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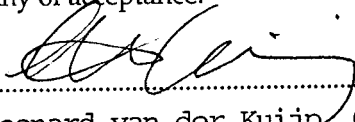
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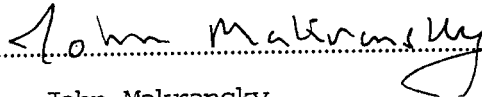
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Date May 7, 2003

Falling to Pieces, Emerging Whole:
Suffering Illness and Healing Renunciation
in the Dge slong ma Dpal mo Tradition

A thesis presented

by

Ivette Maria Vargas

to

The Committee on The Study of Religion

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

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Harvard University

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***Falling to Pieces, Emerging Whole:
Suffering Illness and Healing Renunciation
in the Dge slong ma Dpal mo Tradition***

Thesis Advisor: Professor Leonard W. J. van der Kuip

ABSTRACT

How do we make sense of suffering and illness? How can renunciation be understood in the midst of illness in the Tibetan Buddhist context? This thesis argues that according to the hagiographies and ritual texts of the Nun Palmo tradition, written and compiled by the lineage-holders of the practices of a tenth or early eleventh century Kashmirian or Indian Buddhist nun who contracted leprosy, and the canonical texts attributed to her, struggle is necessary for liberation. Struggle in the form of illness results in renunciation and reconceptualization of worldly identity, setting a course (through a fasting ascetic-devotional practice) of a healing and teaching within the world associated with the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Findings from ethnographic work in Nepal and Tibet and works by Simone Weil, Ariel Glucklick, David Bakan, and others supplement textual analyses.

The Introduction discusses how the texts are a source of understanding some of the patterns of doctrinal concerns and practices, especially in terms of illness, ritual, and gender, throughout the late eleventh century to the present day. Chapter One discusses the possible identity of Nun Palmo, the historiographic value of the texts, and provides a synopsis of the hagiographies. Chapter Two examines the language of illness in the texts. Illness was a religious experience and a metaphorical tool in order to transmit

Buddhist teachings about impermanence and renunciation. Leprosy revealed its karmic etiology, the sexual connotation of the condition, the connection between the body and societal ideas of purity, gender biases, and perhaps pre-Buddhist concerns about “demons.” Through fragmentation, leprosy violated several boundaries with its excrescences, its de-genderizing, and de-humanizing effects and yet, in the texts, it was a step forward in the direction of purification and redemption. It acted as a catalyst for transformation of old ways of thinking and being, a deconstruction of the conception of a permanent self and attachment to *samsāra*.

Chapter Three examines the structure of the rituals in the texts and contemporary practices in Nepal and Tibet. Chapter Four discusses the goal of the texts as aversion (*nges 'byung*) or renunciation, an ascetic process. Asceticism is one of both denial (of old ways of thinking) and affirmation (re-embodiment). The re-embodiment of Nun Palmo (shedding her leprosy) as a bodhisattva and other figures also reinforces a positive view of the female body, an idea valued in modern practices in Nepal and Tibet with the majority of Tibetan women performing and organizing this ritual, and retelling her story. Hymns of praise and visualizations directed to Avalokiteśvara draw attention to the process of transformation, healing, and compassion.

On the whole, rituals and the experience of illness act together to complete the process of transformation. When transformation and the stigma that results are so graphic and extreme, does illness become a medicine. Reminiscent of tantric ideas of transformation, poison is transformed into a nectar.

To my mother, husband, and in loving memory
of Kiko who all taught me about illness

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INTRODUCTION

We live with a body and in a world that eventually falls apart, that disintegrates over time. We struggle to prolong our lives, maintain a facade of youthfulness, renovate our surroundings, and cling to our identities and materiality for as long as we can until we are struck with the reality of impermanence and a perceived lack of agency. Illness, for example, in its devastating phases, has a way of shaking our realities; its brutal strike on the body and mind and the stigma that follows can often be worse than the final throes of death itself. It is a slow dying wrapped with preconceptions and reconfigurations of thought caught in a timeless warp despite the predictions of physicians and gurus. Illness is often an odyssey of multiple dimensions leading to devastating hopelessness, profound enlightenment, or something in-between. Meaning from this experience may derive from our cultural and religious backgrounds and from personal philosophy. We may respond with conviction or discover our weaknesses in the presence of something more powerful than we are; such times are moments of realization of mortality and of the consequences of our actions, the moment of revelation into the meaning of life (and death), the realization of our spiritual powers, and our first encounter or seeking of the divine. And if religion is essentially about what it means to be human, then suffering such as this is its foundational element: that which challenges and molds us when least expected, what tests our very essence of being.

Throughout my academic studies, I was always intrigued by the struggles of female renunciates and was drawn to the lives of Buddhist, Hindu, Christian, and

Muslim nuns, saints, and/or ascetics that showed that the more intense the struggle, the more likely was their final purification, liberation, or commitment to a deity. During my preparation for General Examinations at Harvard University, I came across again the story of the life of a tenth or early eleventh century Buddhist nun called Nun Palmo recounted by Sherry Ortner in her work about the Sherpas in Nepal¹--a work I had first encountered in a class at Columbia University taught by Theodore Riccardi Jr. when it was first published in 1989. I was struck by the account's telling that this nun wanted to renounce her royal surroundings at all costs and live a life as an ordained nun, even requesting of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara for leprosy to make her unattractive and make it easier to achieve her goal. This story for me sounded like many of the stories I had encountered in other religious traditions I studied thus far yet it was couched within a distinct tantric Buddhist framework full of paradox and multiple levels of meaning. After further investigation I found that this nun practiced a fasting ritual called *smyung gnas*² that was propagated by her Tibetan lineage descendants throughout several centuries. In fact, her ritual is the practice most often performed in Tibetan communities, particularly by women, in Nepal, India, Tibet, Taiwan, the U.S., and Europe during one of the most auspicious times of the Tibetan calendar, *sa ga zla ba*.³ In addition, her link with Avalokiteśvara--a bodhisattva with a long history

¹ *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 181-185.

² *Smyung gnas* signifies "a fasting state, abiding in the fast, enduring the fast".

³ This term will hereafter be written as *sagadawa*. The Sanskrit equivalent of this term is *Veśākha*. The Tibetan term *sagadawa* means literally, the month (*zla ba*) of one of the lunar

throughout Asia and known for his or her healing, ascetic activities, and transformations--made Nun Palmo's story even more intriguing.

Yet, there was so little I could find written in academic studies about Nun Palmo's life, her ritual, and the impact of the corpus of materials associated with her and the fasting ritual in the lives of Tibetans historically or in contemporary context. My curiosity then turned into a project in 1998 conducted in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal and Lhasa, Tibet funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Dissertation Grant and the Harvard University Asia Center's Religion, Economics and Politics in Contemporary Asia Travel Grant. This project enabled me to analyze hagiographic texts on Nun Palmo and fasting ritual texts written by her lineage descendants as well as engage in participant-observation of the fasting ritual according to the Nun Palmo system. After studying these texts and Tibetan communities, I was struck by how popular these texts and the practice were and how they functioned in Tibetan lives. I began to further investigate the meaning of Nun Palmo's experiences with illness (in her embodiments as a human and enlightened being) in the hagiographies and how these experiences,

mansions (*sa ga*) referring to the fourth month of the Tibetan calendar. This period commemorates the anniversary of the Buddha's birth, enlightenment, and final *nirvāṇa* (May to June). *Smyung gnas* may be performed on new and/or full moon days, the lunar 10th or 25th days, but the annual performance by Tibetan communities (often lasting 16 days) takes place on the fourth month. More information about this ritual is discussed in Chapters Three and Four.

along with the ritual practice in both hagiographies and ritual texts, focused on renunciation. These investigations led me to ask many questions that are central to this dissertation: How do we make sense of suffering and illness? How is renunciation understood in the midst of illness? Is the experience of illness redeeming? How can I understand healing in terms of transformation in the Buddhist context?

Goals of This Study

The central concern of this study is the Nun Palmo hagiographies' and her lineage-holders' ritual texts' focus on illness and renunciation, specifically the role of physical ailment and asceticism (most notably, fasting) in Tibetan Buddhist religious development (and what may be called "healing" in a spiritual sense). This study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the texts than what has been done in previous scholarship about this tradition focusing on two interlocking themes: 1) the hermeneutics of suffering through illness and 2) healing through renunciation in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Based on textual research and ethnographic evidence, this study seeks to illuminate how illness and fasting were essential to the liberation experience of Nun Palmo, a key figure in Tibetan religious history. Attention is given to what previous scholarship neglects about these experiences in the life and ritual texts associated with this Buddhist nun: the meaning behind the struggles of illness

and fasting manifested by the figure Nun Palmo in both hagiographies and ritual texts.⁴ By describing the devastating effects of leprosy and the purification and re-assembling process that occurs through fasting, the texts exemplify Buddhist teachings on suffering⁵ and how struggle can be an effective means to lead to renunciation. The interplay of illness and renunciation in these texts reveal Tibetan Buddhist tantric doctrinal concerns for transformation physically and conceptually as well as stressing the world-renouncing and world-affirming attitude in the path of enlightenment. This study illuminates that, through a more thorough evaluation of the circumstances that led to and occur during ritual performance in the hagiographies, we can also better understand the rich dimensions of the ritual. Illness also prompts the reader of these texts to become aware of the connection between the impurity of the body and the values of society, especially in terms of purity and gender--a major preoccupation in many religious traditions.

Methodology and Contribution

This dissertation will provide i) an analytic description of how the lenses of illness and renunciation in the hagiographies and ritual texts illuminate Buddhist teachings of the instrumentality of suffering and asceticism to religious development,

⁴ Past scholarship is examined more closely in Chapter One.

⁵ *sdug bsngal, duhkha*

and ii) a comparative study of how these themes appear in Tibetan religious history and other religious traditions like Indian, Buddhist, and other traditions. Methods include original translation of texts; philosophical and historical analyses of texts; ethnographic observation of several Tibetan temples, monasteries, and retreat centers for unordained women; and application of studies by Western, Tibetan, and Indian religious and/or medical anthropological scholars on illness, pain/affliction, fasting, and asceticism. This study has been greatly influenced by a variety of disciplines and scholars, contributing to its comparative spirit.

The main texts in this study belong to the genres of hagiographies (*rnam thar*), ritual texts of propitiation (*sgrub thabs*, *sādhana*) and fasting (*smyung gnas*), and hymns of praise (*bstod pa*, *stotra* / *stava*). The texts examined are: 1) *Smyung gnas bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar* by Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po (1341-1433), 2) *Dge slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba'i chos gtam* written at the behest of the Bhutanese Bla ma Rab brtan, 3) *Dge slong ma dpal mo rnam thar* by the Rnying ma scholar 'Od dpag rdo rje (?late 14th-?early 15th century), 4) *'Phags pa 'jig rten dbang phyug zhal bcu gcig pa dge slong ma dpal mo'i lugs kyi sgrub thabs dang smyung gnas kyi cho ga nyams su len pa* by the Sa skya scholar Zhu chen Tshul khrims rin chen (1697-1774), 5) *Thugs rje chen po zhal bcu gcig pa dpal mo'i lugs kyi sgrub thabs smyung bar gnas pa'i cho ga* by the Dge lugs pa scholar Dalai Lama VII Blo bzang bskal bzang rgya mtsho (1708-1757), and 6) hymns of praise attributed to Nun Palmo (with some reference to other ritual manuals and relevant texts in the

Tibetan tradition).⁶ Fieldwork suggests that the texts in this study represent the most commonly used materials in different Tibetan sects and among diverse populations and practitioners in Nepal, Tibet, and the United States.⁷ Findings from fieldwork conducted in Nepal and Tibet in nunneries and monasteries in 1998 supplement textual analyses in this study.⁸ The institutions studied in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal are:

⁶ Tibetan texts are translated by me in this study unless otherwise indicated. Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar* (Lhasa: Dpal ldan Par khang, n.d.), folios 1-7 [*The Hagiography of the Lineage Gurus of the Fasting Ritual*]; Anonymous, *Dge slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba'i chos gtam* (added English title: *The Biography of Kamala Bhikshuni, Princess of King Dharma Pal, an Ancient King of Kashmir, India*) (Kalimpong: Tibet Mirror Press, 1953[63]), 1-21 [*The Hagiography of Nun Palmo: A Religious Discourse Which Gives Rise to Aversion in the [Mind] Stream*]; 'Od dpag rdo rje, *Thugs rje chen po bcu gcig zhal gyi bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar nor bu'i phreng ba* contained in *Instructions for the Practice of the Gso Sbyong and Smyung gnas Focusing Upon the Invocation of Avalokiteśvara in the Eleven-faced Form* (Thimphu: Dorji Namgyal, 1985), 1-233, with the *Dge slong ma dpal mo rnam thar* [*The Hagiography of Nun Palmo*] contained in pages 20-50; Zhu chen, *'Phags pa 'jig rten dbang phyug zhal bcu gcig pa dge slong ma dpal mo'i lugs kyi sgrub thabs dang smyung gnas kyi cho ga nyams su len pa* (Sikkim: National Sikkim Press, 1968), folios 1-53 [*The Ritual Practice of Propitiation and Fasting of the Eleven-Faced Holy Lord of the World According to the Tradition of Nun Palmo*]; and Dalai Lama VII, *Thugs rje chen po zhal bcu gcig pa dpal mo'i lugs kyi sgrub thabs smyung bar gnas pa'i cho ga* [*The Ritual Practice of Propitiation and Fasting of the Eleven-faced Great Compassionate One According to the Palmo Tradition*] (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1988), folios 1-58.

Although two of these texts are directly analyzed in this study, all the hymns of praise attributed to Nun Palmo that were consulted are: *Dge slong ma Dpal mo, 'Jig rten dbang phyug la bstod pa*. Sde dge Bstan 'gyur, facsimile Delhi edition, Nu, vol. 72, Toh. 2729 (Delhi: Karmapa Choedhey Gyalwa Sungrab Partun Khang, 1985): folios 107a-b, 213-214; *id.*, *'Phags pa spyen ras gzigs dbang phyug la bstod pa*. Toh. 2738, *ibid.*, folios 125b-126a, 250-251; *id.*, *'Phags pa spyen ras gzigs dbang phyug gi bstod pa*. Toh. 2739, *ibid.*, 126a-127a, 251-253; and *id.*, *Rje btsun thugs rje chen po la bstod pa*. Toh. 2740, *ibid.*, folios 127a-b, 253-254. Another text consulted is *Dge slong ma Dpal mo, Rje btsun 'phags pa spyen ras gzigs dbang phyug zhal bcu gcig pa'i sgrub thabs*. Sde dge Bstan 'gyur, facsimile Delhi edition, Nu, vol. 72, Toh. 2737 (Delhi: Karmapa Choedhey Gyalwa Sungrab Partun Khang, 1985): folios 123b-125b, 246-250.

⁷ This is not an exhaustive list. These texts date from the eleventh century to 1953.

⁸ Archival and ethnographic research of sites and participant-observation of the *smyung gnas* ritual was conducted in Kathmandu and Jumbesi, Nepal and Lhasa, Tibet (and surrounding

Skyid grong thugs rje chos gling dgon pa, Nga gi dgon pa, Dga' ldan bshad sgrub
'phel rgyas gling, and Mkha' spyod dga' dkyil gling. In Lhasa and surrounding areas
in Tibet, I observed rituals at: A ne mtshams khung dgon pa, Shug gseb dgon pa, Sera
Je's (?) Ham gdong Khang tshan, and Grub thob Lha khang.

Chapter One focuses on the religious and historiographic value of the texts in
Tibetan and Buddhist studies by examining the possible identity of Nun Palmo,
evidence of past scholarship on these materials, and the significance of the texts and
their authors/compilers in Tibetan religious history. Chapter Two examines the
function of illness in Buddhist and Tibetan literature and specifically how this is
reflected in the Nun Palmo hagiographies. The karmatic etiology of illness in relation
to the body and the redemptive value of illness are central concerns in this discussion.
Illness as an healing experience and as a didactic tool in the texts reveal the
paradoxical nature of this condition in terms of Buddhist doctrinal concerns. Scenes
of dramatic deterioration and transformation also point to the texts' concern with
physical, cognitive, and social restructuring that an illness like leprosy creates.
Chapter Three examines the structure of the rituals that are performed in the
hagiographies and are described in the ritual texts, and the performance of these rituals
in modern Tibetan communities in Nepal and Tibet. The ritual manuals reveal the
ascetic and devotional⁹ aspect of the ritual practices. Chapter Four examines the role

areas) from March to August 1998.

⁹ The concept of devotion is discussed in Chapter Four.

of fasting as an ascetic-devotional practice in relation to the illness experience, the development of renunciation (or “aversion,” *nges ‘byung*), and the themes of transformation and re-embodiment. I will show that acquisition of illness in the hagiographies themselves results in renunciation and reconceptualization of worldly identity and sets a course (through a fasting ascetic-devotional practice) of a healing and teaching responsibility within the world.

Chapter Four will also focus on devotion to Avalokiteśvara, perhaps the most popular deity of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Appearing in Indian sculptures and texts early on,¹⁰ he assumes textual prominence in the Pure Land sūtras where he is attendant of the Buddha Amitābha. In the *Karaṇḍavyūha*, Avalokiteśvara possesses his own pure land called Mount Potalaka to which he will bring all who recite his six syllable mantra (*oṃ maṇi padme hūṃ*) or pray to him. In the *Lotus Sūtra*, Avalokiteśvara appears in various forms. In the tantric tradition, he may appear in

¹⁰ Some key studies include: Marie-Thérèse de Mallmann, *Introduction à l'étude d'Avalokiteṣvara*, *Annales du Musée Guimet*. Tome XLVII (Paris: Civilisations du Sud, 1948), 21-348; *id.*, “Nôtes sur les bronzes du Yunnan représentant Avalokiteṣvara.” In *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*. Vol. 14, nos. 3/4 (1951): 567-601; *id.*, *Introduction à l'iconographie du Tantrisme bouddhique*. Vol. I (Paris: Bibliothèque du Centre de recherches sur l'Asie centrale et la Haute Asie, 1975); Meisezahl, R.O., *Geist und Ikonographie des Vajrayana-Buddhismus* (Sankt Augustin: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, 1980); and Maria Dorothea Reis-Habito, *Die Dhāraṇī des Großen Erbarmens des Bodhisattva Avalokiteṣvara mit tausend Händen und Augen*. Monumenta Serica XXVII (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag: 1993). Studies about Sri Lanka and South-East Asia include: John Clifford Holt, *Buddha in the Crown: Avalokiteṣvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Nandana Chutiwongs, *The Iconography of Avalokiteṣvara in Mainland South East Asia* (Ph.D. diss., Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit, 1984). Regarding China, see Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteṣvara* (New York: Columbia University, 2001). Tove E. Neville provides a study of the Eleven-faced form of this bodhisattva cross-culturally in his *Eleven-headed Avalokiteṣvara, Chenresigs, Kuan-yin or Kannon Bodhisattva: Its Origin and Iconography* (New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1998).

about 108 forms, any of which the practitioner may serve and identify with. In East Asia, he appears in the feminine form of Kuan Yin (in China) or Kannon (in Japan). In Tibet, he becomes the progenitor of the Tibetan race (appearing as a monkey who joined with a rock-ogress),¹¹ incarnates as the early kings and the Dalai Lamas to propagate Buddhism, and has cultic status with the laity. Overall, Avalokiteśvara's close historical association with asceticism¹² and healing, his role as a bodhisattva, and his various guises makes his presence in the Nun Palmo texts relevant to the themes of this study. The main form of Avalokiteśvara that the hagiographies are directed to is Ekādaśamukha (Zhal bcu gcig pa, "The Eleven-faced One")¹³ and the most common epithet used for him in all the texts in this study is Mahākāruṇika (Thugs rje chen po, "The Great Compassionate One"). Contemporary evidence also shows the links made in modern day practices in Tibetan communities between illness, Nun Palmo, and Avalokiteśvara as healer.

Overall, the texts seemed to have enjoyed widespread impact: lineage-holders of diverse sectarian affiliations and ethnic groups transmitted these texts throughout a

¹¹ See Matthew Kapstein, "Remarks on the Maṇi bKa' 'bum and the Cult of Avalokiteśvara in Tibet." In *Tibetan Buddhism: Reason and Revelation*. Edited by Steven D. Goodman and Ronald M. Davidson (Albany: State University of New York, 1992): 79-94; *id.*, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 144-155.

¹² Samuel Beal, tr., *Si-yu-ki: Buddhist Records of the Western World. Translated from the Chinese of Hiuen Tsiang (A.D. 629)*. 1884, vol. 1 (New York: Paragon Book Reprint Corporation, 1968), 160.

¹³ In this manifestation, the bodhisattva is also known as Sāmantamukha, the "all-sided one", possibly meaning the one who looks in all directions to save sentient beings. For a study of this form of bodhisattva in India and Tibet and references to Sāmantamukha, see Neville, *Eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara*, 1-41.

long historical period.¹⁴ In addition, present day Tibetan Buddhist female renunciates tend to be holders and organizers of her ritual tradition and their “nunneries”¹⁵ are often places for the retelling of the Nun Palmo stories. And as Bla ma Rab brtan, who requested the publication of the modern hagiography of Nun Palmo,¹⁶ and evidence in Nepal show today, sufferers of severe illnesses like leprosy may have sought solace (and do seek in current practice) through the printing and transmitting of Nun Palmo’s story, practicing her ritual, or visiting a temple associated with her and the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara.

Though Western scholarship has acknowledged the impact of some of these hagiographies and ritual texts in Tibetan culture (I will return to this issue in Chapter One), it has not fully developed its full religious and historiographic value, especially as it relates to the experiences of the ritual’s founder.¹⁷ Past and recent scholarship

¹⁴ I consulted other texts (many of which are not found in Western collections) that belong to the Nun Palmo tradition and are not mentioned in this study. My main concern here are the texts that I found most prevalent in contemporary Tibetan communities in Nepal and Tibet at the time of my research.

¹⁵ Because the lineage of nuns, the means by which women could become fully ordained, did not take root in Tibet, there are no ordained nuns in the Tibetan tradition. Therefore, there are no official nunneries in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition but only places that house renunciate women. Also the term “nun” in the Christian tradition has a different connotation than what a renunciate woman in the Tibetan tradition signifies. This dissertation employs the term “nun” to designate renunciate women in contrast to “monks” or otherwise, it uses Tibetan terms like *a ne*. For a discussion of the term *a ne* and other designations for renunciate women, see Hanna Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns History, Cultural Norms and Social Reality* (Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ According to the colophon, Bla ma Rab brtan was a leper who requested that a hagiography of Nun Palmo be published while in Kalimpong Leprosy Hospital. See *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 21.4-13.

¹⁷ Although we do not have evidence that Nun Palmo was the founder of the fasting ritual, in later hagiographic literature and ritual texts dealt with in this study her designation as

have valued the ritual texts of propitiation and fasting mostly for their concern about monastic-lay relations, gender dynamics in a monastic context, and the texts' presentation of teachings relevant to all three major vehicles of Buddhism. Even Western Dharma Centers have viewed the ritual *smyung gnas* as a powerful purification rite. Some scholars have focused on oral and limited written versions of the hagiographies for the same concerns listed above. But no one has examined these texts together, how they inform each other, and their joint concern to transmit Buddhist teachings that derive from illness and ascetic experiences reflecting concerns of particular Tibetan communities in particular time periods. Many in contemporary Tibetan communities in Nepal and Tibet recognize the value of all of these types of texts by reciting them and engaging in ritual re-enactment in memory of a leprous nun who appeared for their sake and a bodhisattva who can heal if they put their faith in him.

The lack of attention in modern Tibetan Buddhist scholarship to recognize the texts' concern about illness and renunciation, female religious experience, and the widespread reverence for the texts historically and in modern-day context (the latter may contribute to our understanding of local traditions) is difficult to ascertain perhaps because the field is still relatively "new" and there is a continued preference in Buddhist and religious studies on textual scholarship over ethnographic research rather

"founder" is made more explicit.

than their joint benefit.¹⁸ With so many transmissions of texts from the late eleventh century to the present day associated with prominent figures like Atiśa (?982-?1054), Rin chen bzang po (958-1055), Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po, Zhu chen Tshul khrim rin chen, Dalai Lama VII, 'Jam mgon Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas (1813-1899), and others, and their prominence in Tibetan communities today as well as the popularity of the fasting practice itself, it is a reflection of the state of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies that a study such as this has not yet been conducted and that the hagiographies and fasting ritual manuals have not yet been comprehensively and systematically studied together for their impact in Tibetan religious history.

Overall, we should not overlook the historiographic and current value of the Nun Palmo materials for religious studies as a whole (as well as the fields of gender and ritual studies, and medical anthropology) because of insight on doctrinal and ritual concerns in Tibetan religious history. The texts' articulation of religious experience through illness, the multiple meanings of the ascetic-devotional practices of a woman (and what these texts may have meant to the men who wrote them), and women's religiosity in general in contemporary context should enhance any field. In revisiting old texts and highlighting new ones, it is possible to reevaluate the corpus now available to uncover how the themes of illness and renunciation play a crucial role in

¹⁸ I am aware of the growing trend and acceptance in the scholarship of the fields of Tibetan and Buddhist Studies toward integrating ethnographic work alongside textual studies, note, for example, Todd T. Lewis's work, *Popular Buddhist Texts from Nepal: Narratives and Rituals of Newar Buddhism*. Translations in Collaboration with Subarna Man Tuladhar and Labh Ratna Tuladhar (Ithaca: State University of New York, 2000). However, there is still so much we need to learn. Attention to the texts and practices in this study could contribute a great deal to our understanding of doctrinal concerns and practices historically as well as all the gender and sociological implications.

the Nun Palmo tradition and in Tibetan Buddhist history.

CHAPTER ONE

RE-ESTABLISHING THE TEXTS THROUGH THE LENSES OF ILLNESS AND RENUNCIATION

1.1 Introducing Nun Palmo: Her Stories, Practice, and Lineage Holders

We humans are fragmented and divided beings, at odds with ourselves and our surrounding world. We suffer from our ongoing fragmentation and yearn for a wholeness whose presence we somehow sense as the driving force in our quest for its recovery.

-Herbert V. Guenther¹⁹

We live as divided beings in a divided world, consuming divisions during our divided days.

-Katherine E. Ulrich²⁰

During what the Tibetan cultural world calls *sagadawa*, considered one of the most auspicious times of the Tibetan religious calendar, many Tibetans (and other ethnic groups as well) in Nepal, Tibet, and India, prepare their belongings to take with them and stay at the local monastery or temple²¹ where the annual fasting ritual is performed. There they remain as long as they can prostrating, reciting prayers to the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, circumambulating the local sacred sites, giving offerings

¹⁹See his *Ecstatic Spontaneity: Saraha's Three Cycles of Dohā* (Berkeley, California: Asian Humanities Press, 1993), 16.

²⁰ See her "Divided Bodies: Corporeal and Metaphorical Dismemberment and Fragmentation in South Asian Religions" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 2002), 1.

²¹ *dgon pa*

to presiding lamas of temples or monasteries, and vowing to fast for the prescribed period of time. Others remain close to home, tending to their altars, and performing prostrations and recitations. Some monastics and lay people retell the story of a leperous nun (though they are not quite sure if she was Tibetan, Kashmirian, or Nepalese) who was healed by a fasting ritual and who also appeared in other times and places for their sake.

Who was this leprous nun? Why was her story and mode of practice transmitted for so many centuries? Why do they still mesmerize the minds and bodies of Tibetans and others in nearby communities to this day? Although we do not know whether Nun Palmo was an historical person, her image and tradition live on. They are transmitted through the oral and written texts of famous and unknown Tibetan, Nepalese, and Indian monks, yogis, and other religious practitioners and also through the practices of contemporary Tibetan communities.

This chapter will orient the reader to the texts in this study in two ways. First, it examines the historiographic value of the texts and how this study makes a contribution to previous scholarship on these texts. Second, it briefly examines the significance of each text and their authors/compiler in Tibetan Buddhist history and in contemporary context as well as providing a synopsis of each hagiography.

1.2 Historiographic Value and Previous Scholarship

1.2.1 Introduction

Reconstructing the identity of Nun Palmo is a difficult task because concrete information is sparse and no systematic study has ever been done on any of these materials. However, some information can be extracted from a variety of sources: specifically, the hagiographies on the life of Nun Palmo, Tibetan canonical texts, historical sources, and Nun Palmo's "remains". All of these sources create an icon that is at once historical and extra-historical, present at all times and places, and in people's memories and imagination.

1.2.2 Identity and Historiographic Value

In the hagiographies, Nun Palmo has several names and appears in a variety of guises. What is consistent throughout these texts is her title of *dge slong ma*²² indicating that she was a fully ordained nun. Prior to her renunciation, she is referred to as princess Lakṣmīṅkarā, and after her healing experience, as Rdo rje Phag mo (Vajravārāhī). She is also referred to as a *sprul sku* (a reincarnated being),²³ *mkha'*

²² In Sanskrit, Dge slong ma Dpal mo might be referred to as Bhikṣuṇī Lakṣmī. In Tibetan, *dge slong ma* means "fully ordained nun" and *dpal mo* means "splendorous, lustrous, or wealthy woman".

²³ The Tibetan term *sprul sku* means "emanation body." This term will be discussed later in Chapter Four.

'gro ma, and rnal 'byor ma²⁴ and thus has a number of different designations. These names have particular purposes in terms of Nun Palmo's identities in different phases of her experiences.²⁵

As her designations, Nun Palmo's place of origin is likewise not clear from the texts. This dissertation will not take a definite stand on this issue.²⁶ The hagiographies themselves first describe Nun Palmo prior to her renunciation as a beautiful princess from Kha che (a Tibetan word referring to Kashmir) or Northern India.²⁷ From the beginning, the texts, written in Tibetan, are situated in a Kashmirian or Indian Buddhist world viewed through Tibetan eyes. It is difficult to know precisely the proper geographical limits of Kha che, but it is usually the valley in which Śrīnagar is located, from Tibetan and Indian sources.²⁸ What is certain from

²⁴ The term *mkha' 'gro ma* (*dākinī*) literally means "sky goer". This term is discussed in greater detail in later chapters. The term *rnal 'byor ma* (*yoginī*) is a female hermit or ascetic practitioner.

²⁵ This is discussed in Chapter Four.

²⁶ Because of the uncertainty of her ethnic origins, this study will refer to Nun Palmo as both of Kashmirian and Indian background. Jean Naudou thinks that Nun Palmo is Kashmirian. See *Buddhists of Kaśmīr*. Bareton and Picron, tr. (Delhi: Agam Kala Prakashan, 1980), 154. Other scholars, who will be discussed below, dispute this claim.

²⁷ Jo gdan's text states that Nun Palmo was in Magadha and an unidentified place called Li kha ra Shing 'phel, *Smyung gnas*, 7a.3. According to the 'Gos Lo tsā ba Gzhon nu dpal's (1392-1481) chronicle *Deb ther sngon po* (*The Blue Annals*, 1476-1478), the latter location may be referring to Puṇḍravardhana and it may be the same location in India referred to by the Chinese traveller Huanzang where fasting occurred around the statue of the bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. See George N. Roerich's translation of *The Blue Annals* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 1008 and Beal, tr., *Si-yu-ki*, vol. IV, 403-404. 'Od dpag rdo rje's text states that Nun Palmo was the daughter of the king of O rgyan (Oḍḍiyāna), a place in Northwest Pakistan. See *Thugs rje chen po*, 30.1. The modern hagiography specifically states that she came from Śrīnagar, Kashmir. *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 1.7.

²⁸ Nalinaksha Dutt gives a brief historical overview of Buddhism in Kashmir including

historical, narrative, archaeological, and epigraphic evidence is that Kashmir was the seat of immense intellectual Buddhist activity and practice, a cross-roads for scholars and practitioners from many cultures for a number of centuries.²⁹ Sources include the Ceylonese Chronicle, the *Mahāvamsa*,³⁰ (that preserves a 5th century B.C. account of the introduction of Buddhism into Kashmir by the monk Majjhantika) and the famed Kashmirian historian Kalhaṇa's *Rājatarāṅgiṇī* (that describes Buddhism's advent in Kashmir from before the time of the Mauryan Emperor Aśoka until the 12th century).³¹ As stated before, there is an account by Xuanzang of a practice of fasting in front of a statue of Avalokiteśvara, a statue that was located in a convent in Kashmir.³² Tibetan historians, scholars, and practitioners' accounts of Tibetan-Kashmirian encounters refer back to the 7th century.³³

Nun Palmo's association with key Indian religious figures may indicate her Indic roots and also her place in Tibetan religious history. The hagiographies in this study mention King Indrabhūti, perhaps one of the Indian *siddhas* mentioned, for

information that states that Kashmir was linked with Gandhara and, at later times, was independent from it. See his *Buddhism in Kashmir* (Delhi: Eastern Book Linkers, 1985), 5-7.

²⁹ According to Berriedale A. Keith, it was not until the eleventh century in Kashmir that Indic historical writing begins. See Keith, *A History of Sanskrit Literature* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1973), 158-172.

³⁰ Manama, 5th c., *Mahāvamsa, or The Great Chronicle of Ceylon*. Wilhelm Geiger, tr., et al. (London: Pali Text Society, 1912), 82-87.

³¹ See Kalhaṇa, *Rājatarāṅgiṇī English and Sanskrit: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kashmir*. M.A. Stein, tr. (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1979-1988) and Ranjit Sitram, tr., *Rājatarāṅgiṇī: The Sage of the Kings of Kaśmīr* (New Delhi: Sakitya Akademi, 1968).

³² Beal, tr., *Si-yu-ki*, vol. I, 160.

³³ Naudou, *Buddhists of Kaśmīr*, 38-115.

instance, in the historian Tāranātha's (1575-1634) *The Seven Instruction Lineages*.³⁴

She is also linked with a King Dharmapāla but it is unclear who this person was in historical reality.

Tibetan historical and canonical sources also either clarify or complicate the matter of identity as well as dating. The *Blue Annals*³⁵ is the only reputedly historical textual account that establishes dates for Nun Palmo's possible historical existence, especially in terms of her association, even indirectly, with key religious figures in Tibetan history. This text supplies some details about Nun Palmo and her link with Avalokiteśvara as well as information about her impressive lineage of fasting descendants:

The degree of propitiating Ārya Avalokiteśvara by performing the rite of fasting was preached by the Nun Lakṣmī (dPal mo) personally blessed by Ārya Avalokiteśvara. She taught it to the paṇḍita Ye shes bzang po (Jñānabhadra), blessed by her. He to Bal po (the Nepalese) Peñaba, blessed by him. They were all saints (siddhas).

.....
Also there existed a lineage of the *dmār-khrid* (detailed exposition) of the cycle of the Great Merciful One (Mahākāruṇika). The Nun Lakṣmī (dGe-slong ma dPal mo) imparted it to dPal gyi bzang po (Śrībhadra). The latter on Rin chen bzang po who imparted it to Atiśa.³⁶

This text also notes that teachers of the Bka' gdams pa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism

³⁴ David Templeman, tr., *The Seven Instruction Lineages*. Translation of Tibetan text: Jo nang pa, Tāranātha, *Bka' babs bdun ldan gyi brgyud pa'i rnam thar* (Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1983), 24-29, 66-74.

³⁵ See passages in George N. Roerich, tr., *The Blue Annals* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976), 1007-18, 1044 for information on her lineal descendants.

³⁶ Ibid., 1007-8, 1044. More information about the lineage holders is found on pages 1009-1018.

surround Avalokiteśvara in a vision,³⁷ demonstrating that this early lineage (dating back to the 11th century) was indirectly associated with this deity and the Nun Palmo practice. In addition, the earliest texts included in the Tibetan Canon (the hymns of praise examined in this dissertation), which are attributed to a Nun Palmo (and might belong to the Nun Palmo system) discussed here were translated by the Indian master Atiśa (?982-?1054) and Lo tsā ba Rin chen bzang po.

But as the *Blue Annals* and recent scholars have pointed out, there may also have been several women by the name of Palmo (Lakṣmī), which complicates the identity and dating of Nun Palmo. These figures include a nun, a Kashmirian woman who wrote the Anuttarayoga Tantras, a princess, a male or female Kashmirian scholar, and others.³⁸ According to Dragomir Dimitrov, there may have been five or more women by the name of Palmo who existed from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries as the *Blue Annals* and canonical accounts seem to indicate.³⁹ Based on sources

³⁷ Ibid., 1015.

³⁸ See Dragomir Dimitrov, “Lakṣmī--On the Identity of Some Indo-Tibetan Scholars of the 9th-13th Centuries.” *Zentralasiatische Studien* 30 (2000), 9-27 for sources and a brief essay on different women who are called “Palmo”. Vladimir L. Uspensky from the Institute of Oriental Studies, St. Petersburg, Russia drew my attention to Bstan pa rgyal mtshan’s *’Phags mchog Thugs rje chen po dpal mo lugs kyi bla ma brgyud pa’i rnam thar pad ma dkar po’i phreng ba*. Vol. Ka. *Collected Works*, folios 8a.2-10a.1; a short biography of a woman called Dpal mo states that she is related to King Indrabhūti and is the woman tantrist Lakṣmī. Email communication iats-forum@eGroups.com, February 2, 2000. Dan Martin also refers to a Kashmirian woman Dpal mo who wrote Anuttarayoga Tantras. See his *Tibetan Histories: A Bibliography of Tibetan-Language Historical Works* (London: Serindia Publications, 1997), 63.

³⁹ Dimitrov’s article is extremely valuable in distinguishing between diverse Palmo figures (including a possible male figure) that appear in historical and canonical documents. I do not, however, agree with the sharp distinction he makes between Nun Palmo and the princess Lakṣmīṅkarā from O rgyan (we cannot discount as well that Nun Palmo may have been from

discussed above, including her association with key figures in Tibetan Buddhist history like Atiśa and others, Nun Palmo may have lived in the tenth or early eleventh century. Since these texts crossed cultural borders, we also have claims about her identity in Nepal. Among the Newars in Nepal, Nun Palmo is referred to as Śrīmatī Bhikṣuṇī,⁴⁰ who is believed to have existed in the 10th century, and as

Kashmir and not simply a mistake of conflation by the “storyteller” of the hagiographies). Although I am open to the possibility that there may have been a Lakṣmīṅkarā who was not the Nun Palmo of this study and who wrote the Tibetan canonical texts he refers to in his article, his justification for this view is untenable. See Dimitrov, *Lakṣmī*, 15-16, 19. In these passages, Dimitrov restricts his findings to Tibetan canonical texts, the *Blue Annals*, and one biography of Nun Palmo obtained by a Tibetan teacher of the ‘Bri gung Bka’ brgyud pa school without consulting the broad range of hagiographies of Nun Palmo that are available. With closer examination of the hagiographies in this study, Dimitrov would note that the distinction is not so straightforward. In ‘Od dpag rdo rje’s text and the modern hagiography, for example, Nun Palmo is described as Lakṣmīṅkarā, the sister of Indrabhūti, and in ‘Od dpag rdo rje’s and Jo gdan’s texts, Nun Palmo’s father is also called Indrabhūti (with the designation of “senior”). All women called Palmo in these hagiographies are ordained nuns and undergo the same illness and fasting experiences. Of course, I do not discount the possibility that historically there were more than one Lakṣmīṅkarā who had a brother by the name of Indrabhūti or there may have been mistakes committed by authors or compilers along the way.

⁴⁰ This information was given to me during research in Nepal, spring 1998 and discussed via email with Min Bahadur Shakya, the Director of the Nāgārjuna Institute of Exact Methods, a Center for Buddhist Studies in Nepal. See Lāmā Jyampal Dorjye and Nimā Rinchen Yolmo, *Śrīmatī Bhikṣuṇī Kamalāko Upoṣādhā (nyungne) Grantha*. 2nd edition (Darjeeling: Yolmo Prakāśan, 1996). Note that the Tibetan transliteration of the term *smiyung gnas* (meaning “fasting”) written in the title as *nyungne* is not the equivalent of the Sanskrit term *upoṣādhā*. The Tibetan term should be *gso shyong*. It is unclear what *Śrīmatī Bhikṣuṇī Kamalāko*’s association is to Nun Palmo from the text except what Tibetans have told me. The introductory poem in the front of the text is written in memory of a woman who was born in Helambhu, Nepal; spent nine years in Lhasa; and came to Darjeeling to combat animal sacrifice and superstition. She taught the Mahāyāna *upoṣādhā* and *smiyung gnas*, built two temples or monasteries, and is said to have become enlightened. I thank David Gellner for his assistance in the translation of parts of this work.

Candrikantā.⁴¹ There is also reference to an Ani⁴² Palmo Cave Settlement in the Dhaulagiri Zone of the North Mustang district. This site has a many-storied underground monastery consisting of interconnected cells where a person called Ani Palmo, known as the holy nun of Samdruling, ate only stones and took only one grain of barley every 11 days.⁴³ During my own research in Nepal, numerous Tibetans pointed out that in a temple on Chobar Hill in Patan, Nun Palmo appeared as a dancing *mkha'* *'gro ma*, thus blessing the area where Adinātha Lokeśvara resides.⁴⁴ In the end, this study is not meant to resolve questions of identity but to highlight the rich identities of and possible conflation of Nun Palmo with other figures throughout Tibetan and Buddhist history.

Finally, although relics do not firmly establish historical existence, they do illuminate Nun Palmo as a figure of religious historical importance. Kaḥ thog Si tu Chos kyi rgya mtsho records in his travelogue the existence of the relics of Nun Palmo

⁴¹ Dan Martin states that in the Newar tradition in Nepal, Nun Palmo is known as Candrikantā (corresponding to the Tibetan name *Zla mdzes?*). Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, 62.

⁴² “Ani” (*a ne*) is one of many terms referring to a female renunciate, not a fully-ordained nun. See Hanna Havnevik, *Tibetan Buddhist Nuns*, 44.

⁴³ See Michel Peissel, *Mustang: The Forbidden Kingdom, Exploring a Lost Himalayan Land* (New York: Dutton, 1967), 189-190. I am grateful to Hubert DeCleer for alerting me to this reference.

⁴⁴ The evidence discussed above is based on my own fieldnotes from research conducted in Nepal from March to August 1998. I thank Tshe ring chos sgron and her friends in Bodhnāth for taking me to Chobar temple and for this information. The Tibetan monk Jhampa Losal was also very helpful in this regard and Todd Lewis for identification of one of the Nepalese forms of Avalokiteśvara. For an account of this temple on Chobar Hill, see Keith Dowman, “A Buddhist Guide to the Power Places of the Kathmandu Valley.” In *Kailash: A Journal of Himalayan Studies*, vol. VIII, 3-4 (1981): 270-271.

in Zhwa lu monastery in Gtsang province, Tibet: one of her liver (*sku mchin*) inside an image of Thugs chen rgyal ba rgya mtsho (Mahākāraṇika Jina Sāgara)⁴⁵ and the other inside a medicine image (*smān sku*) of Spyān ras gzigs.⁴⁶ The fact that Nun Palmo's relic is found in a medicine image of this particular type of bodhisattva is relevant to this study because of her illness experience, Avalokiteśvara's association with healing, and her devotion to this deity,⁴⁷ that is, she and her ordeal are associated with healing officially.

1.2.3 Stepping Beyond Previous Scholarship

Past scholarship on the texts associated with Nun Palmo have certainly generated the seeds for this dissertation. Scholars in anthropology and religious studies and non-academics from the late 1960s to the present have made solid contributions in terms of exegesis and translations of oral and written texts (like the ones in this study). Most of their works have focused exclusively on the fasting ritual as a single study, while a few have focused on the link between the ritual in its

⁴⁵ This is one of two red forms of Avalokiteśvara. The other is Cintāmaṇi Avalokiteśvara (Spyān ras gzigs yid bzin nor bu). I thank John Makransky for his assistance.

⁴⁶ See *Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do* (An Account of a Pilgrimage to Central Tibet During the Years 1918 to 1920, being the text of Gangs ljongs dbus gtsang gnas bskor lam yig nor bu zla shel gyi se mo do) (Tashijong: Tibet Craft Community, 1972), 407, 409. I thank Hanna Havnevik for this reference.

⁴⁷ Chapter Four discusses the association of Nun Palmo with Avalokiteśvara.

performative contexts and oral versions of the hagiography of Nun Palmo.

For the most part, however, previous Western scholarship set its sights on the fasting ritual disembodied from the story of its founder in the texts, for its doctrinal and ritual significance. Perhaps one of the earliest to mention the fasting ritual was Emil Schlagintweit's work published in 1863⁴⁸ where he drew information mainly from travelogues and he and his brother's own scientific missions in Tibet and the surrounding Himalayan region in 1854-58. In this work, he described the fasting ritual as a ritual of abstinence⁴⁹ and confession used for the purification of "sins" in honor of Padmapāni, a form of Avalokiteśvara as Protector of the World ('Jig rten mgon po).

As other academic works appeared from the 1960s to the 1980s, the focus narrowed to the use of the ritual on the local level. Anthropologists studied the significance of the fasting ritual in particular Tibetan and Tibetan-related communities in the Himalayan region, especially among the Sherpas of Nepal. In the 1960s, Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf in his work on Sherpas noted the predominance of female renunciates conducting the rites of the fasting ritual, the use of the ritual for the atonement of sins, and the fasting ritual as a merit-making ceremony.⁵⁰ In Stan Royal Mumford's 1989 work concerning Tibetan lamas and Gurung Shamans, the fasting ritual was described as a ritual of merit-making for humans, animals, and deities alike,

⁴⁸ *Buddhism in Tibet* (Leipzig: F. A. Brockhaus, 1863), 95, 240-42.

⁴⁹ For Schlagintweit, abstinence derives from his translation of the word *smiyung par gnas pa*, *smiyung pa* meaning "to reduce (in food)" and *gnas pa* "to continue."

⁵⁰ *The Sherpas of Nepal: Buddhist Highlanders* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), 150, 153, 180-5, 211, 224. Haimendorf misidentifies a story told on the occasion of the ritual as the origin story of the ritual.

as a protest for animal sacrifice, and as an example of lay-monastic tension about Buddhist doctrine.⁵¹

Beyond the local Nepalese level, Eva K. Dargyay's work, which arose out of research conducted among modern Tibetan exiles in India and Switzerland, specifically linked the fasting ritual to a particular period when the laity undertook the *upoṣādhā* vows⁵² (vows taken by the laity on the 8th, 15th, and 30th day of the lunar month) and recited the mantra of the deity *Spyan ras gzigs*.

Other scholars' recent translations and brief commentaries on the fasting ritual texts (for example, the works of Buddhist scholars like Roger Jackson and John Makransky) have illuminated how the fasting ritual incorporates classical Buddhist ideas of asceticism, renunciation, merit-making, and personal liberation as taught in the three phases of the Buddhist tradition, *Hīnayāna*, *Mahāyāna*, and *Vajrayāna*.⁵³ Non-academic Buddhist practitioners provide a translation and a brief discussion of the ritual's relevancy to and accessibility in everyday lay life (for example, Lama Zopa Rinpoche and George Churinoff)⁵⁴ and the ritual's powerful purification effects.

⁵¹See his *Himalayan Dialogue: Tibetan Lamas and Gurung Shamans in Nepal* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 4, 25, 57, 82, 111-13, 116.

⁵² See her *Tibetan Village Communities: Structure and Change* (Warminster, Wilts: Aris and Phillips, 1982), 52.

⁵³ Roger Jackson, "A Fasting Ritual." In *Religions of Tibet in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997): 271-292; Roger Jackson and John Makransky, *Eleven-Headed Avalokiteśvara's Fasting Ritual Condensed into a Nectar Drop*. Donald Lopez ed. (Oregon, WI: Deer Parks Books, 1989).

⁵⁴ Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche and George Churinoff provide a translation of Dalai Lama VII, *Thugs rje chen po* text. See their *Nyung Nā: The Means of Achievement of the Eleven-faced Great Compassionate One, Avalokiteshvara*. The Seventh Dalai Lama (Boston:

Recent work by Kim Gutschow on nuns in Zangskar, Ladakh,⁵⁵ presented findings that the ritual is described as a means for removing sin and defilements in order to attain a more favorable rebirth, especially for women, who comprise a lower rebirth, or even to attain autonomy.⁵⁶ Among Zangskari fasters, there is no stress on identification with a deity nor with a founding nun. This fasting ritual also allows nuns a sense of autonomy and control in celibate life within a patriarchal monastic institution. Similarly, my own research findings when engaged in participant-observation and fieldwork research of the fasting ritual in nunneries and monasteries in Nepal and Lhasa in 1998, made me think about the gender implications in the performance of the fasting ritual according to the Nun Palmo system for several reasons: women outnumbered men in this practice, it was usually performed in

Wisdom Publications, 1995). Lama Zopa Rinpoche, a Tibetan monk in Kopan monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal, encourages his followers in Nepal and in U.S. Dharma Centers that are under the umbrella of the FPMT (The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahāyāna Tradition, an international network of Buddhist centers) that *smiyung gnas* is the “practical answer” to one’s needs of spiritual practice in today’s busy society. I thank Lama Zopa Rinpoche for his insights on the *smiyung gnas* ritual during his 1999 visit to Kurukulla Center in Cambridge, MA.

⁵⁵ See her essay, “The *smiyung gnas* Fast in Zangskar: How Liminality Depends on Structure.” In *Ladakh: Culture, History, and Development between Himalaya and Karakoram*. Recent Research in Ladakh 8, edited by Martijn van Beek, Kristoffer Brix Bertelsen and Poul Pedersen (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 1999), 153-173; *id.*, “The Women Who Refuse to be Exchanged: Celibacy and Sexuality at a Nunnery in Zangskar, Northwest India.” In *Celibacy, Culture, and Society: The Anthropology of Sexual Abstinence*, edited by Elisa Janine Sobo and Sandra Bell (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 2000): 47-64. During a trip to Ladakh in the summer of 1999, I discovered that the nuns at Hemis nunnery undertake a three month annual *smiyung gnas* retreat.

⁵⁶ Gutschow, “The *smiyung gnas* Fast in Zangskar,” 156-157. The comment about women comprising a lower rebirth is discussed in Chapter 2.3.2. These justifications by women to fast, especially for the sense of autonomy and purification, are reminiscent of what Rudolph M. Bell deals with in his study of the religious acts of Italian female Christian women and anorexia nervosa. See his *Holy Anorexia* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985).

nunneries or primarily organized by nuns, and it was often called a “woman’s practice” perhaps because of the female role model.⁵⁷

However, other scholars saw that a link between the experiences described in the Nun Palmo hagiographies and the practice of the fasting ritual illuminated the impact of monastic values on lay life. Sherry Ortner, who conducted ethnographic work among the Sherpas of Nepal culminating in her publications, *Sherpas through their Rituals* (1978) and *High Religion: A Cultural and Political History of Sherpa Buddhism* (1989),⁵⁸ was perhaps the most influential scholar in this regard. Ortner highlighted the psychological and sociological significance of both the fasting ritual and the story of the life of its founder, Nun Palmo, by examining the relationship between human intentions and practice as well as the structures of a culture. The interplay of these factors revealed what Ortner saw in the texts and practice: there was first, a stress on altruism as a means of identifying with the main bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara and second, a kind of “monastic assault” on Sherpa lay life since the values of family life were being replaced by the monastic family and the maternal care of this bodhisattva. Finally, perhaps the earliest attention given to the link between illness, gender, and ritual is Kathryn March’s dissertation on women in Tamang and Sherpa villages where she sees the fasting ritual as an attempt to prevent or cure illness

⁵⁷ Two Tibetan monks from Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal, Geshe Tsulga and Lama Konchok, reiterated this often in March 1998. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

⁵⁸ See her *Sherpas through their Rituals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978) and her *High Religion*.

in these communities.⁵⁹

On the whole, past scholarship has been helpful in pointing out the rich Buddhist features of these texts and their practices; yet, much about the religious and cultural meanings of these texts is open to interpretation. Since the scope of these studies was relatively restricted (often using only one oral or written version of a genre and/or text or focused on one location) and often in the earlier anthropological studies, scholars conducted research without full knowledge of the written and/or oral Tibetan language, the results of the findings are limited. As Dalai Lama V Ngag dbang blo bzang rgya mtsho (1617-1682) pointed out to fellow Tibetan contemporaries about the fasting ritual itself,⁶⁰ practitioners must carefully scrutinize the practices and doctrines described in the texts. Current scholarship has much to explore in terms of the doctrinal, philosophical, and historical aspects of these texts.

⁵⁹See her *The Intermediacy of Women: Female Gender Symbolism and the Social Position of Women Among Tamangs and Sherpas of Highland Nepal* (Ph.D. diss., Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1979), 277-291. In this work, March does draw attention to three oral versions of Nun Palmo's hagiography. In another work, Miranda Shaw discusses the significance of Nun Palmo's story in terms of Buddhist teachings and gender in Miranda Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 126-130.

⁶⁰ The views of the Dalai Lama V are cited in Glenn H. Mullin, ed., *Meditations on the Lower Tantras from the Collected Works of the Previous Dalai Lamas* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1997), 78-80 referring to Dalai Lama V, *Lha tshogs rnams kyi sgrub skor*, *The Collected Works (Gsung 'Bum) of Vth Dalai Lama*, vol. 3 (Gangtok: Sikkim National Press, 1992), 13-133.

1.3 The Sources and Their Authors/Compilers

1.3.1 Introduction

Many texts associated with Nun Palmo have been widely transmitted in oral and written form, yet no one has comprehensively and systematically studied the texts found as individual works and in collections. As mentioned earlier, certain written extant canonical and extra-canonical texts are used within and outside of Tibetan culture, crossing sectarian and cultural boundaries.⁶¹ Though we will not be dealing with all the genres in this study, the sources associated with Nun Palmo are a diverse group: the hagiographies of Nun Palmo and of her lineage descendants; “ritual prescriptions” or manuals (*cho ga, viddhi*) for the fasting ritual and rituals of propitiation or literally, means for the spiritual realization of a deity (*sgrub thabs, sādhana*); as well as prayers (*smon lam, pranidhāna*) and hymns of praise (*bstod pa, stotra / stava*). There is at least one Nepali version of the hagiography, and the rituals of fasting and propitiation used in Newari and Tamang communities in Nepal and translations of some of these genres have appeared in English and other Western languages.⁶²

⁶¹ The texts even contain information about Tibetan, Nepalese, and Indian teachers and practitioners. The texts are preserved and used by present day Tibetan and non-Tibetan Buddhist communities in Tibet, Nepal, India, China, and the West.

⁶² The Nepali version of the Nun Palmo hagiography was orally translated for me by a Tamang practitioner in the spring of 1998 in Nga gi dgon pa in the Kathmandu Valley. A Nepali version (written from Tibetan works) of a *smyung gnas* text mentioned earlier entitled *Śrīmatī Bhikṣuṇī Kamalāko Upoṣādhā (nyungne) Grantha* used by Newars in Nepal was sent to me from Patan, Nepal in the spring 2000 by Min Bahadur Shakya. This text discusses in the cover the merit one accrues with the practice of *smyung gnas* and describes this ritual as a

The following section (1.3.2-1.3.5) will now provide a brief synopsis of the texts examined in this study and whatever biographical information of the individual authors/compiler is available. This dissertation also uses ideas from Tibetan, Indian, Christian, and other traditions as sources of comparison that contribute to further understanding of the materials in this study.

1.3.2 The Texts and their Authors

1.3.2a Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po's Text and His Identity

One of the earliest extant hagiographies to be examined in this study is *Smyung gnas bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar* (*The Hagiography of the Lineage Gurus of the Fasting Ritual*) written by Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po. The entire collection of texts is 107 folios long (recto and verso), which includes the hagiography of Nun Palmo, a biography of the author by his student Bsod nams dar (1385-1444), a biography of Bsod nams dar by Btsun pa Chos kyi grags pa, and hagiographies of Nun Palmo's

purification practice. See Zopa Rinpoche and Churinoff, *Nyung Nā* for the English translation of a fasting and ritual of propitiation manual by Dalai Lama VII. On pages 193-96 is a short synopsis of Nun Palmo's life derived from Ye shes rgyal mtshan (1713-1793), written in 1760, in his commentary of the *sgrub thabs* of Spyian ras gzigs found in the *Collected Works of Tshe mchog gling Yongs 'dzin Ye shes rgyal mtshan*, vol. 9 (New Delhi: Tibet House, 1976), folios 162-165.

lineage descendants of Tibetan and Nepalese origin. Only the first 60 folios are by Jo gdan. The Nun Palmo hagiography itself is 7 folios long with a publisher's colophon on a separate folio.

Among the three hagiographies in this study, this is the shortest. According to the colophon, it was extracted from other earlier accounts of her life.⁶³ The hagiography begins with her royal life and contraction of leprosy after she became a learned nun. The text describes her suffering state and her isolation. She learned that her tutelary deity was Avalokiteśvara after she experiences a vision of her own father Indrabhūti, Mañjuśrī, and seven *mkha'* 'gro ma (the latter reveal that she will become the head of their retinue). After having meditated and fasted before Ekādaśamukha (the Eleven-faced Avalokiteśvara) for a full year, her illness "shed like the skin of a snake." She was endowed with *bodhicitta* ("enlightened attitude") and transformed obstacles and the eight *nāgas*⁶⁴ into protectors of the practice of Mahākāruṇika and Ekādaśamukha, respectively. Afterwards, she continued to fast and saw visions of her tutelary deity, Tārā, along with other tantric deities, and eventually achieved the level of a bodhisattva. She finally appeared in Magadha as a dancing *ḍākinī* and revealed

⁶³ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, folio 60a.1-3: *de ltar bla ma gong ma rnam kyi rnam thar mdor bsod 'di ni skyes bu chen po de rnam kyis rnam par thar pa'i yi ge kha thor ba rnam las btus shing/phyogs cig tu bsdebs te/jo gdan bsod nams bzang pos yi ger bkod pa'o//*

⁶⁴ *Nāgas* play an ambiguous role in Buddhist mythology, often considered dangerous and beneficial entities. Powerful creatures who dwell in the underground or in rivers, *nāgas* control fertility and destruction through their power over rain. They were among the historical Buddha's staunchest adversaries and also guardians of the Buddha and his teaching once they were pacified. They were the protectors of the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras retrieved by Nāgārjuna. See Richard S. Cohen, "Nāga, Yakṣiṇī, Buddha: Local Deities and Local Buddhism at Ajanta." Unpublished paper, n.d.

herself as Vajrayoginī, and blessed the people in the area, helping them achieve *dn gos grub* (*siddhi*). The story ends with the statement that those who practice during *sagadawa* will end all obstacles and achieve *dn gos grub* quickly.

Now the identity, dating, and establishment of the historical importance of the author of this text are difficult to ascertain primarily due to the etymological complexity surrounding his name and title. Jo gdan is an author who may, because of his title *jo gdan*, be directly linked with a key figure in Tibetan Buddhist history, the Kha che Paṇ chen (Kashmirian scholar) Śākyaśrībhadrā (1127-1225). This Kashmirian scholar was associated with monastic ascetic practice. Jo gdan is also referred to as Jo gdan Mkhan chen Bsod nams bzang po and Bsod nams dpal bzang po. However, there is some room for conjecture about this figure.

The author's colophon is by itself uninformative about his identity. It merely states that Jo gdan extracted details from scattered writings of previous lamas (the great beings, *skyes bu chen po*) about the hagiography of Nun Palmo, put them together in one compilation, and arranged them in written form. The hagiography itself contains a brief biography by his student Bsod nams dar (1385-1444)⁶⁵ which helps in narrowing down the dating of this author. Fortunately, the studies of David Jackson and Leonard W. J. van der Kuijp have led to some answers and curious

⁶⁵ The dating of this student Bsod nams dar was supplied by Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, 62. Martin dates Jo gdan Mkhan chen Bsod nams bzang po to 1341-1433. Martin also notes that the biography of an author called Smyung gnas pa Bsod nams bzang po is found in Ko zhul Grags pa 'byung gnas and Rgyal ba blo bzang mkhas grub, *Gangs can Mkhas grub rim byon ming mdzod* (Lanzhou: Kan su'u Mi rigs Dpe skrun khang, 1992), 1330-1331. In Don rdor and Bstan 'dzin chos grags, *Gangs ljongs lo rgyus thog gi grags can mi sna* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang, 1993), 417-419, he is called Gnyag phu ba Bsod nams bzang po. See Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, 63.

possibilities about the identity of the author/compiler of this work. A brief synopsis of these findings will reveal how the possible clarification of the identity of this person adds to the significance of the fasting ritual in terms of Nun Palmo's experiences and for Tibetan Buddhist history.

For example, if we assume that the author of this text is the same as the so-called Jo gdan mkhan chen Bsod nams bzang po and Bsod nams dpal bzang po, then we can make conclusions about the author's affiliations and interests. The least problematic detail is the etymology of the affix *dpal bzang po* to the substantive part of his name in religion, equivalent to the Sanskrit term *śrībhaddra*. This term indicates that this individual was most likely ordained in the same lineage and followed the practice established in Tibet by the renowned Śākyaśrībhaddra, a key figure in Tibetan Buddhist history of the 12th and 13th centuries and the founder of a famous Vinaya ordination lineage and community (the latter becoming the basis of the "four communities," *tshogs pa bzhi*).⁶⁶ Unfortunately, other available sources have not provided such definitive conclusions about Jo gdan's identity, but they do, however, suggest some curious possibilities.

⁶⁶ According to David Jackson, Śākyaśrībhaddra is renowned for four major contributions in Tibetan history: 1) The founding of a famous Vinaya ordination lineage and community, the latter became the basis of the "four communities" (*tshogs pa bzhi*), 2) providing in Tibet a revised translation and establishing a teaching line of Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* done in collaboration with his pupil Sa skya Paṇḍita Kun dga' rgyal mtshan (1182-1251), 3) the calculating of the probable dates of the Buddha Śākyamuni, possibly deriving from the Sinhalese tradition and closer to modern estimates, and 4) cooperating with Khro phu Lo tsā ba on the building of a Maitreya statue in Western gTsang. See his *Two Biographies of Śākyaśrībhaddra: The Eulogy by Khro phu Lo tsā ba and its Commentary by Bsod nams dpal bzang po* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1990), 1. The "four communities" are: the Tsha mig/ Tshogs chen pa, the Bye rdzing pa, the dGe 'dun sgang pa, and the Chos lung pa. See van der Kuijp, "On the Lives of Śākyaśrībhaddra (?-?1225)," 603.

One of these is that this author, known as Bsod nams dpal bzang po, is the same one mentioned in the *Blue Annals*, one of the lineage descendants of the Nun Palmo tradition.⁶⁷ Another source identifies him, and van der Kuip agrees in his review of the work, as the sixth abbot of the Tsha mig or Tshogs chen community that came from Śākyaśrībhadrā's Vinaya transmission, a possibility confirming that he flourished in the year 1300.⁶⁸ Another possibility as to the identity of this individual is that, judging from the text studied by David Jackson, he was most probably a monk because he refers to himself as *btsun pa* in the colophon.⁶⁹

Van der Kuip sheds light on Bsod nams bzang po's identity and probable dates through another work devoted to the lines of Vinaya transmission in Tibet⁷⁰ entitled *Mkhan rgyud rnam gsum byon tshul gyi rnam thar*. In this text, three Bsod nams dpal bzang po appear. In favor of Jackson's tentative dating of this author, the text refers to Bsod nams dpal bzang po as preceptor (*slob dpon*) and links him with the renowned historian Bu ston, (and recognized this historian as the reembodiment of Śākyaśrī "who then re-embodied himself as the Jo nang pa scholar Shar ka ba Kun dga' blo gros rgyal mtshan (1365-?1430-43))."⁷¹ He is also described as the sixth abbot (*mkhan po*,

⁶⁷ Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 1044.

⁶⁸ Jackson, *Two Biographies*, 4, 19-20, n. 9; Leonard W. J. van der Kuip, "On the Lives of Śākyaśrībhadrā (?-?1225)." In *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 114.4 (Oct.-Dec. 1994): 602. Mention of him as an abbot is made in Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 1017-18.

⁶⁹ Van der Kuip, "On the Lives of Śākyaśrībhadrā (?-?1225)," 604.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 603.

⁷¹ Ibid., 604.

upadhyāya) of the Tsha mig community.⁷² This text also identifies the second Bsod nams dpal as a time keeper (*dus go ba*) during the ordination of Mkhan chen Rin chen rgyal mtshan dpal bzang po (1348-1430), alias Spos khang pa, in 1367. The third Bsod nams was someone called a “precentor” (*dbu mdzad*) in connection with the passing of Bshes gnyen Rgyal mchog dpal bzang po (1370-1424), Spos khang pa’s successor of the Chos lung pa.⁷³ This is in accordance with *The Blue Annals*, which mentioned a Bsod nams dpal as the fifth abbot of the Chos lung tshogs pa.⁷⁴ Van der Kuijp states,

Tshal pa observes in his survey of the abbots of Tshal Gung thang monastery that, in 1315, [Bsod nams dpal bzang po] was the initiatory abbot of Yon tan rin chen, whom the myriarch Smon lam rdo rje (1284-1347) appointed abbot of Tshal Yang dgon monastery.⁷⁵

Therefore, based on the evidence presented thus far from the *Blue Annals*, Jackson’s earlier study, and van der Kuijp’s review of that study, this figure may reasonably be dated to the early fourteenth century.

Finally, the expression *jo gdan* is problematic etymologically. According to van der Kuijp in the same review article, the expression was already in use at least by the beginning of the twelfth century. The term *jo gdan* can be defined in two possible ways: 1) *stan gcig*, (keeping in mind that *stan* and *gdan* are “interchangeable

⁷² Ibid., 604-5.

⁷³ Ibid., 603.

⁷⁴ Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 1073.

⁷⁵ Van der Kuijp, “On the Lives of Śākyaśrībhadrā,” 605

variants”), referring to “a discipline [consisting of] not eating more than one meal a day;”⁷⁶ or 2) it is an abbreviation for the term *jo [bo] gdan gcig pa*.⁷⁷ The *Blue Annals*, referring to the Vinaya students of Śākyaśrībhadrā, offers another possibility when it states:

Great was the number of those whom he established in the vows of the Prātimokṣa, but the two men, who had taken the final monastic ordination in the presence of the mahāpaṇḍita and had taken the vow of a “single mat” (*stan gcig gi brtul zhugs ‘dzin pa*) were rDo rje dpal and Byang chub dpal.⁷⁸

Jackson also points out that followers of the same tradition or similar ones seem to have been known as *jo gdan*, *jo dan*, or *stan gcig pa* dating from as early as the mid-twelfth century, probably linked to the early Bka’ gdams pa tradition, which might explain the “Jo” element.⁷⁹ The term “Jo” may also just be an honorific designation. Jackson observed, referring to a passage in the chronicle of Yar lung Jo bo Shākya rin chen of 1376, that the four main Vinaya transmissions that issued from Śākyaśrībhadrā are called the *jo gdan sde bzhi*, “the four *jo gdan*.”⁸⁰ Therefore, there are so many possibilities for the name “Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po,” especially such associations with strict Vinaya practice, a thriving monastic community life, and a prominent figure like Śākyaśrībhadrā, which add to the potential doctrinal concerns of the hagiographies and ritual manuals associated with Nun Palmo and offer the possibility as well of their

⁷⁶ Ibid., 606, n. 26.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 1071.

⁷⁹ Jackson, *Two Biographies*, 21-22, n. 11.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 21-22, n. 11. See van der Kuijp, “On the Lives of Śākyaśrībhadrā,” 603, n. 17.

prominence in Tibetan religious monastic life of such an early period.

1.3.2b. The Anonymous Modern Text

The second hagiography examined in this study is the modern anonymous text published in 1953, *Dge slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba'i chos gtam* (*The Hagiography of Nun Palmo: A Religious Discourse Which Gives Rise to Aversion in the [Mind] Stream*). The text is 21 pages (not folios) long including the publisher's colophon.

The longest of the hagiographies, this text contains detailed narrative accounts of Nun Palmo's religious development and that of her servant. This text also contains highly descriptive passages of the condition of her leprosy and state of her suffering. From the beginning, this text affirms Nun Palmo's divine nature, she is Rdo rje Phag mo and a *sprul sku* who appears for the sake of others. As in the previous text, she also comes from a royal family but is specifically Kashmirian, by the name of Lakṣmīṅkarā, with a brother called Indrabhūti. There is a detailed description of her rejection of her royal lineage and offers of marriage by kings from several Asian countries like China, Afghanistan or Iran, and India until she finally procures permission from her family to become a renunciate. After a few years of training as an ordained nun and excelling in her studies even to the capacity of leading a temple, she contracts leprosy at the age of 25. At this point she is thrown out of her temple by her fellow monastics. The narrative continues with elaborate descriptions of her servant

Sampelma's devotion to her mistress while Nun Palmo's body deteriorates. After undertaking several journeys even reaching the mountain of Byang Thang in Tibet, Nun Palmo requests for her servant Sampelma to leave her to die in a retreat house built for her, but her servant only agreed to leave on the condition that she could return to her in a short period of time. After her servant left, Nun Palmo remained in a meditational state for 21 days until she received a vision of the young 16-year-old Avalokiteśvara who told her to go to a temple to meet the image of Ekādaśamukha in order to receive *ngos grub*. Then her brother Indrabhūti, who apparently achieved high spiritual realization, appears in a vision with a long life consecration vase containing ablution water for cleansing leprosy and convinces her to generate strength during this difficult time. Five *mkha'* 'gro ma appear and lead her to her tutelary deity. Nun Palmo generates *bodhicitta* after being thrown out of a temple because of her condition. As in the previous hagiography, she remains fasting and meditating in the presence of her deity, but this time she attains a rainbow body. After much supplication by her servant to the deities to help the situation, Nun Palmo appears in the sky in front of her along with five *mkha'* 'gro ma. Her servant also achieves a rainbow body. They then both return to help alleviate the suffering of the people of another temple.

Even more than the previous author, the identity of the author of this modern tale is problematic since no outside sources are available except for what is provided by the publisher's colophon.⁸¹ The author's name and colophon are missing. The

⁸¹ See *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 21.4-13: "Something like this hagiography, which was just

publisher's colophon, provided by G. Tharchin in Kalimpong,⁸² informs the reader that the text was published in 1953 to honor the bequest of a Bhutanese Bla ma Rab brtan. This lama, while hospitalized in Kalimpong Leprosy Hospital, made a request to have this version of the life of Nun Palmo published for future generations. This Bhutanese

printed, was requested from this [time by] the late Bhutanese scholar Bla ma Rab brtan, who had come to Kalimpong Leprosy Hospital for treatment many years ago. When he was in hospital, he said to the publisher of a newspaper that this very brief hagiography of Nun Palmo must certainly be printed for the benefit of future generations. In accordance to what he said, now it has been printed in memory of that late lama. May [this] become the cause of benefit for the readers [of the] hagiography. [This] has been published in Kalimpong in the Tibetan Language Mirror Publishing House on the 6th day [of the lunar calendar] of the 7th hor month of the water-snake year, that is. on the 15th day of the 8th month [August 15th] of a sexagenary cycle in the year 1953 A.D." (*de yang par bskrun zhus ma thag pa'i rnam thar 'di bzhin 'di nas lo mang ngon ka spug mdze nad sman khang du sman bcos ched du phebs pa mkhas dbang 'brug pa bla ma rab brtan dam pa de nyid sman khang du bzhugs skabs dge slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar mdor bsdus 'di nyid phyi rabs skye 'gro rnams la sman slad du gsar 'gyur byed por par brko zhig nges par yod pa zhes phebs don ltar / da lam bla ma dam pa de nyid gyi dran gso'i slad du par brkos zhus zin pa 'dis rnam thar klog mkhan rnams la phan pa'i rgyur gyur cig / ka spug bod yig me long par khang du rab byung bcu drug pa'i chu sprul hor zla bdun pa'i tshes drug spyi zla brgyad pa'i tshes bco lnga ston pa ye shu'i 'das lo 1953 nyin par du bskrun pa'o //*)

⁸² G. Tharchin was a Christian missionary of Khu nu descent. See van der Kuijp, "Tibetan Historiography." In *Tibetan Literature: Studies in Genre*, edited by José Ignacio Cabezón and Roger R. Jackson (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 39-56, 40.

lama sought solace and believed in the meritorious value of the printing of this text for himself and others.

1.3.2c. ‘Od dpag rdo rje’s Text and Identity

A hagiography that will be used as a text of comparison with the other two central texts is entitled *Dge slong ma dpal mo rnam thar*. This hagiography is contained in a collection of texts called: *Thugs rje chen po bcu gcig zhal gyi bla ma brgyud pa’i rnam thar nor bu’i phreng ba* (*A Jeweled Garland: The Hagiography of the Lineage Gurus of the Eleven-faced Great Compassionate One*). The collection was written by the Rnying ma scholar ‘Od dpag rdo rje. The hagiography itself was written in *dbu med* script and is contained in pages 20-50. Although this version of the narrative is longer, many passages in this text parallel Jo gdan’s version.

Since this text will only be used as a point of comparison with the other two central hagiographies, which contain many of the same details, the synopsis of the hagiography will be brief. As in Jo gdan’s text, Nun Palmo appears as the daughter of a King Indrabhūti (but in contrast to Jo gdan’s text, specifically stating that he was the king of O rgyan) and like the modern text, is known as Lakṣmīṅkarā who has a brother by the same name as the king. Like this latter text, she is also desired by kings of several countries and receives offers of marriage. From the beginning, she contracts leprosy after being a learned nun. Like the other texts, she receives several visions including that of her father that lead her to the same tutelary deity who helps her

achieve *ngos grub* and become healed.

As with the other two texts, the dating and background information of the author is unclear. According to Dan Martin, ‘Od dpag rdo rje was a student of Chu bzang Gnyag phu ba Bsod nams dbang phyug (d. 1371).⁸³ The *Blue Annals* describes a chief abbot (*mkhan chen*) who advocated fasting as a life-preserving ceremony.⁸⁴ ‘Od dpag rdo rje is also known as the author of fifteen works in the Tibetan Rnying ma tradition.⁸⁵

1.3.3 The Ritual Texts of Fasting and Propitiation and Their Authors, Zhu chen Tshul khri ms rin chen & Dalai Lama VII

The manuals of the texts of propitiation and fasting provide structure for the schematic descriptions of the ritual in the narrative framework of the hagiographies. Chapter Three will discuss in more detail the main sections of these texts. As for fasting texts, the Tibetan tradition features numerous texts dedicated to various deities. However, the fasting ritual according to the Nun Palmo tradition is by far the most popular based on the number of texts used presently and what the texts describe as

⁸³ Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, 66, 236.

⁸⁴ Roerich, *Blue Annals*, 1016.

⁸⁵ Leslie Bradburn, et al., *Masters of the Nyingma Lineage. Crystal Mirror* 11 (Berkeley: Dharma Publishing, 1995), 441.

used in the practices of the past.

The two main ritual texts in this study were written by Zhu chen and Dalai Lama VII. Both authors were renowned figures in Tibetan Buddhist history in their own right who wrote several works on poetry, tantric ritual texts, and prayers. Zhu chen was one of the most revered teachers and scholars of Eastern Tibet of the 18th century. He was selected by the ruler of Sde dge to be the editor of the Sde dge edition of the *Bstan 'gyur* (1744).⁸⁶

1.3.4 The Canonical Works: Ritual Texts and Hymns of Praise

The Sde dge edition of the *Bstan 'gyur* section of the Tibetan Buddhist Canon lists five works attributed to Nun Palmo, a ritual of propitiation and four hymns of praise, entitled *Rje btsun 'phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug zhal bcu gcig pa'i sgrub thabs* (*The Ritual of Propitiation of the Holy Lord Eleven-faced Spyman ras gzigs*), *Jig rten dbang phyug la bstod pa* (*Praise to the Lord of the World*), *Rje btsun thugs rje chen po la bstod pa* (*Praise to the Holy Great Compassionate One*), and two texts of the same title, *'Phags pa spyan ras gzigs dbang phyug gi bstod pa* (*Praise to the Holy Lord Spyman ras gzigs*).⁸⁷ These texts reflect Nun Palmo's religious devotion

⁸⁶ See E. Gene Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts: History & Literature of the Himalayan Plateau* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001), 89.

⁸⁷ See Introduction, page 7, n.4 for complete publishing information.

to Avalokiteśvara.

1.3.5 Other Relevant Works

Certain Tibetan and Sanskrit primary sources and other secondary sources will provide background and comparative information for this study. Texts on *blo sbyong* (“mental purification”), and *gtong len* (“sending and taking”),⁸⁸ which are ascribed to Atiśa and the Bka’ gdams pa teachers, focus on the development of *bodhicitta* and the transformation of negative afflictions into benefits. Indian and Tibetan medical texts like the *Aṣṭaṅgahṛdaya* and the *Rgyud Bzhi*, and works by Western scholars are useful in terms of understanding comparatively the notions of illness, suffering, and renunciation in the Nun Palmo texts in this study.

1.4 Conclusion

Overall, the sources according to the Nun Palmo tradition point to their religious and historiographic value in Tibetan religious history by their association with key religious figures as well as lineage-holders and practitioners from diverse cultures. The next chapter discusses the role of illness in Buddhist and cultural history

⁸⁸ The Tibetan term *gtong len* derives from the word *gtong ba len pa*.

and in the Nun Palmo hagiographies.

CHAPTER TWO

SITUATING ILLNESS WITHIN TIBETAN HISTORY AND THE NUN PALMO HAGIOGRAPHIES

2.1 Introduction: The Illness Experience in the Nun Palmo Narrative Accounts

From the beginning, hagiographies of Nun Palmo direct the reader to view Nun Palmo from the lenses of both conventional and ultimate reality and from the perspective of her as an enlightened figure who appears in many forms.⁸⁹ On the one hand, the hagiographies concur in describing Nun Palmo as an ordinary human being, unclear of her goals and prone to the suffering life presents. Although her family tried to fulfill her every physical need, she was unfulfilled by what she saw as the limited pleasures of existence in the world of royalty; she therefore sought a life as a renouncer, a life that she hoped would lead her to ultimate liberation from suffering. But while she was living a renunciant life as an ordained nun in charge of a group of monastics according to the Buddhist teachings, she was confronted with the limitations of her physicality. She contracted a devastating illness, leprosy. This condition caused such extreme suffering because it severed all connections and social boundaries, enforcing the reconstruction of a new identity and community.

On the other hand, Nun Palmo is a re-embodiment, known as a *sprul sku* and a bodhisattva reborn in this world as a human being, who appears to contract leprosy for

⁸⁹ The outer form is the historical embodiment considered an “emanation body” (*sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*) and the inner one is the enlightened form called the “enjoyment body” (*longs spyod sku, sambhogakāya*). The different forms Nun Palmo appears is discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

the sake of other sentient beings, and as a *mkha' 'gro ma* (*dākinī*), who cuts away the ignorance of *saṃsāra* and leads others to higher states of realization. Both points of view transmit ideas about the role of illness and renunciation in the Nun Palmo texts in order to reach liberation in the Buddhist sense.

This chapter will examine the role of illness, in particular, leprosy, in the three main hagiographies discussed in the last chapter. In doing so, it contributes to our understanding of issues that are relevant to certain Buddhist and Tibetan concerns. On the whole, this section explores how illness provides a lens through which to study the Nun Palmo texts and Asian religious traditions in general.

After describing the structure of the literary genre itself, this chapter will focus on the role of illness via three lenses. First, it briefly discusses recent scholarship and historical evidence about the role of illness in religious traditions and cultural history and examines the social, political, and religious ramifications of illness in society. Second, it examines the role of illness in Tibetan history and Buddhist literature. This section draws attention to the appearance of diseases prevalent (and some alluded to) in Inner Asian history and shows how these historical realities are endemic in Tibetan literature. This section also explores how Indian and Tibetan Buddhist literature use illness realities and illness metaphors to transmit Buddhist doctrine. Third, this chapter explores the role of illness in the Nun Palmo hagiographies themselves. After a discussion of disease etiology and leprosy in the medical view, this section examines Nun Palmo's painful illness experiences. This section focuses on how these experiences reinforced and transmitted Buddhist ideas about change and its challenges within a genre of texts that focus on transformation. In these texts, leprosy, in

particular, violates a social and sexual norm and provides redemptive suffering.

Illness is not just a biological condition but also an experience. Through examining the meaning and experience of illness, this section discusses examples in which it serves as a catalyst for religious experience, that is, illness as human transformation. This and subsequent chapters draw attention to the views that illness concerns karma and rebirth, conceptions of the body, gender, suffering and redemption, agency, divine intervention, techniques for liberation, and renunciation. Illness is therefore revealed to be a skillful means and an hermeneutical tool for reflection.

In reference to bodily and mental afflictions, this study most often uses the term “illness” rather than “disease” because of the former term’s broader implications. There is, however, an ongoing debate about the use of these terms. For example, according to Arthur Kleinman, there is a distinction between “illness as experience” and “disease as biological pathology”.⁹⁰ According to Arthur L. Caplan, Director of the Center for Biomedical Ethics at the University of Minnesota, illness can also be referred to as a “subjective perception” or the “phenomenological experience of disease.” In other words, illness is by definition subjective and defined as the experience of disease, and as such, is heavily influenced by the prevailing values and norms of a given society. Disease is then defined by Caplan as “any impairment of the functions typical of a particular biological species, functions required to achieve natural goals set, not by politics or culture, but by the twin demands of survival and

⁹⁰ See his “What is Specific to Western Medicine?” In *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, vol. I, W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 18-19, 240, 242.

reproduction.” In the same study, Christopher Broose defines diseases in a more objective, almost value-free way, purely from the physiological perspective.⁹¹

This study loosely follows the definition that illness is a “subjective” or “phenomenological experience” of disease, a subjective perception of the biological experience.⁹² Because illness is not just a condition of a somatic nature or even a metaphorical trope, this chapter problematizes the idea of illness in order to reveal the social and cultural perceptions and conditions underlying the Nun Palmo texts themselves. This view therefore helps situate the texts in particular historical and doctrinal contexts. The complexities of the presence of an illness condition and the language of illness in the Nun Palmo texts will also illuminate illness’s multivalent purposes in Tibetan and Buddhist history.

According to Western medicine, leprosy is a devastating non-contagious disease caused by the microbacterium *leprae*;⁹³ it has complex symptoms⁹⁴ that

⁹¹ Arthur L. Caplan, “The Concepts of Health, Illness, and Disease.” In *Companion Encyclopedia of the History of Medicine*, vol. I, W.F. Bynum and Roy Porter, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 240-242.

⁹² Other studies that I have consulted include: Robert A. Hahn, “Rethinking ‘Illness’ and ‘Disease’.” In *Contributions to Asian Studies*, vol. 18 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), 1-23; Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor and AIDS and its Metaphors* (New York: Doubleday, 1988). The latter study is useful for understanding new ways to think about illness, beyond the metaphorical and its symbolic stigma, that is, it is *only* a disease. Sontag reacts to what she sees as the invented and punitive uses of illness in our culture. A general essay that provided some basic ways to think about illness is David Kinsley’s “Theories of Disease and Types of Healers.” In *Health, Healing, and Religion: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1996): 5-20, 60-70.

⁹³ It is, however, important to keep in mind that historically various cultures found it difficult to clearly identify an illness as “leprosy,” since symptoms may have been secondary or tertiary infections due to lack of, or improper, treatment of another illness like small pox or other skin ailments. Therefore, even though the Tibetan term *mdze* appears in texts, it may

manifest physically in numerous ways. In general, leprosy appears as a blister on the extremities of the body because apparently the bacilli like cooler surfaces. As leprosy bacilli migrate to nerves in the cooler regions of the body, such as around the joints, the body's immune system dispatches masses of macrophages and lymphocytes which swarm in and swell inside the nerves' insulating sheath, choking off vital nourishment. The nerve swellings result from the body's own defense mechanism. After the extremities like the nasal passages, hands, feet, testicles, eyes, and ear lobes become deformed, they may also lose, in some cases, all sensation, including the sensation of pain, leaving the victim vulnerable to injury.

not always indicate "leprosy" in the strict sense but an illness that resembles it symptomatically, like small pox does in its early phases. Cognizant of the presence of leprosy in Tibet and the stages described, the symptoms were most probably associated with leprosy in its various stages.

⁹⁴ It was not until the Norwegian scientist Armauer Hansen (1841-1912) who identified the agent responsible for the illness in 1873/4 as microbacterium leprae (a bacillus closely resembling the tuberculosis bacillus), and others in the twentieth century like Paul Brand, Philip Yancey, and so forth that crucial discoveries about nerve damage and lack of pain in leprosy patients were made about the illness. See Paul Brand and P. Yancey, *Pain: The Gift Nobody Wants: A Surgeon's Journey of Discovery* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1993).

2.2 The Tibetan Hagiographic Literature

The various extant versions of the frame story of Nun Palmo appear in a genre of texts called *rnam thar*,⁹⁵ a term implying both polemical and didactic purposes. These versions are the main sources relied upon in this chapter for their joint historical and extra-historical value. Operating almost like historical fiction, these texts provide a lens through which to study not just the teachings and ritual techniques of an enlightened being but also the religious development of a practitioner and the underlying socio-cultural context.

Rnam thar is an abbreviation of the term *rnam par thar pa* meaning literally, “full liberation” [story], implying that the protagonist reached full liberation in the Buddhist sense. *Rnam thar* contain elements from what Tibetan scholars often describe as three distinct kinds of biography: *phyi'i rnam thar* (outer biography), *nang gi rnam thar* (inner biography), and *gsang ba'i rnam thar* (secret biography),⁹⁶ a triadic structure that does not seem to occur until the 14th century.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ At the end of Jo gdan's text, the hagiography is referred to as a *lo rgyus*. See Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 7b.4. *Lo rgyus*, literally meaning “annals, news of the year(s)” is in actuality a narrative account or record that includes both historical and an-historical material. For specific information on this term, see van der Kuijp, “Tibetan Historiography,” 42-3 and Martin, *Tibetan Histories*, 14-15.

⁹⁶ For more information on biographies, see Willis, *Enlightened Beings*. Janet Gyatso writes on autobiographies in Tibetan literature in “Autobiography in Tibetan Religious Literature: Reflections on its Modes of Self-Representation.” In *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the 5th International Association of Tibetan Studies Seminar*, ed. Shōren Ihara and Zuihō Yamaguchi, vol. 2 (Narita, Japan: Naritasan Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1992), 465-78.

⁹⁷ I bear in mind that these are often arbitrary distinctions not always applicable in Tibetan texts.

As the traditional Western sense of biography, the first type describes the historical narrative of the birth, schooling, and human experiences of the subject. It is, however, difficult to distinguish between the second and third types of biography. They may describe the specific meditation cycles, initiations, and practices imparted to future practitioners and chronicle the visionary experiences and meditative accomplishments of an accomplished being. As Janice D. Willis states in her work, *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition*, this threefold structural model of *rnam thar* can be useful to represent respectively the “historical, inspirational, and instructional levels” of the narratives, although of course one biography may include all three or stress one element over the other.⁹⁸

Rnam thar, like an hagiography in the Western sense, are written in a narrative framework including factual material and showing greater-than-human figures overcoming limitations in very human ways. Representative of these genres, they also provide models and illustrate religious doctrines of particular lineages of teachings throughout a long historical period. In addition, like the stories of the Indian *mahāsiddhas*,⁹⁹ these genres are narratives of transformation that operate within the Mahāyāna notion of two levels of reality: the phenomenal and the absolute as mentioned earlier. These structural models are particularly useful in studying the role

⁹⁸ *Enlightened Beings: Life Stories from the Ganden Oral Tradition* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 5-6.

⁹⁹ *grub thob, siddha*. The Tibetan term *grub thob* means “the accomplished one.” It refers to a highly realized being who is a tantric practitioner. The great tantric practitioners (*mahāsiddha*) are famous in the Indian tradition. A translation of a collection of their biographies can be found in Keith Dowman, tr., *Masters of Enchantment: The Lives and Legends of the Mahasiddhas* (Vermont: Inner Traditions International, 1988).

of illness in the Nun Palmo hagiographies because they provide multiple levels of interpretation and reflect the texts' coverage of early Buddhist, Mahāyāna, and Tibetan tantric teachings and their composers' diverse concerns.

2.3 Illness in the Cultural & Religious History of Buddhism and Other Traditions

Not unlike accounts of the lives of practitioners in other religious traditions, illness is the most prominent feature of the Nun Palmo hagiographies. In fact, the effects of illness on the physical and mental constitution of individuals, on the social and cultural fabric of a community, and on language have had dramatic ramifications on religious traditions and societies throughout the world. Illness is a powerful reality of human existence, and as is evident in the Nun Palmo narratives, the more virulent or challenging it is, the more destructive or transformative it becomes.

Recent studies suggest that illness is a powerful lens through which to study religious, socio-cultural, and political dimensions of a society. Informative works by Peter Lewis Allen¹⁰⁰ and Hanne de Bruin¹⁰¹ show how Western and South Asian

¹⁰⁰ See his *The Wages of Sin: Sex and Disease, Past and Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000). Saul Nathaniel Brody gives an earlier informative study on this subject. See *The Disease of the Soul: Leprosy in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1974).

¹⁰¹ de Bruin, *Leprosy in South India: Stigma and Strategies of Coping*. Pondy Papers in Social Sciences 22 (France: Institut Français de Pondichery, 1998).

cultures have often associated illness with “sin” or immoral action, frequently of a sexual nature. For example, the leper represented the vices of a particular society, and the stigma attached was supported by scriptural and extra-scriptural evidence. In a recent study by Jane Buckingham, *Leprosy in Colonial South India: Medicine and Confinement*,¹⁰² the leper, caught between two worldviews in British India and confined by her gender, had the power of negotiation and resistance. Other sources offer positive views of illness and pain, for example, the medieval stories in Christianity highlight figures who sought out illness as a mark of God’s grace, to be closer to God, or to emulate Christ’s sacrificial self.¹⁰³ Ariel Glucklich’s recent study also draws attention to the positive transformative aspects of so-called “sacred pain.”¹⁰⁴ In pre-Vatican Catholic theology, suffering has strong redemptive qualities.

¹⁰² See *Leprosy in Colonial South India: Medicine and Confinement* (Hampshire, Great Britain: Palgrave, 2002).

¹⁰³ Medieval Christian saints come to mind immediately with their acceptance of illness as a mark of grace. Yvette of Huy (1158-1228), a Catholic anchoress in a leper colony in the town of Liège, France, who attracted a community of disciples and benefactors, is described as hoping to contract leprosy for its sacred purpose:

Nor shall we seem to omit by silence that in order to win more merits with God the holy woman prayed that she might be given the grace to become leprous so that she would lack nothing that could give her consummate grace by becoming as vile and despicable as possible to the world. And pursuing this desire she ate and drank among the lepers and washed herself in their bath water and even mixed her blood with theirs so that she might be infected, that filth would attract filth and leprosy causes leprosy and disease be attracted by disease.

Hugh of Floreffe, *The Life of Yvette of Huy*, Jo Ann McNamara, tr. (Ontario, Canada: Peregrina Translation Series, 1999), 63.

¹⁰⁴ See his *Sacred Pain: Hurting the Body for the Sake of the Soul* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). More sources that relate to the issues of pain and religious experience are discussed later in this chapter.

And long after illnesses have been eradicated, remnants of their long term effects remain in social discourse.¹⁰⁵ The Nun Palmo hagiographies reflect the historical reality, and the didactic and metaphorical use of illness in Tibetan culture that have been the subjects of study in other religious traditions and cultures.

Illness in Indian and Inner Asian History and Buddhist Literature

The hagiographies provide graphic accounts of Nun Palmo's body literally falling to pieces from leprosy (*mdze, mdze nad*). These descriptions point to, first of all, larger realities of epidemiological concerns that may have ravaged Indian, Kashmirian, as well as Tibetan areas and secondly, the impact of illness on the individual and its socio-cultural meanings underlying these specific texts and the times they appear in. Conditions of illness may cause a crisis in faith and religious persecution not unlike what occurred in Europe during the fourteenth century and the witch hunts of puritan New England.¹⁰⁶ Since the eighth century, histories and

¹⁰⁵ For studies of what social discourse retains once a disease is eradicated and no longer seen in Buddhist culture, see Liora Navon, "Cultural Notions Versus Social Action: The Case of the Socio-Cultural History of Leprosy in Thailand." In *Social Analysis: Journal of Cultural and Social Practice* 40 (September 1996): 95-119; *id.*, "From Wordless Ritual to Ritual Words: An Analysis of the Ritualized Contact with Leprosy in Thailand." In *Anthropos* 90 (1995/6): 511-24.

¹⁰⁶ David Herlihy's study about the Black Plague in Europe is most informative in this regard. David Herlihy, *The Black Death and the Transformation of the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 73-81. See also Richard Godbeer, *The Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

prophecies of Buddhism in Khotan found in several Tibetan versions at Dunhuang, accounts in the Tibetan canons, and historical studies provide much food for thought about the political and religious ramifications of illness conditions. Tibetan scholars have drawn attention to occurrences of such crises in Tibetan history. For example, Christopher Beckwith comments on the relationship between an outbreak of what he calls a “plague” in the year 739 in Tibet and the persecution of Buddhism: “The foreign monks were blamed...for having brought the plague with them.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Matthew Kapstein, in his work *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism: Conversion, Contestation, and Memory*, draws attention to a manuscript found by Pelliot, one of a number of sources which points to a Buddhist persecution that occurred during an outbreak of illness in the eighth century:

At about the time [during the events in Khotan described earlier in the text] the divine Tsenpo of Tibet and the lord of China formed [the relationship of] nephew and uncle, at which the Chinese princess, too, became the divine Tsenpo’s bride. The Chinese princess builds one great temple in Tibet and established the provisions. The whole saṃgha went there, whereupon the princess also provided rations. The doctrine of the Mahāyāna having thus blossomed in Tibet, for a period of twelve years both the saṃgha and ordinary layfolk practiced the doctrine and so were exceedingly happy. But even there Māra’s host became agitated, and Māra sent forth the black pox and many other sorts of disease. As for the princess, she died after the black pox appeared at her heart. After that the laity lost faith and said that the occurrence of the black pox and many sorts of disease was an evil due to an arrival in Tibet of the host of the saṃgha. It was ordained that not even one member of the saṃgha be permitted to remain in Tibet. After they were banished, one and

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Beckwith, “The Revolt of 755 in Tibet.” In *Contributions on Tibetan Language, History, and Culture*. Proceedings of the Csoma de Körös Symposium held at Velm-Vienna, Austria, vol. I (Vienna: Arbeitskreis für Tibetische und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1983), 7.

all, the entire saṃgha traveled to Gandhāra in India.¹⁰⁸

Kapstein points out that it was believed by the inhabitants of Tibet that the spread of Buddhism during this early period was specially linked to the spread of illness: “What seems certain is that the presence of plague aroused fear of the alien, and that this sentiment, rather than the precise knowledge of the illness’s sources, provoked the anti-Buddhist reaction.”¹⁰⁹

In later periods as well there are accounts of Tibetans who often traveled to South Asia and encountered severe illnesses among the populations.¹¹⁰ In the twentieth century, records left by Franciscan and Jesuit missionaries point to what was described as an outbreak of leprosy and other illnesses in Tibetan areas. Missionaries’ presence in these areas created tension with Tibetans and resulted in some Christian converts.¹¹¹ Finally, leprosy was both a reality in the life of Bla ma Rab brtan of the

¹⁰⁸ Kapstein, *The Tibetan Assimilation of Buddhism*, 41-42. See also Ronald E. Emmerick, *Tibetan Texts Concerning Khotan* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 84-85, lines 57-61. Tibetans themselves in sacred literature also account for the presence of leprosy or illness in general in their vicinity. More of this is discussed shortly in relation to Buddhist and Tibetan literature.

¹⁰⁹ Kapstein, *Tibetan Assimilation*, 223, n. 28.

¹¹⁰ See Todd Lewis for his citation of Tibetan Lama Si tu Paṇ chen chos kyi ‘byung gnas’ (1700-1774) visit to Nepal in 1723 and his own study of the *Pañcarakṣā*. Lewis, *Popular Buddhist Texts*, 121.

¹¹¹ One such narrative is the Franciscan missionary account of Fr. Giuseppe Andreatta of leprosy in Eastern Tibet from 1930-1951. See *Ventidue Anni tra i lebbrosi del Tibet* (Padova, Italy: Missioni Francescane, 1952). See pages 9-11 for information on specific locations. A recent work on missionaries speaks of a Father Nussbaum’s experience in Tibet. See Henri Daniel-Rops, *The Heroes of God: Eleven Courageous Men and Women Who Risked Their Everything to Spread the Catholic Faith* (Manchester, New Hampshire: Sophia Institute Press, 2002), 203-220. This latter work is useful as well to get an idea of the tension between

modern hagiography in this study and for sufferers in Kalimpong Leprosy Hospital in Darjeeling, where he was hospitalized.¹¹²

Illness permeates the language of many Buddhist texts pointing to the presence of illness conditions historically and illness' powerful metaphorical value. In the Buddhist tradition, illness appears as an essential component of a practitioner's religious development or one of an enlightened being's tools for teaching. Early on in the tradition, illness is one of the signs revealed to Śākyamuni Buddha that made him aware of the teaching of impermanence and the four holy truths (suffering, the arising or origin of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering). One of the early Buddhist texts speaks of illness in this way:

The Buddha said: 'O bhikkhus, there are two kinds of illness. What are those two? Physical illness and mental illness. There seem to be people who enjoy

the missionaries who attempted to convert Tibetans in certain periods of history.

¹¹² Information about areas in South Asia and Tibet where Tibetan lepers have congregated have not been an object of study but scattered information in narratives, pilgrimage guides, and so forth are available. During my research trip in 1998, I was told by one informant that a temple in Chobar Hill in Patan, the same place where Tibetans had said that they had seen visions of Nun Palmo as a *mkha'* *'gro ma* (see Chapter One) and where an image of Adinātha Lokeśvara resides, is visited by ill practitioners. I thank Min Bahadur Shakya for first alerting me to this information via an email communication, 2001.

I also thank Hubert deCleer for alerting me to information contained in two Tibetan pilgrimage guides to the Kathmandu Valley that describe a site visited by massive numbers of leprosy sufferers from India, Nepal, and Tibet, the Hindu Temple of Changu Narayan with the object of devotion, the self-originated ruby with a *garuḍa* image. He notes that it is implied that this image is an abbreviation of the Hari-hari-hari-hari-lokeśvara, one of Avalokiteśvara's 108 forms in the Newar tradition. He also mentions that there are new gilt copper reliefs at Jana Bahal that show them clearly and there is a famous statue of that form (the snake held by *garuḍa*, *garuḍa* mounted by Vishnu, Vishnu mounted by Avalokiteśvara, hence the 4 Hari) in the courtyard of that temple. Email communication, September 16, 2001. See more information on one of these guides discussed later in this chapter.

freedom from physical illness even for a year or two...even for a hundred years or more. But, O bhikkhus, rare in this world are those who enjoy the freedom from mental illness even for one moment, except for those free from mental defilements' (i.e. arahants).¹¹³

This distinction between physical illness and mental obscurations (*nyon mongs, kleśa*) is typical of Buddhist texts' concern about purifying or healing this level of illness which would otherwise produce karmic ramifications in the future. Note examples from early Buddhist and Japanese Buddhist traditions that use the language of illness to illustrate Buddhist doctrine:

Here, student, some man or woman is given to injuring beings with the hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife. Because of performing and undertaking such action, on the dissolution of the body, after death, he reappears in a state of deprivation...But if instead he comes back to the human state, then wherever he is reborn he is sickly. This is the way, student, that leads to sickness, namely, one is given to injuring beings with the hand, with a clod, with a stick, or with a knife.

-*Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta*¹¹⁴

Yün-men's Two Sicknesses:

A bodiless person suffers illness. A handless person compounds medicine. A mouthless person takes meals. A non-receiving person has ease and comfort. Tell me, for incurable disease, what's the treatment? Attention! Great Master Yün-men said: 'When the light doesn't penetrate completely, there are two kinds of sicknesses. *Do you feel your mouth dry up and shrivel?* When wherever you are is not quite clear and there are things in front of you, that is one (sickness). *When you see a ghost in the daylight, isn't it an illusion?* Even though you thoroughly penetrate the emptiness of all dharmas, there still somehow seems to be something. In this also, the light has not penetrated completely. *Already your chest is constricted. What does it matter if your*

¹¹³ See *Āṅguttara-nikāya*, Devamitta Thera, ed. (Colombo, Pali Text Society, 1929), 276. This passage was translated by Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), 67.

¹¹⁴ *Cūlakammavibhanga Sutta* 135, iii 204. In *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya*, Bhikkhu Bodhi, tr. (original translation by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli) (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 1054.

throat is closed?'

'Again, there are two kinds of sicknesses in the Dharmakaya. *Calamities don't happen alone.* Though you reach the Dharmakaya, because Dharma-attachment is not forgotten and a view of self still persists, you plummet into the Dharmakaya side--that is one (sickness). *Not only are there false idols outside, there's also one inside.* Though you penetrate through (this), if you are negligent it's still no good. *Nursing sickness, you lose your body.* Even after a minute examination, when "What inadequacy could there be!" --this is also sickness. *Before the doctor has gone out the door, already you have another seizure.'*

-Dogen Zenji¹¹⁵

In these examples, the language of illness, which may also be described as ignorance or delusion, points to the Buddhist doctrines of karma and emptiness respectively.

Other examples in Buddhist literature, including in medical texts, illness can be defined on a physical and spiritual level and how Dharma is described as the ultimate medicine.¹¹⁶ Paul Demiéville's study on the relationship of Buddhism to medicine and healing provides insight on how extensive these links were in the Buddhist tradition cross-culturally.¹¹⁷ The literature, therefore, uses the language of illness to illuminate and transmit doctrinal teachings and define ritual goals.

There are many common tropes in Buddhist Mahāyāna literature, in particular, about how enlightened beings or great teachers use illness both as a didactic tool to

¹¹⁵ Hakuyū Taizan Maezumi and Bernard Tetsugen Glassman, *The Hazy Moon of Enlightenment* (Los Angeles, California: Zen Center of Los Angeles, 1978), 37-38.

¹¹⁶ See Mark Tatz, tr., *Buddhism and Healing: Demiéville's Article "Byō" from Hōbōgirin* (New York: University Press of America, 1985); Raoul Birnbaum, *The Healing Buddha* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1989); John Avedon, et al. *The Buddha's Art of Healing: Tibetan Paintings Rediscovered* (New York: Rizzoli, 1998); Tadeusz Skorupski, "Health and Suffering in Buddhism: Doctrinal and Existential Considerations." In *Religion, Health and Suffering* (London: Kegan Paul International, 1999), 139-165; and Tom Dummer, *Tibetan Medicine and Other Holistic Health-Care Systems* (London: Routledge, 1988).

¹¹⁷ See Tatz, tr., *Buddhism and Healing*, 17-18.

assist sentient beings achieve awareness in the teachings and reveal their true saṃsāric nature, and as a catalyst for transformation. For example, the historical Buddha's physical body is said to undergo illness, while his emanation body (*sprul sku*, *nirmāṇakāya*) does not.¹¹⁸ One need not also go far to remember the torturous exercises Vimalakīrti had his disciples undergo when they visited him. He stated:

This illness of mine is born of ignorance and feelings of attachment. Because all living beings are sick, therefore I am sick. If all living beings are relieved of sickness, then my sickness will be mended.¹¹⁹

Illness was a skillful means (*thabs la mkhas pa*, *upāyakaūśalya*) used by Vimalakīrti to lure his disciples to confront ultimate reality and the nature of emptiness. In the second chapter of the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, Vimalakīrti represents the consummate embodiment of skillful means and teaches about the reconciliation of dichotomies or non-duality. In the way of Mahāyāna thinking, wisdom must be integrated with skillful means to reconcile the basic dichotomy between *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, between the cycle of rebirth and liberation from this cycle.¹²⁰

In the Tibetan tradition as well, several prominent masters and lineage holders contract illness as a didactic tool to help others with their development or as an essential part of their own religious development. For example, the eleventh century

¹¹⁸ Tatz, tr., *Buddhism and Healing*, 22-25.

¹¹⁹ Burton Watson, tr., *The Vimalakīrti Sutra* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 65.

¹²⁰ Vimalakīrti makes it clear that the sole function of wisdom or any state of liberation is a necessary complement to the indispensable great compassion that has no subject and is not a sentimentally conceived emotion. This is also seen in the Nun Palmo texts as she becomes ill and is re-embodied for the sake of others.

Tibetan tantric practitioner Milarepa is described by his biographer Gtsang smyon Heruka (1452-1507) as wearing illness as an ornament, and the *gtong len* masters practice of sending blessings and receiving suffering.¹²¹ From the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, many practitioners and teachers contract illnesses (like leprosy) and keep the company of lepers such as Ras chung pa and Ma gcig Lab sgron (1055-1145).¹²² ‘Chad kha ba Ye shes rdo rje (1102-1176) carried lepers on his back and taught them the *blo sbyong* and *gtong len* teachings¹²³ ascribed to Atiśa and the Bka’ gdams pa lineage. Often, after long periods of illness, practitioners underwent ‘*das log*’ experiences.¹²⁴ The next section discusses how many of the aspects of illness present in the writings of the life and rituals of Nun Palmo reflect the multiple levels (like those discussed above) at which the texts can be interpreted.

¹²¹ These ideas are elaborated upon later in the chapter.

¹²² See Jérôme Edou, *Machig Labdrön and the Foundations of Chöd* (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications, 1996), 133.

¹²³ These teachings will be discussed later in the chapter. I thank Dan Martin for alerting me to many of these figures.

¹²⁴ ‘*Das log*’ means “one who has returned (*log*) from passing away (*das*)”. This term refers specifically to figures in hagiographies and in present day Tibetan communities who claim that they have undergone personally the experience of returning from death and commit themselves to a life of telling stories to others about their experiences in the intermediate state (the *bar do*) or the hells. See Françoise Pommaret-Imaeda, *Les revenants de l’au-delà dans le monde tibétain: sources littéraires et tradition vivante* (Paris: Éditions du centre national de la recherche scientifique, 1989); Lawrence Epstein, “On the History and Psychology of the ‘Das log.’” *The Tibet Journal*, vol. VII, no. 4 (Winter 1982): 20-85; and Hanna Havnevik, *Folk-Religious, Non-sectarian, and Monastic Trends in the Religious Practices of Shugseb Ani Lochen (1865-1951)*. Unpublished paper, n.d. An example of a study on how illness indicates a religious calling can also be seen in Mircea Eliade’s comparative study, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970).

2.4 Leprosy in the Nun Palmo Narratives: Karma, Metaphor, Didactic Tool, and Redemption

As the previous chapter and sections make evident, Tibetan literature did not develop in a vacuum. The Nun Palmo hagiographies themselves reflect the religious and socio-cultural concerns inherited by the literature. After a discussion of disease etiology and leprosy in the medical view, this section addresses the impact of illness on the physical, religious, and social level described by the texts in this study. Leprosy, in particular, will be discussed in detail as a violation of a social and sexual norm and as redemptive suffering. The presence and language of illness in the narratives not only relate to early Buddhist, Mahāyāna, Tibetan religious and medical ideas and practices, but also reveal socio-cultural concerns important to the composer or reader/reciter of the texts.

Leprosy is an illness almost immediately confronted by readers of the Nun Palmo hagiographies. One of many examples of the effects of leprosy on the extremities is evident in the modern text,

Just about three months passed,
the ten toes of the lama's feet fell off.
Then five months later,
the ten fingers of her hands fell off.¹²⁵

All the Nun Palmo hagiographies in this study early on cite one reason for the

¹²⁵ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 7.19-8.1: *zla ba gsum tsam lon pa dang bla ma'i zhabs kyi sor mdzub bcu chad / de nas zla lnga long pa dang phyag mdzub bcu chad/*

appearance of leprosy: *karma (las)*, the consequences of actions from previous lives.¹²⁶

Karma is a major factor¹²⁷ contributing to the cycle of suffering and rebirth. For example, the two early hagiographies in this study state:

Despite [the fact] that this nun was knowledgeable
in the five domains of knowledge [*rig pa'i gnas lnga*]¹²⁸
and also instructions and vows were present [in her] in a very noble way,
leprosy arose due to the force of previous karma,

.....
Even though knowledgeable in the five domains of knowledge,
by being afflicted with a virulent illness,
there arose immeasurable suffering
settling in her mind as if without recourse.
Attendants carried her into an isolated thatched hut
where she stayed crying.¹²⁹

Then at the age of 15,
after leprosy arose
from the ripened sinful actions of previous lives
.....
immeasurable suffering arose in her mind.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ See examples in Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 2b.3-3a.5; 'Od dpag rdo rje, *Thugs rje chen po*, 21.4-6; *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 11.15.

¹²⁷ 'Od dpag rdo rje explicitly states that karma is not the main line of causation but a contributing factor (*rkyen*). "Due to this severe leprosy as a contributing cause..." (*drag po mdze nad 'di yis rkyen byas nas*) 'Od dpag rdo rje, *Thugs rje chen po*, 24.6.

¹²⁸ *Rig pa'i gnas lnga* refers to linguistics, medicine, technology, logic and epistemology, and inner science (Buddhism proper).

¹²⁹ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, folio 2b.3-5, 3a.3-5: *dge slong ma 'di ni rig pa'i gnas lnga la mkhas shing / bslab sdom rnams kyang shin tu btsun par bzhugs pa las /sngon gyi las dbang gis mdze byung ste /.../ rig pa'i gnas lnga la mkhas kyang/ nad drag pos btab pas sdug bsngal sems la bzhag thabs med pa lta bu dpag tu med pa byung ste /'khor rnams kyis logs shig tu rtsa'i spyil bu cig tu bskyal nas der bshum gyin bzhugs pa na/*

¹³⁰ 'Od dpag rdo rje, *Thugs rje chen po*, folio 21.4-6, 21.6: *de nas sngon gyi mi dge' ba'i las ngan smin nas bco lnga lo la mdze byung nas/.../sems la sdug bsngal dpag tu med pa byung/*

It is unclear what “sins” exactly Nun Palmo committed in her previous lives to deserve such a fate in the current one.

A Tibetan medical text and South Asian literature illuminate how texts in this study can be understood with regard to illness, what physiological and psychological effects illness had on Nun Palmo, and how a religious tradition plays a role in the healing process. It is uncertain how Tibetan medicine developed and whether it is an amalgam of other medical systems like Indian Āyurvedic, Chinese, and Greek, reflecting Tibetan culture’s cosmopolitan past or whether it derives from Tibetan indigenous and Buddhist ideas.¹³¹ Generally, the Tibetan medical perspective encompasses a broad range of literature and practices designed to improve and maintain mental and physical health. The purpose of medicine in the genre of literature *gso ba rig pa* (the science of medicine) is to restore or heal.¹³² The best-known medical encyclopedic work revered in Tibetan medical training is the *gter ma* text, the *Rgyud bzhi* (“The Four Tantras”).¹³³ The practice of Tibetan medicine is fully

¹³¹ See references to the development of Tibetan medicine and translations of two Tibetan medical texts in Dr. Barry Clark, tr., *The Quintessence Tantras of Tibetan Medicine* (Ithaca, New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1995), introduction.

¹³² The literal meaning of *gso ba* is “to restore, to heal”.

¹³³ Many of the ideas that are contained in the *Rgyud bzhi* derive from the Indian medical text, *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhitā*. For information about illness in this text and how to treat it, see Emmerick, “A Chapter from the *Rgyud-bzhi*.” In *Asia Major* 19 (1975): 141-62; *id.*, “Epilepsy According to the *Rgyud-bzhi*.” In *Studies on Indian Medical History*, edited by G. Jan Meulenbeld and Dominik Wujastyk (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1987), 63-90; Jean Filliozat, “Un Chapitre du *Rgyud-bzhi* sur les bases de la santé et des maladies.” In *Laghu-Prabandhāḥ: Choix d’articles d’indologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), 233-42; Yeshe Donden, *The Ambrosia Heart Tantra*, Jhampa Kelsang (Alan Wallace), tr. (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1976); and Elisabeth Finckh, *Foundations of Tibetan Medicine According to the Book rGyud bzhi*, vol. 1 & 2 (Dorset: Element Books, 1985).

integrated with Tibetan religious views and practices. These include a wide variety of religious, ritual, and yogic practices of divination, amulet and talisman-making, astrology, the collection of merit, and the power of the lama. In addition, it includes practices one associates with modern Western medicine like physiological theory and pharmacology.

As the Tibetan medical tradition makes clear, there are basically two causes of illness: one, the long term cause, karma from past lives; and two, the short term cause, factors in the present life, including seasonal changes, evil spirits, poison, and habit and behavior. The third tantra of the *Rgyud bzhi* specifically refers to different types of causes: one, a primary cause (*rgyu*), (distant causes such as the three poisons, and near causes with wind as the cause of all disorders because of its influence on both hot and cold) and promoting causes (*rkyen*), such as the influence of time, nutrition, behavior, and demons. In addition, the *Rgyud gzhi* categorizes leprosy in a way that is useful for this study.

As with all illnesses that could not be satisfactorily explained, Tibetan medical theory traditionally ascribed leprosy (as well as other ailments like possession by evil spirits, dementia, epilepsy, and so forth) to a large category of causes typically translated as “demons” (*gdon*),¹³⁴ who cause certain illnesses, specifically leprosy and

¹³⁴ *Gdon* or *gdon bgegs* is the general category used for one of the causes of illness like leprosy although in the Tibetan religious system, there are many so-called “demon-like” entities called *bgegs pa*, literally meaning “obstacles,” *klu* (*nāga* in Sanskrit), *bdud*, and so forth. In the 81st chapter of the third tantra, the *Rgyud bzhi* describes leprosy’s connection to so-called “demonic forces.” See G.yu thog Yon tan mgon po, *Bdud rtsi snying po yan lag brgyad pa gsang ba man ngag gi rgyud* (Lhasa: Bod ljongs mi dmangs dpe skrun khang,

other skin diseases, when they are offended by an action.¹³⁵ Demons are perceived as physical entities (that cause illness and may be transformed into dharma protectors as we shall see shortly) and also as psychological entities associated with a multitude of

1993), chapter 81 (*gza'i gdon nad bcos pa*), 392-400. See an image in *The Atlas of Tibetan Medicine*, a commentary on the *Rgyud bzhi*, that illustrates the 17th century medical text, the *Blue Beryl* (*Vaidūrya sngon po*), which depicts various gynecological diseases along with other illnesses like leprosy, evil spirits, madness, dementia, and epilepsy, which are attributed to the action of demons. See Avedon, *The Buddha's Art of Healing*, plate 39, 153.

¹³⁵ The relationship between *nāga* and leprosy (as well as other skin diseases) is well-known in South Asia and Tibet. In an email communication, Hubert deCleer points out an extract from the fourth Khams sprul Bstan 'dzin chos kyi nyi ma's (Si tu Panchen's disciple) *Kathmandu Guide* originally published by Alexander MacDonald in *Kailash* that is helpful in this regard. This was based on an edition of this text in an anthology brought out by Dudjom Rinpoche in the early 1980s. I used Keith Dowman's "A Buddhist Guide to the Power Places of the Kathmandu Valley," which was accessible to me. In this account about the Hindu Temple of Changu Narayan, a *garuḍa* manifested itself from the rosary of Nāgārjuna. According to Newari accounts, this sacred representation consisted of a precious ruby (*pad ma ra ga*) within which there is a believed to be naturally formed image of Viṣṇu riding on a *garuḍa*. In the summertime, this *garuḍa* manifested itself and devoured a *nāga* that comes out of the middle of a lake. This sight was still believed to happen in the Kathmandu area. Furthermore, the text states,

At this time, in the temple, the image of *garuḍa* perspires, and many people come here to moisten scarves with the exuding perspiration to gain protection from the ravages of Nāga spirits....Leprosy is the most dangerous disease inflicted by the Nāgas; also abscesses, consumption, ulcers, itch, sores and swelling of the limbs, and all diseases related to excessive indulgence, or lack of the element water.

See Dowman, "A Buddhist Guide," 277-278.

For the reasons cited above does deCleer note that Nepalis and Tibetans come to this site on pilgrimage. And just below this temple, there is a sacred pond where it is believed that the *garuḍa* and *nāga*-king Shankhapola, who were once at war, became friends.

I am also indebted to deCleer's communication regarding a meeting with Mr. Sangye, the former head of the National Library in Thimpu. According to Mr. Sangye, sometime between 1740-1750, the original ruby mentioned above had been housed in Bhutan in the temple of Punakha due to the donation by the Nepalese king in gratitude for the then Bhutanese Rje mkhan po's financing of a renovation of Svayambhūnāth. According to Mr. Sangye, once a year the ruby is immersed in water and the water acts as a protection against *klu nad*. This came from email communication on November 15, 2001.

negative mental and emotional obscurations or afflictions that cause individuals to commit acts that could have negative implications. One explicit example of “demons” symbolically being identified with mental afflictions is found throughout the biographies of the eleventh century practitioner, Ma gcig Lab sgron ma, the founder of *gcod*. The *gcod* practice of giving up one’s body through visualization exercises, a body which is then cut up and fed to demons, is meant to help the practitioner sever her attachments to this world.¹³⁶

This connection between illness and “demonic forces” (in their various designations) was found to be particularly helpful in understanding the appearance of *klu* (*nāga*) in Jo gdan’s version. After Nun Palmo is healed, she transforms the *klu* into Dharma Protectors of Ekādaśamukha Avalokiteśvara.¹³⁷ According to the Buddhist tradition, the *nāga* are also known to have protected the Mahāyāna teachings.

Next, since we are concerned with a Kashmirian or Indian figure whose texts permeated Tibetan culture, a discussion of the ramifications of illness in the South Asian context are also especially useful here. There are many examples in literature and ethnographic studies in the South Asian context concerning the primary etiology of illness as karmatic, that is, connected with an individual’s past actions.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ Edou, *Machig Labdrön*, 19.

¹³⁷ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 6a.5-6: “The eight great *nāga* [*aṣṭamahānāga*] particularly pledged to be the Dharma protectors of the Eleven-faced One.” (*khyad par du klu chen brgyad kyis zhal bcu gcig pa’i sgos kyi skyong du khas blangs/*)

¹³⁸ Mitchell G. Weiss, “Caraka Samhita on the Doctrine of Karma.” In *Karma and Rebirth in Classical Indian Tradition*, edited by Wendy O’Flaherty (Berkeley: University of California, 1980), 90-115.

Evenmoreso, illness and the body are intimately related to karma and rebirth. Moral responsibility is of utmost importance in this system.

For example, in South Asian literature, the body is often seen as a mirror of the moral dimensions of a person. It is commonplace in classical Sanskrit and legal literature that a good man can be recognized by his pleasant physical appearance.

Medical texts like the *Suśruta Saṃhitā* recommend that, for his own safety, the king should choose a “nice-looking man (*priyadarśana*) as his personal physician.”¹³⁹ The implication is clear: physical appearance is therefore a reflection of internal morality.

These ideas are also reflected in the attitude toward disability. As the law book the *Manusmṛti* states, “because of the particular effects of their past actions, men who are despised by good people are born idiotic, mute, blind, deaf, and deformed.”¹⁴⁰ The message is unambiguous: physical problems are the result of bad karma.

Karma’s connection to the body and the moral implications of that connection also reflect early Buddhist and Mahāyāna notions of the body (in the Buddhist case, with a more focused attention on volition). Gregory Schopen’s study of the Sanskrit and Tibetan editions of *The Bhaiṣajyaguru-Sūtra* also demonstrates that ill health was a major preoccupation within the text.¹⁴¹ According to his study, the karmatic

¹³⁹ See a translation of the *Suśruta Saṃhitā: Kalpasthāna* 1.8 which is contained in Dominik Wujastyk, *The Roots of Āyurveda: Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings* (Delhi: Penguin, 1998), 173 for information on this.

¹⁴⁰ A passage from this text (*Manusmṛti* 11.53) was translated by Julie Leslie, “The Implications of the Physical Body: Health, Suffering and Karma in Hindu Thought.” In *Religion, Health and Suffering*, edited by John R. Hinnells and Roy Porter (London: Kegan Paul International, 1999), 35.

¹⁴¹ Gregory Schopen does state that illness was a major concern among Buddhists themselves

explanation was utilized, illness and disability are the fruit of harmful past actions.¹⁴²

As is typical of certain Buddhist literature concerned with transmitting doctrinal teachings about the material state, the Nun Palmo hagiographies spend much time describing how leprosy deteriorates the body and creates suffering:

Despite [the fact] that this nun was knowledgeable in the five domains of knowledge and also instructions and vows were present [in her] in a very noble way, leprosy arose due to the force of previous karma. Her body was severed from the wrist of her right hand, even the front of her face was like it had been pounded with bronze nails. Her complexion was like an autumn flower struck by frost. Taking food and drink was like an animal eating grass not knowing how to feed herself with [her left] hand.

.....
Immeasurable suffering arose in her mind as if without recourse. Her attendants carried her into an isolated thatched hut where she remained crying.¹⁴³

Scenes such as these of Nun Palmo's body literally breaking away from her into little pieces are reminiscent of scenes in Buddhist literature of deteriorating corpses in cremation grounds. Such scenes provide graphic metaphors exemplifying physical impermanence that inculcate a sense of detachment. Each severed limb and aesthetic

in Gilgit but we do not have any direct evidence of this.

¹⁴² See Schopen, *The Bhaisajyaguru-Sūtra and the Buddhism of Gilgit* (Ph.D. diss., Australia: Australian National University, 1978), section 5.6 (xeroxed copy of dissertation, page #s cut off in copy).

¹⁴³ Note that this passage indicates that early on in her experience with illness, Nun Palmo's crying was out of despair for her predicament. Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 2b.3-6, 3a.3-5: *dge slong ma 'di ni rig pa'i gnas lnga la mkhas shing /bslab sdom rnams kyang shin tu btsun par bzhugs pa las /sngon gyi las dbang gis mdze byung ste /phyag g yas pa'i 'khrigs ma nas chad /zhal gyi gdong la yang khro gzer btab pa bzhin du gyur /sha mdog ni ston ka'i me tog la ba mos phog pa bzhin du gyur /bza' btung byed pa yang phyag gis bsnyod mi shes par dud 'gro rtsa za ba bzhin du gyur /..../....sdug bsngal sems la bzhag thabs med pa lta bu dpag tu med pa byung ste /'khor rnams kyis logs shig tu rtsa'i spyil bu cig tu bskyal nas der bshum gyin bzhugs pa na/*

imperfection on the body has symbolic impact. The *Anguttara Nikāya* (4:386-87) in the Indian Buddhist Tradition describes a scene of the historical Buddha's comparison of the body to a festering pustule, like a boil with nine openings:

Imagine, monks, a boil that has been gathering for many years which might have nine open wounds, nine natural openings, and whatever might ooze out of it, foulness would certainly ooze out of it... This boil, monks, is a...metaphor for the body which is made up of the four great elements, begotten of mother and father, ... subject to impermanence, ...dissolution, and disintegration...¹⁴⁴

This description is similar to the language used in the modern text:

Then at a certain time,
reaching the age of 25,
a little itch arose on one big toe of [Nun Palmo's] foot
and a small boil arose.
Then it became like a bursting boil
that filled the bottom of her feet to the crown of her head.¹⁴⁵

Therefore, the South Asian view of the body, especially the implications of an ill one, is strongly echoed in the Nun Palmo texts, particularly in the way the texts reflect Buddhist conceptions of suffering and the doctrine of impermanence. As the Nun Palmo texts consistently describe bodily decay and dismemberment in graphic detail, they insist on the impermanence of physical existence and the suffering response that arises from that awareness. These texts reflect the basic Buddhist dictum as expressed in Pāli: *yad aniccaṃ taṃ dukkhaṃ*, "whatever is impermanent is suffering."

As past studies have shown, any devastating illness (especially if it impacts on

¹⁴⁴ Rev. Richard Morris and Hardy tr., *Anguttaranikāya* (London: Pali Text Society, 1883), 4: 386-7.

¹⁴⁵ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 7.8-12: *de nas dgung lo nyer lnga lon pa'i dus nam zhig gi tshe / zhabs kyi the bong gcig gya' ba tsam byung bas brum cung zhig byung / de nas srin thor gcig tu song bas / de'i rkyen byas zhabs kyi mthil dang spyi bo'i gtsug rnam gang bas/*

the body) affects not only the person but the individual's relationship with society.¹⁴⁶

This occurred when Nun Palmo was severed from her monastic community. One

hagiography describes a scene when Nun Palmo contracted leprosy while she was still the head of a temple:

When the nun was afflicted and consumed with severe leprosy, because of this, suffering arose like an arrow struck into the mind of that very servant Sampelma. Although she offered whatever services were possible [to Nun Palmo], it had no effect. About three months passed, the ten toes of the lama's feet fell off. Then five months later, the ten fingers of her hands fell off. At that time, severe suffering arose in the minds of both the master and the servant. Sampelma enclosed the lama with a curtain. During this time, it was as if her body was not seen by anyone....After all [in the temple] noticed the pus and blood, [Nun Palmo and Sampelma] were thrown out after the end of the year.¹⁴⁷

These passages and many other scenes in the Nun Palmo hagiographies therefore invite the reader to look upon the body not as a whole--as something beautiful and pure--but as it is, fragmented into its constituent parts. When they are found separately, society considers them to be impure.¹⁴⁸

Katherine E. Ulrich's recent study also contributes to understanding the fragmentation of Nun Palmo's body in the texts. Ulrich's assessment that women's

¹⁴⁶ For a modern study of this phenomenon, see Arthur Kleinman, *The Illness Narratives: Suffering, Healing and the Illness Condition* (New York: Doubleday Books, 1988).

¹⁴⁷ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 7.16-8.4: *dge slong ma mdze snyung drag po zhig gis zin te bzhug pa'i tshe / gyog mo bsam 'phel ma de nyid sems la mda' phog pa lta bu'i sdug bsngal byung bas / zhabs tog gang cir byed kyang mi phan par / zla ba gsum tsam lon pa dang bla ma'i zhabs kyi sor mdzub bcu chad / de nas zla lnga long pa dang phyag mdzub bcu chad / de tshe dpon gyog gnyis po thugs la sdug bsngal drag po byung bas / bsam 'phel mas bla ma la yul bas skor te / sku lus gzhan gyis mi mjal ba ltar bzhugs pa'i dus 'dir / kun gyis rnag khrag tshor nas skabs 'dir lo rdzogs pa dang phyi la ston byung/*

¹⁴⁸ This connection between the body's purity and society is a major preoccupation in the texts. This view is discussed later in this chapter.

bodies were “frequently represented as composite in Pali Buddhist literature, and were hence viewed as inferior to undivided or whole bodies (usually male)” is useful here.¹⁴⁹ In a section of her study, Ulrich draws attention to a preoccupation about female fragmented and divided bodies (and bodies in general) in Buddhist literature early on and how we need to engage in multiples levels of interpretation when analyzing texts in which fragmentation of the body into constituent parts occur. Therefore, like with early Buddhist literature (as will be discussed below), the hagiographies’ descriptions of Nun Palmo’s body falling apart from leprosy must also be understood in conjunction with remarks about gender and celibacy.

While a certain group of Buddhist texts insist on the carefully controlled use of the body (an ascetic tendency) and vividly describe the foul aspects of the body in order to inculcate a sense of detachment and celibacy, they also reflect a negative view toward the female gender. From the beginning in the Buddhist tradition, monks and nuns were both impelled to meditate on the deterioration of the female body reflecting attitudes toward the feminine. As Diana Paul points out, women were often seen as temptresses.¹⁵⁰ Schopen also notes that passages in the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-Sūtra* are confirmed by other passages in scriptures which state that existence as a woman is “an obstruction caused by past action” (*karmāvaraṇa*) and is therefore both implicitly and explicitly classed with poverty, illness, deformities, rebirths in the hells, and other

¹⁴⁹ See her “Divided Bodies,” 162.

¹⁵⁰ See her *Women in Buddhism: Images of the Feminine in Mahayana Buddhism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 3-59.

negative conditions.¹⁵¹ Many examples that Liz Wilson provides in her work on Indian Buddhist hagiographic literature closely parallel the descriptions of the body in the Nun Palmo text. In one example, an elder brother provides a Dharma lesson to a young egotistical girl who has trouble renouncing:

Then the greatly compassionate one saw me lingering in lust.
 For the sake of aversion to beauty (nibbindanattham rūpasmim),
 the conqueror, in the range of my vision,
 Produced by his own majesty a radiant woman.
 She was a sight to see--more splendid, even, than I,
 so shapely was she....
 I said to her, 'Come here, lucky one, and tell me why you've come....
 Lie down on my lap and rest yourself on my body for a moment.'
 Then, having put her head on my lap,
 the lovely eyed one laid down.
 An extremely poisonous spider dropped onto her forehead.
 Even as it fell, boils rose up,
 and pus and blood oozed out of her broken corpse.
 Then her face became disfigured and
 her body became putrid-smelling;
 her entire body was now bloated and discolored.
 Trembling all over....
 she declared her own misery and wept pitifully.
 'I'm miserable with misery [*dukkhena dukkhitā*]
 I'm drowning in great misery--be my refuge friend!'

[I responded:]
 'But what's happened to the splendour of your face, your aquiline nose?....
 Your juglike breasts, resembling the buds of the celestial coral tree,
 are now burst open.
 You've become an evil-smelling, putrid corpse.
 Your waist like a sacrificial altar (*vedimajjhā*)
 and your broad buttocks are stained with wounds
 (*vaṇṇakibbisā*) like a slaughterhouse.
 You're now filled with impurity (*abhejjabharitā*).

¹⁵¹ Schopen draws attention to passages from *Sarvatathāgatā dhiṣṭānasattvāvalokanabuddhakṣetradarśanavyūhasūtra* 55.5, 65.10; *Ajitasenavyākaraṇanirdeśa-sūtra* 108.19, 109.14, 111.9; *Ratnaketuparivarta-sūtra* 42.10, and so forth. Schopen, *Bhaiṣajyaguru-Sūtra*, section 5.8.

Beauty clearly doesn't last.
All that arises in the body is putrid-smelling and frightful,
like a loathsome cremation ground where only fools find delight.¹⁵²

In this quotation, where the conventions of Indian feminine beauty are reversed, the text approaches the issue of impurity. As Wilson states, even a woman's waist that would normally remind a poet of the sacrificial altar's shape, is now turned to what she terms a "slaughterhouse," a place where "profane beings are unceremoniously sacrificed." This passage is reminiscent of what occurs in the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-Sūtra* and other texts in which existence as a woman was considered both a negative state and a state to be avoided.¹⁵³

The stigma created by illnesses like leprosy is reminiscent of leprosy's historical association with issues of purity, especially as purity relates to sexual transgression, gender, and ritual prescriptions. In South India and Europe, leprosy was

¹⁵² See her *Charming Cadavers: Horrific Figurations for the Feminine in Indian Buddhist Hagiographic Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 162-163.

¹⁵³ See Schopen, *Bhaiṣajyaguru-Sūtra*, section 5.8. There are many examples of similar views of the body in the Mahāyāna. A work attributed to Nāgārjuna states:

Lust for a woman mostly comes
From thinking that her body is clean,
But there is nothing clean in a woman's body.
The mouth is a vessel filled with foul saliva
and filth between the teeth,
The nose with fluids, snot and mucus,
The eyes with their own filth and tears...

Jeffrey Hopkins, tr., *The Precious Garland and the Song of the Four Mindfulnesses* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1975), 39. Other examples include the eighth chapter of Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (verses 63-4) or the thirteenth chapter of his *Śikṣāsamuccaya*. Reference to these texts and translations are noted in David Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhists and their Tibetan Successors* (London: Serindia Publications, 1987), 289.

usually perceived of as an impure affliction and its victims as unclean--a view evoked and strengthened by the unaesthetic visual manifestation of the illness.¹⁵⁴ In addition, the notions of balance emphasized by popular South Indian health views are useful to exegeting an understanding of this view of purity. By maintaining the various dimensions of purity (hygiene, ritual, moral), people achieve a balanced state of body and mind, and maximum resistance against illness. The concept of bodily equilibrium, or health as balance, may furthermore be expressed through notions of humoral imbalance, the hot-cold balance, and the degree of bodily restraint involving alimentary, emotional, and sexual control.

According to a study by de Bruin on leprosy in South India, leprosy has sexual connotations. Like other skin complaints, leprosy is classified as “hot.” Its hot nature is believed to manifest itself through symptoms such as boils, ulcers, blisters, and fever, which are interpreted as “eruptions of heat” [*ushanam cūtu*] through the skin.¹⁵⁵ De Bruin states:

The overheating of the body was sometimes attributed to ‘bad blood’ (*keṭṭa vattam*) as a result of which ‘bad germs’ (*keṭṭu kirimikal*) got the chance to eat away the bones or spoil the quality or the flow of the blood....More frequently, however, the body’s overheated condition was ascribed to the perceived impure nature of the illness as well as to the fact that it was thought to be the result of the transgression of a sexual or social norm.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ In Europe, since leprosy sufferers were considered unclean by society and by the Church, they were expected to live in a lazaret or hospital situated outside the city wall. See Brody, *Disease of the Soul*. For South India, see de Bruin, *Leprosy in South India*.

¹⁵⁵ de Bruin, *Leprosy in South India*, 34.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

This attitude about sexual connotations included not just impurity in a hygienic sense, but also ritual impurity. In the South Indian context, leprosy is often attributed to neglect of ritual prescriptions and violations by low caste people. Patrick Olivelle's essay, "Deconstruction of the Body in Indian Asceticism," is helpful in understanding the preoccupations concerning the body in the Indian context as well in other traditions:

If,...we define dirt as matter out of place, then it seems that, at least as far as the social perception of the human body is concerned, dirt gathers predominantly on its margins and in a special way at the openings that lets the inside of the body meet the outside both by letting bodily excreta and fluids flow out and permitting outside elements--especially food and water--to come inside, the protection of the boundaries have been a major preoccupation of most traditional religions....¹⁵⁷

The Nun Palmo hagiographies also reveal leprosy's implications about gender and its association with purity on the hygienic, ritual, and moral level. An example of the implications about gender are reflected in the texts with scenes describing a reluctance on the part of men to believe in women's ability to commit to Buddhist practice and including a statement put into the mouth of Nun Palmo that men have superior spiritual capacities.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁷ Patrick Olivelle, "Deconstruction of the Body in Indian Asceticism." In *Asceticism*, edited by Vincent L. Wimbush and Richard Valantasis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 189.

¹⁵⁸ A passage from the modern hagiography remarks that women are not headstrong about religion. See *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 2.9-13. In another scene, after her brother Indrabhūti appeared in a vision offering the ablution water that was capable of washing away 18 kinds of leprosy, Nun Palmo was convinced of men's ability to acquire superior spiritual attainment. As the passage in *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 15.6-9 states, despite her practice, her brother passed her in attainment:

[Nun Palmo] thought,

One of the most curious examples of sexual implications in the narratives is an oral version of Nun Palmo's hagiography recorded by Sherry Ortner in her studies of *smyang gnas* among the Sherpas of Nepal. In one narrative, Nun Palmo is thrown out of her monastery specifically because the monastics thought that she was having a miscarriage.¹⁵⁹ Whether her condition was linked to leprosy or leprosy's association with sexual promiscuity is unclear, but we cannot discount the possibility of this association.

'Od dpag rdo rje's hagiography reflects attitudes about leprosy's association with impurity. In Nun Palmo's desperate attempt to find an image of her chosen deity Avalokiteśvara in order to alleviate her affliction, she comes across a temple. When she is discovered by the custodian of the temple, he says to Nun Palmo:

'Since previously, I was better in terms of religious practice,
And Indrabhūti was better in terms of achieving spiritual realization,
[therefore] that adage is true,
'Between women and men,
There is a [difference of] 9 lifetimes.'

(*mo rang gi bsam pa la snga mar chos byas pa ni nged rang lhag / grub pa thob pa ni indra buddhi lhag pas / skyes pa dang skyes dman gyi bar la skye rabs dgu yod zer ba de bden pa 'dug bsam nas/*)

¹⁵⁹ Ortner, *High Religion*, 181. March also recounts an oral version of the hagiography told among the Solu Sherpas in which Nun Palmo (who desired to get ill in order to avoid marriage and to attain freedom in order to live a renunciate life) contracted leprosy but was then accused by her father of having a venereal disease. See March, *Intermediacy of Women*, 277.

On top of being of low birth [*skye dman*],
you are a leprous woman.
Stay behind the door and make your request.¹⁶⁰

The modern text further describes the fury the custodian felt:

‘You beggar woman, who are a leprous beggar, came inside my temple.¹⁶¹ I myself cannot do offerings of incense to the deities and ablutions in the temple. If the crops fail, hail strikes and so forth, it is certain that [all] will come to my head.’

With the key handle, he beat her from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. Having pulled the nun from her feet, he brought her to the back of the temple. In Nun Palmo’s mind, she generated an enlightened attitude [and thought], ‘Sentient beings’ minds are obscured by ignorance.’¹⁶²

As the text makes clear, the custodian of the temple was convinced that Nun Palmo’s presence would defile the sacred space and cause harm even to the outside environment, not only because of her impure state of leprosy, but also because of her gender. The Tibetan term used to signify “woman” in the text, *skye dman*, means “low birth” implying the low status of women in relation to the male gender.¹⁶³ In addition, as Mary Douglas has argued (congruent with Olivelle’s views), anxiety about bodily

¹⁶⁰ ‘Od dpag rdo rje, *Thugs rje chen po*, 23.1-2: *dkon gnyer na re khyod skye ba dman pa’i thog du mdze mor ‘dug pa sgo rgyab tu ‘dug la gsol ba thob cig gsungs/*

¹⁶¹ Nun Palmo’s goal was specifically to find the image of her tutelary deity, however, it is typical throughout history of diseased people, criminals or people accused of crimes, and the homeless to seek sanctuary in temples, churches, or synagogues.

¹⁶² *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 16.16-17.3: *mdze sbrang gi sbrang mo khyod nged gyi lha khang nang ‘ongs pa dang / nged rang ni lha khang nang lha bsangs khros gsol byas mi tshugs pas / lo thog nyes pa dang ser bas rdung pa la sogs pa byung na nged rang gi mgor ‘ong nges yin zer nas / lde mig gi thag pa des spyi gtsugs nas rkang thil yan chad du brdungs shing / dge slong ma’i shabs nas ‘then te lha khang gi rgyab la bskal bas / dge slong ma’i thugs dgongs la sems can gyi blo ma rig pas sgrib pa yin snyam byang chub tu thugs bskyed de/*

¹⁶³ A Tibetan term *bud med* also signifying “woman” may etymologically mean “lack of masculinity” again implying the low status of women in relation to men.

margins and the preoccupation with keeping them clean express anxiety about social integrity and concern for maintaining social order.¹⁶⁴ Thus the custodian's anxiety and his preoccupation with bodily impurity increase with the perceived threat to the integrity of the social body. Such incidences, therefore, imply the double stigma that Nun Palmo faced in relation to sacred spaces and society. It is clear here that both women and lepers, who are often portrayed as low status persons, defile--a theme common throughout diverse religions and cultures.

In South Indian narratives, leprosy's impurity appears at times to be interchangeable with untouchability. This condition is associated in Hindu mythological accounts with the victim of an illness like leprosy becoming a destitute wanderer who must atone for a sin while roaming the earth. The image of the ill vagabond, even though her condition may not be due to leprosy, is seen in stories such as those about Indra and Śiva, who are described as untouchable and even mad outcastes after they have committed the sin of Brahmicide or other ethical violations. In de Bruin's account of South Indian narratives, a character like Reṇukā, the wife of a sage Jamadagni, is described as wandering the earth before being cured of leprosy. Even after her recovery, she retains elements of her previous impurity. For example, according to one version of the mythical account, her head was accidentally restored not onto her own torso, but onto that of an untouchable woman.¹⁶⁵ Likewise, after being

¹⁶⁴ See her *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982), 65-81 and *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1984).

¹⁶⁵ de Bruin, *Leprosy in South India*, 39.

thrown out of her monastery and rejected by temples, Nun Palmo was forced to roam the earth as an outcaste, even on stumps, slowly approaching death.

These examples point to the fact that with leprosy, Nun Palmo is confronted with what Clifford Geertz describes as an “experiential challenge in whose face the meaningfulness of a particular pattern of life threatens to dissolve into chaos of thingless names and nameless things.”¹⁶⁶ Leprosy appears at first as a painful disintegration of not just the body but of old ways of thinking and being. Nun Palmo had to overcome the limitations of physicality. Physical decay shook the very foundation of Nun Palmo’s preconceived notions of reality, triggering a sense of loss and despair and an urgent need for direction. From these stigmatizing experiences, Nun Palmo faced a crucial lesson: illness cuts the barriers of social distinctions. As the body breaks down, all physical and social marks of identity break down and take on new meaning. This painful deconstruction is reflected in Nun Palmo’s experiences in two levels: a loss of human agency and a disruption of identity. One of the ways in which leprosy is connected to the first, the loss of human agency, is reflected in Jogan’s text:

Leprosy arose due to the force of previous karma.
Her right hand was severed from the wrist
.....
taking of food and drink was like an animal eating grass
not knowing how to feed herself with [her left] hand ¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 100.

¹⁶⁷ Here the text uses the non-intentional verb form ‘*chad*’ meaning “to be cut” rather than the

Here the use of the non-intentional verb form '*chad*' is "intentional." In a South Asian context, the loss of her right hand has great significance. Nun Palmo has only two options: to eat with her left hand (an impure act) or simply to eat as an animal. Her initial response to leprosy forced her to accept the loss of her agency because the act of eating with her left hand, the defiled hand used to clean oneself, has moral and social implications.

One hagiography gives an example of Nun Palmo being stripped of her identity and of life itself when Nun Palmo discourages her servant Sampelma from remaining with her and orders her to return to Kashmir:

I have exhausted benefiting you.
 This marsh valley is my burial site.

 I am not a person,
 I am a leprous corpse.
 Girl, detach yourself from this leprous corpse.
 It is better that you go to a happier place.¹⁶⁸

On the surface, Nun Palmo experienced a state equivalent to death. As Liz Wilson makes clear in her work on Indian Buddhist hagiographic literature, women represent transience and death, an equation that is increasingly evident in the Nun Palmo texts

use of the intentional form of the verb, *gcod*, meaning "to cut". Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 2b.4-5, 3a.1-2: *sngon gyi las dbang gis mdze byung ste / phyag g.yas pa'i 'khrigs ma nas chad /.../ bza' btung byed pa yang phyag gis bsnyod mi shes par dud 'gro rtsa za ba bzhin du gyur/*

¹⁶⁸ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 11.13-15, 11.16-17: *nga ni khyod la phan pa'i mtha' rdzogs pas// spang ljongs 'di na nga yi dur sa yin//...// nga ni mi min mdze ma'i ro yin no // mdze ma'i ro la zhen chags ma byed par // bu mo gang dga'i yul du 'gro ba legs//*

reinscribed by leprosy:

They personify the corrupt, corrupting social order that seekers of liberation must renounce. The more revolting the women seem to be, the more revolting the social order that is metaphorically linked to them becomes. To be sure, some women are lovely without, but even the loveliest are vile, foul, and putrefying within. They reek of impermanence, disease, suffering, and sexual folly, be the aim of sexuality, the production of heirs or the gratification of lust. To see through the specious charms of women is to achieve insight into the essence of the human predicament. Freedom from the yearning for sensual gratification and from suffering and death are possible for those who learn to see all women as walking corpses.¹⁶⁹

Notice the themes the modern text draws attention to as Nun Palmo speaks to her servant Sampilma:

‘Sampilma, I myself am a lie.
Even if I do not lie,
my own body is a lie.’

.....
Then Sampilma carried her and left.
The toes of [Nun Palmo’s] feet hit the ground.
Her very body appeared like a discarded load.
Hardships arose three times.
[Nun Palmo] was the height of filth.¹⁷⁰

The simile “her body appeared like a discarded load,” and the phrase “[Nun Palmo] was the height of filth” reflect the Buddhist view of the impermanent and impure nature of the physical. What is also evident from these categories imposed on her by her life (that is, her identity) is that they are fluid and impermanent as is everything else in ordinary existence. This deconstruction of the body and its categories suggest a

¹⁶⁹ Liz Wilson, *Charming Cadavers*, ix-x.

¹⁷⁰ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 8.6-7, 8.9-11: *bsam ‘phel ma nga rang rdzun nged kyang mi rdzun rang gi lus po de rdzun gsungs /.../ de nas bsam ‘phel mas ‘khur nas byon pas zhabs mdzub sa la gtug pas / sku lus de nyid ‘khur bor ba ltar byung bas / ‘o rgyal lan gsum byung zhing ‘bag pa’i tog tu gyur to //*

deconstruction of the notion of a permanent self thus illuminating the texts' teaching of the Buddhist view of no-self (*bdag med*, *anātman*). This passage also reflects that, with the worsening condition of the illness, Nun Palmo appears to accept the reality of the physical condition.¹⁷¹

Such deterioration and transformation of the physical, mental, and social constitution of a person to the level of an outcaste, an animal, or a corpse created by leprosy can also be understood in terms of the anomic thinking reflected in the Vajrayāna. Like the *Mahāsiddhas*,¹⁷² who often behaved against worldly conventions and appeared as outcastes, and did so because such antinomian behavior cut through and shed the attachment to identity that is self-constructed and manipulable, Nun Palmo's contraction of leprosy served as a skillful means in order to cut through worldly conventions and to get to the real meaning of religion. In terms of her human condition, Nun Palmo's goals had to change. This view also accords with the Tibetan Buddhist tantric idea¹⁷³ that Nun Palmo's early level of renunciation (becoming an

¹⁷¹ More examples of Nun Palmo's acceptance of her condition is discussed later in this chapter and Chapter Four in reference to the idea of atonement and Nun Palmo's role as an enlightened being.

¹⁷² See Dowman, *Masters of Enchantment* for a discussion and translations of narratives that show the diverse ways in which *siddhas* presented themselves in order to represent the nondualistic ontology of tantra, that the worldly and the spiritual (or *nirvāṇa*) are part of the same reality.

¹⁷³ *Tantra* (*rgyud*) must be defined broadly because of all the diverse textual and practice traditions that use this designation. I have found two definitions useful for this study. André Padoux states that tantra is:

an attempt to place *kāma*, desire, in every sense of the word, in the service of liberation...not to sacrifice this world for liberation's sake, but to reinstate it, in varying ways, within the perspective of salvation. This use of *kāma* and of all aspects

ordained nun) was not a full one; she needed to attain further religious development in order to achieve the goals of the Mahāyāna Buddhist tradition. The crucial step in Nun Palmo's development entailed being rejected (and therefore, rejecting the

of this world to gain both worldly and supernatural enjoyments (*bhukti*) and powers (*siddhis*), and to obtain liberation in this life (*jīvanmukti*), implies a particular attitude on the part of the Tantric adept toward the cosmos, whereby he feels integrated within an all-embracing system of micro-macrocosmic correlations.

In addition, David Gordon White defines it as:

Tantra is that Asian body of beliefs and practices which, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains that universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways.

See Padoux, "Tantrism." In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade, vol. 14 (New York: Macmillan, 1986), 273 and White, "Introduction." In *Tantra in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9. Tantra's focus on articulation in the world for the sake of liberation and the channeling of divine energy within the human microcosm are what Nun Palmo's transformative experiences signify. In addition, the contraction of leprosy becomes a beneficial state, a medicine and a didactic tool or skillful means for others' liberation.

conventional) and exposed to the impermanence of materiality so that she could become free in mind and body in order to undergo empowerments (*dbang*) and attain higher levels of achievement that were not possible in her previous state when she was still attached to her identity. For others' sake, she appeared as the leper-outcaste so as to awaken a sense of religiosity and therefore, Buddhist doctrine becomes graphically "real".

Although in the case of leprosy, physical pain is eventually anesthetized, the texts indicate that Nun Palmo's challenge is psychologically painful because of her ties to her identity and society. The leprous individual also experiences a painful suffering, a pain not altogether related to a specific bodily location. As Joseph H. Fichter notes in his work on religion and pain in the modern Western health care system, "Since pain is an experience that touches and envelopes the whole person it is not easily distinguished into bodily pain and mental pain, although this distinction is frequently made in ordinary conversation."¹⁷⁴ Consequently, rather than experiencing the sensation of the prick of a needle on the skin, the leprous individual feels a more existential pain (because paradoxically, lepers do not feel pain)--a philosophical concern that goes beyond the immediate personal experience to the wider concerns of suffering in the world.

The pain caused by the experience of illness can also be understood through Ariel Glucklich's notions of "disintegrative" and/or "integrative" pain and David

¹⁷⁴ Joseph H. Fichter, *Religion and Pain: The Spiritual Dimensions of Health Care* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 26.

Bakan's "telic-decentralization" and "telic-centralization." According to Glucklich and Bakan, pain has a way of causing a disintegration of the notion of a self and separation from society and yet, it empowers the individual (and creates a sense of awareness) through the reinforcement of certain goals and values. There is, therefore, a breaking up and reinforcement of a system in relation to its goals, for example, the self goes through these transformations in order to understand the effects of pain.¹⁷⁵

Bakan states:

Human understanding and suffering are reflexively related. A certain level of awareness is a precondition for suffering as well as its management; and awareness is enhanced as well as diminished by suffering. Because of these reflexive relationships, oblivion and the enhancement of understanding are two natural options for coping with suffering....Human suffering [in the form of disease and pain] has biological, psychological, and existential aspects.¹⁷⁶

These ideas can contribute to an enhanced understanding of the multiple levels of interpreting pain and illness in the texts of this study, especially Nun Palmo's process of disintegration and reassemblage.

For example, in the first case (dintegrative pain and telic-decentralization),

¹⁷⁵ See Glucklich, *Sacred Pain*, 33, 61, 76, 91-92, 94, 96 and David Bakan's entire work, *Disease, Pain and Sacrifice: Toward a Psychology of Suffering* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1968). Telos (goal) of a system is defined by its survival needs, a systematic pursuit for balance (and according to Bakan, is centered on the ego and communication. He also examines telos in reference to the communication between simple cellular organisms and human beings). Telos is a function of higher principles or an overarching purpose that entails that others or lesser systems to "subserve" themselves to this higher end or goals. For Bakan, "telic-centralization" is registered at the human level as health. What Bakan means by the process of "telic-decentralization" or disease is a breakdown of the overall system's goal, which is not necessarily an attack from the outside but can be an internal reaction to perceived external threats or disease (like the cancerous parts of a body become a separate entity from the individual himself). See pages 31-38 for a discussion of the decentralization process in regards to telos.

¹⁷⁶ Bakan, *Disease, Pain and Sacrifice*, vii.

pain is understood as punitive. It completely disrupts the life of an individual, isolating her from the world and destroying her sense of being and will to live. For Glucklich and Bakan, pain is also a problem of evil--a theodicy--(like in the case of Job) and therefore a disruption of meaning and order.¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, in the integrative case, pain is empowering, it reaffirms a sense of identity and is a reaffirmation of the world. Therefore pain is considered a healing and transformation.

These concepts of pain illuminate the painful deconstruction that Nun Palmo must undergo for her liberation. Like Glucklich's and Bakan's schemas, these hagiographies show, first of all, the punitive aspect of pain. Nun Palmo faced a "telic-decentralization" because there was a threat to her physical system and conventional goals by external sources (bacteria/demons/prior actions) to breakup from a larger system (self and society). Leprosy is therefore a "problem" that "decentralizes or disintegrates" Nun Palmo's position from herself and her society (but within a Buddhist framework not with the Christian connotation of a theodicy or a problem of evil). She could no longer be defined in terms of categories established by the ordinary world, that is, by her gender, social status as daughter and princess, religious status as nun, and even as an human being, and the suffering she undergoes creates new categories. Paul Brand in his work on leprosy in India makes this crucial connection: "I hurt, therefore I am." Here he suggests how leprosy patients are redefined by their illness, a new definition that requires new ways of relating to

¹⁷⁷ See Job 1-42. In *Holy Bible*, King James version (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1988), 771-817.

themselves and their world.¹⁷⁸

As Chapter Four will make clear with the discussion of the ascetic-devotional ritual, pain is a solution, a transformative experience that helped Nun Palmo re-envision her goals. As Glucklick notes, “[P]ain can act as a socially and spiritually integrative force that defines and broadens the individual’s sense of identity within the traditional community.”¹⁷⁹ Nun Palmo’s painful experiences with illness strengthens her faith in the Buddhist teaching and her ability to situate herself within the world in a state that is aware of the reality of liberation and as a model for others.

French mystic and philosopher Simone Weil (1909-1943) has also identified the phenomenological change that pain inflicts on the psyche and showed how this can lead to a deepened sense of religious commitment. In relation to her own experience of illness, she asserts, “There is a point in affliction where we are no longer able to bear either that it should go on or that we should be delivered from it.”¹⁸⁰ In being “lacerated in our sense of time,” Weil notes that eternity entered these fragmented moments of physical suffering, offering us fragile lines of escape from temporality. According to Weil, our understanding of the supernatural is deepened through our encounters with physical pain.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Paul Brand with Philip Yancey, *Pain*, 205.

¹⁷⁹ Glucklick, *Sacred Pain*, 34.

¹⁸⁰ See her work, *Gravity and Grace*, Arthur Wills, tr. (New York: Putnam, 1952), 133-134. Weil died of tuberculosis and malnutrition in England on August 24, 1943. See George A. Panichas, ed., *The Simone Weil Reader* (Wakefield, Rhode Island: Moyer Bell), 1999), 4.

¹⁸¹ This notion of pain deepening our religious understanding is further elaborated upon in Chapter Four.

This deepened understanding is also present in the Nun Palmo texts. The texts direct attention to the instrumental nature of illness in terms of religious development. Leprosy is both a skillful means (a didactic tool) and has redemptive value in these texts. Part of this redemption has to do with renouncing what is not beneficial in the first place (what is impermanent) in order to gain liberation and help others' religious development. In the following two scenes, Nun Palmo is in a very advanced stage of the leprosy and she finally understands the instrumentality of her illness. Her brother Indrabhūti said to her,

After having turned [*byas nas*, literally, “made”]
this virulent illness of yours into an opportunity,
You should produce in yourself the energetic application [*snying rus*]
by quickly obtaining the highest spiritual realization. [*mchog gi dngos grus*]¹⁸²

Nun Palmo said,
‘I am sick for the sake of sentient beings
who are as vast as the sky.’¹⁸³

In accordance with Buddhist ideas, Nun Palmo transformed leprosy, a condition most people view as a detriment and an impure state, into an opportunity to practice the Dharma or express her full commitment to the Buddhist teachings and to teach others (as she eventually did). Therefore, illness had a purpose. According to the biographer of the eleventh century Tibetan practitioner Milarepa, Milarepa is said to have valued illness in this way:

¹⁸² Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 3b.2-3: *khyod kyi nad drag po 'dis rkyen byas nas mchog gi dngos grub myur du 'thob par 'dug gis snying rus bskyed la/*

¹⁸³ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 7.12-13: *nam mkha' dang mnyam pa'i sems can gyi don la na ba yin gsungs/*

For a hermit, sickness is usually an exhortation to spiritual practice. Without performing any ritual, he must transform all experiences of adverse conditions into sublime attainment and must be able to face sickness and even death itself.¹⁸⁴

According to the teaching of *blo sbyong*, a system of mental purification in the Tibetan tradition ascribed to Atiśa and the Bka' gdams pa teachers, which draws from a variety of sources, a bodhisattva needs to cultivate *bodhicitta* in order to be able to create this transformation ('gyur ba). Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey states:

Bodhicitta eliminates mental and physical obstacles and its cultivation is thus the best initial practice. Like a chemical that transforms all metal into gold, it turns the impurities of the human body into the three Bodies of the Buddha. It is because people have not developed Bodhicitta that they still have an impure form. The rate of this development depends on one's pure effort.¹⁸⁵

This quotation directs attention to the tantric tradition's idea of 'turning poison into medicine,' poison in the Buddhist case refers to delusion and attachment. According to a text ascribed to the Indian teacher Dharmarakṣita, a bodhisattva is able to create this transformation within the midst of adversity:

In jungles of poisonous plants strut the peacocks,
Though medicine gardens of beauty lie near.
The masses of peacocks do not find gardens pleasant,
But thrive in the essence of poisonous plants.

¹⁸⁴ Lobsang P. Lhalungpa, tr., *The Life of Milarepa* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1984), 162.

¹⁸⁵ Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, *Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development* (Dharmasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1974), 121. Note that *bodhicitta* training entails many stages and there are distinctions made among the types of *bodhicitta* that must be cultivated like relative and absolute, (in order to awaken compassion and emptiness), and the training in *bodhicitta* of aspiration and application. Patrul Rinpoche (1808-1887) states that in the training for *bodhicitta* of aspiration, there are three stages: considering others as equal to oneself, exchanging oneself and others, and taking others as more important than oneself. These stages are important to keep in mind in a later discussion of a component of *blo sbyong* called *gtong len*. See Patrul Rinpoche, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*, Padmakara Translation Group (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1998), 222-234.

In similar fashion, the brave Bodhisattvas
 Remain in the jungle of worldly concern.
 No matter how joyful this world's pleasure gardens,
 These Brave Ones are never attracted to pleasures,
 But thrive in the jungle of suffering and pain.
 We spend our whole life in the search for enjoyment,
 Yet tremble with fear at the mere thought of pain;
 Thus since we are cowards, we are miserable still.
 But the brave Bodhisattvas accept suffering gladly
 And gain from their courage a true lasting joy.
 Now desire is the jungle of poisonous plants here.
 Only Brave Ones, like peacocks, can thrive on such fare.
 If cowardly beings, like crows, were to try it,
 Because they are greedy they might lose their lives.
 How can someone who cherishes self more than others
 Take lust and such dangerous poisons for food?
 If he tried like a crow to use other illusions,
 He would probably forfeit his chance for release.
 And thus Bodhisattvas are likened to peacocks:
 They live on delusions--those poisonous plants.
 Transforming them into the essence of practice,
 They thrive in the jungle of everyday life.
 Whatever is present they always accept,
 While destroying the poison of clinging desire.¹⁸⁶

Within these statements as well lies a theology of atonement (or sacrifice) that assigns redemptive meaning to suffering. One example of a tradition that sees the redemptive value of suffering is the Catholic tradition. Pre-Vatican II Catholic piety embraced the message that suffering accepted in faith had redemptive value. By offering their path in union with Christ's passion to God, Catholics believed that they

¹⁸⁶ This is a translation of a text entitled *Theg pa chen po'i blo sbyong mtshon cha 'khor lo* provided by Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey, et al., tr. in *A Mahayana Training of Mind: The Wheel of Sharp Weapons* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1981), 7-8. See Geshe Lhundub Sopa, et al., *Peacock in the Poison Grove: Two Buddhist Texts on Training the Mind* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2001) for translations and commentaries on the above-mentioned text and *Rma bya dug 'joms*. See also Lama Zopa Rinpoche's commentary on a *blo sbyong* text by Rdo grub chen III 'Jigs med Bstan pa'i nyi ma (1865-1926) in *Transforming Problems into Happiness* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1992). I thank John Makransky for assistance on this subject. More discussion on *blo sbyong* in relation to *gong len* and the Nun Palmo texts appears later in this chapter.

contributed to the redemption of humankind. Joined to Christ's affliction, they could participate through their sorrows in the divine work of salvation. Behind this pious practice stood a particular theology proposing that Christ's suffering on the cross made satisfaction for the sins of humanity and thus pacified God's displeasure. This theology of atonement, formulated in the eleventh century by St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), wove together a number of biblical passages announcing that Christ offered himself as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.¹⁸⁷ Subsequent Catholics, for example, understood the idea of suffering as participation in the redemption of the world. According to Catholic teaching, Christians are grafted unto Christ, are imbued by his grace, form one body with him, and are thus able to share with one another the merits that are the fruit of their faith.¹⁸⁸ This theology played an important part in much of Catholic piety and later, in Protestant piety as well and came to embody a full range of imagery and symbolism.

According to Frances Young, two theological traditions developed generally which shaped the thinking of this theology, which she calls the "objective" and "subjective" theories of the atonement, and later, they were elaborated upon with diverse ideas about sacrifice. According to the first view, the cross was an "objective transaction whereby God was reconciled to man" and therefore Christ bore the

¹⁸⁷ See Anselm of Canterbury, "Cur Deus Homo?" [Why God Became Man?]. In *A Scholastic Miscellany: Anselm to Ockham*, Eugene Fairweather, tr., vol X (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 100-183.

¹⁸⁸ Flora Keshgegian, *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000).

punishment for our sake and this, in a sense, symbolized our liberation. According to the other view, it is human beings' response to the cross and not the cross itself, that was important. These views were further elaborated upon throughout the centuries.¹⁸⁹

Revisiting the texts of Vimalakīrti and Milarepa offers evidence of the Buddhist tradition's view of the redemptive value of suffering through illness. However, the Buddhist tradition does not focus on the Christian suffering Godhead or on guilt and original sin. Instead, Buddhist texts show that certain beings experience suffering for a number of reasons: to exhort others to practice (deliberately imposed as in the case of a *bodhisattva* figure), in order to purify their past karma, or as sign for a higher religious calling. Vimalakīrti states:

Because the bodhisattva for the sake of sentient beings
enters the realm of birth and death,
and because he is in the realm of birth and death
he suffers illness.
If living beings can gain release from illness,
then the bodhisattva will no longer be ill.¹⁹⁰

In another passage, Milarepa is said by his biographer to experience suffering for the sake of an egotistical *geshe* who attempted to kill him:

Sickness, evil spirits, harmful deeds, and delusion
Are my ornaments, hermit that I am.
In me, they are the nervous system, vital fluids, and psychic energies.
For me, generosity and the other virtues
Are the one hundred and twelve signs of Buddhahood.
May the sinner be absolved of his crimes.
This sickness greatly becomes me;

¹⁸⁹ Frances M. Young, *Sacrifice and the Death of Christ* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 85-100.

¹⁹⁰ Watson, *The Vimalakirti Sutra*, 65.

I could transfer it, but have no reason to do so.

.....
And the Master said:

A certain being is possessed by the demon of egotism,
which is the worst crime of all.

It is he who has caused my illness.

.....
There is no reality in my sickness.

There is no reality in my death.

I have manifested here the appearance of sickness.¹⁹¹

The text shows that the appearance of suffering an illness is a didactic tool, a skillful means to teach about the doctrine of emptiness

Zhu chen's ritual text, *'Phags pa 'jig rten*, also suggests illness's redemptive role. A passage from the text prescribes an intercessory prayer of visualization involving Nun Palmo:

Imagine that upon the top of one's head is a lotus and moon disc

Upon which is seated Nun Palmo

And think that she intercedes [to Avalokiteśvara] on one's behalf.

On top of one's head is Nun Palmo

Seated in the manner of intercession,

Praising with the melody of a sweet voice.

May the assembly of teachers and holy deities listen and pay attention.¹⁹²

Therefore when Nun Palmo states that she is sick for the sake of sentient beings, she is saying that her condition is instrumental. Both the hagiographies and ritual texts confirm Nun Palmo's role as intermediary; she is suffering leprosy on behalf of others. Suffering this illness is not simply an ornament like in the case of Milarepa, but it is

¹⁹¹ Lhalungpa, *Life of Milarepa*, 167, 169.

¹⁹² Zhu chen, *'Phags pa 'jig rten*, 35a.6-35b.2: *rang gi spyi bor pad zla'i steng du dge slong ma dpal mo zhugs nas ngo chen byed par bsam la// bdag gi spyi bor dge slong dpal mo ni// ngo chen zhu ba'i tshul gyis bzhugs pa dang// mgrin bsdebs snyan pa'i dbyangs kyis bsdod pa la// bla ma 'phags pa'i lha tshogs gsan cing dgongs/ zhes sngon du 'grogs/*

redemptive.

Revisiting Simone Weil's philosophy that life is characterized by its affliction (despite its Christian lens), makes us aware that suffering is instrumental to religious development and liberation. Weil likens extreme affliction, consisting of physical pain, spiritual distress, and social degradation, to a nail being struck by a hammer.

The shock, which is ultimately religious, travels "from the nail's head to the point":

The point of the nail is applied to the very centre of the soul, and its head is the whole of necessity throughout all space and time....The man whose soul remains oriented towards God while a nail is driven through it finds himself nailed to the very centre of the universe; the true centre, which is not in the middle, which is not in space and time, which is God.¹⁹³

Another passage from the essay, "The Love of God and Affliction," states:

Affliction is a marvel of divine technique. It is a simple and ingenious device to introduce into the soul of a finite creature that immensity of force, blind, brutal and cold. The infinite distance which separates God from the creature is concentrated into a point to transfix the centre of a soul....In this marvellous dimension, without leaving the time and place to which the body is bound, the soul can traverse the whole of space and time and come into the actual presence of God.¹⁹⁴

For Weil as for Palmo, affliction serves both as a spiritual opportunity and revelation.

It is to know the death of one's old self and preconceptions as well as the acceptance of that death. Paradoxically, affliction heals or liberates in the spiritual sense.¹⁹⁵ In

¹⁹³ Panichas, ed., *Simone Weil Reader*, 403.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 452.

¹⁹⁵ Note also Weil's analogy of the crucifixion in this passage to the religious experience of pain. At the time of Christ's crucifixion, the act of crucifixion was considered a slanderous and shameful mode of execution set aside for common criminals. Nun Palmo's illness made her a "commoner" and an outcaste; she experienced social degradation. I thank Kimberley Patton for drawing attention to the reflection of the crucifixion in Weil's work. In Chapter Four, Nun Palmo's devotion to Avalokiteśvara in her deteriorating state also exemplifies

addition, this state reveals Nun Palmo's divine presence and her skillful means.

The Tibetan practice of *gtong len* offers some useful analogies as well regarding the redemptive value of suffering leprosy in the Nun Palmo hagiographies. Being part of the *blo sbyong* teachings, this term refers to a method of meditation aimed at generating compassion and training in *bodhicitta* while the practitioner absorbs the suffering of oneself and others. In return, the practitioner radiates

Weil's philosophy of affliction. Notice Weil's positive view of affliction in a letter to her friend Joe Bousquet,

I am convinced that affliction on the one hand, and on the other hand joy, when it is a complete and pure commitment to perfect beauty, are the only two keys which give entry to the realm of purity, where one can breathe: the home of the real. But each of them must be unmixed: the joy without a shadow of incompleteness, the affliction completely unconsolated....[D]ivine love which one touches in the depth of affliction, like Christ's resurrection through crucifixion, that love which is the central core and intangible essence of joy, is not a consolation. It leaves pain completely in tact....A pure joy, which in some cases may replace pain or in others may be superimposed on it, is not a consolation. On the other hand, there is often a consolation in morbidly aggravating one's pain.

Panichas, ed., *Simone Weil Reader*, 93.

happiness and good fortune in the form of white light. As in the case of *blo sbyong*, the practice of *gtong len* is drawn from a variety of sources including Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatāra* and was expanded upon by a variety of teachers like the twelfth century Bka' gdams pa teacher 'Chad kha ba Ye shes rdo rje, (who systematized the *blo sbyong* teachings into seven points consisting of 59 slogans divided by subject and rendered them more accessible),¹⁹⁶ and the influential nineteenth century Tibetan Buddhist scholar 'Jam mgon Kong sprul, who also wrote a ritual text according to the Nun Palmo tradition.¹⁹⁷

To some extent, in terms of practice, *gtong len* resembles *metta* (loving-kindness) meditation of the *vipassana* tradition. Both practices help to radiate well-being and compassion through controlled breathing techniques. *Gtong len*, however, also tends to break down the barriers between the self and other. By actually being

¹⁹⁶ A translation of and commentary on 'Chad kha ba's *Blo sbyong don bdun ma'i khrid yig mdor bsdus don bzang bdud rtsi'i snying po* and a brief synopsis of his life are provided by Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Universal Compassion: Transforming Your Life Through Love and Compassion* (New York: Tharpa Publications, 2002). References to him are included in: Patrul Rinpoche, *Perfect Teacher*, 227-228, 407; Chagdud Tulku, *Gates to Buddhist Practice* (Junction City, CA: Padma Publishing, 1993), 116; Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (San Francisco: Harper Publications, 1994), 193-194; and Chögyam Rinpoche, *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1993), xvi.

¹⁹⁷ Otherwise known as Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas, this figure was associated with the non-sectarian movement in Eastern Tibet called *ris med*. Particulars about him can be found in Smith, *Among Tibetan Texts*, 235-272. 'Jam mgon Kong sprul's ritual text is entitled *Bcu gcig zhal dpal mo lugs dang 'brel bar smyung gnas sgrub pa'i lag len gser sdod g.yu'i phra tshom* [*A Set of Gold and Turquoise Jewels: The Practice of Fasting and Propitiation of the Eleven-faced One According to the Palmo Tradition*] contained in 'Jam mgon Kong sprul *rgya chen bka' mdzod*. In *The Collected Writings of Kong sprul Blo gros mtha' yas*, vol. 7 (New Delhi: Shechen, 1973), 247-395. I thank Dkong bstan 'dzin (Matthieu Ricard) of Zhe chen dgon pa in Bodhnāth, Nepal for drawing my attention to this text in May 1998.

willing to take on others' pain, the practitioner experiences her own commonality with those sentient beings. And by offering the wealth of happiness and kindness that the practitioner embodies to others, the practitioner acknowledges the experiential message of *gtong len*.¹⁹⁸ In Chapter Eight, Śāntideva deals quite extensively with this practice in the training of *bodhicitta*:

First of all I should make an effort
 To meditate upon the equality between self and others:
 I should protect all beings as I do myself
 Because we are all equal in (wanting) pleasure and (not wanting) pain.
 Although there are many different parts and aspects such as the hand,
 As a body that is to be protected they are one.
 Likewise all the different sentient beings in their pleasure and pain
 Have a wish to be happy that is the same as mine.
 The suffering that I experience
 Does not cause any harm to others.
 But that suffering (is mine)
 because of my conceiving of (myself as) "I";
 Thereby it becomes unbearable.
 Likewise the misery of others
 Does not befall me.
 Nevertheless, by conceiving of (others as) "I"
 Their suffering becomes mine;
 Therefore it too should be hard to bear.
 Hence I should dispel the misery of others
 Because it is suffering,
 just like my own,
 And I should benefit others
 Because they are sentient beings, just like myself.

 Being no (inherent) owner of suffering,
 There can be no distinction at all between (that of myself and others)

 If by one person's suffering
 The suffering of many would be destroyed,
 Surely kindhearted people would accept it
 For the sake of themselves and others?

¹⁹⁸ Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Universal Compassion*, 32.

Thus whoever wishes to quickly afford protection
To both himself and other beings
Should practice that holy secret:
The exchanging of self for others.

.....
If I do not actually exchange my happiness
For the suffering of others,
I shall not attain the state of Buddhahood
And even in cyclic existence shall have no joy.

.....
Therefore in order to allay the harms inflicted upon me
And in order to pacify the sufferings of others,
I shall give myself up to others
And cherish them as I do my very self.

.....
Although others may do something wrong,
I should transform it into a fault of my own.¹⁹⁹

In the “exchange of oneself for others,” suffering is not something eschewed but sought after for liberation. Likewise, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey states that *bodhicitta* cultivation involves relieving the suffering of others and this may entail carrying their suffering as a burden,

When in pain, consider the suffering of all sentient beings and develop the wish to carry this burden in order to deliver them from misery. This will lead to the end of your own suffering.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Batchelor, tr., *Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* (Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, 1992), 118-131.

²⁰⁰ Dhargyey, *Tibetan Tradition*, 122.

Several examples of bodhisattva figures and teachers absorbing the pain and suffering of others in order to cultivate *bodhicitta* and compassion are retold in Patrul Rinpoche, *Perfect Teacher*, 228-231. One story about Dharmarakṣita, the author of a *blo sbyong* text, reflects the teaching of taking on the suffering of a sick person out of compassion and in order to achieve liberation:

Once someone in the region where [Dharmarakṣita] lived was attacked by a violent illness which the doctor declared could only be healed with one medicine--the flesh of a live human being. If that could not be found, there would be no hope.

This is reminiscent of Nun Palmo carrying the illness for the sake of others.

‘Chad kha ba Ye shes rdo rje’s circumstances in particular reflect the connection between *gtong len* teachings and leprosy. According to the story of his

‘If it helps, I’ll give him mine,’ said Dharmarakṣita and, cutting some flesh from his own thigh, he gave it to the sick person, who ate it and was cured. Dharmarakṣita, who had not yet realized emptiness, suffered enormous pain as a result of what he had done, but his great compassion prevented him from feeling any regret. ‘Are you feeling better?’ he asked the invalid. ‘Yes, I am fine, but look at the difficulties I’ve brought upon you!’ ‘I would even bear death if it could bring you happiness,’ said Dharmarakṣita.

He was in such pain, however, that he could not sleep at all. Finally, at some time in the small hours, he dozed off and had a dream. A man, all white, appeared to him and said, ‘Whoever wants to attain enlightenment must pass through such trials as yours. Well done! Well done!’ The man spat on the wound and rubbed it with his hand. The wound disappeared leaving no scar at all. When Dharmarakṣita awoke from his dream, he saw that his wound really had been healed. The white man had been the Great Compassionate One [Avalokiteśvara] himself. The authentic realization of the natural state then dawned in Dharmarakṣita’s mind and the words of Nāgārjuna’s *Five Treatises on the Middle Way* were ceaselessly on his lips.

Patrul Rinpoche, *Perfect Teacher*, 230.

life, a small passage in a text on *blo sbyong* led him to the teachings,

May I take defeat upon myself
And offer them the victory.²⁰¹

Afterwards, 'Chad kha ba trained in the practice of *gtong len* for an arduous twelve years as he aimed at attaining Buddhahood. At a time in Tibet when leprosy was apparently prevalent, he first restricted his teaching to a group of lepers who were then cured from the practice. As a result, his teachings became known among Tibetans as the "Dharma for leprosy."²⁰²

This brief description of *gtong len* in no way implies that Nun Palmo practiced this method of meditation or transmitted it, since it is evident that the practice she transmitted was *smyung gnas* (fasting). However, the absorption and acceptance of suffering and the point that leprosy was cured by this practice is significant. Note one passage where 'Chad kha ba writes,

Because of my many wishes,
Having endured suffering and a bad reputation,
I received the instructions for controlling self-grasping.
Now, if I die, I have no regrets.²⁰³

Although the written hagiographies in this study describe that Nun Palmo did not at first put a conscious effort to contract leprosy or any other types of suffering (except that there is evidence of this in oral versions of Nun Palmo's life), there is a utilitarian

²⁰¹ Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Universal Compassion*, 3.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 155.

response to the illness as it advances and as she gains greater insight on its significance to her life. The sickness enabled Nun Palmo to absorb the suffering of a physical body and understand first-hand the experience for the sake of others. Lineage holders of Nun Palmo's tradition also reflected this message. Dalai Lama VII's ritual text confirms this message of voluntary taking of suffering that is transmitted to fellow practitioners:

In short, whatever physical and mental sufferings arise
 At all times during fasting,
 Thinking that by this [practice]
 The suffering of all beings is purified,
 May [I] accept the sufferings [of others]
 With the thought to bring benefit and happiness.²⁰⁴

Current readers of the modern hagiography notice how Nun Palmo's experience of illness was powerful for the Bhutanese lama as well.²⁰⁵ Nun Palmo's painful deconstructive experience has value for Bla ma Rab brtan's and others' redemptions.

But not only is redemption evident in Nun Palmo's overall acceptance of suffering but also in her appearance as a woman redeeming as well. Despite all the misogynist voices in Buddhist texts and in some of the passages of the hagiographies, there is also an inclusive redemption in these texts in regards to women. A passage from Rosemary Radford Ruether can be generally applied here in terms of the themes of redemption, liberation, and gender:

²⁰⁴ Dalai Lama VII, *Thugs rje chen po*, 53b.1-3: *mdor na smyung bar gnas pa'i dus kun tu// lus dang sems la sdug bsngal ci byung yang// 'gro kun sdug bsngal 'di yis byang snyam pa'i// phan bde'i sems kyis sdug bsngal dang len shog/*

²⁰⁵ See Chapter 1.3.2b.

Redemption is not primarily about...rejecting our bodies and finitude, and ascending to communion with a spiritual world that will be our heavenly world after death. Rather, redemption is about reclaiming an original goodness that is still available as our true selves, although obscured by false ideologies and social structures that have justified domination of some and subordination of others.²⁰⁶

This “reclaiming” can be applied to Buddhist ideas of realizing one’s Buddhanature.

Like Tārā and Kuan Yin,²⁰⁷ Nun Palmo insists on being reborn as a woman for the sake of others and achieves liberation in that physical state. In this way, gender relations may have been changed by redemption.

Also because illness is redemptive, the texts expect that others will follow suit and accept the Buddhist teachings despite their initial disbelief or previous behavior as two scenes from the texts show below. In the first example (the modern text) when Nun Palmo is “cured” of her physical and spiritual ailments or reveals her innate enlightened nature, she appears with her servant Sampelma at ‘Bigs Śrī Temple:

Then both the Master Nun Palmo and servant went inside ‘Bigs Śrī Temple.
In the crowd, they beat a drum,
blew a conch shell and so forth in front of the statue of the Holy One.
Having summoned all the people of the town, Nun Palmo said:
‘Since I accept this mere illness of mine for the sake of sentient beings,
all who contracted the vows must purify yourselves by confessing.’

That Nun [Palmo] leaped up into the sky in front of them
and spoke the Dharma to all,
placed them on the path of quintessential enlightenment.

²⁰⁶ Although Ruether in her work is concerned primarily with the Christian tradition, her insights are useful in terms of how gender relations change alongside ideas about redemption. See Ruether, *Women and Redemption: A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 8.

²⁰⁷ See Martin Willson, *In Praise of Tārā: Songs to the Saviouress* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986), 12 regarding Tārā’s wish to be reborn as a woman. For Avalokiteśvara’s appearance in the form of Kuan Yin in East Asia, see Chün-Fang Yü, *Kuan-yin*.

Having removed the suffering of poverty,
they enjoyed the splendor and wealth of the full happy kalpa.²⁰⁸

And in another version, people around Nun Palmo attain higher spiritual realizations
due to her efforts as a deified *mkha'* 'gro ma:

When she went to Magadha,
people said,
'Since the cause for this nun's illness subsided,
she became lax in her instructions and vows. How is it?'

In order to reverse their disbelief,
at a congregation for a worship service for Khasarpaṇa,²⁰⁹
[Nun Palmo] cut off her own head.
Since she placed it on her monastic staff [*mkhar bsil*] and danced,
now the people,
in realizing that she was one who attained spiritual realization,
all requested a blessing and obtained a realization as well.²¹⁰

Both passages show the value of illness for both the main figure in the texts and
others. Nun Palmo's intercession (her suffering for the sake of others) prompted

²⁰⁸ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 20.13-21.2: *de nas dge slong ma dpon gyog gnyis po 'bigs shri lha khang nang byon / 'phags pa'i sku mdun la khrom rnga brdung / dung 'bud pa la sogs te / grong 'khyer gyi mi rnams thams cad bkug nas gsungs pa / nged rang gi nad 'di tsam 'gro ba sems can gyis don du bzhes par gda' bas / khyed rang rnams dam tshig dang 'gal ba thams cad bshags sbyangs bgyis shig / ces gsungs pas / dge slong ma de nyid mdun gyi nam mkha' la 'phar nas thams cad la chos gsungs shing / snying po byang chub kyi lam la 'god de dbul 'phongs gi sdug bsngal sel nas / rdzogs ldan bskal bzang gi dpal dam par longs su spyod par gyur to//*

²⁰⁹ A form of Avalokiteśvara, one of the fifteen main manifestations in the *Sādhanaṃālā*. See Piyasīlo, *Avalokiteśvara: Origins, Manifestations and Meaning* (Malaysia: Buddhist Roots Series. No. 1. Dharmafarer Enterprises, 1991).

²¹⁰ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 7a.3-6: *yul dbus su byon pa na/ mi rnams na re/ dge slong ma 'di'i snyun gzhi te drag 'dug ste/ bslab sdom la gyel du song 'dug ci 'dra yin nam zer ba la/ de rnams kyi ma dad pa zlog ba'i phyir du/ kha sar pa ni'i dus mchod kyi khrom gseb tu khong rang gi dbu bcad nas mkhar bsil la bkal te gar mdzad pas/ bzod mi rnams kyi grub pa thob par shes nas thams cad kyi byin rlabs zhus shing dngos grub kyang thob bo//*

miraculous transformations in others.

These and other passages will be revisited in the following chapters' focus on ritual's relationship to the illness experience. In order to consider further the significance of illness in Nun Palmo's full healing and religious development, this study will now consider the role of ritual in the Nun Palmo texts.

CHAPTER THREE

THE RITUAL PRACTICE OF PROPITIATION AND FASTING: STRUCTURE AND PERFORMANCE

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter argued that the experience of illness as described in the texts in this study contains a hidden rationality. Illness can bring about a profound transformation of not just the physical body, but of the consciousness and identity of the spiritual seeker. The chapter also uncovers certain socio-cultural biases. Leprosy, in particular, violates social and sexual norms. Suffering also has redemptive value. Illness is not just a biological condition but also an experience. Therefore being ill was essential for Nun Palmo's religious development. Illness in these texts aims to illustrate graphically certain religious doctrinal values.

But the transformation does not end with the experience of illness. The texts also point out that transformation is not complete until the suffering becomes almost unbearable, when the victim, in this case, the practitioner, hits rock bottom--the point of no return. At this point, suffering becomes meaningful to the practitioner, and paradoxically, it becomes an healing. As the Muslim mystic Mizra Asadullah Ghalib sang in Delhi in the nineteenth-century, "When pain transgresses the limits, it becomes medicine."²¹¹ The texts in this study show that while the person is in a state of a

²¹¹ Annemarie Schimmel, *Pain and Grace: A Study of Two Mystical Writers of Eighteenth-*

severe degenerative illness, the goal of renunciation becomes accessible. It is through the difficult ascetic practice of fasting, along with other rituals that accompany it, that the struggle becomes a liberative technique. It does not torment the practitioner but rather, the struggle is embraced by her because it is a liberation or healing in the ultimate sense. Moreover the practice of fasting in this struggle for physical and spiritual liberation reveals the significance of ritual remediation in Tibetan Buddhist textual and current practice contexts.

As mentioned in Chapter One, past scholarship on the fasting ritual texts have contributed greatly to a preliminary understanding of fasting rituals in the Tibetan tradition.²¹² Yet, as it is evident in most religious traditions, more than “fasting” is involved. Therefore the second half of this dissertation aims to examine the role of the fasting ritual, especially in relation to the illness experience, and the development of renunciation. This chapter focuses on two areas: first, it describes the contents and structure of the rituals performed and advocated by Nun Palmo’s lineage descendants and attributed to her in the ritual manuals, with some references to how these are described in the hagiographies and practiced in modern Tibetan communities in Nepal and Tibet; and second, it examines briefly the two main components of the ritual complex, propitiation and fasting.

The texts examined are the same hagiographies discussed in Chapter Two

Century Muslim India (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 59.

²¹² Because of the numerous fasting texts (some not related to the Nun Palmo tradition) and practices of fasting, an area for future research is the significance and use of fasting rituals in the Tibetan tradition.

along with the texts of propitiation and fasting by Zhu chen and Dalai Lama VII. The latter two texts will provide more detailed structure for the schematic descriptions of the rituals in the narrative framework of the hagiographies. Some references are made to other rituals and to findings from ethnographic research.

3.2 The Structure of the Ritual Texts According to the Tradition of Nun Palmo

Before engaging in the topic of how ritual works in conjunction with illness to help Nun Palmo achieve renunciation, we need to try to understand some of the basic elements of the structures of the rituals themselves according to what the two manuals describe and how Tibetans structure them in practice. Despite the vast diversity in the structure and types of ancillary rituals, hymns, and group participation, the texts concur in terms of covering the two main practices of propitiation and fasting, and in their association with Nun Palmo and Avalokiteśvara.

Ritual texts vary in the fine details especially because of different lineage affiliations, audience, and time period. The first text by Zhu chen includes certain lineage prayers and arranges recitations and practices differently than does Dalai Lama VII's text. But on a general level, the structure of both texts is very similar and is divided into three stages²¹³ that assist the practitioner to achieve the desired effect: a preliminary practice (*sngon 'gro*), the actual ceremony (*dngos gzhi*), and the

²¹³ This arrangement is according to the topical outline *sa bcad*.

concluding ceremony (*rjes*).

The texts prescribe a preliminary practice consisting of arrangement of offerings and objects of veneration on altars and in temples as well as ritual practices. There are several reasons for each particular arrangement but generally the practitioner creates a sacred space that she could invite and appease certain central deities for the ceremony. This is also the time of purification prayers (*gso sbyong*) of the sacred space and of the practitioners themselves, the creation of *mandalas*, prayers of confession, refuge vows to the four jewels, the taking up of precepts, and the recitation of special prayers of invocation of merit.

For the actual ceremony, the texts prescribe fasting and meditative exercises of propitiation, along with recitation prayers and offerings dedicated to particular deities. First, in its wider religious significance, fasting, along with its other rituals, is an ascetic practice²¹⁴ of self-denial of food, water (even one's saliva), and even of speech (a vow of silence) aimed at self-discipline and a number of other soteriological goals. Secondly, *sgrub thabs* are tantric meditational texts and ritual exercises focused on a deity or group of deities (the objects of refuge), and the practitioner's relationship with them. These texts prescribe how one visualizes a deity and may dissolve into one, that is, achieve identification with a particular deity. The ritual texts of Nun Palmo are specifically concerned with propitiation of deities in two ways: front and self generation (*mdun bskyed* and *bdag bskyed*).

²¹⁴ Asceticism, as it relates to the fasting ritual, is described in more detail in the next chapter.

For front generation, the practitioner is instructed to imagine a buddha-figure sitting in the air in front of her, sending blessings into her, but not effecting an identification with the figure. As the term self-generation implies, the practitioner imagines her mundane body and experience as having dissolved into emptiness and being replaced by a new appearance of the self as the buddha figure. As a result, one simultaneously imagines oneself to be the deity that one visualized in body, speech, and mind.²¹⁵ In the Nun Palmo texts, the deity Avalokiteśvara is the main object of refuge in her ritual practice. Central to the ritual session is the recitation of the long *dhāraṇi* prayer (*gzungs ring*) dedicated to Avalokiteśvara.²¹⁶

Now not only is there an association with a particular deity, but also these texts mention tantra classes that may reveal something about the level of practice these texts profess. Note a passage from Jo gdan's text in which Nun Palmo experiences a vision about the body of Avalokiteśvara:

²¹⁵ To visualize these complex images requires great concentration and effort in order to build up the image and envision its transformation during the course of the propitiation. As all tantric practices profess, this transformation can be effected in a single lifetime. Janet Gyatso notes that the theory behind this transformation is the view that a person's identity and experience are "self-created" and "can be manipulated at will" given the appropriate training and transmission by a qualified teacher. See J. Gyatso, "An Avalokiteśvara Sādhana." In *Religions of Tibet in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 266. The features of these enlightened figures may vary as well dependent on the visions of the author, the needs of the practitioner (for example, if she needs to work on anger or compassion), and are justified by standard Mahāyāna theory.

²¹⁶ The edited passage from Zhu chen's text is: *namo ratna trayāya namaḥ ārya jñāna sāgara vairochana vyūha rājāya tathāgatāya arhate samyaksaṃ buddhāya namaḥ sarva tathāgatebhyaḥ arhadbhyaḥ samyaksaṃ buddhebhyaḥ namaḥ ārya avalokiteśvarāya bodhisattvāya mahāsattvāya mahākāraṇikāya tadyathā oṃ dhara dhara dhiri dhiri dhuru dhuru itti vatte chale chale prachale prachale kusume kusume vare ili mili. citi jvalaṃ apanaye svāhā/* Zhu chen, 'Phags pa 'jig rten, 22b.2-5.

On the eighth day,
 she witnessed the majority of the *kriyā* tantra deities
 such as five Amoghapaśa deities and so forth,
 On the fifteenth day,
 she witnessed the countenance of the Eleven-faced One
 endowed with a thousand hands and a thousand eyes
 and furthermore, countless Buddhas in all the pores of the body,
 the hands also being the quintessence of Buddhahood.
 On the eyes on the palms of the hands,
 she witnessed a host of tantric deities.²¹⁷

In this quote, the *kriyā* (*bya brgyud*, meaning “action”) tantra class deities and the meditational deities of the tantras appear on the body of Avalokiteśvara. A tantra class is a system based on the particular practices emphasized in the tantras (texts designated by this term) and the relative importance of external rituals and internal yogas. These tantra classes are often classified as action tantra, performance tantra, yoga tantra, and highest yoga tantra.²¹⁸ Although the Palmo texts mention the action

²¹⁷ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 6b.3-6: *tshes brgyad la don zhags lha lnga la sogs kri ya'i lha phal che ba'i zhal gzigs/ bco lnga la zhal bcu gcig pa phyag stong spyen stong dang ldan pa'i zhal gzigs shing/ de yang ba spu'i bu ga thams cad na sangs rgyas dpag tu med pa gnas pa/ phyag rnams kyang sang rgyas kyi ngo bo la/ phyag mthil gyi spyen rnams ni gsang sngags kyi lha tshogs su gzigs/*

²¹⁸ Snellgrove gives a valuable overview of the complicated idea of tantric classes. Tibetan compilers of the canon would often have the responsibility of giving authority to the tantras in relation to Śākyamuni's teachings (the early Buddhist teachings of the so-called “first turning of the wheel of the Dharma”), the Mahāyāna teachings (the “second turning”) and the Mind Only Teachings (the “third turning”), arrange them into categories, and often [mis]label them as “sūtras”. Snellgrove notes that in the action and performance tantra categories,

[I]n so far as they are concerned with the correct recitation of magical formulas for the warding off of ills and for the gaining of merit especially from the worship of relics and the rebuilding and repair of stūpas, are easily attributed to Śākyamuni during the course of his last life on earth, especially as this included his visit to the Heaven of the Thirty-three Gods. His miraculous powers were an accepted part of the earliest traditions concerning his teaching and thus there need be nothing to discourage the exhibition of such powers.

See Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 119. However, the third and fourth categories of

tantra, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate among these classes based on the practices as other Tibetan texts also affirm.²¹⁹ Despite the action tantra label, Nun Palmo becomes a buddha-figure, achieves the supreme attainment (*mchog gi dngos grub*),²²⁰ and the ritual texts prescribe both self and front generation. Different views about visualization are also present in other texts associated with Avalokiteśvara.²²¹

The texts also prescribe a concluding ceremony that consists of offerings to

tantras were more difficult to justify in terms of the Buddha's teaching especially regarding achieving buddhahood through consecration and sexual yoga. However, as Snellgrove points out, texts were found to justify these teachings as Buddha activities or Buddha word. For example, all of the acts of Śākyamuni living in the world, from living in a harem to his marriage, prepared him for the act of renunciation leading to enlightenment. See Snellgrove for examples of these texts in *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 122-123, 147-160. In keeping with later developments in the Mahāyāna with the creation of a vast pantheon of deities, and with the Vajrayāna, there was less of an effort to link these teachings strictly to the early traditions; some texts were incorporated into the tradition as "Buddhist" although they did not even have a Buddhist link at all. See Snellgrove for a discussion of these ideas and the various tantras in *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 123-305.

²¹⁹ It is not the case that action tantras do not teach self-generation and therefore practice deity yoga but authors of Tibetan texts are aware that many practitioners are not ready to perform it. See Dalai Lama XIV, Tsong ka pa and Jeffrey Hopkins, *Deity Yoga in Action and Performance Tantra* (Ithaca, NY: George Allen Unwin, 1981), 1-67.

²²⁰ Although the passage above states *bya rgyud* classes in practice, Nun Palmo also seems to have experienced levels from the first two or three categories (action tantra, performance tantra, yoga tantra). Nun Palmo also practiced the two stages of tantric practice, generation (*bskyed rim*) and completion (*rdzogs rim*) stages.

²²¹ In a study regarding a *sgrub thabs* on Avalokiteśvara, the focus is on a "middle position" between the front and self generation visualizations because the practitioner visualizes the buddha figure on top of the head and there is a full identification with that figure. The text is *Thugs rje chen po'i sgom zlas 'gro don mkha' khyab*. See J. Gyatso, "An Avalokiteśvara Sādhana," 267.

deities (and particularly to the deity generated in front of the practitioner) and of effigies (*gtor ma*), ablutions, confessions, and prayers of dismissal of the deities. The rituals end with a prayer describing the benefit generated from the practice.²²²

3.3 Performance of the Rituals in the Hagiographies and in Modern Context

As within the ritual texts, the performance and structure of the ritual in the hagiographies and in current practice (which may not strictly follow the three stage framework described above) vary as well. There is no standard structure except for what is prescribed in the texts. The hagiographies themselves vary in terms of the duration of and types of rituals Nun Palmo performed before being healed.²²³ The practices are all focused mainly on the image and visualization of Avalokiteśvara (and some other secondary figures) and according to Jo gdan's text, should be performed during *sagadawa* for maximum effect.

Findings based on participant-observation of the rituals in Nepal revealed that the duration and types of ancillary practices (not propitiation or fasting) varied greatly

²²² See Zhu chen's *'Phags pa 'jig rten* for a discussion of these practices: *mdun bskyed mchod pa* 33a.6, *bstod cing gsol ba gdab pa* 35a.6, *gtor ma gtong ba* 37b.1, *khros bya ba* 39a.3, *nongs pa bshags shing gshegs su gsol ba* 39b.3, *phan yon bstan pa* 43a.2. Dalai Lama VII's *Thugs rje chen po* varies in terms of the arrangement and inclusion of other prayers like the long life prayer to the Dalai Lama.

²²³ Prescriptions for the duration of fasting vary in the Nun Palmo texts from one and a half years in the hagiographies to an unspecified time in the ritual texts. See *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 17.3-18.2 and Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 5b.2-5. Tibetan monks repeatedly said in Nepal and Tibet that if you have never performed *smyung gnas*, you should begin with the *sagadawa* period.

according to the preferences of the presiding lama or renunciate women, the lineage of the temple, and the individual practitioner. Typically the rituals may last two and a half days to several months, and sometimes they are performed by practitioners for many years. During my time in Nepal, an elaborate event was held during *sagadawa* when many Tibetans (and other ethnic groups as well in Nepal and Tibet) prepare their belongings to take with them and stay at the local temple or monastery that performs the annual fasting ritual to perform it for a period of sixteen days. The sessions were divided into 1.5 day intervals, which included many of the activities described in the last section broken up by one large mid-day meal that prepared practitioners for the next period.

Ethnographic findings revealed several practices. At Svayambhū, Nepal in Skyid grong thugs rje chos gling dgon pa (named after a “nunnery”²²⁴ in Tibet in the Dge lugs pa tradition) where I conducted the bulk of the participation-observation of the rituals, preparation for the rituals began with the arrangement of the altar and creation of images, cleaning of sacred spaces, and pacification rituals for the local deities. They used the Dalai Lama VII’s text. The nuns in this location constructed a mandala²²⁵ of the tutelary deity and arranged the altar offering bowls (usually seven for the mandala deities, the self-generation rite, and the merit field), three *gtor ma* (for

²²⁴ *a ne dgon pa*.

²²⁵ For nuns to be trained in mandala construction is a very rare event in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition but this, as well as Buddhist philosophical and medical training for women, is an example of the changing climate in modern Tibetan culture. I thank Melissa Kerin, who studied these nuns’ training, for introducing me to this temple.

dharma protectors, Avalokiteśvara, and local deities), and the victory and action vases (the latter was placed in front of the practitioner) filled with saffron water and other special substances.

The actual fasting ritual began the next day at dawn with the taking of eight vows in front of the officiating nuns.²²⁶ Then there were separate performances of the vows of purification (*gso shyong*); refuge vows to the four jewels; prostrations and visualizations practices; offerings to the deities; a complete fast of food, drink and even one's saliva; a vow of silence (except for the recitation of prayers); and ablutions (*khirus*). After praying and prostrating three times, the officiating nuns performed an ablution ceremony in which saffron water was poured from a long life vase (*tshe bum*) over a mirror. Each participant was invited to drink a drop of the ablution water which symbolized blessings and purification. This ritual is reminiscent of many scenes in the hagiographies when Nun Palmo was cleansed with ablution water.²²⁷ On this day only

²²⁶ In this temple, there were four officiating nuns.

²²⁷ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 14.18-15.4:

Her brother Indrabhūti held a [long] life vase in [his] right hand;
with [his] left, [he held] a skull filled with food.
He said the following to Nun [Palmo]:

‘Listen sister, Princess Lakṣmīṅkarā.
Listen up to [your] brother’s words today.
[In my] right hand,
inside of the [long] life vase,
there is cleansing water
which removes 18 kinds of leprosy.
This skull in my left [hand],
filled with substances,
is the supreme *samādhi* food of uncontaminated bliss.
Generate strength of wisdom and stand up now!’

one meal was taken at noon. Afterwards, all the participants circumambulated the temple and sacred sites in the surrounding area (some even went home to sleep or invited me over for lunch) and then resumed the activities described above at the temple with a final dedication of merit to all sentient beings and the hungry ghosts.

On the second day, the first session of activities were completed with a feast at noon and a prayer of the dedication of merit was recited for the sake of sentient beings including hungry ghosts (with food left on the side of the plate for them). Then the same sequence of events continued for the duration of the prescribed period. When the 16-day period was coming to an end, a full ground ritual (*sa chog*) and fire ritual were performed before dismantling the mandala, confirming the conclusion of the rituals.

(/ming po in dra buddhi'i phyag g.yas na tshe bum bsnams/ g.yon pas thod pa zas gyis bkang nas dge slong ma la 'di skad ces gsungs so // sring mo nyon dang legs ming dkar lcam ma //de ring ming po'i skad la yar gsan dang // phyag g.yas tshe yi bum pa'i nang shel na // mdze rigs bco brgyad sel ba'i khrus chu yod // g.yon pa thod pa rdzas kyis bkang ba 'di // zag med bde ba'i ting 'dzin zas mchog yin / rig pa ngar skyed da lta yar longs shig / ces gsungs pas/)

See also Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 3a.5-3b.4, which describes how Avalokiteśvara's ablution water from his crystal jug cleansed Nun Palmo's body, speech, and mind like a consecration ceremony.

In the case of the temples in Lhasa (A ne mtshams khung dgon pa, Shug gseb dgon pa, Sera Je's (?) Ham gdong Khang tshan, and Grub thob Lha khang) where I observed these rituals during *sagadawa*, as expected, many of the same arrangements were done and the same ritual text was used in the Dge lugs pa temples. The main exceptions were no construction of a mandala, less elaborate *gtor ma* and food offerings on the altars, and particularly, a distinct difference in gender representation (the latter drew my attention because of the issues of gender that I noticed in the texts).

In the case of gender representation in Kathmandu, Nepal and its surrounding areas, although many individual monks performed the rituals and were considered *smyung gnas pa* (generally, experts of *smyung gnas*), the rituals were most often arranged and performed by renunciate women (*a ne*) in their temples or were the main participants in monasteries. In Skyid grong thugs rje chos gling dgon pa, four *a ne* conducted the ceremony for the renunciate women and laity in the area. This was also the case in two other nunneries, Mkha' spyod Dga' dkyil gling in Bodhnāth and Nga gi dgon pa (belonging to the Bka' brgyud and Rnying ma lineages) located about an hour from the center of Bodhnāth, Nepal in the Shivapuri Mountain area. In the latter, several renunciate women and a few monks performed (along with about 300 Tamang, Nepali, and Tibetan lay persons) the annual 16-day intensive practice of this ritual along with recitation of the hagiographies. In one temple in Svayambhū, Nepal called Dga' ldan bshad grub 'phel rgyas gling, despite monks presiding over the ritual and a few older lay men participating, most of the audience was composed of lay women.

On the other hand, in Lhasa and surrounding areas in Tibet, the five temples that were found to practice the ritual according to the Nun Palmo tradition varied in

terms of gender representation. Despite the performance of the ritual in the three nunneries (A ne mtshams khung dgon pa, Shug gseb dgon pa, and Grub thob Lha khang), many monks presided most of the ceremonies and drew a larger crowd of lay participants of both genders than the nunneries. It is unclear why there is a difference in Lhasa but perhaps economics is a factor and lack of foreign investment in women's temples as in the Nepalese case.

The following chapter will now focus on the rituals' relationship to illness and the cultivation of renunciation.

CHAPTER FOUR

EMERGING WHOLE WITH FASTING: TIBETAN ASCETICISM AND RENUNCIATION

Addio, fratelli lebbrosi, addio!²²⁸

4.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the textual and performative structure of the rituals prescribed by Nun Palmo and her lineage descendants occur with certain teleological and religio-cultural goals in mind. And these concerns are intricately related to the experience of illness. We will now focus on the primary concern of these texts, that of renunciation. As made explicit in the title of the modern hagiography, the goal of the texts is to achieve *nges 'byung* meaning “aversion” or sometimes defined as “renunciation.”²²⁹

On a basic level, aversion in the Buddhist context refers specifically to a rejection of *samsāra*. *Nges 'byung* has another side as well, a Mahāyāna and tantric appreciation of embodiment, an active engagement in the world, and a re-envisioned view of reality made possible through Nun Palmo's turning illness into an opportunity to help others and herself undergo religious experiences through Buddhist practice. With each deconstruction of layers of identity and agency or “telic-decentralization,”

²²⁸ “Goodbye, brother leper, Goodbye!” Andreatta, *Ventidue Anni*, 67.

²²⁹ This term also refers to the third holy truth, the cessation of suffering.

Nun Palmo renounced her physicality and previous identity, and sought a “healing” (physically and spiritually) with the assistance of a tutelary deity. Therefore if leprosy can be seen as a graphic example of the breakdown of the attachment to previous ways of thinking and being, ritual practice may be seen as a direct means through which to transform and reconstruct the “pieces” left over from that previous state into an enlightened re-embodiment. Buddhist practice is the next step in the reassembling process. As in the case of many religious practitioners who had a calling in their lives, Nun Palmo also had to fulfill particular religious goals. The role of ritual or ritual remediation will illuminate this better.

Since one of the contributing causes of illness was karma, physical means are often most effective in combating illness. As is evident in Buddhist and Tibetan religious and medical literature, one needs to counteract action with action. Examples include findings by Schopen who made clear in his study on the medicine Buddha scriptures in the Gilgit context that since the primary etiology of disease is karmatic then the primary cure and prevention were completely consistent with this primary etiology. Melford Spiro in his anthropological discussion of karmatic Buddhism in the Burmese context also refers to the laity resorting to ritual. And as Suzanne Mroziak makes clear in her recent study of the *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, the most effective means to counteract an illness or deformity is Buddhist practice.²³⁰

In order to illuminate the purpose of Buddhist practice in relation to the illness

²³⁰ Suzanne Mroziak, *The Relationship Between Morality and the Body in Monastic Training According to the Śikṣāsamuccaya* (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge: Harvard University, 1998), 45.

condition, this chapter first examines how the particular rituals of fasting and devotion fit into an ascetic framework common to all religious traditions and how this framework contributes to a better understanding of the role of Buddhist practice in these texts. Next, the study draws attention to the point that asceticism in the Nun Palmo texts interacts and is often interdependent with devotion to a deity.²³¹ This devotional aspect of worship (*mchod*) comes close to what the Indian tradition defines as *bhakti*, which refers to an intense worship and longing for a deity. In the Nun Palmo texts, this devotion appears in conjunction with *deity yoga* (*lha'i rnal 'byor*) that occurs in the visualization process.²³² Within a tantric framework, asceticism and devotion are harmonious components of Nun Palmo's practice rather than contrasting

²³¹ Outside of the Buddhist context, this phenomenon is also noticed in the Jain tradition. I thank Professor John E. Cort for giving me his unpublished paper on devotion and asceticism in the Jain tradition. John E. Cort, "Devotion of Asceticism Among Śvetāmbar Mūrtipūjak Jains." Unpublished paper. n.d.

²³² The term *bhakti* derives from the root *bhaj* meaning "to share". We cannot, however, take for granted what this word means in religious contexts. The very multiplicity of interpretation reveals the vast array of theologies present in diverse traditions. In this study, this term, referred to as "devotion," will be broadly conceived to mean respect, attentiveness, and worship to a deity. In the Indian Hindu and Buddhist contexts, *bhakti* concerns a complete submission and emotional worship surrounding particular deities and a merging may occur between devotee and the deity. At the beginning of Clifford Geertz's essay, "Ethos, Worldview, and Analysis of Sacred Symbols," Geertz remarks that the "holy bears within it everywhere a sense of intrinsic obligations: it not only encourages devotion, it demands it; it not only induces intellectual assent, it enforces emotional commitment." See Geertz, "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols." In *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 126. This relationship of obligation between the devotee Nun Palmo and her tutelary deity is certainly present in the texts in this study. For examples of *bhakti* in two diverse religious traditions, see Andrew Schelling, *For Love of the Dark One: Songs of Mirabai* (Prescott, Arizona: Hohm Press, 1998) and Charles Hallisey, *Devotion in the Buddhist Literature of Medieval Sri Lanka* (Ph.D. diss., Chicago: University of Chicago, 1998). See also a collection of essays on *bhakti* traditions in India, Diana L. Eck and Françoise Mallison, ed., *Devotion Divine: Bhakti Traditions from the Regions of India* (Groningen: Egbert Forsten, 1991). The hymns of praise attributed to Nun Palmo, especially in the Tibetan Canon, reflect the devotee's longing for a deity that is typical of *bhakti* devotion in the Indian context.

opposites. This ascetic-devotional mode of practice in the Nun Palmo texts is the necessary step through which to achieve “healing” or transformation in the physical and spiritual senses.

This chapter approaches these issues in two ways. The first discusses how the development of what will be called “asceticism” is of primary concern in these texts. Asceticism provides a framework through which to study the function of fasting and devotion in the texts in this study. The renunciatory and affirmative elements of asceticism are particularly useful to understanding these texts, especially as they portray early Buddhist and tantric elements and illuminate the significance of the roles played by Nun Palmo. In the second, I examine how devotion to the bodhisattva of compassion Avalokiteśvara (in tandem with other ascetic practices) is understood in relation to the illness experience and socio-cultural concerns discussed earlier in the dissertation.

4.2 Asceticism in Religious Traditions

[Asceticism] is a voluntary, sustained, and at least partially systematic program of self-discipline and self-denial in which immediate, sensual or profane gratifications are renounced in order to attain a higher spiritual state or a more thorough absorption in the sacred.²³³

[Asceticism is a] transfiguration rather than a mortification.²³⁴

²³³ Walter Kaelber, “Asceticism.” In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, edited by Mircea Eliade, vol. I (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 441.

²³⁴ Kallistos Ware, “The Way of the Ascetics: Negative of Affirmative?” In *Asceticism*, 13.

Asceticism is an important religious behavior commonly observed throughout the world's religious traditions, often signaling an individual's practice and defining a particular community. Deriving from the Greek word *askēsis* meaning "training," asceticism came to signify a variety of things depending on the contexts. First appearing in Homer meaning "to work" or "fashion" raw materials so as to manufacture handiwork, it came to mean exercise or training both of soldiers and athletes. As Steven Fraade in his article states, "As athletic and military training require both the positive strengthening of one's physical faculties and the negative abstention from weakening habits, so too philosophical and spiritual training require both affirmation and renunciation."²³⁵ These elements of affirmation and renunciation are elaborated upon throughout history. In Greco-Roman antiquity, ascetic practice was regarded as the path to happiness and joy. The Cynics saw rigorous self-denial as "part of askēsis for happiness."²³⁶ According to the Russian orthodox philosopher Nicolas Berdyaev (1873-1948), asceticism means the liberation of the human person, a "concentration of inner forces" and "command of oneself".²³⁷ And in modern times, the sociologist Max Weber describes asceticism in his *Sociology of Religion* as a "methodical procedure for achieving religious salvation."²³⁸ On the socio-cultural

²³⁵ Steve D. Fraade, "Ascetical Aspects of Ancient Judaism." In *Jewish Spirituality from the Bible through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 256.

²³⁶ Vincent L. Wimbush, *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 117.

²³⁷ Donald A. Lowrie, *Christian Existentialism: A Berdyaev Anthology* (London: G. Allen and Unwin, 1965), 86-87.

²³⁸ See Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 164.

side, Richard Valantasis has stated in his studies on this subject that “asceticism functions as a system of cultural formation.”²³⁹ And in terms of the relationship between physicality and asceticism in the Indian context, Patrick Olivelle has argued that the ascetic creation of the body is a deconstruction of the socially-created body and this deconstruction of the body (the physical and social) carries implicit meanings regarding society and socially-sanctioned values.²⁴⁰

These particular examples of affirmative and renunciatory aspects of asceticism are relevant to what is described in Nun Palmo narratives and ritual texts because Nun Palmo is presented as both transcendent and immanent. World-negating and world-affirming aspects are often found in Indian religions and are central to Buddhist Mahāyāna and tantric traditions. Asceticism will be studied in these texts as a strategy of empowerment. Not only is the focus on discipline and cleansing in these texts but also on active engagement in a re-envisioned world and an enlightened re-embodiment.

²³⁹ Richard Valantasis, “A Theory of the Social Function of Asceticism.” In *Asceticism*, 547.

²⁴⁰ See Olivelle, “Deconstruction of the Body,” 188-210. Olivelle disputes academic scholarship that has often argued that asceticism is a major component of Indian religions simply because of their world-negating aspects. See Louis Dumont, “World Renunciation in Indian Religions.” In *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 4 (1960): 33-62; J.C. Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Traditions: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship, and Society* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1985); and T.N. Madan, *Non-Renunciation: Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

4.3 Fasting as An Ascetic Practice in the Nun Palmo Accounts

The closest Tibetan equivalent term for the word “asceticism” is *dka' thub* meaning “capable of [enduring] difficulties.” In the Buddhist and Tibetan traditions, practitioners from monastics, hermits, to the laity have endured various forms of challenges on a physical and mental level for religious goals. In Nun Palmo contexts, the training of ascetic qualities expressed through fasting and devotion completes the transformative, that is, healing process.

In terms of fasting, various types are often practiced in religious traditions. Many motives intermingle in both individual and corporate fasts, and as scholars have made clear about the Christian, Hindu, and Newar traditions, fasting practice often attracts the female gender.²⁴¹ Fasting could be a religious preparation and intercession for union with the divine or for liberation, purification of past transgressions or exorcism of evil spirits, a penitential exercise, a way of expressing mourning, a means to coerce the gods, and to ensure fertility among many other reasons. A mid-fourth century treatise for virgins by an author referred to as Pseudo-Athanasius is

²⁴¹ Of course diverse theologies impact on the reasons for the performance of fasting rites by women. For example, Caroline Walker Bynum was concerned about food-related religious practices and of food images in the piety of medieval women (unlike what we see in the texts in this study and Buddhist traditions) especially as they relate to the Eucharist. See the following for fasting practices in diverse traditions: Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); McGee, Mary, *Feasting and Fasting: The Vrata Traditions and Its Significance for Hindu Women* (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge: Harvard University [1987] 1989); Anne Mackenzie Pearson, *'Because it Gives Me Peace of Mind': Functions and Meanings of Vrats in the Religious Lives of Hindu Women in Banaras* (Ph.D. diss., Hamilton, Canada: McMaster University, 1992); and Lewis, “Mahāyāna Vratas in Newar Buddhism.” In *Journal for the International Association for Buddhist Studies*, vol. 12 (1) (1989): 109-138.

particularly relevant to the views in this study. It states:

Fastingcures disease, dries up bodily humors, puts demons to flight, gets rid of impure thoughts, makes the mind clearer, and the heart purer....²⁴²

For Tibetans, fasting rituals have been an important part of religious life for centuries throughout Inner and East Asia including Tibet, China, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim, Ladakh, Mongolia as well as in diaspora in the West.²⁴³ The collected writings of many of Tibet's great lamas include fasting rituals and many ritual texts concern fasting of some type and duration. Although there are several fasting rituals in the Tibetan tradition, the fasting ritual according to Nun Palmo is the one most often recited and practiced.

It is common for fasting rituals to incorporate and intersect with a wide range of practices, both ritual and ethical. These practices include prescriptions and injunctions on worship, speech and silence, sleep, clothing, sexual activity, food, offering, story-telling, singing, the creation of a ritual act, and pilgrimage. They also incorporate devotional activities toward a particular deity and prescribe vows.

As an ascetic ritual, the Tibetan fasting practice consists of disciplinary and challenging exercises of self-denial of food and speech meant to assist the practitioner achieve a transformative state. The ascetic exercises in the Tibetan ritual are meant to

²⁴² Herbert Musurillo in his "The Problem of Ascetical Fasting in the Greek Patristic Writers." In *Traditio* 12 (1956): 17 n. 43 cites and translates a passage from [Pseudo-] Athanasius' *De virginitate*.

²⁴³ See Matthieu Ricard, tr., *The Life of Shabkar: The Autobiography of a Tibetan Yogin* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 32, 109, 24, 468, 508, 526, 552.

reshape and transform the individual in body, speech, and mind, and in advanced meditation practices, to effect a transformation into a purified being, therefore, certain physical, verbal, and oral exercises need to be mastered. As explained in more detail in Chapter Three, for example, the practitioner undergoes a series of full-body or half-body prostrations in front of sacred images and sites, circumambulations around these same items, and makes offerings. With restrictions on food and drink including one's saliva, the sense of control over one's bodily functions and needs are enforced.

Verbally, the practitioner must take a vow of silence while at the same time, chanting, reciting, and praying only the words of the Buddhas and prayers in praise of the lineage gurus of the particular community in question. On the mental level, the practitioner must visualize the deities in gradual increments until the practitioner and the deity are conjoined. Through these exercises, Nun Palmo (and the practitioner) is able to develop renunciation or literally aversion (*nges 'byung*) to *samsāra* (the cycle of rebirth) and to her physicality and previous ways of thinking about reality.

Therefore a certain measure of ascetic self-denial was thus a necessary step for Nun Palmo to undertake. Without this ascetic concentration of effort the practitioner is at the mercy of exterior forces or her own emotions and moods, reacting rather than acting.

The Tibetan fasting ritual specifically is also one of many occasions in which lay people are permitted to participate for a time in the local monastery or temple by undertaking ascetic vows incumbent upon monastics and in some instances, staying in the monastic compounds for the duration of the rite. As discussed earlier, Tibetans will gather during specific time periods at the local monastery and, as is typical of

Buddhists everywhere, observe the eight vows or precepts, and spend the day praying, making offerings, and listening to religious discourse. This is also a social gathering.

In the Nun Palmo texts, the practice of fasting interacts with devotion. Nun Palmo reveres a particular deity who will eventually lead her to an enlightened state. This devotional aspect also reflects the tantric element of the texts and the affirmative aspect of asceticism, that is, liberation comes in the form of engagement in the world and Nun Palmo and her deity are examples of this engagement. The next section examines the role of Avalokiteśvara in the completion of the transformative process including the positive valuation of embodiment.

4.4 Devotion and Fasting: Catalysts for Transformation

Homage to the Lord of the World.
The Bhagavan who has an intuitive understanding
[of each and every aspect of] the knowable without exception,
who has loving-kindness for all beings as his only child,
and possesses Buddha activity,
which is spontaneous and unceasing [in its] flow.
Homage to the protector Spyān ras gzigs.²⁴⁴

The wisdom-being of my self-visualization melts into the front visualization.
On top of my head appears the nun Lakṣmī,
dressed as a renunciate.
With her two hands pressed together at her heart,
she asks for intercession.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 1.1-2a.1: *namo lokaśvarāya shes bya ma lus mkhyen pa'i bcom ldan 'das // 'gro ba kun la bu gcig lta bur brtse // lhun grub rgyun mi 'chad pa'i phrin las can// mgon po spyān ras gzigs la phyag 'tshal lo//*

²⁴⁵ This is translated by R. Jackson in "A Fasting Ritual," 285-286. This quote derives from another ritual text entitled *Spyān ras gzigs zhal bcu gcig pa'i smyung gnas kyi cho ga shin tu*

Although there are a number of deities that appear in the Nun Palmo texts cultically, all the Nun Palmo hagiographies and ritual texts concern the worship of Avalokiteśvara. Appearing in visions, as a moving icon,²⁴⁶ as a tutelary deity for rituals of propitiation, and encasing Nun Palmo's relics in Zhwa lu monastery, Avalokiteśvara is central to the religious development and transformation of Nun Palmo and her lineage-holders. He appears in a number of forms but predominantly as Ekādaśamukha.²⁴⁷

bsdus pa bdud rtsi thigs pa by Thu'u bkwan Blo bzang chos kyi nyi ma (1737-1802).

²⁴⁶ 'Od dpag rdo rje, *Thugs rje chen po*, 23.2-3: "The image of the Lord Spyān ras gzigs, having arisen from its throne, came forth" (*jo bo spyān ras gzigs kyi sku de gdan khri las 'phags nas byung bas*)

²⁴⁷ There are several examples from the text of this form of the bodhisattva, for example, see Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 3b.3-4: "[Indrabhūti said], You must be with intense reverence and devotion to the Eleven-faced One, the essence of all the Buddhas of the three times." (*dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyi ngo bo zhal bcu gcig pa la mos gus drag tu gyis shig gsungs nas*) Passage 6b.3-5 states:

On the eighth day,
she witnessed the face of the majority of the *kriyā* tantra deities
such as five Amoghapaśa deities and so forth,
On the fifteenth day,
she witnessed the countenance of the Eleven-faced One
endowed with a thousand hands and a thousand eyes,

(*tshes brgyad la don zhags lha lnga la sogs kri ya'i lha phal che ba'i zhal gzigs/ bco lnga la zhal bcu gcig pa phyag stong spyān stong dang ldan pa'i zhal gzigs shing/*)

Dge slong ma dpal mo text also states: "[They] brought her to Ling khar[a] śrī gtsug Temple [where] inside there was an Eleven-faced Spyān ras gzigs." (*ling khar[a] śrī gtsug lha khang 'phags pa bcug zhal bzhugs pa'i lha khang nang bskyal nas.../*) See *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 16.9-10. Nun Palmo describes the eleven-faced form in the visualization manual: *Dge slong ma Dpal mo*, *Rje btsun 'phags pa spyān ras gzigs*, Toh. no. 2737, folios 126.6-125a.3. In her praise of Avalokiteśvara, she describes his attributes and gestures in *Dge slong ma Dpal mo*, *'Phags pa spyān ras gzigs*, Toh. no. 2739, fol. 126b.1-2.

As is typical of Buddhist texts, the Nun Palmo ritual and hagiographic texts explicitly call upon the intercession of a deity, in this case, Avalokiteśvara, or have him appear to assist the ailing Nun Palmo because of his healing capacity.²⁴⁸ The modern hagiography written at the behest of Bla ma Rab brtan describes him as the physician, and his mantra, the medicine.²⁴⁹ Nun Palmo herself reflects upon his bodhisattvic qualities as a healer:

Your face is beautiful like the full moon.
 Your eyes are pleasingly expansive like the best lotus petals.
 Fragrant and white as a snowy conch shell,
 You hold a glowing [rosary] of pure pearls.
 You are adorned by the lovely red light rays of dawn,
 Like a lotus lake, your hands exude nectar,
 Youthful one, your complexion like an autumn cloud,
 Many jewels adorn your shoulders.
 The palms of your hands are soft and young like new leaves.

 Your navel is soft like a lotus petal.

 Source of eternal bliss, you cure old age and illness.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Reminiscent of medical terminology, the Buddha (or any of the bodhisattvas) are often described as the physician, the Dharma as the medicine, and the *saṃgha* as the nurses. See Tatz, tr., *Buddhism and Healing*, 14-18, 31-35

²⁴⁹ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 20.8-9:

The Lama said,
 ‘The doctor who attended me was the Holy Spyan ras gzigs.
 The medicine that was given [to me]
 was the six syllable mantra [*om maṇi padme huṃ*].’

(*bla ma*’i *zhal nas/ nga drung* ‘*tsho* ‘*phags pa spyan ras gzigs bsten/ sman yi ge drug pa btang ba yin gsungs/*)

²⁵⁰ *Dge slong ma Dpal mo*, *Phags pa spyan ras gzigs*, Toh. no. 2738, folios 125b.4-126a.1, 250: *zhal ras rgyas pa zla ba lta bur mdzes pa po/ spyan gyi padma mchog tu bzang zhing yangs pa po/ kha ba dung ltar rnam dkar dri ngad ldan pa po/ dri med ‘od chags mu tig tshom bu ‘dzin pa po/ mdzes pa’i ‘od zer skya renga dmar pos brgyan pa po/ padma’i mtshe ltar phyag ni mngar bar byas pa po/ ston ka’i sprin gyi mdog dang ldan zhing gzhon pa po/*

Fasting ritual texts also equate this deity with healing in a broad sense. Dalai Lama

VII's text states:

May the Thousand-armed One,
the guide from the state of bad migration,

*rin chen mang pos dpung pa gnyis ni brgyan pa po/ lo ma'i mchog ltar phyag mthil gzhon
zhing 'jams pa po/..../lte ba'i ngos ni padma'i 'dabs ltar 'jam pa po/..../rtag tu bde ba 'byung
gnas rga nad sel ba po*

Note that the passage has a *bhakti*-like quality. Every aspect of the deity is described and appreciated. This language is reminiscent of devotional poems to deities in Vaiṣṇavite communities, for example. The female Rājapūt devotee Mirabai's (1516-1546) poems, also understood on multiple levels, are meant to convey her devotion to Krishna:

I look for the Dark-one,
I found his image in my heart,
I stood in his court,
my life in his hands,
only his medicine healed.

In the end, Mirabai merged with her beloved deity, who was in the form of a statue. See Louise Landes Levi, *Sweet On My Lips: The Love Poems of Mirabai* (New York: Cool Grove Press, 1997), 37.

alleviate the sufferings of all six migrations
 by emanating and collecting light rays generated from his holy body.
 And care for beings with his holy mind of wisdom, mercy, and power.
 May I be born within a thousand-petalled lotus in Sukhāvātī,
 the supreme blissful Pure Land where the word ‘suffering’ does not exist.²⁵¹

Another ritual text is also clear about the effects of the devotional process:

Om I prostrate to the protector of the world.
 The One praised by the supramundane world

 I prostrate to the protector of the three worlds

 The one who is the source of all happiness,
 who clears up aging and disease.
 The one who has put the three realms behind him
 and shows the practice
 [for attaining the pure land] of Vajrayoginī.
 The one who liberates by practicing [love, compassion, joy and equanimity].²⁵²

²⁵¹ This passage was translated by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, *Nyung Nā*, 175 from Dalai Lama VII, *Thugs rje chen po*, folios 53b.5-54a.1. *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 17.14-20 has a similar passage that states:

‘Great Compassionate Holy One,
 The Power of the Supreme Holy Lord Spyan ras gzigs.
 May you behold limitless sentient beings.
 May you save them from unbearable suffering.
 May you heed their supplication and may you lead [those] sinners to liberation.’
 Three times [she utters the mantra], ‘Om maṇi padme huṃ.’
 Twice, [she utters], ‘Om maṇi padme huṃ.’
 She supplicated, ‘[You who are an] omniscient tutelary deity, Great Compassionate One. Please deliver [us] from the narrow passage of fear of the *bar do* and bring [us] to the pure and perfectly enlightened Buddhahood.’

(‘*phags pa thugs rje chen po // ‘phags mchog spyan ras gzigs dbang // mtha’ med sems can gzigs shig / mi bzod sdug bsngal las skyobs shog / gsol ba btab pa la dgongs te // sdig can thar pa la drongs shig / Om mani pad me huṃ / lan gsum / om mani pad me huṃ / lan gnyis / yi dam thugs rje chen po mkhyen no // bar do ‘jigs pa’i phrang las drang du gsol // yang dag rdzogs sangs rgyas sa ru skyol // zhes gsol ba ‘debs pa las/*)

²⁵² According to Roger Jackson, it is in remembrance of Nun Palmo that participants in the fasting ritual imagine that the Long Request Prayer is recited by her. See his “A Fasting Ritual,” 285-286.

In these texts, devotion must be coupled with an ascetic practice in order to effect a transformation.²⁵³ Note an example from the modern hagiography:

Doing the fast,
one day she [cut off] food.
one day, she [cut off] speech.
In meditation, she said the praises of the Holy One
with intense fortitude and diligence
.....
Due to the compassion of the Holy One,
Nun Palmo departed and attained the rainbow body.²⁵⁴

The passage above stresses the intentionality of the act of fasting. Nun Palmo in this stage takes control over her healing process by actively engaging in the act of detachment in the form of fasting. She regains her sense of agency which in effect transforms her situation.

In fasting, Nun Palmo engages in visualization practices that focus on the transformation of the cognitive and spiritual level of the practitioner. As Janet Gyatso states:

Another assumption underlying *sādhana* practice is that the manifest features of the buddha figure so depicted in the text--that is, its iconography, its mantras, and the descriptions of its state of mind--precisely reflect the figure's enlightenment state as such, and thus are efficacious tools to effect the desired

²⁵³ In the modern text on page 14.8, the etymology of the name of the temple Ling kha ra śrī gtsug sbrum that Nun Palmo must go to meet the image of Avalokiteśvara is unclear but the possible meaning of some of its terms is revealing for this study on illness and the role of Avalokiteśvara as healer. *Sbrum bu* is associated with the term '*brum pa* meaning "pock or postule" or "small pox" (as in the *Rgyud bzhi*). See Tsewang J. Tsarong, *Fundamentals of Tibetan Medicine* (Dharamsala: Tibetan Medical Center, 1981), 104.

²⁵⁴ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 17.4-6, 18.1-2: /...smyung gnas gnang nas / nyi ma gcig za ma / nyi ma gcig ngag byed nas / thugs dam la 'phags pa'i bstod pa snying stobs brtson 'grus drag po'i sgo nas 'di ltar gsungs pa /.../ 'phags pa'i thugs rjes dge slong ma dpal mo phung po 'ja' lus grub nas tshe 'di la mkha' spyod du gshegs pa yin no//

transformation from imagined identity to reality.²⁵⁵

This attitude is articulated in several instances in the ritual texts in this study. For example, Dalai Lama VII's ritual text presents the following visualizations during the empowerment ceremony (*dbang*):

Again rays of light radiate from the Hriḥ at one's heart,
invoking the empowering deities:
the five (buddha) families with Amitābha as their principal,
together with their retinues

.....
Requested thus, the Goddess dressed in White and the others who are emitted
from the (tathāgatha's) heart hold aloft vases with nectar and say:

Just as at the very time of birth,
The devas offered ablution (to the Buddha),
So do I, with pure divine water,
Offer ablution to the holy body
and bestow the empowerment.
Thereby, the entire body is filled and all the defilements are purified.
From a transformation of the excess water remaining on the crown,
the head becomes adorned with Amitābha
--the very nature of one's guru--
on the crown, Akṣobhya on the forehead,
Ratnasambhāva behind the right ear,
Vairocana at the back,
and Amoghasiddhi behind the left ear.
On a moon cushion at one's heart is the exalted wisdom being,
Ārya Avalokiteśvara,
with a white-colored holy body,
one face and two hands.
The right (hand is in the mūdra of) bestowing sublime (realizations)
and the left holds a lotus (at his heart).²⁵⁶

This practice of visualization, focused on devotion to Avalokiteśvara while heavily engaged in other ascetic activities, creates a positive, world-affirming attitude toward

²⁵⁵ J. Gyatso, "An Avalokiteśvara Sādhana," 266.

²⁵⁶ Zopa Rinpoche, tr., *Nyung Nā*; 95-97, Dalai Lama VII, *Thugs rje chen po*, folios 24a.6-24b.3, 24b.4-25a.6.

the body and advocates the physical transformations possible from the practice.

The new attitude toward the body also becomes evident in the hagiographic texts as Nun Palmo struggles to attempt to practice fasting and devotion to her deity in her deteriorating state:

Having meditated on the Eleven-faced One
throughout the day and night,
when one year passed,
the entire illness of her body shed
like the skin of a snake
and disappeared.
Her right hand was also restored and
her body became even more beautiful
than it was before leprosy appeared.
Sound *samādhi* was produced in her [mind] stream.²⁵⁷

There are a number of themes that are significant in this passage. First, this passage must be read in relation to the illness experience discussed earlier. Here Nun Palmo has regained her right hand, and therefore regained a purified state as well as a sense of human agency. Secondly, the phrase, “the entire illness of [her] body shed like the skin of a snake” draws attention to the theme of reincarnation or transformation. The physical state is not suppressed but re-envisioned.

This re-envisioned view of the physical state points to the more tantric element of the texts, that is, a positive view of the body (even a female body) and the use of the body as a means of transformation. Two examples in tantric texts reflect these ideas more explicitly. As the tantric yogin Saraha sings:

²⁵⁷ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 5b.4-.6a.1: *nyin mtshan khor yug tu zhal bcu gcig pa la thugs dam du mdzad nas lo gcig lon pa'i tshe lus kyi nad thams cad sbrul gyi shun pa bud pa bzhin du song/phyag g.yas pa yang sor chud cing sku lus ni mdze ma byung ba'i dus las kyang mtshar bar gyur/ ting nge 'dzin bzang po rgyud la skyes/*

Don't concentrate on yourself,
 restricting your breath...
 O fool, hold fast to the Innate,
 And abandon the clinging bonds of existence.
 Bring together in thought the restless waves of breath,
 Then know the true nature of the Innate,
 And this becomes still of itself.
 When the mind goes to rest
 And the bonds of the body are destroyed,
 Then the one flavor of the Innate pours forth,
 And there is neither outcaste nor brahmin.
 Here is the sacred Jumna and here the River Ganges,....
 here are the Sun and Moon.
 I have visited in my wanderings shrines and other places of pilgrimage
 But I have not seen another shrine like my own body.²⁵⁸

The *Hevajra Tantra* states directly:

In the absence of a body how could there be bliss?....
 Likewise without form and so on bliss could not be perceived.
 I am what exists, yet I am not what exists;
 I am the Enlightened One because I know things for what they are.²⁵⁹

In the modern hagiography, one scene shows that Nun Palmo attains a rainbow body,
 signifying a liberative state after singing praises to Avalokiteśvara.²⁶⁰ This extra-
 human transformation is prevalent throughout many versions of the hagiographies.
 Metaphorically, Nun Palmo cut her attachment to her old state of mind and being, and
 emerged divinely restored.

There are many examples in the hagiographies themselves that heavily focus
 on the re-embodiment theme. Instead of renunciation and negative views of the body,

²⁵⁸ Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 289.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., from *Hevajra Tantra*, II. ii. 35-38.

²⁶⁰ As mentioned earlier, this refers to a passage in *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 18.1-2.

(particularly that of the female gender) in order to reflect Buddhist ideas of attachment and impermanence, symbolized by the deteriorating body due to the effects of leprosy; the Nun Palmo texts now change venue. The focus is on re-embodiment instead of fragmentation. Nun Palmo also remains female in a transfigured body. The body is valorized and gendered without jeopardizing renunciation or creating impurity.

For example, in addition to Nun Palmo being explicitly called a *sprul sku*²⁶¹ in the hagiographies, she also is an eighth stage bodhisattva²⁶² as the text below describes:

In the *saga* month
 [at the time of the constellation] *sa ri nam mthongs*,
 the interfering demons were placed in the state of *bodhicitta*.
 [Nun Palmo's] illness, sins, and defilements were purified
 and she saw the truth of the first *bhūmi*.
 On the first day of *sa ga zla ba*,
 she witnessed the countenance of the Holy Tārā
 and [Tārā] prophesized,
 'Buddha activities of all the Buddhas

²⁶¹ The Tibetan term *sprul sku* literally means "emanation" (*sprul pa*) and "body" (*sku*). Another hagiography identifies Nun Palmo as this figure: *Sprul sku Dge slong ma Dpal mo'i rnam thar le'u brgyad pa* [*The Eighth Chapter: The Hagiography of the Tulku Nun Palmo*] (Kathmandu, Nepal: Nepal-German Manuscript Preservation Project microfilm), running no. 216, reel no. AT 46/2, folios 1-60. Unfortunately the author, date, and exact title of this text is unknown because of the poor condition of the colophon of the manuscript copy. The text is in *dbu med* script and is thus far the longest version of all the hagiographies.

²⁶² The bodhisattva stages concern the paths of higher meditation to buddhahood. The first six are the six perfections. There are different ways in which these stages were discussed in texts from the various traditions. See Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, 75. As a bodhisattva, Nun Palmo seems to have attained the level of cessation (*nirodha*) and also the status of active engagement in the world to profess compassionate activities. See, for example, Makransky's discussion of Buddhahood, regarding the paradox of "meditative equipoise on thusness" and periods of altruistic activity (particularly, non-abiding *nirvāṇa* or *apratiṣṭhita nirvāṇa*) and the stages of enlightenment (*bhūmi*) in *Buddhahood Embodied: Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 97; 45, 48-49, 76, 79-80, 99, 332.

of the three times are consolidated in you.’
 On the eighth day,
 she witnessed the majority of the *kriyā* tantra deities
 such as five Amoghapaśa deities and so forth.
 On the fifteenth day,
 she witnessed the countenance of the Eleven-faced One
 endowed with a thousand hands
 and a thousand eyes and furthermore,
 countless Buddhas in all the pores of the body,
 the hands also being the quintessence of Buddhahood.
 On the eyes on the palms of the hands,
 she witnessed a host of tantric deities.
 Since the holy one talked about the Dharma,
 inconceivable *samādhi* arose in [her].
 She saw the truth of the eighth *bhūmi*.
 Then moreover she practiced the fasting ritual
 for three months more for the sake of all sentient beings.²⁶³

Nun Palmo is also described as a *mkha’ ‘gro ma*, the head of a retinue of *mkha’ ‘gro ma*, and having these figures as intermediaries and guides during her religious development as in the two passages below:

Seven red *mkha’ ‘gro ma* wearing flowers
 appeared in front [of her] and said,
 ‘When [you] obtain your highest realization,
 we will also be at the head of your entourage
 and serve as protectors of the teaching.’
 Since [she asked], ‘Of what lineage are you of *mkha’ ‘gro ma* ?’
 [They said], ‘We are the *mkha’ ‘gro ma* of the lotus family.
 A little while ago, we have come from Orgyan.

²⁶³ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 6a.6-7a.2: *sa ga sa ri nam mthongs kyi zla ba la bar du gcod pa’i bgegs rnams byang chub kyi sems la bkod/ nad dang sdig sgrib rnams byang ste/ sa dang po’i bden pa mthong/ sa ga zla ba’i tshes geig la rje btsun sgrol ma’i zhal gzigs te/ dus gsum sangs rgyas thams cad kyi phrin las nyid la ‘dus so zhes lung bstan/ tshes brgyad la don zhags lha lnga la sogs kri ya’i lha phal che ba’i zhal gzigs/ bco lnga la zhal bcu geig pa phyag stong spyang stong dang ldan pa’i zhal gzigs shing/ de yang ba spu’i bu ga thams cad na sangs rgyas dpag tu med pa gnas pa/ phyag rnams kyang sang rgyas kyi ngo bo la/ phyag mthil gyi spyang rnams ni gsang sngags kyi lha tshogs su gzigs/ ‘phags pas chos gsungs pas ting nge ‘dzin bsam gyis mi khyab pa rgyud la skyas/ sa brgyad pa’i bden pa mthong ngo// de nas yang sems can thams cad kyi don du smyung gnas zla ba gsum mdzad de/*

Tomorrow, after you have gone to Orgyan,
 [you] will be made the head of the *mkha'* 'gro ma.'²⁶⁴
 Here in front of her were five smiling ladies
 endowed with white, yellow, red, and green scarves,
 not saying anything whatsoever to Nun [Palmo].
 Then from the nun's mouth,
 she sang this song [in] which she says,
 'Where are you five ladies from?
 All of you five ladies who are endowed with beauty,
 from what region are you from? East, south, west, and north.
 From where are you from?
 The surface of the earth, underground or space.
 Of what good family lineage are you daughters?
 I ask you, who are endowed with beauty and splendor, to explain.'

Then the five ladies circled like dancers
 revolving as in the manner of dancing a Nepalese dance,
 one [of the ladies] glides into the center
 and the [other] four surround the edges.
 The middle lady said thus:
 'She is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the vajra family.
 She is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the ratna family.
 She is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the lotus family.
 She is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the karma family.
 I am the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the Buddha family.
 We are the supreme mothers of the five Buddha families.
 We were sent by Siddha Lwavapa
 from the palace of Śrī Parvata Pad ma bkod pa.'
 [The Siddha Lwavapa said to us] 'That Nun Palmo, [who is] our sister,
 call [her] by name and bring [her] to the abode of the deity.'
 'We are messengers who are reporting [to] you, Nun [Palmo].'²⁶⁵

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 5a.1-5: *mkha'* 'gro ma dmar mo me tog gi thod bcings can bdun mdun du byung nas/ khyod kyi[s] mchog gi dngos grub thob pa na/ nged rnams kyang 'khor gyi thog mar mchis te bka' srung bgyid to zhes zer/ khyed rnams gang gi rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin byas pas/ nged rnams pad ma'i rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin/ da ci o[rg]yan nas ongs/ sang res nyid kyang o[rg]yana du byon nas mkha' 'gro ma rnams kyi gtso mo mdzad par gda' zer ro//

²⁶⁵ Dge slong ma dpal mo, 15.11-16.7: *sku mdun nas tshur dar dkar ser dmar ljang ldan pa'i bu mo lnga zhal 'dzum dang bcas te dge slong ma la cang mi smra bar bzhugs pa dang / de nas dge slong ma'i shal nas khyed bu mo lnga po gang nas yin zer ba'i mgur 'di gsungs so // mtshar sdug ldan pa'i bu mo khyed lnga po // shar lho nub byang sa phyogs gang nas yin //sa steng sa 'og bar snang gang nas yin //pha ma rigs bzang su yi sras mo dag / mtshar sdug 'od dang ldan pas bshad du gsol // ces gsungs pa dang / de nas bu mo lnga pos gar 'cham pa'i tshul du gzhas ma sgor ba lta bu / bal mo 'cham pa ltar / gcig gis dbus la 'dzul / bzhi'i mtha'*

The *mkha'* 'gro ma figure is a common occurrence in these hagiographies. The literal meaning of the Tibetan term *mkha'* 'gro ma²⁶⁶ ("sky goer") reflects the common depiction in texts of a female figure who is able to fly through the sky and appears floating. Often in scholarly literature, the term has been used to refer to real, imagined, and mythical feminine figures in a variety of roles as deity, *yoginī*, wife, consort, intermediary or messenger, and enlightened teacher. Sanskrit literature draws attention to her affinity to flesh-eating females called *mātrkā* (literally meaning "mother"), known to cause havoc to children and pregnant woman and to women who congregate in sacred sites. This latter association has affinity to the *srin mo* figure in Tibetan literature.²⁶⁷ This figure has also been described as taking diverse forms: outer-outer, outer, inner, and secret, the latter two may not be anthropomorphic in form.²⁶⁸

skor te / dbyangs snyan pa'i tshul gyis yul gyi lo rgyus 'di ltar zhus so // mo rdo rje rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin // mo rin chen rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin // mo pad ma rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin // mo las kyi rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin // nged bud dha rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin // rgyal ba rigs lnga'i yum mchog yin // dpal ri pad ma bkod pa'i pho brang nas // grub thob la lba pa yis biang ba yin // nged sring mo dge slong dpal mo de // ming nas 'bod de lha yi gnas su khyol // khyod dge slong zhu ba'i pho nya yin // zhes dbus kyi bu mo des 'di ltar zhus pas/

²⁶⁶ This term may be associated with the term *mkha' spyod ma* ("sky-user"). Giuseppe Tucci derives the Sanskrit term *dākinī* from the root *dai* meaning "to fly". See his "On Swāt: The Dards and Connected Problems." In *East and West* 27 (1977): 69, n. 96. The semantic ambiguity of the Sanskrit term *dākinī* makes it difficult to define this word in any definitive way.

²⁶⁷ This figure is discussed in J. Gyatso, "Down With the Demoness: Reflections on a Feminine Ground in Tibet." In *Tibet Journal* 12.4 (1987): 34-46.

²⁶⁸ Scholarly literature notes a number of possible definitions for this term and the forms she may take in canonical and other Indian and tantric literature. See Adelheid Herrmann-Pfandt, *Dākinīs: zur Stellung und Symbolik des Weiblichen im tantrischen Buddhismus* (Bonn: India

As a *mkha' 'gro ma*, the two levels of manifestation described earlier is evident and again reiterate the role this figure plays in Tibetan and Indian literatures.

Jo gdan's text describes Nun Palmo in two manifestations:

[Nun Palmo] cut off her own head,
 since she placed it on her monastic staff and danced,
 now the people,
 having realized that she was one who attained spiritual realization,
 all requested a blessing and obtained a realization as well.
 Moreover, externally [she] was Nun Palmo.
 Internally, [she] was the Holy Rdo rje Rnal 'byor ma. [Dākinī Vajrayoginī]²⁶⁹

In this passage, Nun Palmo appearing in the divine form of a *mkha' 'gro ma* dancing signifies that she herself becomes the embodiment of the Buddhist concept of renunciation. As is typical of the iconographic features of Rdo rje rnal 'byor ma, it is

et Tibetica-Verlag, 1990), 143-44, n.15; David Kinsley, *Hindu Goddesses: Visions of the Divine Feminine in the Hindu Religious Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 151-60; Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism: Indian Buddhist and Their Tibetan Successors*, vol. I (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1987), 167-170; and Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism* (Boston: Shambhala, 2002). See also J. Gyatso, *Apparitions of the Self*, 243-264 for extensive references. Judith Simmer-Brown's work on *dākinī* describes in detail the distinctive outer, inner, and secret forms these figures may take.

²⁶⁹ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 7a.5-7b.1: *khong rang gi dbu bcad nas mkhar bsil la bkal te gar mdzad pas/ bzod mi rnams kyis grub pa thob par shes nas thams cad kyis byin rlabs zhus shing dngos grub kyang thob bo// de yang phyi ltar dge slong ma dpal mo// nad ltar rje btsun rdo rje rnal 'byor ma'o//*

Rje btsun Rdo rje Rnal 'byor ma's common manifestation is as a meditational deity (*yi dam*), in which she appears in the classical dancing (*bro brdung*) *mkha' 'gro ma* form with her staff (*tse sum*, *khaṭvāṅga*). This figure is important in all the tantric lineages of Tibet and is said to have directly transmitted her teachings through the siddhas Nāropa, Maitripa, and Indrabhūti. She is particularly connected with *Anuttarayoga Tantra* (*rnal 'byor bla na med kyi rgyud*), the highest of the four orders of tantra. See Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Guide to Dakini Land: A Commentary To The Highest Yoga Tantra Practice of Vajrayoginī* (London: Tharpa Publications, 1991) and Judith Simmer-Brown, *Dakini's Warm Breath*, 116-160, 234-264 for information on this. These details are significant because of Nun Palmo's association in the hagiographies with an Indrabhūti and the possible affiliation with a Kashmirian woman by the name of Dpal mo who wrote *Anuttarayoga Tantras*.

implied in the passage that she also appears wielding a hooked knife (*ltab gri*) which she uses to cut off her head. The metaphorical value of this knife is not missed: this ritual implement and meditation tool is used intentionally to cut off self-centered states in human beings and their preconceived notions about reality.

Moreover, Nun Palmo in this passage reveals two forms that a *mkha'* *'gro ma* takes: the human ("emanation body," *sprul sku, nirmāṇakāya*) and wisdom or enlightened ("enjoyment body," *longs spyod pa'i sku, sambhogakāya*) forms. She is not only the suffering Nun Palmo but also the head of a retinue of *mkha'* *'gro ma* both meant to transform practitioners in their religious quests. Nun Palmo enacts the healing process of others and she is transformed from the role of outcaste patient-leper to that of physician and teacher to a community.

Overall, these embodiments show that asceticism is not only world-denying but also world-affirming. Nun Palmo experiences a "liminal state" if you will (as Victor Turner would state)²⁷⁰ through her experience of illness, which is followed by a return (in which the ascetic acts as a spiritual guide and helps others reveal their own innate Buddhature). Here the ascetic functions within a re-envisioned world, re-envisioned in terms of her new state as a teacher and guide. In these texts, Nun Palmo thus reveals both her transcendence from and immanence in the world.

This re-envisioned view also reflects a positive attitude toward female embodiment especially exemplified by an enlightened, healed pure state. The latter

²⁷⁰ Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (London: Routledge & Kegan Hall, 1969).

passage just discussed draws attention to the fact that Nun Palmo is the embodiment of other female deities and vice versa. This is made explicit with her being equated with Vajrayoginī. In the *Caṇḍamahāroṣaṇa tantra*, Vajrayoginī states that all women participate in her divine form:

Wherever in the world a female body is seen,
That should be recognized as my holy body.²⁷¹

One passage from a fasting ritual text pointed out earlier also makes it clear that healing is not complete until Avalokiteśvara reveals the fasting ritual of this deity:

The one who has put the three realms behind him
and shows the practice
[for attaining the pure land] of Vajrayoginī.
The one who liberates by practicing [love, compassion, joy and equanimity].²⁷²

In addition, a passage from the Tibetan Canon in which Nun Palmo herself is said to praise Avalokiteśvara for appearing as a woman is particularly significant to this study:

Moonlike mother of the Conquerors,
Whose body is of a beautiful female deity,
Homage to the six-syllable mantra,
.....
empty by nature,
you [emerge] from emptiness
with a woman's form
and discipline beings.²⁷³

Not only does this passage obviously reinforce a positive view of the female body, it is

²⁷¹ Translated by Shaw, *Passionate Enlightenment*, 41.

²⁷² R. Jackson, "A Fasting Ritual," 285-286.

²⁷³ Dge slong ma Dpal mo, *Rje btsun thugs rje chen po*, Toh. no. 2740, fol. 127b.1-2, 254: zla ba'i 'od ltar rgyal ba'i yum/ gzugs kyi lha mo yid 'ong sku/ yig drug ma la phyag 'tshal lo/..../rang bzhin mi dmigs stong pa'i ngang/ bud med gzugs kyis 'gro ba 'dul

also a significant one for its use of the female gender in relation to Avalokiteśvara and its implications regarding Nun Palmo's relationship to this bodhisattva. First, Avalokiteśvara is described as "*zla ba'i 'od ltar rgyal ba'i yum*" (Moonlike mother of the Conquerors), which is unusual since Avalokiteśvara is described as a woman and he is certainly not Kuan-Yin in this tradition. Secondly, note that "*yig drug ma la phyag 'tshal lo*" (Homage to the six-syllable mantra) uses the feminine particle "ma" to feminize Avalokiteśvara's mantra. Therefore, a question arises from this curious passage: Who then "emerges from emptiness with a woman's form"? This study contends that in this passage, there is more than a passive statement about the positive value of the bodhisattva reincarnating in a feminine form. In fact, the passage implies that Nun Palmo identifies with Avalokiteśvara, that is, she is this bodhisattva, who appears in this world, as the hagiographies state, "re-embodied into the body of a female for the sake of sentient beings"²⁷⁴ and who "showed the great wonder [of herself?] as Khasarpaṇa."²⁷⁵ Nun Palmo represents many female embodiments that are useful for her own and others' liberation.

As mentioned in Chapter Three, the gender issue is also significant in terms of understanding practices in present society. As scholars on fasting and other ascetic practices have also made clear in the Christian, Hindu, and Newar traditions, fasting seemed to be very much a gendered practice (or at the very least, attracts women for certain reasons as discussed in earlier chapters) and is prominent throughout diverse

²⁷⁴ *Dge slong ma dpal mo*, 1.5-: '*gro ba bud med kyi lu su skur sprul nas sems can gyi don la*

²⁷⁵ Note also that Khasarpaṇa is a form of Avalokiteśvara who is known for curing smallpox. Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 2b.2: // *kha sar pa nir cho 'phrul chen po bstan* //

religious traditions. Fasting creates a sense of control over the self in a patriarchal society and it differentiates women's religiosity from men's. The practice and attitudes in present day Tibetan communities also reflects some of this trend.

According to findings from ethnographic research in Nepal and Tibet, not only did women outnumber men in this practice but also female renunciates presided over and organized the rituals and recited the hagiographies. Male lamas often said that this was a "woman's practice" because women needed more female role models and personal deities like monks have.²⁷⁶ This accords with Kim Gutschow's findings in Zangskar when she states:

[S]ince women represent a 'lower rebirth'...and are more likely to be reborn as animals, they comprise a large percentage of the fasting practitioners. In two *smyung gnas* rites in which I participated at Karsha nunnery (1994 and 1995), women comprised 74% and 97% of those present. Women's bodies are innately polluted (*grib can*) by menstruation and rebirth.....The *smyung gnas* rite is believed to purify and thus 'liberate' (*sgrol byed*) women from both their negative karma and defiled body. A common proverb suggests that one will be interrogated about fasting experiences when one reaches the *bar do* or the intermediate state after death and preceding rebirth."²⁷⁷

However, in terms of the Tibetan texts in this study, we need to keep in mind that they were written by men (except the canonical hymns of praise and one ritual text) so we cannot definitely confirm that this was a gendered practice except for what is seen in today's communities.

²⁷⁶ This latter comment was reiterated several times by Lama Konchok, a *smyung gnas pa*, in his home at Kopan Monastery in Kathmandu, Nepal.

²⁷⁷ Gutschow notes that some nuns in Zangskar believed that Gshin rje chos rgyal (the Lord of Death) takes into account *smyung gnas* practice in his evaluation of good and bad karma. Gutschow's view has been helpful on a comparative level in terms of understanding how *smyung gnas* practice functions in terms of gender outside of Nepal and Tibet. Gutschow, "The *smyung gnas* Fast in Zangskar," 157-158.

Beyond the transformation on the individual level (as in the case of leprosy and in terms of embodiment), the Nun Palmo texts also respond to the universe-at-large. As Nun Palmo regains control over herself and is literally “reassembled,” she now has control over her environment and becomes a better vehicle for the teachings than she was in her former state. Eight *nāga* (entities which were often accused of causing illness like leprosy in Buddhist and Hindu texts as mentioned earlier and created obstacles in the hagiographies) are put in the service of Ekādaśamukha:

When the ten directional protectors and so forth
also arose to do a little harm,
she remained steadily in the generation stage
of the Great Compassionate One,
and summoned them before her.
By having bound them to an oath,
they pledged to be the Dharma protectors
of the practice of the Great Compassionate One,
and in particular, the eight great *nāga*
pledged to be the Dharma Protectors of the Eleven-faced One.
In the *saga* month [at the time of the constellation] *sa ri nam mthongs*,
the interfering demons were placed in the state of *bodhicitta*.
[Nun Palmo’s] illness, sins, and defilements were purified.²⁷⁸

The origins of the illness (the demons), that also were a hindrance to the teachings of the Buddhadharma, were subdued and transformed.

These passages show again that the central focus of these texts is that an ascetic practice can help transform a fragmented state to a state of completion, and in

²⁷⁸ Jo gdan, *Smyung gnas*, 6a.3-.6b.1: *phyogs skyong bcu la sogs pa yang cung zad glags bltar byung ba la/ thugs rje chen po'i bskyed rim la brtan par bzhugs te mdun du bkug nas dam la btags pas thugs rje chen po'i sgrub pa byed pa'i chos skyong du khas blangs shing/ khyad par du klu chen brgyad kyis zhal bcu gcig pa'i sgos kyi chos skyong du khas blangs/ sa ga sa ri nam mthongs kyi zla ba la bar du gcod pa'i bgegs rnams byang chub kyi sems la bkod/ nad dang sdig sgrib rnams byang ste/*

essence, lead to renunciation. Asceticism has this transformative effect as Richard

Valantasis makes clear:

At the center of ascetical activity is a self who, through behavioral changes, seeks to become a different person, a new self; to become a different person in new relationships; to become a different person in a new society that forms a new culture. As this new self emerges (in relationship to itself, to others, to society, to the world) it matters the behaviors that enable it at once to deconstruct the old self and to construct the new. Asceticism, then, constructs both the old and reformed self and the cultures in which these selves function; asceticism asserts the subject of behavioral change and transformation, while constructing the environment in which that subjectivity functions.²⁷⁹

Overall, Nun Palmo's first level of renunciation against her attachment to her physicality and previous ways of thinking enabled her to endure the struggle of performing the fasting ritual. The fasting ritual integrated with devotion to Avalokiteśvara was the crucial step in the transformative process of healing.

²⁷⁹ Valantasis, "Asceticism," 547.

CONCLUSION

Chapter One of the thesis asked the questions: Why has Nun Palmo's story and mode of practice been transmitted for so many centuries? Why do they still mesmerize the minds and bodies of Tibetans and others in nearby communities to this day? Although it would be premature at this point to give a definitive answer to these questions without conducting a comprehensive textual and ethnographic study of all or most of the texts and practices according to the Nun Palmo tradition, including the hagiographies of the lineage-holders themselves, the texts in this study nevertheless provide a lens through which we can respond to concerns about suffering illness and renunciation in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

The thesis can be summed up with the question: How do we make sense of suffering and illness? Or like Clifford Geertz asked, how do we make suffering sufferable? Is this a necessary step in the religious development of a Tibetan Buddhist practitioner? The eleventh century Milarepa had to be beat up a few times before he became a great teacher! Or in another way, we can ask, how can renunciation be understood in the midst of illness in the Tibetan Buddhist context? Is it simply a rejection of *samsāra* or a re-envisioning of conventional reality? The hagiographies and ritual texts of the Nun Palmo tradition demonstrate that struggle is necessary for liberation. The acquisition of illness results in renunciation and reconceptualization of worldly identity setting a course (through a fasting ascetic-devotional practice) of a healing and teaching responsibility within the world. Illness is not simply a karmic flaw but a step forward in the direction of purification and redemption. Leprosy, in

particular, acts as a catalyst for transformation of old ways of thinking and being, a deconstruction of the conception of a permanent self and attachment to the cycle of rebirth. Ritual practices like fasting and devotion act together to complete the process of transformation, in disciplining and awakening the practitioner to a calling in ways not possible before the illness experience. The breaking down of old identities and the transformation that results are graphically illustrated in the real life experiences of Nun Palmo and re-envisioned in visualization practices. When transformation of the physical state and the stigma that results are so graphic and extreme, does illness become a medicine; poison is transformed into a nectar.

The Tibetan tradition is full of examples of the necessary struggles and illnesses endured for the sake of liberation and of these conditions as signs of a religious calling as in the stories of practitioners like Ras chung pa, Ma gcig Lab sgron, 'Chad kha ba, and the '*das log*. The '*das log*, for example, before embarking on their journey in the *bar do* or the hells are first seized by illness and enter a catatonic state. Henceforward, illness opens the door to a new calling in the individual's life. Yet current academic studies have not illuminated the impact of the experience of illness in the renunciation process in Tibetan or Buddhist context and how the Nun Palmo texts are a direct and actively recognized example of this impact in the Tibetan tradition. The diverse texts in the Nun Palmo tradition must be studied together to understand their collective doctrinal concerns.

Historiographically, the Nun Palmo texts are a major source of understanding some of the patterns of doctrinal concerns and practices throughout a long historical period from the late eleventh century to the present day. Lineage holders like Atiśa,

Rin chen bzang po, 'Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po, 'Od dpag rdo rje, Zhu chen Tshul khrims rin chen, Blo bzang bzkal bzang rgya mtsho, and 'Jam mgon Kong sprul all point in the direction of an interest in ascetic practice in their own respective ways often within the Vinaya and sometimes across sectarian boundaries. Adding the Nun Palmo hagiographies and/or ritual manuals to their rich itinerary of works point to how these texts may have responded to their religious (and/or political) needs and practices at their respective times and locations.

As this study has shown, with all the scholastic and ritual background behind Nun Palmo, monastic vows and asceticism do not lead anywhere without the illness experience. Chapter Two draws attention to the occurrence of serious illnesses in the Inner Asian and South Asian landscapes, the active use of illness language in Buddhist and Hindu texts and practices, and the role of illness in the Nun Palmo hagiographies. Narrative literature, historical accounts, and ethnographic and missionary records provide much evidence for the prevalence of illnesses like leprosy in South Asia and Tibet. The Nun Palmo texts draw attention to these realities and to the language of illness to reflect doctrinal concerns. Illness was used in these texts to describe an experience, a real and a religious one, and as a metaphorical tool in order to transmit Buddhist teachings about impermanence and renunciation. An illness like leprosy revealed the karmatic etiology and sexual connotation of the condition. It revealed the belief in forces that perhaps were pre-Buddhist concerns (*klu*, *gdon*, *bgegs*, and so forth or what might be called “demons”) and perceived to be real threats to the well-being of individuals, communities, or the Buddhist religion; and the negative perceptions about the physical body, especially that of a woman in sacred spaces and

society.

Illness prompts the reader of these texts to become aware of the connection between the impurity of the body and the values of society--a major preoccupation in many religious traditions. As both Mary Douglas and Patrick Olivelle have argued elsewhere, the "protection of the boundaries,"²⁸⁰ being that of the body, (in the Nun Palmo case, this would also include class identities and gender), has strong moral implications. Leprosy violates these boundaries with its excrescences, its de-genderizing²⁸¹ and de-humanizing effects. The impending lot of outcaste is thrust upon the leprous individual which on one level, is destructive (destroying old ways of thinking and being like Bakan's "telic-decentralization") and on the Buddhist level, is constructive ("telic-centralization"). It is at this point that illness becomes beneficial because there is no body, no society, no self with which to hold onto. With nothing left to lose, the individual has everything to gain. As Simone Weil has said, in being "lacerated in our sense of time," eternity entered these fragmented moments of physical suffering, offering us fragile lines of escape from temporality.

With all the focus in Buddhist texts on fragmentation and laceration (and as Weil and Ulrich point out) what also comes to mind in this study is the French scholar Georges Bataille's preoccupation with the fragmented body and how this could be related to a mystical experience. In hindsight, I have found Bataille's writings

²⁸⁰ Olivelle, "Deconstruction of the Body in Indian Asceticism," 189.

²⁸¹ What I mean by this term is that gender is lost in the process of the deterioration of the body into constituent parts. And yet, as Ulrich points out, the fragmentation may also be a deliberate attempt to emphasize (and de-value) the female gender in contrast to the "whole bodies" of the male one.

insightful (although often extremely disturbing) for understanding the images of fragmented bodies in these texts. Bataille's obsession with the photographs of Chinese torture,²⁸² for example, and other violent images, often of cut-up bodies, draws attention to the image of suffering as a means to mystical ecstasy (not unlike the pain sought out by European medieval practitioners described by Ariel Glucklich or endured by Simone Weil). In Bataille's work, *Inner Experience*, the projection of suffering in images of fragmented (and tortured) bodies is a crucial moment or step in a new way of thinking; the aim of Bataille is to escape, by entering into a particular mode of "concentration," from the "prison" of discourse and the "verbal servilities" of language and so to attain "non-discursive experiences."²⁸³ Experience is revealed in the non-discursive, the silence and the image. For Bataille, thinking must be brought back into contact with the body, it is through this connection, even transgressing boundaries, that makes ecstasy possible.²⁸⁴ The Nun Palmo texts draw attention to the physical in both its horrific and beautiful aspects and the transgressions of boundaries on several levels are evident. The practices de-emphasize the discursive and focus on the visualization, which at the same time memorializes the leprous individual whose story is in background.

²⁸² This image can be seen as replacing the image of the suffering Christ. See Leslie Anne Boldt, tr., *Inner Experience* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 119.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ In his *Inner Experience*, Georges Bataille eroticizes and obsesses over the tortured body but also finds the suffering it projects as liberating. See Boldt, tr., *Inner Experience*. According to Peter Tracy Connor, these images can lead to a mystical experience with a connection to ethics. Peter Tracy Connor, *Georges Bataille and the Mysticism of Sin* (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 2000).

As Weil, Glucklich, and Bakan have argued about pain, it is also at the point when illness reaches the extreme that Nun Palmo's understanding of the "religious" is deepened, that she becomes in touch with the divine or her divinity. The redemptive value of suffering then becomes evident in the texts. Nun Palmo accepts the illness for the sake of others. The illness becomes an ornament for her transformative process, as in the case of Milarepa, and also a skillful means for others' development. Like *gtong len*, illness is accepted voluntarily to purify others' obscurations and karmic flaws and to answer a religious calling. If not by experience only, but also by example, do sentient beings become receptive. As we have seen in the hagiographies, Nun Palmo's transformation leads to others' realizations. With further study of the pilgrimages to Chobar Hill in Nepal by ill individuals, we might be able to get a better understanding of the significance of the messages of these texts in current practice.

Chapter Two points out as well that the struggles of illness is a first step in Tibetan tantric development. Like the *'das log* and Ma gcig Lab sgron, the struggles experienced by spiritual seekers in religious traditions create the foundation for the ultimate renunciation or liberation that is sought. Struggle becomes a liberative technique. Also as in the case of the *Mahāsiddhas*, the figure of an impure outcaste alerts the reader to read the texts from two levels of reality (the ordinary and the absolute). The texts shock the reader, as in the case of a leprous Nun Palmo herself, into understanding the real meaning of religion. Chapters Three and Four point out that in order for the seeker Nun Palmo to become completely receptive to the teachings and be a teacher to others, she must first reassemble, that is, reconstruct her self and her body through ascetic practices of fasting and propitiation.

Structurally, fasting and propitiation require the practitioner to engage in a number of exercises meant to discipline and transform the body, speech, and mind in order to purify and eventually, effect a transformation of the person into an enlightened being. It is this transformative point when the differences between the two levels of reality collapse, when *saṃsāra* becomes *nirvāṇa*, and vice-versa. In Buddhist tantric development, the body becomes the means through which a practitioner can reach high states of realizations and the “world” as we know it becomes a Buddha-field. Chapter Four makes it clear that the goal of the texts is aversion (*nges 'byung*) or what might be termed “renunciation”. Renunciation is achieved through ritual practice. Ritual remediation is the logical key step in these texts (as Schopen and Spiro have pointed out in their respective works) because of the karmatic etiology that the texts lay out.

The framework of asceticism is useful because of its various connotations. Fasting, for example, did cure illness and put “demons” to flight, purified the body, and made the mind clearer. Asceticism in the Nun Palmo texts is like Kallistos Ware states, a “transfiguration rather than a mortification”²⁸⁵ (as Nun Palmo’s body sheds like the skin of a snake).

What is also useful about the ascetic framework in these texts are the negation and affirmative aspects of the practices. Illness serves as an entry way to the goals of asceticism in the Tibetan context, a renunciation that is one of both denial and affirmation. As we have seen in previous chapters, renunciation of *saṃsāra* (as in

²⁸⁵Ware, “The Way of the Ascetics: Negative of Affirmative?,” 13.

the early Buddhist sense) does not in the tantric sense, mean a complete turning away from the world or physicality. Not only must Nun Palmo endure the difficulties and self-denial through illness and fasting (or through asceticism, *dka' thub*) developing discipline, but also re-emerge to re-engage with society. It is like Victor Turner's returning from a state of liminality. The return is just as important as entering the liminal state itself. As Nun Palmo without limbs, remains fasting and chanting her tutelary deity's mantra until she receives visions and is eventually transformed physically and spiritually, she then returns to Magadha or 'Bigs Śrī Temple to help others also undergo a transformation and a purification.

Chapter Four also describes that despite the karmatic etiology, these negative perceptions about the physical body and women and lack of agency are dispelled with Nun Palmo's active engagement in an ascetic practice and her emanation as a divine being--a *sprul sku*, a *mkha' 'gro ma*, and a *bodhisattva*. The transformation created by illness and fasting-devotional practices at once revealed the doctrinal messages of the texts both on the level of Mahāyānic ideas of emptiness and impermanence as well as tantric ideas of transformation and positive engagement within a physical state. The *rnam thar* structure itself invites multiple levels of interpretation pointing to the main figure's dual roles in the texts--the outer form as the historical embodiment considered an "emanation body" and the inner form, the enlightened form called the "enjoyment body." In addition, the cultic connection with Avalokiteśvara may point to the texts' political affiliations and religious concerns. Although more studies need to be conducted about this connection, it is not an accident that Avalokiteśvara appears in these texts. Nun Palmo's relics contained in his medicine image, his numerous

embodiments, his ascetic leanings, and his role as physician and bodhisattva, point to the texts' concern about basic doctrinal teachings of transformation, renunciation, and healing.

The focus on re-embodiment also reinforces a positive view of the body, even that of the female gender, but this is a body that is not without a realization of the true nature of reality in the Buddhist sense. The female gender is valued not only in the hagiographies and ritual texts (that memorialize Nun Palmo) but also in contemporary practice. Female renunciants in Nepal and Tibet often organize and preside over *smyung gnas* rituals and retell Nun Palmo's story. Even if Nun Palmo or Avalokiteśvara are not explicitly mentioned by female practitioners as in the case of Zangskar, the rituals themselves provide a forum for women to gain autonomy and independence in a predominantly patriarchal institution or society.

The hope of this study is to draw attention to the richness of the texts of the Nun Palmo tradition and to dig a little deeper doctrinally than what has been done previously. With a fuller appreciation of the wider scope of material included in the Nun Palmo tradition, the academic field will be better able to consider the impact of these materials in Tibetan religious history, current practice, and religious studies, especially in terms of the impact of suffering, illness, and the goal of renunciation.

APPENDIX

Transliteration and Translation of Select Tibetan Texts

Text 1:

Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po

//smyung gnas bla ma brgyud pa'i rnam thar bzhugs so //

1.1-2a.1: namo lokeśvarāya shes bya ma lus mkhyen pa'i bcom ldan 'das // 'gro ba
kun la bu gcig lta bur brtse // lhun grub rgyun mi 'chad pa'i phrin las can // mgon po
sryan ras gzigs la phyag 'tshal lo//

2a.1-4: de yang 'phags pa zhal bcu gcig pa'i sgrub thabs 'di slob dpon gang gis mdzad
na / dge slong ma dpal mos 'phags pa la dngo[s] su gsan nas /des bde blag tu mdzad
do//

2a.4-2b.3: dge slong ma 'di nyid /rgyal po indrabodhi che ba'i sras mo yin zhing /de
yang / Indrabodhis lung bstan 'phags pa bsgrubs // shing 'phel gnas su mchog gi dngos
grub brnyes // kha sar pa nir cho 'phrul chen po bstan // dpal ldan dpal mo'i zhabs la
phyag 'tshal lo // zhes pa ste /

Hagiographies of the Lineage Gurus of the Fasting Ritual²⁸⁶

1.1-2a.1: Homage to the Lord of the World, the Bhagavan who has an intuitive understanding [of each and every aspect of] the knowable without exception, who has loving-kindness for all beings as his only child, and possesses Buddha activity, which is spontaneous and unceasing in its flow. Homage to the protector Spyān ras gzigs.

2a.1-4: Now, what master composed this means for the spiritual realization [*sādhana*] of the holy Eleven-faced One? Having heard it, Nun Palmo listened directly to the holy one and composed it with ease.

2a.4-2b.3: This particular nun was the daughter of King Indrabhūti, the senior, and moreover, it is said: “Homage to the feet of the Lustrous Palmo who has realized the Holy One [in accordance with] what Indrabhūti prophesized, attained the supreme realization in [Li kha ra] Shing ‘phel, and showed the great wonder [of herself?] as Khasarpaṇa.²⁸⁷”

²⁸⁶ This translation is only for the hagiography of Nun Palmo. See Chapter 1.3.2a for information on the other biographies of lineage gurus included in the entire text.

²⁸⁷ This form of Avalokiteśvara is known for healing smallpox.

2b.3-3a.5: dge slong ma 'di ni rig pa'i gnas lnga la mkhas shing / bslab sdom rnams
 kyang shin tu btsun par bzhugs pa las / sngon gyi las dbang gis mdze byung ste / phyag
 g.yas pa'i 'khrigs ma nas chad / zhal gyi gdong la yang khro gzer btab pa bzhin du
 gyur /sha mdog ni ston ka'i me tog la ba mos phog pa bzhin du gyur / bza' btung byed
 pa yang phyag gis bsnyod mi shes par dud 'gro rtsa za ba bzhin du gyur /rig pa'i gnas
 lnga la mkhas kyang / nad drag pos btab pas sdug bsngal sems la bzhag thabs med pa
 lta bu dpag tu med pa byung ste / 'khor rnams kyis logs shig tu rtsa'i spyil bu cig tu
 bskyal nas der bshum gyin bzhugs pa na /

3a.5-3b.4: nub gcig gi rmi lam du / rang gi yab rgyal po indrabodhi²⁸⁸ byon nas /shel
 gyi bum pa spyi bslugs gcig bsname te / thugs rje chen po la zhus pa'i khrus chu yin
 gyis gsungs nas spyi bo nas bslugs pas lus ngag yid gsum bde lhod kyis song /rgyal
 po'i zhal nas khyod kyis nad drag po 'dis rkyen byas nas mchog gi dngos grub myur du
 'thob par 'dug gis snying rus bskyed la / dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyis ngo
 bo zhal bcu gcig pa la mos gus drag tu gyis shig gsungs nas mi snang bar song ngo //

²⁸⁸ I have standardized all textual spellings of Indrabodhi to Indrabhūti in the translation.

2b.3-3a.5: Despite [the fact] that this nun was knowledgeable in the five domains of knowledge and also instructions and vows were present [in her] in a very noble way, leprosy arose due to the force of previous karma, [her body was] severed from the wrist of her right hand, even the front of her face was like it had been pounded with bronze nails, her complexion was like an autumn flower struck by frost, taking food and drink was like an animal eating grass not knowing how to feed [herself] with [her left] hand. Even though knowledgeable in the five domains of knowledge, by being afflicted with a virulent illness, there arose immeasurable suffering, settling in her mind as if without recourse. Attendants carried her into an isolated thatched hut where she remained crying.

3a.5-3b.4: Her own father King Indrabhūti, having appeared in a dream of a certain evening, held a water jug²⁸⁹ that monks carry, a jug of crystal, and said, “Take [what] is the ablution water which [I] requested from the Great Compassionate One.” By pouring [the water] from the head [down], [she] experienced well-being [in the] three [of] body, speech, and mind. The king said, “After having turned this virulent disease of yours into an opportunity, [you] should produce [in yourself] the energetic application by quickly obtaining the highest spiritual realization. [You] must be with intense reverence and devotion to the Eleven-faced One, the essence of all the Buddhas of the three times.” [Then] he disappeared.

²⁸⁹ The term should be *blugs*. Dan Martin noted that *bslugs* is a spelling error, an unambiguous past that begins with *ba* and ends in *sa*. *Spyi blugs* means “a golden pitcher, holy water pitcher,” perfective of *blug pa*: “to pour into a pot, to fill.”

3b.4-4a.2: de'i nang mo nas phyag gis zas bsnyod pa 'ong ba dang /nad kyang sdug
bsngal du mi byed par/ nyin mo yi ge drug pa dang/ mtshan mo bcu gcig zhal gyi
gzungs la thugs dam du mdzad cing zla ba drug song ba'i tho rengs kyi tshe /da ni
bdag la sgrub sla la rtog pa chung ba'i lha gcig dgos te mi 'dug / nad drag po 'di dang
bcas / 'di bas shi na dga' ba la snyam pa'i 'phro la mnal du rib kyis song ba na /

4a.3-4b.1: spyil po'i nang thams cad 'od kyis gang ba'i snang ba zhig byung/ der
khye'u gzhon nu seng ge la zhon pa gcig byung nas khyod 'dir ma sdod par/ li kha ra
shing 'phel du song dang/ de na dus gsum gyi sangs rgyas thams cad kyi ngo bo phyag
stong spyen stong dang ldan pa bzhugs kyis de'i drung du snying po zlos shing gsol ba
thob dang sgrub sla la rtog pa chung ba'i lha te yin gsung nas lung bstan zhing lce thog
tu bdud rtsi ril bu gcig bzhag go/

4b.1-3: de la nyid su yin zhus pas/ nga 'jam dbyangs gzhon nu yin gsung/ dngos grub
cig zhu zhus pas/ da lta'i de ka yin mod gsung nas 'ja' yal ba bzhin du song/

3b.4-4a.2: From that morning [on], she was able to take food with her hand and also the illness did not cause her suffering. She meditated on the six syllable mantra during the day, and on the *dhāraṇī*²⁹⁰ of the Eleven-faced One at night. At dawn [after] six months have passed, it dawned on her, “Now I require a deity who is easy for me to realize and [needing] little consideration. Lacking that, together with this virulent disease, [I] would be happy to die from this.” Shortly after, she went to sleep.

4a.3-4b.1: A manifestation arose up that filled the entire interior of the hut with light. There arose a young child astride a lion prophesizing by stating: “You are not staying here! Go to Li kha ra Shing ‘phel because in that place resides the one endowed with a thousand hands and a thousand eyes, the essence of all the Buddhas of the three times. Recite what is essential and reverentially petition before him, [he] is that deity who is easy to realize and [needing] little consideration.” [He] placed an elixir pill on her tongue.²⁹¹

4b.1-3: Because [she] asked him, “Who really are [you]?”, [he] answered, “I am the young Mañjuśrī.” Because [she] requested, “Please give me a realization,” [he] answered, “Just that very one is the realization.” Like a dissolving rainbow, [he] disappeared.

²⁹⁰ See Chapter 3.2.

²⁹¹ The Tibetan tradition has many examples of the importance of placing pills and gems on the tongue and their ingestion for the purposes of purification, long life, and rebirth. See Kapstein, *Tibetan Assimilation*, 39-43, 46-48; *id.*, “The Guide to the Crystal Peak.” In *Religions of Tibet in Practice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 103-119.

4b.1-5a.1: de nas byams snying rje drag po rgyud la skyes/ thugs rje chen po la mos
gus rtse gcig tu mdzad cing li kha ra shing 'phel la byon te shag bdun song ba'i tshe
shing sdong gcig gi 'gram du gzims pa na/ gcan gzan gdug pa can mang po'i skad
grags te 'jigs snyam byed pa gcig byung nas/ 'phags pa la mos gus drag tu byas pas
'jigs pa de yang rang yal du song ste/

5a.1-5: mkha' 'gro ma dmar mo me tog gi thod bcings can bdun mdun du byung nas/
khyod kyi[s] mchog gi dngos grub thob pa na/ nged rnams kyang 'khor gyi thog mar
mchis te bka' srung bgyid to zhes zer/ khyed rnams gang gi rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin
byas pas/ nged rnams pad ma'i rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin/ da ci o [rg]yan²⁹² nas ongs/
sang res nyid kyang o [rg]yan du byon nas mkha' 'gro ma rnams kyi gtso mo mdzad
par gda' zer ro//

5a.5-5b.1: bdag la li kha ra shing 'phel du myur du slebs pa'i dngos grub cig blang
byas pas/ mkha' 'gro ma gnyis kyis ras kha tshar ma nyams pa gcig khyer byung nas
'di'i steng du byon zer ba dang/ de ka'i nub mo la li kha ra shing 'phel gyi 'gram du
slebs 'dug/

²⁹² The Tibetan text was adjusted for the word spelled as *oyana*.

4b.3-5a.1: Then intense loving-kindness [and] compassion was born in her [mind] stream. Focusing her reverence and devotion on the Great Compassionate One, she went to Li kha ra Shing ‘phel. When seven days passed in the place where she slept on the side of a tree trunk, sounds of many dangerous carnivorous animals resounded and a thought of fear arose [in her]. She became powerfully reverent and devoted to the holy one. That fear also disappeared of its own accord.

5a.1-5: Seven red *mkha’ gro ma* wearing flowers appeared in front [of her] and said, “When you obtain the highest realization, we will also be at the head of your entourage and serve as protectors of the teaching.” Since [she asked], “Of what lineage are you of *mkha’ gro ma*?” [They said], “We are the *mkha’ gro ma* of the lotus family. A little while ago, [we] have come from Orgyan. Tomorrow, after even you have gone to Orgyan, [you] will be made the head of the *mkha’ gro ma*.”

5a.5-5b.1: Since [Nun Palmo said], “I will receive a realization for quickly going to Li kha ra Shing ‘phel,” two *mkha’ gro ma* appeared carrying a piece of cloth with untattered fringe and said, “Come on top of this.” On that very evening, [Nun Palmo] arrived at the outskirts of Li kha ra Shing ‘phel.

5b.1-5: der mkha' 'gro ma gcig gis ras dkar po gcig gi khud du 'bras grus ma khal gcig
tsam phul nas mi snang par gyur to// de nas zhal bcu gcig pa'i drung du bzhugs nas
mchog gi dngos grub ma thob bar du 'di nas gzhan du mi 'gro ba'i dbu snyung bzhes
te bza' ba dang btung ba yid la mi byed par nyin mtshan khor yug tu zhal bcu gcig pa
la thugs dam du mdzad nas lo gcig lon pa'i tshe lus kyi nad thams cad sbrul gyi shun
pa bud pa bzhin du song/

5b.5-6a.2: phyag g.yas pa yang sor chud cing sku lus ni mdze ma byung ba'i dus las
kyang mtshar bar gyur/ ting nge 'dzin bzang po rgyud la skyes/ phyi rol gyi bdud la
sogs pas bar chad rtsom du byung ba la/ byams snying rje cung zad re bsgoms pas
thams cad byang chub kyi sems dang ldan par gyur/

6a.3-6: phyogs skyong bcu la sogs pa yang cung zad glags bltar byung ba la/ thugs rje
chen po'i bskyed rim la brtan par bzhugs te mdun du bkug nas dam la btags pas thugs
rje chen po'i sgrub pa byed pa'i chos skyong du khas blangs shing/ khyad par du klu
chen brgyad kyis zhal bcu gcig pa'i sgos kyi chos skyong du khas blangs/

5b.1-5: There a *mkha'* 'gro ma, having offered her a load of hulled rice²⁹³ onto the folds of a white cloth, disappeared. From having remained before the Eleven-faced One, she made an oath not to go elsewhere until she realized the highest realization, not paying attention [to] eating or drinking. Having meditated on the Eleven-faced One throughout the day and night, when one year passed, the entire disease of her body shed like the skin of a snake and disappeared.

5b.5-6a.2: [Her] right hand was also restored and [her] body became even more beautiful than it was before the leprosy²⁹⁴ arose. Sound meditative equipoise was produced in her [mind] stream. When external demons and so forth began to create obstacles, since [she] meditated a little on each [demon with] loving kindness and compassion, all [of them] became endowed with an enlightened attitude. [*bodhicitta*]

6a.3-6: When the ten directional protectors and so forth also arose to do a little harm, she remained steadily in the generation stage of the Great Compassionate One, and summoned them before her. By having bound them to an oath, they pledged to be the Dharma protectors of the practice of the Great Compassionate One, and in particular, the eight great *nāgas*²⁹⁵ pledged to be the Dharma Protectors of the Eleven-faced One.

²⁹³ *grus ma*: typographical error in text. Should be *drus ma*: “millet, rice without husk, hulled rice.”

²⁹⁴ Read, of course, *mdze*.

²⁹⁵ *aṣṭamahānāgārāja*

6a.6-6b.6: sa ga sa ri nam mthongs kyi zla ba la bar du gcod pa'i bgegs rnams byang
chub kyi sems la bkod/ nad dang sdig sgrib rnams byang ste/ sa dang po'i bden pa
mthong/ sa ga zla ba'i tshes gcig la rje btsun sgrol ma'i zhal gzigs te/ dus gsum sangs
rgyas thams cad kyi phrin las nyid la 'dus so zhes lung bstan/ tshes brgyad la don
zhags lha lnga la sogs kri ya'i lha phal che ba'i zhal gzigs/ bco lnga la zhal bcu gcig pa
phyag stong spyen stong dang ldan pa'i zhal gzigs shing/ de yang ba spu'i bu ga thams
cad na sangs rgyas dpag tu med pa gnas pa/ phyag rnams kyang sang rgyas kyi ngo bo
la/ phyag mthil gyi spyen rnams ni gsang sngags kyi lha tshogs su gzigs/

7a.1-2: 'phags pas chos gsungs pas ting nge 'dzin bsam gyis mi khyab pa rgyud la
skyes/ sa brgyad pa'i bden pa mthong ngo// de nas yang sems can thams cad kyi don
du smyung gnas zla ba gsum mdzad de/

7a.3-5: yul dbus su byon pa na/ mi rnams na re/ dge slong ma 'di'i snyun gzhi te drag
'dug ste/ bslab sdom la gyel du song 'dug ci 'dra yin nam zer ba la/ de rnams kyi ma
dad pa zlog ba'i phyir du/ kha sar pa ni'i dus mchod kyi khrom gseb tu khong rang gi
dbu bcad nas mkhar bsil la bkal te gar mdzad pas/

6a.6-6b.6: In the *saga* month [at the time of the constellation] *sa ri nam mthongs*, the interfering demons were placed in the state of *bodhicitta*, [Nun Palmo's] illness, sins, and defilements were purified, and she saw the truth of the first stage of the bodhisattva realization. On the first day of the *saga* month, she witnessed the countenance of the Holy Tārā and [Tārā] prophesized, "Buddha activities of all the Buddhas of the three times are consolidated in you." On the eighth day, she witnessed the majority of the *kriyā* tantra deities such as five Amoghapaśa deities and so forth. On the fifteenth day, she witnessed the countenance of the Eleven-faced One endowed with a thousand hands and a thousand eyes and furthermore, countless Buddhas in all the pores of the body, the hands also being the quintessence of Buddhahood. On the eyes on the palms of the hands, she witnessed a host of tantric deities.

7a.1-2: Since the holy one talked about the Dharma, inconceivable *samādhi* arose in her [mind] stream. She saw the truth of the eighth stage of the bodhisattva realization. Then moreover she practiced the fasting ritual for three months more for the sake of all sentient beings.

7a.3-5: When she went to Magadha, people said, "Since the cause for this nun's illness subsided, she became lax in her instructions and vows. How is it so?" In order to reverse their disbelief, at a congregation for a worship service for Khasarpaṇa, [Nun Palmo] cut off her own head. Since she placed it on her monastic staff and danced,

7a.5-7b.4: bzod mi rnams kyis grub pa thob par shes nas thams cad kyis byin rlabs
zhus shing dngos grub kyang thob bo// de yang phyi ltar dge slong ma dpal mo// nad
ltar rje btsun rdo rje rnal 'byor ma'o// de ltar rgyal rigs stobs ldan gyi dge slong ma des
nam mthongs kyis zla ba la bar du gcod pa'i bdud rnams phyir bsal nas dngos grub thob
pa'i dus yin pa'i rjes 'jug da lta sgrub pa byed pa rnams gyis kyang thog mar nam
mthongs sa ga'i zla ba la byas na/ bar chad nyung zhing dngos grub myur zhes gsung
ngo// 'di'i lo rgyus rgyas par ni gzhan du shes par bya'o//

colophon 60a.1-3: de ltar bla ma gong ma rnams kyis rnam thar mdor bsodus 'di ni
skyes bu chen po de rnams kyis rnam par thar pa'i yi ge kha thor ba rnams las btus
shing / phyogs cig tu bsdebs te / jo gdan bsod nams bzang pos yi ger bkod pa'o //

7a.5-7b.4: now²⁹⁶ the people, in realizing that she was one who has attained spiritual realization, all requested a blessing and obtained a realization as well. Moreover, externally she was Nun Palmo. Internally, she was the Holy Rdo rje Rnal 'byor ma [Dākinī Vajrayoginī]. It is said so that Nun [Palmo], of a powerful royal family, had obtained the realization after having dispelled again the demons who interfered during the month of [the constellation] *nam mthongs*, [and] because of this time, when those followers practice at first in the *saga* month [during the constellation of] *nam mthongs*, [then] obstacles will diminish and the realization is swift. Her record should be known in extenso elsewhere.

colophon 60a.1-3: So, this brief hagiography of the previous lamas was collected from various biographical accounts of those great beings, having been put together in one compilation. Jo gdan Bsod nams bzang po wrote it.

²⁹⁶ I hesitantly take *bzod* to be a possible misspelling for the term *da gzod* meaning “now.”

Text 2:

Anonymous

dge slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar nges 'byung rgyud la skye ba'i chos gtam zhes bya
ba bzhugs so //

1.1-3: dus gsum rgyal ba kun gyi 'phrin las pa // gcig tu sdud cing snyigs ma'i dus 'di
ru // 'gro ba'i dpal tu byon pa'i rnal 'byor ma / dpal ldan dpal mo'i tshogs la phyag
'tshal lo //

1.3-7: de lta bu'i rnal 'byor ma de nyid dus gsum rgyal ba'i yum mchog rdo rje phag
mo 'gro ba bud med kyi lu su skur sprul nas sems can gyi don la bsam gyis mi khyab
cing brzod kyi mi lang shing rgyu skar nas nyi zla'i zur tsam ston pa la /

1.7-11: de yang rgya gar gyi yul kha che khri rten ces bya ba na / yab rgyal po dhar ma
pa la dang/ yum sgyu ma lha mdzes ma gnyis la rgyal srid mnga' thang bsam gyis mi
khyab pa yod pa las / nam zhig gi tshe bstun mo la sras bltams pa'i mtshan bzang po
byung nas zla dgu ngo bcu lon pa dang sras gcig 'khrung[s] so /

1.11-12: khyi'u gzugs mdzes shing sdug pa kun gyis mthong na yid du ong ba zhig
yod pa la mtshan yang in dra bu dhir grag[s] so /

The Hagiography of Nun Palmo: A Religious Discourse

Which Gives Rise to Aversion in the [Mind] Stream²⁹⁷

1.1-3: Homage to the bodily constituents of the Illustrious Palmo, a *yoginī* who came as a luster of the world in this degenerate time, subsumed into one the Buddha activity of all the conquerors of the three times.

1.3-7: Such a *yoginī* like that is Rdo rje Phag mo, the supreme mother of the conquerors of the three times, after she has [voluntarily] miraculously re-embodied into the body of a female for the sake of sentient beings. It will be shown, on the basis of the constellation, just a part of the sun and the moon of what is inconceivable and inexpressible.

1.7-11: In Śrīnagar, Kashmir, a region of India, there were both a royal father Dharmapāla and mother Sgyu ma lha mdzes ma who had an inconceivably powerful reign. At a certain time, there appeared an auspicious sign of the queen having conceived a son. Nine or ten months later, a son was born.

1.11-12: A boy whose body was beautiful, pleasing and attractive to all who saw him, his name, moreover, was known as Indrabhūti.

²⁹⁷ Alternative title stated at end of text is “The Hagiography of Nun Palmo: The Origin of Everything That is Good.”

1.13-16: de nas lo dgu lon pa dang sras mo gcig 'khrungs so / de yang ye shes mkha'
 'gro'i mtshan ltas dang ldan pa la / mtshan yang legs smin dkar lcarn du grags so / bu
 mo legs pa'i snyan grags nyi zla ltar grags pa las/ phyogs phyogs nas blta ba'i mi mang
 po byung bas /

1.16-2.4: lo brgyad lon pa dang rgyal srid sras kyis 'dzin / bu mo 'dod mkhan gyi
 rgyal po bzhi byung bas / phyogs kyis²⁹⁸ rgyal po rgya gar chos kyis rgya[l] po / rgya nag
 stong gi rgyal po/ ge sar dmag gi rgyal po / stag gzig nor gyi rgyal po bcas glang po
 che la nor bsam gyis mi khyab pa bkal nas / yab rgyal po dhar ma pa la'i drung du
 phebs pas / blon pos rgyal po la zhus pa / khyod kyis sras mo legs smin dkar lcarn
 phyogs kyis rgyal po rnams kyis btsun mo la 'gro bar zhu zhus pas / rgyal pos gsungs pa/
 gdam kha bu mo rang la 'dri zer ba las

2.4-9: bu mos bsam blo zhig btang nas / yab rgyal po la zhus pa / yab chen chos kyis
 rgyal po bdag la gson skye gzugs phun sum tshogs pa'i bu mo nga / smon lam bzang
 bas yab yum gnyis dang mjal /da lta ci byed rang dbang yod dus su// gtan 'dun dam
 pa'i lha chos ma byed na / rin chen gling gi tshong pa stong log 'dra / bu mo dam pa'i
 chos la bka' gnang zhu // zhes gdung ba'i smre ngag gis zhu ba las/

²⁹⁸ Instrumental *kyis* should be genitive *kyi*.

1.13-16: Then nine years passed, a daughter was born. Moreover, she was endowed with the signs of a wisdom *mkha' 'gro ma* and also her name was the daughter Lakṣmīṅkarā. Her reputation as a good girl was renowned like the sun and moon, many people came to see her from all places.

1.16-2.4: Eight years later, the son took over the reign. Since four kings came, who were desirous of the girl--the kings of the directions²⁹⁹ were: the Indian king of religion, the Chinese king of Thong, the Gesar king of the military, and the Tajik king of wealth--having loaded on an elephant inconceivable wealth, came before the father King Dharmapāla, [and] the ministers [of these kings] asked the king, "May we request your daughter Lakṣmīṅkarā to become the wife of one of the kings of the directions?" The king answered, "Ask my daughter the choice."

2.4-9: After having given a thought, the girl asked her father, the king, in a pained voice, "Great father, King of Religion, listen to me. I, a daughter of outstanding body and countenance, met both father and mother due to good prayers. Were I not to practice the divine religion [the Buddhadharma], which is a holy, long-term aspiration at a time when I have the independence to do whatever I want, I will be like a merchant of a precious island returning empty-handed. May your daughter request permission to go forth to the holy religion."

²⁹⁹ For information on kings of the directions, see R. A. Stein, *Recherches sur l'épopée et le barde au Tibet* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1959), 245-266; *id.*, "Une source ancienne pour l'histoire de l'épopée tibétaine." In *Journal Asiatique* 250 (1) (1962): 81-86, 89, 96-98.

2.9-13: yab kyis bu mo la spyan cher gyis gzigs te / spyir bud med rnams kyis chos
mgo mi 'thon pa'i dpe mang po gsungs shing / shing khru gang gcod pa la rtsa ba
'dom gang gsal dgos zer ba'i dpe yod / bu mo chos mgo 'thon na gser bre gang khyer
la song/

2.13-17: de nas bu mo chos byed pa'i don du yum la zhu ba / lus srog drin gyis 'tsho
ba'i yum chen ma // yum chen pha rol phyin ma bdag la gson // snyigs dus mi tshe
dgun ka'i nyin dang 'dra // mtho ris mi yi bde skyid yal yud tsam // las ngan 'khor ba'i
sdug bsngal mi sel bas / bu mo dam pa'i chos la 'gro bar zhu //

2.17-3.2: yum gyis smras pa / ming po la dris gsungs / bu mo chos mgo 'thon na g.yu
bre gang ster zer bas/ de nas ga'u gru bzhi gcig yod pa'i rin chen gser gyi sa gzhi byas
de'i mgo la g.yu nor bu 'dra ba gcig bkal nas / 'bul ba gnyis mtshan tu byas / de'i mgo
la rin chen gser gyi sor gdub gcig khyer nas gsum mtshan du byas /

3.2-6: ming po in dra budhi'i drung du zhu ba /sa skyong rgyal po thugs dgongs lhod
par zhu // brtse ba'i thugs kyis bka' bkyon mi gnang 'tshal // tshe 'dir bde skyid phun
sum tshogs gyur kyang // 'chi bdag 'byung dus rang dbang mi 'dug pas // sring mo
dam pa'i chos la bka' gnang zhu // ces zhus pa dang /

2.9-13: As the father gazed wide-eyed at his daughter, he stated, in a general way, many examples for women not to be headstrong about religion and had an adage to the effect that in order to cut one cubit of wood, it is necessary to clear one *'dom* of its root. If his daughter will be headstrong about religion, then she should carry a full *bre* of gold and go.

2.13-17: Then the daughter requested from her mother to practice religion and said, “Great mother who sustained my body and my life out of kindness. Great mother, Transcendent One, listen to me. Human life in the degenerate age is like a winter day, since the well-being and happiness of gods and people are but a mere flicker; this does not eliminate the suffering of bad karma and *saṃsāra*. I request, let your daughter go forth to the holy religion.”

2.17-3.2: Her mother said, “Ask your brother. Daughter, if you are headstrong about religion, I will give a full of *bre* of turquoise.” Since [the queen said this], she had a square amulet made of a foundation of precious gold. On top of that, she placed a turquoise like a precious stone, [and thus] made two sets of offerings. On top of that, she carried a finger-ring of precious gold and made three sets [of offerings].

3.2-6: She asked before her brother Indrabhūti, “King, Defender of the Earth, please calm your mind. Please do not chastise me with your loving heart. In this life, although abundant with well-being and happiness, there is no freedom when the Lord of Death comes. I request permission for your sister to go forth to the holy religion.”

3.6-12: ming po in dra budhi'i thugs gtum pa'i stabs kyis mar khu la chu blugs pa ltar
gyur nas / shel gyi ral gri shub [shubs?] nas phyung ste phyag g.yas pa sring mo'i spyi
bo nas gzung/ g.yon pas ral gri mgo thog tu 'phyar zhing gsungs pa / sring mo nyon
dang legs ming dkar lcam ma / thang stong skams [skam?] la nya mo mi 'byung bas //
sring mo dam pa'i chos ni shin tu dka'// de bas ral gris sdang ba'i dgra bo btul // sring
mo 'dod pa'i gnyen la ster ba yin // gang dga' rgyal srid gdam las 'gro ba legs //

3.12-4.3: yang bu mos zhu ba / nyon dang bdag gi ming po khyod nyid kyang// tshe
snyon bsod nams bsags pa'i 'bras bu las // tshe 'dir stobs 'byor ldan pa'i rgyal por
skyes // phyi ma gar 'gro ming pos mi shes pas // sring mo phyi ma gar 'gro'i nges pa
med // rgyal po'i rgyal srid mdang sum rmi lam tsam // 'dod yon longs spyod rtsa kha'i
zil pa 'dra / byang chub sems la pho mo ma mchis pas // bdag ni dam chos mthar phyin
byung gyur na // pha ma gnyen dang ming po'i drin lan 'jal // sring mo rgyal srid gcig
la byin na yang // gnyen 'debs gcig la dgra bo gsum tu spel // pha rol dgra yis ming po
bzod mi bde // slad ni phung gi rtsa ba bud med yin // de bas mi gcig chos kyis rgyu yin
pas // sring mo dam pa'i chos la bka' gnang zhu / zhes zhu ba

3.6-12: Because of brother Indrabhūti's fierce nature, he became like water poured into melted butter. He unsheathed³⁰⁰ a crystal sword, grabbed [the top of] his sister's head with his right hand, brandished his sword above her head with his left hand and said, "Listen sister, Princess Lakṣmīṅkarā. Fish do not arise from a dry³⁰¹ empty plain. Sister, the holy Dharma is very difficult, therefore subdue the angry enemy with a sword. Sister, give in to the kinsmen who are desired [by us]. Choose whatever kingdom [you like] and you had better go there."

3.12-4.3: The girl said again, "Listen, my brother, you yourself were also born as a king endowed with power and treasures in this life due to the fruit of your accumulated merit from past lives. Since my brother does not know where he will go in the next [life], there is no certainty [as well] where your sister will be going in the next life. The kingdom of a king was merely last night's dream. Material things are like dew drops on grass. *Bodhicitta* has no gender. If I were to succeed in the holy religion, I would repay the kindness of [my] parents, relatives and brother. Even if [your] sister is given to a kingdom, you will have an ally and generate three enemies. With enemies on the other side, my brother won't be able to tolerate [it]. Women are the root of future ruin, therefore one person is the cause of religion. Please grant permission for your sister [to go forth] to the holy religion."

³⁰⁰ *shub* should be *shubs*: "sheath"

³⁰¹ *skams* should be *skam*: "dry"

4.3-11: pul bas / ming po na re / chos byed pa gar 'gro gsungs / bla ma jo bo dpal gyi
 zhabs drung du 'gro zhus pas / de nas ming po in dra budhi yis /phyogs kyi rgyal po
 rnams nas 'ong pa'i pho nya ba rnams la smras pa /nga yi sring mo de nyid sang snga
 dror dam pa'i chos la 'gro ba thag chod pas / khyed rang rnams kyang rang sa'i 'bul
 ba'i nor rnams khyer nas slar yul gnas gro ba 'thad zer bas / blon 'bangs rnams na re /
 bu mo chos mgo thon na rgyas kyi yo byad nged rnams kyis kyang phul /dam pa'i chos
 las lhag pa med zer nas thams chad rang gnas su log song ngo //

4.11-20: de nas bu mos yab las gser bre gang zhus / yum las g.yu bye [bre?] gang
 zhus/ ming po in dra budhi nas chos byed pa'i bka' shog brten dang bcas pa zhus /
 g.yog mo zhig kyang dgos zer zhu ba las / bu mo khyed rang chos rnam dag cig yong
 na rgyal srid phyed bgos ster gsungs pas / g.yog mo dgos na khyed rang gi sems dang
 gang mthun pa khrid cig gsungs / chung gzhon dus nas rtsed grogs byed cing thugs la
 gcang pa'i g.yog mo bsam 'phel ma khrid de lo brgyad nas 'jig rten 'khor ba'i khyim
 thabs mi gtsang ba'i rdzas bzhin du bor / dge slong ma'i spyi gtsug tu nor bu khur/
 dam chos bu bzhin du len nas bsam 'phel ma phyag phyir khrid de

4.3-11: Since [the request] was offered, the brother said, “Where do you want to practice religion?” She answered, “I will go to the feet of Lama Jowo Pel.” Then brother Indrabhūti said to those messengers who came from the kings of the [four] directions, “Since it is evident that that very sister of mine will go [forth] to the holy religion tomorrow in the early morning, then you yourselves, having carried the gifts of your own lands, it is appropriate to return to your own region.” The ministers and subjects answered, “If the girl is headstrong about religion, we will also offer her provisions. There is nothing more than the holy religion.” All [of them] returned to their own regions.

4.11-20: Then the girl accepted a full *bre* of gold from her father. She accepted a full *bre* of turquoise from her mother. She requested from her brother Indrabhūti a letter of authorization for practicing religion together with an offering. Out of that request, she said she also needed a female servant. [The brother] answered, “If you yourself, girl, yield a pure religious practice, I will divide the kingdom in half and grant it to you. If you need a female servant, take whomever you are in accord with.” [Princess Lakṣmīṅkarā] took the female servant Sampelma, who was a playmate since childhood and of clever mind. Since the age of eight, [Lakṣmīṅkarā] abandoned the household of *saṃsāra* like an impure thing. She carried the [notion of a] nun as a precious jewel on the crown of her head. Having taken the holy religion as her only son, she took Sampelma as her servant.

4.20-5.6: nags tshal dra ba can gyi dgon par bla ma jo bo dpal gyi drung du chos zhu
ru phyin pas / de nas bu mos bla ma'i gnyer pa zhig 'dug pa de la zhus pas / gnyer pa
des chos khrims pa la zhus / chos khrims nga [?] nmams kyis bla ma la zhu ba 'bul ba
dang / bla ma'i zhal nas/ in dra budhi de thugs shing tu gtum pa'i rgyal po yin pas / bu
mo de chos la 'ong ba bden mo rang mi yong gsungs / ma bden na bza' btung gya nom
pa byin nas slar 'gro ba 'thad zer gsung pas /

5.6-14: yang chos khrims pa nmams kyis zhus pa / chos byed chog pa'i bka' shog 'dug
lags zhus pas / bla ma spyod pa'i bsam gtan la bzhugs kyang ting nge 'dzin g.yor bu
mo mang bkol bsgrigs gsungs pas / de nas bla ma'i sku mdun du mang bkol phul bas /
bla ma'i zhal nas / bu mo khyod 'jig rten spangs chos byed pa'i don ci yin gsungs pa
dang / bu mos chos byed pa'i don bla ma la zhu ba tshig gsum 'di ltar phul ba / der bla
ma'i g.yas g.yon dang mdun na yod pa'i grwa btsun nmams kyis bu mo 'di gang zhu
snyam bsam nas nyan cing yod pa la /

5.14-19: bu mos zhu ba 'di ltar phul ba / skyabs rje rin po che la zhu ba la / mi tshe 'di
bas phyi ma shul thag ring // 'khor ba'i sdug bsngal bzod rlags mi 'dug pas // chos
dbyings thar pa'i lam bzang ston par zhu / bu mo bdag ni blo dman shes rab chung //
tshig nyung don che gdams ngag zab mo zhig / brtse ba'i thugs kyis bdag la gnang bar
zhu / zhes zhus pa dang/ 'di nang bzhugs pa kun kyang ha las so //

4.20-5.6: She went to the monastery of the Dra wa chen grove in order to request for religious [instruction] from Lama Jowo Pel. Then the girl asked in that [place] the manager of the lama. The manager reported to the monastic disciplinarians. The monastic disciplinarians asked the lama. The lama answered: “Since Indrabhūti is an extremely fierce-minded king, that girl, coming for the dharma, is not sincere. If this is not true [that is, coming for the dharma, then] after having given her an abundance of food and drink, it is better that she returns.”

5.6-14: The monastic disciplinarians asked again. They reported that she had a letter of authorization which allowed her to practice religion. Although the lama was in meditative concentration, while in the flux of his meditation, he said, “Arrange for the girl, tea and noodles.” Then the tea and noodles were placed in front of the lama. The lama said, “You girl, what is the purpose of practicing religion and abandoning the world?” The girl offered these three statements to the lama regarding the meaning of practicing religion. The monks and elevated monks who were there in front on the right and left of the lama listening thought about what this girl was going to ask.

5.14-19: The girl offered the following petition: “Rinpoche, the Lord [one can take] refuge in, since I cannot bear the suffering of *saṃsāra* for longer in the future time than this life, I request you to teach the good path of liberation, the *dharmadhātu*. I, a girl, of low intellect and little insight, give me a profound instruction in few words and great meaning with a heart of loving-kindness.” Even all who were there were also astonished.

5.19-6.4: de nas gzhon nu dgung lo brgyad nas slob sbyangs la brtson pas / lo bcu
gnyis kyi bar du bla ma dang 'bral ba med par bzhugs pa'i tshe / phyis shes bya'i chos
thams cad la bla ma dang mnyam par song / nang gi don gyis rtogs pa bla ma las lhag
tsam song ba las / de nas dge bsnyen gyi sdom pa gnang nas mtshan yang dge slong ma
dpal mo mtshungs mor grags so //

6.4-12: de nas lo bcu lnga tsam lon pa dang / bla ma'i zhal nas / khyod gzhon nu ma
dang nged rang rgan po gnyis sdeb ste sdod na gzhan gyis yang skur pa yong / khyod
rang la yang kha ram [kha rem pa?] 'ong pas / de bzhin khyod rang phyogs gzhan zhig
la bla ma zhig byed dgos pa 'dug gsungs / mi 'gro byas na dge slong gi mtshan yang
mi thos pa'i sar skye ba'i nyes pa 'ong / gro na rkyen byung zer zhu ba las / bla ma'i
zhal nas / rkyen byung na dge ba'i bshes gnyen yin / las byung na sdig pa'i chags shing
yin / de nas rgyang grags gcig gi sar 'jag ma'i spyil bu nang bzhugs /

6.12-19: dge slong mas bsam 'phel ma khrid nas rgyang grags gcig gi sar phebs pas
'bigś śrī gtsug lag khang gi nags tshal du bzhugs pa'i dus la / bla ma'i chos gsungs pa
rgyang grags gcig gi sa nas thos snyams nyan bzhugs pa las / de 'bigś śrī bla ma de
mkha' spyod du gshegs nas lo lnga drug tsam song bas / de nas der yod pa'i blon dang
dge slong rnams kyi dbu blar spyen drangs dgos zer ba las kun kha 'cham nas dge
slong ma'i drung du zhu ru yong ba'i zhal lta ba gsum sleb nas zhu ba las /

5.19-6.4: Then from the age of eight, the young girl strived in her studies. She remained inseparable from her lama until the age of 12. Later, despite the fact that she became the equal of her lama in all knowable phenomena, she surpassed the lama in terms of the realization of inner meaning. Then after having been given the *upoṣādhā* vow, her name also became known as Nun Palmo Shungmo.

6.4-12: Then she reached about the age of 15. The lama said, “If we both get together and live [together], you, a young girl, and I, myself, an old man, [we] will be slandered by others. Since there will be gossip[?] about you, it is necessary that you yourself be a lama in another place.” [She said], “If I do not go, [then] the misfortune will arise for being born in a place where I will not hear even the name of a monk. If I go, a condition will arise.” The lama said, “If a condition arises, it is a spiritual friend of virtue. And if karma arises, it is a tree of attachment which is a defilement. Then, stay inside of a grass thatched hut in a place within hearing distance.”

6.12-19: Leading Sampelma, Nun [Palmo] went to a place within hearing distance. Despite her time residing in the grove of ‘Bigs Śrī Temple, she remained hearing, thinking, and listening to the religious teaching of the lama from within hearing distance. After the ‘Bigs Śrī lama died, about five or six years [later], then the preceptors and monastics who were there all agreed from a discussion that she should be invited to be the head lama. Three servants arrived and came to ask before Nun [Palmo].

6.19-7.8: dge slong ma'i zhal nas / cig kyang nged rang bud med kyi rang bzhin gyis /
bla ma skyes pa'i mgo sgrims nas mi yong gsungs kyang / khong rnams kyis lan gnyis
lan gsum gyi bar la gsol ba 'debs su yong bas / dge slong ma'i thugs dgongs la / sangs
rgyas khro ba la 'dzin pa med zhu ba ltar byon nas / dge slong ma de nyid dgung lo
nyer gcig nas 'bigs śrī gtsug lag khang la chos sde pa rnams kyi mkhan por mnga' gsol
bar gyur to// der chos gsungs pa la ngal dub dang skyo ngal rtsa nas med pas / rtswa
sngon mo la phebs cham mi mdzad cing / rgyun gyi 'tsho ba yang nyin phyed yol ba
las zas mngar skyur gang yang mi bzhes par bzhugs pas /

7.8-16: de nas dgung lo nyer lnga lon pa'i dus nam zhig gi tshe / zhabs kyi the bong
gcig gya' ba tsam byung bas brum cung zhig byung / de nas srin thor gcig tu song bas /
de'i rkyen byas zhabs kyi mthil dang spyi bo'i gtsug rnams gang bas / de nas blon
mdzad rnams la gsang bas / bsam 'phel ma la gsungs pa / nam mkha' dang mnyam pa'i
sems can gyi don la na ba yin gsungs / de'i skabs la bsam 'phel mas lus kyi sgo nas ci
drag gis zhabs tog dang / ngag gi sgo nas snyan pa'i zhabs tog / yid kyi sgo nas dad
pa'i zhabs tog / lus ngag yid gsum gyis zhabs tog tshad med du zhu ba'i skabs 'dir /

7.16-19: dge slong ma mdze snyung drag po zhig gis zin te bzhugs pa'i tshe / g.yog
mo bsam 'phel ma de nyid sems la mda' phog pa lta bu'i sdug bsngal byung bas /
zhabs tog gang cir byed kyang mi phan par /

6.19-7.8: Nun [Palmo] said, “On the one [hand], since I myself am a woman, I also will not come on the basis of having been made head lama of male teachers.” Although [she said this], they came up two to three times to make a request. In her mind, [she thought] as the saying [goes], “An angry Buddha does not have attachment,” and she left. From the age of 21, that very nun was appointed as abbess of the religious community in ‘Bigs Śrī Temple. While there she was never fatigued nor weak for the religious teaching. She would not walk on the green grass and did not even take sweet or sour food after mid-day for continual sustenance.

7.8-16: Then at a certain time, reaching the age of 25, a small itch arose on one toe of her feet and a small boil appeared. Then [it] became as a bursting blister. Because of that condition, it filled the bottom of her feet to the crown of her head. Then [Nun Palmo] [kept it a] secret from the preceptors. She said to Sampelma, “I am sick for the sake of sentient beings who are as vast as the sky.” At that time, Sampelma offered her services with her body by whatever means; with her speech, she offered the service of sweet sound; with her mind, she offered devotion. In this time, she offered immeasurable services with her body, speech and mind.

7.16-19: When the nun was afflicted and consumed with severe leprosy, because of this, suffering arose like an arrow struck into the mind of that very servant Sampelma. Although she offered whatever services were possible [to Nun Palmo], it had no effect.

7.19-8.4: zla ba gsum tsam lon pa dang bla ma'i zhabs kyi sor mdzub bcu chad/ de nas
zla lnga long pa dang phyag mdzub bcu chad / de tshe dpon g.yog gnyis po thugs la
sdug bsngal drag po byung bas / bsam 'phel mas bla ma la yul bas skor te / sku lus
gzhan gyis mi mjal ba ltar bzhugs pa'i dus 'dir / kun gyis rnag khrag tshor nas skabs
'dir lo rdzogs pa dang phyi la ston byung /

8.4-12: tshogs pa rnams kyi dge slong ma thon zhus pas / bsam 'phel ma zhu bas
thon rgyu med zer bas / bla ma'i gsungs nas / bsam 'phel ma nga rang rdzun nged
kyang mi rdzun rang gi lus po de rdzun gsungs / bsam 'phel mas bla ma khur bas /
phyag zhabs med pa'i stabs kyi dar ston nas 'khur zhig gsungs / de nas bsam 'phel
mas 'khur nas byon pas zhabs mdzub sa la gtugs pas / sku lus de nyid 'khur bor ba ltar
byung bas / 'o rgyal lan gsum byung zhing 'bag pa'i tog tu gyur to / de nas nang gi mi
rnams dga' bas /

8.12-18: lam khar'i brag phug cig tu phyin nas bzhugs pa'i tshe/ dge slong ma na re /
bsam 'phel ma gleng mo byed yar shog gsungs / de'i lam tu tshong pa mi lnga 'gro ba
gzigs nas / yar shog gsungs / khyed rang rnams yul gang nas yin gsung pas / khong
rnams na re / kha che khri rten zer pa'i yul nas yin lags zhus pas / rgyal po su yi cha
zhabs yin gsungs / rgyal po dhar ma pa la'i phyag zhabs yin lags / rgyal po bzhugs yod
dam gsungs pas /

7.19-8.4: About three months passed, the ten toes of the lama's feet fell off. Then five months later, the ten fingers of her hands fell off. At that time, severe suffering arose in the minds of both the mistress and the servant. Sampelma enclosed the lama with a curtain. During this time, it was as if her body was not seen by anyone. At this time, after all [in the temple] noticed the pus and blood, [Nun Palmo and Sampelma] were thrown out after the end [of the] year.

8.4-12: Since those who assembled asked Nun [Palmo] to leave, Sampelma said, "[There is] no reason for us to leave." The lama [Nun Palmo] said, "Sampelma, I myself am a lie. Even if I do not lie, my own body is a lie." While with Sampelma and with the burden of not having hands or feet, [Nun Palmo] showed her a scarf and said, "Carry [me]." Then Sampelma carried her and left. The toes of [Nun Palmo's] feet hit the ground. Her very body appeared like a discarded load. Hardships arose three times and [Nun Palmo] became the height of filth. Then the members of the community were pleased.

8.12-18: After [Nun Palmo] went to a cavern which was by the road side. While residing there, Nun [Palmo] said, "Sampelma, Come up! Let's chat." Having seen five merchants going on that path, [Nun Palmo] said, "Come up! What region are you yourselves from?" They answered, "We are from the region which is called Śrīnagar, Kashmir." She asked, "What king are you subject to?" They answered, "We are subjects of King Dharmapāla." She asked, "Is the king alive?"

8.18-9.3: rgyal po sku gshegs song zhus / yum sgyu ma lha mdzes yod dam gsungs /
yum yang med lags zhus pas / rgyal po in dra budhi bzhugs yod dam gsungs / rgyal po
in dra budhi nub phyogs rnam dag u rgyan gyi yul la chos la song zer / bla ma jo bo
dpal bzhugs yod dam gsungs / bla ma yang chos dbyings la gshegs nas lo dga' [lo ka?]
song zer zhus pas /

9.3-15: de nas dge slong ma sku la snyun drag pos zin te bzhugs pa'i khar tshong pa
gsum nas lo rgyus 'di ltar gsan pas / dge slong ma'i thugs skyo ba tshad gzung med
pa'i ngang nas der ngal gso ba'i tshong pa lnga po dang bsam 'phel ma la 'di ltar
gsungs pa / kye ma kyi hud 'di 'dra'i sdug bsngal ma // skyo ba'i lus la skam pa'i
mdze yis zin // lus nas thon pa'i rnag khrag mtsho ltar 'khyil // sdod pa'i gnas ni 'brag
phug stong pa'i nang // 'khor ba'i mi ni sbrang ma tsam yang med // yab chen chos kyi
rgyal po dgung la gshegs // yum chen a ma tshe 'di'i snang ba nub // bsam blo gtad
pa'i ming po chos la bros // chos bskur sprod pa'i bla ma zhing la gshegs // dam tshig
med pa'i slob mas bla mas bton // sems la skyo ba yod do bsam 'phel mo // las kyi shi
bral byung na bya thabs med // ma shi gson bral med do bsam 'phel ma //ces gdung
ba'i smre ngag 'di ltar gsungs pa dang //

8.18-9.3: They answered, “The king is dead.” She asked, “Is Mother Sgyu ma lha mdzes alive?” They answered, “Mother Sgyu ma lha mdzes also does not remain.” She asked, “Is King Indrabhūti alive?” They answered, “King Indrabhūti went forth to practice religion in the region of Pure Orgyan [in] the Western direction.” She asked, “Is Lama Jo wo Pel alive?” They answered, “The lama also left some years ago and departed to the *Dharmadhātu*.”

9.3-15: Then while Nun [Palmo] was being consumed by a virulent illness in her body, at the opening of her residence, she listened likewise to the account of the three merchants. From the state of the nun’s immeasurable mental suffering, she said likewise with words of distress to all five resting merchants and Sampelma: “Alas! Alas! A suffering woman, my weak body is consumed by dry leprosy. The pus and blood which departed from my body whirled like a lake. My dwelling place is inside an empty cavern. Not even a person nor a mere honeybee migrates [here]. The great father king of religion died. The great mother ama, the light of this life is set. My brother to whom I entrust my thoughts took refuge in religion. The lama, who realized *Dharmakāya*, went to the Pure land. Since my disciples broke their vows and threw their lama out, my mind has sorrow. Oh, Sampelma. If karmic death separates us, there is nothing to be done. Without death, there is no separation in life [between you and I], Sampelma.”

9.15-10.4: 'bigs śrī lha khang gi bris sku rnams kyang zhal dge slong ma bzhugs pa'i phyogs la skor te bzhugs so // der yod pa'i rgan po rnams na re //dge slong ma slar zhu ba 'thad zer bas / gzhon pa rnams kyis ma nyan par sgo bsdams pas/ dge slong ma'i zhal nas/ bsam 'phel ma da 'di ru bsdad na rgan pa rang mo mnyam du rul ba 'i dpe bzhin 'dug pas 'di ru sdod pa bas kyang / byang dug mtsho khol ma'i gling la 'gro dgos gsungs / da khyed rang khang pa shar bstan nas yod pa'i yul phyogs de la / nged rang gi gnas po gnas mo gnyis yod sa der song la ba glang gnyis khrid shog gsungs pas/

10.4-16: dge slong mas bka' bzhin bsam 'phel mas yul der phyin nas ba glang gnyis bdas nas 'ongs pas / dge slong ma de nyid phyag zhabs med par chibs ma thub / glang de nyid byol song dud 'gro yin pa'i stabs kyis lus rgur ma shes/ de nas rkang lag bzhi sar bskums nas bzhag pas /dge slong ma gzhon chugs pa byung zhing / bsam 'phel mas kyang bla ma'i bzhes bang bzhes chas sogs 'khur te dug mtsho khol ma'i gling la phebs pa las / bla ma dpon gyog gnyis po byon pa dang / nyi ma phog ste shar ba dus mnyam du byung zhing / sangs rgyas kyi bstan pa la nyi ma shar ba'i snang ba byung / thugs spro zing ba'i ngang nas rten 'brel bzang po byung / dug mtsho'i gling de yang mkha' spyod dag pa'i snang ba byung / shing dang lo 'dab so sor bral bas srid gsum gyi sdug bsngal las chad pa'i snang bar byung / stag gzig gung gsum la sogs pa'i can gzan rnams kyang bla ma la dad cing gus pa'i tshul gyi ma bu 'phrad pa bzhin du byung bas /

9.15-10.4: And even the faces of the images of 'Bigs Śrī Temple turned in the direction of where Nun Palmo was and remained [that way]. The elders who were there said, "It would be suitable to invite Nun Palmo again." The younger [monastics] did not listen and closed the door. Nun [Palmo] said, "Sampelma, if we were to stay in this place now, then it would be like the example of rotting together with the elders themselves. Rather than staying here, we must go to the island of the Boiling Poison Lake in the north. Now there is a house in the direction of the region facing east. You go to that place where there are two of our householders and bring two cows and oxen.

10.4-16: According to Nun Palmo's instructions, Sampelma, having gone to that place, came chasing after two cows and oxen. That very nun was not able to ride without hands or feet. That very ox, because of being an animal, did not know how to bend [his] body. Then the [ox], having his four legs bent [by Sampelma] and placed them on the ground, Nun Palmo was able to ride and Sampelma also carried the lama's belongings, provisions and so forth. They left to the island of the Boiling Poison Lake. Both the master lama and servant together came at the same time as when the sun struck and arose. [It] appeared [as if] the sun arose on the *Buddhadharma*. From the state of mental elation, auspicious omens arose. That island of [Boiling] Poison Lake also appeared as a pure sky realm. As trees and leaves are separated from each other, it appeared [to Nun Palmo] that [she was] cut from the suffering of the three worlds. Even the carnivorous [animals] such as the three, tiger, leopard, snow-leopard, arose in a manner of devotion and respect to the lama, like the meeting between mother and sons.

10.16-20: de nas dug mtsho'i gling la shing phran tser skye ba'i rtsa bar bzhag gsung
pas / der bzhugs pas bla ma'i zhal nas bsam 'phel ma da khyed rang glang gnyis po
yang bdas nas sprod / slar yul la song gsungs / g.yu bre gang yang khyed rang khyer
nas song gsungs pas/

10.20-11.11: bsam 'phel ma de nyid sems la skyo shas nges 'byu ['byung] drag po'i
sgo nas mig nas mchi ma byung ste zhu ba / kye ma kyi hud slob dpon rin po cher /
smon lam dbang gis dpon gyog lhan cig 'dzoms // khyed thugs brtse bas bu yang nga
yin zhing // nga yi blo btad pha ma khyed lags pas // khyod dang bral nas gar yang bag
mi chags skad cig tsam yang 'bral ba ma mchis pa'i // nga la tshe 'di khyed rang ma
gtogs pa // nor dang grogs ni bdag la dgos pa med // dge 'dun slob ma'i skyil du
bzhugs dus kyang // khyed sku bar chad nad gyis zin gyur nas // nga ni khyod dang yud
tsam bral ma phod //da ni byang thang ri la sleb pa'i dus // las kyi shi bral byung na
bya thabs med // ma shi gson bral byas pa ga la phod //bdag ni zhabs tog sgrub nas
sdod par zhu // bsam 'phel mas 'di ltar zhus pa dang /

11.11-15: dge slong ma'i phyag bsam 'phel ma'i mgo la bzhag nas gsungs pa/ chung
nas 'grogs shing phan sems che ba'i grogs // brtse gdung can gyi bu mo bsam 'phel
ma// nga ni khyod la phan pa'i mtha' rdzogs pas // spang ljongs 'di na nga yi dur sa
yin// tshe sngon las las grub pa'i na tsha 'di //

10.16-20: Then [Nun Palmo] said, “Place me at the root of a small tree which grows on a peak on the island of the [Boiling] Poison Lake.” While she remained there, the lama said, “Sampelma, you yourself now, having chased out both oxen and returning them, go back to your home. You should also carry a full measure of *bre* of turquoise [and] go.”

10.20-11.11: As tears arose from that very Sampelma’s eyes due to severe sorrow in her mind and aversion, she requested, “Alas! Oh, precious teacher! Because of prayer, master and servant met together. Because of your compassion and love, I am also your child and you are my parent to whom I entrust my mind. Having separated from you, there is misfortune wherever I go. In this lifetime, I have never been separated from you even for a moment. There is no need for wealth or friends. Also during your residence in the midst of the disciples [of the] *samgha*, your body was consumed by a illness which was an obstacle. I did not dare to be separated from you for a mere instant. Now [when] we arrived at the mountain of Byang Thang, there is nothing to be done if karmic death separates [us]. How can I dare separate [from you] while we are alive? May I remain while I serve you?”

11.11-15: Nun [Palmo], having placed her hand on Sampelma’s head said, “Sampelma, a girl who is endowed with love; a friend who has accompanied me since childhood and has a great mind to benefit [others], I have exhausted benefiting you. This marshy valley is my burial site. This disease developed from karma from my previous life.

11.15-12.11: ji ltar byas kyang phan pa mi srid pas // nga ni mi min mdze ma'i ro yin
no // mdze ma'i ro la zhen chags ma byed par // bu mo gang dga'i yul du 'gro ba legs //
ces gsungs pa dang // yang bsam 'phel mas zhu ba 'di ltar phul ba / tshe rab [rabs]
sngon nas da lta tshun chad du //las dang smon lam dag pas zhal mjal ba'i //blo gtad
skyabs mgon byed pa'i dge slong ma// nga yi chung nas kyed kyi zhabs tog zhus //lus
ngag yid gsum zhabs tog ci sgrub byas// rang don bde skyid tsam yang byed ma myong
//khyod kyi lus la 'thebs pa'i na tsha dang// bdag gi sems la 'khor ba'i sdug bsngal
gnyis // tsha grang mnyam du myong ba ma gtogs par // rang don skad cig tsam yang
byed ma myong // khyod kyi thugs la 'gyod pa ma dgongs na // nga la bskal ba bzang
po yod gyur na// dge slong khyod dang tshe 'dir mjal bar shog / gal te tshe 'dir mjal bar
ma gyur na // skye ba 'di nas phyi mar gar skyes kyang// khyod kyi nga yi slob dpon
'gyur ba dang // khyod thugs dgyes pa'i zhabs tog 'gyur bar shog / phyi ma o rgyan yul
dang mkha' spyod du //dpon g.yog lhan cig mjal ba'i smon lam shog / ces gsungs pas/

12.11-15: dge slong ma'i shal nas mtshams khang rgyab zer gsungs pa / de bzhin
bsam 'phal mas bla ma'i gsung bzhin mtshams khang 'dom gang gru bzhi ma zhi
rgyab pas / legs par grub ste / dge slong ma de nyid mtshams khang nang du bzhud de
bzhag pas / mtshams khang gi phyogs bzhi la bu sgo bzhi ston nas mtshams shing re re
bkal //

11.15-12.11: Whatever is done, it is impossible to help. I am not a person; I am a leprous corpse. Girl, do not be attached to a leprous corpse, it is better to go to whatever happier place.” Sampelma also offered a request like this, “Nun [Palmo], who from previous rebirths up until now, whom I have met because of pure karma and prayer, to whom I entrust my mind, and who protects. Since my childhood, I served you. I did whatever devotion needed to be accomplished with my three: body, speech and mind. I never experienced even a small [degree of] happiness for myself. The two: a disease which has seized your body and suffering wanders in my mind. Except for experiencing hot and cold together, I never had the experience of doing even a small thing to benefit myself. If you do not regret in your mind and if I have good fortune, may I meet you, Nun [Palmo], [again] in this life. If we were not to meet in this life, [then] wherever [we] will be born from this life to the next, may you become my teacher and may [I] become your disciple who does services which please your mind. In a later [life], pray that master and servant will meet together in the region of Orgyan and in the sky realm.

12.11-15: Nun [Palmo] said, “[Build] a retreat house.” Therefore, Sampelma built a one ‘dom square retreat house according to what the lama said. She completed it well. That very Nun [Palmo] was led inside the retreat house and was placed [there]. [Sampelma], having made 4 door openings in the four directions of the retreat house, hung wood on each [opening].

12.15-20: mtshams mdo tho yor gsum gsum re brtsigs nas bsam 'phel ma bla ma dang
'bral ma phod kyang yul gnas la bla ma'i bka' bzhin slar 'gro dgos byung zhing / bla
ma'i gnang ba'i g.yu de spud skyor / glang gnyis po mdun du bcug nas shar gyi bu sgo
'di nas phar zhus pa/ bla ma lags/ nga rang yul gnas la ga 'dra tsam bsdad de log zhus
pas /

12.20-13.14: bla ma'i gsung nas / lo lnga sdod la shog gsungs / lan gnyis zhus pas / lo
gsum sdod la shog gsungs / yang lan gsum zhus pas / lo gcig dang zla ba lnga sdod la
shog gsungs / de nas bsam 'phel ma glang gnyis mdun la bcug nas slar kha che khri
rten gyi yul la log go / de nas bsam 'phel ma lam du sngar gyi dpon gyog gnyis po
bzhugs pa'i brag phug de nang la phebs pas / bla ma dran pa'i gdung shugs kyi skyo
shas drag po'i sgo nas mig nas mchi ma phyung ste sdod pa'i tshe/ spos dri ngab ba
[nga ba?] bzang po'i sprul tshor ba lta bu byung ngo // der bla ma'i sku lus las 'bab
pa'i rnag khrag thams cad rdo la chags pa de rnams bzhes nas slar lam du phyin / glang
gnyis po gnas po de'i lag tu sprad / gnas po des glang gnyis la phyi bre re re gzan chu
'dur rgyab nas byin pas / glang de gnyis po skoms par sel nas dus las 'das so // bla ma'i
thugs rjes shar phyogs rgyal po'i sras che chung gnyis la skyes nas 'dug / bsam 'phel
ma mo rang kha che khri rten yul gyi rgyal kham la phebs 'dug go /

12.15-20: Although Sampelma could not bear to be separated from her lama, after having piled up three cairns [in front of] each [door opening as] a border for the retreat, she had to go back again to her land according to the lama's command. The turquoise which was given by the lama was held up as a hanging ornament. She placed both oxen in front of her. From the eastern entrance, she spoke toward [Nun Palmo], "Oh Lama. Just how [long] do I myself stay in the region and return [back here]?"

12.20-13.14: The lama said, "Stay five years and come." [When Sampelma] asked a second time, [the lama] answered, "Stay three years and come." [When Sampelma] also asked a third time, [the lama] answered, "Stay one year and five months and come." Then Sampelma placed the two oxen in front of her again and returned to the region of Śrīnagar, Kashmir. Then on the road, Sampelma went into that cavern where both master and servant stayed previously. While she remained, tears flowed from her eyes because of the severe sorrow of remembering her lama. There arose like the sensation of an auspicious transformation of bad smells to perfume. She went again on the road after taking all the pus and blood which had fallen from the lama's body there and formed on the rock. She handed over the two oxen into the hands of the householder. That householder poured into a thick liquid a *bre* of flour each and gave food to the two oxen. After those two oxen quenched their thirst, they died. Through the lama's compassion, [the oxen], after being born as two elder and younger princes of the king of the eastern direction, remained there. Sampelma herself arrived at the royal empire of Śrīnagar, Kashmir and remained there.

13.14-14.6: de nas dge slong ma de nyid g.yog mo bsam 'phel ma slar 'gro ba'i tshes
 nas bzung ste/ zhabs rdo rje skyil krung du bzhugs/ rgal tshigs mda' lta srang/ rang lus
 'phags pa'i dkyil 'khor/ ngag yi ge drug pa'i dkyil 'khor/ thugs gsal stong 'dzin pa med
 pa'i dkyil 'khor/ dkyil 'khor gsum gyis grub pa la bzhugs nas/ der zhag po lnga lon pa
 dang/ mnal dang 'od zer 'dres pa'i nyams snang zhig la/ sku smad kyi shang lam chu
 lam nas mar lcong nya sbal sbrul la sogs pa mang po thon te zhal nas yi ge drug pa
 yengs med kyi nang nas gnang/ sa 'og la 'dzul ba'i mnal lam gzigs te/ de nas dgung
 zhag nyer gcig song ba'i dus na/ mo rang gi mdun gyi nam mkha' la lo brgyad gnyis
 bcu drug lon pa'i lang tsho dang ldan pa zhig gis/ phyag g.yas pas shel gyi 'phreng ba
 brgya rtsa brgyad bsams/ g.yon pas chu skyes kyi sdong bu 'dzin pa zhig gis /

14.6-12: dge slong ma dpal mo tsho mo khyod la tshe 'dir mchog mthun mong gi
 dngos grub mi 'dod dam/ 'dod na 'di nas phar zla ba bdun 'gro ba'i sar/ ling khar[a] śrī
 tsug sbrum bur zer ba'i lha khang zhig yod pas/ de'i nang la 'phags pa bcu gcig zhal
 sku dngos bzhugs yod pa/ der mjal bar song zhig gsungs/ 'phags pa'i thugs rjes zhal
 nas ma ni dang sangs se thon pa byung zhing/ de nas dge slong ma dpal mo 'phags pa'i
 bka' sgrub phyir dka' spyad dang du long te byon pas/

13.14-14.6: Then, since the day her servant Sampelma left again, that very nun remained in cross-legged posture in the *vajra* position. The joints of her back were straight like an arrow. She remained in a meditational state by means of the three mandalas: Her own body as the mandala of the Holy One, her speech as the mandala of the six-syllable mantra, and her mind as the mandala which is emptiness and without grasping clarity. When she stayed there five days, in an experiential vision in which sleep and light were mixed, she saw many tadpoles, fish, frogs, snakes, and so forth come out of her vagina and anus and glide into the earth while she recited the six-syllable mantra without distraction. Then when the 21st day passed, in the sky in front of her, a certain 16-year old endowed with youthfulness, holding a 108-[beaded] crystal rosary with his right hand [and] with his left [hand], holding a lotus stalk, [appeared and] said:

14.6-12: “Nun Palmo tsho mo. Don’t you desire the common and uncommon siddhis in this lifetime? If desire [them], [go] toward a place which is to be traveled for seven months from here. There is a temple which is called Ling kha ra śrī gtsug sbrum bu. Inside of that [temple], there is a true image of the Eleven-faced Holy One. Go to meet [him] there.” From the mouth of the compassionate holy one, the *mani* [mantra] came out vividly and then Nun Palmo, because of the instruction of the Holy One, accepted the hardship and went.

14.12-18: nyin cig byon pa dang sku'i gzhi snyung mdze yin pa'i stabs kyis zhabs kyis
 byon ma tshugs/ [de nas spyi shud rgyab cing byon pas/ spang go log rlung gis pha
 dran nang gnyis kyis bya rgyal lan gsum du gyur to//]³⁰² de skabs la sku gzugs la zug
 zer drag pos phyi dbugs chad nang dbugs ma chad tsam zhig gi ngang las glo ba dang
 mchin pa mthong ba'i dong thon te sdug bsngal dang du blang ste bzhugs pa'i skabs
 'dir/

14.18-15.11: ming po in dra buddhi'i phyag g.yas na tshe bum bsams/ g.yon pas thod
 pa zas gyis bkang nas dge slong ma la 'di skad ces gsungs so// sring mo nyon dang
 legs ming dkar lcam ma// de ring ming po'i skad la yar gsan dang// phyag g.yas tshe yi
 bum pa'i nang shel na// mdze rigs bco brgyad sel ba'i khrus chu yod// g.yon pa thod pa
 rdzas kyis bkang ba 'di// zag med bde ba'i ting 'dzin zas mchog yin/ rig pa ngar skyed
 da lta yar longs shig/ ces gsungs pas/ dge slong ma'i thugs dgongs la/ ming po'i gsung
 yin pa mkhyen nas yar bzhengs pa dang/ sku mdun na mi gang yang mi 'dug pas/ mo
 rang gi bsam pa la snga mar chos byas pa ni nged rang lhag/ grub pa thob pa ni in dra
 budhi lhag pas/ skyes pa dang skyes dman gyi bar la skye rab[s] dgu yod zer ba de
 bden pa 'dug bsam nas/ dge slong ma de nyid grogs kyang med pa las sku gzugs kyis
 sku lus kyang 'gul ma tshugs pa de brtson 'grus drag po'i sgo nas bzhengs te bzhugs
 pa dang /

³⁰² See note 303.

14.12-18: After she traveled for a day, because her body was sick with leprosy, she could not walk with her feet. Then she crawled generally [on] all [fours] and left.-----

-----³⁰³At that time, because of the intense pain of her body, her external breath was cut, [her] internal breath was not quite stopped. There appeared a hole through which her lungs and liver were seen. She accepted the suffering and remained there.

14.18-15.11: At this time, her brother Indrabhūti held a [long] life vase in his right hand; with his left, [he held] a skull filled with food. He said the following to Nun [Palmo]: “Listen sister, Princess Lakṣmīṅkarā. Listen up to your brother’s words today. In my right hand, inside of the [long] life vase, there is cleansing water which removes 18 kinds of leprosy. This skull in my left [hand], filled with substances, is the supreme *samādhi* food of uncontaminated bliss. Generate strength of wisdom and stand up now!” In Nun [Palmo’s] mind, she knew that [the words] were being spoken by her brother, and she stood up, [but] no one was in front of her. [So] she thought, “Previously, I was better in terms of dharma practice. Indrabhūti is better in terms of achieving spiritual realization. [Therefore] that adage is true, ‘Between women and men, there is a [difference of] 9 lifetimes.’” That very nun, because of not even having assistance, was also not able to move her body. Due to her intense efforts, she stands up and remains there.

³⁰³ No translation is provided.

15.11-16.7: sku mdun nas tshur dar dkar ser dmar ljang ldan pa'i bu mo lnga zhal
 'dzum dang bcas te dge slong ma la cang mi smra bar bzhugs pa dang / de nas dge
 slong ma'i shal nas khyed bu mo lnga po gang nas yin zer ba'i mgur 'di gsungs so//
 mtshar sdug ldan pa'i bu mo khyed lnga po //shar lho nub byang sa phyogs gang nas
 yin //sa steng sa 'og bar snang gang nas yin //pha ma rigs bzang su yi sras mo dag /
 mtshar sdug 'od dang ldan pas bshad du gsol //ces gsungs pa dang / de nas bu mo lnga
 pos gar 'cham pa'i tshul du gzhas ma sgor ba lta bu / bal mo 'cham pa ltar /gcig gi
 dbus la 'dzul /bzhi'i mtha' skor te/ dbyangs snyan pa'i tshul gyis yul gyi lo rgyus 'di
 ltar zhus so //mo rdo rje rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin// mo rin chen rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin //
 mo pad ma rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin // mo las kyi rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin // nged bud
 dha rigs kyi mkha' 'gro yin // rgyal ba rigs lnga'i yum mchog yin // dpal ri pad ma
 bkod pa'i pho brang nas // grub thob la lba pa yis btang ba yin// nged sring mo dge
 slong dpal mo de //ming nas 'bod de lha yi gnas su khyol //khyod dge slong zhu ba'i
 pho nya yin //zhes dbus kyi bu mo des 'di ltar zhus pas /

15.11-16.7: Here in front of her were five smiling ladies endowed with white, yellow, red, and green scarves, not saying anything whatsoever to Nun [Palmo]. Then from the nun's mouth, she sang this song [in] which she says, "Where are you five ladies from? All of you five ladies who are endowed with beauty, from what region are you from? East, south, west, and north. From where are you from? The surface of the earth, underground or space. Of what good family lineage are you daughters? I ask you, who are endowed with beauty and splendor, to explain." Then the five ladies circled like dancers revolving as in the manner of dancing a Nepalese dance, one [of the ladies] glides into the center and the [other] four surround the edges. The middle lady said thus: "She is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the *vajra* family. She is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the *ratna* family. She is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the lotus family. She is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the karma family. I am the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the Buddha family. We are the supreme mothers of the five Buddha families. We were sent by Siddha Lwavapa³⁰⁴ from the palace of Śrī Parvata Pad ma bkod pa. [The Siddha Lwavapa said to us] 'That Nun Palmo, who is our sister, call [her] by name and bring her to the abode of the deity.' We are messengers who are reporting [to] you, Nun [Palmo]."

³⁰⁴ Lwavapa (or other wise known as Kambala, literally meaning "blanket" or "cloak," and by other names as Kamaripa and Śrī Parvata) was the name of the Mahāsiddha who was known for wearing one piece of cloth and taught the *siddhas* Indrabhūti, Lakṣmīṅkarā, and others. See Dowman, tr., *Masters of Mahāmudrā: Songs and Histories of the Eight-Four Buddhist Siddhas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), 179-185 for a translation of his biography and comments on the problems of identification of this figure.

16.7-17.3: khong lnga po re re nas dar dkar ser dmar ljang re ston nas dge slong ma de
nyid dgung dang sprin gyi mtshams nas phar gdan zhus te / ling khar[a] śrī gtsug lha
khang ‘phags pa bcug zhal bzhugs pa’i lha khang nang bskyal nas khong rang bu mo
lnga po nam mkha’ la ‘ja’ yal ba bzhin du song ngo // de nas dge slong ma khong rang
‘phags pa la mos gus gdung ba drag po’i sgo nas dkyil ‘khor gsum gyi grub pa la
bzhugs pa’i tshe / sang snga dro la lha khang sku gnyer de mchod pa ‘bul zhing ‘ongs
pa dang / dge slong ma sor mo ma tshang ba’i stabs kyis sku gnyer des mig hrig hrig
ltas zhe sdang ‘bar te / lde mig gi thag pas brdung / mdze sbrang gi sbrang mo khyod
nged gyi lha khang nang ‘ongs pa dang / nged rang ni lha khang nang lha bsangs khrus
gsol byas mi tshugs pas / lo thog nyes pa dang ser bas rdung pa la sogs pa byung na
nged rang gi mgor ‘ong nges yin zer nas / lde mig gi thag pa des spyi gtsugs nas rkang
thil yan chad du brdungs shing / dge slong ma’i shabs nas ‘then te lha khang gi rgyab
la bskal bas / dge slong ma’i thugs dgongs la sems can gyi blo ma rig pas sgrib pa yin
snyam byang chub tu thugs bskyed de /

16.7-17.3: After each of the five [ladies] displayed white, yellow, red, and green scarves, [they] invited that very nun [to come on top] toward the juncture between the sky and the clouds. They brought her to Ling kha ra śrī gtsug Temple, where inside resides a holy Eleven-faced One. They, all the five ladies, disappeared like a vanishing rainbow in the sky. Then Nun [Palmo] herself, due to her intense devotion and love for the Holy One, remained during this time in meditation of the three mandalas. On the next morning, the temple custodian came to make offerings. Because of Nun [Palmo]'s incomplete finger and noticing her twitching eye, that custodian burned with rage and beat her with the handle of his keys. He said, "You beggar woman, who are a leprous beggar, came inside my temple. I myself cannot do offerings of incense to the deities and ablutions in the temple. If the crops fail, hail strikes and so forth, it is certain that [all] will come to my head." With the key handle, he beat her from the crown of her head to the soles of her feet. Having pulled the nun from her feet, he brought her to the back of the temple. In Nun Palmo's mind, she generated an enlightened attitude [and thought], "Sentient beings' minds are obscured by ignorance."

17.3-18.2: gang ltar yin rung yi dam la rgyab mdun med snyam pa'i thugs bzhes bzang po'i sgo nas smyung gnas gnang nas / nyi ma gcig za ma / nyi ma gcig ngag byed nas / thugs dam la 'phags pa'i bstod pa snying stobs brtson 'grus drag po'i sgo nas 'di ltar gsungs pa / om 'jig rten mgon po la phyag 'tshal zhes pa nas / 'jig rten 'jig rten las 'das dgos pa kun grub 'gyur //zhes 'di ltar mos gus drag po'i sgo nas bstod cing gsol ba btab pas / zla ba bdun langs pa dang 'phags pa'i lha khang 'di yang zhal dge slong ma'i phyogs la sgor ba yin no// lha khang de'i ming la yang rgyab mdun brjes pa'i lha khang zer / bcu gcig zhal gyi lha khang zer/ ling ga [ʔkha ra]³⁰⁵ śrī gtsug 'brum bu zer / lha khang gcig la ming gsum thos pa yin no// yang dge slong mas 'phags pa la gsol ba 'di ltar btab cing 'dug/ 'phags pa thugs rje chen po // 'phags mchog spyen ras gzigs dbang // mtha' med sems can gzigs shig / mi bzod sdug bsngal las skyobs shig / gsol ba btab pa la dgongs te // sdig can thar pa la drongs shig / om maṇi padme huṃ / lan gsum / om maṇi padme huṃ / lan gnyis / yi dam thugs rje chen po mkhyen no // bar do 'jigs pa'i phrang las drang du gsol //yang dag rdzogs sangs rgyas sa ru skyol //zhes gsol ba 'debs pa las / 'phags pa'i thugs rjes dge slong ma dpal mo phung po 'ja' lus grub nas tshe 'di la mkha' spyod du gshegs pa yin no//

³⁰⁵ The term *ling ga* was adjusted to *ling kha r[a]* (the term *ling khar* also appears in the text) to be consistent with the term *li kha ra shing 'phel* that appears in Jo gdan's text, although I do not discount that *ling ga* may be correct and the others are errors.

17.3-18.2: By means of good thoughts, [she thinks], “Whatever is proper, the tutelary deity has no front nor back.” Doing the fast, one day she [cut off] food. one day, she [cut off] speech. In meditation, she said the praises of the Holy One with intense fortitude and diligence: “Om. Homage to the protector of the world. [May I] accomplish all the necessities of the mundane and supramundane world.” With intense aspiration and respect, she praised and supplicated. After reaching seven months, this temple of the Holy One had even turned its face in the direction of the nun. The temple had acquired three names: The name of that temple was even called the temple of changed back [and] front, the temple of the eleven-faced one, and Ling ga śrī gtsug brum bu. Again Nun [Palmo] supplicated like this to the Holy One and remained [there]: “Great compassionate Holy One, supreme Holy Spyan ras gzigs. May you behold limitless sentient beings. May you save them from unbearable suffering. May you heed the supplication and may you lead sinners to liberation.” Three times [she utters the mantra], “*Om maṇi padme huṃ.*” Twice, [she utters], “*Om maṇi padme huṃ.*” She supplicated, “Omniscient tutelary deity, Great Compassionate One. Please deliver us from the narrow passage of fear in the *bar do* and bring us to the pure and perfectly enlightened Buddhahood.” At this time, due to the compassion of the Holy One, Nun Palmo departed and attained the rainbow body.

18.2-8: de nas kha che khri rten gyi yul du g.yog mo bsam 'phel ma de nyid bla ma
dran pa'i gdung shugs kyis zhag rtsis rgyab ste sdod pa las lo gcig dang zla ba lnga
song 'dug pas / de'i dus na bla ma'i gnang ba'i g.yu de yang phyag rten du 'khyer nas
slar mtsho'i gling la phebs pas / lo rgyun ring ba'i btab kyis bla ma'i mtshams khang
g.yas g.yon gyi shing rnams kyang mtshams khang bas ring ba song 'dug /

18.8-16: de nas bsam 'phel ma'i bsam blo la sgo 'di zhi rgyas dbang drag gi sgo nas
bcol phye dgos bsam nas / shar zhi ba la spyod de phye yi 'dug / shar rdo rje rigs gyi
mkha' 'gro ma// sku mdog dkar mo dung gi mdangs // zhi ba'i lang tsho rab dkar
zhing// phyag g.yas thabs kyis da ru khrol // g.yon pa shes rab dril bu [b]snams // dar
dpyangs cod pan pu ru ru// zhabs kyis bro brdung khrig se khrig / ma ye shes mkha'
'gro ma la gsol ba 'debs// gsang ba ye shes mtsho rgyal la gsol ba 'debs //dge slong ma
dpal mo mtshungs mo la gsol ba 'debs //

18.2-8: Then in the region of Śrīnagar, Kashmir, that very servant Sampelma, because of her strong sorrow for missing the lama, was counting the days and remained there. One year and five months had passed. At that time, [she] also carried the turquoise which was given by the lama as a present and returned to the island of [Boiling Poison] Lake. Due to the long period of the year, even the trees that were on the right and left of the lama's retreat house had become taller than the retreat house.

18.8-16: Then in her mind, Sampelma thought, "It is necessary to entrust [the forces] to open this entrance by means of [the four types of Buddha activity]: pacification, increase, power, and subjugation. In the east, the one who practices pacification, opens [the door]. In the east is the *mkha'* 'gro ma of the *Vajra* family. The color of her body is white, the splendor of a conch shell, and the very white youthfulness of pacification. Her right hand plays a drum which is method. Her left [hand] holds a bell which is wisdom. [She wears] a crown with silk ribbons [that make a] pu ru ru [sound]. Her dancing feet [makes the sound] thrik se thrik. I supplicate Mother Wisdom *mkha'* 'gro ma. I supplicate Secret Yeshe Tsogyel.³⁰⁶ I supplicate Nun Palmo mtshungs mo.

³⁰⁶ The inclusion of Yeshe Tsogyel here gives the text a Rnying ma flavor.

18.16-19.5: nga slob ma'i rkyen ngan bar chad sel //lam sna chos la drangs pa dang //
 shar sgo phye ba'i las mdzod cig / ces pas gang du yang mi 'dug / lho rin chen rigs kyi
 mkha' 'go ma //sku mdog ser po gser gyi mdog / rgyas pa'i lang tsho rab gang zhing//
 phyag g.yas thabs kyi da ru khrol //g.yon pa shes rab dril bu bsname //dar dbyangs cod
 pan pu ru ru //zhabs kyis bro brdung khrig se khrig/ ma ye shes mkha' 'gro ma la gsol
 ba 'debs //gsang ba ye shes mtsho rgyal ma la gsol ba 'debs //dge slong ma dpal mo
 mtshungs mo la gsol ba 'debs //nga slob ma'i rkyen ngan bar chad sel //lam sna chos la
 drangs pa dang //lho sgo phye ba'i las mdzod cig / de nas 'ja' gur gcig ston pa byung //

19.6-19: nub pad ma rigs kyi [m]kha' 'gro ma //sku mdog dmar po byu ru'i mdog /
 dbang gi lang tsho rab gang zhing //phyag g.yas thabs kyi da ru khrol //g.yon pa shes
 rab dril bu bsname // dar dbyangs cod pan pu ru ru //zhabs kyis bro brdung khrig se
 khrig / ma ye shes mkha' 'gro ma la gsol ba 'debs //gsang ba ye shes mtsho rgyal ma la
 gsol ba 'debs //dge slong ma dpal mo mtshungs mo la gsol ba 'debs //

18.16-19.5: May you remove the impediments from me, your disciple. May you lead me to the path of religion and do [this by] opening the door to the east.” [At this point,] nothing happens. [Sampelma thought,] “In the south is the *mkha’ ‘gro ma* of the Jewel Family. The color of her body is yellow, the color of gold, fully[-developed] youthfulness of increase. Her right hand plays the drum [which is] method. Her left [hand] holds a bell [which is] wisdom. [She wears] a crown with silk ribbons [that make a] pu ru ru [sound]. Her dancing feet [makes the sound] thrik se thrik. I supplicate the Mother Wisdom *mkha’ ‘gro ma*. I supplicate Secret Yeshe Tsogyel. I supplicate Nun Palmo Mtshungs mo. May you remove the impediments from me, your disciple. May you lead me to the path of religion and do [this by] opening the door to the south.” Then there arose a rainbow canopy display.

19.6-19: “In the west is the *mkha’ ‘gro ma* of the Lotus Family. The color of her body is red, the color of coral, fully[-developed] youthfulness of empowerment. Her right hand plays the drum [which is] method. Her left [hand] holds a bell [which is] wisdom. [She wears] a crown with silk ribbons [that make a] pu ru ru [sound]. The dance of her feet [makes the sound] thrik se thrik. I supplicate the Mother Wisdom *mkha’ ‘gro ma*. I supplicate Secret Yeshe Tsogyel. I supplicate Nun Palmo Mtshungs mo.

19.19-20.2: nga slob ma'i rkyen dang bar chad sel // lam sna chos la drangs pa dang//
 nub sgo phye ba'i las mdzod cig / 'ja' gur gnyis ston / byang las kyi rigs kyi mkha'
 'gro ma //sku mdog sngon po g.yu yi mdog / drag po'i lang tsho rab gang zhing//
 phyag g.yas thabs kyi da ru bsnams// g.yon pa shes rab dril bu bsnams //dar dpyangs
 cod pan pu ru ru //zhabs kyis bro brdung khrig se khrig / ma ye shes mkha' 'gro ma la
 gsol ba 'debs //gsang ba ye shes mtsho rgyal ma la gsol ba 'debs //dge slong ma dpal
 mo mtshungs mo la gsol ba 'debs //ngo slob ma'i rgyen dang bar chad sel// lam sna
 chos la drangs pa dang// byang sgo phye bas las mdzod cig / ces gsol ba 'debs pas 'ja'
 gur gsum brtsegs ma zhig khra lam me byung /

20.2-9: de'i dbus su dge slong ma mo rang sngar bas kyang gzi mdangs che ba bzhin
 zil chu khrol le bzhugs pas / bsam 'phel ma bla ma'i zhal mjal nas / der dpon g.yog
 gnyis po lan cig gdung ba drag pos ma bzod par dran med kyi ngang du brgyal nas
 'dug / rgyal ba sangs pa dang yar bzhengs te bsam 'phel mas zhus pa / bla ma rin po
 che lags / khyod drung 'tsho su bsten / sman ci tsam sdong 'tshal / zhus pas / bla ma'i
 zhal nas / nga drung 'tsho 'phags pa spyen ras gzigs bsten /

19.19-20.2: May you remove the impediments from me, your disciple. May you lead me to the path of religion and do [this by] opening the door [to] the west.” [Then] two displays of rainbow canopies appeared. “In the north is the *mkha’ ‘gro ma* of the Karma Family. The color of her body is blue, the color of turquoise, fully [-developed] youthfulness of wrathfulness. Her right hand plays a drum [which is] a method. Her left [hand] holds a bell [which is] wisdom. [She wears] a crown with silk ribbons [that make a] pu ru ru [sound]. The dance of her feet [makes the sound] thrik se thrik. I supplicate the Mother Wisdom *mkha’ ‘gro ma*. I supplicate Secret Yeshe Tsogyel. I supplicate Nun Palmo Mtshungs mo. May you remove the impediments from me, your disciple. May you lead me to the path of religion and do [this by] opening the door to the north.” Because of such supplications, there appeared multi-colored, 3-storied rainbow canopies.

20.2-9: In the center of them resided Nun [Palmo] herself [like] a sparkling dew drop as if more brilliant than before. After Sampelma faced the lama, both master and servant were there once [again]. With intense longing, [Sampelma] fell unconscious. [When she] revived and stood up, Sampelma said, “Oh, Precious Lama. Who was the doctor who attended you? How much medicine did you take?”³⁰⁷ The lama answered, “The doctor who attended me was the Holy Sgyan ras gzigs.

³⁰⁷ If there is a spelling error, I am assuming that the phrase should be *sman...gtong ba*: “to give medicine.” I have translated this simply as “...medicine [did you] take?” referring to what “medicine was given” to her.

20.9-13: sman yi ge drug pa btang ba yin gsungs / de nas slob ma bsam 'phel ma yang
bla ma la dam tshig ma log par bka' ci gsungs 'grub ste / mos gus drag po'i sgo nas lus
ngag yid gsum gyis zhabs tog ci nus zhu ba'i dbang las / tshe 'di la phung po 'ja' lus
grub / mkha' spyod du gshegs pa yin no /

20.13-21.3: de nas dge slong ma dpon g.yog gnyis po 'bigs śrī lha khang nang byon /
'phags pa'i sku mdun la khrom rnga brdung / dung 'bud pa la sogs te / grong 'khyer
gyi mi rnams thams cad bkug nas gsungs pa / nged rang gi nad 'di tsam 'gro ba sems
can gyis don du bzhes par gda' bas / khyed rang rnams dam tshig dang 'gal ba thams
cad bshags sbyangs bgyis shig / ces gsungs pas / dge slong ma de nyid mdun gyi nam
mkha' la 'phar nas thams cad la chos gsungs shing / snying po byang chub kyi lam la
'god de dbul 'phongs gi sdug bsngal sel nas / rdzogs ldan bskal bzang gi dpal dam par
longs su spyod par gyur to //dge slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar dge legs kun 'byung
zhes bya ba rdzogs so // //sarva maṅgalaṃ//

20.9-13: The medicine [that] was given [to me] was the six syllable mantra.” Then the disciple Sampelma also, while not breaking her vow to the lama, fulfilled whatever command she was told. Through intense respect and devotion, she offered whatever service she could by means of the three: body, speech and mind. In this life, [Sampelma] attained the rainbow body. She went to the sky realm.

20.13-21.3: Then both the Master Nun [Palmo] and servant came inside ‘Bigs Śrī Temple. In the market, they beat a drum, blew a conch shell and so forth in front [of the] image of the Holy One. Having summoned all the people of the town, [Nun Palmo] said, “Since I accept this mere illness of mine for the sake of sentient beings, all who contracted the vows must purify yourselves by confessing.” That Nun [Palmo] leaped up into the sky in front of them and spoke the Dharma to all, placed them on the path of quintessential enlightenment. Having removed the suffering of poverty, they enjoyed the splendor and wealth of the full happy kalpa. “The Hagiography of Nun Palmo: The Origin of Everything That is Good” has ended.

colophon 21.4-13: de yang par bskrun zhus ma thag pa'i rnam thar 'di bzhin 'di nas lo
mang sngon ka spug mdze nad sman khang du sman bcos ched du phebs pa mkhas
dbang 'brug pa bla ma rab brtan dam pa de nyid sman khang du bzhugs skabs dge
slong ma dpal mo'i rnam thar mdor bsdus 'di nyid phyi rabs skye 'gro rnam la sman
slad du gsar 'gyur byed por par brko zhig nges par yod pa zhes phebs don ltar / da lam
bla ma dam pa de nyid gyi dran gso'i slad du par brkos zhus zin pa 'dis rnam thar klog
mkhan rnam la phan pa'i rgyur gyur cig / ka spug bod yig me long par khang du rab
byung bcu drug pa'i chu sprul hor zla bdun pa'i tshes drug spyi zla brgyad pa'i tshes
bco lnga ston pa ye shu'i 'das lo 1953 nyin par du bskrun pa'o//

colophon 21.4-13: Something like this hagiography, which was just printed, was requested from this [time by] the late Bhutanese scholar Bla ma Rab brtan, who had come to Kalimpong Leprosy Hospital for treatment many years ago. When he was in hospital, he said to the publisher of a newspaper that this very brief hagiography of Nun Palmo must certainly be printed for the benefit of future generations. In accordance to what he said, now it has been printed in memory of that late lama. May [this] become the cause of benefit for the readers [of the] hagiography. [This] has been published in Kalimpong in the Tibetan Language Mirror Publishing House on the 6th day [of the lunar calendar] of the 7th *hor* month of the water-snake year, that is, on the 15th day of the 8th month [August 15th] of a sexagenary cycle in the year 1953 A.D.

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