, the stage of understanding the powers of mantra, and the identity of the body, speech, and mind of the practitioner with the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha.

### *Path as Organizing Principle of Buddhist Thought*

Obviously, not all Buddhist systematic thought encompasses the entirety of the path as its object of inquiry. There are many much more specialized discussions across the scope of what Steven Collins has called systematic thought, which he contrasts with narrative thought.<sup>37</sup> Despite the specialized nature of systematic works, it is heuristically useful to think of them as located on the path. That is, such works can be understood as discussing some particular aspect or element of the path, whether concerned for example with different kinds of meditation practice or the forms of logic, and the function of such inquiries places them at a particular location on the path. This is being suggested not as a historical matter, but rather as a useful hermeneutic for our own approach to giving an overall, and in its own way scholastic, organization to the textual heritage.

#### IV.A. NOT THE CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE

Path literature, such as the *Jewel Ornament*, can be seen as telling a story, the story of the individual's progress along a path of development from ordinary foolish person to fully awakened buddha. In a very important sense, these texts are based not simply on a scholastic intent to organize information about practice, but on the model of the life story of the Buddha Śākyamuni. Although the details of the story may vary, perhaps widely, the fundamental developmental trajectory is the same. What makes such stories, in this loose sense, "Buddhist" is the ways in which each of the three basic narrative phases (ground, path, goal) are defined. In other words, these differ from Christian corollaries in which movement can be described as beginning in an unconscious blissful harmony in paradise, followed by the fall and ejection from paradise, and leading finally to redemption/atonement/absolution/sanctification, that is, a return to the harmonious state of paradise.

#### *The Biblical Narrative*

The three parts of the Christian narrative structure can be traced in terms of the Biblical structure of religious salvation, a pattern that continues to structure discussions of soteriology in contemporary Christian thought. We should note here, however, that the structure of a harmonious primal state, the loss of that state, and a final re-unification—whether structured specifically in three steps or as a more

general narrative line—is found throughout Western culture, as will be discussed in the following section.

Though the narrative structure can be laid out in more complex form, it can be analyzed as basically comprising three steps: beginning with a condition of unity or perfection or grace, followed by a necessary though painful fall into alienation, followed by redemption or atonement to a state like the original one but encompassing the experience of the intervening fall. The Christian narrative begins with a state of original harmony, an undifferentiated unity between God and His creation. The primal harmony is broken, however, by sinful disobedience, that is, the willful exertion of separate decision-making and independent action. This is the fall, or the expulsion from the paradisaical harmony of creation. Redemption is achieved through atonement of some kind and leads to a return to paradise and harmony. Historically this Biblical narrative originates as a structured religious cosmology. Originally interpreted in terms of societal redemption, in the medieval period the narrative was reinterpreted in terms of individual salvation. Particularly in the late medieval development of Christian mysticism, this cosmic narrative became increasingly read as the narrative of the individual soul's development. In the nineteenth century, the same three part narrative structure was first secularized, that is, its grounding in supernatural events was removed. And, it was then naturalized, that is, interpreted as the very workings of nature itself, providing human and historical processes significance as development or progress. This took two forms. On the one hand it retained its historical function in the work of Hegel and Marx, while on the other as a narrative of the individual it came to inform first Romanticism, and then psychotherapeutic theory. The naturalized version was internalized and became the basic structure for psychotherapies, defining personal redemption in terms of higher levels of reflective self-awareness.<sup>38</sup> In contrast to the secularized and naturalized versions, the Biblical mythic history continues to be interpreted by some Christian theologians as teleological in character, and the end of the story is what gives purpose or meaning to all of existence.<sup>39</sup>

#### IV.B. ROLE OF CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE IN WESTERN CULTURE

One of the things that struck me in examining the Christian atonement narrative (creation, fall, redemption) was how profoundly it structures so much of Western thought. While I'm suspicious of any claim

regarding a “master key” that explains all of Western thought, I do think that this comes close. It is so deeply rooted in Western culture that it unconsciously molds thought—providing not only a sense of coherence, but establishing a specific expectation of how humanly meaningful events cohere, and making any narrative that matches that pattern acceptable since it appears “natural.”

In much the same way, the threefold structure of ground, path, and goal provides a powerful rhetorical structure for Buddhist thought as well. In a sense it is hardly news that they are found in a text such as the *Jewel Ornament*, since it is itself an instance of the stages of the path literature. However, if we consider the history of Buddhist discourse, all of it may be interpreted as relating to one or another of these three stages.

There are discussions, for example, of the nature of the ground. Is the basic human condition that of ignorance (*avidya*), or is it, as claimed by Gampopa and his tradition, the case that all humans have *tathāgatagarbha* (glossed by Khenpo Konchog Gyaltsen as “buddha-nature”). All of the discussions of practices—meditation, recitation, visualization, ritual, confession, and so on—are located on the path stage. And, finally, discussions about the nature of the goal include such matters as whether all humans are capable of awakening or not, are there three different goals (*arhat*, *pratyekabuddha*, and *buddha*), or just one single kind of awakening, does the buddha have a variety of different bodies, and so on.

## V. WHY NARRATIVE STRUCTURE MATTERS

### *Conception Determines Experience: Shared Imaginal Space*

In this imaginal space, the auditor is able to consider alternative ways of being—not so much consciously in the form of explicit consideration of alternatives, but rather by imagining different possibilities for a human existence. Using the language of public and private, Dinkler points out that “public stories shape private experience. The stories one hears in the public realm . . . inevitably inform one’s understanding of individual, subjective experiences.”<sup>40</sup>

### *Definition without Essence*

One of the intellectual issues confronting the study of Buddhism today is the tension between the postmodern emphasis on specificity

and uniqueness, and the (intuitive) sense that there is some unity to Buddhism as an object of study. The postmodern emphasis on specificity and uniqueness matches very well with a Buddhist ontology of emptiness and impermanence, of *anātman* as a rejection of the neo-Platonic metaphysics of essence and accident.

That form of thought, i.e., essence and accident, fell under the weight of the philosophical critiques of Heidegger and Sartre. That strain of post-Husserlian phenomenology and existentialism, together with post-structuralist critiques, demonstrates the absence of universal categories, that is, the groundlessness, the absence of any metaphysics, that so many find disturbing in postmodern thought. Without a metaphysical basis for our categories, however, how do we talk, not only about Buddhism, but about anything?

Some two decades or more ago, I made what I thought was a totally obvious distinction between generalities and generalizations. My interlocutor at the time, another faculty member, i.e., someone with some education, looked totally blank, however, and asked me to explain what the difference was. (This is not a criticism of the unnamed interlocutor, as I've done the same in different circumstances, where something obvious to someone else has been slightly more than opaque to me.)

A generality is an assertion made on the basis of assuming some kind of essential nature. Generalities are rhetorically effective because of the presumption of a neo-Platonic metaphysics, that is, they implicitly claim to identify an essence. They are the basis of clichés and stereotypes, such as the not uncommon assertion that “All Americans are materialistic.” In contrast, a generalization is based on an observational or statistical approach, an approach to categories that sees them in what might be called probabilistic terms. It is inductive and sees all thought as necessarily inductive since the universal claims that establish deductive thought must themselves be proven—they cannot depend on essences as the basis for their truth.

So the goal here is to say something true about Buddhism that is based on actual specific instances. Hence the focus on Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation*. But the point is not simply to disclose some characteristic of a single Tibetan Buddhist text (or even of several texts<sup>41</sup>). Instead the intent is to use that text as an exemplary instance in order to make a generalization about Buddhist thought. If we were

pre-critically naïve, and were content with a generality, it would not be necessary to refer to any source text, but simply make assertions.

What I think is—or should be—clear is that we cannot look to any doctrinal claim as the unifying characteristic for Buddhism. On an intellectual level, there is no doctrinal claim, no matter how fondly embraced, that actually is found as an object of study or as a guide to practice throughout the entirety of Buddhism—unless we take the self-delusional turn of a *petitio principii* strategy by saying that if it doesn't have that doctrinal claim, then it isn't Buddhism. That is the divisive logic of sectarianism—and is evident in claims of behavioral purity, such as celibacy or vegetarianism, or claims for conceptual obedience, such as *anātman* or the nature of the Buddha. The divisive logic of sectarianism plays all too easily into the power relations of authority, purity, authenticity, lineage, and so on. Just as postmodern thought has made the neo-Platonic metaphysics of essences implausible, it should have also sensitized us to the strategies involved in assertions of power and authority.

As a consequence, however, a generalization such as the formative structure of ground, path, and goal for Buddhist thought is simply a heuristic claim. It is not a universal claim regarding all forms of Buddhism, nor a claim about a defining characteristic of Buddhism. As a heuristic, the claim is that it is informative to think about Buddhist teachings as being organized in terms of an underlying narrative structure, that of ground, path, and goal.

#### CONCLUSION

We have here sought to establish several different but closely interrelated theses. These include that the “path” organizes Buddhist thought in systematic ways. The path serves to unify Buddhist thought, structuring it in a three-part narrative of ground, path, and goal. This narrative structure distinguishes Buddhism from other kinds of religious systems, such as the instance examined here—the Christian three part narrative structure of creation, fall, and redemption. More speculatively, we suggest that narrative structures, such as either the Buddhist narrative structure of ground, path, and goal, or the Christian one of creation, fall, and redemption, condition experience. By structuring and organizing experience, narrative is one of the most important ways that experience is given the meaning that it has for us.

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OUTLINE OF THE *JEWEL ORNAMENT*

GROUND

Part 1: The Primary Cause

Chapter 1: Buddha-Nature

Part 2: The Working Basis

Chapter 2: Precious Human Life

Part 3: The Contributory Cause

Chapter 3: Spiritual Master

PATH

Part 4: The Method

Chapter 4: Impermanence

Chapter 5: Samsara as Suffering

Chapter 6: Karma

Chapter 7: Loving-Kindness and Compassion

Chapter 8: Refuge and Precepts

Chapter 9: Cultivation of *Bodhicitta*

Chapter 10: Training in Aspiration *Bodhicitta*

Chapter 11: Training in Action *Bodhicitta*

Chapter 12: Perfection of Generosity

Chapter 13: Perfection of Moral Ethics

Chapter 14: Perfection of Patience

Chapter 15: Perfection of Perseverance

Chapter 16: Perfection of Meditative Concentration

Chapter 17: Perfection of Wisdom

Chapter 18: Five Paths

Chapter 19: Ten Bodhisattva *Bhūmis*

GOAL

Part 5: The Result

Chapter 20: Perfect Buddhahood

Part 6: The Activities

Chapter 21: The Activities of a Buddha

## NOTES

1. At the end of an essay written some years ago, one in which I critiqued the application of the threefold Biblical narrative structure of creation/paradise, fall/alienation, and redemption/atonement to Buddhism via psychology, I speculated that a more specifically Buddhist narrative structure could be identified (Richard K. Payne, "Individuation and Awakening: Romantic Narrative and the Psychological Interpretation of Buddhism," in *Buddhism and Psychotherapy across Cultures: Essays on Theories and Practices*, ed. Mark Unno [Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2006], 48). This essay was prepared for the symposium "Narrative in Buddhist Texts, Practice, and Transmission" held at the Institute of Buddhist Studies, Berkeley, on Friday, 18 April 2014. I would like to thank the organizers of this symposium, David Matsumoto and Scott Mitchell, for giving me an opportunity to continue to explore this topic.
2. An interesting treatment of a literary usage of the image of journey and its critical interpretation in terms of Buddhist teachings is found in Hyangsoon Yi, "The Journey as Meditation: A Buddhist Reading of O Chŏng-hŭi's 'Words of Farewell,'" *Religion and Literature* 34, no. 3 (Autumn 2002).
3. Paths are what Lakoff calls "kinesthetic image-schematic structures," one of "at least two kinds of structure in our preconceptual experiences" (George Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987], 267).
4. From memory. Anthony Esolen translates as "Midway in the journey of our life//I found myself in a dark wilderness//for I had wandered from the straight and true" (*Inferno, Purgatory, Paradise* [New York: Modern Library Classics, 2002], 2).
5. I am using the term "path literature" here in a general sense to include not only "stages of the path" (*lam rim*) and "stages of the doctrine" (*bstan rim*), but other similarly structured literary genres as well. See discussion in Dölpa, Gampopa, and Sakya Paṇḍita, *Stages of the Buddha's Teaching: Three Key Texts*, trans. Ulrike Roesler, Ken Holmes, and David P. Jackson (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2015), 26–27. A finer discrimination between *bstan rim* and *lam rim* is sometimes made on the basis of the role of the "three spiritual capacities" in a text's contents. See Dölpa, Gampopa, and Sakya Paṇḍita, *Stages of the Buddha's Teachings*, 3. On these categories, see David Jackson, "The *bsTan rim* ('Stages of the Doctrine') and Similar Graded Expositions of the Bodhisattva's Path," in *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, ed. José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 229–243. A prepublication copy of the *Stages of the Buddha's Teachings* was kindly made available to me just after this essay had itself gone to press. I thank the publisher for this, and note that I was able to make some terminological revisions to this essay on its basis. 6. Although more widely used metaphorically, I would like to limit the

discussion here to Buddhism. For wide-ranging cross-cultural comparisons to be meaningful, adequate context is required for each instance.

7. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Robert M. Gimello, "Introduction," in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, ed. Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Robert M. Gimello, Kuroda Institute Studies in East Asian Buddhism, no. 7 (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1992), 2.

8. The metaphor of path is in this way overlapping with the medical metaphor implicit in the four truths of the noble, which also describes a causal relation that moves the person from one condition (suffering) to another (cessation) via diagnosis (obsessive desire) and prescription (eightfold path).

9. Per K. Sørensen, "The Prolific Ascetic lce-sgom śes-rab rdo-rje *alias* lce-sgom žig-po: Allusive, but Elusive," *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre* 11 (1999): 175.

10. Yael Bentor, "The Tibetan Practice of the Mantra Path according to lce-sgom-pa," in *Tantra in Practice*, ed. David Gordon White (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 330.

11. Robert Scholes, James Phelan, and Robert Kellogg, *The Nature of Narrative*, 40th anniversary ed., rev. and expanded (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 13. Mimetic they describe as tending toward "plotlessness," perhaps something like "My Dinner with Andre."

12. Brian Boyd, *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

13. Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 4.

14. Ruf draws a distinction between story and narrative, the former being a much broader and more inclusive category, and which he calls a "mixed" literary form (Frederick J. Ruf, "The Consequences of Genre: Narrative, Lyric, and Dramatic Intelligibility," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 3 [Autumn 1994]: 801). Ruf's approach to narrative, however, suffers from being an *a priori* one. Acknowledging that his distinctions between narrative, lyric, and drama are neither "Platonic" nor "even empirical," he defends his *a priori* assertions regarding narrative as "roughly accurate (in the current time and in the West) of those genres in the simplified forms that I present them and of the instances that I will cite" (Ruf, "Consequences of Genre," 800.) He then goes on to make the unitary voice of the narrator definitive for narrative, but this results in a circularity—only that which has a unitary voice of the narrator is narrative, and narrative is that which has a unitary voice of the narrator. This limitation is one that finally appears arbitrary—Ruf seems to be clinging to the unitary voice of the narrator because that is what he sees as important for the (religious) formation of the reader. He seems to be struggling desperately to deny any religious validity to other kinds of narrative, such as the "authorial

absence, the disunity of the narrative voice, the general multiplicity of voices, the blurred distinction between inside and outside worlds” (Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* [Basingstoke, UK, and New York: Palgrave, 1998], 59) that characterize not only Joyce’s *Ulysses*, but also other modern works of fiction such as Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse*. The kind of delimitation that Ruf proposes is just exactly what Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, writing just over three decades earlier, had described as the “narrowly conceived views of one major kind of literature” (Scholes, Phelan, and Kellogg, *Nature of Narrative*, 4) and which they sought to overcome.

15. Gampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation*, trans. Herbert V. Guenther (orig. pub. 1959; Boston and London: Shambhala, 1986), 116.

16. Gampopa, *The Jewel Ornament of Liberation: The Wish-Fulfilling Gem of the Noble Teachings*, trans. Khenpo Konchog Gyaltzen, ed. Ani K. Trinlay Chödrön (Boston and London: Snow Lion, 1998), 44.

17. Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, 35.

18. See for example, William Grosnick, “Nonorigination and *Nirvāṇa* in the Early *Tathāgataḡarbhā* Literature,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 4, no. 2 (1981): 33–43.

19. W. Blythe Miller, “The Vagrant Poet and the Reluctant Scholar: A Study of the Balance of Iconoclasm and Civility in the Biographical Accounts of two Founders of the ‘Brug pa Bka’ Brgyud Lineages,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 28, no. 2 (2005): 370.

20. A form of Vajrayoginī, female tantric deity, probably deriving from the Hindu form Vārāhī, herself a consort of Vārāha, the boar manifestation of Viṣṇu; she may be one of the wrathful *yoginīs* present as protectors in the outer circles of the mandala, but became more central with the *Hevajra tantra*, and then became the primary consort of Heruka in the *Cakrasaṃvara tantra*, an Anuttarayogatantra class text.

21. Though there is debate within the Tibetan schools, *mahāmudrā* is considered by some to have both sutra and *tantra* versions

22. Miller, “The Vagrant Poet and the Reluctant Scholar,” 370.

23. Dan Martin, “A Twelfth-Century Classic of Mahāmūdra, *The Path of Ultimate Profundity: The Great Seal Instructions of Zhang*,” *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 15, no. 2 (1992): 243.

24. This approach was later criticized, particularly by Sakya Pandita.

25. Although the specifics of the categories differ, one of the suggestive parallels between the Pāli texts examined by Bond and the *Jewel Ornament* in providing a sense of cosmos, that is, the universe understood to be a well-ordered whole, is the use of three part schemas to describe different people in terms

of their religious capacities. The system of three degrees of spiritual capacity is a common trope in the Tibetan path literature. See Dölpa, Gampopa, and Sakya Paṇḍita, *Stages of the Buddha's Teachings*, 3–4. Another area of similarity between the Pāli works, which tend to be explicitly hermeneutic in character, and works such as Rob Gande Sherab's text discussed herein is that they focus on texts, such as establishing categories for different kinds of suttas.

26. George Bond, "Gradual Path as a Hermeneutical Approach to the *Dhamma*," in *Buddhist Hermeneutics*, ed. Donald S. Lopez, Jr. (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1988), 31.

27. The way in which the relation between mundane and supramundane goals is used in Buddhism should not be interpreted as adhering to the division of religion into this-worldly (*innerweltliche*) and other-worldly (*ausserweltliche*). This dualism was introduced into religious studies by Max Weber on the basis of his studies of the Protestant Reformation, and therefore at best only problematically universalized to include Buddhism despite having been largely naturalized in religious studies.

28. Bond, "Gradual Path as a Hermeneutical Approach to the *Dhamma*," 33.

29. *Ibid.*, 33–34.

30. The "principle of charity" is a hermeneutic one employed in philosophy and rhetoric. This requires the interpreter to assume that the author of a text is rational and to engage the strongest version of the author's argument. The principle arises out of a debate tradition and would seem to assure that one is not rebutting a straw man. In the instances discussed here, it is quite easy to dismiss the organizing structure as merely polemic, but that fails to actually engage the systems being presented.

31. Kai Mikkonen, "The 'Narrative Is Travel' Metaphor: Between Spatial Sequence and Open Consequence," *Narrative* 15, no. 3 (Oct. 2007): 286.

32. Michal Beth Dinkler, "Telling Transformation: How We Redeem Narratives and Narratives Redeem Us," *Word & World* 31, no. 3 (Nov. 2011): 289.

33. We may consider that this is in fact where we always find ourselves. It is a criticism of Descartes' method in the *Meditations* that it is impossible to get to the kind of ground he claims for his philosophy.

34. Mikkonen, "The 'Narrative Is Travel' Metaphor," 292.

35. Yoshito S. Hakeda, *Kūkai: Major Works* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 10.

36. In addition to the translation in Hakeda, see also Rolf Giebel, trans., *Shingon Texts* (Berkeley: Numata Center for Buddhist Translation and Research, 2004), 135–215.

37. Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 121–122.

38. Payne, “Individuation and Awakening,” 34–39. See also Suzanne R. Kirschner, *The Religious and Romantic Origins of Psychoanalysis: Individuation and Integration in Post-Freudian Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

39. Indeed, the absence of any cosmic teleology in Buddhism is taken by such theologians as a failing, a characteristic so foreign as to be not simply incomprehensible, but simply wrong and probably bad in that from the underlying assumption of the threefold teleologically informed narrative, a universe that is not teleological is one that is meaningless and purposeless. See Keith Yandell and Harold Netland, *Buddhism: A Christian Exploration and Appraisal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, InterVarsity Press, 2009).

40. Dinkler, “Telling Transformation,” 290.

41. See, for example, Tsongkhapa’s “Three Principal Aspects of the Path,” in Ruth Sonam, ed. and trans., *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path: An Oral Teaching by Geshe Sonam Rinchen* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 1999).