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THE SECRET DOCTRINE

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THE BOOK OF DZYAN: THE CURRENT STATE OF THE EVIDENCE

*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 has nonetheless been taken to confirm the widely held view that the Book of Dzyan is a product of Blavatsky’s imagination. Indeed, it is practically impossible to verify the authenticity of a book when we have only alleged translations from it, and not an original language text. On the expectation that a Sanskrit or Tibetan original would become available in my lifetime, I have devoted the past few decades to preparing for this. In the course of doing so, I have come across significant circumstantial evidence in favor of the authenticity of the Book of Dzyan. Until conclusive evidence in the form of an original language manuscript becomes available, it may be worthwhile to present the current state of the circumstantial evidence.

From among this circumstantial evidence, five distinctive parallels between the teachings of the Book of Dzyan and those of known books stand out. The first of these parallels is of something described as
being neither non-existent nor existent, yet breathing, when there was only darkness. This parallel is to *Rgveda* X.129, the so-called ‘Hymn of Creation.’ This text was already available in Blavatsky’s time. The remaining four are to texts that were not available in her time. The second of these parallels is the highly unusual idea of four modes of birth for humans: the self-born or parentless, the sweat-born, and the egg-born, preceding the womb-born as at present. This parallel is to the *Abhidharma-kośa* and *Bhāsyā* by Vasubandhu, chapter 3, verses 8-9. This fundamental Buddhist text did not become available in any European language until its 1923-1931 French translation from the Chinese and Tibetan translations, while its Sanskrit original was not discovered until the mid-1930s, and not published until 1946 (*kośa-kārikā*) and 1967 (*bhāsyā*).

The other three distinctive parallels are with the three key terms of the system of teachings of 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 have 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. 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 Hymn of Creation

The teachings of the Book of Dzyan are alleged to be very old, older even than the Veda-s: '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 Veda-s.' 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 Veda-s, Rgveda X.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 Rgveda X.90 where the cosmic man (puruṣa) 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 *Rgveda* 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 *Rgveda* 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 *Rgveda* 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 *Rgveda* X.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 *āvarīvaḥ* in X.129.1c from the root *vrīt*, ‘exist, turn, move,’ rather than from the root *vṝ*, ‘cover.’ Using this translation, here follows a more detailed comparison of the first three of its seven verses with the Book of Dzyan.

*Rgveda* X.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 pulsated unconscious in universal space,...'; 3.2: '... the darkness that breathes over the slumbering waters of life.'

In particular, we may compare Rgveda X.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 Rgveda X.129.1c, 'What moved incessantly?,' the 'incessantly' is only an attempt to render the sense of 'repeated' in the intensive verb 'moved' (āvarīvah), 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 pulsated unconscious,' where 'pulsated' well shows repeated movement. The 'water, dense [and] deep' asked about in Rgveda X.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.'

Rgveda X.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 Svābhāvika-s'] plastic, invisible, eternal, omnipresent and unconscious svabhāva is Force or Motion ever generating its electricity which is life.’ The svadāha, ‘inherent power’ or force by which ‘that one’ breathed without air in Rgveda X.129.2c, is apparently the svabhāva or ‘inherent nature’ of ‘that one.’

Rgveda X.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 [upapādaka].’ ‘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 Rgveda X.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 Rgveda X.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 *Rgveda* X.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 *Rgveda* X.129 was derived from the extensive stanzas of the Book of Dzyan, than that the latter were elaborated from *Rgveda* X.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 anthropogenesis 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
Veda-s 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 Sāṅkrityāyana. An edition of this was published in India in 1946, 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 (āndaja) origin, the womb-born (jarāyujā), 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 Śaila and Upāśaila who emerged from those of a crane, . . . ; the womb-born, as now; the sweat-born, such as Māndhātṛ, Cāru, 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 Yāsomitra 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 ākāśa 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 Sānkṛityāyana, 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 (buddha-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 *khams*, ‘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.\textsuperscript{20}

The quotation given above from the Pali Saṃyutta-nikāya collection is from the \textit{Paccaya-sutta} of the \textit{nidāna-vagga} within that collection. The parallel Sanskrit text is the \textit{Pratiṣṭha-sūtra} of the \textit{nidāna-saṃyukta} in the Saṃyukta-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.

\textit{upādād vā tathāgatānām anupādād vā sthitā eveyaṃ dharmatā dharma-sthitaye dhātuḥ.}\textsuperscript{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 \textit{dharma}-nature (\textit{dharmatā}), the element (\textit{dhātu}) for the establishment of the \textit{dharmas}.’

In trying to stay as literal as possible, and avoid interpretation, I have left the word \textit{dharmatā} as ‘\textit{dharma}-nature.’ It is often translated as ‘true nature.’ It is used as a synonym of \textit{dhātu}, and like \textit{dhātu}, is contrasted with the \textit{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 dharmar-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 Sutra in 25,000 lines, in the section called ‘The Questions of Maitreya’ (maitreya-pariścchā). My translation follows.

yā utpādād vā tathāgatānām anutpādād vā sthitaiveyaṃ dharmarṇāṃ dharmatā dharmar-sthitiśā dharmar-dhātur . . . 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 (dharmar-sthitiśā), the element (or basic space) of the dharmas (dharmar-dhātu).’

Some translators have used ‘basic space’ rather than just ‘space’ (or ‘sphere’ or ‘expanse’ or ‘realm’) for dhātu in dharmar-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 Tathāgatas are produced or not, the established order of dharmas, the realm of dhara (dharmar-dhātu) . . . ’ 23
We notice that Conze here translates *dharmā-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’:

\[ uṭpādād \ vā \ anutpādād \ vā \ tathāgatānām \ sthita \ evāyam \ alaṅkaṇa-dhātur. \]

‘Whether the Tathāgatas are produced or not produced, just so is this unmarked Element established.’

The difference is because Conze followed the different Tibetan translations in the different places. In the first instance, where we had *dharmā-dhātu,* the Tibetan translation of *dhātu* is *dbyings,* ‘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 [upapāduka].’ ‘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 Maitreyā’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’.”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 Maitreyā’s Ratna-gotra-vibhāga. Two kinds of gotra are distinguished. As explained in Ratna-gotra-vibhāga I.149, and also in Maitreyā’s Mahāyāna-sūtrālāṃkāra III.4, these are the ‘naturally present’ (prakṛti-stha) 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 I.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."^{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 dhātu, the element or space. The acquired gotra that is developed is differentiated from this only verbally, by way of the various dharmas. This is explained in Maitreya's Abhisamayālaṃkāra 1.39 (my translation follows):

\[
dharma-dhātor asambhedād gotra-bheda na yujyate
\]
\[
ādheya-dharma-bhedāt tu tad-bhedaḥ parigīyate
\]

'Because the dharma-dhātu is without division, division of the gotra is not tenable. But due to the division of the dharmas that are based [on the dhātu], the division of it [the 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, svabhāva; and 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 (tamas) is the term used in Ṛgveda X.129. There for the germ the very rare term ābhu is used, a term almost unknown elsewhere. By contrast, the term gotra is not rare in the Buddhist texts, and is basic in Maitreya’s Ratna-gotra-vibhāga, because the dhātu is basic there.

These parallels indicate that, as was the case with the Sanskrit term dhātu rather than ākāśa for ‘space,’ so gotra rather than other possible terms such as garbha 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 dhātu and the gotra in Maitreya’s Ratna-gotra-vibhāga. The already clear link between them based on the dhātu parallel was made even clearer with the gotra parallel.

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 Upaniṣad-s, prāṇa is equated with the absolute brahman several times, and we find the trinity of cosmic principles: manas (mind), prāṇa (breath, life), vāk (speech, matter). The ‘great breath,’ however, is a very specific term, which would be mahā-prāṇa rather than just prāṇa. The monumental 16-volume Vedic Word-Concordance (1935-1965) indexes every word in the entire Vedic literature. Thanks to the lifelong efforts 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,’ mahā-prāṇa (or mahā-śvāsa), is not found in the śruti, the Vedic texts proper. It is found only in two vedāṅga-s, 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 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 \textit{Vimalaprabhā} published.\textsuperscript{31} It is here that we find the ‘great breath,’ \textit{mahā-prāṇa}, and as an ultimate cosmic principle.

The ‘great breath,’ \textit{mahā-prāṇa}, is found in the \textit{Vimalaprabhā} commentary on the Kālacakra-tantra, chapter 2, verse 86. In that verse we read of the eight \textit{prakṛti-s} or kinds of substance (see \textit{Bhagavadgītā} VII.4), namely, the five standard elements, earth, water, fire, air, and space as ether, followed by mind (\textit{manas}),
the principle of intelligence (*buddhi*), and the principle of self-consciousness (*ahāmkara*). We also read of dense (*sthūlā*), subtle (*sūkṣmā*), and higher (*parā* *prakṛti*), with the three standard qualities or *guna*-s 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 (*avikṛti*), that is or has life (*jīva*, saying *jīva-bhūtā*, like in *Bhagavadgītā* VII.5), and that is not the elements (*bhūta*), earth, etc. The *Vimalaprabhā* commentary thereon further explains that this is a fourth *prakṛti*, corresponding to the turiyā avasthā (the fourth state taught in the *Māṇḍukya Upaniṣad*, 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 *Gzhan 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 proliferation-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):

\[
\text{mahā-prāṇo hy akāraḥ sa cānupāda-svabhāvas tasya dharma-dhātu-svabhāvatvād ādṛśa-jñāna-hetutvāc ca}^{33}
\]

‘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 (anupāda) 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-saṃgīti 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,’\textsuperscript{34} referring to its
meaning in phonetics. As elaborated in the Kālacakra
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 mula or
root Kālacakra-tantra, quoted in the Sekoddeśa-ṭīkā on
verse 7.\textsuperscript{35} The Buddha is addressing King Sucandra of
Śambhala, to whom he gave the Kālacakra teachings. I
here cite it and translate it:

\[
\text{jānma-sthānam jinendrāṇāṁ ēkasmin samaye}
\text{\ 'kṣare /}
\]

\[
\text{mahā-prāṇe sthite citte prāṇa-vāte kṣayaṁ gate /}
\]

\[
\text{divyendriye samudbhūte naṣte māṁsendriye}
\text{\ 'ganē /}
\]

\[
\text{prākṛtāyatane naṣte divyāyatana-dārsane /}
\]

\[
\text{sarvam paśyāmi rājendra adṛṣṭaṁ nāsti me sadā |}
\]

‘The birthplace of the buddhas is [the complete
enlightenment] in a single, unchanging moment.
When the mind (citta) is established (sthita) in
the great breath (mahā-prāṇa) and the [outer]
breath-winds (prāṇa-vata) 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 *Rgveda* X.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

5. ‘Concerning H.P.B.,’ *The Theosophical Review*, vol. 34, 1904, p. 140.
7. ‘The Text of the Abhidharmakośakārikā of Vasubandhu,’


17. ‘Cosmological Notes,’ Appendix II in *The Letters of H. P. Blavatsky to A. P. Sinnett*, p. 376.


24. The Gilgit Manuscript of the Aṣṭadasāsāhasrikāprajñā-
pāramitā, Chapters 55 to 70 Corresponding to the 5th Abhisamaya, edited and translated by Edward Conze, Roma, 1962, chap. 69, p. 191, lines 3-4.


2008, pp. 367-76.


28. The term mahā-prāṇa does not occur in the Saṃhitās, Brahmanas, Āranyakas, or Upaniṣads. It occurs five times in the Ṛṣiśali-sīkṣā (IV.3, IV.5, VIII.16, VIII.19, VIII.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 Ṛsiśali-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 Ṛsiśali-sīkṣā prepared by B. A. van Nooten and published in Tōid Orientalistikā Alalt, Tartu (then USSR, now Estonia). The other vedāṅga text in which mahā-prāṇa is found is the Pāṇiniya Gaṇapatha. It is there found listed in the group of words, or gaṇa, beginning with the word utsa (Gaṇapatha XXVI.7), referred to in the rule given in Pāṇini’s sūtra IV.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: Gaṇapatha, by Pāṇini expert S. M. Katre, it means ‘the aspirate’ (p. 422). This is what it means in the Ṛsiśali-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.


32. The Gzhan stong Chen mo: A Study of Emptiness according

