

**“If Apprehending Occurs, It is not the View”
— Sakya Thinkers on the Madhyamaka View
of Freedom from Proliferations**

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국문요약

희론적멸이 무엇인지, 명상수행에서 그것이 어떻게 적용되는지, 그리고 비탄트라 및 탄트라 불교의 좀 더 넓은 영역 속에서 그것이 어떠한 위치를 점하고 있는지와 관련하여 본고에서 언급된 싸까학파(Sakya)의 사상가들이 지니고 있는 관점은 항상 동일한 것이었다. 희론적멸은 어떤 대상이 아니며 일체 존재와 비존재 등의 영역을 넘어서는 것이다. 결과적으로 그것은 색, 맛, 생각 등을 묘사하거나 이해하는 방식으로는 도달하거나 설명할 수 없는 것이다. 그

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러나 그것은 또한 토끼의 뿔 또는 다른 거짓으로 상상되는 현상과 같이 비존재인 것도 아니다. 그것은 단지 부정하고(negative) 해체하는(deconstructive) 방식, 즉 모든 개념적 구성물들을 벗겨냄으로써, 그리고 ‘보지 않는 방식으로 보는 것’을 통해서만이 깨달을 수 있다. 희론적멸은 다만 얻을 것이 없고(non-findability) 파악할 것이 없는(non-apprehending) 어떤 것일 따름이다. 희론에서 벗어나기 위해서, 파악할 것이 없는 상태에 도달하기 위해서는 명상 수행에 의지해야 하며, 이는 양극단을 부정하는 중관파의 논증과 [또는] 가르침의 정수, 탄트라파의 관정, 가피, 그리고 생기와 원만이라는 두 단계의 수행에 바탕을 둔 깨달음을 포함하고 있다.

희론적멸에 대한 이러한 접근은, 실재에 대해 사카가 취하는 중관파적 관점을 이해하기 위해 우리가 사카 사상가들이 깨닫는 ‘대상(object)’을 표현하는 방식 뿐만 아니라 더욱이 그들이 그 ‘대상’을 깨닫는 ‘주체(subject)’임을 나타내는 방식에 대해서도 깊은 주의를 기울여야 한다는 사실을 제시해 준다. 다시 말해, 희론적멸에 대한 가장 정확한 정의를 내리기 위해 노력하기보다는 마음이 스스로 희론에서 떠나는 과정을 고찰해야 하는 것이다. 그리고 그것은 중관파의 관점이 어떻게 관상수행에 포함되게 되었는지에 대해 탐구하지 않고서는 이루어질 수 없다.

주제어: 싸까학파(Sakya), 중관파, 희론적멸, 티벳 불교

This paper addresses several key elements of Sakya thinkers' approach to Madhyamaka, with the primary focus on their understanding of ultimate reality described as 'freedom from proliferations' (*spros bral*). It first provides a short summary of the general Sakya approach, then addresses works of several early Sakya masters, and finally explores writings of Gowō Rāṅjampa Sönam Senggé (*go bo rab 'byams pa bsod nams seng ge*, 1429-1489)—Gorampa (*go rams pa*) for short—whose position is accepted as representative of the mainstream within the Sakya tradition.

Sakya thought in general, and its approach to Madhyamaka in particular, is based largely on the works of the Five Foremost Venerable Founders (*rje btsun gong ma lnga*): Sachen Kūnga Nyingpo (*sa chen kun dga' snying po*, 1092-1158), Sönam Tsemo (*bsod nams rtse mo*, 1142-1182), Drakpa Gyeltsen (*grags pa rgyal mtshan*, 1147-1216), Sakya Pandita Kūnga Gyeltsen (*sa skya paṇḍita kun dga' rgyal mtshan*, 1182-1251), and Pakpa Lodrö Gyeltsen (*'phags pa blo gros rgyal mtshan*, 1235-1280). It is further elucidated in the writings of Rongtön Sheja Kūnrik (*rong ston shes bya kun rig*, 1367-1449), Rendawa Zhönnu Lodrö (*red mda' ba gzhon nu blo gros*, 1349-1412), Serdok Penchen Shakya Chokden (*gser mdog paṅ chen shākya mchog ldan*, 1428-1507), Taksang Lotsawa Sherap Rinchen (*stag tshang lo tsā ba shes rab rin chen*, b.1405), and Gorampa (to mention just a few).

While Sakya thinkers are not unanimous in their interpretations of Madhyamaka (or, more precisely, Niḥsvabhāvavāda Madhyamaka)¹⁾ and

1) In this paper, the term 'Madhyamaka' refers specifically to the Niḥsvabhāvavāda system. Such Sakya thinkers as Shakya Chokden, for example, include Alīkākarāvāda Yogācāra in the category of Madhyamaka. For more on Shakya Chokden's position, see Komarovski 2011.

related topics, they do agree on several key points. These points are well articulated in *Good Explanations of Knowing All Tenets of [the Vehicle of] Characteristics: Clear Explanation of the Presentation of the Four Tenets of the Causal Perfection [Vehicle]* by the twenty-eighth Sakya throne-holder Amé Künga Sönam (*a mes kun dga' bsod nams*, 1597-1659), whose position is representative of the Sakya approach. Addressing different Madhyamaka systems deriving from India, Amé Künga Sönam writes: “In that way, although with respect to the relative reality there are many dissimilar modes of positing, with respect to the meaning of thatness, there are no disagreements at all [between different Madhyamaka systems].”²⁾ Explaining the reason why such is the case, he continues:

This is because all [systems of] Madhyamaka agree that when the designated meaning of that which is designated as the correct relative reality has been analyzed and searched for through the reasoning of [the lack of being] one and many, etc., it is not found anywhere, and that [non-findability] is designated by the term ‘ultimate reality’.³⁾

The way one ‘sees’ this ultimate reality is different from the way one sees physical, verbal, or mental objects: ‘those [seers of ultimate reality] see [it] by way of not seeing’.⁴⁾ Correspondingly, when explaining the

2) *de ltar kun rdzob kyi bden pa la 'jog pa'i tshul mi 'dra ba du ma yod kyang / de kho nan yid kyi don la ni mi mthun pa cung zad kyang med de.* Amé Künga Sönam 2004, 600.

3) *yang dag kun rdzob kyi bden par btags pa de 'i btags don gcig dang du ma la sogs pa 'i rig [sic; amending to rigs] pas dpyad cing btsal ba na gang du yang ma rnyed pa de la don dam pa 'i bden pa zhes bya ba 'i ming gis 'dogs par dbu ma thams cad mthun pa 'i phyir.* Ibid.

meaning of 'realization of ultimate reality', Amé Künga Sönam points out that ultimate reality is not an object of mind at all, and that "the convention of that [mind] realizing that [ultimate reality] is applied to the mind itself being born as an entity devoid of all proliferations."⁵⁾ Clarifying why realization of ultimate reality is devoid of objective referents, he writes: "This is because other than a mere pacification of all signs of proliferations just being expressed by the term ["ultimate reality"], with regard to the ultimate reality [itself], it is not established as anything existent, nonexistent, etc., and not observed as anything whatsoever."⁶⁾

This approach can be summarized as follows: 1. Despite different interpretations of conventional reality, Madhyamaka systems deriving from India are in consensus in their positions on ultimate reality. 2. That reality is not an object, but rather the state of non-findability or freedom from proliferations which transcends all referents of conceptual thinking. 3. The process of realizing ultimate reality consists of deconstructing and giving up all sorts of apprehending.⁷⁾ 4. Direct realization of reality is a state of mind⁸⁾ stripped

4) *ma gzigs pa 'i tshul gyis de dag gis gzigs*. Ibid., 601.

5) *blo de nyid spros pa thams cad dang bral ba 'i ngo bor skyes pa la des de rtogs so zhes pa 'i tha snyad byas*. Ibid.

6) *don dam pa 'i bden pa ni spros pa 'i mtshan ma thams cad nye bar zhi bar tsam zhig la ming du brjod pa tsam las / yod med la sogs pa gang du yang ma grub cing cir yang ma dmigs pa 'i phyir ro*. Ibid.

7) Throughout this paper, 'apprehending' (*'dzin pa*) is used in terms of mental clinging or grasping in all of its gross and subtle forms, not only in terms of conceptual comprehension or understanding.

8) Throughout the paper, I use such terms as 'mind' and 'mental state' in a general, broad sense, encompassing such categories as *jñāna* (*ye shes*), etc., which some Sakya thinkers do *not* include into the category of mind (*sems*).

of all objects, with no holding onto anything whatsoever.

Because this paper deals with the Madhyamaka view of ultimate reality held by the leading Sakya thinkers—Drakpa Gyeltsen, Sönam Tsemo, Sakya Pendita, and Gorampa (with particular attention to the latter’s position)—view whose realization, according to them, is not affected by divergent Madhyamaka perspectives on conventional reality, I will not go into details of the first point,⁹⁾ and focus only on the latter three. Even a brief look at these points reveals that they cannot be addressed in separation from each other. In particular, due to the close relationship between the view of ultimate reality and its contemplative realization, it also suggests that it is necessary to address not only Sakya thinkers’ approach to the philosophical dimensions of Mahyamaka, but their approach to its contemplative dimensions as well. Limiting my own ruminations to a minimum and letting the Sakya thinkers speak for themselves, below I will extensively cite their writings which elucidate these points. My objective is twofold: clarifying the meaning of ‘freedom from proliferations’ as interpreted by leading Sakya thinkers, and demonstrating that they are in agreement regarding it.

9) Suffice it to say here that this point has been intentionally stressed by Sakya thinkers at least starting from the time of Rongtön, who makes the following statement: “The differentiation of Prāsaṅgika and Svāntarika in terms of particulars of good / bad views—without realizing the meaning of the explanation that they branched because of the particulars of explaining the intent of [Nāgārjuna’s] ‘[Wisdom:] Root [Stanzas on] Madhyamaka’ in a way of consequences and autonomous [syllogisms]—is the description of the views of the great Madhyamaka proponents of the Land of Āryas in ways of superimposition and deprecation. Thus, it is to be discarded as spittle (*dbu ma rtsa ba’i dgongs pa thal ’gyur dang rang rgyud du ’chad pa’i bye brag gis / thal rang gnyis su gyes par bshad pa’i don ma rtogs par lta ba bzang ngan gyi bye brag gis ’byed pa ni ’phags pa’i yul gyi dbu ma smra ba chen po dag gi lta ba la sgro ’dogs skur ’debs su smra ba yin pas / mehil ma’i thal ba bzhin du dor bar bya’o*). Rongtön 1988, 40.

A good place to start is *Parting from the Four Attachments (Zhen pa bzhi braḥ)*—famous instructions which, according to the Sakya tradition, were given by Mañjuśrī to the twelve-year-old Sachen Kūnga Nyingpo in a vision that followed Sachen's six years of practice focusing on Mañjuśrī.¹⁰⁾ The instructions consist of the following four lines: "If attached to this life, one is not a Dharma practitioner. / If attached to cyclic existence, it is not renunciation. / If attached to one's benefit, it is not bodhicitta. / If apprehending occurs, it is not the view."¹¹⁾ What interests us here is the final line which addresses the view of reality, instructing us to part from apprehending, characterized as a type of attachment. While it received different interpretations by Sakya thinkers, here is how it is explained by Drakpa Gyeltsen in his *Instructions on the Parting from the Four Attachments*:

With the apprehending of existence, there is no liberation.
With the apprehending of nonexistence, there is no high state [of rebirth].
Since the apprehending of the two is unknown,
Leave [yourself] at ease in the state of non-apprehending.
All dharmas are the objects of functioning of mind.
Without searching for creators of the four elements
[Such as] fate, God, etc.,
Leave [yourself] at ease in the state of mind-ness.

10) See Gorampa 1995d, 465.

11) *tshe 'di la zhen na chos pa min // 'khor ba la zhen na nges 'byung min // bdaq don la zhen na byang sems min // 'dzin pa byung na lta ba min*. According to Gorampa, these instructions embrace all practices taught in sūtras and their commentaries by Maitreya, Nāgārjuna, Āryadeva, Śāntideva, Candrakīrti, and others. *Ibid.*, 463-466.

With the appearances illusory by nature
 And the interdependent origination's
 Way of being unknown to express,
 Leave [yourself] at ease in the state of inexpressibility.¹²⁾

In both the root line and the commentary we find what can be described as a negative, deconstructive approach to understanding the view. It is not through forming correct ideas that the view is understood, but rather through eventually parting from apprehending any ideas and dwelling in the inexpressible state of mind free from all apprehending. It is this apophatic view of reality that is often described by Sakya thinkers as 'freedom from proliferations'. Let us now look at further details of Sakya thinkers' descriptions of the view of reality, ways of contemplating it, and its realization.

In his *Commentary on [Śāntideva's] 'Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds'*, Sönam Tsemo describes this view as follows: "That which is empty of all erroneous objects of observation is ultimate reality. Whatever is determined as existent, nonexistent, both, or neither, is the object of observation of erroneous minds. Because [ultimate reality] is devoid of them all, it is free from proliferations."¹³⁾ Regarding its contemplation and realization, he also

12) *yod par 'dzin la thar pa med // med par 'dzin la mtho ris med // gnyis kar 'dzin pa mi shes pas // gnyis med kyi ngang la gang dgar zhog // chos kun sems kyi spyod yul yin // phyang dang dbang phyug la sogs pa // 'byung bzhi 'i byed mkhan ma tshol bar // sems nyid kyi ngang la gang dgar zhog // snang ba sgyu ma 'i rang bzhin dang // rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba yi // gnas lugs brjod par mi shes kyi // brjod bral gyi ngang la gang dgar zhog.* Drakpa Gyeltsen 1736, 597.

13) *phyin ci log gi dmigs pa mtha' dag gis stong pa ni don dam pa 'i bden pa ste / yod pa dang med pa gnyis ka dang gnyis ka ma yin pa ji ltar yong su bcad kyang phyin ci log gi blo 'i dmigs*

writes: "the ultimate free from proliferations is known by the yogic direct perception by way of seeing nothing [merely being posited as] seeing suchness. It is ascertained by the inferential [valid cognition] by way of eliminating the object of negation."¹⁴⁾

What we learn in these passages is that because everything that can be characterized as existent, nonexistent, etc., is an object of erroneous minds, ultimate reality or freedom from proliferations is not an object at all, and its direct realization, therefore, is not a realization of anything. Thus, it is not surprising that Sönam Tsemo argues that for Mādhyamikas, even accepting something as emptiness is incorrect.¹⁵⁾ For support, he cites Nāgārjuna's *Wisdom: Root Stanzas on Madhyamaka*: "If the non-empty existed [even] a little, / The empty would exist a little. / [But] if the non-empty does not exist [even] a little, / How would the empty exist either?"¹⁶⁾ and "Victors taught emptiness / As relinquishing all views. / Those who view emptiness / Were taught as unsuitable for accomplishment."¹⁷⁾

Although no words or concepts can reach the freedom from proliferations that defies them all, the inferential, conceptual contemplation of it is seen as

pa yin la / de mtha' dag gis dben pas spros pa dang bral ba'o. Sönam Tsemo 1736, 577.

14) *don dam pa spros pa dang bral ba ni rnal 'byor gyi mngon sum gyis 'ga' yang ma mthong ba de kho na mthong ba'i tshul gyis shes la / spros pa gcod pa'i rjes dpag gis dgag bya rnam par bcad pa'i tshul gyis nges so.* Ibid., 577.

15) Ibid., 582.

16) *gal te stong pa cung zad yod // mi stong cung zad yod par 'gyur // mi stong cung zad med pas na // stong pa'ang yod par ga la 'gyur.* Derge, *dbu ma*, Tsa, 8a6 (the first two lines in the Derge version read: *gal te stong min cung zad yod // stong pa cung zad yod par 'gyur.*)

17) *rgyal ba rnams kyi stong pa nyid // lta kun nges par 'byin par gsungs // gang dag stong pa nyid lta ba // de dag bsgrub tu med par gsungs.* Ibid., 8a6-7 (the first two lines in the Derge version read: *rgyal ba rnams kyi stong pa nyid // lta kun nges par 'byung par gsungs.*)

the means of reaching its direct realization. Sönam Tsemo provides details of this process in his commentary on the following verses of *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*:

The habitual tendencies towards things are abandoned
 By familiarizing with the habitual tendencies towards emptiness.
 Those [latter tendencies] too are subsequently abandoned
 By familiarizing with ‘nothing at all’.
 When the analyzed thing,
 ‘What does not exist’, is not observed,
 Then how can the non-thing, devoid of support,
 Remain before mind?
 When neither things nor non-things
 Remain before mind,
 Then, since there are no other representations,
 Without objects of observation it is totally pacified.¹⁸⁾

Commenting on these lines, Sönam Tsemo outlines a threefold contemplative process. First, the apprehending of things is negated through meditation on emptiness: “If the meaning-generality of emptiness is meditated upon, then due to [that meditation being in] mutually exclusive contradiction with the

18) *stong nyid bag chags goms pas ni // dngos po 'i bag chags spong 'gyur zhing // ci yang med ces goms pas ni // de yang phyi nas spong bar 'gyur // gang tshe gang zhig med do zhes // brtag bya 'i dngos po mi dmigs pa // de tshe dngos med rten bral ba // blo yi mdun na ji ltar gnas // gang tshe dngos dang dngos med dag // blo yi mdun na mi gnas pa // de tshe rnam pa gzhan med pas // dmigs pa med par rab tu zhi.* Derge, dbu ma, La, 32a3-4.

apprehending of things, the apprehending of things is negated.”¹⁹⁾ Then one abandons emptiness in terms of inclusionary elimination (*yongs gcod*, i.e., the idea of emptiness reached through the negation of things or their ‘exclusionary elimination’, *rnam gcod*). That is done by “familiarizing with the exclusionary elimination and inclusionary elimination not existing at all.”²⁰⁾ That superimposition of emptiness in terms of inclusionary elimination is abandoned “because the superimposition of the object of negation—the support for the superimposition of negation—does not exist.”²¹⁾ As a result of this process of cessation—induced by reasoning—of conceptualization of things and emptiness alike, finally wisdom with no appearances is produced:

When things do not remain before mind—i.e., are not established on the path of reasoning—and when non-things do not remain before mind—i.e., the nonexistence in terms of inclusionary elimination is not established as an object of reasoning, then, because the meaning-generalities of existence and nonexistence do not arise and there is no attachment to externalities, without objects of observation [mind] is totally pacified—i.e., there is born wisdom with no appearances, wherein there are no objects of observation of superimpositions and the flow of conceptualization is severed.²²⁾

19) *stong pa nyid kyi don spyi bsgoms na dngos por 'dzin pa dang / phan tshun 'gal ba'i stobs kyis dngos por 'dzin pa 'gag pa*. Sönam Tsemo 1736, 603.

20) *rnam gcod dang yongs gcod ci yang med par goms pa*. Ibid.

21) *bkag pa'i sgro 'dogs kyis [sic; amending to kyi] rten dgag bya'i sgro 'dogs med pa'i phyir*. Ibid., 604.

22) *gang tshe dngos dag blo'i mdun na mi gnas te rig [sic; amending to rigs] pa'i lam du ma grub la / gang tshe dngos med dag blo'i mdun na mi gnas te med pa yongs gcod rigs pa'i yul du ma grub na yod pa dang med pa'i don spyi mi 'char zhing phyi rol du zhen pa med pas*

These passages provide further details of the deconstructive contemplative process, wherein all referents of conceptual thinking, including phenomena and their emptiness, are deconstructed, and mind which perceives and projects those referents is transcended as well. Yet, the state reached as the culmination of this process is not some sort of blank vacuumness, but a mental state described as wisdom.

The view of freedom from proliferations is highly esteemed by Sakya thinkers not only in the context of Pāramitāyāna (non-tantric Mahāyāna), but Tantra as well. This is how Sakya Pendita—one of the most well-known and influential figures in the Sakya world—argues in his *Thorough Differentiation of the Three Types of Vows* for the sameness of this view in the two systems, while at the same time maintaining that the Buddhist tantric practice is superior to the non-tantric one, because it provides the means of accessing a special ‘subject’ realizing freedom from proliferations:

If there were a view higher than the Pāramitā[yāna]’s
View of] freedom from proliferations,
That view would have proliferations.
If it is free from proliferations, there is no difference [between the two].
Therefore, the view of listening
Understood through explanation is only one [for both systems].
Nevertheless, Secret Mantra is superior in terms of
Means of realizing freedom from proliferations.²³⁾

dmigs pa med par rab tu zhi ste / sgro 'dogs kyi dmigs pa med cing rtog pa rgyun chad pa 'i snang ba med pa 'i shes rab skye 'o. Ibid.

23) *pha rol phyin pa 'i spros bral las // lhag pa 'i lta ba yod na ni // lta de spros pa can du 'gyur*

Sakya Pendita also argues that freedom from proliferations—which he equates with dharmadhātu (*chos dbyings*) as well—transcends the categories of existence, nonexistence, etc. Citing Nāgārjuna’s *Wisdom: Root Stanzas on Madhyamaka*: “‘Existence’ is the apprehending of permanence. // ‘Nonexistence’ is the view as annihilation. // Therefore, wise ones should not abide // In both existence and nonexistence,”²⁴) in the same text he writes: “This passage too is the textual statement // That dharmadhātu is neither existent nor nonexistent.”²⁵) He specifically insists that: “Dharmadhātu is not even existent. // Dharmakīrti clearly taught that // The mere existence is pervaded by impermanence.”²⁶) Clarifying the meaning of the latter statement in his *Answers to the Questions of the Teacher Lodrö Rapsel*, Sakya Pendita cites *Diamond Cutter Sūtra*: “Reality is not a knowable. // It cannot be known”²⁷) and *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds*: “The ultimate is not the object of mind. // Mind is asserted as relative.”²⁸) Explaining their meaning, he

// spros bral yin na khyad par med // des na bshad pas go ba yi // thos pa’i lta ba gcig nyid yin // ‘on kyang spros bral rtogs pa yi // thabs la gsang sgnags khyad par ’phags. Sdom pa gsum gyi rab tu dbye ba. Sakya Pendita 2002, 308. Note that the term ‘view of listening understood through explanation’ does not refer only to the conceptually understood view. For more details on the passage, see Gorampa’s comments below.

24) *yod ces bya ba rtag par ’dzin // med ces bya ba chad par lta // de phyr yod dang med pa la // mkhas pas gnas par mi bya’o.* Derge, dbu ma, Tsa, 9a3-4.

25) *zhes gsungs pa yang chos kyi dbyings // yod med gnyis ka min pa’i lung.* Sakya Pendita 2002, 283.

26) *chos dbyings yod pa’ang ma yin te // yod tsam mi rtag gis khyab par // chos kyi grags pas gsal bar gsungs.* Ibid., 282. ‘Pervaded’ here means ‘necessarily being’ or ‘being included into’.

27) *chos nyid shes bya ma yin te // de ni shes par nus ma yin.* *Āryavajracchedikānāmaprajñā-pāramitāmahāyānasūtra*, ‘Phags pa shes rab kyi pha rol tu phyin pa rdo rje gcod pa zhes bya ba theg pa chen po’i mdo. Derge, shes rab sna tshogs, Ka, 131b1 (Derge version reads: *chos nyid rig par bya min pas // de ni rnam par shes mi nus*).

writes: “On its own side, dharmadhātu is indeed beyond the objects of knowing and expression. Nevertheless, via other-exclusion it is termed a knowable.”²⁹⁾ These arguments make clear that for Sakya Pendita too, ultimate reality or freedom from proliferations is not an object. It is merely labeled as ‘knowable’, etc., by conceptual minds whose mode of operation is described as ‘other-exclusion’ (*gzhan sel*).³⁰⁾ That said, freedom from proliferations can indeed be realized, and furthermore, there are superior (viz., tantric) and inferior (viz., non-tantric) means of its realization.

How then should one contemplate reality and how does that contemplation led to its realization? Sakya Pendita argues that when contemplating reality, one should not apprehend anything whatsoever, and he emphasizes the soteriological efficacy of dwelling in the state of non-apprehending or non-abiding as the means of destroying sufferings and achieving awakening. In his *Answers to the Inquiry by Kadampa Namkhabum*, having argued that

28) *don dam blo yi chos yul min // blo ni kun rdzob yin par 'dod*. Derge, *dbu ma*, La, 31a1.

29) *chos dbyings rang ngos nas shes brjod kyi yul las 'das mod / gzhan sel gyi sgo nas shes byar tha snyad mdzad*. Sakya Pendita 1736b, 488-491. This text is a reply to the inquiry into the meaning of “‘What exists is destroyed, similar to a pot; // Sound also exists’ is the reason of nature” (*gang yod de 'jig bum pa bzhin // sgra yang yod ces rang bzhin rtags*) from Sakya Pendita’s *Treasure of the Science of Valid Cognition (Tshad ma rig pa 'i gter)*, and the above passage from *Thorough Differentiation of the Three Types of Vows*. In reply to the former inquiry, citing passages from Dharmakīrti and summing their meaning, Sakya Pendita writes: “There are two types of existence here: // As actuality and as terms. // The actual existence performs function. // The terminological existence [serves as] the basis of negating and establishing” (*'dir ni yod pa rnam gnyis te // don dang tha snyad dag gis so // don gyi yod pas bya ba byed // tha snyad yod pas dgag bsgrub rten*). His reply to the latter has just been addressed.

30) Referring to the property of all conceptual minds which perceive things via eliminating what they are not.

even viewing mind as empty or luminous is a mistake, he writes:

Therefore, one is not to abide anywhere. In non-abiding, characteristics are not born. If characteristics are not born, no good and bad karmas issue results. If results of good and bad karmas are not issued, one does not take birth in the three realms. If one does not take birth in the three realms, one does not experience sufferings. That is called 'awakening'.³¹⁾

In *Answers to the Questions of Yogin Trumpa*, discussing the view of freedom from proliferations in the context of calm abiding and special insight, and proposing to carry it over into the tantric practice as well, Sakya Pendita writes:

The two—the calm abiding with blissful pliancy
And the special insight with the thorough pacification of all proliferations—
Are the great path of Pāramitāyāna.
It is good if they are accomplished by the Victors' Sons.
The two—the calm abiding with the thorough pacification of conceptualization
of characteristics
And the special insight with the union of bliss and emptiness—

31) *de bas na gang la yang mi gnas par bya / me gnas pa la mtshan ma mi skye / mtshan ma ma skyes na las legs nyes kyi 'bras bu mi 'byin / las legs nyes kyi 'bras bu ma phyung na khams gsum du skye ba mi len / khams gsum du skye ba ma blangs na 'khor ba 'i sdug bsngal mi myong / de la byang chub ces ming btags pa yin.* Sakya Pendita 1736a, 486. In light of Sakya Pendita's overall approach to the practice of the Buddhist path, this passage, of course, should not be read as denying the importance of practices other than meditation on reality per se.

Are the supreme path of Mahāmudrā of the Secret Mantra.

It is good if they are accomplished by those striving for liberation in this life.³²⁾

Thus, we see that whether in the context of non-tantric or tantric practice, whether in combination with the advanced contemplative states or not, freedom from proliferations occupies a central place in Sakya Pendita's approach to the view of reality, its contemplation, and realization.

In his writings on Madhyamaka and related topics, Gorampa upheld and further elucidated the early Sakya masters' position on the view of freedom from proliferations. Unpacking the meaning of the term 'freedom from proliferations', in his major independent text on Madhyamaka, *Thorough Clarification of Definitive Meaning: General Presentation of the Thatness of Madhyamaka—the Profound Intent of the Hearts of All Victors*, Gorampa writes that 'proliferations' refer not only to truly existent things (*bden pa'i dngos po*), but to all signs of negative and positive phenomena that mind engages in and diffuses toward (*blo 'jug cing 'phro ba dgag sgrub kyi chos kyi mtshan ma thams cad*). 'Freedom' refers to the utter non-findability in terms of being free [even] from mere negative and positive phenomena (*dgag sgrub kyi chos tsam dang bral ba'i ci yang ma rnyed pa nyid*), transcendence beyond the objects of functioning of examples, sounds, and minds (*dpe dang sgra dang blo 'i spyod yul las 'das pa*).³³⁾

32) *shin sbyang bde ldan zhi gnas dang // spros kun nyer zhi 'i lhag mthong gnyis // phar phyin theg pa 'i lam chen te // rgyal sras rnams kyis bsgrubs na legs // mtshan rtog nyer zhi 'i zhi gnas dang // bde stong zung 'jug lhag mthong gnyis // gsang sngags phyag chen lam mchog ste // tshe 'dir grol 'dod bsgrubs na legs*. Sakya Pendita 1736c, 499-500.

33) Gorampa 1995g, 93-94.

In the same text, Gorampa also emphasizes the crucial role played by reasoning in the process of contemplating freedom from proliferations in the non-tantric context, while at the same time presenting the outcome of that process as the state of mind free from observing anything at all. According to him, this process consists of the following: having determined the objective mode of being (*yul gyi gnas lugs*) by reasonings taught in Madhyamaka texts, one refutes objects of adherence of apprehending extremes (*mthar 'dzin gyi zhen yul*), and finally arrives at not finding any proliferations of existence, nonexistence, etc. This mere non-finding is termed 'realization of the Madhyamaka view' (*dbu ma 'i lta ba rtogs*).³⁴⁾ In his *Rays of Light of the Perfect View: Explanation of [Nāgārjuna's] Wisdom: Root Stanzas on Madhyamaka* he likewise states that at the time of searching by reasoning, one does not find any extremes of existence, nonexistence, being empty, not being empty, etc., and that non-findability is called on the conventional level 'Madhyamaka view', while in fact, no view at all has been established.³⁵⁾ Gorampa specifically juxtaposes this approach with that of the Chinese teacher Heshang Moheyan (said to be active in Tibet in the eighth century) who, in Gorampa's opinion, interpreted as realization of the final view nothing more than not taking anything to mind after concepts have been simply blocked without any preceding analysis of the mode of being.³⁶⁾

According to Gorampa, the abovementioned deconstructive conceptual process based on Madhyamaka reasoning eventually leads to the non-

34) Ibid., 178. For more details of Gorampa's approach to contemplation of reality based on Madhyamaka reasonings, see Komarovski 2015, chapter 5 section 2.

35) Gorampa 1995f, 628.

36) Gorampa 1995g, 177-178 (see also below).

conceptual realization of reality. As he puts it in *Distinguishing the Views: Moonrays of Essential Points of the Supreme Vehicle*:

On the level of an ordinary being, one meditates by gradually negating each of the proliferations of the four extremes.³⁷⁾ Due to this, the Mahāyāna path of seeing is produced, at which point the proliferations of the four extremes are negated simultaneously. The convention ‘ultimate reality’ is applied to the object [wherein] without the realized reality and realizing mind appearing separately, that very mind is manifested inseparably from freedom from proliferations.³⁸⁾

Put together with Gorampa’s description of freedom from proliferations given above, this passage makes clear that he too sees realization of reality as a state of mind devoid of all sorts of apprehending. It is also clear that Gorampa uses the term ‘object’ here (and in the next paragraph) only figuratively, because similar to the above thinkers, he does not treat freedom from proliferations as an object. In fact, in the *Thorough Clarification of Definitive Meaning*, he explicitly argues that if the actual freedom from proliferations could be taken as an object by either conceptual thinking or experience (*rtog pa dang myong bas yul du byas na*), it would not go beyond being a generic image or a thing (*don spyi dang dngos po*).³⁹⁾

37) These four are variously described as the extreme of truth, truthlessness, both and neither; the extreme of existence, nonexistence, both, and neither; etc.

38) *so so skye bo 'i gnas skabs su / mtha' bzhi 'i spros pa res 'jog tu bkag nas bsgoms pas / theg chen gyi mihong lam skyes pa 'i tshe / mtha' bzhi 'i spros pa cig char du 'gags nas rtogs bya 'i chos nyid dang rtogs byed kyi blo gnyis so sor mi snang bar / blo de nyid spros bral dang dbyer med par mngon du gyur pa 'i yul de nyid la don dam bden pa zhes pa 'i tha snyad btags pa yin.* Gorampa 2007, 216.

In his *Clarification of the Intent of the Victor's Excellent Words: Explanation of [Sakya Pendita's] 'Thorough Differentiation of the Three Types of Vows'*, commenting on Sakya Pendita's statement regarding the sameness of the view of freedom from proliferations in Pāramitāyāna and Tantrayāna, Gorampa reiterates that there is no difference between the two systems in their view of listening and thinking (*thos bsam gyi lta ba*), also described as the view determined through listening and thinking (*thos bsam gyis gtan la phab pa'i lta ba*) and the view of listening understood through explanations (*bshad pas go ba'i thos pa'i lta ba*). While in general, 'view' can refer to jñāna which realizes (*rtogs byed kyi ye shes*) and an object realized (*rtogs bya'i yul*), here the term refers to the latter.⁴⁰ Arguing that all stages of practice of Tantra are the means of realizing this very view of freedom from proliferations, Gorampa explains why Vajrayāna is superior to Pāramitāyāna in terms of its means of realizing it:

This is because in Pāramitāyāna, on the level of an ordinary being, there are no other [techniques of realizing freedom from proliferations] than meditation on the continuity of the inferential reasoning consciousness based on reasons. In Vajrayāna, [in contrast,] there is realization [of freedom from proliferations] by the illustrative example-jñāna arisen from the empowerments and the two stages,⁴¹ and by way of ornamentation with bliss due to the winds and minds

39) Gorampa 1995g, 103.

40) Gorampa 1995b, 242-243.

41) This illustrative example-jñāna (*mtshon byed dpe'i ye shes*), which is manifested by such means as tantric empowerments, etc., serves as an illustration of, and is contrasted with, the illustrated meaning-jñāna (*mtshon bya don gi ye shes*)—the ultimate reality underlying all

entering the central [channel] when the path of seeing is attained.⁴²⁾

We should note that the first sentence in this passage refers specifically to what can be called the ‘mainstream’ Pārāmitāyāna approach according to Gorampa. As the discussion below demonstrates, Gorampa also accepts the possibility of realizing freedom from proliferations based on quintessential instructions in both tantric and non-tantric systems, without using formal reasoning.⁴³⁾

In a letter addressed to Drungchen Künpangpa, Gorampa also elaborates on how the view of freedom from proliferations is incorporated into tantric contemplative practice. Having presented all appearances as appearances of mind, and all appearances of mind as empty, he writes:

One’s own mind empty of essence

Is free from all extremes of proliferations of the apprehending of duality of

Existence and nonexistence, truth and non-truth, permanence and annihilation.

Such is the view realized by way of listening and thinking.

This way of realization of that very view through relying on the experience of

phenomena, which becomes fully manifest at the time of buddhahood.

42) *phar phyin theg pa la so so skye bo'i dus su rtags la brten pa'i rigs shes rjes dpag gi rgyun bsgom pa las gzhah med cing / rdo rje theg pa la dbang dang rim gnyis las byung ba'i mtshon byed dpe'i ye shes dang / mihong lam thob pa'i tshes lung sems dbu mar zhugs pas bde bas brgyan pa'i tshul gyis rtogs pa yod pa'i phyir*. Ibid., 243.

43) He also makes it clear in Gorampa 1995g, 385-386 (see Komarovski 2015, 213-214 for the summary). In this, Gorampa agrees with other Sakya thinkers such as Rongtön and Shakya Chokden, who also value such instructions as valid means of realizing that view (see Komarovski 2011, 97 and attendant footnotes).

jñāna

Arisen from the empowerments and the two stages,
Which dawns from within due to the lama's blessings,
Is the system of Vajrayāna.
Familiarizing with that very [realization] in an isolated place
Through the immovable calm abiding,
Having abandoned the faults of laxity, excitement, etc.,
Within the clear and unceasing [state of] union is meditation.⁴⁴⁾

As this discussion makes clear, such terms as 'view of listening and thinking', etc., do not refer only to the view conceptually realized based on listening and thinking, but also the view realized by yogic direct perception which has been preceded by the conceptual process of studying and applying Madhyamaka reasoning, etc.

In *Answers to the Questions of Denma Tsegyelkyap*, Gorampa further clarifies the connection between the view of freedom from proliferations and contemplative practice, defends his approach to non-apprehending from its critique as resembling the position ascribed to Heshang Moheyan, and, as in the above, links that discussion with the position of Sakya Pendita on the sameness of the view of Pāramitāyāna and Vajrayāna and the superiority of

44) *ngo bos stong pa'i rang sems yod med dang // bden dang mi bden rtag chad skye 'gag sogs // gnyis 'dzin spros pa'i mtha' kun dang bral ba // thos bsam tshul gyis rtogs bya'i lta ba yin // lta ba de nyid dbang dang rim gnyis las // byung ba'i ye shes bla ma'i byin rlams kyis // nang nas 'char ba'i nyams myong la brten nas // rtogs tshul 'di ni rdo rje theg pa'i lugs // de nyid g.yo ba med pa'i zhi gnas kyis // bying rgod la sogs skyon rnams spang byas nas // zung 'jug gsal dang rgyun chad med par ni // dben pa'i gnas su goms pa sgom pa yin.* Gorampa 1995c, 650-651.

the latter over the former:

Because the object of negation—truth—is not established,
How can emptiness, wherein it has been negated, be found?
Due to not finding both and neither,
To not apprehend anything at all is the view.
Regarding some saying here,
‘This is Heshang’s view’,
Those are carelessly spoken demonic words,
Because they [attempt] to destroy the view of freedom from proliferations
While not differentiating the two—
Not finding the four extremes upon analysis and
Describing as the supreme meditation
Just the casual stoppage of concepts.
Although when analyzing, the four extremes are not found,
Just the clear and unceasing knowing being left as it is,
Abandoning the faults of laxity, excitement, etc., is meditation.
Regarding the view of Vajrayāna,
When determined through analysis by reasoning,
There is no reasoning higher than this.
Therefore, the view of listening and thinking [of Pāramitāyāna and Vajrayāna]
is one.
When integrated through the quintessential instructions,
The meditation through the integration into the three—
Mind, illusion, and naturelessness⁴⁵—

Also has no difference in both [systems].

[Nevertheless,] Vajrayāna is superior

In terms of the way of generation of the self-arisen jñāna

From the ripening empowerments, the two stages,

And certain profound blessings.⁴⁶⁾

The below passage from *Moonrays: Answers to the Questions by Kachupa Rinchen Jangchup*, which harks back to the line from *Parting from the Four Attachments* cited at the beginning and in the title of this paper, summarizes well Gorampa's approach to freedom from proliferations in connection to Madhyamaka reasoning and meditation on emptiness in non-tantric and tantric contexts:

45) This refers to the threefold process of establishing appearances as mind (*snang ba sems su bsgrub pa*), establishing mind as illusion (*sems sgyu mar bsgrub pa*), and establishing illusion as naturelessness (*sgyu ma rang bzhin med par bsgrub pa*). This, in fact, is how Gorampa (1995d, 472) explains contemplative practice within meditative equipoise in connection with the fourth line of *Parting from the Four Attachments*. Shakya Chokden explains that these instructions are transmitted from Drokmi Lotsawa ('*brog mi lo tsā ba*, 11th century; see Komarovski 2011, 97).

46) *dgag bya bden pa ma grub pas // de bkag stong nyid ga la rnyed // gnyis dang gnyis min ma rnyed pas // gand du 'ang mi 'dzin lta ba yin // 'di la kha cig ha shang gi // lta ba yin ces smra ba ni // dpyad nas mtha' bzhi ma rnyed dang // rang dgar rtog pa bkag tsam la // sgom gyi mchog tu smra ba gnyis // khyad par ma phyed bzhin du yang // lta ba pros bral bsnub pa 'i phyir // rang dgar smra ba 'i bdud tshig yin // dpyad tshe mtha' bzhi ma rnyed kyang // shes pa gsal tsam ma 'gags pa // bying rgod la sogs skyon spong nas // rang dgar bzhag pa bsgom pa yin // rdo rje theg pa 'i lta ba ni // rigs pas dpyad nas gtan phab tshe // 'di las lhag pa 'i rigs pa med // de phyir thos bsam lta ba gcig // man ngag sgo nas bsdu ba 'i tshe // sems dang sgyu ma rang bzhin med // gsum du bsdu nas bsgom pa yang // gnyis ka la yang khyad par med // smin byed dbang dang rim gnyis dang // byin rlabs zab mo 'ga' zhig las // rang byung ye shes skye tshul gyis // rdo rje theg pa khyad par 'phags. Gorampa 1995a, 142-143.*

When the self of persons asserted by non-Buddhists, the substantially different apprehended and apprehender asserted by the two śrāvaka schools, and the non-dual consciousness asserted by Cittamātra Followers are searched for with the reasoning taught in Madhyamaka texts, no true establishment is found at all. Because the object of negation, truth, does not exist, truthlessness itself, wherein it has been negated, is not found either. Because it does not exist, both and neither themselves are not found either. Thus, because there are no any proliferations of the four extremes to apprehend, and nothing else to apprehend [either], one dwells—relaxed, at ease, lucid, wonderstruck—in the state of non-findability, inseparably from the sharpness of clarity. If laxity or excitement occur, one uses the way of their elimination in accordance with quintessential instructions. This is the final objective of the Pāramitā[yāna] system, the meaning of the words from the quintessential instructions given by Protector Mañjuśrī to Sachen [Kūnga Nyingpo]: “If apprehending occurs, it is not the view.” [In] the Vajrayāna way of meditation, even without that much analysis by reasoning, having set within meditative equipoise within the mixture of space, one’s mind, and the mode of being, at a certain point a unique jñāna is born, which is due to maintaining the view of the three higher empowerments.⁴⁷⁾

47) *phyi rol pas 'dod pa'i gang zag gi bdag nyan thos sde gnyis kyi 'dod pa'i gzung 'dzin rdzas gzhan dang / sems tsam pas 'dod pa'i gnyis med kyi rnam shes rnam dbu ma'i gzhung las bshad pa'i rigs pas btsal ba'i tshe / bden par grub pa cung zad kyang mi rnyed / dgag bya bden pa med pas de dkag pa'i bden med nyid kyang mi rnyed / de med pas gnyis ka dang gnyis ka ma yin pa nyid kyang mi rnyed pas mtha' bzhi'i spros pa gang du yang 'dzin rgyu med / de las gzhan zhig kyang 'dzin rgyu med pas 'dzin med kyi ngang la gsal ba'i ngar dan ma bral bar 'bol le / shig ge / sing nge / had de bar bzhag / bying rgod byung na sel tshul man ngag bzhin byed pa 'di ni pha rol tu phyin pa'i lugs kyi mthar thug gi skyel so yin te / mgon po 'jam pa'i dbyangs kyi sa skya pa chen po la gnang ba'i man ngag las / 'dzin pa byung na*

This passage well illustrates that according to Gorampa, no matter in which context the view of freedom from proliferations is treated, how it is arrived at, and what other practices it is combined with, it is none other than total non-findability and non-apprehending transcending all referents of conceptual thinking. Its contemplation likewise consists of not apprehending anything whatsoever, because—to cite Mañjuśrī just one more time—"If apprehending occurs, it is not the view."

The foregoing discussion makes it clear that the Sakya thinkers whose views were addressed in this paper are consistently in agreement regarding what freedom from proliferations is, how it is utilized in contemplative practice, and how it is located within the broader universe of non-tantric and tantric Buddhism. Freedom from proliferations is not an object, and transcends all categories of existence, nonexistence, etc. Consequently, it cannot be approached and described in the same way we understand and describe colors, tastes, ideas, etc. Yet, it is also not a nonexistent thing similar to rabbit horns and other types of falsely imagined phenomena. It can be realized, but only in a negative, deconstructive way: by stripping away all conceptual constructs, and 'seeing by way of not seeing'. Freedom from proliferations is just this very non-findability, non-apprehending of anything at all. To free mind from proliferations, to reach this state of non-apprehending, one has to resort to contemplative practice which incorporates Madhyamaka reasoning negating extremes, and/or realizations

lta ba min // zhes gsungs pa'i don no // rdo rje theg pa'i sgom tshul de tsam gyis rigs pa'i dpyad pa ma byung kyang // nam mkha' dang rang sems dang gnas lugs bsre ba'i ngang la mnyam par bzhag pas nam zhig na ye shes khyad par can skye ste / dbang gong ma gsum gyi lta ba skyong ba yin pa'i phyir ro. Gorampa 1995e, 141-142.

based on quintessential instructions, tantric empowerments, blessings, and practice of the two stages.

This approach to freedom from proliferations suggests that to understand the Sakya take on the Madhyamaka view of reality, we have to pay close attention not only to how Sakya thinkers articulate the ‘object’ realized, but also—and even more importantly—to how they present the way the ‘subject’ realizes that ‘object’. In other words, rather than trying to find the most adequate definition of freedom from proliferations, we have to examine the process wherein mind frees itself from proliferations. And that, in turn, cannot be done without exploring how the Madhyamaka view is supposed to be incorporated into contemplative practice.

As such, it is also important to analyze not only Madhyamaka commentaries and independent Madhyamaka treatises written by Sakya thinkers, but also their letters of answers to inquiries, practical instructions, contemplative manuals, and other writings which explicitly and succinctly articulate the practical, contemplative application of the Madhyamaka view. That way, not only will we gain a more holistic and contextualized understanding of Tibetan Madhyamaka systems, but will be less likely to treat Madhyamaka as a philosophical system that can somehow be separated from the broader networks of Buddhist views and practices.

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Abstract

**“If Apprehending Occurs, It is not the View”
— Sakya Thinkers on the Madhyamaka View of
Freedom from Proliferations**

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The Sakya thinkers whose views were addressed in this paper are consistently in agreement regarding what freedom from proliferations is, how it is utilized in contemplative practice, and how it is located within the broader universe of non-tantric and tantric Buddhism. Freedom from proliferations is not an object, and transcends all categories of existence, nonexistence, etc. Consequently, it cannot be approached and described in the same way we understand and describe colors, tastes, ideas, etc. Yet, it is also not a nonexistent thing similar to rabbit horns and other types of falsely imagined phenomena. It can be realized, but only in a negative, deconstructive way: by stripping away all conceptual constructs, and ‘seeing by way of not seeing’. Freedom from proliferations is just this very non-

findability, non-apprehending of anything at all. To free mind from proliferations, to reach this state of non-apprehending, one has to resort to contemplative practice which incorporates Madhyamaka reasoning negating extremes, and/or realizations based on quintessential instructions, tantric empowerments, blessings, and practice of the two stages.

This approach to freedom from proliferations suggests that to understand the Sakya take on the Madhyamaka view of reality, we have to pay close attention not only to how Sakya thinkers articulate the ‘object’ realized, but also—and even more importantly—to how they present the way the ‘subject’ realizes that ‘object’. In other words, rather than trying to find the most adequate definition of freedom from proliferations, we have to examine the process wherein mind frees itself from proliferations. And that, in turn, cannot be done without exploring how the Madhyamaka view is supposed to be incorporated into contemplative practice.

Key words : Sakya, Madhyamaka, freedom from proliferations, Tibetan Buddhism

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