

Book of Dzyan Research Report

Technical Terms in Stanza I

Serious students of *The Secret Doctrine*, and especially those who are Theosophical teachers and lecturers, will wish to know what light current research can throw on the technical terms found in the “Book of Dzyan.” During H. P. Blavatsky’s time only a handful of books on Buddhism and a couple translations of Buddhist scriptures existed in any European language, and these were none too reliable. Today there are many hundreds of such books and translations, and the work of scholars in the earlier part of this century has in recent decades been corrected with the help of learned Tibetans. In H. P. Blavatsky’s time there was little question of researching the original language Buddhist texts, as they were largely inaccessible. But since 1975 whole libraries of Sanskrit manuscripts and Tibetan blockprints have become available. It is this material that we have gathered for researching and one day annotating an original Sanskrit/Tibetan manuscript of the “Book of Dzyan,” and it is from this material that the following is drawn.

There are six technical terms in the English translation of the first Stanza of the “Book of Dzyan” given in *The Secret Doctrine* by H. P. Blavatsky. As spelled in the first edition these are: Ah-hi, Paranishpanna, Dangma, Alaya, Paramartha, and Anupadaka. The first of these, Ah-hi, is from verse 3 of Stanza I: “Universal mind was not, for there were no Ah-hi to contain it.” Ah-hi is given in H. P. Blavatsky’s *Theosophical Glossary* as a Senzar word whose Sanskrit equivalent is Ahi, meaning “Serpents. Dhyān Chohans. ‘Wise Serpents’ or Dragons of Wisdom.” Since the other five technical terms from Stanza I are all Buddhist terms, I have not attempted to research the Sanskrit term *ahi* in Hindu texts, where it is commonly used in the meaning of snake or serpent. In Buddhist texts I have not found any special uses of it other than the standard meaning in compounds such as *ahi-*

tuṇḍika, “snake-charmer.” But we may apply a rule for “ferreting out the deep significance of the ancient Sanskrit nomenclature” given by T. Subba Row in his article, “The Twelve Signs of the Zodiac,” namely, to “find the synonyms of the word used which have other meanings.” A widely used synonym of *ahi* is *nāga*, as in the name Nāgārjuna, famous for having received the *Prajñā-pāramitā* or “Perfection of Wisdom” scriptures from the Nāgas, the Serpents of Wisdom. The word *nāga* has two primary meanings: serpent and elephant. The elephant has also been a symbol of wisdom, as depicted in Gaṇeśa, the elephant-headed Hindu god of wisdom, and as depicted in the dream of Queen Māyā, mother of the Buddha, where a white elephant entered her body just before she conceived. Most Buddhist Mahāyāna Sūtras open with a stock formula giving some fourteen epithets of the group of arhats to whom the Buddha is about to give the teaching. The seventh of these epithets (*śrāvaka-guṇas*) is *mahā-nāgas*, “great serpents” or “great elephants.” This may be seen in the various Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras, the Lotus Sūtra, the Vimalakīrti Sūtra, the *Sukhāvati-vyūha* or “Devachan” Sūtra, etc. Thus this symbol is widely used to portray the recipients or receptacles of wisdom, as it also is in the Stanza, “Universal mind was not, for there were no Ah-hi to contain it.”

The second technical term, “Paranishpanna,” has a minor spelling error. The prefix *para-* should be *pari-*; thus it should be *parinishpanna*, or using standard diacriticals, *pariniṣpanna*. This is possibly due to H. P. Blavatsky’s known habit of consulting Hindu colleagues to correct the spelling of Sanskrit terms and the fact that this term is little known in Hindu texts. While the term “paranishpanna” is not known at all, in either Hindu or Buddhist texts, the prefix *para-* is common, and so the word would have been considered theoretically possible. Note that it is spelled correctly at *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, p. 23. Another spelling error like this in *The Secret Doctrine* is “Paranirvana,” which should be *parinirvana* (*parinirvāṇa*), as given correctly in *The Mahatma Letters*. *Pariniṣpanna* is found in verse 6 of Stanza I: “The seven sublime lords and the seven truths had ceased to be, and the Universe, the son of Necessity, was immersed in Paranishpanna, to be outbreathed by that which is and yet is

not. Naught was.” It is defined in the “Commentaries” portion of *The Secret Doctrine* (vol. I, p. 42) as “absolute perfection, Paranirvana [read: *parinirvāṇa*], which is Yong-Grüb [phonetic Tibetan, transliterated *yongs grub* or *yoṅs grub*].” This meaning, “absolute perfection,” is well enough attested in the Sanskrit Buddhist texts, but almost none of these were published when *The Secret Doctrine* was written. The only one I know of among those containing this term is F. Max Müller’s 1883 edition of the *Sukhāvātī-vyūha*. Similarly, the standard Sanskrit dictionaries, such as Monier-Williams’ and V. S. Apte’s, were all compiled before the publication of any significant number of Buddhist texts. So for these Buddhist technical terms one must consult Franklin Edgerton’s 1953 *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, and even this is far from complete, since few texts of Buddhist Tantra, the “Books of Kiu-te,” were then available. Edgerton gives for *pariniṣpanna* the literal meaning as a past passive participle, “completely perfected.” This agrees in sense with its use as a noun, “absolute perfection.” It has a related application as one of the characteristic technical terms of the Yogacharya (*Yogacaryā*), or Yogachara (*Yogācāra*), school of Buddhism. It is in this context that it is found on p. 48 of vol. I of *The Secret Doctrine*. *Pariniṣpanna* is, along with *paratantra*, the “dependent,” and *parikalpita*, the “illusory,” one of the three *svabhāvas*, “natures,” or *lakṣaṇas*, “characteristics,” taught by the Yogācāra school. This cardinal Yogācāra doctrine could not be studied authoritatively until the first publication of a primary Yogācāra sourcebook, which occurred in 1907. This was the *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra*, “Ornament to the Mahāyāna Sūtras.” Although the Sanskrit edition was followed in 1911 by a French translation, it was not until 1992 that an English translation came out, by Surekha Vijay Limaye. This English translation, however, cannot be recommended, as it exemplifies the types of errors which students of even competent Indian Sanskritists fall into if not familiar with the special terminology of Buddhist texts. The *Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṅkāra* is one of five texts attributed by Tibetan tradition to Maitreya. The other primary Yogācāra texts are by Āryāsaṅga and his younger brother Vasubandhu. The latter’s brief *Vijñapti-mātratā-siddhi-triṃśikā* in only thirty

verses is the nearest thing to a Yogācāra catechism. Vasubandhu has also written a small treatise specifically on these three terms, the *Tri-svabhāva-nirdeśa*. The definitions found in these texts, however, have given rise to different opinions regarding their correct interpretation. Theosophical students when studying this material in English should know two things: (1) Translators and writers generally describe the Yogācāra teachings as “Mind-Only,” i.e., that the universe is nothing but mind, or consciousness. They are often unaware that there exists another and older tradition of interpretation, which holds that the Yogācāra teachings are not a description of the universe as such, but rather, as the name implies, are an analysis of the universe in terms of consciousness for use in meditation practice. Both these traditions come to us through China, where Yogācāra is still followed. The popular “Mind-Only” tradition comes from the late Indian commentator Dharmapāla through the Chinese translator Hsüan-tsang, while the other tradition comes from the older Indian commentator Sthiramati through the Chinese translator Paramārtha. (2) The majority of Tibetan exegetes also describe the Yogācāra teachings as “Mind-Only,” and then proceed to show that the Madhyamaka school gives the highest teachings and refutes the Yogācāra school. They, too, are often unaware that there exists another tradition of interpretation in Tibet, the “Great Madhyamaka,” which harmonizes the two schools. This tradition, brought out by the Jonangpa writer Dolpopa, teaches that the primary Yogācāra authors Maitreya, Asaṅga, and Vasubandhu, as well as the primary Madhyamaka author Nāgārjuna, were all of the “Golden Age Tradition,” and hence in agreement with each other. But the later Buddhist commentators who were not in on the “Golden Age Tradition” did not understand these authors correctly, and considered them as rivals. This teaching which shows how Madhyamaka and Yogācāra are not mutually contradictory is, in my opinion, essential for a correct understanding of the Stanzas of Dzryan.

The third term is a Tibetan word written phonetically, Dangma, which may be transliterated dwangs-ma or dwaṅs-ma, as correctly given by Boris de Zirkoff in *Blavatsky Collected Writings*, vol. 6, p. 113. It occurs first in verse 8 of stanza I: “Alone the

one form of existence stretched boundless, infinite, causeless, in dreamless sleep; and life pulsed unconscious in universal space, throughout that all-presence which is sensed by the opened eye of the Dangma.” Dangma is defined in a footnote on p. 46 of *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I: “Dangma means a purified soul, one who has become a Jivanmukta, the highest adept, or rather a Mahatma so-called.” Dangma is not a very common word in known Tibetan writings. The standard *Tibetan-English Dictionary* by Sarat Chandra Das gives only an obscure unrelated meaning of “juice,” etc. (p. 617); but the earlier 1881 *Tibetan-English Dictionary* by H. A. Jäschke says this (p. 249): “the spirit; the soul’, a signification not found hitherto in any book, but acc. to a Lama’s statement the word denotes a soul, when purified from every sin, and to be compared to a clear and limpid fluid, in which every heterogeneous matter has been precipitated.” The *Tibetan-Sanskrit Dictionary* by Lokesh Chandra does not give it as a noun, but only as an adjective (meaning “clear”) in a compound with *blo* (p. 1089) from the *Bhadra-kalpika Sūtra*, Sanskrit *prasanna-buddhi*, so we cannot research it through its Sanskrit equivalent. The definitive new Tibetan-Tibetan Dictionary, the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, gives two basic meanings: *gtso-bo* and *gsal-ba*. The first, *gtso-bo*, is defined by Das in English as: self, soul; chief, lord, master. The second, *gsal-ba*, means: pure; clear. Though I do not think these sources shed any new light on the term Dangma, they do at least confirm the meaning given in *The Secret Doctrine*, “purified soul,” of a rather rare word.

The remaining three terms are all from verse 9 of Stanza I: “But where was the Dangma when the Alaya of the universe was in Paramartha and the great wheel was Anupadaka?” The word *ālaya*, like *pariniṣpanna*, is one of the characteristic technical terms of the Yogācāra school of Buddhism. And similarly, the standard Sanskrit dictionaries do not record its meaning as a Buddhist technical term, because the Yogācāra sourcebooks were not yet published when these dictionaries were compiled. This has led some to question whether the term in the Stanzas should be *alaya* or *ālaya*, the former being taken as *a-laya*, or “non-dissolution.” However, Blavatsky’s comments on pp. 48-49 of *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, as well as in the *Theosophical Glossary*,

“The name belongs to the Tibetan system of the contemplative *Mahāyāna* School,” leave no doubt that *ālaya* is meant. Blavatsky defines *ālaya* as “Soul as the basis of all,” “Anima Mundi,” the “Soul of the World,” the “Over-Soul” of Emerson, the “Universal Soul.” As can be seen from the Buddhist texts now available, *ālaya* is short for *ālaya-vijñāna*, which can be defined literally as the “storehouse consciousness.” This is the eighth and highest consciousness posited by the Yogācāra school, where it is indeed understood to be the universal consciousness, or “soul,” as the basis of all. A primary Buddhist sūtra on *ālaya-vijñāna* is the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, which has been translated into English in 1932 by D. T. Suzuki. The primary Yogācāra sourcebook on *ālaya-vijñāna* is Asaṅga’s *Mahāyāna-saṃgraha*. This has been translated into French by Étienne Lamotte in 1938-39, and into English by John P. Keenan in 1993 under the title, *Summary of the Great Vehicle*. In this translation all technical terms have been translated into English, but the original terms have not been retained in parentheses following their translation. Thus when reading about the container consciousness, one must know that it is the *ālaya-vijñāna*. In Sanskrit, *ālaya-vijñāna* has a full range of connotations; in English, container consciousness has none, and practically no meaning. To me, this type of translation takes a lucid and incisive text by one of the greatest spiritual teachers of all time, and reduces it to pabulum. A much superior type of translation is found in an important text on *ālaya-vijñāna* by Tsong-kha-pa, translated by Gareth Sparham in 1993 under the title, *Ocean of Eloquence: Tsong kha pa’s Commentary on the Yogācāra Doctrine of Mind*. A major two-volume study of *ālaya-vijñāna* by Lambert Schmithausen, one of the leading Yogācāra scholars today, was published in 1987 as *Ālaya-vijñāna: On the Origin and the Early Development of a Central Concept of Yogācāra Philosophy*. All these works may profitably be consulted by Theosophical students wishing to study further the *ālaya-vijñāna*, perhaps the most important and distinctive Yogācāra doctrine.

The fifth technical term is Paramārtha. Like *ālaya* is for the Yogācāra school, so *paramārtha* is for the Madhyamaka school, one of its most important and distinctive doctrines. And as stated in *The Secret Doctrine*, vol. I, p. 48: “The two terms ‘Alaya’

and ‘Paramārtha’ have been the causes of dividing schools and splitting the truth into more different aspects than any other mystic terms.” *Paramārtha* is there defined (p. 47) as “Absolute Being and Consciousness which are Absolute Non-Being and Unconsciousness,” and in the *Theosophical Glossary* as “absolute existence.” The Madhyamaka school teaches two truths: the absolute truth, or *paramārtha-satya*, and the conventional truth, or *saṃvṛti-satya*. The reason for this is compassion. If the absolute truth is the ultimate emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of everything, if therefore nobody is ultimately real, what is the need for compassion? This is answered by the teaching of the conventional truth; and indeed the Tibetan Buddhists, who virtually all accept this teaching, are probably the most compassionate group of people on the planet. While Nāgārjuna is the primary Madhyamaka author, he has no work specifically on the two truths. But a later Indian Madhyamaka writer does, and this has been translated by David Malcolm Eckel in 1987 under the title, *Jñānagarbha’s Commentary on the Distinction Between the Two Truths*. A study drawing on Tibetan Gelugpa sources is Guy Newland’s 1992 *The Two Truths*. This doctrine is as important to Theosophists as to Buddhists, because it provides modern rational humanity with an intellectually satisfying reason for compassion.

The sixth and last term is Anupadaka. Just as the previous two terms have been the causes of disputes in Buddhism, so this term has been the cause of dispute in Theosophy. The facts about to be presented should theoretically put this dispute to rest, but only time will tell; time and the discovery of a Sanskrit manuscript of the “Book of Dzian.” The story of this term is the story of error compounded on error. It all started around 1828 with the first access by westerners to Sanskrit Buddhist texts, thanks to the efforts of B. H. Hodgson in Nepal. Hodgson had made contact with one of the last Buddhist Sanskrit pandits in Nepal, and convinced him to provide abstracts as well as the original texts of Buddhism. He sent the texts to Paris, London, and Calcutta, and published articles based on the abstracts, which were later collected into a book, *Essays on the Languages, Literature, and Religion of Nepal and Tibet*. In one of his articles published in *Asiatic Researches*, vol. 16, 1828, on p. 440, appears

the term *anupapādaka*. Research carried on in these Sanskrit Buddhist texts by Franklin Edgerton, culminating in his 1953 *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary*, shows that no such term exists there, but only the two forms *anupapāduka* and *upapāduka*. So Hodgson's *anupapādaka* is apparently the result of either he misreading the abstracts of his pandit, or of a typesetter misreading Hodgson's handwriting. Then from here the incorrect *anupapādaka* was miscopied as *anupadaka* in Emil Schlagintweit's 1863 *Buddhism in Tibet*. This latter work was used extensively by H. P. Blavatsky, as it was the only book on Tibetan Buddhism then in existence. Many of her comments on verse 9 of Stanza I, and most of her spellings of Tibetan and Sanskrit Buddhist terms, are found in this book. May we here recall the "plagiarism" charges concerning Mahatma K.H., and his reply in *The Mahatma Letters* (3rd ed., p. 358): "When you write upon some subject you surround yourself with books of references etc.: when we write upon something the Western opinion about which is unknown to us, we surround ourselves with hundreds of paras: upon this particular topic from dozens of different works—impressed upon the Akasa. What wonder then, that not only a chela entrusted with the work and innocent of any knowledge of the meaning of plagiarism, but even myself—should use occasionally a whole sentence already existent, applying it only to another—our own idea? I have told you of this before and it is no fault of mine if your friends and enemies will not remain satisfied with the explanation." In this way the doubly erroneous *anupadaka* entered *The Secret Doctrine*. But the story is not over yet. M. Monier-Williams also copied the incorrect *anupapādaka* from Hodgson for use in his *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 34, as may be seen from his definition which is taken straight from Hodgson, and the fact that no other sources for this term are given. Thus *anupapādaka* may now be found in an authoritative dictionary, though of course *anupadaka* (or *anupādaka*) is not. This, in conjunction with Blavatsky's listing in the *Theosophical Glossary*: "Anupādaka (Sk.). Anupapādaka, also Aupapāduka," has led some Theosophists to believe that *anupapādaka* is the correct form of *anupadaka* (or *anupādaka*). But as just shown, both these terms are the result of error. The last spelling given

in the *Theosophical Glossary*, however, is one of the two forms found throughout the Sanskrit Buddhist texts (see the many references in Edgerton), *aupapāduka* and *upapāduka*. These are used interchangeably, and have the same meaning as that given by H. P. Blavatsky, “parentless.” It is this spelling which should now be adopted by Theosophists wishing to use a form given by Blavatsky: *aupapāduka*; or better, they should adopt the more common *upapāduka*.

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