

11 Inspiration—Turning Bliss to Light

(Aryadeva says) in the Integrated Practices that, if you possess the intuitive wisdom of realizing freedom of mind through the process of knowing the instinctual natures and the three luminances, at the time of the homogenous order (of four bliss-voids), you will dissolve the wind energies that move the virtuous and nonvirtuous natural instincts and the voids will dawn in sequence and you will enter into clear light transparency.

(Tsong Khapa, *Brilliant Illumination of the Lamp of the Five Stages*¹)

The Stage of Freedom of Mind: Embarking on the Process Path of Insight

Once we've begun to unravel the knot of defenses that binds our hearts, to taste and savor the bliss and clarity deep within, we're ready to embark on the next phase of our journey: using that clarity to disarm and transform the instincts that drive us. Though the methods used here are basically the same as those used on the first perfection sub-stage—inner fire, diamond recitation, and sublimated intimacy—this stage involves more profound forms of these inner and outer arts. More profound immersion in recitation and more vividly simulated intimacy or real intimacy with an actual partner help take us deeper into the subtlest layers of the mind, allowing us to expose and reform not just reactive habits learned through conditioning but the innate instincts underlying them. That is why our focus in this phase, as described by Tsong Khapa, shifts from the subjective aspect of sublimation—tapping and harnessing the progressive flow of bliss—to its objective aspect: cultivating the intuitive clarity freed by progressive realization of openness, technically realized as “emptiness” or “voidness.”

On the face of it, this shift is reminiscent of the transition on the path of engagement from the stage of insight, which dispels learned negative habits, to the stage of meditation, which uproots the instincts underlying them. Though technically, that shift on the process path is not complete until the end of the third perfection sub-stage, it begins in earnest here. As we learned in chapter 10, the objective reality of emptiness that helps us cut through both habits and instincts here is the same reality as that known on the engaged path. But the art of sublimating bliss, which serves as the platform for contemplating emptiness on the process path, is fundamentally different from the engaged method of concentrative quiescence. Specifically, the insight of emptiness we cultivate on the second perfection sub-stage is a visceral insight at the subtlest level of our energy-mind, a type of intuition that is truly indivisible from the flow of great bliss tapped by inner fire and deepened by diamond recitation. This explains why Tsong Khapa closes the chapter on this sub-stage in his *Brilliant Illumination* by describing the aim here in terms that would equally suit the engaged insight path, while linking that aim to a method distinctive to the process path:

To abbreviate the import, understanding the self habit as the cause of migrating in the egoistic life cycle and as the means of supporting the instinctual cognitive obscurations, you decisively determine the view of selflessness that eradicates the objective of the self habit. (In terms of method) you see that if you do not develop that view into the experiential actuality of great bliss you will not have completed the extraordinary cause of the wisdom of the truth body, so you generate bliss by dissolving the wind-energies that drive the instincts.²

Process Meditation on Emptiness: The Four Bliss-Voids and Luminous Intuitions

Traditionally, the distinctive process form of emptiness meditation depends on the alignment of the levels of emptiness insight with the degrees of bliss-void intuition tapped by inner fire, as well as with the subtlest

levels of the dissolution caused by immersing our subtle energy-mind into the extremely subtle wind-mind-drop at the heart. This alignment is expressed in the identification of the four bliss-voids—bliss/void, sublime bliss/extreme void, supreme bliss/ultimate void, and orgasmic bliss/complete void—with the four luminous intuitions that mark the four final stages of dissolution—luminance, radiance, immanence, and translucence. Before we go any further, this key alignment of the bliss-voids and luminances—alluded to in our opening quote—needs some clarification. The first point to clear up is how and why these nuanced metaphors of light serve to orient us on the path towards freedom of mind. The second point is why that quote cites only three luminous intuitions, rather than four.

Pure Intuition: The Luminous Clarity of the Primal Mind

While the tradition makes a great deal of the distinctive process view of the body, nervous system and mind, the use of the metaphor of light to describe the primal nature of the mind is as old as Shakyamuni's first teaching. Though the first two noble truths of suffering and origin, and the last, the truth of the path, describe the complex nature of the mind in its compulsive mode driven by the three poisons, the third truth of Nirvana—which he pronounced “the sole, supreme truth”—describes the mind as “profound, peaceful, blissful and *luminous*” His finding that consciousness is naturally lucid awareness or primal clarity insures the fundamentally positive and radically optimistic character of Buddhist psychology, in all forms.

When it comes to the process-oriented path, the depth-psychology of the process tradition is no exception. In explaining freedom of mind, Aryadeva's *Integrated Practice* cites pronouncements from the “Lord,” that is, Shakyamuni himself, which link the process view of mind with the view of classical systems of Buddhist psychology:

The Lord said, “Mind has the character of space—free of color, shape and so forth.” The Lord also explained that, “(It) should be understood through (its) characteristics of radiance and perceptiveness.” Hence, the personal instruction of that (shall be) introduced: that is to say, first the radiance(s), then the prototypes (of the instinctive patterns).³

The Three Intuitions: Paths to Purification

Now let's consider why the luminous intuitions are listed here as three, not four. The answer to this question, on the face of it, is simple. Of the four luminous intuitions aligned with the four voids and the four final phases in the dissolution into clear light, the first three—luminance, radiance, and immanence—are grouped together, distinct from the fourth—clear light translucence—based on their distinct functions in the normal mind as well as the distinct roles they play on the path. The normal function of the first three intuitions is different from the clear light since they co-operate with the eighty instinctive patterns that drive ordinary, compulsive life, while the clear light is naturally free from such patterns and so can support either compulsion or purification. In addition, their key role in the contemplative practice of the second perfection stage is that they are the means to an end—the realization of clear light—while the clear light itself, in this context, is the end.

As for definitions of the three luminances, they are of two kinds: heuristic and definitive. The first kind, meant for novices on the second perfection stage, applies a range of terms from various systems of Buddhist psychology to help provide some provisional indications of their true nature based on familiar ideas. Nagarjuna's *Five Stages* applies three sets of heuristic terms, to illustrate their functional, cognitive, and affective nature, respectively.

The Three Sets of Three Heuristic Similes of the Three Luminances

The first of these sets compares luminance, radiance, and immanence to mind, mindset and consciousness, terms derived from the depth-psychology of Buddhist Constructivism. After critiquing any simplistic alignment of the three with the three levels of consciousness defined in that psychology—superficial consciousness, traumatic mindset, and the subconscious mind—Tsong Khapa explains that the intention here is simply to indicate that the three luminances, like the layers of mind in that system, can be fully purified through contemplative self-analysis.⁴ In lieu of aligning the three with layers of mind, he aligns them with the functional aspects of accumulating normal experiences, supporting those experiences, and maintaining consciousness. Of course, in the same moment, he insists that all three luminances have all three functions to

some degree, so the terminology seems to serve as a heuristic way of indicating that the three together have a quality of a depth of mind which must be successively exposed and transformed.

The second set of terms—imaginary, relative, and perfect—also derive from the deconstructive framework of Constructivist depth-psychology. According to that system, our cognition is distorted by our instincts for projecting and reifying our habitual constructs of past experience onto present reality. Those projections make up the imaginary reality we normally project onto the world and mistake for the world as it actually is. Underlying those projections is a real process of subconscious construction of conception and perception, a process referred to as the relative reality or the reality of interdependence. When, on the path of contemplative self-analysis, we deconstruct our projected, imaginary view of the world, and expose the real process of interdependent causes and intersubjective conditions underlying it, that real process now emerges as the perfected or purified reality of mind and things as they are. Applying these terms to the luminances presumably helps prepare the novice for the way the successive experience of the three deconstructs even the subtlest, intuitive sense of subject-object dichotomy involved in normal compulsive experience.

Of all Nagarjuna's heuristic similes of the three intuitions, however, the one that most concerns us is his affective simile, comparing them to the three root compulsions—attachment, aggression and delusion—respectively.⁵ Of course, as we'll see when we explore them further, this likeness is complicated by the link between the luminances and the other key dimensions of the subtle mind: the neural energies and instinctive patterns. The complexity here lies in the fact that the three groups of instinctive patterns, or at least the first two, don't sprout neatly from any one root compulsion, but seem like a wild bramble of tangled instincts, positive and negative, desirous and aggressive.⁶ Despite that complexity and a range of views on this topic, I've chosen to stick with the alignment cited in Aryadeva's *Integrated Practice*.⁷

More significant than that alignment per se, is the seeming contradiction Tsong Khapa resolves between Aryadeva's view of the three luminances as each aligned with one group of instinctive patterns and the view of some Tibetan medical and scholarly traditions that all eighty patterns dissolve with our coarse energy-mind into the first luminous intuition at the threshold of the subtle energy-mind.⁸ The seeming contradiction stems from a contrast between the baseline condition in which a normal person's subtle luminances are unconscious and remain enmeshed with the eighty instincts, and the condition of a person on the path who, thanks to exceptional control of neural energies, remains conscious in transition through the three subtle intuitions and so is able to "dissolve" the normal instinctive patterns into them.

So if we read Nagarjuna's simile as describing the mind in its normal compulsive condition, the luminous intuitions represent layers of the subtle mind's primary cognitive process, yet they also cooperate with the reactive energies and affective functions of the subtle mind, represented by the instinctive patterns. However we group the instinctive patterns, the point of this simile is to orient us specifically to the process of insight and transformation involved at this stage. That is, to disengage our subtle minds from their normal enmeshment with instinctive patterns of compulsive life, by freeing the three intuitions from the reactive energies that fuel those patterns; and by joining them instead with the blissful openness that helps us see through and break free of instinctive compulsions.⁹

More Heuristic Similes from the Imagery of the Creation Stage

Before we delve more deeply into the art of disentangling the luminances from the instincts, we should touch on a final set of heuristic similes for them which derive not from classical Buddhist psychology but from the process imagery of the optimal creation stage. This imagery combines natural symbols used on the creation stage—moon and sun, night and day, female and male, left and right, lotus and jewel—with the linguistic symbols for the parts of the breath-cycle from diamond recitation—OM, AH, HUM—to indicate the second perfection stage experience of the three luminances. Specifically, moon, night, female, and so on combine with the in-breath sound OM to indicate luminance; sun, day, male, and so on combine with the breath-pause sound AH to indicate radiance; and moon-sun union, day-night boundary, androgyny, and so on combine with the out-breath sound HUM to indicate immanence.

Spacious, Formless Awareness: The Definitive Definition of the Luminous Mind

As for the definitive explanation of the three luminances, Tsong Khapa quotes Aryadeva's *Integrated Practices*:

(Luminance) ... is formless, without body or speech; it is like a taintless autumn sky filled by the illumination of light rays from the moon disc, perceived in the form of the natural clarity in all things—this is the ultimate spirit of enlightenment, the first void, the wisdom-luminance.

(Radiance) has the form of freedom from subject and object, and is without body and speech; being the perception of all things in the reality of extremely brilliant taintlessness, like the autumn sky flooded with sun rays, it is the second spirit of enlightenment, the total goodness, having the character of the second stage, that of extreme void.

(Immanence) has the form of nothingness, the character of space, lacking body and speech; as if pervaded in a state of fog-bound midnight, subtle and selfless, motionless, with no movement of life-energy control; without mind, unwavering ... (it) has the characteristic mark of delusion, the ultimate void.¹⁰

So in a definitive sense, the three luminances are described as subtle intuitive states of pure awareness, increasingly freed from visual or auditory symbolic forms, and progressively purged of even the subtlest distinction of subject-object duality, experience or motion. But this cognitive description reflects only one of three key dimensions that define the luminances, the second and third being the activity of subtle neural energies and, coordinated with that activity, the functioning of instinctive patterns of affect. As for these two other dimensions, Tsong Khapa quotes Nagarjuna's *Five Stages*:

With the nature of twilight, day and night,
There are luminance, luminance-radiance,
And likewise luminance-immanence;
Thus the mind is said to be threefold.
And thereby its basis is explained.
The wind-energies, in their subtle form
Having become fully mixed with consciousness,
Emerging through the paths of the senses,
Thus cause the perception of (all) objects.
When you have luminance(s)
Mounted on wind-energies,
Then all the instinctual natures
Fully arise without remainder.
Wherever the wind energies remain,
There the instinctual natures function.¹¹

In other words, these primal, undifferentiated forms of consciousness, comingled with the reactive neural energies of stress and trauma, activate the instinctive patterns of compulsive life, which color all our mental activity, perception and experience. But while this is how the luminances function in the normal condition of unconscious life, they also can serve as powerful forces of purification and change, when they can be consciously accessed and freed from reactive energies. So Aryadeva quotes the *Intuition Diamond Compendium*:

The consciousness which arises from brilliance—that very thing is called “mind” (and) “mentation.” All things have that as their root, (having) the nature of defilement (or) purification. From that, (evolves) the imaginary duality, self and other. That consciousness is mounted on air ... From that, (one) experiences very clearly the three consciousnesses, the manifestation of the prototypes (of instinctive patterns) and the luminances. The prototypes are born from the luminance(s) as cause.¹²

Wind in the Trees: Reactive Energies and the Instincts They Stir

Interestingly, Aryadeva goes on to illustrate the causal interactions linking the luminous intuitions with the instinctive patterns they support by drawing on a classical metaphor of wind and the movements it engenders:

The three consciousnesses (are) rootless, unlocated, foundationless, signless, colorless, shapeless, beyond the senses. Nonetheless, (they are) luminous; thus, one is aware (of them when they are) conjoined with the air (i.e. wind) element. For the same reason that the formless air-element may be perceived by

inference by observing the actions (of trees and such) moving and shaking, and so on (in the wind), just so the formless luminance of (subtle) consciousness may be perceived by inference, as it is inferable from the (perceptible) prototypes such as passion, dispassion, moderate passion, and so forth.¹³

In fact, considering the definitive definition the luminous intuitions, this metaphor can be tweaked a bit to help illustrate the complex relations between the elements of subtle consciousness, energy and primal patterns (which my colleague Christian Wedemeyer translates elegantly as “prototypes”). Specifically, if we follow the analogy of the luminances with sky or space, then the analogue of the wind which must be inferred from the moving trees is actually the reactive subtle energy that normally drives the compulsive mind. And it is such reactive energy in turn that stirs up the instinctive patterns, which are the specific analogues of the moving trees.

Given this analysis, when Nagarjuna and the *Intuition Diamond Compendium* describe the three luminous intuitions as the causes of instinctive patterns, we must add the caveat that this is only true in the condition of their unconscious “defilement” by reactive stress-energy, not in the condition of their conscious “purification” by pure, disarmed bliss-energy. With this distinction between defiled and purified mind-states, our analysis of the definitive model of the subtle body-mind leads to the actual practice of the second perfection sub-stage, based on deepening forms of diamond recitation and sublimated intimacy. But before we can explore how those arts work to bring us to the realization of clear light, the gateway to freedom of mind, we should turn to consider the instinctive patterns which are the shades of attachment, aggression, and delusion to be dispelled by the brilliant light of the three luminances.

Affective Psychology in the Process Tradition: The Eighty Instinctive Patterns

As for the traditional enumeration of these patterns, both Thurman and Wedemeyer confide that Indian and Tibetan process masters seem to have attributed little importance to rectifying the precise list and count. Fortunately, my pioneering colleagues have done the work of reviewing the literature and codifying two fairly compatible lists. Though I’ve taken some liberties with their scholarly translations for the sake of consistency with the model of process science we developed in chapter 10, essentially I follow their presentations.¹⁴

As we said, the lists are organized in three groups, aligned with the three luminances—luminance, radiance and immanence—and categorized (by most experts) as attachment-oriented, aggression-oriented and delusion-oriented, respectively. Each list contains a different number of patterns, classically: thirty-three in the first; forty in the second; and seven in the third. You’ll notice, as I said, that the list contains a wide range of different affective instincts, some seemingly contradictory with the primary instinct that defines their category. Of course, given the complex interconnections and polarities which characterize the nervous system as conceived in both the process subtle body and modern brain models, this should hardly be surprising.

The Luminance Intuition’s Thirty-Three Attachment-Oriented Instinctive Patterns

As for the thirty-three attachment-oriented patterns aligned with luminance, I will list each with a brief description drawn from Tsong Khapa. The first three—mild, moderate, and strong detachment—refer to letting go of objects of attachment or desire. The fourth, extroversion/introversion, refers to the mind’s tendency to approach objects of desire and avoid objects of fear.¹⁵ Patterns five, six, and seven—mild, moderate, and intense grief—refer to the emotional anguish caused by the loss of an object of attachment or desire. The eighth, gentleness or benevolence refers to the mind being at ease or at peace with others. The ninth, antagonism, refers to the opposite: the combative activity of an agitated mind.¹⁶ The tenth, eleventh, and twelfth, mild, moderate, and intense fear, refer to the fear, panic, and terror of the mind facing threatening adversity. The thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth, mild, moderate, and intense craving, refer to the mind’s strong longing for an object of desire. The sixteenth, dependency, refers to an addictive clinging to some sensory stimulation. The seventeenth, discouragement, refers to a disinclination to engage in positive actions. The eighteenth and nineteenth are hunger and thirst. The twentieth through twenty-second are mild, moderate, and intense sensitivity to pain, pleasure and indifference. The twenty-third through twenty-fifth, receptivity, retention, and discrimination, refer to the three capacities for social learning. The twenty-sixth, conscience, refers to an aversion to harmful actions based on personal values. The twenty-seventh,

compassion, refers to a sensitivity that wishes others to be relieved of suffering. Mild, moderate, or intense love, refers to the wish for others to be safe and happy. The thirty-first, being startled or alarmed, refers to the insecurity of a mistrusting mind. The thirty-second, greed or hoarding, refers to an obsession for collecting possessions. The thirty-third, envy, refers to feeling disturbed by the good fortune of others.

The Radiance Intuition's Forty Aggression-Oriented Instinctive Patterns

As for the aggression-oriented instinctive patterns aligned with radiance, there are forty. The thirty-fourth, attraction, refers to longing for an unattained object of desire. The thirty-fifth, passion, refers to longing for an already attained object of desire. The thirty-sixth through thirty-eighth, mild, moderate, and intense joy, refer to enjoyment of pleasure. The thirty-ninth and fortieth, delight and rapture, refer to the joy of attaining a desired goal and the joy of repeatedly savoring that attainment. The forty-first, awe, refers to the intense enjoyment of something wholly astonishing or new. The forty-second and forty-third, elation and satisfaction, respectively refer to the mind's exuberance at and enjoyment of something delightful. The forty-fourth through forty-sixth, embracing, kissing, and sucking, refer to the primal urges of social bonding. The forty-seventh, constancy, refers to the mind's ability to persist without changing course. The forty-eighth, courage, refers to an impulse to undertake a positive challenge. The forty-ninth, pride, refers to an inclination towards arrogance. The fiftieth, effectiveness, refers to the urge to fully engage challenges. The fifty-first and fifty-second, covetousness and aggressiveness, refer to the impulse to deprive or dominate others. The fifty-third, enthusiasm, refers to the impulse to initiate positive action. The fifty-fourth through fifty-sixth, mild, moderate and extreme transgression, refer to the urge for increasingly violent actions towards others.¹⁷ The fifty-seventh, hostility, refers to unprovoked aggression towards others, especially those in authority. The fifty-eighth, seduction, refers to the impulse to charm or possess an attractive person. The fifty-ninth, resentment, refers to the inclination to harbor a grudge. The sixtieth, virtue, refers to the impulse to engage in positive action. The sixty-first, transparency, is the impulse to communicate clearly and openly. The sixty-second and sixty-third, honesty and dishonesty, refer to the inclination to communicate truthfully or deceptively. The sixty-fourth, conviction, refers to a strong mindset of certitude and determination. The sixty-fifth, dispossession, refers to the inclination to stop accumulating things. The sixty-sixth, generosity, refers to the impulse to give things away. The sixty-seventh, leadership, refers to the urge to rouse more inhibited others. The sixty-eighth, heroism, refers to the urge to face inner demons like addictions and compulsions. The sixty-ninth, incorrigibility, refers to the impulse to indulge negative actions without qualms of conscience. The seventieth, deceitfulness, refers to the intent to mislead others through dissembling. The seventy-first, malevolence, refers to an inclination to indulge malice. The seventy-second, domination, refers to the urge to oppress others. The seventy-third, cunning, refers to the urge to defraud or manipulate others.

The Immanence Intuition's Seven Delusion-Oriented Instinctive Patterns

Finally, there are the seven delusion-oriented patterns aligned with the immanence intuition. The seventy-fourth, moderate attachment, refers to residual clinging to familiar objects of love and desire. The seventy-fifth, forgetfulness or mindlessness, refers to loss of memory or mindfulness. The seventy-sixth, confusion, refers to a tendency towards disorientation, distortion and error. The seventy-seventh, withdrawal, refers to an urge to stop communicating. The seventy-eighth, exhaustion, refers to a tendency towards depression and fatigue. The seventy-ninth, apathy, refers to a disinclination to act. Finally, the eightieth, dullness, refers to a tendency towards mental fogging and doubt.

Deep Cognitive and Affective Change: Accessing and Analyzing the Subtle Mind

Given this brief introduction to the process depth-psychology of the subtle mind, it's time for us to turn to the contemplative path of insight based on that model. This is where the path of insight begins in earnest on the optimal integral perfection stage: with a direct, deconstructive encounter with a range of compulsive patterns that are not acquired in this lifetime, but instinctive and innate. But before we can explore how we might understand the work of this sub-stage in terms of modern neuroscience and psychotherapy, we first need to unpack the traditional models and methods used to guide and support that work.

Perhaps the best place to start that unpacking is to revisit a distinction Tsong Khapa makes about the nature of the subtle mind: that the luminous intuitions and the instinctive patterns of the subtle mind are

mutually incompatible. This insistence may seem confusing now that we've surveyed the model and map of the subtle mind in terms of the intersection of the luminances, reactive energies, and instinctive patterns. You may recall, though, the point I made in that survey: that the normal condition in which these three are enmeshed is not the condition to which Tsong Khapa's commentary is addressed.¹⁸

A simple way to resolve this seeming contradiction is to draw a distinction between the luminances as normally unconscious, subtle levels of mind, and the luminous *intuitions* as conscious realizations of the natural potential of the subtle mind to disentangle itself from reactive energies and instinctive patterns. Given this distinction, we only realize a luminous intuition to the extent that we have the mastery of neural energies we need to take the wind out of the sails of the instinctive patterns, and the clarity we need to expose those patterns as reactive compulsions driven by reactive energies.

Disentangling the Intuitions from the Instincts: Sudden or Gradual?

Although Tsong Khapa makes the point that the luminances can and must be freed from the instincts, by dissolving reactive energies into the subtlest mind-energy-drop at the heart, he also adds that this dissolution process is not instantaneous but gradual.¹⁹ This raises some question about whether the disentanglement of the luminances from the instincts is gradual as well. Thurman addresses this question in a long footnote to his translation by suggesting that the instincts dissolve along with *coarse* energy all at once into the first luminance of the subtle mind, and are not compatible with the *subtle* energies that support the first three luminances leading up to the *extremely subtle* energy-mind of clear light.²⁰ However, such a disjunction based on different energy levels conflicts with the basic assumption that the extremely subtle mind-energy-drop is the source of both the reactive instinct-energies which drive compulsive life *and* the proactive bliss-energies which fuel enlightened life.

Given that assumption, it seems clear that the luminous mind and its subtle energies must be equally able to operate in either of two possible modes: an unconscious, compulsive mode clouded and biased by the instincts; and a conscious, enlightened mode purged and freed from the instincts. Assuming this, the process of awakening the luminous intuitions and purging the energies and instincts of the subtle mind must be a gradual process, in which luminous intuitions and bliss-void energies increase as instinctive compulsions and reactive energies are dissolved.

In effect, we can think of the luminous intuitions as *progressive degrees of clarity within the depths of the subtle mind, brought about by disentangling intuitive consciousness from the clouding and biasing influence of innate compulsions*. In this, they reflect the extension and deepening of the work of the first sub-stage, which purged our deep symbolic processing of the clouding and biasing influence of stress-conditioned memories and the reactive neural energies supporting them. In this phase, the luminous intuitions help take the process beyond symbolic processing and energy, to free the deepest affective processing of our minds from the clouding and biases of innate compulsive patterns and the reactive neural energies that support them.

So, if the goal of the first sub-stage was freeing our symbolic mind-energy to fully merge with the blissful rhythms of expressive energy cultivated by diamond recitation, the goal in this stage is to free our deepest affective mind and intuitive energy to fully merge with the blissful openness of the heart-drop, released and accessed in the final phases of diamond recitation. Understanding this parallel is key not just to recognizing the insight-oriented aim of the second sub-stage, but also to understanding the methods that bring us to freedom of mind—to total immersion in the ecstatic translucency that is the gateway to the great perfection stages.

The Arts That Free: Diamond Recitation and Process-Oriented Intimacy

Once we clearly understand this aim—the final objective of the process-oriented path of insight—it's time to turn our attention to the arts by which it is realized: the most profound forms of diamond recitation; and the most advanced practice of sublimated intimacy. Starting with the first, Tsong Khapa spends much of his discussion of freedom of mind on reviewing and critically assessing the many traditions of advanced diamond recitation found within the classical literature and the process lineages of his day. The many methods he reviews use a broad range of arts to cultivate freedom of mind at various points along the central channel, including the navel and sexual organs, as well as the crown and heart. Some methods involve complex visualizations, others simply involve lights and syllables or no imagery. While most involve some advanced form of diamond recitation, some do not. And while some emphasize conjoining diamond recitation with real sexual intimacy, others emphasize conjoining it with simulated intimacy alone. The main point to be drawn

from this review is that there seems to be no one, exclusive way to approach this profound insight path or to reach its aim, called “the mind objective.”

In analyzing the range of traditional process methods for realizing freedom of mind, Tsong Khapa reiterates many of the points we’ve explored already in chapter 10. Wherever we find it easiest to immerse coarse mind-energy into the central channel, he emphasizes the vital importance of eventually gathering and immersing subtle mind-energy into the indestructible drop at the heart. His reason should be familiar: among all the complexes within the central channel, the heart complex plays a special role as the seat of the coarse and subtle life-support energies as well as their source in the extremely subtle mind-energy-drop. From this follows his preferred method for immersing mind and energy fully into the subtle and subtlest levels of the heart complex, namely diamond recitation, the most effective art for loosening and unraveling the heart-knot which normally blocks access to the extremely subtle body-mind.

So while he admits the potential value of methods involving other complexes like kindling inner fire at the navel—with or without intimacy—to start the descent of bliss from crown to sexual organ or to channel it back up to the crown, he locates these as introductory ways for novices to tap into the central channel. This synthetic approach uniting the arts of the mother and father traditions at different points in perfection stage practice was already well established in Tibet thanks to the *Death Terminator* lineage transmitted by Atisha. Eventually, however we tap the flow of bliss, he recommends we learn to gather it from above and below into the heart, so we can practice tapping into the indestructible drop. He says this quite clearly:



Figure 11.1 Atisha, Master of the Process Art of Inspiration

Thus, by the inner condition of the method of life-energy control however you do it, and by an outer condition of relying on union with a (virtual or actual) consort, the wind-energies and (blissful) enlightenment spirits are compressed into the heart center from the top and bottom of the body.²¹

So, when it comes to practicing diamond recitation at the heart, here as in the second sub-stage, the art of immersing awareness and energy fully into the subtle and subtlest body-mind involves channeling the flow of bliss-voids concentrically into and out of the indestructible mind-energy-drop. And, as we saw in chapter 10, those methods which guide this practice with elaborate or simple sets of syllables arrayed around a lotus, wheel, moon or sun disc, are seen by Tsong Khapa as preliminary means of gathering mind and energy, which should be gradually simplified and eliminated as practice progresses. The aim here is exemplified by the method transmitted from Naropa to Marpa using three concentric rings of syllables—outer vowels, middle consonants, and a seed-syllable hub—to cultivate the final immersion and dissolution process, marked by the successive dawn of the three luminous intuitions that culminate in the objective clear light.²² Of note, most lineages within this tradition anticipate Tsong Khapa's conclusion that, in using this form of diamond

recitation as preparation for freedom of speech, the wheel is first alternated with formless practice then removed entirely.

As for the final keys of practice for realizing freedom of mind, Tsong Khapa points to two indispensable “inner” conditions, conjoined with two possible “outer” supports. The two inner keys he defines are: (1) holding the energies from above and below in a “kiss-connection” at the heart; (2) “compressing” coarse and subtle mind-energies concentrically into the extremely subtle mind-energy-drop at the heart. The two “outer” supports are: (3) simulated sexual intimacy with a virtual partner, and/or (4) real sexual intimacy with an actual partner. Let’s touch on each of these, one at a time.

The Two “Inner” Keys to Freedom of Mind: Kiss-Connection and Compression

When it comes to the first key, essentially Tsong Khapa is referring to the same process of gathering and connecting energies from above and below at one vital point within the central channel, as in the art of vase breathing we experimented with in chapter 10. The difference here is that the focal point of that “kiss-connection” is shifted upwards from the navel to the heart, as in our meditative experiment 10.2. He makes this quite explicit: “Here (in the context of freedom of mind), holding in kiss-connection requires that you perform vase-pressure at the heart center.”²³ Of note, in discussing this key, our guide mentions the risk for novices in applying such pressure, yet assures us that, “if you know what you’re doing, this is not a big hindrance.” Essentially, this risk comes from the temptation to be impatient with the slow unfolding of the gentle path of gradual self-transformation and to push for “results” too hard, too soon.

As for the second inner key, the art of compression essentially involves the ability to gather, focus, and dissolve mind and energy into a vital point, in this case concentrically into the innermost essence of the heart. Essentially, this art amounts to a continuation of the work of loosening and unraveling the heart-knot with the help of diamond recitation. As this unraveling proceeds beyond the level of freedom of speech, we gradually experience a fuller and deeper immersion of coarse and subtle mind-energy into the heart-drop, made increasingly accessible by continued recitation. As at less profound levels of immersion and dissolution, this process is marked by the eight signs which culminate in the conjunction of the four bliss-voids with the concentric dawning of the three luminous intuitions, and finally, clear light translucence.

In reviewing this key, Tsong Khapa points out that when we’ve been able to experience the four bliss-voids conjoined with glimpses of the luminous intuitions on the path to freedom of speech, there will likely be no need for further imagery to aid the art of compression. Instead, the gradual dissolution of coarse mind-energy and subtle mind-energy into the unknotted heart will have been deep enough to give rise to the four initial signs of death—mirage, smoke, sparks, flame—and we’ll go on to experience the concentric flow of bliss-voids as subtle mind-energy melts into the drop, marked by the signs of luminance, radiance, immanence, and finally clear light. Tsong Khapa quotes the *Concise Five Stages*:

First the mirage-like experience
Arises with its five light-rays,
Second there is the moon-like luminance,
And third there is embrace by the light of the sun;
And from the night luminance there is immanence.²⁴

You’ll notice that, where a prior quote abbreviated the last four stages into one, this quote abbreviates the first four into “the mirage-like experience,” and only implies the final experience of clear light. The focus here is on the three luminous intuitions, specifically because of their key role in the analysis and purging of the subtle mind-energy-body. Given the continuity of the experience on the two stages—freedom of speech and freedom of mind—you might wonder, “What is the difference in the work on the two stages?” We already mentioned the key distinction: while the first stage focused on unlearning defensive reactions based on the symbolic imprints acquired through personal or intergenerational traumas, this stage focuses on exposing, disarming, and transforming compulsive reactions based on innate, natural instinctive patterns. More to the point, although the literature often seems to describe these stages and their attainments as all-or-nothing events, in my view, this tradition approaches the profound work of symbolic and intuitive self-analysis they map as gradual processes involving an intricate unraveling sequence in which countless, cumulative insights are aligned with corresponding breakthroughs in emotional and energetic self-mastery.

Two Sides of One Fabric: Disentangling Learned and Innate Reactivity

In particular, though I've drawn a distinction between the two stages in terms of analyzing symbolic and non-symbolic reactive patterns, our more or less conscious, learned stress-reactions and our more unconscious, instinctive reactions are so congruent by nature and interwoven by development that disentangling them is far from simple. The enmeshment of these levels is suggested by the term reserved for the unconscious level reactions—literally “instinctive constructs”—a compound that may seem like a contradiction in terms. The first word, meaning “instinctive,” “primal,” or “natural” seems to clash with the second, meaning “construct,” “concept,” or “pattern.” This tension reflects a recognition of the complex causal relationship between learned symbolic processing habits, on the one hand, and pre-symbolic, instinctive processing patterns, neural energies and chemistry, on the other. As I see it, this insight and term dovetail neatly with the psychoanalytic notion of “instinctual representatives,” which Freud used to describe how higher mental and emotional patterns reflect the demands made on the conscious mind by unconscious instincts and the energies driving them.²⁵ Likewise, the continuity between the symbolic “speech” stage of process insight and the pre-symbolic “mind” stage also reflects Tsong Khapa's depth-psychological formula of the two-tiered analysis of conscious and unconscious defensive habits on the engaged insight path:

Although this (unconscious, instinctive) mental habit does not hold (objects in this way) after analysis of the meaning of expressions, if the objects thus held (as objectively real) were to exist in fact, they would have to be discoverable by rational cognition that analyzes the manner of existence of the referents of conventional expressions. Therefore, since there is no contradiction between the fact that non-analytic, unconscious self-habits are the principal rational negates (of self-analysis) and the fact that the treatises contain only analytic negations (on the theoretical plane), one (should) not adhere to the notion that “the texts merely negate intellectual mental habits with their objects.”²⁶

Tsong Khapa clearly affirms that discursive self-analysis works because there is a structural congruence between the forms of misperception caused by conscious self-protective habits and by instinctive, unconscious self-protective patterns.

This formulation may also help explain the apparent conflict between the teaching that the instinctive patterns dissolve all at once into the first luminance and the recognition that the gradual unraveling of the heart-knot and immersion into the heart-drop involves a long process of purifying and dissolving reactive energies and instincts. The seeming conflict disappears if we assume that the conditionings layered over instincts may be resolved as early as the initial dissolution into the central channel on the way to freedom of speech, while the final disarming of the underlying instinctive patterns may only be resolved gradually as we progress to the full unraveling and immersion into the heart-drop on the way to freedom of mind. A final indication of the gradual nature of the path to freedom of mind comes in the many subtle shades of distinction traditionally made in describing the levels of realization of the clear light which is the aim of this stage, as described in this passage from the *Diamond Rosary*:

By strong application of diamond recitation
Having known the nature of wind-energy,
You cut off the instinct-driving wind-energies,
And will attain the objective in the mind.²⁷

Mother and Child: Levels and Types of Clear Light

When it comes to that objective, the tradition distinguishes many levels and shades of clear light, depending on how profound and complete is the dissolution of mind and energy which leads to it. There are many profound shifts in mind/body state that may lead to a dissolution process, marked by the experience of the eight signs culminating in clear light, but each can be distinguished based on the level and depth of that state transition, as mapped onto the process model of the subtle nervous system. The dissolution caused by natural transitions from waking to sleep, waking to orgasm, or life to death lead to different (usually faint) experiences of clear light when compared with the dissolutions caused by consciously induced transitions from waking to altered meditative states.

As for meditative transitions, the dissolution caused by immersing coarse mind-energy into the central channel leads to an experience of clear light far less profound than that caused by the dissolution of coarse and

subtle mind-energy into the extremely subtle, indestructible drop. And the dissolution caused by the partial dissolution of subtle mind-energy into that drop leads to an experience of clear light less profound than that caused by complete dissolution of subtle mind-energy into the fully unraveled heart-drop. Only the clear light realized in this final context has the depth, stability, and intensity which compares with the natural clear light glimpsed in the more or less unconscious process of deep sleep, orgasm, or death, while also being fully realized because of its fully entering and abiding within the stream of conscious experience.

Technically, the natural experience of clear light is called the “mother clear light” while that experienced through meditation is the “child clear light.” The clear light experienced through dissolutions short of full immersion into the heart-drop is called “non-free clear light,” while that experienced through full immersion into the heart-drop is the “free clear light.” A realization of clear light still mediated by a mental image of emptiness is called “metaphoric clear light,” while one that involves a direct intuitive perception of emptiness is the “objective clear light.” And a realization of metaphoric clear light in which subtle mind-energy is less than fully immersed in the heart drop is called “penultimate metaphoric clear light,” while one in which that mind-energy is fully immersed is the “ultimate metaphoric clear light.” Of course, the point of reviewing these distinctions is simply to get a feel for the way the gradual and progressive nature of the first two perfection sub-stages is mapped and experientially described.

Outer Keys to Freedom of Mind: The Nine Mergers and Three Seals

The most important aspect of this traditional mapping is the idea that reaching the goal of fully immersing coarse and subtle mind-energies into the unraveled heart-drop is not normally possible by inner meditative means alone. Traditionally, in order to reach freedom of mind, it’s said that most people will need to combine the “inner” methods of tapping and unraveling the heart-drop which we’ve surveyed with “outer” methods or conditions. The conventional wisdom is that fully unraveling the heart-knot and immersing mind-energy is only possible when we enhance the arts of diamond recitation, kiss-connection, and compression with the natural altered state of sexual orgasm or near-death experience. This insight leads to the remarkable framework of altered-state integration called the system of the nine mergers and three seals. We’ve already touched on the three seals, and will soon explore the art of reaching freedom of mind with the aid of simulated/real intimacy, Tsong Khapa’s third and fourth keys. For now though, we need to set the stage for that discussion, by exploring the nine merger system which frames the whole methodology of self-transformation on the optimal integral perfection stage.

The Nine Mergers: A Complete Framework for State-Specific Self-Transformation

Taken together the nine mergers and three seals set out a framework for using both consciously induced and naturally occurring altered states to help us get through the gateway of freedom of mind and onto the final three perfection sub-stages. In effect, the nine mergers system is a perfection stage version of the framework of narrative self-creation you may recall as the three conversions. As the conversions set out the logic for transforming our normal perception of the nodes of the life-cycle—death, development, and life—the mergers set out the logic for transmuting our normal range of mind/body states into the living-breathing fabric of a master altruist’s fully integrated body-mind.

The nine mergers come in three sets of three. Each set involves a cycle of three mind/body states which is “merged with” one of the three aspects of perfect altruism: the embodiment of truth; the embodiment of enjoyment or bliss; and the embodiment of emanation or manifestation. What this means is that the altered state in question is used as raw material to be worked, by way of the arts of the perfection stage, into one of the three fruits of the path. In the context of the perfection stage, the three fruits or forms of embodied enlightenment, respectively, are: the objective clear light mind; the pure virtual body; and the transformation of our normal body-mind into a manifestation of their communion.

The Waking State Mergers: Waking Meditative Paths to Altruistic Mastery

The first set—the waking state mergers—map the transmuting of our meditative states into vehicles for realizing a master altruist’s fully integrated body-mind. Specifically, our meditative experience of dissolution into the metaphoric clear light is merged with a master altruist’s embodiment of truth; our meditative experience of the re-emergence out of that clear light in a virtual body of blissful openness is merged with the

embodiment of enjoyment; and our meditative re-entry into the normal waking state after and in-between sessions is merged with the embodiment of emanation. Of course, on the traditional map, this set of mergers cannot take us all the way through the gateway of freedom of mind, and so must be complemented with the second or third set of mergers, which relate to the mind/body states of the sleep-cycle and death process, respectively.

Sleeping, Dreaming, and Awakening: Sleep-Cycle Paths to Altruistic Mastery

Since the sleep-cycle involves the natural dissolution of coarse, waking mind-energy into the formless state called the clear light of sleep and reemergence from that into the virtual body of the dream state, it is highly recommended as a platform for deepening our realization of clear light and, consequently, our ability to resurrect our body-mind as a virtual body of pure blissful openness. Tsong Khapa addresses this briefly in his *Book of Three Inspirations*:

(In sleep yoga) one meditates upon the heart *chakra* because it is to the petals of the heart *chakra* that the vital energies naturally withdraw when one goes to sleep. Working with this *chakra* during the waking state brings familiarity with a technology that can be utilized in the sleep yogas, to be engaged when (during the process of entering into the sleep state) the subtle energies of the luscious and succulent (side channels) naturally begin to withdraw into the central channel and the heart *chakra*. The force of the experience of the four emptinesses in general and the clear light emptiness (metaphoric clear light) in particular will be amplified. One fixes one's meditative absorption on this clear light of sleep as intensely as possible.²⁸

The manner of the application (of this same art to dream yoga is that in the process of first retaining the clear light of sleep one cultivates awareness of the four emptinesses (luminous intuitions) of sleep. After that, when dreams occur one recognizes them as such.... If in the process of dream yoga one wishes to extend the duration of one's dreams, then before going to sleep one meditates on the throat *chakra* as (one did the heart) before. As soon as the mind holds to it for a moment, then within the dream sphere one engages in whatever spiritual exercises are appropriate.²⁹

Bringing deep sleep into our practice in this way is what is meant by merging the sleep state with the truth body; and bringing dreams into our practice afterwards is what is meant by merging the dream state with the bliss body. And finally, waking up while bringing new levels of clarity and bliss to transform our embodied experience of daily life is what is meant by merging the sleep-cycle with the emanation body. In terms of the traditional mapping of the second sub-stage, this art may help us advance the depth and fullness of our realization of the penultimate metaphoric clear light closer towards the ultimate metaphor clear light, but cannot take us all the way there, much less to the objective clear light which yields complete freedom of mind. Nonetheless, using the sleep-cycle can help us progress toward freedom of mind and also have spin-off benefits on the way. Before we move on, two points may help flesh out the nature and use of this practice, especially of working with dreams.

First, Tsong Khapa clearly distinguishes this process method of working with dreams through inner fire from the method of simply bringing waking focus and resolve to stay lucid in the dream state. Although he lays out at length a range of techniques for using resolution alone, some from the process tradition and some not, in the end he insists that the depth, stability, and effectiveness of dream practice based on resolution is limited in comparison with the optimal integral practice based on inner fire. "To bypass the method of inner heat and instead to rely solely upon cultivating the power of resolution is like throwing away the trunk of the tree and keeping only the branches."³⁰ This point is relevant in distinguishing the process practice from the arts of dream-work we're familiar with from psychoanalysis³¹ and lucid dreaming.³²

Second, this tradition involves an extensive practice of working with dreams to overcome traumas, phobias and general anxiety, as well as to transmute traumatic images of ourselves, others and the world we share into ideal images of a mature altruistic self, life and object world.

During the dreaming process whenever anything of a threatening or traumatic nature occurs, such as drowning in water or being burned by fire, recognize the dream as a dream and ask yourself, "How can dream water or dream fire possibly harm me?" Make yourself jump or fall into the water or fire in the

dream. The method of training in the illusory nature of dreams entails that we take one of the dream objects, such as a vase or the like, and remind ourselves that, even though this object is appearing in the dream, nonetheless it is empty of the nature of its appearance. Recognize dream objects as dream objects.... On the basis of that understanding one transforms the dream world and its inhabitants into the supporting and supported *mandala* (i.e. ideal environment and archetypes). One meditates on how all these appearances are empty of true self-nature, yet manifest as illusions. Cultivate the vision of how all phenomena are a drama of ecstasy and void. These meditations are also to be applied to the waking state.³³

Death and Dying: Near-Death Paths to Altruistic Mastery

The final set of three mergers applies to using the process of death and dying to enhance our experience of metaphoric clear light based on waking state and/ or sleep cycle practice with the profound, natural dissolution of mind-energy in the course of near-death or real death. Tsong Khapa explains:

Should death arrive before supreme enlightenment has been attained (through the gateway of freedom of mind), and one wishes to apply the yoga for enlightenment at the time of death, then (as the death process sets in) one engages in the yogas of controlling the vital energies in order to recognize the clear light of the moment of death, using the same principles that were applied in the yoga of retaining the clear light of sleep. In this way one enters into the *bardo* (transition state) experience, applies the techniques learned through the yoga of the illusory (virtual) body of dreams, and generates the *bardo* body as the illusory body of the bardo.³⁴

So, relying on the natural dissolution of death to fully unknot the heart, access the heart-drop and deepen our experience of the luminous intuitions, we can reach not just the ultimate metaphoric clear light but the actual, objective clear light that yields perfect freedom of mind. This remarkable transformation of traumatic death into a path to enlightenment is what is meant by merging the clear light of death with the body of truth. In the transition that follows clinical death, akin to that reported by the many who survive near-death experiences,³⁵ the art of shaping the re-emergence into a virtual body like a dream body is what is called merging the transition state with the bliss-body of a master altruist. And finally, given the traditional view of intergen-erational agency (or after near-death experience), the voluntary transmission of that virtual body as a seed of altruistic mastery into another (or our own) embodied mind is called merging re-incarnation with the emanation body of a master altruist.

If the arts of unraveling the heart-knot through meditation in the waking state or sleep cycle were not remarkable enough, this third set of mergers introduces a truly incredible science of transforming even the final transition of death. Of course, this science is integral to the process tradition, and like process dream-work, deserves a volume in itself. But while the application of process neuroscience and technology to death and dying is crucial to understanding its full scope and potential, in terms of our understanding of the perfection stage, it is also in a sense a detour. This is because the mainstream of optimal integral process practice is devoted to becoming a master altruist “in this life, as quickly as possible,” to quote a traditional refrain. Even if merging the sleep-cycle with the embodiment of altruistic mastery brings us closer to unraveling the heart-knot and realizing objective clear light, we cannot actually complete our journey to perfect freedom of mind short of death without relying on the “outer” support of the first two seals.

The Virtual and Actual Seals: A Fourth Set of Mergers?

Given this, Tsong Khapa glosses over the mergers of sleep and death while discussing the freedom of mind stage laid out in Nagarjuna’s *Five Stages*, but devotes much of his chapter to his remaining two keys: the two seals of simulated and real intimacy. In fact, it’s not a stretch to think of these two as a fourth set of mergers, teaching us how to merge the dissolution, reemergence, and afterglow of sexual experience with the triple embodiment of a master altruist. In any case, viewed in light of the mergers, it’s easier to appreciate the science behind the traditional emphasis on the sexual arts of the first two seal practices. On this, Tsong Khapa quotes the *Wisdom Scepter Compendium*:

Just as, without thoroughly combining milk and sesamum you won’t get butter and sesame butter, so, without uniting *vajra* (scepter) and lotus which thoroughly combine (male and female) practitioners, you

cannot approach the three (ultimate luminous) consciousnesses (that lead to objective clear light). Through such inability to unite vagina and phallus, the concentration of great bliss is not discovered.³⁶

And in the same key, the *Five Stages*:

Of all magics, a woman's magic is most excellent.
This clearly marks the distinct three (luminous) wisdoms—
Attachment, detachment and that between—
All three come from the union of the two organs,
The connection of the scepter and the lotus.³⁷

Sublimation and Sexuality: Sacred or Profane?

Given the hypothetical model of sublimation we sketched in chapter 10, we can better understand the role of sexual imagery and practices in the perfection stage arts of sublimation. Our model strongly supports the traditional insistence that sexual imagery and practices on the process path are in not meant to attract lustful students or promote indulgent lifestyles. The key role of the biology of courtship and sexual intimacy in the perfection stage is not gratuitous or pedagogical, but a simple reflection of the fact that tapping into the subtle and extremely subtle body-mind requires more profound altered states than those accessible from the normal waking state, even in the warmblooded mode of optimal social engagement. In fact, our model suggests that mammalian forms of courtship and sexuality are the prime paradigms for the smart *vagus* disarming and recruiting the sympathetic and primitive vagal nervous systems into a socially engaged way of life. It suggests that the art of sublimation may be seen as a contemplative method of cultivating and extending the natural cycle of psychosexual maturity in humans, which leads from courtship to intimacy, intimacy to mating, mating to reproduction, and childrearing to caretaking and parental/extended group altruism.

As in the Jungian notion of the psyche as an androgynous being with feminine and masculine aspects—*anima* and *animus*—the process art of the virtual partner involves envisioning ourselves as embracing an opposite sex partner who embodies those aspects of integration which complement our gender-specific ideal self-image. If we identify with a feminine archetype of heroic altruism, we center our minds in the objective intuition of translucency oriented towards unconditional openness and envision our intuition partner as a congenial masculine archetype aligned with the blissful energy and chemistry of compassionate openness. On the other hand, if we identify with a masculine archetype of heroic altruism aligned with compassionate bliss-void energy, we envision our intuition partner as a congenial feminine archetype aligned with the wisdom of clear light translucency. In either case, our aim is to develop a strong enough sense of empathy, intimacy and communion that we can see things from both gender perspectives, without losing the sensori-motor experience of being fully embodied and immersed in intimate union.

The way the simulation works is that we imagine ourselves as vividly as we possibly can in our empty archetypal body being intimate with our intuition partner, also envisioned vividly as inhabiting an empty congenial body of light. Inside our body and our partner's, we envision the subtle nervous system with its three channels, four complexes and four syllables, only now we extend the three channels into the pelvis, opening out at the fifth complex at the tip of the sexual organ, blocked by a sapphire seed-syllable HUM. We imagine our two bodies, both sitting in meditation, the female on the male's lap or vice versa, with arms and legs wrapped around each other in passionate kiss, joined in full sexual communion. While the aim here is to bring the experience as much as possible to life, with all senses engaged—looking, hearing, smelling, tasting, and touching our partner as viscerally as possible—and rehearsing the mounting excitement, balancing the vividness of our simulation is the enlightened dignity which sees the transparency and emptiness of self, other, and our shared experience. Visually reflecting this balancing act between arousal and restraint, the sex organs themselves are envisioned in symbolic form, the male's as a diamond scepter, and the female's as a pure gem-light lotus, with their most sensitive points blocked by a sapphire seed-syllable.

This vivid simulation is then conjoined as an "outer condition" to enhance the "inner condition" of inner fire and diamond recitation. So, whatever sensual arousal we generate adds fuel to the fire, intensifying the energy available to draw up from the locked "lower doors" to meet the inhaled energy pressed down from above in a "kiss" around the AH-stroke at the navel or heart. Mastering the art of sublimation means that, whatever bliss we generate, is not meant as an end in itself to be indulged, but as a means to an end. And that begins when we restrain the normal sexual response and instead use that bliss as a platform to practice seeing through any and all the ordinary constructs we'd normally bring to such an experience. This includes deconstructing any sense of "myself" or "my partner;" any notion of physical identity or gender identity with a

reified “body;” any construct of a discrete, identifiable “experience” to be had, or a discrete, identifiable “mind,” “subject” or “self” that could have it. In describing this process of fueling inner fire by arousing the sexual response—called “the wood of the organ of truth” in the *Great Seal Drop*—Tsong Khapa quotes this compelling passage:

By closing and opening (the lower doors),
The energy encompasses the fire.
With the wood of the organ of truth,
Thereby the furor-fire burns,
Consuming the body entirely,
And all materials of the heap of notions.³⁸

Given the general point that the seal practices are indispensable to freedom of mind in this life, he goes on to explore some of the technical questions surrounding them. Among these, two main points shed light on the links between the arts of sexual intimacy and the death and sleep mergers we just surveyed. While both points impact on both seal practices, the first mainly concerns the actual seal or real sexual partner, while the second is more relevant to the intuition seal or imaginary partner.

Tapping and Channeling Bliss with the Aid of Sexual Intimacy

The first question Tsong Khapa addresses about how the bliss of sexual arousal and orgasm is channeled in the seal practices is twofold: where should we try to tap into the central channel; and once we’ve done that, where and how should we channel the flow of bliss through the various complexes? The traditional response is that we can tap into the central channel at any number of vital points, including the classical three “nose-tips” or points for energy-control, at the nostrils or mid-brow, at the tip of the sexual organ, or at the heart. In addition to these three—upper, lower, and middle “doors”—emphasized in the father process there is the navel complex where most kindle the inner fire, and, as we saw in dream practice, the throat. But while we may tap into the central channel at any of these points, the release and flow of bliss chemistry is typically localized, as descending from the crown to the sexual organ, and/or as ascending in reverse order from the sexual organ up to the crown.

This is perhaps most especially true in the context of the sexual arts in the process tradition, since the downward flow of bliss chemistry from crown to jewel, and the upwards flow of sublimation from jewel back up to crown make obvious sense given the normal physiology of sexual orgasm and its restraint. Given this orientation, we would expect the vital points to be emphasized in the first two seal practices would be either the “lower door” called the “lustful” (for cultivating bliss) or the “upper door” called the “lust-free” (for practicing sublimation). Assuming this, Tsong Khapa’s answer to this question and his explanation are not just surprising but also shed light on the real nature and mechanisms of the first two seal practices.

The Necessity and Efficacy of Heart-Centered Sexual Intimacy

Tsong Khapa’s reply is clear: even the “outer” support of sexual practices must ultimately be applied at the heart and channel the flow of bliss-voids concentrically. Given the special role of the heart, perhaps this insistence shouldn’t surprise us in itself. But, of course, applying this orientation to sexual practice, not just to meditation, sleep, and death, seems counterintuitive and is surprising. Given the many references to sexual organs in the literature, he takes pains to show that, while the flow of sexual bliss may be channeled to the “lustful lower door” and/or the “lust-free upper door” to strengthen bliss and/ or sublimation, eventually it must be channeled into the middle or “medium” door of the heart, citing the following key passage from Aryadeva’s *Integrated Practices*:

From the union of the scepter and the lotus, beginning from the crown, the enlightenment spirit melts from the 72,000 channels and flows gradually through the lustful, lust free, and their medium states.³⁹

Even more intriguing is his own explanation of why the heart-center must ultimately be used:

Here you are developing the four voids of extremely great impact according to the death process, and so it is an emergent order coming from the process of compressing the wind-energies into the heart center and a reverse order coming from a process of expanding back out from the heart center. Thus, by the inner condition of the method of meditating life-energy control however you do it, and by an outer

condition of relying on union with a consort, the wind-energies and enlightenment spirits are both compressed into the heart center from the top and bottom of the body.⁴⁰

In other words, the heart center must be used because only when meditatively channeled there can the orgasmic bliss generated naturally by sex have the same “extremely great impact” on the subtle body-mind as the death process: fully unraveling the heart-knot in which the extremely subtle mind-energy drop is normally bound. In this sense, the intensely sublimated version of sexual intimacy practiced on the optimal integral perfection stage is in fact closely linked with the death mergers. And this link helps reveal that the form of intimacy this practice involves is as far removed from ordinary sexuality as the death mergers are from the ordinary experience of dying. Naturally, such a sublimated re-channeling of sexual arousal and bliss is only possible in the context of a mind and nervous system prepared by the meditative arts of inner fire, diamond recitation, vase kiss-connection and compression. Tsong Khapa explains:

(Sexual practice fosters.) compression in the heart center, because, when you rely on previous habituation to the compression practice in the heart center, when you unite with the consort and practice the yoga of the two contemplations (compressing into and expanding out of the heart-drop), union with the outer consort serves as a condition for the compression of wind-energy into the heart center.⁴¹

Virtual Versus Actual Intimacy: The Primacy of Mind

This brings us to Tsong Khapa’s second main question about process sexual practices. Is real intimacy absolutely indispensable to reaching freedom of mind in this life, or can simulated intimacy serve as well for any practitioner under any circumstances? The focus of the question is how to read an obscure passage from the *Five Stages*:

Who finds *not* scepter-lotus (real sexual) union,
Even superficially,
Will (still) achieve (mind objective) once by experience,
Due to the potency of the yoga.⁴²

Tsong Khapa’s remarks on this question are both surprising and significant. After dismissing misinterpretations, he supports the reading that highly receptive students may have so powerful an experience during their initiation rite that their subsequent “inner” practice combined with simulated intimacy is enough for them to realize the objective clear light. Traditionally, this is taken to mean that, without even once experiencing an external, “superficial” union with a real partner, some process students may be able to achieve the same death-like depth, stability, and intensity of clear light experience as others who rely on a real sexual partner. This reading is especially clearly developed in the commentary based on the *Wheel of Time* tradition by Tsong Khapa’s main process-oriented disciple, Khedrub Je.⁴³ This partly reflects the distinctive *Wheel of Time* teaching that the central channel remains partly open naturally even in untrained humans, making the prospects for unraveling the channel knot(s) and fully accessing the indestructible drop(s) by meditation more promising.⁴⁴

This reading is remarkable because it challenges yet again the widespread misconception that process practices are meant to indulge or enhance normal sex, making it unmistakably clear that the emphasis in this tradition is on the *sublimation* of sexual energy and chemistry for the sake of mind/body self-regulation and mature psychosexual development. In a sense, it also links the sexual practices back to the dream mergers, in that it underscores the possibility for fully orgasmic experiences to be mentally generated through vivid imagination, as in the normal experience of some sexual dreams. And this explains why Tsong Khapa frames the supposed necessity of relying on a real sexual partner as advice meant for novices who need or want external support tapping into the central channel to release the flow of bliss.⁴⁵

As a corollary to this crucial question, Tsong Khapa also touches on the methods of restraining orgasm explored in chapter 10, as vital to the art of sublimating sexual energy and chemistry. As you might expect, he also reframes these methods as specifically addressed to novices who have just begun to master tapping into the central channel and are struggling to gain control of the flow of bliss energy and chemistry. While he admits the potential value of such practices in intensifying the experience and control of bliss, he also clearly challenges any reading that overstates the importance of men restraining emission or women restraining orgasm, as if such restraint or the heightened, prolonged bliss it supports was an end in itself:

As for this, for many who can hold (enlightenment spirit) without emission (or orgasm) ... though the (practice) can be claimed to produce great excellent qualities, if there is no art of uniting this (practice) with the view of voidness that decisively ascertains reality, the purpose for generating the bliss is lost.⁴⁶

As a final note, Tsong Khapa's take on the primacy of sublimation in the seal practices also helps explain another framework commonly used to describe their range and scope. Specifically, that's the rubric of sexual practices as complicated, uncomplicated, and extremely uncomplicated. This rubric describes the tradition, as part of the ritual matrix of these practices, for real sexual partners to use elaborate *mandala* stage settings and gatherings with costumes, masks, play dialogue, food, music, song, and dance, to help them envision/hear themselves and one another as archetypal beings rather than ordinary partners. Given Tsong Khapa's analysis of the elective and preliminary role of real sexual practice, and our comparative model of the disarming effect of positive facial imagery, speech tones and movements on the heart, we can easily understand the rationale for these audiovisual aids for novices. Tsong Khapa comments:

As for the need for performing those, the *Integrated Practices* says that it is for the sake of not letting the mind turn elsewhere and to mutually delight each other, meaning that the mind should not deviate from great bliss, and to mutually increase the bliss.⁴⁷

We can also readily see these as part of an organic progression to less complex ritual arts for more advanced practitioners who can leave more to the imagination, eventually leading to the most advanced, extremely uncomplicated practice that focuses simply on joining the internal process of channeling and sublimating bliss with the process of simulated intimacy.⁴⁸

Given this look at the four keys of practice on this stage, we're almost ready to translate its remarkable means and ends in terms of modern science and psychology. But before we do, it remains for us to address the culmination of the process path of insight on this perfection sub-stage: the intuitive realization of clear light that is the gateway of freedom of mind.

Realizing Clear Light: The Gateway to Freedom of Mind

However we approach the unraveling of the heart-knot and full immersion in the heart-drop, the culmination of the path of insight on this crucial perfection sub-stage is the practice of harnessing the four deepest levels of bliss to realizing the most profound forms of the four voids, which is the final attainment of the luminous intuitions including the translucence intuition of the ultimate metaphoric clear light. Tsong Khapa stresses the fact that the aim of this practice is to realize the true nature of the mind. So he insists that it isn't enough to focus on emptiness as an afterthought to the dissolution process, in the state of orgasmic bliss and complete void. Instead, he explains the traditional emphasis at this stage on the three intuitions, rather than on the clear light, is meant to counteract any tendency to rush to clear light and gloss over the subtle mind. In fact, cultivating the emptiness insight continuously through all stages of dissolution is vital to insure both the purging of each successive layer of the mind and the cumulative development of depth and stability of insight needed to achieve the ultimate realization of the objective nature of the mind. Here is how he spells this out:

Since you will not realize selflessness if you do not unite the bliss and void of the three wisdom-intuitions, they will not arise in the mode of nonelaboration (required to deeply realize clear light), and only the luminances themselves of white, red and black will arise. If you do unite the bliss and void of those three, in the actuality of the certain knowledge of the view (of emptiness) you must eliminate the subject-object dichotomy in the three luminances.⁴⁹

It's pertinent that Tsong Khapa uses the term "selflessness" here, since it underscores the fact that the crucial point of this stage is to see through even the subtlest residue of our conscious and unconscious identification with traumatic memories and aversive mind states. So it is vital for us here not just to *see* pure, blissful openness as the objective nature of our minds, but to immerse our sense of self so completely in that nature that we dissolve any lingering confusion with or clinging to an aversive mind-state as "I" or "mine." In this spirit, he unpacks the traditional emphasis on the first three luminances, especially the third, in technical terms, explaining how the depth of our immersion in the first three bliss-voids prepares the mind for the most profound, nonconceptual realization of clear light:

In general in the first three voids, by just the proportion of how great is the momentum of termination of

wind-energies, just so dense and long are the clarity and nonconceptuality of the clear light. Especially in the occasion of immanence unconsciousness, by just how great is the momentum of the loss of consciousness, just so much is the elimination of the mind's ability to distract itself to other objects and the development of immersion into clear light itself.⁵⁰

The “termination of wind-energies” and “loss of consciousness” he refers to in this passage presuppose the basic insights of process science that the mind-states accessed by full immersion into the heart-drop naturally involve the gradual dissolution of even subtle neural energies, to the point where even experts can expect a transient loss of consciousness. Likewise, “nonconceptuality” and the prior reference to “nonelaboration” are references to the fact that such profound states naturally involve a decline in symbolic processing to the point where we are less prone to distraction and more able to directly experience the mind and its reality, eventually without the intrusion of even the most accurate mental constructs which make prior intuitions of clear light “metaphoric.”

Of course, the endpoint of the second stage is not the final realization of objective clear light without any conceptuality at all. Instead, it is an opportunity to refine our mental image as far as possible by fully dissolving disturbing energies into the blissful openness of the heart-drop. Technically, the fruit of the second stage is called the ultimate metaphoric clear light, where the mind is free from the bias of reactive instincts and energies, and so can refine its symbolic image of clear light to approximate its objective reality as accurately as possible. Tsong Khapa's point here is that when we can immerse our subtle mind-energies fully in the luminous intuitions, our awareness makes a relative break with even subtle forms of compulsive self-consciousness and self-object dualism. Once we've effectively cut the umbilical cord to those familiar frames of reference, we don't permanently lose consciousness, but, as clear light dawns, we gain the greater clarity we need to glimpse the objective nature of mind, albeit in the mirror of a highly refined intuitive image. Here are Tsong Khapa's final pointers for this radical realization:

At the time of the arising of clear light, except for remembering the view of voidness and focusing one-pointedly on the import of reality, you must concentrate consciousness completely, unmoved by wind-energies, without any thinking about other objects.⁵¹

Once again, it's notable here that Tsong Khapa not only places this realization near the extreme lowest limit of human conceptuality and mental complexity, but also still assumes and describes a continued capacity to monitor, analyze, and direct our experience with discursive thought. His words make it crystal clear that freedom of mind does not mean freedom from thought, but rather from any reactive mind-energy states that would block our total immersion in blissful openness, as well as any symbolic self-object habits that might distance us from the natural clarity of our luminous mind.

The Path to Freedom of Mind in Terms of Modern Brain Science

For a modern scientific view of the subtle body-mind at the heart of this stage, we only need to recall the comparative, hypothetical model of the central nervous system sketched out in chapter 10. Assuming this model, it makes good sense that the primal sources of consciousness and our instinctive life would both be traced to the subtle and subtlest body-mind, since we've linked these with the sub-cortical and brainstem levels where consciousness and primal instincts originate in our modern brain map. More precisely, the analysis of the subtle mind and its affective life into three types of consciousness and three classes of instincts may also be translated based on our model into systemic mind-states and instinctive response-styles regulated by the three aspects of the ANS, namely: the smart vagus, sympathetic, and old vagus systems, respectively. This tentative link would help explain why the first consciousness—luminance—is aligned with instinctive patterns related to social attachment; the second—radiance—is aligned with instincts related to survival and self-protection; and the third—immanence—is aligned with instincts related to primitive withdrawal and immobilization. The association of the immanence intuition with the old vagus is further supported by the tradition that its realization leads to a syncopal episode, since these are mediated by the old vagal freeze reflex.

Assuming this hypothetical alignment, it makes sense that learning to master these sources and instincts would involve tapping the central channel and accessing the vital heart-drop, since our comparative model has linked these steps to developing conscious self-regulation of the ANS, by enhancing our conscious control over its three sub-systems *via* the smart vagus. Specifically, this would suggest that gaining profound freedom of mind requires the art of diamond recitation, since slow breathing and breath-holding deepen the down-regulation of fearful attachment and defensive reactivity, by enhancing smart vagal control of the cardio-

respiratory oscillator thought to cross-regulate sympathetic and old vagal tone. This linkage is further strengthened by the teaching that regulating states of consciousness and primal instincts at the deepest possible level requires completely un-knotting the heart complex and accessing the heart-drop, by deepening diamond recitation with kiss-connection and compression/expansion at the heart. Our comparative model would also suggest that these advanced arts of tapping into the heart may take smart vagal regulation of the ANS to the next level, by stimulating the release of oxytocin and vasopressin, which mediate the mammalian modulation of the sympathetic and old vagal systems to support fearless, playful, and unconditional social engagement.

In terms of the advanced methodology of the mergers and seals, our comparative model would suggest that the reliance on more profound altered states works by offering the conscious mind access to the primitive defensive mechanisms like sympathetic fight-or-flight reflexes and old vagal immobilization, since these are involved in various ways in REM sleep, slow wave sleep, near-death experiences, sexual courting and consummation.⁵² Given that access, our model would suggest that the arts of diamond recitation, kiss-connection and compression/expansion at the heart support a progressive deepening of higher self-regulation of mind-state and instinct, mediated by both the deepening neural integration of the ANS under smart vagal dominance and by the increasing chemical modulation of the HPA axis and ANS by enhanced production and release of disarming neurotransmitters oxytocin, vasopressin, melatonin, and β -endorphin.⁵³

Finally, in terms of the fruits of this path of insight-oriented self-regulation, our comparative model would suggest that the insight path of the second sub-stage helps make it possible for us to consciously access and integrate the deepest intuitions and instincts of the body-mind, by offering reproducible methods for extending the normal regulation of cortico-limbic processing mediated by prefrontal cortex to the level of hypothalamic, core brain and brainstem processing. Though such advanced levels of conscious self-regulation and mind/brain integration are not normally seen by us as accessible or teachable, a growing body of evidence gathered from process adepts and novices strongly suggests the contrary.⁵⁴

The freedom promised by this path is a radical freedom of mind that involves not just breaking the hold of aversive conditionings from childhood or adult trauma but also breaking the grip of unconscious instincts for fear-based attachment, reactive self-protection, and primitive immobilization and withdrawal. It reflects not just freedom *from* the grip of mind-states driven by traumatic conditioning and primitive stress-instincts, but freedom *to* fully immerse ourselves in our natural potential for mind-states of intuitive clarity and blissful openness. By freeing us to make these deeply positive states our new normal, the attainment of freedom of mind would not just be an incredible boon for us as individuals, but an even more incredible revolution in our potential for unconditional social engagement, including exceptional psycho-sexual integration and exceptional altruism.

The Path to Freedom of Mind in Terms of Modern Psychotherapy

In terms of the insights and methods of contemporary psychotherapy, this profound level of integration of conscious and unconscious, mind and body, is hardly conceivable from the perspective of mainstream therapies. Of course, there are less conventional forms of psychoanalysis, dynamic and somatic therapies which do offer analogues for the second perfection sub-stage. Although no one modern therapy integrates the broad range of process insights and methods that clear the way to such complete freedom of mind, there are several that offer partial analogues for the inner approach of this stage, and some that offer analogues for its outer approach. In particular, the inner approach of the stage may be compared with those of the Kohutian and Lacanian schools of analysis. And the outer approach may be compared with those of Jungian and Reichian analysis.

The Inner Path of Selfless Desire: Kohut and Lacan

In terms of its inner approach, the second sub-stage resembles those schools of analytic psychology which believe we can delve deeply into what is normally the unconscious mind, and gradually eliminate unconscious self-imposed blocks to our natural capacities for clarity and love, deepening and expanding our primal interconnectedness with others. In Kohut's conception, the development of the self revolves around our natural capacity to merge with others, as the infant originally did with mother, guided by our empathic ability to see and connect with the inner life of another. With the help of attuned and "mirroring" others, Kohut believed, our tripartite minds naturally avoid the fragmented, compulsive mode of life Freud described, in which the traumatized ego is powerless over a punitive conscience and instinctive drives. At our best, our

narcissism is not self-enclosing, but increasingly opening us through empathy with others to allow the development of mature self-love, healthy intimacy, and eventually the expansive mode of engagement he called “cosmic narcissism.”⁵⁵ Of course, such growth involves the ability to use empathic bonds to expose and see through traumatic self-object constructs and the attachment, aversion or primitive narcissism which anchor them. The aim of this process of self-analysis is the freeing and expanding of our most profound natural capacity for unconditional acceptance, mature empathy and heroic connection to life, eloquently described by the Buddhist analyst Pilar Jennings in her recent book, *Mixing Minds*:

He called this (optimal phase of development) the *curve of life*, in which we understand, without undue despair that we are part of a life continuum that does not start with us and will not end with us. The world is something more than our original experience, and our capacity to move into this graceful recognition, argued Kohut, is our greatest psychological achievement. With this reconciliation to impermanence and connection to the larger rhythm of life and death comes wisdom, the final transformation of our primary self-interest.⁵⁶

In this sense, while Kohut’s psychology puts “self” and “self-love” first, it does so given a view of human narcissism as naturally unitive, connective, and self-transcendent, and as capable of evolving into a cosmically loving, open agency akin to the process-oriented “self of selflessness.”

Perhaps more suggestively, the deconstructive analysis of Lacan was based on the profound insight that the unconscious is not a fixed structure of mind but the product of habitual reifications of language. Given this profound insight, Lacan saw our potential to break through the reified constructs that constitute our personal unconscious and gradually come to embody our mind’s primal desire to love and be loved, the source of enjoyment or *jouissance*. Although desire is one, enjoyment has masculine and feminine forms. Lacan’s deconstructive approach to freeing these from the repression of self and culture revolved around the distinction of three “orders” of mental life: the imaginary, the symbolic, and the real. These three bear a clear family resemblance to the three natures Nagarjuna aligned with the three luminous intuitions.

Like the constructed which indicates luminance, the imaginary is the most dualistic and differentiated layer of mental life, driven by attachment to images of self and world signified or constructed as objects of desire. Like the relative which indicates radiance, the symbolic is a less differentiated, more subjective layer of mental life, the realm of the signifier driven by compulsive demands and by defensive repetitions of the death drive. Like the perfect which indicates immanence, the real is without differentiated subject and object, and is described by Lacan as a deconstructive immersion in the authentic other, “the essential object which is not an object any longer, but this something faced with which all words cease and all categories fail.”⁵⁷ Another point of resemblance is that Lacan distinguished the constructed aspect of instincts called “drives” or “demands” from the natural aspect called “instincts” or “needs.” So along with deconstructing the imaginary object-world and symbolic, signifying self, analysis clears the way to a deconstruction of drives in and through immersive dialogue with the genuine other.

Although neither Kohut nor Lacan delve as deeply into the undifferentiated, unconscious mind or offer the kinds of altered state methods that allow the level of integration sought on the perfection stage, they both assume a core level of blissful desire for selfless connectivity within the mind that bears some family resemblance to the process view of the luminous bliss-void intuitions at the heart of the subtle and subtlest mind.

The Outer Path of Sublimated Passion and Intimacy: Jung and Reich

As for the “outer” practice of sublimating sexuality, the pioneering approaches of Jung and Reich offer helpful analogues for the psychosexual methods of the intuition seal and action seal, respectively. In his contemplative model of psychotherapy, Jung incorporated not just the hermetic tradition of active imagery we compared with the art of the creation stage, but also the alchemical tradition of sublimating the instinctive energies of sex and death. This esoteric complement to Jung’s more popular archetypal imagery includes some striking analogues for the profound insights and blissful arts of the second perfection stage. In his groundbreaking book, *The Psychology of the Transference*, Jung reviewed and analyzed a medieval alchemical manuscript called the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, which revolves around an imagery of deep transformation through the sexual union of opposites, called the *unio oppositorum* in Latin. In particular, he describes the images of union—some suggesting sexual merger, some suggesting death—as symbolic of the sublimation of Eros into a source of integration and creativity:

Our pictures of the *conjunction* (sexual union) are to be understood in this sense: union on the biological

level is a symbol of the *unio oppositorum* at its highest. This proves that the union of opposites in the royal art (of alchemy) is just as real as coitus in the common acceptance of the word, so that the *opus* (work) becomes an analogy of the natural (sublimation) process by means of which instinctive energy is transformed, at least in part, into symbolical activity. The creation of such analogies frees instinct and the biological sphere as a whole from the pressure of unconscious contents.⁵⁸

In fact, after laying out the alchemical model of the mind as a mercurial fountain, whose three pipes symbolize the way the sublimation of desire dissolves and unifies the polarities of male and female, right and left, sun and moon, the text introduces the archetypes of king and queen linked in desire, leading Jung to comment:

Meditation and speculation about the mystery of the *conjunctio* were inevitable, and this would certainly not leave the erotic fantasy untouched, if only because the pictures spring from the corresponding unconscious contents—half spiritual, half sexual—and are also intended to remind us of that twilight region, for only from indistinguishable night can the light be born.⁵⁹

What follows is a series of eight images which map an odyssey from desire, convergence and union, through the stillness of death, and from there back through ascent and purification, to reengagement and reintegration. We can easily correlate the stages “naked truth,” “immersion,” and “conjunction” with the three luminous intuitions of the dissolution process; the stage of “death” is obviously linked to the clear light of death; and the stages of “ascent,” “purification,” and “return” with the luminous intuitions of reemergence process; all this culminating in “the new birth” linked with voluntary reincarnation.

On the level of process or mechanism, Jung links the art of sublimation, which drives this work, to the symbolism of the mercurial fountain:

In our picture the immersion is effected by the rising up of the fiery, chthonic Mercurius, presumably the sexual libido which engulfs the pair and is the obvious counterpart to the heavenly dove (which descends on them in the fountain).⁶⁰

In addition to the family resemblance between the fiery, three-piped fountain and the inner fire within the subtle body, the text speaks of two airs that rise from the sublimation fire to purify the mind of residues and taints,⁶¹ as well as dew showers which descend from the heavens (like the dove), purifying the spirit for its ascent.⁶² These latter images suggest links with the polar energies of the side channels fused in the art of inner fire, as well as the bliss drops that descend from the crown and help us purify the subtle body-mind.

Although Jung made only general links between some of the terms of this art and those of psychoanalysis, he did apply certain insights and methods from Western alchemy to his work with clients in psychotherapy. In particular, he used the erotic imagery of *anima* and *animus* to address the feminine and masculine aspects and energies within his clients' minds and relationships, and saw psychotherapy as a path in which therapist and client may venture together into the primal depths of the mind to undergo phases of dissolution and reemergence which foster greater self-knowledge, self-transcendence, and re-integration or “individuation.” In addition to applying this profound path of psychosexual self-transcendence to the everyday work of psychotherapy, he also applied it to his archetypal approach to dream imagery and its analysis.

As for the use of real intimacy on the process path, the first pioneer of a psychosexual approach to disarming unconscious defenses and fully integrating our vital energy was Wilhelm Reich. Troubled in later life and marginalized by mainstream analysis, Reich is still recognized for his early work developing Freud's insights into the link between sexual repression, self-preservative instincts and the development of neurotic character styles. In addition, he developed a somatically-based affective approach to psychotherapy that influenced gestalt therapy, bioenergetic analysis and primal therapy, anticipating current trends in affective neuroscience and psychotherapy.⁶³ Finally, Reich was among the first proponents of popular sex education, and was a forerunner of modern sex therapies.

Most compelling from a comparative standpoint are Reich's ideas about the way traumatic conditioning and stress-reactivity lead to a developmental convergence of defensive character traits with somatic tensions and rigidities he called “character armor.” Like the “knots” formed in the subtle body by the constricting effect of compulsive energy-swings, Reich saw character armor as anchoring reactive mood-energy states and blocking the flow of the disarming energy of blissful openness Freud termed libido and he called “orgone.” Anticipating current findings that facial expressions, vocalizations, and bodily movements have a bidirectional feedback on autonomic tone and visceral affect or vegetative state,⁶⁴ he developed a method of teaching clients

to practice deep, relaxed breathing, positive facial expressions, vocalizations, and movements, which he called “vegetotherapy.” As part of this approach, he believed couples should incorporate practicing healthy sexual intimacy into their work disarming stress-reactive character traits and body armor, with the aim of freeing their minds and bodies to tap and integrate their full natural potential for blissful openness he called “orgasmic potency,” experienced in and through “ego-orgasm.” Although he pursued his pioneering work in extreme ways that obscured his contribution, his most basic insights and methods were well ahead of his time and are practiced to this day in Lowen’s tradition of bioenergetic analysis⁶⁵ as well as in deep affect approaches to couples therapy.⁶⁶

Sex, Love, and Self-Transcendence: Process Intimacy in Perspective

The very existence of an overlap between sexuality and such advanced forms of contemplative practice raises a host of questions to which I cannot do justice here. The exceptional nature of process practices may make them seem not just daunting but frankly inconceivable to most novices or mainstream readers. This is why I find our analogies with modern therapies helpful, even if those therapies are also exceptional. Yet, like an ultra high-tech breakthrough achieved in the course of space exploration, what such extremely advanced and profound contemplative arts suggest about the powerful potential link between sexual intimacy and the liberation of our minds and nervous systems from instinctive compulsions should be known to educated moderns.

More specifically, what we’ve learned about these practices should completely dispel the popularization of Indian *tantra* as an amped-up “secret” version of sex therapy, the *Kama Sutra* or the *Joy of Sex*. On the other hand, it should also dispel the equally unfortunate misconception of the process arts of intimacy as inaccessible, sacred mysteries, or arcane rituals. The traditional case for working with the human experience and neuropsychology of intimacy and sexuality—as one among many natural platforms for deepening self-regulation and embodied altruism—is not just relevant to all our lives, but very resonant with cutting edge research and clinical approaches to optimal psychosexual development. As such, it stands alongside the process arts and sciences of death and dream-work, as one of humanity’s most complete and effective contemplative systems of mind/body self-regulation and altruistic development.

In deference to the traditional emphasis on the indispensable role of sexual intimacy in fostering the greatest freedom of mind we can reach in this life, it may help to compare the process approach to that of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFT), a recent evidence-based approach fostering couples’ psychosexual development, inspired by the thought of globally minded contemplative Thomas Merton. A few passages from Sue Johnson’s *Hold Me Tight* can help us glimpse the possibility of a deep dialogue between the process science and arts of intimacy and a key growth need for our alienated secular culture and lifestyle:

The emotional bond forged here is something that many couples have never experienced, even in the midst of initial infatuation when their bodies were flooded with passion’s hormones. It is similar to the joyous connection between parent and child, except that it is more complex, reciprocal, and sexual. As this conversation unfolds, partners see themselves and their lovers differently; they find themselves feeling new emotions and responding in new ways. They can now take more risks and reach for more intimacy.⁶⁷

With this background, Johnson contrasts a mature approach to what she calls “the neural duet” of “synchrony sex” with our culture’s addictive messages and habits:

We are told that the sexual fires that burned so brightly at the start of love inevitably burn down, just as our relationships, once filled with excitement, inexorably turn into prosaic friendships. Moreover, we’ve been taught to see sex as an end in itself. Slaking desire, preferably with a big orgasm, is the goal. We emphasize the mechanics of sex, the positions, techniques, and toys that can heighten our physical bliss. Sex is all about immediate physical satisfaction, we believe. In fact, secure bonding and fully satisfying sexuality go hand in hand; they cue off and enhance each other. Emotional connection creates great sex, and great sex creates deeper emotional connection. When partners are emotionally accessible, responsive and engaged, sex becomes intimate play, a safe adventure. Secure partners feel free and confident to surrender to sensation in each other’s arms, explore and fulfill their sexual needs, and share their deepest joys, longings and vulnerabilities. Then, lovemaking is truly making love.⁶⁸

Finally, in exploring the global implications of her approach to teaching ordinary couples how to cultivate deep, healing intimacy, Johnson traces the source of her work to Merton, a Catholic monk who was deeply drawn to Buddhism and involved in bringing contemplation to a world of action:

The view of love and lovemaking presented in this book fits with the thoughts of the Trappist monk and writer Thomas Merton, who believed that compassion had, in the end, to be based on “a keen awareness of the interdependence of all living things, which are all part of one another and all involved in one another.” It seems that if we, as a species, are to survive on this fragile blue and green planet, we have to learn to step past the illusion of separateness and grasp that we truly are mutually dependent. We learn this in our most intimate relationships.⁶⁹

As Johnson suggests, I’ve found that our most profound glimpses into the freedom of mind it takes to feel such deep interconnection come in the context of couples working on deepening their intimacy. Though even the most mature process practitioners I’ve worked with have yet to fully dive into the second sub-stage, many students and some of my clients with experience in the creation stage and/or readiness for the perfection stage have reported tastes or glimpses of the kind of deep, instinctive disarming which yields full freedom of mind.

Intimacy Practice for Process Novices

Even the most preliminary creation stage practice involves commitments and pledges that directly address couples’ perceptions of and feelings towards one another. Two of these, however simple, are worth pointing out here. First, there is the key guideline—based on the fourteenth pitfall—to maintain the utmost respect for the opposite sex. This guideline, like the keys to lasting love Sue Johnson recommends, aims at alerting us to the need to maintain a special quality of accessibility, responsiveness and engagement with our partners. Of course, to be genuine and consistent, it also obliges us to expose and reverse any negative bias towards members of the opposite sex in general—whether cultural, familial or personal in origin—since such biases not only block our full empathy for all, but also specifically interfere with our capacity for true intimacy with our partner.

The second element of creation stage practice that addresses couples’ perceptions and feelings is the guideline that lay practitioners envision their partner through the idealizing lens of the opposite gender archetype of their chosen practice. This guideline especially applies to moments of intense intimacy including sex, where we’re directed to see ourselves as our chosen archetype and our partners as archetypal partners. So while process practitioners on the creation stage may be far from applying the inner or outer keys of the second perfection stage, they start right away to work on transforming their perceptions of themselves and their partners to facilitate intimacy. If we recall our comparative model of process practice from chapter 10, we would expect that this seemingly artificial tool may be helpful in blocking negative self-images and transference projections that would make us feel less fundamentally safe and open to our partner. This guideline resembles the attention paid in Jung’s method of active imagery to exposing and transforming unconscious images of our *anima* or *animus* projected onto our partners, since such projections tend to block our full capacity for conscious integration and mature love.

Guidelines for Intimacy in the Mother Class of Optimal Integral Process Practices

As a final note, optimal integral practices of the mother class like the *Supreme Bliss Wheel* involve their own special set of guidelines, known as the ten exceptional pledges of mother process practice. Though we cannot give these the consideration they deserve, simply listing them here may be instructive. As you’ll see, they address the process practice of intimacy far more explicitly than the ordinary commitments and pledges of the (father class) optimal integral process. (1–2) The first two pledges—initiating all physical actions with the left hand and/or foot first—is an intriguing guideline that seems to be meant to shift the normal balance of our mind and nervous system towards the more emotionally and viscerally sensitive, less defended “feminine” side of our cerebral cortex and vagal nerve. The remaining eight pledges are mostly self-explanatory: (3) see all members of the opposite sex as archetypal beings; (4) avoid intimacy with the immature; (5) contemplate emptiness during sexual intimacy; (6) learn to restrain and sublimate passion; (7) learn to sublimate sexual orgasm; (8) practice intimacy with a virtual partner and/or embodied actual partner; (9) harness intimacy towards practice communing with the universe as a partner; (10) abandon any revulsion towards the primal

sensual experience of intimacy. Even though many of these pledges pertain to advanced stages and methods, they are presented to mother process novices as guidelines for present and future, with the clear intent of preparing the way for the process practice of intimacy.

Given this tradition, though it's neither possible nor practical for us in the context of our introductory survey to try to simulate the meditative experience of the second sub-stage, we may get a taste or glimpse of the insight path to freedom of mind by revising our practice of the feminine and masculine wisdom archetypes, *Transcendent Wisdom* and *Sheer Brilliance*. Observing the tradition of emphasizing the art of intimacy as the prime "outer" support for profound process insight, we'll close with a meditative experiment that joins these two archetypes into a wisdom couple. Remember, if you're not currently an optimal process practitioner, this experiment is solely for liberal arts purposes, not for regular practice.

Meditative Experiment 11: The Union of *Mother Wisdom* and *Father Brilliance*

*In as peaceful and uplifting a space as possible,
With or without real offerings or images
Of Transcendent Wisdom and Sheer Brilliance,
Settle into a comfortable, stable posture,
And clear your breath and balance your state
With nine rounds of alternate nostril breathing.
Now prime your energy and nervous system
By taking three or more simple vase breaths,
And, as you hold them, doing the rotating wheel
Exercise counterclockwise three times, then clockwise
Three times, and then forward and back three times.
When you've reached a balance of heightened clarity
And profound calm, recite mentally or out loud the following
Performance script, based on the purification process
Of the Wisdom Mother-Father, pausing after each section
For as long as you like to hold its imagery,
Follow the recommended breath practice,
Focus on your experience, or seal in its meaning.*

1. *Taking Refuge in the Four Healing Gems*

"In a state of true confidence and radical openness,
I take refuge in my mentor's inspiration and clarity—
A gem-like embodiment of triple kindness,
In the prime example of the Great Sage, Shakyamuni,
His enlightening teaching and altruistic community
And in all mentor-archetypes of heroic altruism.
To free myself and all sensitive beings I conceive
The altruistic spirit of pure blissful openness, and will
Develop myself and all beings as quickly as possible,
Until we gain the enlightenment to heal this world!"

1a. *Invoking the Mentor and Lineage as Heroic Altruists*

"Suddenly out of the void, six inches above my crown,
Your pure reality emits a thousand-petalled lotus
Of rainbow light, in the midst of which your translucent mind
Dawns like a sunrise reflected in water.
Bubbling up from the sun like a fish leaping out of water
Comes a 3-D sapphire light exclamation point,
Resonating with the loving sound of your voice,
Beaming a rainbow aura everywhere that purifies
The destructive habits and instincts of all living beings,
And delights the enlightened, melting the whole multiverse
Into gem-toned lights that melt into the exclamation point,

Intensifying its light until it emits a rainbow
 Aura in which you assume your embodied form
 As *Transcendent Wisdom-Sheer Brilliance*, mother and father
 Of all enlightened beings and all master altruists.
 Seated in meditation, facing forward, hovering
 Just inches over my crown, your golden complexion
 Glows with light and warmth like the sun,
 And the wisdom crown before your topknot
 Holds a mini blue Buddha *Unshakeable*.
 Your right hand holds the light saber of wisdom overhead,
 And your left, embracing the small of your partner's back,
 Holds the stem of a lotus that blossoms a wisdom text
 At your left shoulder. Straddling the father's lap, you sit
 As the sunrise gold *Wisdom Mother*, your arms and legs
 Embracing your partner, holding a chopper and skull-bowl.
 Your third eye sees with non-dual intuition,
 And the wisdom tiara before your topknot
 Holds a mini blue *Lady Reality*.
 At ease in heavenly silks, you bear the marks and signs
 Of perfect altruism, and the living gems of transcendent virtue.
 Above your head, like a stack of suns, sit all the mentors
 Of the great seal tradition, above whom sits the prime *Wisdom*
 Mother-Father, all appearing exactly like you!"

1b. *Inviting the Mentor and Lineage to Bless Your Efforts*

"Your form glows like a brilliant sun, lit from within
 By the diamond OM, ruby AH, sapphire HUM
 Seed syllables on moon discs at your crown, throat and heart,
 Beaming gem-lights to invite your spirit and the pure genius
 Of all mentors to melt into my vision and merge as one!"

2. *Welcoming Mentor and Lineage into Your World*

"In the presence of your clarity, all experience has the taste
 Of blissful openness, pervading the mind and all the senses!
 I HAVE A PURE NATURE WHICH IS
 THE NATURAL PURITY OF ALL THINGS!
 In the crucible of the clear light of bliss, my five mind/body
 Systems and elements melt and transform into healing
 Elixir, the quintessence of the five pure intuitions.
 OM AH HUM HA HO HREE! (3X)
 Welcoming you all gratefully into my world, I offer
 A sun-shower of sense delights—scented waters,
 Incense, flowers, lights, music, and delicacies—
 Converging toward you from everywhere, horizon and sky!
 Fully and freely I share with you all my resources,
 Virtues, every aspect of my intimate life—
 Transformed by healing the elixir of my blissful openness,
 Plus this precious earth, with its oceans, continents,
 Wonders, forests, waters, and infinite web of life.
 Perfectly pleased, the primordial *Transcendent Wisdom-
 Sheer Brilliance Mother-Father* and all the mentors
 One at a time, melt into you and merge as one!"

2a. *Requesting and Receiving Consecration*

"Intensified by absorbing the genius of the lineage,
 And enjoying the singular taste of these blissful offerings,
 The sapphire HUM at your heart beams gem-lights everywhere
 Inviting the five Mother-Father Transcendent Ones
 To consecrate you and grant me initiation.

The couples come holding vases of wisdom elixir
Which they pour into you crown, filling your body/mind
And overflowing as Mother-Father Blue Buddha crowns.
MAY THE CONSECRATED VOWS
OF ALL THE TRANSCENDENT SHINE!”

3. *Fully Disclosing Faults, Limits and Blocks*

“Regretting all the negative instincts and habits I’ve acquired,
All that limits and blocks me from mastering inner fire,
From the depths of my heart I regret every one of them now,
And firmly resolve with your help to avoid and unlearn them all.”

4. *Vicariously Enjoying the Power of Inner Fire*

“Though all things are empty of any non-relative being,
With gratitude I enjoy your perfect freedom of mind
And the power it gives you to embody pure bliss and light,
And refine the wisdom that yields your master’s communion.”

4a. *Enhancing Enjoyment with the Four Boundless Moods*

“May all beings have real happiness and its causes!
May we all be freed from all suffering and its causes!
May we all enjoy and savor all excellent things!
May we all know unwavering equanimity!” (Repeat 3X)

5. *Requesting and Receiving Blessings*

“Mother-Father of bliss and clarity, please bless my body-mind
With your pure intuitions, help me focus my awareness
And purify my energy so I can open and clear
The channels and complexes of my central nervous system,
Balance and gather my sun and moon energies into
The central channel at my heart, unlock my heart-drop,
Master the flow of bliss and realize innate wisdom!”

“Moved by your love for me and all life, MOTHER-FATHER,
You enter into a full embrace and melt into bliss
That flows from your crown and sexual organs into your hearts,
Which merge into one jewel drop of orgasmic bliss-complete void,
Melting into my crown, into my central channel,
Radiating warmth, bliss and light, so I can see and feel it
Opening and clearing the channel both frontwards to mid-brow
And downwards to my throat, heart, navel, and sexual center.
Savoring the drop’s warmth, bliss and light, I see and feel it
Light up and clear my crown complex, with its diamond
Exclamation point, then flow to light my throat complex,
With its inverted ruby exclamation point, then flow
To light my heart complex, with its sapphire exclamation point,
And finally flow to light up and clear my navel complex,
Merging with its inverted ruby exclamation point, until
It intensifies the navel point’s innate warmth and light.
Focusing now on that ruby point, I see and feel it
Glowing with heat and light like a ruby-seed tongue of fire,
Fanned to greater heat with each breath, its starts to flare
From its brazier and point and burst from its tip into flame.
Kindled now, I take some vase breaths to ignite inner fire,
Melt and savor pure bliss and seal it with emptiness.”

*Now slowly draw breath in through both nostrils, see and feel it
Filling both your side channels down below your navel and into
Your central channel. Nodding your head and swallowing, gently
Press the breath into your navel complex, and hold it down onto*

The fiery ruby-seed there. Now tone the muscles of your pelvic Floor, and see and feel yourself embracing your (virtual or actual) Partner, drawing whatever sensual energy you've aroused up Your central channel to your navel complex, holding it up to The fiery seed, to meet the breath above in a kiss. Now hold your Breath and savor that kiss as long as you can, but well before any Distress, start letting it go, gently and slowly, up though the fiery Ruby point, up the central channel to the crown, where it reenters The side channels and leaves out the nostrils. As you repeat this 3, 7, or 21 times, taking care not to strain or push yourself, see and Feel the fiery ruby exclamation point at your navel burn and Blaze more and more, until its flame-tip threads its way slowly up The central channel, melting the sapphire point at the heart, until It drips like wax into the fire, then threading up to the throat, Kindling its ruby inverted exclamation point to burst into flame, Sending the flame-tip up to the diamond point at the crown, Heating it until it too starts to melt and drip like wax, releasing The flow of bliss-chemistry. As it flows throughout your nervous System, downwards from crown to pelvis then back up to your Crown, And finally permeating to the core of your being at your Heart, imagine your sense of self melting gradually Into more Intense bliss and more perfect openness. As you try to immerse Your awareness and energy as fully and deeply as possible into Blissful openness, reflect on savoring and sharing that taste with Your (virtual or real) partner, and practice letting go of patterns Of fearful attachment, angry defensiveness, and shame-bound Isolation, finally savoring and sharing real freedom from fear, Anger, and shame-based blocks to communion with your partner And the world we all share.

As you immerse your bliss-energy in translucent openness, Observe your in-breath, pause and out breath themselves as the Diamond recitation of OM, AH, HUM, and reflect that your Subtlest breath-drop-mind knows no distinction between self And other, subject and object, body and mind, and lacks even the Subtlest hint of any non-relative being, essence, nature, identity, Or objectivity (3 or more breaths). Seal the process by affirming Your enlightened pride & confidence:

**"I AM THE SELF WHOSE NATURE IS
THE DIAMOND INTUITION OF OPENNESS!"**

5a. Self-Consecration: Embodying Pure Inspiration

*"From the womb of emptiness our clear light mind becomes
A vast rainbow lotus with sun and moon cushions
From which my affirmative thought bubbles up as a sapphire
Light syllable HUM, in which all our vowels and constants,
Neural energy and mind merge as one, beaming a rainbow
Aura, within which we take bodily form as the sunrise gold
Brilliant Wisdom Father-Mother, in blissful embrace,
Holding a light saber and text, chopper, and skull-bowl,
Symbolizing the union of great bliss and pure clarity!
Lit from within by a diamond OM, ruby AH,
Sapphire HUM on moon discs at our crowns, throats, and hearts,
We beam rainbow lights everywhere to invite all altruists
To melt into us and merge as one, while wisdom muses
And geniuses consecrate us with pure bliss-void nectars,
Overflowing as blue Buddha and Buddness crowns."*

6. *Requesting Constancy as you Practice Freedom of Mind*

“Recognizing this imagery as a mere simulation,
I ask you, mentor, and the whole great seal lineage,
Please stay with me until I reach perfect mastery!
Moved by your love for us and all life, Mother-Father,
You instantly come to my crown, embrace and melt
Into one, indestructible drop, like a rainbow tear for joy,
Which slips through our crowns and throats to melt into our hearts,
Merging your blissful openness with ours, intensifying our light,
Energy and warmth until they fill us as a flame fills a lamp
And a nectar, a vase, rippling out in our actions
Until all those around us at home and on earth become
Wisdom Mother-Fathers, returning joy waves to our hearts!”

*Now pause to absorb and drink in the warmth and moisture of
That joy, as long and deeply as you can, and then prepare to close
The session:*

“Suddenly the earth, my meditation space and my body
All return to their normal appearance, and the three syllables
Sealing my body-speech-mind melt into my heart-drop.”

7. *Dedicating Yourself to Embodying Non-Dual Wisdom*

“With any errors or omissions I’ve made in this practice
Out of ignorance, misperception, lack of resources or art,
I ask you, mentor, please be patient and all-forgiving!
Any positive insight or energy I’ve gained through this practice
I dedicate to being always inspired by your teaching,
Until I myself become the *Wisdom Mother-Father*,
In this very lifetime, as quickly as possible!
By mastering the arts of inner fire, recitation, and intimacy,
May I gain the freedom to enlighten myself and all life!”