

Transforming ordinary birth, death and intermediate state into the three bodies

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One of the main premises of Highest Yoga Tantra is that enlightenment may be achieved in this very lifetime. At the same time, enlightenment is equated with attaining the three bodies of the Buddha. This might be perceived as involving an apparent contradiction. If the body of the Buddha were to be attained by forsaking the present body and taking a new rebirth as an enlightened being, this would not constitute enlightenment in this very lifetime. Then how is it that, without undergoing death and rebirth, the present impure body – produced by karma and afflicting emotions – could be abandoned, and the body of the Buddha, adorned with the major and minor marks, be attained? While other schools have similar ideas, this paper will look only at works of Dge-lugs-pa authors who maintain that because there are unique correspondences holding between ordinary death and the Dharma Body, between the ordinary intermediate state and the Enjoyment Body, and between ordinary birth and the Emanation Body, it is possible to transform the one into the other without ordinary death intervening. This tradition was especially developed by Tsong-kha-pa on the basis of a work by Naagabuddhi (Naagabodhi), and was followed by Mkhas-grub-rje and other Dge-lugs-pa authors. The key for attaining enlightenment in this life through the generation process, according to them, lies in unique correspondences linking three levels: (1) the ground of purification, meaning ordinary birth, death and intermediate state (2) the fruit of purification, meaning the three bodies of the Buddha, and (3) the purifier, meaning the tantric practices of the generation and completion processes. This paper will examine some traditional Dge-lugs-pa arguments about the essential role these correspondences must play in the transformation of the ordinary states into the three bodies of the Buddha.