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INTERIORIZED FIRE RITUALS IN INDIA AND IN TIBET

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The term "interiorization of ritual" bears a multitude of meanings. It may pertain to a mental performance of the ritual; to the replacement of the ritual with a continuous process of life, such as breathing or eating; to a particular way of life, such as renunciation; to an actual performance with an inner interpretation; to the replacement of the external ritual with an internal one, and so forth (following Bodewitz). This paper analyzes different forms of the interiorized ritual *par excellence*—the fire ritual—as it has existed in Tibetan culture, against the background of Indian precedents. Among the practices discussed here are inner heat (*tapas* and *gtum-mo*), breathing (*prāṇa*) and the subtle body (*rtsa-lung*), sexual yoga, food yoga, mental fire offerings and the fire offering of enlightened wisdom. The paper concludes with an examination of the interrelationships of the various interiorized fire offerings as they are seen in Tibetan writings. Since most major Tibetan practices are presented in this context in terms of the fire ritual, this examination elucidates the relative status of these practices from a theoretical point of view. It also sheds light on how diverse and autonomous practices come to be synthesized into a unified path to enlightenment.

FIRE OFFERINGS

IN *DĪGHANIKĀYA* I.5 THE BUDDHA is said to have declared that the optimal form of fire sacrifice is the Buddhist path to the attainment of *nirvāṇa*.¹ In a typical heuristic strategy frequently encountered in Indian Buddhist texts, the Buddhist path is contrasted to non-Buddhist brāhmaṇical practices in order to emphasize the superiority of the former. This is yet another facet of an ongoing inter-religious dialogue, however one-sided it may at times appear to be, between Buddhism and Brahmanism in India.² The presentation of new practices as higher or truer

forms of older ones is, however, more commonly not an *inter-* but rather an *intra-*religious phenomenon. In spite of the profound alternations affecting vedic religion as it evolved into Brahmanism and what falls generally under the rubric of "Hinduism," the post-vedic traditions often continued to communicate the new by employing the old vedic terms. The Vedas and their rituals lent an orthodox and canonical justification to a wide number of innovations (B. Smith 1989: 202–16). The special status of vedic rituals in India is well demonstrated by the fact that even the heterodox traditions³ at times found it advantageous to claim some sort of relationship with vedic practices, as occurs, for example, in our passage from the *Dīghanikāya*. Fire rituals, in particular, seem to have been so popular in ancient India that the heterodox traditions could hardly afford to ignore them. This would explain how, over the course of time, and despite the positions taken in early Buddhist scriptures such as the *Dīghanikāya*, the fire rituals of vedic origin were nevertheless eventually appropriated by Buddhism as one of many different means that might be employed on the path

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¹ The *Kūṭadanta Sutta*. For English translations of the passage, which ought to be read in its larger context, see T. W. Rhys Davids 1899, I: 173–85; Walshe 1987: 133–41. For additional Pāli scriptures which refer to the performance of sacrifice, see, in particular, Krishan 1993.

² Another well-known example of a Buddhist reinterpretation of a brāhmaṇic notion is the Buddhist representation of one of the vedic myths of creation as a mistaken perception on the part of both Brahmā, the supposed creator, and those purportedly created by him (*Brahmajāla Sutta*, *Dīghanikāya* I.1).

³ For the employment of this strategy in Jainism, see Heesterman 1985: 42; B. Smith 1989: 211–12; Lang 1994. The "heterodox traditions" are generally defined by their rejection of the Vedas as authorities, which makes it all the more interesting to find cases in which the Vedas do, in some degree, supply them with justifications for their practices.

to *nirvāṇa*—a phenomenon not unique to fire rituals. In an attempt to underline superiority of a certain practice, it was contrasted with another popular ritual, which in some way resembled it. Thanks to this resemblance the contrasted practices eventually merged together. This is common within the Buddhist religion, and even more so in Tibetan Buddhism, with its strong tendencies toward synthesis.⁴ Words of the Buddha that strongly criticized or rejected brāhmaṇical practices were subsequently taken as charters for buddhized forms of those very practices.

At the time Buddhism adapted them,⁵ Hindu fire rituals already included not only external rituals in which libations were poured into a fire, but also internalized forms of these rituals. In presenting their new practices in terms of the vedic sacrifice, the renunciation movements characterized the classical vedic ritualists by the word *devayājin*, 'sacrificer[s] to the gods', while calling their own practitioners *āmayājin*, 'sacrificer[s] to one's self'.⁶ Later Hindu schools developed the inner fire ritual still further, calling their own practices 'inner sacrifice', while occasionally condemning the outwardly performed rituals outright, as in this example from the *Liṅga Purāna*:

The aspirant who seeks salvation shall perform the non-violent sacrifice. One shall meditate on the fire stationed in the heart and perform the sacrifice Dhyānayajña (meditation). After realizing Śiva stationed in the body of all living beings, the lord of universe, he shall devoutly perform the sacrifice by Prāṇāyāma perpetually. He who performs the external Homa becomes a frog in the rock. (1973, II: 713)

Fire rituals by their very nature are particularly susceptible to a diversity of interpretations. External fire may be explicitly or implicitly related to external phenomena such as light, heat, cooking, home, incubation,

ripening, growth, fertility, purification, and so forth. When internalized, fire is akin to the heat of the living body, life, vitality, energy, digestion, anger (and related strong emotions—hatred, jealousy, etc.), sexual desire and excitation, procreation, purification, ecstatic insights, yogic or ascetic practices, etc.⁷ As Northrop Frye says in his introduction to Bachelard's *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*:

To the imagination, fire is not a separable datum of experience: it is already linked by analogy and identity with a dozen other aspects of experience. Its heat is analogous to the internal heat we feel as warm-blooded animals; its sparks are analogous to seeds, the units of life; its flickering movement is analogous to vitality; its flames are phallic symbols, providing a further analogy to the sexual act, as the ambiguity of the word "consummation" indicates; its transforming power is analogous to purgation. These links of analogy are so adhesive that they spread all over the universe. (Bachelard 1964: ii)

A common thread that runs through most of these properties, whether external or internal, is the fire's transformative power, and this power would seem to lie at the very foundation of its ritual usages. Our concern here is mostly with the interiorization of fire, a subject of great fascination throughout human history, one that crosscuts many cultural boundaries. As Bachelard states with a degree of poetic fervor necessary to do the subject justice:

Light plays upon and laughs over the surface of things, but only heat penetrates. . . . This need to penetrate, to go to the interior of things, to the interior of beings, is one attraction of the intuition of inner heat. (1964: 40)

Or, as Knipe explains:

It is precisely the fact that fire can be reduced to heat, and that heat can be seen as the final property of life (like breath), that allows for the pervasiveness of such schema as the interiorization of fire. (1975: 37)

The vedic fire ritual with its hearth, funnel, ladle, oblations, deities, and so forth has received diverse interpretations in different historical epochs and contexts to accord with then-prevailing theories,⁸ but it is very frequently instrumental in accomplishing the highest goals postulated by those theories. While Hinduism may dress

⁴ See Bentor 1995, where it is shown that certain Buddhist practices which would have been performed individually and were even competing with each other at various points in their histories, eventually were synthesized into a single comprehensive practice.

⁵ According to Strickmann, "we can confidently state that by the mid-sixth century at the latest, a Buddhist Homa rite existed in India" (1983, II: 433, see also Matsunaga 1977: 172; de Jong 1984; 96; Payne 1991: 44–46).

⁶ Heesterman 1993: 216. At the same time it should be emphasized that vedic sacrificers had much broader concerns than merely that of propitiating the gods (B. Smith 1989; Heesterman 1993; etc.). On *āmayajña*, see Coomaraswamy 1942; Bodewitz 1973: 304–5.

⁷ See also Miller 1971; Knipe 1975; Lévy 1982; Kaelber 1989; D. Smith 1990.

⁸ See Deussen 1906: 63.

later practices in the terms of vedic rituals, thereby rendering them canonical and orthodox, Tibetan Buddhism stands in no need of vedic authority. The continuous employment of internalized fire rituals in Tibet appears to be part of a general process of interiorization that took place in both Hinduism and Buddhism, especially in their systems of Yoga and Tantra. The transformative power of the fire is especially significant in tantric ritual, where the attainment of an inner transformation is the prime objective.

Even though the interiorization of vedic rituals has been extensively discussed by such scholars as Eliade, Varenne, Biarreau and Malamoud, and Heesterman, it is essential to bear in mind that at times these writers refer to different forms of interiorized rituals.⁹ The term “interiorization” may pertain to a mental performance of the ritual, to the replacement of the ritual with a continuous process of life such as breathing or eating, to a particular way of life such as renunciation, to an actual performance with an inner interpretation, to the replacement of the external ritual with an internal one, and so forth. In the following discussion the various processes of interiorization will be analyzed in accordance with Tibetan categories. While it may seem to be a suspect procedure to employ a schema based on later Tibetan notions, we hope to show that doing so provides us with important analytical tools in our search for ritual-historical insights in this important area. The following is my own summary of classifications of inner fire rituals as found in various Tibetan writings.¹⁰

1. Fire offerings based on the inner heat (*gtum-mo*) and the subtle body (composed of *nāḍi*, *cakra*, and *prāṇa*) as part of the Perfection Process.
2. Fire offerings of great bliss performed together with a consort (visualized or real), as in the third initiation.
3. Food ritual (*bhojanavidhi*), in which food is offered to the deities residing at one’s heart.

⁹ See Bodewitz 1973: 337, n. 84.

¹⁰ No single Tibetan work I have consulted recounts all five of these categories in a straightforward manner. Most writers use a threefold classification of outer, inner, and unexcelled fire rituals. The inner and unexcelled categories are often further subdivided. Still, at least four of these five categories are mentioned by several authors. For example, Abhayākara Gupta, followed by Tsong-kha-pa, lists my nos. 1, 3, 4, and 5. The Sa-skya-pas—Kun-dga’-snying-po, Phags-pa, and Nor-chen Kun-dga’-bzang-po—list my nos. 1, 2, 3, and 5. See also Kong-sprul Blo-gros mtha’-yas (according to the translation in Skorupski 1995: 7).

4. Mental fire offerings.

5. Fire offerings of the Great Enlightened Wisdom which destroy ignorance, burn the *kleśas* and consume dichotomies.

Each of these categories will be discussed separately, first by presenting some well-known vedic and upaniṣadic examples, and then, the Tibetan forms.

1. *Fire Offerings of Breathing, Inner Heat, and the Subtle Body*¹¹

In the upaniṣads one of the most widespread forms of interiorization of the vedic sacrifice considers life itself—together with the physiological functions that maintain it—as an unceasing sacrifice. Both breathing and the consumption of daily meals are regarded as permanent fire sacrifices. The origins of such interiorization may be found, in the classical vedic world, among the traveling brahmins who temporarily find themselves far from their sacred fires. The brahmins transform the sacred fire into their breath, and when the sacred fire is needed their breath may then be used to sacralize any fire for the ritual.¹² The brāhmaṇa texts expanded the idea of the traveling brahmin, teaching that the *agnihotra* is, in fact, breathing or life. As long as one breathes, the *agnihotra* is being performed.¹³ According to *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* 29.5, a brahmin who is physically unable to perform the external *agnihotra*, after transferring the fire into himself, consumes the two *agnihotra* oblations himself, with the usual ritual.¹⁴ Such methods of expiation, of only incidental importance to the classical vedic ritual, became central in upaniṣadic thought, where they were interpreted as a continuous and uninterrupted inner *agnihotra* in accordance with the theories then current, which emphasized internal processes.¹⁵ Other brāh-

¹¹ This section is included in Bentor 1997.

¹² Olivelle, unpublished, MS 4; see also the *Baudhāyana Dharmasāstra* 2.10.17; Bühler 1882: 273–79; Biarreau and Malamoud 1976: 57–80; Olivelle 1992: 89.

¹³ *Jaiminiya Brāhmaṇa*, Bodewitz 1973: 64, see also pp. 237–38. A similar passage is found in *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 11.3.1, Eggeling 1882–1900, V: 46–48.

¹⁴ *Śrautakośa* I.1: 185–86; see also Bodewitz 1973: 231–34, 321.

¹⁵ See Bodewitz 1973: 221ff. Other fashions in which the vedic texts explain the inner *agnihotra* as a continuous, uninterrupted sacrifice are found in the *Aitareya Āraṇyaka* (Keith 1909: 257) and *Kauṣītaki Upaniṣad* 2.5 (Hume 1921: 310); see also the *Prāṇāgnihotra Upaniṣad* (Varenne 1960).

manical texts explicitly identify the sacred fires of the *śrauta* rituals with the three or five breaths.¹⁶

Such an interiorization of fire is related as well to the notion of *tapas*,¹⁷ inner heat, which, like breath, means life. The practice of *tapas*, attested already in the *Ṛgveda*, ideally accompanied every vedic sacrifice, and contributed to its accomplishment. *Tapas* is accumulated through different practices, and these practices on their part serve to increase the practitioner's inner heat. This fruitful notion of *tapas* was adapted by various religious systems in India (see Knipe 1975; Kaelber 1989: 85). Also, the yogin was assimilated to the *tapasvin* of the vedic sacrifice (Eliade 1969: 108–9). Though the upaniṣadic passages that considered breathing a form of internal offering did not refer to controlled breathing (*prāṇāyāma*),¹⁸ but were concerned with the unconscious and continuous form of breathing, already the Vedas had mentioned breath control as one means of accumulating *tapas*.¹⁹ Some of the major upaniṣads, including the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* (6.18–26), also prescribed the yoga of breath control. This conceptualization of human physiology in sacrificial terms received a special interpretative twist in the systems of Yoga and Tantra. All these concepts of breathing (*prāṇa*) as an interiorized fire ritual, of inner heat (*tapas*) and of controlling the breath (*prāṇāyāma*) were combined together in the yoga of the subtle body, the first among the inner fire rituals which concern us here.²⁰

The yoga of the subtle body²¹ especially emphasizes inner experiences of nonduality as the basis for libera-

tion. It is precisely because the human body is such an important source of suffering, according to general Buddhist theories, that it serves in the Tantra as an instrument and a location for overcoming suffering. It is intriguing to note the strong resemblance between the Indian concept of the subtle body and the system of internal conduits splitting into right and left channels as described by Plato, in *Timaeus* 77c–e (see McEvelley 1993). It is also of significance that even though described in terms similar to those of the yoga of Patañjali, the Tibetan yoga of the subtle body, like the yoga of the *Maitrī Upaniṣad* (see Zigmund-Cerbu 1963; Wayman 1977: 164), consists of six limbs (*ṣaḍaṅgayoga*), in distinction to the eight-limbed yoga of Patañjali. While the names of the yogic limbs in both the eight-limbed and six-limbed systems are similar, the interpretations they receive, particularly in the context of the yoga of the subtle body, set the six-limbed system apart from the yoga of Patañjali.

During this six-limbed practice (of which various descriptions are available²²) inner heat (*gtum-mo*) is generated in the navel (or in the junction of the central channel with the *ro-ma* and *rkyang-ma* below the navel) and blazes up through the central channel. As a result the *bodhicitta*, the white drop located at the head's center, melts and meets with the red drop, the *gtum-mo* fire. The practice culminates in the realization of supreme nondual enlightened wisdom. *Tapas*, which in pre-tantric practices was regarded as a potency, becomes here the inner heat of *gtum-mo*, which is again a potency enabling the goal of this particular practice. The simple notion of "breath" (*prāṇa*) had by this time evolved into a complex system of channels of which the subtle body is made.

How does the Indo-Tibetan Buddhist tradition present the yoga of the subtle body in terms of the fire ritual? The *Śrī-Vajradāka Tantra* (*Dpal Rdo-rje-mkha'-gro*, Toh. 370, Tog Palace 336), an important scriptural source often cited in subsequent presentations, explains:

(Varenne 1960, II: 106–9). In Tibetan Buddhism fire is more commonly related to the navel alone. This is also a part of a system which associates the five elements (earth, water, fire, air, and space) with five layers of the body (knee and below, pelvis, heart, eyebrows, and top of the head, respectively) found in the *Yogattva Upaniṣad* (Eliade 1969: 130–31).

²² For the Kālacakra system, see Dhargyey 1985: 128–53; Sopa 1985: 149–50; Cozort 1986: 124–28; Mullin 1991: 237–56; Orofino 1996, and references there. For the Guhyasamāja system, see Wayman 1977: 163; Cozort 1986: 129–31; Orofino 1996, and references there.

¹⁶ One example is found in *Vaikhānasa Smārta Sūtra* II.18 (Caland 1929: 65–66).

¹⁷ Eliade 1969: 106–11; Knipe 1975; Kaelber 1989: 84. See also Kloppenborg 1990 on the Buddhist redefinition of *tapas*. For heat in contemporary Indian rituals, see Beck 1969; Babb 1973.

¹⁸ Bodewitz' objection to Eliade 1969: 112, who makes this point, can be found in Bodewitz 1973: 239. On *prāṇāyāma* as a step in the present-day Hindu fire offerings, see Shingo 1993: 201.

¹⁹ Eliade 1969: 112, 337; Kaelber 1989: 18, 58; Zysk 1993: 202–3.

²⁰ In the syncretistic *Bhagavad Gītā* (4.25–30) also, yoga was interpreted in terms of sacrifice.

²¹ For the subtle body according to Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, see, for example, Geshe Kelsang Gyatso 1982: 17–32; Geshe Sopa 1985. The Hindu *Prāṇāgnihoṭra Upaniṣad* 27–32, which speaks about the location of four-plus-one sacrificial fires within the human body, locates these fires in the head, mouth, heart, and navel, while the fifth one is related to procreation.

The fire wood of the *skandha* and so forth should be burnt in the fire of Enlightened Wisdom which blazes from the navel *maṇḍala* and is blown by the wind of *karma*. The Brahmā-fire abides at the waist; the *rkyang-ma* is the ladle; the *ro-ma* is the head of the funnel; the handle, below the precious *vajra*, is up until the end of one's *vajra*; the skull is the vessel for the oblations. All the substances should be burnt. These are successively the implements of the unexcelled fire offerings. So it is explained to you, O Devī. (Tog Palace, vol. 92, p. 730)

Here the sticks to be burned are the *skandhas*, *dhātus*, *āyatanas*, etc., the psycho-physical constituents according to Buddhism. The fire that burns them is the fire of Enlightened Wisdom fanned by the winds of *karma*. Its hearth is the navel *maṇḍala*. The fire, here called Brahmā-fire, is located at the waist. The ladle (*dgang-gzar*, *pātrī*) is the *rkyang-ma* (*lalanā*); the *ro-ma* (*rasanā*) is the spout of the funnel (*blugs-gzar*, *sruva*), while the handle of the funnel starting from the *vajra* located at the center of the funnel up until the tip of the handle is one's own *vajra*, that is to say, the male sex organ. The skull is the vessel for the oblation, which is the *bodhicitta* (*byang-chub sems*), the seed, the white element.

A similar interpretation is found in the *Vasantatilakā* (*Dpyid-kyi-thig-le*) [8.23–24] of Kṛṣṇācārya (Nag-po-spyod-pa-ba).²³

The head [or] the skull is explained as the vessel for oblations. The funnel is explained as the *rasanā*. That which consists of the *lalanā* [at] the heart wheel is called the ladle. The hearth is the navel *maṇḍala*. The Brahmā-fire which is blown by the wind of *karma* is situated at the threefold junction (*sum-mdo*, *trikaṭa*).²⁴

The actual practice of the yoga of the subtle body is further explained by Kun-dga'-snying-po (1092–1158), the foremost among the five early masters of the Sa-skyapa (*sa-skya gong-ma lnga*):

Having kindled the *gtum-mo* fire at the navel center, the *bodhicitta* (white element) whose nature becomes moist and warm descends from the *Haṃ* at the head center to the throat center. Then it descends further into the heart center.²⁵ From there again it descends into the *om* at the

navel. Thereby the feeling of bliss is born, while the conceptual thoughts of the *skandha*, etc., are overcome. Finally the realization of the pure-by-nature mind is born. (p. 229, cols. 3–4)²⁶

'Phags-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan (1235–80), the last among the five early masters of the Sa-skyapa school, provides a succinct definition for this fire ritual of the subtle body. It is:

The pouring of the completely pure oblation of the seed (*khams*) with the funnel and ladle of the *ro-ma* and *rkyang-ma* into the hearth of the *nirmāṇa* wheel (the navel center), and so forth, in which blazes the immaculate and clear fire of Enlightened Wisdom. (p. 188, col. 2)

At approximately the same time the 'Brug-pa Bka'-brgyud-pa teacher Yang-dgon-pa Rgyal-mtshan-dpal (1213–58) also wrote:²⁷

One's own requisites for fire offerings are as follows: the hearth is the junction of the three channels (*sum-mdo*), the fire deity is the short *A*, the ladle and funnel are the *ro-ma* and *rkyang-ma*, the oblations are the winds and drops. (p. 96)

While in certain texts, such as the *Śrī-Vajradāka Tantra* cited above, the oblations are the gross body composed of *skandhas*, *dhātus*, *āyatanas*, etc., here the oblations are the subtle body of winds (*rlung*) and drops (*thig-le*). The fire deity here is the short *A*. This is one of the descriptions of the *gtum-mo* fire, referring to the vowel-length mark in Indic alphabets that resembles an upright filament (which is made to brighten and blaze in this practice).

Rje Tsong-kha-pa (1357–1419), the founder of the Dge-lugs-pa school, supplements these explanations for the fire ritual in his work entitled *Dngos-grub rgya-mtsho*. The *ro-ma* is the funnel and the *rkyang-ma* is the ladle,

²⁶ Because this passage is written as a commentary, parts of it are paraphrased to avoid the repetition of words from the source-text. The words *padma*, *rdo-rje*, *sa-bon*, *bla-med gnas*, and *ye-shes me ni skyes gyur-bas* that appear in Kun-dga'-snying-po's text refer to Nag-po-pa, *Bde-mchog 'Khor-lo'i Sbyin-sreg* (Toh. 1447 = Toh. 1537, Derge, vol. 21, p. 585 and vol. 23, p. 223). These verses of Nag-po-pa are translated in the section on the fire ritual of great bliss below.

²⁷ In the table of contents of the book in which this work appears the author is given as Sa-skyapa Rgyal-mtshan-dpal-bzang. Based on the colophon of this work itself, however, Dan Martin (personal communication) identifies him as the 'Brug-pa Yang-dgon-pa Rgyal-mtshan-dpal.

²³ Samdhong Rinpoche and Dwivedi 1990; Toh. no. 1448.

²⁴ Here the fire is explained only as the Brahmā-fire and it is situated not at the navel but below it at the junction of the three subtle channels.

²⁵ Literally: "into that which is like the *chu-shing* flower of the heart" (see *Samvarodaya Tantra* 7.17).

the navel wheel is the hearth, and the head wheel is the vessel for the oblations; the head and also the skull. The oblations are like the liquid of *bodhicitta*. The flame of the fire offerings is the inner heat (*gtum-mo*) whose nature is the fire of the red *bodhicitta*, the elemental essence. This elemental fire, the constituent of blood, dissolves the oblation of semen which abides at the head. Since, for the most part, it [the fire, red *bodhicitta*] ascends through the *ro-ma*, the channel in which it abides is called the funnel, because it is the channel which oblates the elixir (*bcud*). Since the melted semen descends, for the most part, through the *rkyang-ma*, that channel is called the ladle which is to be filled; it is because the *ro-ma* fills it with oblated elixir. The Brahmā-fire, the elemental essence, abides below the navel at the secret lotus. But because it is considered for the most part always to abide at the navel, it was also explained to abide at the navel. The equivalent of the fan which enkindles the fire is action (*karma*). Both object of meditation and the senses should be united. Through meditating on the coëmergent *gtum-mo*, when the mind is stable, having united the winds of the *ro-ma* and *rkyang-ma* in the central channel, the fire of yogic *gtum-mo* becomes “one taste” with the Brahmā-fire. Thereby the blazing *gtum-mo* melts the oblation. Hence coëmergent bliss is bestowed. (pp. 195–96)²⁸

Here Tsong-kha-pa identifies the implements of the fire ritual with the four centers (wheels, *cakra*, 'khor-lo) of the subtle body. The head of the funnel is the *ro-ma* at the throat center and the head of the ladle is the *rkyang-ma* at the heart center. The navel center in which the *gtum-mo* fire or red *bodhicitta* burns is the hearth, while the head center containing the oblations of semen or white *bodhicitta* is the vessel for the oblations. The fire dissolves the oblation of semen. On the whole, the fire or red *bodhicitta* ascends through the *ro-ma*, which is therefore considered to be the funnel. The white *bodhicitta*, the melted semen, descends through the *rkyang-ma*, which is therefore called the ladle. The purpose of this yoga is the merging of the winds of right and left subtle channels in the central one, as well as the merging of the oblater with the oblated, the sacrificer with the sacrificed, or the *gtum-mo* fire with the melted semen. Thereby the realization of nonduality is attained and the most supreme bliss bestowed.

As the Rnying-ma-pa Sog-bzlog-pa (b. 1552) points out, “this is the yoga of the Perfection Process” (p. 10). The practice itself is no different from the yoga of the

subtle body that is a major component of the Perfection Process (*rdzogs-rim*). Its interpretation here, however, is in terms of the fire ritual. The vedic fire is lit by rubbing together two fire sticks (*araṇī*, du.), while the inner fire of *gtum-mo* is considered to ignite by means of the friction of the winds in the *ro-ma* and *rkyang-ma* and their penetration into the central channel.²⁹ In the vedic *agnihotra* the fire consumes the oblations for the purpose, among others, of conveying them to the gods. In certain among the principal upaniṣads the offering to the *prāṇātman* is performed in order to realize the union of the *ātman-brahman*. The present tantric practice is centered on the inner fire of *gtum-mo* which consumes dualities.³⁰ As the vedic Agni, a messenger who conveys the offered oblations to the gods, links the poles of heaven and earth, the practice of inner heat unites the opposite poles of the red and white *bodhicitta*.

2. *Fire Offerings of Great Bliss Performed Together with a Consort*³¹

Internal fire rituals are related not only to the yoga of the subtle body, but also to the yoga of great bliss performed with a consort, in which sexual desire is transformed into a spiritual bliss (see also Eliade 1969: 248). This would also seem to bear certain parallels with ancient Greek thought, where the sperm is considered to come from the brain and the spinal marrow (Plato's *Timaeus*, Diocles, the Sicilian school of medicine; see McEvelley 1993). While the sperm is related to the lower Eros and the begetting of offspring, affording us immortality through progeny, the brain from which the sperm originates pertains to the passion for wisdom and true immortality.³²

²⁹ Compare Abhinavagupta, *Tantrāloka* V.22, in Silburn 1988: 41–42; Bachelard 1964: 23–31.

³⁰ For a similar interpretation in Hindu Tantrism, see Silburn 1988: 88.

³¹ Although this category has much in common with the preceding category, certain Tibetan authors do distinguish between fire offerings of the subtle body which are self-blessing (*bdag byin-gyis brlab-pa*, Nor-chen Kun-dga'-bzang-po, p. 392, cols. 1–2) or based on one's own body alone (*rang-lus thabs-lđan*, Kun-dga'-snying-po, p. 229, cols. 3–4) and fire offerings performed with a consort, called in this context fire offerings of great bliss (*bde-ba chen-po'i sbyin-sreg*, 'Phags-pa, p. 188, col. 2; Nor-chen Kun-dga'-bzang-po, p. 393, col. 1.).

³² Also according to nondualistic Kashmir Śaivism: “two kinds of sexual union are to be distinguished: a worldly one, leading to the inferior domain (*adhodhāman*), and a mystical one, leading to the superior domain (*ūrdhavadhāman*)” (Silburn 1988: 186).

²⁸ I would like to thank Geshe Tshul-khrims-chos-'phel of Sera Monastery and David Molk for their help with some difficult points in this work of Tsong-kha-pa, cited here and below.

The creative aspects of the fire have long been related to sexual desire and procreation, as well as to spiritual birth.³³ The brāhmaṇas and upaniṣads contain various passages linking the fire offering to sexual intercourse and conception.³⁴ The milk offered into the fire has been related to semen and the boiling of the milk to orgasm (Kaelber 1989: 145). Also the kindling of the fire from the friction of the two fire sticks (*araṇī*) is correlated to sexual intercourse (see also Bachelard 1964: 23–31). While in the vedic rituals the two poles are the Agni fire and the Soma liquid (fire and water) (Heesterman 1993: 86), in the Buddhist tantric ritual the opposition is between the red *gtum-mo* fire and the white obladed seed. In the dominant imagery of Tibetan inner-fire practices the blazing fire, blood, sun, and the red color are associated with the female, while the male is related to the seed, milk, moon, and the white color (for other similar imageries see O'Flaherty 1980: 33–61; 1973: 278). On the whole, however, Tibetan sources contain notions very similar to those of the brāhmaṇas and upaniṣads (see also Shaw 1994: 151–52, 163–66). Phags-pa defines the fire ritual of great bliss as:

Pouring the oblation of *bodhicitta* with the funnel of the *vajra* in the completely purified hearth of the *maṇḍala* of the vulva in which blazes all around the Enlightened Wisdom fire of great passion. (p. 188, col. 2)

A notable scriptural source for the fire ritual of great bliss is the *Mahāmudrātilaka Tantra*.³⁵

By joining the wood (the fire sticks) of the two organs, the fire is enkindled by the wind. [Because] the upper wheel contains butter, it is thought of as the butter vessel. The *Ha* was explained as the funnel. The ladle was

taught as the *vajra*.³⁶ The hearth of the *homa* was explained as the vulva. The grain is thought of as the five senses. The fire wood was taught as the *skandhas*. The *bodhicitta* burns as the butter.

Nag-po-pa, one of the important authorities on inner-fire offerings, provides a similar (but not identical) explanation in his work *The Fire Offerings of Cakrasaṃvara*.³⁷

The lotus was explained as the hearth, the *vajra* is known as the funnel. By always making fire offerings of seed, the highest stage will be obtained.

While the fire ritual of the subtle body—discussed in the previous section—is related to practices of the Perfection Process, as Sog-bzlog-pa (pp. 8–9) explains it, the fire ritual of great bliss, performed with a consort, is associated with practices such as the third initiation, the initiation of Enlightened Wisdom [performed with] the *shes-rab-ma [prajñā] (shes-rab ye-shes-kyi dbang)*.³⁸ In the practices related to the subtle body the fusion into nonduality (*gnyis-su med-pa*) is accomplished by merging the right and left winds into the central channel, as well as by the meeting of the red and white drops within one's own body. In the practices of great bliss the fusion into nonduality is achieved by the union of Father-Mother (*yab-yum*), the *vajra* of the Father with the lotus of the Mother, the white drop of the Father with the red drop of the Mother. Still, the levels of realization attained through any of these methods are said to be equal (see below).

According to Indo-Tibetan medical ideas, conception results from the union of the white drop—the seed, and the red drop—the essence of the female. While in its conventional aspect the white drop is sperm, in its sublime transformed nature (parallel to the brain in ancient Greece) it is the *bodhicitta* in the sense of the aspiration to achieve enlightenment. While the conventional white drop of seed leads to [re]birth in *samsāra*, the ultimate white drop is the seed of enlightenment and liberation from rebirth. The red drop, or red *bodhicitta*, is the inner fire of great passion which has been transformed from an affliction into a spiritual passion for enlightenment. It also is a seed of enlightenment, as the red drop is related to inner heat and *tapas*, which are potencies

³³ See also Eliade 1969: 254–67; Knipe 1975: 102–5; Kaelber 1989: 29–44.

³⁴ In *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 6.6.2.8: “the fire pan is a female, and the fire is a male: hence when the male heats the female, he infuses seed into her” (Eggeling 1882–1900, III: 254; see also *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 1.7.2.14 [Eggeling, I: 194]). The *Bṛhadāraṇyaka* and *Chāndogya* upaniṣads also describe sexual intercourse as a fire sacrifice (*Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 1.4.6, 6.2.12–13, 6.4.3 [Hume 1921: 168] and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.7–5.8 [Hume 1921: 232]). These conceptions were further developed in the Hindu Tantra as well (see, for example, Silburn 1988: 184).

³⁵ *Phyag-rgya chen-po Thig-le'i Rgyud*, in its chapter 11, entitled “The Fire Offerings of Ultimate Meaning” (Don dam-pa'i sbyin-sreg-gi cho-ga), Toh., 420, Tog-Palace 381, vol. 94, pp. 429–30.

³⁶ Note that here, unlike the preceding and following citations, the ladle is the *vajra*.

³⁷ *Bde-mchog 'Khor-lo'i Sbyin-sreg*, Toh. 1447 = Toh. 1537, Derge, vol. 21, p. 585 and vol. 23, p. 223.

³⁸ For the third initiation, see Jackson 1985: 132–33; Snellgrove 1987: 258–59; Bentor 1996: 258–61.

thereto pertinent. This fire melts the white *bodhicitta* so that both intermingle into nonduality. Rather than a biological birth, this union yields a spiritual one. The creative aspects of the fire are employed here for attaining spiritual consummation and fecundity—the achieving of enlightenment.

Kun-dga'-snying-po further explains the relationship between the fire offerings of the subtle body and those of great bliss in his word-for-word commentary on the verse by Nag-po-pa cited above. The practice that leads to the realization of nonduality, or enlightenment, can be performed on three different levels.³⁹ The first, for those endowed with the highest faculties, is based on one's own body alone. This is the practice of fire offerings of the subtle body (this section from Kun-dga'-snying-po commentary was paraphrased in the previous section). The second and third levels, which are for those endowed with middling and lowest faculties, respectively, are based on a union with a consort and are related to the fire offerings of great bliss. The following is again a paraphrase of Kun-dga'-snying-po's explanation.

The practice for those endowed with middling faculties is based on meditation on a visualized consort of Enlightened Wisdom (*ye-shes-kyi phyag-rgya, jñānamudrā*). Visualize the consort of Enlightened Wisdom as Vajravārāhī. From the *A* at her lotus generate an eight-petaled lotus, with the seed syllable *om* arrayed on its antlers. Visualize the Father (*yab*) as Heruka. From the *hūṃ* at his secret place generate a *vajra* . . . Then visualize that the red drop of the *om* at the Mother's lotus and the white drop of the *hūṃ* of the Father[s' secret place] meet. Think that the *vajra* and lotus churn. Then bliss arises . . . First the feeling bliss arises; then arises bliss of nonconceptual thought which is the highest stage. The culmination of this practice is the same as that of the fire offerings of the subtle body. The realization of the pure-by-nature mind is born. (p. 229, col. 4)

Those endowed with the lowest faculties should engage in a practice based on an "action" consort (*las-kyi phyag-rgya, karmamudrā*). The action consort is generated as Vajravārāhī as well. The practitioner reverses the descent of the seed,

then the drop descends and returns as one wishes. Then also the feeling of bliss and the bliss of nonconceptual thought arise. Now one attains the highest stage [as above]. (p. 230, col. 1)

³⁹ For a differing view, see Geshe Kelsang Gyatso 1982: 90, 126.

Having conquered desire and the wish for progeny, the yogis attain ultimate release. By achieving control over the internal breath and winds, the male practitioners are not to emit seed for the sake of a biological procreation, but rather to reverse the normal flow of the seed, to transmute it, to unite it with the red element of the female, and to direct the flow through the central channel for the purpose of begetting enlightenment.

3. Fire Offerings of Food

The consumption of daily meals was regarded, like breathing, in the upaniṣads as a form of interiorized fire ritual.⁴⁰ The brāhmaṇa literature is particularly fond of homologies linking cosmos, person, and ritual. While on the macrocosmic level the twice-daily fire sacrifice (*agnihotra*) corresponds to sunrise and sunset, on the microcosmic level the *agnihotra* correlates to inhalation and exhalation, and also to the morning and evening meals. We have encountered already the brahmin who is too old to perform the external *agnihotra* and therefore after depositing the sacred fire within himself, consumes the two ritual oblations. This literature expounds, as was noted above, a homology of the five *śrauta* fires with the five breaths (*prāṇa*) located within the human body.⁴¹ In this form of the interiorized fire ritual, offerings are made to the five breaths. Such offerings constitute the *prāṇāgnihotra* ritual in its strict meaning. As Bodewitz points out, in this case, "[t]he fires are abandoned, but the ritual remains" (1973: 230). This *prāṇāgnihotra* is not synonymous with life or breathing as a continuous sacrifice: "the *prāṇāgnihotra* as it is described in these texts (which have at least in part the function of ritual handbooks) forms a *bhojanavidhi*, a ceremony of dining, to be regarded as one of the usual daily ceremonies" (1973: 256).⁴² The internal *agnihotra* is coupled with the

⁴⁰ On the relations between eating and sexual activity see O'Flaherty 1973: 279–82. On Agni as an eater of food, and as the collective mouth of all the gods, see *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 7.1.2.4 (Eggeling 1882–1900, III: 312) and *Pañcaviṃśa Brāhmaṇa* 14.3.19 (Caland 1931: 355).

⁴¹ In its chapter on internal *agnihotra*, *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka* 10 states: "His expiration is the Āhavanīya (fire), his inspiration the Gārhapatyā, his Vyāna the Anvāhāryapacana . . ." (Keith 1908: 60). Similarly, *Baudhāyana Dharma Śāstra* 2.10.18.8 relates the five *prāṇas* to the five sacrificial fires (Bühler 1882: 280).

⁴² Texts describing this type of *prāṇāgnihotra* include *Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra* 2.7.12; *Vaikhāna Smārta Sūtra* 2.18; the *Prāṇāgnihotra Upaniṣad*, and *Maitri Upaniṣad* 6.9.

ritual which accompanies the daily meals, *bhojanavi-dhi*.⁴³ In place of performing the *agnihotra*, the sacrificers make offerings to their five breaths in a short ritual that opens their daily meals. The “first fruits” of the food are consumed in a sacrificial manner, while the meal itself is transformed into the remains of a sacrifice (Biardeau and Malamoud 1976: 69). Even though the ritual remains, the transformation of the meticulous vedic prescription into a simple act done at mealtime renders it especially suitable to world renouncers.

The sacrificial fire is homologized not only with the five breaths, but also with the inner digestive fire. “This is the universal fire which is here within a person, by means of which the food that is eaten is cooked. It is the noise thereof that one hears on covering the ears thus.”⁴⁴ The upaniṣads identify the inner fire of digestion of the five *prāṇas* with the *ātman*, as well as with the universal fire (Agni Vaiśvānara) or the universal *ātman* (Ātman Vaiśvānara). Offerings made to such a fire are regarded as means for realizing the *ātman-brahman* identity. Here we have yet another method employed in the upaniṣads for presenting current practices in terms of vedic fire rituals. The renunciation upaniṣads make use of sacrificial terms as well. According to *Āruṇi Upaniṣad* 2, the renouncer “should deposit his external fires in the fire of the stomach” (tr. Olivelle 1992: 116). Olivelle further explains: “Whatever a renouncer eats, therefore, becomes a sacrifice offered in the internal fire” (1992: 68).⁴⁵ The renunciate’s fires are internalized, and are permanently carried within the body. “His body and bodily functions are transformed into a long sacrificial session” (Olivelle 1992: 68-69). The internal fires are not only equivalent to the vedic sacred fires, they are superior to them.

While in the external *agnihotra* the fire of Agni is often considered to convey the offerings to its recipients, the macrocosmic deities, in upaniṣadic developments of the ritual the oblations are considered to be offered to

the microcosmic self or to the universal *ātman* (Ātman Vaiśvānara).⁴⁶ The fire changes its role from that of a transmitter into that of a recipient. Not only is it the *ātman* that is a recipient of fire offerings, but in some of the vedic texts such offerings are made to the internal deities, in which case it is not the fire (the conveyer of offerings according to the outer ritual) but the recipients of the offerings that are interiorized.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the *prāṇa* is not only interiorized but also divinized. As *Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa* I.1 explains, because they receive the offerings, the *prāṇas* are deities (Bodewitz 1973: 20). With the development of the *devapūjā*—offerings made to deities—within Hinduism, a similar process of interiorizing external deities occurs. The deity to whom the *pūjā* is offered is considered to abide within one’s heart (Rangachari 1931: 137; Gonda 1970: 80). Offerings are then made to this deity as an interior fire (Gonda 1970: 83). Hence, while the inner fire ritual of breathing is related to yoga, the inner fire ritual of food is more closely related to offerings made to deities, in other words, to the ritual of *pūjā* and its internalized forms.

In the Tibetan literature one encounters various kinds of inner fire offerings of food in which the two hands are the ladle and funnel, the mouth is the *homa* pit, while the fire is the *gtum-mo*. ‘Phags-pa Blo-gros-rgyal-mtshan provides a brief definition of the fire offerings of food:

[It is the] pouring of the oblations of food and drink with the ladle and funnel of the two hands into the *homa* pit of the mouth which is the hearth of the body in which blazes the fire of *gtum-mo*. (p. 188, cols. 2–3)

The inner fire of *gtum-mo* carries the meanings of *tapas*, inner sacrifice, inner deity, great passion, and so forth, as well as of the fire of digestion found in earlier Indian works. Sog-bzlog-pa concludes his own discussion about fire offerings of food by saying:

In fact, this is indeed the yoga of food which is explained in the *sādhana*s of the various deities. (p. 10)

Yoga of food (*kha-zas-kyi rnal-'byor*) is, among other things, the yoga of eating as a post-meditation observance (an ancillary to the *sādhana* practice). Having arisen from meditation on himself as his chosen enlight-

⁴³ On this ritual, see Kane 1930–62, II: 757–806.

⁴⁴ *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad* 5.9 (Hume 1921: 152–53). *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 2.6 repeats this passage; see also *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 3.13.7–8 (Hume 1921: 209) and *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 6.34 (Hume 1921: 446).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Kaṭhaśruti (Kaṭharudra) Upaniṣad* 3:

What he eats in the evening becomes his evening sacrifice. What he eats in the morning becomes his morning sacrifice. What he eats on the new moon becomes his new moon sacrifice. What he eats on the full moon becomes his full moon sacrifice” (tr. Olivelle 1992: 134).

⁴⁶ *Maitrī Upaniṣad* 6.9 (Hume 1921: 429–30) and *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.24.2 (Hume 1921: 239). See also *Vaikhānasa Smārta Sūtra* 2.18; *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka* 10; and *Baudhāyana Dharma Śāstra* 2.7.12.

⁴⁷ *Śāṅkhāyana Āraṇyaka* 10 (Keith 1908: 58–59); see also Bodewitz 1973: 328.

ened being (*yi-dam*, *iṣṭadevatā*), the practitioner should regard every aspect of his ordinary life as pertaining to that tantric Buddha. This serves to enhance his realization of himself as his chosen enlightened being as well as to create a transformation, an altered reality, not only in the context of his meditation session, but in his everyday life, as well. Hence, when he falls asleep the practitioner should visualize himself dissolving into emptiness (*stong-pa-nyid*) or clear light (*'od-gsal*). His bathing should be regarded as the vase initiation (*bum-dbang*) and his daily meal as offerings to his chosen Buddha.

In his *Sngags-rim-chen-mo*, toward the end of the chapter on the Generation Process, Tsong-kha-pa explains the yoga of post-meditation, including food yoga:

As for food yoga: also at the time of partaking food, including drinks and so forth, having recollected oneself as an enlightened being, having blessed the food as nectar, with the thought of making offering to the enlightened being [i.e., oneself as an enlightened being], one should eat. (Peking, p. 204, col. 3)

Blo-bzang-rta-mgrin (1867–1937) provides a more detailed explanation of such a ritual, which is still not too long to be cited here:

Here we set down the procedure for eating food as a method of inner fire offerings in a ritual way suitable for any⁴⁸ *yi-dam*: In [a ritual of] Guhyasamāja, visualize yourself as the *yi-dam*. Visualize your mouth as the hearth and your two hands as the ladle and funnel. Think that the food has turned into an ocean of nectar of Enlightened Wisdom and the inner fire (*gtum-mo*) at the navel is a heap of blazing fire of Enlightened Wisdom. Visualize that at your heart abides the assemblage of thirty-two enlightened beings [of the Guhyasamāja *maṇḍala*⁴⁹] in the *vajra* body of Akṣobhya⁵⁰ who is the lama, surrounded by the precept lamas who have explained the initiation. Think that the subtle channels and elements turn into an assemblage of Dākinīs and Dharma protectors.

Hoh! I myself am actual Guhyasamāja.⁵¹

Without wavering from the thought of enlightenment,

⁴⁸ Blo-bzang-rta-mgrin refers here primarily to the main *yi-dams* of the Dge-lugs-pa school (see below).

⁴⁹ In the ritual for Bde-mchog, there are here sixty-two enlightened beings; for Rdo-rje-'jigs-byed, five enlightened beings, and so forth.

⁵⁰ In the ritual for Bde-mchog, Akṣobhya is replaced with Heruka; for Rdo-rje-'jigs-byed, with 'Jigs-rje, and so forth.

⁵¹ See the previous note.

I eat this immaculate nectar of Enlightened Wisdom for the sake of satisfying the enlightened beings who abide in [my] body.

After saying this, taste a little from the food. After saying:

Aho! mahāsukhaḥ (great bliss),

eat to satisfy.⁵²

Having blessed his food as nectar of Enlightened Wisdom,⁵³ the practitioner offers it in his internal fire for the enlightened beings of the *maṇḍala* with whom he identifies. Similar explanations are provided by authors belonging to various periods and schools. Sog-bzlog-pa provides the following explanation for the fire offerings of food:

The mouth is the hearth, the hands are the funnel and ladle. The foods blessed as nectar are the offerings for satisfying the enlightened beings of the inner body in the manner of oblations. (p. 5)⁵⁴

Sna-tshogs-rang-grol (1608–after 1678), who belongs to the Bka'-brgyud-pa school, explains:

Inner fire offerings are offerings, without holding attachment, of oblations of nectar of food and drink into the self-arising fire hearth of *gtum-mo* for the *maṇḍala* of *skandhas*, *dhātus*, and Buddhas by joining the funnel and ladle of one's hands which are wisdom and means. (fol. 6a)

Indian Buddhist works as well contain similar expositions. Abhayākara Gupta (1064?–1125?),⁵⁵ in his work on fire ritual *Jyotirmañjarīhomavidhi* (or *-pāyika*),⁵⁶ explains the fire offering of food as follows.

⁵² This ritual is repeated with the appropriate emendations for Bde-mchog (Cakrasaṃvara), Rdo-rje-'jigs-rje (Vajrabhairava) and Rta-mgrin (Hayagrīva). A note at the end states that this ritual can be adjusted also for other *yi-dams* such as Mkha'-spyod-ma. For similar rituals, see, for example, Chos-rje Ngag-dbang-dpal-ldan of Urga (p. 461, cols. 2–3) and Go-ram-pa (p. 77, col. 4–p. 78, col. 1).

⁵³ The blessing of one's food as nectar is part of the pan-Indian ritual of dining (see Kane 1930–62, II: 763).

⁵⁴ Sog-bzlog-pa calls this ritual "inner fire offerings in dependence on food and drinks" in order to differentiate it from other inner fire rituals.

⁵⁵ For Abhayākara Gupta, see Bühnemann 1992.

⁵⁶ Tib: *Sbyin-sgreg-gi cho-ga 'Od-kyi Snye-ma*, Toh. 3142, P. 3963. For an English translation of this work, see Skorupski 1994.

At the time of eating, having turned one's food into all-equal pure nectar,⁵⁷ perfectly satisfy the wheel of one's own enlightened beings who have arrived at⁵⁸ one's heart and are embraced by the fire of the hearth at the navel with the ladle and funnel of one's hands and so forth, as in the [outer] ritual. (Derge, vol. 75, p. 322; P. fol. 187b)⁵⁹

Even though Nag-po-pa in his *Fire Offerings of Cakra-samvara* (*Bde-mchog 'Khor-lo'i Sbyin-sreg*, Toh. 1447 = Toh. 1537) does not refer to food yoga, Kun-dga'-snying-po in his commentary on this work explains the verses on mental action (*sems-kyis bya*, vv. 7.3–4) as fire offerings of food:

With regard to experiencing the nectar of the purified food, visualize yourself outwardly as Heruka with his consort. Then clearly visualize the enlightened beings of the *maṇḍala* where the fire which ignites from the *om* at the navel blazes up toward the heart. Having made the two hands into the ladle and funnel, make offerings to the *maṇḍala* at the heart. (p. 230, col. 1)

Throughout history and in various cultures, eating the daily meal has involved certain rituals. In ancient India

⁵⁷ This phrase is not clear. The *Kriyāsamuccaya*, which draws upon the *Jyotir-mañjarī*, contains a similar passage (see also Bühnemann 1992–93 on the text of the *Niṣpannayogāvalī* found in Jagaddarpaṇa's *Kriyāsamuccaya*). In the *Kriyāsamuccaya*, *thams-cad mnyams-pa nyid-du rnam-par dag-pa'i bdud-rtsir byas-nas* (P. 5012, p. 305.3) *sarvasamatovīśuddham amṛtikṛtya* (Lokesh Chandra 1977: 394) is the equivalent of *thams-cad mnyams-pa nyid-kyis rnam-par dag-pas bdud-rtsir byas-nas* in the *'Od-kyi Snye-ma* (Toh. 3142, Derge, vol. 75, p. 322).

⁵⁸ *Kriyāsamuccaya*: *gnas 'abide*.

⁵⁹ Abhayākara-gupta calls this ritual “inner fire offerings with outer substances” in order to distinguish it further from still other types of inner fire offerings which are likewise not dependent on outer substances, such as the fire offering of the subtle body. Since the Sanskrit edition of the *Jyotir-mañjarī* (*homavidhi*) by Okuyama Naoji (1983 and 1986) is based on the manuscript from the University Library, Cambridge, it does not include this passage, which is missing in that manuscript. The passage is found in a manuscript preserved at the National Archives, Kathmandu, no. 1/1697 (Bühnemann 1992: 124). Okuyama Naoji has kindly informed me that he is working on an edition that will include the manuscript from Nepal. My translations of this, and other passages of this text below, which are based only on the often ambiguous Tibetan translation, might require modification after the publication of the Sanskrit text. For an alternative English translation of these passages, see Skorupski 1994: 213. The version of the Peking edition of the Tenjur kept at the Yen-ching Institute at Harvard University was used for this text.

the *bhojanavidhi* was conjoined with the internalized fire offerings. In Tibetan Buddhism the consumption of the meal is often accompanied by a ritual of offering first the food to the Buddha. Only then is the meal eaten as his blessed leavings (*prasāda*); the merit accumulated through such offerings to the Buddha is conveyed to all sentient beings for the enjoyment of the food of *dharma* (Bentor 1996: 291–93). Or else, food is offered to hungry ghosts (*yi-dwags*, *preta*) tormented by hunger and thirst. Our main concern here, however, is with the consumption of daily meals as the yoga of food after formal meditation. Here the deity, who is the recipient of the offered food, is oneself—as the Buddha one will ultimately become. Such a Buddha is conceived either as oneself generated as a *yi-dam* or as oneself as a body *maṇḍala*.⁶⁰ As in the upaniṣadic period, in which the consumption of one's daily meals is regarded as a sacrifice, all aspects of life of a Tibetan practitioner, including eating one's daily food, are means for attaining the ultimate goal, in this case becoming a Buddha.

The upaniṣads distinguish between sacrifice to the external deities (*devayajña*) and sacrifice to oneself (*ātmayajña*): “the *ātmayajin* is the superior sacrificer, the *devayajin* being no more than an inferior offering tribute to his superior” (Heesterman 1993: 216). The notion of deities interiorized within the human body was common in the Vedas, in *pūjā*, as well as in tantric rituals. During the upaniṣadic period that “internal deity” is the *ātman*. In the Tibetan food yoga as well, it is not only the sacrificial fire that is interiorized but also the *devas* who are the recipients of the oblations.

4. Mental Fire Offerings

A mental fire ritual is a performance of the actual fire ritual in thought alone using the powers of imagination and visualization. As in the case of the fire ritual of breathing, within the classical vedic frame such a mental ritual is prescribed for journeying brahmins who do not have access to their usual ritual fires and implements (Kane 1930–62, II: 1008). Since world renouncers (*saṃnyāsīn*) have embarked on a permanent journey, the mental ritual is especially suited to them (Bodewitz 1973: 258, n. 8). Indeed, mental fire offerings characterized Indian world renouncers, who turned their backs on the world to find transcendence within themselves. The interiorization of the fire ritual renders them self-sufficient and complete (paraphrasing Heesterman 1985: 4, 39). The mental ritual occupies an important place in the

⁶⁰ Even though according to Tibetan Buddhism these two concepts are differentiated, for present purposes the distinction is not of any crucial importance.

Hindu Tantra (Gupta 1979: 127–46; 1992: 195–207), where it is not the vedic sacrifice but the *pūjā* that is interiorized.

Mental worship is a service of contemplation, in which the worshipper follows in imagination the entire ritual procedure from the evocation of the deity to the final leave-taking. . . A Tantric at the highest stage of spiritual development may depend almost entirely on this mental *pūjā*. (Gupta 1979: 196, 145)

This mental ritual contains not only offerings to the deity, but the entire *pūjā* that includes the fire offerings within it. The practitioner visualizes a fire hearth at his navel lit with the wood of meditation. In this fire he mentally offers the various fire offerings⁶¹ or himself.⁶²

In his work devoted to fire rituals *Jyotir-mañjarī-homa-vidhi*, Abhayākara Gupta describes the mental fire offerings as follows:

Having performed all these [rituals of outer fire offerings] with one's mind alone without any excess or deficiency, one's wishes will certainly be accomplished. This is the characteristic of mind fire offerings. (Derge, vol. 75, p. 321; P. fol. 187a)⁶³

Tsong-kha-pa who follows Abhayākara Gupta in this matter, explains in his own work on the fire ritual *Dngos-grub rgya-mtsho*:

When the oblations for the fire offerings have not been prepared, even if one has them, without any instance of performing [the outward ritual], having just meditated on everything that we have explained before [in the section on outer fire offerings], one's wishes will certainly be accomplished. (p. 194)

The view that the outer ritual is nothing but mechanical action, while the performance in the mind alone is

the real essence of the ritual is not one held by the Tantra. Visualizations in one's mind form an integral part of tantric outer rituals. Tantric rituals, external rituals included, are in fact ritualized meditations. A mere mechanical performance of the external actions would not be regarded as constituting an outer ritual. The external actions and implements are considered to be supports (*rten*) for the actual ones. For example, while, in a *gurupūjā*, one offers a plate of rice, the actual offerings are conceived of as the entire world (see, for example, Tharchin 1981). Without the visualizations of this plate of rice as the entire world these offerings bear no meaning. Mind rituals are not seen as in any way antithetical to the so-called outer rituals. Tsong-kha-pa explains this with regard to the fire ritual:

Also [while performing the fire offerings] with the outer substances, one must accomplish [the ritual] through the meditation of the mind indeed. Therefore, this is a cause for the full realization of the unexcelled mind. (p. 194)

These words are based on the exposition of Abhayākara Gupta in his *Jyotirmañjarī* (Derge, p. 321; P. fol. 187b). Tsong-kha-pa is emphasizing that mental ritual, which on various occasions is considered to replace the actual outer ritual, is often part and parcel of the external ritual as well. This notion is not unique to the Buddhist Tantra, but is found in vedic rituals as well, at least since the time of the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* (F. Smith 1987: 37–38). The role of the *brahman* priest in vedic rituals also points to the importance of the mental aspect in outer vedic sacrifices. While the other priests, such as the *adhvaryu* and *hotṛ*, perform the ritual actions and recite, the *brahman* follows the ritual mentally. Whenever an error in the performance occurs he corrects it not by ritual actions, but through his mental powers (Silburn 1995: 91–95).

5. Fire Offerings of Enlightened Wisdom

In the discussion of fire ritual of great bliss, the creative aspects of the fire related to fertility, incubation, birth, and growth have been emphasized. Here, the destructive aspects of the fire become predominant. The vedic oblations are, after all, destroyed in the sacrificial fire (Heesterman 1993: 7–44). The fire reduces everything to ashes. But, like the creative aspects of the fire, its destructiveness is ultimately a transformative process. The vedic oblations are transformed by the sacrificial fire into gifts suitable for the gods. The fire that consumes the person at death readies him for his next rebirth. The fire of wisdom transforms ignorance, which ties human beings to *samsāra*, into enlightening knowledge.

⁶¹ See Rangachari 1931: 142–43, for a Vaiṣṇava, and *Liṅga Purāṇa* 1973, II: 694–95 (ch. 23), for a Śaiva practice.

⁶² Their *ahaṃtā* (Gupta 1979: 146).

⁶³ For the Sanskrit, see note above. Following the passage translated here, Abhayākara Gupta describes another type of mental fire offering that involves also the visualization of the chief enlightened being of the *maṇḍala* and the offerings of honey and butter. The *Kriyāsamuccaya* similarly explains: “When one meditates on all these [external actions of the fire offerings] with one's mind without any excess or deficiency, one's wishes will certainly be accomplished. These are mind fire offerings that are independent of outer substances” (Tib.: P. 5012, p. 305.3, Skt., p. 394).

The upaniṣads hold that religious knowledge itself is a kind of sacrifice (B. Smith 1989: 203–16). *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.27 adumbrates this notion when it speaks about the fire of the yoga of self-restraint which is kindled by wisdom.⁶⁴ In Buddhism as well, the fire is a common symbol for the meditative state and for enlightenment (Stache-Weiske 1990). The fire of wisdom destroys ignorance, burns the defilements (*nyon-mongs*, *kleśa*), devours karmic propensities (*bag-chags*, *vāsanā*) and consumes duality. *Kāśyapaparivarta* 69 is often cited to illustrate the fire of nondual wisdom that consumes conceptual thinking:

For example, by rubbing two [pieces] of wood with force,⁶⁵ fire arises. That very [fire] consumes [those pieces]. Just so, also the faculty of wisdom, having arisen, consumes the inquiry [which has created it].⁶⁶

While the inner fire of *gtum-mo* annihilates duality through the merging of the right and left subtle channels or the red and white drops, the fire of Enlightened Wisdom destroys duality through the union (*zung-'jug*, *yuganaddha*) of the object and subject (*gzung-'dzin*), wisdom and means (*shes-rab*, *prajñā* and *thabs*, *upāya*), tranquil abiding (*zhi-gnas*, *śamatha*) and penetrative insight (*lhag-mthong*, *vipaśyanā*), emptiness (*stong-panyid*, *śūnyatā*) and compassion (*snying-rje*, *karuṇā*), and so forth. In the yogas of the subtle body and great bliss, tantric terms, especially those related to the subtle body, are employed, while the terms used in the fire ritual of Enlightened Wisdom are, for the most part, generally Mahāyāna terms. Let us see how tantric authors understand the fire offerings of Enlightened Wisdom. *Samvarodaya Tantra* 23.59–61,⁶⁷ an important scriptural source for this type of fire offerings, expounds:

⁶⁴ See also *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.37 on the fire of wisdom that reduces all actions to ashes.

⁶⁵ Or, by the wind.

⁶⁶ The text is found in Staël-Holstein 1926: 102. English translations may be found in Bhikkhu Pāsādika 1977–79, pt. 5; 1978: 33; Chang 1983; Silk (in preparation); as well as Wayman 1955: 154; 1962: 76–77. Kamalaśīla refers to such a passage in his *Third Bhāvanākrama* (p. 248). The Sanskrit text may be found in Tucci 1971: 20. For other citations of this passage, see Gómez 1987: 144, n. 43. See also *Ratnagūṇa* 29.13: “Fire which has arisen from grass and sticks, [then] burns them up” (Conze 1973–75: 64). In vedic mythology Agni is considered to be the son of the two fire sticks who then, as soon as he is born, devours his parents (Bloomfield 1908: 158–59).

⁶⁷ See Tsuda 1974.

The ladle is wisdom; the funnel means; their union is meditation on nonduality.

The clarified butter issued from that is considered as nectar of the great Enlightened Wisdom.

Therefore one should satisfy⁶⁸ with [such an oblation] the fire which embodies the movable and immovable.

Whoever performs fire offering in this manner will be granted accomplishments (*siddhi*) and good fortune.

In his commentary on the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi*, Buddhaguhya says:

Inner fire offerings mean dissolving the subjective five *skandha* into emptiness, and also dissolving the objective outer forms, such as the outer fire hearth, into emptiness, and likewise dissolving each of the issuing consciousnesses of the six doors [connecting the subjective and objective]. Having blocked [them so that they] do not issue, having dissolved like that, one abides in a meditative concentration which is devoid of conceptual thoughts in which even the *bodhicitta*, which [itself] blocks, is blocked by the non-issuing wisdom. (Toh. 2663)⁶⁹

'Phags-pa's definition for this ritual is:

The thorough burning of the oblations of all the conceptual thoughts of the mind and that which arises from the mind in the three realms with the ladle and funnel of tranquil abiding (*zhi-gnas*, *śamatha*) and penetrative insight (*lhag-mthong*, *vipaśyanā*) in the hearth of *dharmadhātu*, in which the fire of Enlightened Wisdom which is free of conceptual thoughts blazes all around, is the inconceivable fire offering. (p. 188, cols.1–2)

Sna-tshogs-rang-grol says:

The fire offering of the utmost meaning of suchness is the burning of the karmic propensities of mistaken conceptual thoughts and grasping at signs by the blazing great fire of Enlightened Wisdom and direct awareness in the hearth of the all-encompassing empty realm. (fol. 6a)

⁶⁸ The *samparpayed* of Tsuda 1974: 144 probably should read *samtarpayed*. This would then correspond to Tsuda's translation “satisfy” as well as to the reading of the only manuscript of this *Tantra* I have access to, a copy of which was sent to me (by mistake) by the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

⁶⁹ The text is found in Wayman 1959: 121, n. 190. For the chapter on *homa* in the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sūtra*, see also Strickmann 1983: 436–42; Yamamoto 1990: 167–69; Wayman and Tajima 1992: 189–208.

Sog-bzlog-pa provides several explanations for the fire ritual of Enlightened Wisdom based on various systems:

According to the new Tantras: "Having kindled the fire of Enlightened Wisdom which is free of conceptual thoughts in the hearth of the emptiness of the *dhar-madhātu* with the ladle and funnel of means and wisdom, burning all the *skandhas*, *dhātus*, and *āyatanas* of the three realms is the inconceivable fire offering which is free from mental elaboration." (p. 8)

According to the old Tantras: "The fire of the letter *raṃ*⁷⁰ of the bright Enlightened Wisdom burns the fire wood of dark conceptual thoughts. With the fire wood, the oblation of the emptiness of things satisfies [with] great bliss the fire deity of emptiness." (p. 5)

According to the Kālacakra system: "The fire of Enlightened Wisdom, which pairs off the unchangeable great bliss and emptiness endowed with all the supreme aspects, burns all the defiled *skandhas*, *dhātus* and *āyatanas*. The transformed *skandhas* and *āyatanas* satisfy the deities. . . ." (p. 6)

In the Great Perfection: "Fire offerings for any purpose burn grasping at things and the karmic propensities. Fire offerings for the sake of overcoming conceptual thoughts are different from burning wood and so forth." (pp. 6–7)

Sog-bzlog-pa concludes this discussion with the following statement:

Practicing the Great Perfection and the six-branched practice [of the completion process] is the supreme unexcelled fire offering. (p. 7)

The upaniṣads introduced new practices and ways of life, such as renunciation, which often viewed even life itself as a sacrifice. In a somewhat similar manner, after classifying and ranking the diverse fire offerings, Sog-bzlog-pa presents the two practices he esteems above all as the paramount form of fire offering. In this work, the frame of reference is, obviously, fire ritual. Still, these practices that he holds in most esteem do not involve any formal outward fire rituals. Sog-bzlog-pa continues here a long tradition of referring to one ritual in terms of the others, such as the Buddha's proclamation in the *Dīghanikāya* of the Buddhist path to *nirvāṇa* as the supreme form of the fire ritual. This brings us to the question of the ranking and interrelationships of these manifold fire rituals.

THE CLASSIFICATIONS OF FIRE RITUALS AND THEIR INTERRELATIONSHIPS

Not only do the Buddhist authors cited in this study explain and define the various types of fire offerings, they also classify them. This is characteristic of compilers and systematizers who attempt to create a coherent system out of separate and often autonomous rituals. Most often the diverse forms of fire rituals are classified according to the three following categories: unexcelled (*bla-na med-pa*), inner (*nang*), and outer (*phyi*). Almost all Tibetan authors consulted agree that the fire ritual of Enlightened Wisdom is an unexcelled fire offering, the fire offering of food is an inner ritual, and the external ritual involving fire wood and so forth is an outer offering. Variations exist with regard to the position of fire offerings of the subtle body, great bliss, and mental fire offerings. While the early Sa-skyas-pas Kundga'snying-po and 'Phags-pa include the fire rituals of the subtle body and great bliss within the unexcelled category, the later Sa-skyas scholar Ngor-chen Kun-dga'-bzang-po (1382–1456) and Tsong-kha-pa and Sog-bzlog-pa agree in classifying these two practices as inner rituals. This points to differing opinions about the relative status of two types of practices: on the one hand, those leading to the annihilation of conceptual thoughts and all dualities, as reflected in the fire offerings of Enlightened Wisdom, and, on the other hand, tantric practices aimed at the realization of nonduality by means of the subtle body and great bliss. While the early Sa-skyas-pa authors rank the latter types of practice as equal to the first, the others regard the practices of the subtle body and great bliss as inferior. This method of classification is related to the place of tantric practices of the subtle body and great bliss within the complete Buddhist system of enlightenment, as conceived by different thinkers. It should be noted that these classifications do not solely depend on the Tibetan writers presenting them. The early Sa-skyas-pas seem to follow Nag-po-pa,⁷¹ while Tsong-kha-pa relies here on Abhayākara-gupta's *Jyotirmañjarī*. Sna-tshogs-tang-grol, alternatively, provides a fourth category for practices of the subtle body, between the utmost fire offerings of Enlightened Wisdom and the inner ritual of food yoga. He calls this category "secret fire offerings," adhering to the common classification of outer, inner, and secret (*phyi, nang, gsang*). In this case, practices of subtle body take an intermediary position between fire offerings of food and fire offerings of Enlightened Wisdom.⁷²

⁷¹ Toh. 1447 = Toh. 1537.

⁷² Kong-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas (1813–99) also follows this classification (Skorupski 1995: 7).

⁷⁰ The seed syllable of fire.

Some Tibetan authors, not satisfied with merely classifying the various practices related to fire rituals in a theoretical way, also delineate the actual sequence of their practice. Ngor-chen Kun-dga'-bzang-po maintains:

The beginner should first cultivate the outer fire offerings. By practicing this ritual of fire offerings according to the tradition of books written by the learned and the commentaries on tantras, all the fire wood of the conceptual thoughts of the mind and that which arises from the mind of all sentient beings in the three realms will be burnt with the ladle and funnel of tranquil abiding and penetrative insight in the hearth of *dharmadhātu*, in which blazes [fire] of nonconceptual thoughts. (p. 391)⁷³

Here, the practice of the outer offerings according to detailed ritual methods will ultimately result in the fire offerings of Enlightened Wisdom, in which conceptual thoughts are consumed through the meditation of tranquil abiding and penetrative insight. This explanation concerns only the external fire ritual and fire offerings of Enlightened Wisdom. Kong-sprul Blo-gros-mtha'-yas presents, in brief, a greater integration of the various fire rituals.

A beginner in ritual practices first performs the external and inner burnt oblations. By acting in this manner, he becomes able to perform the secret burnt oblation through the power of the blessing bestowed by the gratified deities, and through this he becomes proficient in performing with ease the essential burnt oblations [i.e., the supreme fire offerings].⁷⁴

Tsong-kha-pa, in emphasizing the gradual and multifaceted path to enlightenment, integrates most of the diverse internalized fire offerings encountered above into a single continuous practice.

Having pleased one's own enlightened being with outer fire offerings and with inner fire offerings in dependence on outer substances [i.e., food yoga], the enlightened being blesses an inner fire offering in which the *bodhicitta* [located] at the head is burnt in the *gtum-mo* fire of the navel [i.e., fire offerings of the subtle body], because the continuum which generates the realization of the completion process has been ripened. Therefore, constructed *maṇḍalas*, recitations, and fire offerings

were taught for the sake of realizing the union of the true essence. When one has the special ability of [performing] inner fire offerings [of the subtle body], by the power of the bliss of melting the two elements, the coarse conceptual thoughts of the appearance of duality are pacified. At the time the ascent and descent of the *bodhicitta* [along the central channel] appear simultaneously, when one recollects the view of arriving at the real essence of emptiness, of the intrinsic emptiness of all *dharma*s, this cultivation is that of the unexcelled fire offerings. After that, when one arises [from meditation], having arisen as the illusory body of one's own chosen enlightened being, one should once more traverse the path with the sequence of performing fire offerings as before. (p. 197)

In other words, one begins with the performance of outer fire offerings and with fire offerings of food, which pleases one's enlightened being. As a result, this enlightened being bestows blessings on the performer. These blessings enable one to practice the fire offerings of the subtle body. Hence, the ultimate purpose of all external rituals, including those based on the construction of sand *maṇḍalas* and fire altars, is similar—the realization of nonduality. The melting of the white and red drops through the performance of the inner fire ritual of the subtle body pacifies the coarse conceptual thoughts regarding the appearance of duality. The simultaneous ascent and descent of the *bodhicitta* along the central channel at the completion of this yoga leads to the fire offerings of Enlightened Wisdom, in which one arrives at the real understanding of the intrinsic emptiness of all phenomena. After arising from this meditation, the practitioner returns to this world of forms and duality as an appearance of his *yi-dam*. Back in the relative world he should commence again with the outer fire offerings and gradually proceed towards the fire offerings of Enlightened Wisdom, and so on, repeatedly. It is just such a process that forms the foundation of tantric practice. Having achieved the climax of the yoga the practitioner reiterates his steps along a more and more profound course.

In what follows, Tsong-kha-pa explains that it is necessary to perform each of the fire offerings with the aim of reaching the subsequent one. He stresses that:

When there is no cause for cultivating the view of the definite meaning of the absence of intrinsic nature, even though through the fire offering of blazing and dripping which causes the wind of the right and left channels to enter the central channel, the coarse conceptual thoughts are pacified for a short while, still having considered that there is no inclination for the meaning of suchness, the

⁷³ See also the *Mahāvairocanābhisaṃbodhi Sūtra*, in Strickmann 1983: 439–42.

⁷⁴ Translated by Skorupski (1995: 7).

'*Od-Snye*⁷⁵ taught that the unexcelled fire offering [i.e., the fire offering of Enlightened Wisdom] is distinct from the inner fire offerings which do not depend on substances [i.e., fire offerings of the subtle body]. This is correct. (p. 197)

According to this, the ultimate purpose of performing the diverse rituals is the understanding of the true nature of all things by means of the fire ritual of Enlightened Wisdom. Without an aspiration to achieve the realization that all phenomena are empty of own nature, the fire ritual of the subtle body cannot achieve its highest aim. This accords with the common tantric view which calls for the union of bliss, born out of the practices of the subtle body, and emptiness. Such an integration of various practices is related to the question of gradual vs. sudden enlightenment—or, more specifically, to the debate whether the different practices comprising the Buddhist path can lead to enlightenment separately or only when practiced together (Gómez 1983, 1987; Griffiths 1983; Jackson 1994). This integration also relates to the position of the meditation on emptiness, which is based on general Mahāyāna notions, within the tantric path to enlightenment, as discussed above. In a typical systematizing fashion, Tsong-kha-pa's opinion here is that the various fire rituals should be combined into a single consecutive practice culminating in the realization of the empty and nondual nature of all phenomena.⁷⁶

CONCLUSIONS

Tibetan Buddhism presents some of its main practices in terms of fire rituals of vedic origin. In doing so it furthers a prominent theme of the upaniṣads, which continued in later Hinduism as well. When Buddhism adopted the fire ritual, it is clear that factors different from those operating at that early period were involved.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ This is the *Sbyin-sgreg-gi cho-ga 'Od-kyi Snye-ma, Jyotir-mañjarīhomavidhi*, or *pāyika* (Toh. 3142, P. 3963), the work by Abhayākaragupta on fire ritual cited above.

⁷⁶ According to Shaw 1994: 165 and 254, n. 123, Tsong-kha-pa, in his commentary on the *Cakrasaṃvara Tantra*, entitled *Sbas-don Kun-gsal*, also discusses what it is that constitutes the real fire offering, arriving at the conclusion that it is the burning of conceptual thoughts, which results in the entry into clear light.

⁷⁷ Eliade 1969: 111–13 explains the interiorization of the vedic sacrifice, including the replacement of the oblations into the fire with physiological functions, as means for incorporating yogic movements within orthodox Brahmanism. Heesterman 1985: 38–41, on the other hand, emphasizes the orthogenetic character of this process. Others, including B. Smith (1989: 194–

Furthermore, Tibetan Buddhism does not require a strategy of presenting non-vedic practices in vedic garb. When Buddhism adapted fire rituals, their internalized forms were already firmly established. While Indic Buddhist texts were aware of the popularity of fire rituals among non-Buddhists, and therefore designate such non-Buddhist *homa* as false (Strickmann 1983: 425), Tibetan Buddhism gradually lost contact with “heretic” fire rituals. Their vedic origin was forgotten and the ritual was attributed to the Buddha.⁷⁸ Most Tibetan sources do not, therefore, find it necessary to provide explanations for an external origin of their practice of *homa*. Tibetan Buddhism usually makes use of the rich associations of fire to suit its own system of ideas and practices. The fire usually is associated with the highest religious goal; while in the Veda Agni is the messenger who integrates the three worlds (Knipe 1975: 94), in Tibetan Buddhism, not unlike some of the upaniṣads, the inner fire brings about the realization of nonduality that does not require any outer journey, but can be found within. In all these cases the fire transmits, transposes, transforms.

The external fire offering (in which various oblations are poured into an actual fire) did not lose its popularity in India with the decline of vedic ritual (*yajña*) and the evolution of the *pūjā*. The extent to which the external fire has been preserved within Hinduism has surprised even great Indologists like Gonda: “the *homa* (offering into the fire) which, being of vedic origin, has *curiously enough*, been retained in nearly all extended *pūjā* ceremonies (even in Tantric and Śāktist rites) . . .” (1970: 79–80; emphasis added). In Tibet as well, the external fire ritual is considered one of the three most important rituals that every tantric master is obliged to perform.⁷⁹ The prevalent form of the external fire ritual supplied a continuing frame of reference for the internal ritual.⁸⁰

95) and Olivelle (1992: 20–21), take the middle stance between these extremes. See also Strickmann 1983: 418, on the antithetical position of Tantra towards the Vedas.

⁷⁸ The “return” of Buddhists to India as Tibetan refugees, however, has renewed the encounter. A Tibetan who now works in an institute of higher education in India once explained to me that the fire ritual was, in fact, originally taught by the Buddha. Only later on was it borrowed by the other religions in India.

⁷⁹ Rje-brsun Grags-pa-rgyal-mtshan (1147–1216) lists these as follows: “Further, among the actions of a *vajrācārya* (*rdorje slob-dpon*), the most important are these three: initiations, consecrations, and fire rituals” (in his commentary on the *Hevajra Tantra*, p. 136, col. 2).

⁸⁰ The vedic ritual itself cannot be viewed as a purely external process. On this point, see F. Smith 1987: 37–38; B. Smith 1989.

Not only was the external fire ritual accepted by the religious systems of ancient India, but also the concept of inner heat was shared by both Brahmanism and asceticism, yoga and shamanism, as well as Buddhist meditation (Eliade 1969: 337).⁸¹ It was used by the various systems for accomplishing their respective goals, the goals of the vedic sacrifice, the upaniṣadic liberating knowledge, the healing magic of the shaman, or the psycho-physical transformation of the yogin. It would seem to be precisely these common elements in the various systems that permitted adaptation from one system into another. All these practices are concerned with inner transformation, for which the rich associations of interiorized fire are extremely valuable.

As Knipe says, "Fire is the very embodiment of change and transformation" (1975: 47) and Bachelard admirably delineates the manifold roles and associations of the fire:

Fire is thus a privileged phenomenon which can explain anything. If all that changes slowly may be explained by life, all that changes quickly is explained by fire. Fire is the ultra-living element. It is intimate and it is universal. It lives in our heart. It lives in the sky. It rises from the depths of the substance and offers itself with the warmth of love. Or it can go back down into the substance and hide there, latent and pent-up, like hate and vengeance. Among all

⁸¹ For inner heat in Buddhist meditation, see also King 1961; Strickmann 1983: 427–29; Stache-Weiske 1990, etc.

phenomena, it is really the only one to which there can be so definitely attributed the opposing values of good and evil. It shines in Paradise, it burns in Hell. It is gentleness and torture. It is cookery and it is apocalypse. It is a pleasure of the *good* child sitting prudently by the hearth; yet it punishes any disobedience when the child wishes to play too close to its flames. It is well-being and it is respect. It is a tutelary and a terrible divinity, both good and bad. It can contradict itself; thus it is one of the principles of universal explanation. (1964: 7)

This rich symbolism of the fire found clear and potent applications in the interiorized practices of the upaniṣads, as well as of the Buddhist and non-Buddhist schools of Yoga and Tantra. Most important for its utilization in yogic and tantric rituals are its ambivalent nature, its manifestation as internal heat and its transformative power. The fire's ambivalent nature is of great significance in processes of transmutation, as well as in the realization of the nonduality of seemingly opposing qualities. The internal aspects of the fire—including vitality, sexual desire, fecundity, inner knowledge, and so forth—are crucial to the interiorized practices of the Yoga and Tantra. Of utmost significance is the transformative character of the fire which both creates and annihilates, often simultaneously. This kind of transformation may bring about a spiritual birth into enlightening wisdom, enable a transmutation of sexual desire into passion for wisdom and into spiritual bliss, while by consuming duality, it may empower the transformation of ignorance into liberating realization.

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