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Continual Mindfulness According to Patrul's
Foundational Manual

Marc-Henri Deroche

Kyoto University

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Ethos of the Great Perfection: Continual Mindfulness According to Patrul’s Foundational Manual

Marc-Henri Deroche¹

Abstract

This article investigates the role of mindfulness in the so-called foundational practices exposed in Dza Patrul Orgyan Jigme Chökyi Wangpo’s (1808–1887) famous manual, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, which belongs to the Dzogchen lineage of the *Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse* within the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. It argues that, according to these spiritual instructions, the continual exercise of mindfulness, meta-awareness, and carefulness forms the “ethos of the Great Perfection”—the constant ethical base and the consistent way of life that supports the path of Dzogchen. Sources of *Words of My Perfect Teacher* (including Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*) and selected passages are analyzed in

¹ Graduate School of Advanced Integrated Studies in Human Survivability, Kyoto University. Email: deroche.marchenri.6u@kyoto-u.ac.jp. This article was first presented as a paper in the panel titled “Contemplative Practice in Tibetan Context: Methods, Perspectives, and Possibilities” at the 16th conference of the International Association for Tibetan Studies, Prague, 4th July 2022, co-organized by Michael Sheehy and David Divalerio. I am grateful to them and to the other participants for their comments. I would like also to thank Daniel Cozort for his very helpful revision and remarks.

order to elucidate Patrul's moral philosophy of mindful awareness and self-examination. The mnemonic, reflective, and attentional facets of the cultivation of mindfulness all work to internalize the ethical principles that govern the conduct of life, shaping new habits, exercising free will, and forming moral agency. They define the very ethos that articulates the value system and the re-orientation of attention. Such deliberate moment-by-moment mindfulness paves the way for discovering "instantaneous awareness," the distinctive feature of Dzogchen, and for resting in its uninterrupted flow, from within to respond compassionately to other individuals and various circumstances.

Introduction

In this article, I will examine the fundamental role of "mindfulness" (Sanskrit *smṛti*, Tibetan *dran pa*) in the Ancient or Nyingma (*rnying ma*) tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, especially in its teachings of the Great Perfection, Dzogchen (*rdzogs chen*). In particular, I intend to show that the continual exercise of mindfulness and meta-awareness (*smṛti-samprajanya*, *dran pa dang shes bzhin*), or mindful awareness (*dran shes*), is the very ethos and foundation of the *vita contemplativa* in this tradition.

The concept of *ethos*, further defined below, will be used to refer mainly to (1) *ethics*, according to a bottom-up approach, as the first of the three trainings of Buddhism (ethics, concentration, wisdom; Sk. *śīla*, *samādhi*, *prajñā*; Tib. *tshul khrims*, *ting nge 'dzin*, *shes rab*), and to (2) *conduct* according to a top-down approach, as the third of the three elements of the Dzogchen path (view, meditation, conduct; Tib. *lta ba*, *sgom pa*, *spyod*

pa). In Dzogchen, the view introduced directly by the teacher is cultivated in meditation and ultimately is integrated into one's way of life.²

These two complementary frameworks (roughly, exoteric and esoteric) are very much integrated in the Nyingma tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, they can serve to situate mindfulness in the overall structure of the path, without reducing it to one or the other aspect that, when overemphasized, may take the form of either moralism, mysticism, or dogmatism.

In the secular and scientific contexts of contemporary societies, mindfulness and meditative practice are frequently equated. This reflects the physicalist and utilitarian inclinations of our times. However, in Buddhist traditions, mindfulness is not limited to meditation; it applies to the entire path.³ Moreover, mindfulness cannot be regarded as something purely instrumental because it is part of a fundamentally reverential attitude. Thus, the various uses and misuses of the term "mindfulness" should not lead us to dismiss the importance of its ethical and soteriological role in Buddhism.

To examine the ethos of mindfulness in Tibetan Buddhism, I will focus on the so-called preliminary or "foundational practices" (*sngon 'gro*)

²On such a structured threefold presentation of Dzogchen, see Namkhai, *Crystal*.

³Inasmuch as this article is focused on Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, this point is mainly demonstrated through the works of Śāntideva and Patrul. However, to refer briefly to categories that are common to all Buddhist traditions, although "correct mindfulness" (as listed in the eightfold noble path) is grouped (rather mnemonically) under the larger category of the training in concentration, mindfulness is also considered as the first in the list of the seven awakening factors, not to mention other categories like the four ways of establishing mindfulness (to the body, feelings, mind, dharma) that apply explicitly and systematically to all situations of life. I have usually chosen to keep the English recent term of "mindfulness" as a general translation, but I have tried to articulate the various facets of the original Buddhist concept in relation with different key mental factors: memory, reflection, discernment, attention, vigilance, bare awareness, etc.

of the tradition of the *Heart Expense of the Vast Sphere* (*Klong chen snying thig*), a very widespread Dzogchen lineage mainly upheld in the Nyingma tradition. I will focus on the instructions on these practices according to the famous manual (*khrid yig*) composed by Dza Paltrul Orgyen Jigme Chökyi Wangpo (*rdza dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po*, 1808–1887), referred in short as *Words of My Perfect Teacher* (*Kun zang bla ma'i zhal lung*, abbreviated below as KLZh).⁴

The foundational practices are divided into common ones (reflections on precious human life, impermanence and death, retribution of karma, and unsatisfactoriness of mundane existence) and extraordinary ones (refuge, bodhicitta, Vajrasattava mantra recitation, maṇḍala offerings, guru yoga, etc.). It will not be possible here to detail the specific contents of each of them. But by selecting passages of *Words of My Perfect Teacher* that specifically emphasize mindfulness (with *dran-* derivatives) and related mental factors, I intend to show that continual mindfulness forms the thread of the foundational practices. Such continual mindfulness and the foundational practices are mutually supportive. In the end, the cultivation of mindfulness through the foundational practices, and the practice of the foundational practices with mindfulness, both operate a conversion of attention, a new way of being, the constitution of an ethos.

⁴ More precisely, the title refers to the “oral instructions” (*zhal gdams*) of the author’s spiritual teacher or guru (*bla ma*), identified with devotion and through “pure vision” (*dag snang*) as Samantabhadra (*Kun tu bzang po*), the primordial and perfect Buddha, ultimate source of the Dzogchen lineage. Nevertheless, I have kept in this article the concise translation of the Padmakara Translation Group, *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, as it has become quite established in the existing academic literature, including in the present journal. As for the translation of the Tibetan text itself, while I have benefited from Padmakara Translation Group’s work, I have re-translated the chosen extracts by bringing a closer attention to the terminology of the operations of mindfulness and related mental factors. For a traditional and useful commentary on *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, see Pelzang.

In his own instructional writings, Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa Khyentse Özer (*rig 'dzin 'jigs med gling pa mkhyen brtse'i 'od zer*, 1730-1798), by whom the *Heart Expense of the Vast Sphere* was originally revealed, organized, and transmitted, had himself tried to clarify the nature of mindfulness, while reasserting its foundational importance. In collaboration with Michael Sheehy, I have recently analyzed advice texts on mindfulness by Jigme Lingpa and translated one of them that articulates Mahāyāna theories of the path, Abhidharma psychology, Dzogchen's philosophy of mind and gnoseology (Deroche and Sheehy). In these sources, Jigme Lingpa forges a clear-cut typology of mindfulness with two main categories: (1) a "conditioned" or "deliberate mindfulness" (*'du byed kyi dran pa, 'jur dran*), and (2) the "distinctive mindfulness of Dzogchen" (*rdzogs chen gyi khyad chos dran pa*) that consists in maintaining the recognition of the nature of mind or pure awareness (*rig pa*). This relationship is complex. To elucidate it involves trying to solve the perennial problem of the articulation of the progressive approach (*sūtra/tantra*) versus the simultaneous approach (Dzogchen) for this tradition (see van Schaik).

While the non-dual type of Dzogchen mindfulness has been re-labeled as "open awareness" in contemporary contemplative studies, I would like to argue that this essential contemplation cannot be completely separated from the larger framework of its original "life-world" (*Lebenswelt*), without risking its denaturing. Here, by focusing on the foundational practices, I intend to reply to the following research question: *What is the exact role of deliberate mindfulness in accomplishing the groundwork of the Dzogchen path?*

This interrogation becomes even more vital when we consider that, as can be observed in Jigme Lingpa's contemporary living tradition, such foundational practices are not performed simply at the beginning of the path, once and for all. The most qualified practitioners and highly respected experts of this lineage tend, to some extent, to perform such

exercises during their entire lifetime as supportive conditions for the core contemplation of Dzogchen, and for its integration in their entire ways of life (Klein 1-15). Therefore, the foundational practices that are especially based upon deliberate mindfulness can be thus envisioned according to the two bottom-up and top-down conceptions of the path, as mentioned at the beginning. Actually, it is the interrelation between these two vectors that constitutes the very dynamics of the path *in vivo*. Deliberate mindfulness-based foundational practices form the solid ground from which to take off to reach the sky of the Great Perfection, and upon which to land safely, when temporary chains of down-to-earth actions follow and seem to cover up the timeless instants of freedom.

In part one, I will consider the various sources used by Patrul and their confluence in his manual, in order to contextualize its use of the concepts of mindfulness, meta-awareness (*saṃprajanya, shes bzhin*), and carefulness (*apramāda, bag yod*). In part two, I will present a selection and translation of key passages of Patrul's manual in which the roles of these mental factors are particularly emphasized. And in the third and final part, I will further discuss Patrul's moral philosophy, in specific connection with the problem of self-examination, as it forms a bridge with the core soteriological issue of Dzogchen, self-awareness (*rang rig*). In this way, continual mindfulness will be established as forming the "ethos of the Great Perfection."

1. Sources of Words of My Perfect Teacher: Sūtra, Tantra, Dzogchen

Patrul's manual is concerned with the integration of three elements—sūtra, tantra, and Dzogchen—arranged in a practical progression. It starts with sūtra, with the practice of the so-called ordinary foundational practices (the "four mind-changers": meditating upon the precious human

existence, impermanence and death, the retribution of karma, and the suffering of cyclic existence).

Such realizations then lead to tantra, with the extra-ordinary foundational practices of Vajrayāna. These start with entering into refuge (integrating the aspects of sūtra, both Hīnāyāna and Mahāyāna, with those of Vajrayāna), and the generation of the awakening mind (*bodhicitta*, *byang chub kyi sems*). The generation of the awakening mind is exemplified with numerous references to the classical work of Mahāyāna practice, the *Guide to Bodhisattva Conduct (Bodhicaryāvatāra)* by Śāntideva, for the revival of which Patrul was widely acclaimed in pre-modern Tibet.⁵

The next practices are purely tantric, but with a Dzogchen perspective: purification with Vajrasattva's mantra recitation; accumulating merits with *maṅḍala* offerings; and the devotional practice of *guru yoga*, which is itself the rehearsal or repetition of the process of a tantric empowerment with Dzogchen at its heart.⁶ In the Tibetan cultural world, all these ascetic practices traditionally must be performed 100,000 times before one is given further instruction to proceed to Dzogchen.

The more technical aspects of Dzogchen's core practices are beyond the scope of Patrul's manual. They are the subject of other works, especially Jigme Lingpa's Dzogchen manual, *Gnosis Teacher, Ye shes bla ma*. However, Dzogchen forms the horizon and general orientation of *Words of My Perfect Teacher*. For the Dzogchen initiate, all practices, including the refuge, have Dzogchen levels of meanings and corresponding experiences (Klein 11). *Words of My Perfect Teacher* includes a history of this specific Dzogchen lineage that represents the gathering of all the various levels of

⁵ On Patrul's oral lineage of teaching the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, see Pelden, as well as Kretschmar.

⁶ After these extraordinary practices, *Words of My Perfect Teacher* also add the tantric practices of "cutting through" (*gcod*), and the transfer of consciousness (*'pho ba*), according to this lineage of the Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse.

Buddhist teachings, then embodied in the person of the teacher, the lineage-holder.

According to the Dzogchen practice guide written by Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé (*'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas*, 1813-1899), a contemporary of Patrul, the integration of the tantric extraordinary foundational practices with Dzogchen may be a rather late historical development. According to Kongtrul (49-50), canonical Dzogchen scriptures, as well as the practice guides of Longchen Rabjam Drime Özer (*klong chen rab 'byams dri med 'od zer*, 1308-1364), do not contain such integrations. He quotes the *Supportive Manual of Red Letters* (*Yi ge dmar ru'i rgyab yig*), which merely states that at the beginning of the path, practitioners must accumulate merits.

Nevertheless, Kongtrul fully embraces the identification of merit accumulation with the accomplishment of the foundational practices. He too offers a developed version of those exercises as a substantial part of his manual, which covers the entire path of the instruction series (*man ngag sde*) of Dzogchen, including the core practices of “natural release” (*khregs chod*) and “direct crossing” (*thod rgal*). But I must leave the full examination of this historical process for another occasion.

In many ways, the extraordinary effort that is required to implement the foundational practices contrasts with the rhetoric of non-effort (*rtsol med*) that is found in Dzogchen scriptures. In a sense, the total relaxation that is emphasized in Dzogchen instructions may have to be interpreted as the stage coming after the very culmination of intense efforts, thus transcending but also integrating them. The dialectics of effortfulness and effortlessness lies at the core of the categorization of mindfulness in Dzogchen. Not surprisingly, the necessity or the dispensation to perform those foundational practices before being authorized to practice Dzogchen has been a major issue in globalized Tibetan Buddhism. Lay practitioners (whether they are in the East or in the West), facing the many

demands of modern lifestyles, may never find the time to complete these practices and therefore may never access the main liberating practice of Dzogchen. Contemporary teachers have taken a wide spectrum of approaches. Some teachers have chosen an “essentialist/individualist” method, interpreting the purpose of the foundational practices as essentially that of generating an awareness, and therefore regarding them as necessary but on a case by case basis, and in flexible ways. Other teachers have been “formalist/traditionalist,” maintaining the traditionally set numbers and a rigorous step-by-step progression. In the middle, other teachers have taught Dzogchen core practice in parallel with the accomplishment of the foundational practices.

The present article will rather focus on the necessity, according to *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, to establish a firm and deliberate mindfulness (this being arguably the thread of the foundational practices, anyway) in order to be capable of discovering and maintaining the contemplation of Dzogchen. Patrul’s principle source is chapter five of Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, “Guarding Meta-Awareness.” As Garfield notes, in this chapter “mindfulness is taken up as the very foundation of all moral practice and development” (203). In close association with meta-awareness, mindfulness serves as the foundation of the trainings, and especially for observing the precepts of the first training—morality, or ethics.

In *Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Patrul extends this principle, first articulated for the vows of personal liberation and of the bodhisattva, to tantric pledges (*samaya*, *dam tshig*) as well. Thus, mindfulness and meta-awareness enable the progressive establishment and consolidation of all three sets of vows (*trisaṃvara*, *sdom gsum*) found in Tibetan Buddhism.

The following quotations from the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*’s fifth chapter can be seen as the backbone of the doctrine of continual mindful aware-

ness that is proposed in *Words of My Perfect Teacher*.⁷ First, all vows are brought back to their main root, guarding the mind:

Therefore, this, my mind
Should be well-held and well-guarded.
Except for the vow of guarding the mind,
What to do with many vows?
(Chapter five, v. 18)

And the means to guard the mind consists in guarding mindfulness and meta-awareness:

To those who wish to guard their mind,
I join the palms of my hands saying:
With all your efforts, guard
Mindfulness and meta-awareness
(Chapter five, v. 23)

Then guarding mindfulness and meta-awareness, mindful awareness, consists in examining oneself before one can properly act. This adds a major element of discernment through self-observation:

When one wishes to move or
One wishes to speak,
First, one should examine one's own mind,
And then, act firmly with intelligence.
(Chapter five, v. 47)

⁷ I have translated the four following extracts of this chapter five. See Śāntideva for the Sanskrit and Tibetan sources that were used, as well the reference to an English translation of the whole work. In the context of this article on Patrul, I have tried to stay closer to the Tibetan version.

Such self-examination is ultimately defined as the very principle of mindful awareness:

Again and again, examining
 The state of one's mind and body.
 This alone is, in sum,
 The definition of guarding awareness.
 (Chapter 5, v. 108)

The close association of mindfulness and meta-awareness with wisdom is also found in Vasubandhu's *Abhidharmakośa* and its auto-commentary (chapter six, 15a-b; vol. 4, 159-161). Vasubandhu defines the nature of the ways of establishing mindfulness (in the specific sense of the practice of an inquiry into our experience through the joint application of mindfulness and meta-awareness) as being wisdom, and therefore, like wisdom, as being threefold: born from (1) study, (2) reflection, and (3) cultivation. Based upon this significant definition, I have proposed envisioning the role of mindfulness or "presence" by relating its various facets to study, reflection, and cultivation. This forms the exercise of "mindful wisdom": (1) keeping Buddhist teachings *present* in mind, (2) conceiving adequate *re-present-ations*, and (3) cultivating a *presence* of mind (Deroche).

I intend here to show how these three different aspects of mindfulness are interwoven in Patrul's manual. This model of mindful wisdom is also a model of ethical mindfulness, of considering mindfulness, as Śāntideva does, as the pillar of ethics. Again, the moral nature of mindfulness may be better understood when integrated with the threefold wisdom. Although Vasubandhu (chapter six, 5a-b; vol. 4, 142) proposes that ethics is the *base* from which the threefold wisdom is pursued, I would argue that ethics finds its accomplishment and perfection *in* the threefold wisdom. Ethical literacy is directly connected with *study* (learning what to adopt and what to reject in the first place). Self-examination (in the sense of the

examination of conscience) is intimately related to *self-reflection*. Finally, the self-observation and self-awareness, *cultivated* in meditation, considerably support the development of moral judgment by mastering emotional reactivity (compulsively liking and disliking) and progressively correcting cognitive biases.

As we shall now see with Patrul (and not unlike Socrates), life becomes morally good only when it is carefully and rationally *examined*. And such an examination relies upon the constant exercise of mindful awareness.

2. Textual Analysis: Mindfulness as the Foundation of the Path

First, mindfulness understood as non-forgetfulness and retention defines the very ethics of learning from a teacher:

The teacher gives instructions to the student about the way to listen to the Dharma, the way to practice, the way to abandon negativities, and the way to accomplish virtues. It is then up to the student to put these into practice. Therefore, the student as well, not forgetting and keeping these in mind, must practice and actualize them. (KLZh 13)⁸

One can learn only by being undistracted, that is, by relying upon mindfulness and associated mental factors:

The numerous chains of discursive thoughts about the present, past, and future, have no time to become fruitful. Since these are the cause of distraction for one's mind-

⁸ *bla mas slob ma la khrid 'chad pa de/ chos nyan tshul sgrub tshul/ sdig pa spong tshul/ dge ba sgrub tshul/ nyams su len tshul rnams slob pa yin pas/ slob mas kyang de rnams ma brjed par yid la bzung nas nyams su blangs te mngon du byed dgos kyi/*

stream, these are to be perfectly abandoned, and endowed with mindful awareness and care, one listens [to the teacher]. (17)⁹

Then, self-reflection and self-examination illuminate one's own condition. Self-knowledge—the acute awareness of one's existential condition, recognizing that one is subject to the suffering of cyclic existence but at the same time has the potential thanks to this human rebirth (“the precious human body”) to free oneself and others from misery—becomes the starting point, the foundation of the path:

Therefore, if by examining in one's experience the presence of the eight liberties and ten riches,¹⁰ ones finds that these are perfectly complete, then such condition is to be referred as the precious human body endowed with eighteen liberties and riches. (41)¹¹

Reflecting upon the extraordinary potential for awakening of a human birth leads to a deep appreciation: it is rare, precious, and not to be wasted. When Patrul gives his instructions on mindfulness of death (the Buddhist version of *memento mori*), he exhorts the student to live each moment as if it were the last:

One meditates upon nothing but death at all times and in all circumstances. While going, sitting, or lying down, one meditates, repeating also with one's speech, having

⁹ *de ltar 'das ma 'ong pa'i rtog tshogs mang po thog tu khel dus med cing rang rgyud g.yengs pa'i rgyu yin pas legs par spangs te dran shes bag yod dang ldan pas nyan/*

¹⁰ See Patrul 18-19 for the details of these eighteen categories.

¹¹ *de ltar dal ba brgyad 'byor pa bcu dang bco brgyad po de rang rgyud la brtags pas legs par tshang na/ dal 'byor bco brgyad dang ldan pa'i mi lus zhes bya ba de yin yang /*

constantly in mind as well: “this is my last action in this world.” (82)¹²

With one’s mortality kept in mind, one should continuously exercise mindfulness and meta-awareness to put into practice the transformative teachings of Buddhism:

But only meditating upon death will not suffice. At the time of death, what is beneficial is solely the sacred Dharma. Therefore, having constantly an attitude that is not lacking mindfulness and meta-awareness, and knowing that all activities of cyclic existence are impermanent and pointless, one should exhort oneself to practice the authentic Dharma. (83)¹³

These two elements—mindfulness of death and mindful awareness that is directed at awakening—are mutually supportive. To forget the reality of death leads one to be further entangled in trivial matters, obsessed with them, losing sight of what is considered by Patrul to be more essential and beneficial, the path of freedom and lasting happiness:

Until now, not being mindful of death, we have been conquering enemies, protecting relatives, and making future plans about dwellings and possessions. (136)¹⁴

Mindfulness of death loosens the grip of worldly bonds. Then, mindfulness and meta-awareness form the very pillars of ethical conduct, keeping

¹² *dus dang gnas skabs thams cad du 'chi ba kho na bsgom zhing 'gro 'dug nyal gsum thams cad la 'jig rten 'di'i spyod lam gyi tha ma yin no/ zhes ngag tu yang brjod/ yid la'ang dung nge bsgom/*

¹³ *'chi ba tsam bsgom pas kyang mi 'ong ste 'chi khar phan pa dam pa'i chos kho na yin pas/ dus rtag tu dran pa dang shes bzhin ma bral ba'i ngang nas 'khor ba'i bya bzhag thams cad mi rtag snying po med par shes pas yang dag pa'i chos la bskul dgos te/*

¹⁴ *da lta phan chad 'chi ba ma dran pas dgra 'dul gnyen skyong gnas mal dang zang zing la phyi tshis/*

in mind what are the virtuous factors, and monitoring their skillful implementation:

Therefore, at all times, the antidotes of virtues, being held by mindfulness and meta-awareness, do grow; and one must not be sullied even by the slightest negative deed. (212)¹⁵

Such constant vigilance enables one to live with greater discernment and autonomy, decreasing the fixations on external phenomena:

At all times, by means of not being separated from mindfulness and meta-awareness, one does not get attached to all the appearances of the world and beings, external or internal, as having a fixed reality. One trains the mind [to see them] as unreal and illusory displays. (216)¹⁶

Among their many defaults, bad teachers lack the pillars of mindfulness and meta-awareness. This fundamental weakness causes their moral and spiritual failure:

Their mind-stream has gross afflictions, and, because of lacking mindfulness and meta-awareness, they violate their vows and tantric pledges. (225)¹⁷

¹⁵ *de ltar dus dang rnam pa thams cad du dran pa dang / shes bzhin gyis bzung nas dge ba'i gnyen po bskyed de/ sdiq pa'i las phra mo tsam gyis kyang ma gos par bya dgos/*

¹⁶ *dus dang rnam pa thams cad du dran pa shes bzhin dang ma bral ba'i sgo nas phyi nang snod bcud kyi snang ba thams cad la a 'thas kyi bden zhen mi bya zhing / bden med sgyu ma'i rnam rol du blo sbang /*

¹⁷ *rgyud nyon mongs rags shing dran pa dang shes bzhin med pas sdom pa dang dam tshig 'chal ba/*

To avoid such mistaken guides, one has to carefully examine a potential teacher. This inquiry relies upon the mental scrutiny and self-reliance generated by exercising one's own mindfulness and meta-awareness:

First, by means of being skillful in examining the teacher, one should examine him. Before requiring a connection with him through empowerments or teachings, one should perfectly examine him. Then, one relies upon him if he has all the qualifications of a teacher but does not rely upon him if he has not them all. (244)¹⁸

Mindful awareness is also intimately linked to turning the mind toward the objects of refuge, a spiritual conversion that forms a continual practice to be adapted skillfully to every circumstance:

At all times, with an attitude that is not lacking mindful awareness, while walking, one meditates the divinities of the refuge in the space above one's right shoulder: they form a place for circumambulation. While sitting, they are meditated in the space above the summit of the head: they form a support for prayer. (294)¹⁹

Mindful awareness, in close association with self-examination, preserves the mind from the perilous outbursts of the “three poisons” (greed, ill-will, delusion; *rāga*, *dveṣa*, *moha*; *'dod chags*, *zhe sdang*, *gti mug*) that constitutes the central problem according to the moral psychology of Buddhism:

¹⁸ *dang po bla ma brtags pa la mkhas pa'i sgo nas brtags par bya ba de yang dbang chos kyi 'brel ba ma zhus pa'i gong du legs par brtags nas/ bla ma'i mtshan nyid tshang bar 'dug na bstan zhing / ma tshang na mi bstan pa yin gyi/*

¹⁹ *dus dang rnam par thams cad du sems dran shes dang ma bral ba'i ngang nas skyabs yul gyi lha tshogs de dag 'gro ba'i tshe phrag pa g.yas kyi nam mkhar bsgom/ de bskor ba byed pa'i gnas yin/ 'dug pa'i tshe spyi bo'i gtsug gi nam mkha' la bsgom/ de gsol ba 'debs pa'i rten yin/*

Generally, if one does not examine and investigate one's mind-stream by holding all the time with mindfulness and meta-awareness the meaning of the teachings that were requested, then violent thoughts of greed and hatred will have one accumulating severe evil without any difficulty. (352)²⁰

Self-examination enables one to be aware of one's intentions and correct them when they are unwholesome. This is the core principle of Mahāyāna ethics. In order to possess a spiritual value, any practice, even the simplest and most popular in traditional Tibet, needs to be accomplished with a sense of purpose. Without clearly defined concepts, one has no moral compass. Thus, at a foundational level (not to be confused with, or depreciated for, an advanced non-conceptual meditative state), Patrul advocates for a self-examination that has a conceptual dimension, and that serves to clarify one's goals and ethical orientation:

Instead of pretending to practice vast virtues like prostrations, circumambulations, liturgies, recitations, etc., but only vaguely and without a clear idea in mind, it is very important to train in having good intentions by constantly examining one's mind-stream. (354-355)²¹

Such an examination is extended by mindful awareness to all situations, not just those of formal contemplative practice. The slightest negligence

²⁰ *lar rang gis chos zhus pa'i don po dus dang rnam pa thams cad du dran pa dang shes bzhin gyis bzung nas rang rgyud la brtag dpyad ma byas na don med du chags sdang gi blo drag po las ngan tshabs po che [g]sog 'gro ba la tsheds med pa yin/*

²¹ *tsam tsob [>tsab] tu rang rgyud la mi rtog par phyag dang bskor ba kha ton dang bzlas brjod sogs dge ba rgya chen po byed khul las/ rtag tu rang gi rgyud la brtags nas bsam pa bzang po la bslab pa gal che'o/*

in one's behavior may lead to evil deeds and the suffering they cause. Therefore, vigilance is vitally important:

Generally, according to even ordinary, worldly sayings: “virtues happen casually from the mouth, casually from the hand; negativity happen casually from going, casually from sitting.” If one does not train in the points to be rejected and adopted, at all times examining one's mind-stream by means of mindful awareness and carefulness, one may accumulate numerous and severe negativities even at the occasion of a simple game. (392)²²

Weakness of mindful awareness is also to blame for the violation of tantric pledges, the specific ethical system of the Vajrayāna. Mindful awareness enables one to observe tantric pledges properly in the first place:

On the basis of clear mindfulness and meta-awareness, etc., the fault of deteriorating the tantric pledges has not arisen. . . (454)²³

Such constant vigilance is accompanied by a clear awareness of one's limitations, vulnerability, with a deep sense of humility:

Regarding these pledges of the Vajrayāna, of the secret mantras, there is a great fault in deteriorating them, and preserving them is most difficult. Therefore, it is totally

²² *lar 'jig rten pa phal pa'i kha skad la yang / dge ba kha zhor lag zhor/ sdig pa 'gro zhor 'dug zhor zer ba ltar/ rang gi [rgyud?] dus dang rnam pa thams cad du dran shes dang bag yod kyi sgo nas brtags te/ spang blang gi gnas la ma 'bad na/ tha na rtse mo tsam gyi zhor la'ang sdig pa tshabs po che du ma sog 'gro ba yin pas/*

²³ *dran pa dang shes bzhin gsal ba sogs la brten dam tshig nyams pa'i skyon ma byung yang /*

inappropriate to think that one is perfect and to become proud without examining one's own mind-stream. (456)²⁴

The main purification method in tantric Buddhism is the mindful recitation of the mantra of the Buddha Vajrasattva ("Diamond Being"):

Presently, our antidotes are small. Our mindfulness has deteriorated. We lack meta-awareness, and we do not know perfectly the different kinds of downfalls. In these circumstances, there is no doubt that the different kinds of downfalls are pouring upon us like rain. As an antidote to them, it is very important that at all times, we hold to the meditation-recitation of Vajrasattva as our tutelary deity practice, and at the very least, to recite twenty-one times the hundred syllables without interruption. (454)²⁵

Ultimately, all the essential points of the path to awakening are to be kept by mindful awareness:

Applying the instructions to one's faults, correcting one's mind with the Dharma, continually holding these with mindfulness and meta-awareness, taking all blames upon oneself, and not allowing to become undisciplined due to the apparition of a negative thought, are the sacred points

²⁴ *gsang sngags rdo rje theg pa'i dam tshig 'di ni nyams na nyes pa che zhing srung bar yang shin tu bka' bas/ rang rgyud la mi brtags par nga dam ldan yin no snyam nas nga rgyal byas pas ni ci yang mi 'ong ste/*

²⁵ *da lta rang re gnyen po chung ba/ dran pa nyams pa/ shes bzhin med pa/ ltung ba'i rnam grangs legs par mi shes pa rnam la ni/ ltung ba'i rnam grangs char pa bzhin 'bab par gdon mi za bas/ de dag gi gnyen por dus dang rnam pa thams cad du rdor sems sgom bzlas 'di la yi dam du bzung nas tha na yang yig brgya nyer gcig re ma chag par byed pa ni gal che'o//*

for disciplining one's mind-stream by means of the Dharma. (585)²⁶

3. Discussion: Moral Philosophy of Mindful Awareness and Self-Examination in Paltrul's Manual

Let us now discuss the moral philosophy of mindful awareness and self-examination found in Paltrul's incisive arguments and lively exhortations. As well articulated by McRae in her study on moral judgement and perception in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism with special reference to Patrul's tradition: "Many Buddhist moral philosophical arguments share with Hellenistic philosophers a tendency to offer therapeutic arguments They are offered as a way to reclaim the psychological freedom (from afflictions) required to act morally" (353). For Buddhist moral psychology, all unwholesome actions are rooted in the main afflictions of greed, ill-will, and delusion; and all wholesome actions are rooted in a state of mind that is free from them. The space of such freedom between perception and action is what makes moral decisions possible in the first place.

In Patrul's manual, mindfulness and related factors are cultivated precisely to facilitate such a psychological freedom and disentanglement. Mindfulness provides a foundation that enables one to recognize and rest in the core nucleus of freed, this dimension being further clarified and directly introduced in Dzogchen. *Words of My Perfect Teacher* bridges the classical teachings of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and Dzogchen, exposing a progression that is well elucidated in this quotation from Khenpo Chöga, a contemporary representative of Patrul's exegetical and yogic lineage:

²⁶gdams ngag mtshang thog tu phab/ chos dang rang sems zhu dag byas/ rgyun du dran pa dang shes bzhin gyis bzung ste le lan thams cad rang la gda' zhing / kun rtog ngan pa zhiq skyes pa tshun chad/ kha yan tu mi btang bar rang rgyud chos kyis 'dul ba ni gnad dam pa yin no/

The Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra first shows us all the negative aspects of our confused dualistic mind [sems] and gives us various methods to deal with them. The text shows us how to develop our inherent buddha-nature qualities. The Great Perfection teaches us how to recognize the nature of our mind, this very buddha-nature. But before we can understand the teachings on the nature of mind [sems ngo] we must have a good understanding of dualistic mind itself and how to guard and tame it. In this regard, the Bodhisattva-caryāvatāra is a perfect preparation for the teachings of the Great Perfection. (Kretschmar 174)

For Plato, *ethos* (*ἔθος*) refers to the custom linked to the proper law (*Laws*, VII, 792d-e), but can also take the meaning of “character” or “way of being” (*Republic*, VI, 490c). For Aristotle, intellectual virtues are developed by scholarly training, but moral virtues, or virtues of character (*ēthikai*), are acquired by habit, and require time and experience (*Nicomachean Ethics*, II, 1, 1103a). In modern times, Max Weber considered *ethos* to be the normative and internalized order, a set of ethical rules or maxims that direct daily conduct. Based on these Western categorizations, I have used in this article the concept of *ethos* to refer to a “way of life” guided by moral principles, and forming through habituation a certain way of being, a constant, consistent, and continual disposition in all times and places.

In Tibetan language and culture, the parallel concept may be *spyod lam*, the way of conduct or lifestyle, (*spyod pa*, Sk. *cārya*) being after view and meditation the third essential component of the Dzogchen path. In Dzogchen, perfect conduct, as the very goal or fruit of the path, is conduct that arises not from the dualistic mind, but from pure awareness, which allows a compassionate response to any situation. All perceived appearances become then (re-)integrated within this “pure presence,”

traditionally described as the inseparability (*dbyer med*) of “primordial purity” (*ka dag*) and “spontaneous presence” (*lhun grub*).

In the extracts presented in this article, we have seen how Patrul repeatedly exhorts his audience to exercise mindful awareness “at all times and in all circumstances” (*dus dang gnas skabs thams cad du*), at “all different times” (*dus dang rnam pa thams cad du*), “in a permanent time,” “always” (*dus rtag tu*), and “continuously” (*rgyun du*). One is instructed to be inseparable from mindfulness and meta-awareness (*dran pa dang shes bzhin ma bral ba'i ngang nas / sgo nas*). Their function is to hold or retain (*bzung*) the principles by which one should live, by which one should examine oneself (*rang gi rgyud la brtags*) and then to convert to, or maintain, a positive mindset (*bsam pa bzang po*).

Mindfulness has sometimes been represented in contemporary Western accounts as “value-free” and therefore as extractable from its cultural background (a baggage judged, too hastily, as unnecessary and cumbersome). I will argue that on the contrary, as in the Tibetan context of the *Heart Essence of the Vast Expanse* upheld and propagated by Patrul, the mnemonic, reflective, and attentional facets of the exercise of mindfulness form an ethos that mirrors the close relationship between the value system and the orientation of attention. That is, attention is paid to objects that are valued by, or of interest to the subject.²⁷ By sustaining self-observation and self-examination, mindful awareness plays a key role in the re-examination of personal values, assumptions, in shifting priorities, and in re-organizing one’s existence.

This process admittedly transcends passive adherence to categories received from the tradition. It actively engages and transforms the

²⁷ On this philosophical problem and its contemporary relevance, see Young. Furthermore, on attention understood as a cultural problem, the object of a philosophical anthropology, and in relation to the critical issue of moral agency, see Crawford (4-27).

subject and its moral agency. The ultimate Dzogchen ethos, the so-called “conduct of Samantabhadra (*kun tu bzang po'i spyod pa*)” which is beyond conceptual acceptance or rejection, is itself grounded in pure self-awareness. But before such a fruit is attained, conduct on the Dzogchen path consists in alternating self-examination through deliberate mindful awareness and moments of non-dual self-awareness.

Conclusion: Continual Mindfulness as the Dzogchen Way of Life

Deliberate mindfulness, as stabilized and balanced in a continuity, forms the way of life or ethos of the Dzogchen path. Through it, the view and meditation of pure awareness can be gradually and fully integrated. Before one can (re-)enter the core of Dzogchen practice, one needs to gather (repeatedly) the scattered mind. But, as we have seen, distraction is a problem not only of concentration, but of intention, and therefore of existential/ethical orientation. Distraction as dispersion, disorganization, or entropy, is overcome by (re-)establishing life priorities, ethical rules, and philosophical truths that can (re-)direct attention to a higher good. According to Patrul's tradition, such higher good consists in leading all sentient beings to perfect awakening.

A common element of deliberate mindfulness and the distinctive mindfulness of Dzogchen that is inseparable from pure awareness is the “preservation” (*skyong*) of a state of “flow” or “continuity” (*rgyun*). The *moment-to-moment* application of deliberate mindfulness sets the stage for the sudden shift into *instantaneous* pure awareness (*rig pa skad cig ma*). For this conversion to occur, Patrul's manual serves to shape the mind, reorienting attention. Through the application of continual mindfulness, the mind is directed to the objects of refuge, toward perfect awakening for the sake of all sentient being, maintaining the purity of ethical precepts including tantric pledges, increasing generosity as a mindset as vast as the

universe, and ultimately being unified with the awakened state of the teacher. This last exercise, guru yoga, as exposed by Patrul, is not merely a preliminary element. It coincides with the main practice of Dzogchen. The reason is that it catalyses most directly the shift from deliberate mindfulness to pure awareness. Like all foundational practices, it starts with an intentional effort and continues with a sequence of tantric visualisations that involves deliberate mindfulness. But ultimately, the state of the teacher being pure awareness, the practice consists eventually in abiding in the direct experience of pure awareness itself.

In conclusion, we can discern how the ethos of the Great Perfection according to Patrul is echoed by the late Chögyal Namkhai Norbu (1938-2018) in his most essential definition of the foundational practices:

Always training the mind-stream with the four mind-
 changers [becoming aware of the precious human life,
 impermanence and death, the defects of cyclic exist-
 ence, and the retribution of actions]
 Not being at all separated from the yoga of knowing one's
 self-awareness as the teacher,
 Being undistracted in the four activities [walking, standing,
 sitting, lying],
 And guarding mindfulness and awareness, are [all] the
 roots of [Ati] yoga. (Cycle 32)²⁸

Deliberate mindfulness and meta-awareness play a major role in the des-automatization of unwholesome habits and the cultivation of wholesome habits. How does their cultivation relate to the main concern of Dzogchen teachings, resting in pure awareness? On the Dzogchen path, there is an

²⁸ This is my own translation of the Tibetan text: / *rtag tu blo ldog nam bshis rgyud sbyang zhing // rang rig bla mar shes pa'i rnal 'byor dang // nam yang mi 'bral dus bzhir yengs med du // dran shes skyong ba rnal 'byor rtsa ba yin /*

alternation between the process of positive habituation, through conscious effort, extra-attention, meta-awareness, and a heightened sense of presence on the one hand, and on the other the release of such an effort that happens with the radical act of expanding awareness and resting in pure awareness. The reason is that even if pure awareness has been once recognized, later, due to deeply ingrained tendencies of ignorance and distractibility, such recognition is repeatedly lost. Thus, remaining at least aware of this fact, and conscious about its implications, deliberate mindfulness serves to prevent the mind from the perils of mind-wandering. Then, thanks to the enlargement of perspective that accompany the cultivation of a positive mindset, deliberate mindfulness allows the regular shift to, and recovery of, one's original nature. In this way, deliberate mindfulness and pure awareness are dynamically interrelated, until both become completely integrated. One can then live and die, forever remembering who one truly is.

Ultimately, pure awareness is not an inert state; it is endowed with the greatest creative and integrative power, because it is the very nucleus of intrinsic freedom (*rang grol*), present in all sentient beings. It is hidden in plain sight, because its actuality is not discerned in every moment of awareness. But the ethos of continual mindfulness, meta-awareness, and self-examination—structuring a mindful way of living in which each instant is continuously attended to and even carefully examined—offers a renewed opportunity to enter the path of Dzogchen, and to go again and again with the flow of pure awareness.

Abbreviation

KLZh Dza Patrul Orgyen Jigme Chökyi Wangpo (*dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med chos kyi dbang po*), *Rdzogs pa chen po klong chen snying tig gi sngon 'gro'i khrid yig kun bzang bla ma'i zhal lung*. In *Dpal sprul o rgyan 'jigs med*

chos kyi dbang po'i gsung 'bum, 8 vols. Si khron mi rigs dpe skrun khang, 2003, vol. 7.

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