The Secret Doctrine, H. P. Blavatsky’s 1888 magnum opus, is based on stanzas allegedly translated from a secret “Book of Dzyan.” In 125 years, not a single one of these stanzas has been traced in any known book. While we would not expect to trace verses from a secret book in known books, this nonetheless esoteric text would likely have a correspondence to it. Here we at last find the “great breath,” mahā-prāṇa, and as an ultimate cosmic principle. In summary, the three key terms of the system that Blavatsky made known in 1888 were traced to the known texts whose secret versions she associated with the Book of Dzyan, and these known texts were not available until long after her time.

The Book of Dzyan: The Current State of the Evidence
by David Reigle

Alongside the known texts were rāṣṭra-vigrahā commentary, Vimalaprabhā, which distinguished as esoteric texts, and the Book of Dzyan as given in the “Occult Catechism” quoted by Blavatsky in The Secret Doctrine (vol. 1, p. 11). These are space, which ever is, the germ, which ever was, and the great breath, which is ever coming and going. A characteristic phrase about space quoted from the “esoteric Senzar Catechism” (ibid., p. 9) has a remarkable parallel to a catechism-like statement that is found repeated throughout the Buddhist scriptures. This parallel also showed that behind the rather vague term “space” is the Sanskrit term dhātu. The dhātu is the central subject of the Ratna-gotra-vibhāga, one of the five books attributed by Tibetan tradition to Maitreya. Blavatsky in a private letter had linked the Book of Dzyan to the “Secret Book of ‘Maytreya Buddha’,” which she distinguished from his five known books. Their subject matter would, of course, overlap. Alongside the dhātu, the known Ratna-gotra-vibhāga also teaches the gotra. As the “germ,” this would be the second of the three key terms from the “Occult Catechism.” The Ratna-gotra-vibhāga remained unknown in the West until its 1931 English translation from the Tibetan translation. Its Sanskrit original was discovered in Tibet in the mid-1930s, and was first published in 1950.

The third of the three key terms from the “Occult Catechism,” the “great breath,” is a very distinctive one. Blavatsky had described the Book of Dzyan as the first volume of the secret commentaries on the “Books of Kiu-te.” Dzyan is Sanskrit jñāna, “knowledge, wisdom” (the Tibetan letter “dz” always transliterated the Sanskrit letter “j”),1 so the Book of Dzyan is a generic name meaning only “Book of Knowledge/Wisdom.” Kiu-te is Tibetan rgyud-sde, the Tibetan Buddhist tantras. The first among these, as found in the Tibetan Kangyur, is the Kālacakra-tantra. Only in recent decades has the Buddhist tantras started to become publicly available. They were regarded as esoteric texts, and access to them was restricted in Tibet. The great Kālacakra commentary Vimalaprabhā was first published in the original Sanskrit in three volumes, 1986-1994. Although not the secret volume that Blavatsky referred to, this nonetheless esoteric text would likely have a correspondence to it. We at last find the “great breath,” mahā-prāṇa, and as an ultimate cosmic principle. In summary, the three key terms of the system that Blavatsky made known in 1888 were traced to the known texts whose secret versions she associated with the Book of Dzyan, and these known texts were not available until long after her time.
The Hymn of Creation

The teachings of the Book of Dzyan are alleged to be very old, older even than the Vedas: “For in the twentieth century of our era scholars will begin to recognize that the Secret Doctrine has neither been invented nor exaggerated, but, on the contrary, simply outlined; and finally, that its teachings antedate the Vedas.” The stanzas from the Book of Dzyan that Blavatsky gave in volume 1 of The Secret Doctrine are on cosmogenesis, or cosmogony. Among the handful of cosmogonic hymns found in the Vedas, Rg-veda 10.129, known as the “Hymn of Creation,” stands alone. It gives a comparatively straightforward account of cosmogony, as opposed to a more mythological account such as Rg-veda 10.90 where the cosmic man (purusa) becomes the cosmos. Five of its seven verses (1-3, 6-7) were quoted in The Secret Doctrine from the anonymous translation published by Max Müller in 1859, and placed facing the opening of the stanzas given from the Book of Dzyan (p. 26). There are obvious parallels between the two texts.

The first verse of the Rg-veda hymn says, in the early translation quoted in The Secret Doctrine, “Nor Aught nor Nought existed.” The first stanza of the Book of Dzyan speaks of “that which is and yet is not. Naught was.” The second verse of the Rg-veda hymn says, “The only One breathed breathless by itself.” The second stanza of the Book of Dzyan says that there was “naught save ceaseless eternal breath, which knows itself not.” The third verse of the Rg-veda hymn says, “Darkness there was, and all at first was veiled in gloom profound.” The first stanza of the Book of Dzyan had said that “Darkness alone filled the boundless all.”

A new translation of Rg-veda 10.129 was prepared by me, and posted on an internet blog dedicated to the Book of Dzyan (dzyan.net). Extensive translation notes can there be found on the various Sanskrit words and phrases; e.g., the derivation of the verb āvaśivaḥ in 10.129.1c from the root vṛt, “exist, turn, move,” rather than from the root vṛ, “cover.” Using this translation, here follows a more detailed comparison of the first three of its seven verses with the Book of Dzyan.

Rg-veda 10.129.1: “[It] was not non-existent, nor was [it] existent then. There was no world, nor sky, [nor] what is beyond. What moved incessantly? Where? In the abode of what? Was [it] water, dense [and] deep?”

Book of Dzyan, stanza 1, śloka 6: “. . . the Universe, the son of necessity, was immersed in parinispanna, to be outbreathed by that which is and yet is not. Naught was.”; 1:8: “Alone the one form of existence stretched boundless, infinite, causeless, in dreamless sleep; and life pulsed unconscious in universal space, . . .”; 3:2: “. . . the darkness that breathes over the slumbering waters of life.”

In particular, we may compare Rg-veda 10.129.1a, “[It] was not non-existent, nor was [it] existent then,” with the phrase in Book of Dzyan 1.6, “that which is and yet is not,” which is further clarified in the following stanza 1.7, “eternal non-being—the one being.” For Rg-veda 10.129.1c, “What moved incessantly?,” the “incessantly” is only an attempt to render the sense of “repeated” in the intensive verb “moved” (āvaśivaḥ), which sense was rendered by Karl Geldner as “back and forth” (hin und her), by Jan Gonda as “intermittently,” and by Hans Hock as “kept on” moving. The parallel phrase in Book of Dzyan 1.8 is “life pulsed unconscious,” where “pulsated” well shows repeated movement. The “water, dense [and] deep” asked about in Rg-veda 10.129.1d may be compared with “the slumbering waters of life” that darkness breathes over in Book of Dzyan 3.2, called in 3.3 “the mother deep.”

Rg-veda 10.129.2: “There was not death nor life (“non-death”) then. There was no distinguishing sign of night [or] of day. That one breathed without air by [its] inherent power. Other than just that, there was not anything else.”

Book of Dzyan, stanza 2, śloka 2: “. . . No, there was neither silence nor sound; naught save ceaseless eternal breath, which knows itself not.”

According to The Secret Doctrine, “The Great Breath” is “absolute Abstract Motion” (vol. 1, p. 14), which along with “absolute abstract Space” are the two aspects under which the one ultimate principle is symbolized. This breath or motion, the eternal cause, can also be described as force (ibid., p. 93 fn., speaking of the eternal nidāna or cause, the Oi-Ha-Hou): “. . . it is a term to denote the ceaseless and eternal Cosmic Motion; or rather the Force that moves it, which Force is tacitly accepted as the Deity but never named. It is the eternal kārana, the ever-acting Cause.” This motion or force can also be described as svabhāva, something’s “inherent nature”: Their [the Svabhāvikas'] plastic, invisible, eternal,
omnipresent and unconscious svabhāva is Force or Motion ever generating its electricity which is life. The svadhā, "inherent power" or force by which "that one" breathed without air in Rg-veda 10.129.2c, is apparently the svabhāva or "inherent nature" of "that one."

Rg-veda 10.129.3: "Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning. All this was water without distinguishing sign. That one germ which was covered by the void was born through the power of heat."

Book of Dzyan, stanza 1, śloka 5: “Darkness alone filled the boundless all, for father, mother and son were once more one, . . .”; 2.3: "The hour had not yet struck; the ray had not yet flashed into the germ; . . . "; 2.5: " . . . Darkness alone was Father-Mother, svabhāva, and svabhāva was in darkness."; 2.6: "These two are the Germ, and the Germ is one. . . . "; 3.2: “The vibration sweeps along, touching with its swift wing the whole universe, and the germ that dwelleth in darkness: the darkness that breathes over the slumbering waters of life.”; 3.3: “Darkness radiates light, and light drops one solitary ray into the waters, into the mother deep. The ray shoots through the virgin egg; the ray causes the eternal egg to thrill, and drop the non-eternal germ, which condenses into the world-egg.”

To this we may add a quotation from the "Occult Catechism," cited in The Secret Doctrine (vol. 1, p. 11): “What is it that ever is? "Space, the eternal Anupadaka [upapāduka]." What is it that ever was? “The Germ in the Root.” "What is it that is ever coming and going?" “The Great Breath.” This goes along with Book of Dzyan 3.8: “Where was the germ, and where was now darkness? Where is the spirit of the flame that burns in thy lamp, oh Lanoo? The germ is that, and that is light; the white brilliant son of the dark hidden father.” The parallels with darkness and water and the germ (ābhu) are self-evident. In the Book of Dzyan it is light that produces the cosmos (3.3: “Darkness radiates light”) rather than the closely related heat in Rg-veda 10.129.3d. But in Book of Dzyan 3.6 light is heat: " . . . radiant light, which was fire, and heat, and motion."

The close parallels between Rg-veda 10.129 and the Book of Dzyan are obvious; e.g., what is neither non-existent nor existent, its breathing, darkness, etc. Since Blavatsky had access to the anonymous translation of Rg-veda 10.129 published by Max Müller in 1859, which she quoted, she could have elaborated its ideas in an imaginary Book of Dzyan. However, a reader not knowing the source of either would more likely conclude that the brief Rg-veda 10.129 was derived from the extensive stanzas of the Book of Dzyan, than that the latter were elaborated from Rg-veda 10.129.

The Four Modes of Birth

Indeed, the genesis account given in the Book of Dzyan is considerably more comprehensive than other genesis accounts found elsewhere. As put by the Gnostic scholar, G. R. S. Mead, in 1904, “The Stanzas set forth a cosmogenesis and anthropogenensis which in their sweep and detail leave far behind any existing record of such things from the past; . . .” He further says that, "I advisedly call these passages enshrined in her works marvellous literary creations, not from the point of view of an enthusiast who knows nothing of Oriental literature, or the great cosmogonical systems of the past, or the Theosophy of the world faiths, but as the mature judgment of one who has been for some twenty years studying just such subjects." Today I can echo these words, and can now add to them the many Sanskrit texts that have become available in the more than one hundred years since he wrote this. While the Vedas were available in Blavatsky’s time, the Buddhist texts were not.

The Abhidharma-kośa, written by Vasubandhu in the fourth century C.E., systematized the teachings of early Buddhism. It did this so successfully that it remains the standard sourcebook on these teachings even today among the followers of Northern Buddhism. Its Sanskrit original was presumed lost; so the first European-language translation of it was made from its Chinese and Tibetan translations, and published in six volumes, 1923-1931. Then its Sanskrit original was discovered in Tibet in the mid-1930s by Rāhula Sānkritīyānaya. An edition of this was published in India in 1946,7 and again in 1967 along with its extensive commentary (bhāṣya) written by its author, Vasubandhu. Chapter three, titled loka-nirdeśa, concerns cosmology. Here we have the standard and authoritative Buddhist source on these matters.

One of the most unusual teachings of the Book of Dzyan is that of the four modes of birth of humans in prehistoric times. It is given in volume 2 of The Secret Doctrine on anthropogenesis. It speaks of humans who were "self-born" or "parentless," who were "sweat-born," and who were "egg-born,"
Besides the “womb-born,” as is now the case. The Abhidharma-kośa, following the words of the Buddha, also speaks of the four modes of birth, and specifically applies these to both animals and humans. Chapter 3, verse 8cd (translated by me): “There are four origins of living beings, beginning with the egg-born.” Vasubandhu’s own commentary: “The egg-born (āṇḍaja) origin, the womb-born (jarāyuja), the sweat-born (samsvedaja), and the spontaneously generated (upapāduka) origin”; i.e., the self-born or parentless. Verse 9c: “Humans and animals are of four kinds.” Commentary: “Humans are of four kinds: the egg-born, such as the elders Śāila and Upāśila who emerged from those of a crane, . . .; the womb-born, as now; the sweat-born, such as Māṇḍhātra, Čāru, Upacāru, . . ., etc.; and the spontaneously generated, e.g., those of the first age (kalpa).”

Since the Buddha had spoken this, it must be true. Now the commentators had to use all their ingenuity to explain it. So Vasubandhu in his auto-commentary and Yaśomitra in his sub-commentary drew on examples from mythology for the egg-born and sweat-born humans. For the spontaneously generated humans, they referred to the humanity of the first age or kalpa. This is in exact agreement with the Book of Dzyan, which teaches that the first “root-race” of humans was self-born or parentless. The Book of Dzyan is supposed to represent a once universal but now hidden Wisdom Tradition, which is said to be the source of the known religions and philosophies of the world. This tradition claims to have preserved the lost texts and commentaries that are known to have once existed but can no longer be found. These texts are said to contain the true explanations of the still extant texts. Here the four modes of birth for humans still found spoken of in some Buddhist texts, but hardly explained there, are explained as actually having occurred in remote ages.

Space

Blavatsky in a private letter of 1886, describing The Secret Doctrine that she was then writing, had linked the Book of Dzyan with the secret book of Maitreya Buddha: “I have finished an enormous Introductory Chapter, or Preamble, Prologue, call it what you will; just to show the reader that the text as it goes, every Section beginning with a page of translation from the Book of Dzyan and the Secret Book of ‘Maytreya Buddha’ Champai chhos Nga (in prose, not the five books in verse known, which are a blind) are no fiction.” Among the five books attributed to Maitreya by Tibetan tradition, the Ratna-gotra-vibhāga stands apart from the others in its vocabulary and ideas. Its central subject is the dhātu, the “element,” which when associated with impurity (samala) is the tathāgata-garbha, the buddha-nature that all beings are said to have. It so happens that the teaching of the one element is a fundamental teaching of the tradition of the Book of Dzyan, as may be seen in the following three quotations:

“If the student bears in mind that there is but One Universal Element, which is infinite, unborn, and undying, and that all the rest—as in the world of phenomena—are but so many various differentiated aspects and transformations (correlations, they are now called) of that One, from Cosmical down to micro-cosmical effects, from super-human down to human and sub-human beings, the totality, in short, of objective existence—then the first and chief difficulty will disappear and Occult Cosmology may be mastered.”

“Yes, as described in my letter—there is but one element and it is impossible to comprehend our system before a correct conception of it is firmly fixed in one’s mind. You must therefore pardon me if I dwell on the subject longer than really seems necessary. But unless this great primary fact is firmly grasped the rest will appear unintelligible. This element then is the—to speak metaphysically—one sub-stratum or permanent cause of all manifestations in the phenomenal universe.”

“However, you will have to bear in mind (a) that we recognize but one element in Nature (whether spiritual or physical) outside which there can be no Nature since it is Nature itself, and which as the Akasa pervades our solar system, every atom being part of itself, pervades throughout space and is space in fact, . . . Perchance if you remember all this we will succeed in imparting to you at least the elementary axioms of our esoteric philosophy more correctly than heretofore.”
Like the Abhidharma-kośa, the Sanskrit original of the Ratna-gotra-vibhāga was presumed lost; so the first European-language translation of it was made from its Tibetan translation, and published in 1931. Its Sanskrit original was also discovered in Tibet in the mid-1930s by Rāhula Sārkrityāyana, and an edition of this was published in India in 1950. Once this text became available, it was easy to identify the “one element” of the Theosophical teachings as the dhātu of the Ratna-gotra-vibhāga. Blavatsky’s letter had provided the clue linking the Book of Dzyan to the secret book of Maitreya. Even though the Ratna-gotra-vibhāga is one of the five “known” books of Maitreya, and not the “secret” book of Maitreya, there was the dhātu, the fundamental “element.”

If the “one element” is the dhātu, then what is the Sanskrit term behind “space”? These two terms appear to describe the same thing from different angles. For “space,” like the “one element,” is also regarded in the Theosophical teachings as being utterly fundamental. The “Occult Catechism” is quoted in The Secret Doctrine as saying (vol. 1, p. 11):

“What is it that ever is?” “Space, the eternal Anupadaka [upapāduka].” “What is it that ever was?” “The Germ in the Root.” “What is it that is ever coming and going?” “The Great Breath.” “Then, there are three Eternals?” “No, the three are one. That which ever is is one, that which ever was is one, that which is ever being and becoming is also one: and this is Space.”

Is “space” ākāśa? This term, now usually translated as “space,” can refer to an ultimate principle, or to a derived principle, namely, the fifth of the five elements sometimes called ether, or to a mere absence, a nothing. Would “space” in this quotation be ākāśa as an ultimate principle? Or would it even be śūnyatā? Although now usually translated as “emptiness,” śūnyatā was translated as “space” in an early translation of the Heart Sūtra quoted by Blavatsky. For decades I wondered.

Space is clearly not a generic term here; it is a specific technical term. The first verse of the first stanza that we have from the Book of Dzyan speaks of the “eternal parent,” which is identified as “space.” In the “Cosmological Notes” from the fall of 1881, when two Theosophical Mahatmas first began to answer questions from two Englishmen about the Theosophical teachings, the question was asked them, “What is the one eternal thing in the universe independent of every other thing?” The answer given was, “Space.” When The Secret Doctrine was published in 1888, the “esoteric Senzar Catechism” was quoted in the “Proem” as giving the same answer (vol. 1, p. 9):

“What is that which was, is, and will be, whether there is a Universe or not; whether there be gods or none?” asks the esoteric Senzar Catechism. And the answer made is—Space.”

Blavatsky had explained this more fully in her notes to an article published in January 1882:

“Hence, the Arahant secret doctrine on cosmogony admits but of one absolute, indestructible, eternal, and uncreated UNCONSCIOUSNESS (so to translate), of an element (the word being used for want of a better term) absolutely independent of everything else in the universe; a something ever present or ubiquitous, a Presence which ever was, is, and will be, whether there is a God, gods or none; whether there is a universe or no universe; existing during the eternal cycles of Maha Yugas, during the Pralayas as during the periods of Manvantara: and this is SPACE, . . .”

There is a statement found throughout the Buddhist scriptures, from the earliest to the latest, repeated in them like a refrain from a catechism. Here is this formulaic statement as found in the early Pali language Saṃyutta-nikāya (in 2.20), as translated by Bhikkhu Bodhi:

"Whether there is an arising of Tathāgatas or no arising of Tathāgatas, that element still persists, the stableness of the Dhamma, the fixed course of the Dhamma, specific conditionality." This is obviously reminiscent of the phrase from the esoteric Senzar Catechism, "whether there is a Universe or not; whether there be gods or none." A tathāgata is a buddha. Each buddha is said to have a buddha-field (budha-kṣetra). This is a world, or world-system. So in speaking of the arising of tathāgatas, this also implies the arising of the world-systems that are the fields of activity of the individual
buddhas. To say, “whether there is an arising of Tathāgatas or no arising of Tathāgatas,” is also to say, “whether there is an arising of world-systems or no arising of world-systems.” Whether or not these arise, “that element still persists.”

The word translated as “element” in “that element still persists” is dhātu, which is the same in Pali as in Sanskrit. This is directly parallel to “space” as “that which was, is, and will be” in the statement quoted by Blavatsky from the esoteric Senzar Catechism. This parallel would indicate that dhātu is the Sanskrit term behind “space.” The fact that dhātu was translated into Tibetan two different ways, as kham, “element,” and as dbyings, “realm, sphere, expanse, space,” would confirm this.

The basic meaning of the Sanskrit term dhātu is “element,” while in the compound dharma-dhātu, Tibetan chos kyi dbyings, it means the “sphere” or “space” of the dharmas. The dharmas are all the elements of existence that make up the Buddhist worldview, now often translated as “phenomena.” The compound dharma-dhātu is a widely used Buddhist technical term referring to the whole of the cosmos, which consists of the dharmas. It is easy to see how the dhātu, the “element,” or the “space” in which the cosmos appears, would always remain, whether or not the tathāgatas or buddhas or their world-systems arise.

This parallel is of the greatest importance, because there is no teaching more central in the system of teachings of the Book of Dzyan. It will therefore be worthwhile to provide a few more quotations from the Buddhist scriptures to show how pervasive this catechism-like statement is there. These quotations are chosen from among dozens upon dozens found throughout the Buddhist scriptures.

The quotation given above from the Pali Samyutta-nikāya collection is from the Paccaya-sutta of the Nidāna-vagga within that collection. The parallel Sanskrit text is the Pratītya-sūtra of the Nidāna-samyukta in the Samyukta-āgama collection. This collection is lost in the original Sanskrit, but some portions of it were discovered by expeditions to the Turfan area of central Asia in the early 1900s, including this particular text. This material is not readily accessible, like the Pali texts are, nor has it yet been translated into English. So I here quote the Sanskrit first, before translating it.

\[ \text{utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā sthita evaṃ dharmatā dharma-sthitaye dhātuḥ} \] \(^{21}\)

In translating this, I will mostly follow Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation for the first part, which is almost the same in Pali and Sanskrit. My translation of the latter part will reflect the small differences between the Pali and the Sanskrit.

"Whether there is an arising of tathāgatas or no arising, there verily remains this dharma-nature (dharmatā), the element (dhātu) for the establishment of the dharmas."

In trying to stay as literal as possible, and avoid interpretation, I have left the word dharmatā as “dharma-nature.” It is often translated as “true nature.” It is used as a synonym of dhātu, and like dhātu, is contrasted with the dharmas or phenomena as such. Thus, Maitreya’s text titled Dharma-dharmatā-vibhāga contrasts the dharmas with their true nature (dharmatā). Similarly, the dharmas are contrasted with the dharma-dhātu, the “element” or basic “space” of the dharmas.

This formulaic statement may therefore also use dharma-dhātu rather than just dhātu. It may also use other words instead of dhātu. Here is an example of it using dharma-dhātu from the Perfection of Wisdom Sūtra in 25,000 lines, in the section called “The Questions of Maitreya” (maitreya-pariprccchā). My translation follows.

\[ \text{yā utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā sthitaiveyaṃ dharmāṇāṃ dharmatā dharmā-sthitā dharmadātur . . .} \] \(^{22}\)

"Whether there is an arising of tathāgatas or no arising, there verily remains this dharma-nature (dharmatā) of the dharmas, the condition for the abiding of the dharmas (dharm-ṣṭhitā), the element (or basic space) of the dharmas (dharma-dhātu)."
Some translators have used “basic space” rather than just “space” (or “sphere” or “expanse” or “realm”) for dhātu in dharma-dhātu. I have done the same here, adding “basic space” in parentheses after “element.” Edward Conze translates this statement as follows:

"... that dharmic nature of dharmas which is established whether Tathagatas are produced or not, the established order of dharmas, the realm of Dharma (dharma-dhātu) ...”\textsuperscript{23}

We notice that Conze here translates dharma-dhātu as the "realm of Dharma," taking dhātu as "realm." In other places in the Perfection of Wisdom texts, in other versions of this formula, Conze translates dhātu as "element":

utpādād vā anutpādād vā tathāgatānāṃ sthita evāyam alakṣaṇa-dhātur.\textsuperscript{24}

"Whether the Tathagatas are produced or not produced, just so is this unmarked Element established."\textsuperscript{25}

The difference is because Conze followed the different Tibetan translations in the different places. In the first instance, where we had dharma-dhātu, the Tibetan translation of dhātu is dbayings, “realm” or "space." In the second instance, the Tibetan translation of dhātu is khams, "element." This shows clearly how the same word, dhātu, is appropriately translated as "element" in one place, and "realm" or "space" in another place. The dhātu, the special topic of Maitreya’s Ratna-gotra-vibhāga, is both the “one element” and “space” of the system of teachings of the Book of Dzyan.

The Germ

Once the key term “space” could be identified as the dhātu, thanks to the parallels with a catechism-like statement found throughout the Buddhist scriptures, Maitreya’s Ratna-gotra-vibhāga allowed us to identify the second of the key terms from the “Occult Catechism.” This term, as we recall, is the “germ”: “What is it that ever is?” “Space, the eternal Anupadaka [upapādaka].” “What is it that ever was?” “The Germ in the Root.” “What is it that is ever coming and going?” “The Great Breath.” Alongside dhātu, another basic term used in Maitreya’s Ratna-gotra-vibhāga is gotra. The term gotra has more than one meaning. In Buddhist texts, three main meanings for it have been identified by D. Seyfort Ruegg: 1. mine, matrix; 2. family, clan, lineage; 3. germ, seed; to which he adds, “all of which are in some way a ‘source’.”\textsuperscript{26} These meanings are not mutually exclusive, and even when one translation term must be chosen, the other meanings are also applicable. The gotra refers to a “matrix,” in the sense of a mine as the source of minerals, or to a “lineage,” as in a family lineage, or to a “germ,” in the sense of a seed.

The term gotra is used as a partial synonym of dhātu in Maitreya’s Ratna-gotra-vibhāga. Two kinds of gotra are distinguished. As explained in Ratna-gotra-vibhāga 1.149, and also in Maitreya’s Mahāyāna-sūtrālaṃkāra 3.4, these are the “naturally present” (prakṛti-sthā) or “natural” (prakṛtyā) germ or matrix or lineage (gotra), and the "acquired" (samudānīta) or "developed" (paripuṣṭa) germ or matrix or lineage (gotra). Here is Ratna-gotra-vibhāga 1.149 as translated by Jikido Takasaki:

“The Germ [of the Buddha] is known to be twofold,
Being like a treasure and like a tree [grown] from a seed;
The Innate [Germ] existing since the beginningless time
And that which has acquired the highest development.”\textsuperscript{27}

The innate or naturally present gotra is something that everyone has. Everyone has the germ or potential to become enlightened, to develop into a buddha. It is something that has always been there, something “existing since the beginningless time,” or in the words of the “Occult Catechism,” something “that ever was.” By contrast, the acquired gotra that is developed is something that is unfolded by cultivating it through effort. But these two kinds of gotra are not actually different.
The naturally present germ or matrix or lineage is fully equated with the \textit{dhātu}, the element or space. The acquired \textit{gotra} that is developed is differentiated from this only verbally, by way of the various dharmanas. This is explained in Maitreya’s \textit{Abhisamayālaṃkāra} 1.39 (my translation follows):

\textit{dharma-dhātor asambhedād gotra-bheda na yujyate |}
\textit{ādhaya-dharma-bhedāt tu tad-bhedāḥ parigīyate ||}

"Because the \textit{dharma-dhātu} is without division, division of the \textit{gotra} is not tenable. But due to the division of the \textit{dharmanas} that are based [on the \textit{dhātu}], the division of it [the \textit{gotra}] is spoken of."

Likewise, the germ and space are said to be one in the “Occult Catechism”: “Then, there are three Eternals?” “No, the three are one. That which ever is is one, that which ever was is one, that which is ever being and becoming is also one: and this is Space.” The same is said about the germ in the Book of Dzyan, stanza 2.5-6, but using “darkness” rather than “space”: “Darkness alone was father-mother, \textit{svabhāva}; and \textit{svabhāva} was in darkness. These two are the Germ, and the Germ is one.” Darkness, like the one element, is another synonym of space in the Theosophical teachings. As seen above, darkness (\textit{tamas}) is the term used in \textit{Rg-veda} 10.129. There for the germ the very rare term \textit{ābhu} is used, a term almost unknown elsewhere. By contrast, the term \textit{gotra} is not rare in the Buddhist texts, and is basic in Maitreya’s \textit{Ratna-gotra-vibhāga}, because the \textit{dhātu} is basic there.

These parallels indicate that, as was the case with the Sanskrit term \textit{dhātu} rather than \textit{ākāśa} for "space," so \textit{gotra} rather than other possible terms such as \textit{garbhā or bija} is the specific Sanskrit term behind the "germ" of the “Occult Catechism.” The centrality of space and the germ in the system of the Book of Dzyan well matches the centrality of the \textit{dhātu} and the \textit{gotra} in Maitreya’s \textit{Ratna-gotra-vibhāga}. The already clear link between them based on the \textit{dhātu} parallel was made even clearer with the \textit{gotra} parallel.

\textit{The Great Breath}

The Secret Doctrine postulates three fundamental propositions, the first of which is “An Omnipresent, Eternal, Boundless, and Immutable Principle” (vol. 1, p. 14). This principle is symbolized under two aspects: “absolute abstract Space,” and “absolute Abstract Motion.” Blavatsky goes on: “This latter aspect of the one Reality, is also symbolised by the term ‘The Great Breath,’ a symbol sufficiently graphic to need no further elucidation.” Here we have the third of the three key terms from the “Occult Catechism.” While “space” and the “germ” are general terms that might be found in any cosmogony, the “great breath” is a very specific and distinctive term.

We would expect to find the term “great breath” in the Vedic writings, because the idea is there. In the Upanisads, \textit{prāna} is equated with the absolute \textit{brahman} several times, and we find the trinity of cosmic principles: \textit{manas} (mind), \textit{prāna} (breath, life), \textit{vāk} (speech, matter). The “great breath,” however, is a very specific term, which would be \textit{mahā-prāna} rather than just \textit{prāṇa}. The monumental 16-volume \textit{Vedic Word-Concordance} (1935-1965) indexes every word in the entire Vedic literature. Thanks to the lifelong efforts of its compilers, Vishva Bandhu and his co-workers, we can now quickly check and definitively know whether any particular word is or is not found in the Vedic texts. We can now say for certain that the specific term “great breath,” \textit{mahā-prāṇa} (or \textit{mahā-śvāsa}), is not found in the \textit{śruti}, the Vedic texts proper. It is found only in two \textit{vedāṅgas}, auxiliary Vedic texts, and there only as a phonetic term for an aspirate letter.\textsuperscript{28} It is not used for the cosmic principle \textit{prāṇa} in any of the extant Vedic writings.

Blavatsky had described the Book of Dzyan as “the first volume of the Commentaries upon the seven secret folios of \textit{Kiu-te}, and a Glossary of the public works of the same name.”\textsuperscript{29} She goes on to say that there are fourteen volumes of these secret commentaries, distinguishing them from the publicly known Books of Kiu-te that can be found in the library of any Tibetan monastery. The term \textit{Kiu-te} was identified as an early phonetic rendering used by Horace della Penna of the Tibetan term \textit{rgyud-sde}, meaning the tantra (\textit{rgyud}) division (\textit{sde}) of the Tibetan Buddhist canon.\textsuperscript{30} The tantras are the esoteric texts among the Buddhist scriptures, requiring initiation for their study and practice. They remained
largely inaccessible until recent decades. The first volume of the tantra division in the Tibetan Kangyur is on Kālacakra. Not until 1986-1994 was the original Sanskrit text of the great Kālacakra commentary Vimalaprabhā published. It is here that we find the “great breath,” mahā-prāṇa, and as an ultimate cosmic principle.

The “great breath,” mahā-prāṇa, is found in the Vimalaprabhā commentary on the Kālacakra-tantra, chapter 2, verse 86. In that verse we read of the eight prakṛtis or kinds of substance (see Bhagavad-gītā 7.4), namely, the five standard elements, earth, water, fire, air, and space as ether, followed by mind (manas), the principle of intelligence (buddhi), and the principle of self-consciousness (ahamkāra). We also read of dense (sthūlā), subtle (sūkṣmā), and higher (parā) prakṛti, with the three standard qualities or guṇas of prakṛti. In the last line of that verse we read of a prakṛti that is the jñāna-mūrti, i.e., the jñāna-kāya, or “primordial wisdom body,” that is not a product (avikṛt), that is or has life (jīva, saying jīva-bhūtā, like in Bhagavad-gītā 7.5), and that is not the elements (bhūtā), earth, etc. The Vimalaprabhā commentary thereon further explains that this is a fourth prakṛti, corresponding to the turyā avasthā (the fourth state taught in the Māndūkya-upanisad, beyond waking, dreaming, and deep sleep). It is described as being the cause of the origination and cessation of living beings, and as having the inherent nature of the dharma-dhātu (dharma-dhātu-svabhāvā). The “life” (jīva) that it is or has is here glossed as the “great breath” (mahā-prāṇa).

The idea of such a principle is so little known, even today when the Kālacakra teachings are being made public, that it will be helpful to view it in its context in the Kālacakra tradition. The Jonang order of Tibetan Buddhism is known for specializing in the Kālacakra teachings. A book written in 1965 by the modern Jonangpa abbot Ngawang Lodro Drakpa (1920-1975), the Gzhon stong Chen mo, speaks of srog chen, the Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit mahā-prāṇa. This book has been partially translated in a 2007 Ph.D. thesis by Michael R. Sheehy. Near the beginning of the section translated, we read of the “magnificent vital force (srog chen).” This, of course, is our “great breath.” Michael Sheehy translates:

“Because the basic disposition (gshis) of abiding reality’s (gnas lugs) original actual nature is ultimately self-manifesting and spontaneous, it is the very identity of every aspect within the three realms. This is the essence of the lucid and magnificent vital force (srog chen) that is enduring (ther zug), everlasting (g.yung drung), all-pervasive (kun khyab), fearless (jig med), and constant (rtag); what is forever without interruptions, free from partialities and devoid of proliferations—like space.”

The Kālacakra system considers itself to be, in one sense, an extensive elaboration of the Mañjuśrī-nāma-saṃgīti. The first volume of the tantra section of the Tibetan Kangyur, containing Kālacakra texts, begins not with the Kālacakra-tantra but rather with the Mañjuśrī-nāma-saṃgīti. As the name implies, this text consists of names and epithets of Mañjuśrī, and one of its descriptive phrases includes the term mahā-prāṇa. Verse 29, or verse 2 of chapter 5, begins: mahā-prāṇo hy anutpādo . . .

“The great breath is without origination . . .” The Mañjuśrī-nāma-saṃgīti is the most commented on tantric text in existence, being a central text for Yoga-tantra, for Anuttara-yoga-tantra in general, and for Kālacakra in particular. One of the oldest tantric commentaries we have is the Mañjuśrī-nāma-saṃgīti commentary written in the eighth century C.E. by Vilāsa-vajra, before the introduction of the Kālacakra system into India. Vilāsa-vajra’s Sanskrit commentary, still unpublished but partially edited in a 1994 Ph.D. thesis by A. H. F. Tribe, provides us with perhaps the earliest gloss of mahā-prāṇa now extant (my translation follows):

mahā-prāṇo hy akāraḥ sa cānutpāda-svabhāvas tasya dharma-dhātu-svabhāvatvād ādāraṁ jñāna-hetutvāc ca

"The great breath is the syllable ‘a’, and that has the inherent nature of being without origination, because it is the inherent nature of the dharma-dhātu and because it is the cause of the mirror-like wisdom."

So according to Vilāsa-vajra’s commentary, the great breath (mahā-prāṇa) by way of the syllable “a” is the inherent nature (svabhāva) of the dharma-dhātu. As can be seen in the various material quoted throughout this article, various terms are used for the same few basic ideas. The inherent nature (svabhāva) of the element (dhātu) is its life, its breath, its motion. The great breath is without origination
(anutpāda) because the dhātu is without origination. These are two aspects of the same thing, just as The Secret Doctrine describes the two aspects of the one principle as absolute abstract space and absolute abstract motion. Indeed, The Secret Doctrine explains that this motion is the breath of the one element or space (vol. 1, p. 55).

The Mañjuśrī-nāma-saṃgītī phrase is far too brief for us to know just what is being referred to by mahā-prāṇa, the “great breath.” Thus, in the careful 1981 translation of this text by Ronald M. Davidson, mahā-prāṇa is translated as “aspirated,”34 referring to its meaning in phonetics. As elaborated in the Kālakacakra system, however, mahā-prāṇa is not a phonetic term but rather is a cosmic principle. This is further illustrated in a beautiful passage from the lost mūla or root Kālakacakra-tantra, quoted in the Sekoddeṣa-ṭīkā on verse 7.35 The Buddha is addressing King Sucandra of Śambhala, to whom he gave the Kālakacakra teachings. I here cite it and translate it:

janma-sthānaṁ jinendrānāṁ ekasmīn samaye ‘kṣare |
mahā-prāṇe sthite citte prāṇa-vāte kṣayam gate |
divyendriye samudbhūte nāste māṃsendriye gane |
pāṛkṛtāyate naṣṭe divyāyatana-dārśane |
sarvam paśyāmi rājendra adṛśtām nāstī me sadā |

"The birthplace of the buddhas is [the complete enlightenment] in a single, unchanging moment. When the mind (citṛta) is established (sthita) in the great breath (mahā-prāṇa) and the [outer] breath-winds (prāṇa-vāta) have stopped, when the divine senses have arisen and the group of fleshly senses has ceased, when the common sense objects have disappeared and the divine sense objects are seen, I see all, O king. There is nothing ever unseen by me."

Conclusion

All five of the parallels with the teachings of the Book of Dzyan given above are close parallels, and they are too specific to be attributed to chance. While the first of these, to Rg-veda 10.129, can be explained away because that text was available in Blavatsky’s time, the remaining four cannot be. These parallels provide significant circumstantial evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Dzyan. Moreover, they indicate specific sources for further study of its subject matter. My hope is that this evidence will stimulate research on the Book of Dzyan, leading to the eventual discovery of a Sanskrit or Tibetan manuscript of it.

Notes

28. The term mahu-prāṇa does not occur in the Śamhitās, Brāhmaṇas, Aranyakas, or Upaniṣads. It occurs five times in the Āpiṣāli-sīkṣā (4.3, 4.5, 8.16, 8.19, 8.26), a phonetic treatise. There it describes the fully aspirated letters of the Sanskrit alphabet, in contrast to the unaspirated, or alpa-prāṇa letters. The Vedic Word-Concordance used the 1933 edition of the Āpiṣāli-sīkṣā prepared by Raghu Vira and published in the Journal of Vedic Studies, Lahore (then India, now Pakistan), for its references. Using these references, I checked this term in the 1973 edition of the Āpiṣāli-sīkṣā prepared by B. A. van Nooten and published in Tōdō Orientalistika Alalt, Tartu (then USSR, now Estonia). The other vedāṅga text in which mahu-prāṇa is found is the Pāṇiniya Gaṇapāṭha. It is there found listed in the group of words, or gana, beginning with the word uṭa (Gaṇapāṭha 26.7), referred to in the rule given in Pāṇini’s sūtra 4.1.86. It is not defined or used there; it is merely listed among the words falling under that rule. But according to the 1971 book, Dictionary of Pāṇini: Gaṇapāṭha, by Pāṇini expert S. M. Katre, it means “the aspirate” (p. 422). This is what it means in the Āpiṣāli-sīkṣā, and is what we would expect here in this grammatical treatise as well. It is not found as a cosmic principle anywhere in the known Vedic texts.

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