

## **Guhyagarbha Tantra Summary**

Adapted from Gyurme Dorje's Commentary

### CHAPTER ONE: THE INTRODUCTORY SCENE

The purpose of the first chapter is to present the buddha-body of reality (dharmakāya), manifesting naturally in the Akaniêåha Ghanavyüha realm in the form of Samantabhadra, since this is the setting of the introductory scene, on the basis of which the entire tantra-text is expounded. The buddha-body of reality is endowed with five excellent circumstances which are symbolized by the initial stock phrase (v.1) "Thus at the time of this explanation" ('di-skad bshad pa'i dus na), and these are interpreted differently according to the outer tantras, the inner path of skillful means and the secret inner radiance of the Great Perfection.

#### Content

Chapter One demonstrates the excellence of Samantabhadra, the perfect resource of all the buddhas (v.2) which is classified according to the excellent circumstance of its location, its expositors and its audience or retinue of listeners. The excellent location in which this tantra is revealed is none other than the Akaniêåha or Ghanavyüha field associated with all three buddha-bodies (v.3) and within it the celestial palace (v.4) adorned by an excellent array of teaching-thrones (v.5). The excellent expositors of this tantra are endowed with the distinctive marks of buddha-body, and diverse physical postures, hand-implements, and heads (v.6), and include the male and female buddhas of the five enlightened families who embody diverse aspects of pristine cognition, and are the natural purity of the psycho-physical components and elements (vv.7-8). Vajrasattva or Vairocana may be found at the center of this mandala, depending respectively upon the Mahāyoga and Atiyoga perspectives of our text. The excellent retinue, which is the natural retinue of Samantabhadra, comprises sixteen bodhisattvas who are classified as male and female and as inner and outer (vv.9-12), along with the eight male and female gatekeepers who guard the four directions of the natural mandala (vv.13-14).

The chapter concludes with a synopsis of this naturally manifesting array of pristine cognition or buddha-mind: its source is the indestructible reality of buddhahood (v.15), its disposition of compassionate spirituality is the buddha-body of perfect resource (v.16), its pure manifestation occurs in the meditative stabilities of the buddhas (v.17) and its nature is identified with the five inexhaustible ornaments of buddha-body, -speech, -mind, -attributes and -activities (v.18).

### CHAPTER TWO: GENERATION OF ULTIMATE AND RELATIVE ENLIGHTENED MIND IN PRISTINE COGNITION

The purpose of this chapter is to divulge the enlightened intention of Samantabhadra's pristine

cognition, in which all things are ultimately expressed as primordial buddhahood, and relatively expressed as great compassionate spirituality. The former is the genuine intention behind the discourse of this text and the latter is the motivation for its appearance in an externally visible form— the arousal of compassionate energy for the sake of those who have not realised ultimate reality.

## Content

Two aspects of buddhahood are therefore discussed in this chapter: the genuine intention which initiates the discourse and the subsequent arousal of compassionate spirituality for the sake of living beings.

Firstly, the genuine intention is explored through its three successive modalities: Samantabhadra who embodies awareness, buddha-mind itself, through the penetration of Samantabhadri, reveals his enlightened intention that all the psycho-physical components, sensory bases, activity fields, and elements are integrated in the nature of the five buddha-families and their retinue (vv.1-2). Samantabhadri who embodies the abiding nature of reality which is the object of buddha-mind, through indivisible union with Samantabhadra, reveals her enlightened intention that all world-systems and their sentient contents and dissonant mental states are inherently empty, abiding in the great sameness of primordial buddhahood (vv.3-4). Their non-dual Supreme Embodiment (bdag nyid chen po), who is Samantabhadra and consort in union (kun bzang yab yum), then reveals the enlightened intention that the reality of buddhahood exists primordially as pristine cognition. Thus, all things are primordially beyond creation, cessation, abiding, objective reference and motion, and the awareness which realizes this is identified with pristine cognition or buddha-mind (vv.5-11).

The consequent arousal of compassionate spirituality through which this threefold enlightened intention of Samantabhadra is relatively expressed is then directed in four phases which parallel the four noble truths: for the focus of this spirituality is sentient beings' lack of realization (v.12-13); the nature of their bewilderment (vv.14-15); the atemporal presence of ultimate truth beyond bondage and liberation (v.16); and the actual diffusion of compassionate energy which removes bewilderment (v.17).

## CHAPTER THREE: THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ALL SACRED TEACHINGS

The purpose of the third chapter is to explore the nature of this compassionate spirituality as it manifests in the world.

## Introduction

On the basis of the aforementioned diffusion of compassionate spirituality, there are six sages embodying awareness who then emerge from the indestructible body, speech and mind of the tathāgatas in order to teach the six classes of living beings (v.1). In a lengthy overview, the commentator also provides a detailed explanation of this buddha-body of emanation (nirmanakāya), according to the common and the uncommon vehicles. The former view, referring specifically to Shakyamuni Buddha, concerns his cultivation of enlightened mind, accumulation of provisions and attainment of buddhahood over many successive lives, emphasizing his celebrated twelve deeds. The latter interpretation focusses on the emergence of all emanations such as the thousand buddhas and six sages of this "auspicious aeon" from Samantabhadra, the buddha-body of reality.

## Content

The emanational body, represented by these six sages, teaches by means of the following four kinds of instruction (v.2): by the great merits of the buddha-body (v.3), by supernormal cognitive powers of buddha-mind (v.4), by inconceivable miraculous abilities (v.5), and by knowledge conveyed in the five vehicles of buddha-speech, namely, the vehicle of gods and humans, the vehicle of pious attendants, the vehicle of hermit buddhas, the vehicle of bodhisattvas, and the unsurpassed vehicle of secret mantra (vv. 6-8).

The text then analyses the nature of the living beings who are to be trained by these instructions, and the nature of the sacred teachings through which they are trained. Firstly, the nature of cyclic existence (samsāra) is ultimately established to be the pure reality itself. Although it diversely arises on the basis of fundamental ignorance, the underlying reality of buddhahood is present from the moment of its initial appearance as ignorance. The bewildering appearances of cyclic existence are a miraculous display of mind, baseless in nature, and thought itself is actually a display of pristine cognition (vv.9-14).

Secondly, the sacred teachings through which beings are trained and through which this apparent bewilderment is removed are, in the final analysis, established to be inexpressible in nature because they refer directly to the unsurpassed result beyond the exoteric teachings of the causal vehicles. Here, all the teachings are regarded as a miraculous display without inherent or independent existence; and, despite their unchanging basis, they exhibit great flexibility in content and great diversity in their teachers or expositors. In particular, this Guhyagarbha Tantra is revered as the emanational basis of all the vehicles that lead to buddhahood and as the all-embracing, universal interpretation of the sūtras and tantras. Although all teachings and all things that can be known are conventionally assigned names and labels, essentially they too are without inherent existence (vv.15-20).

The chapter concludes with a synopsis which describes the bewildering appearances of cyclic existence and the buddhafields of nirvana as natural manifestations of mind and pristine cognition respectively (vv.21-23).

#### CHAPTER FOUR: CYCLICAL ARRAY OF THE GARLAND OF SYLLABLES

The purpose of this and the following chapter is to show how the compassionate spirituality of the buddha-body of emanation manifests externally, out of emptiness, in form of the seed-syllables, the significance being that it is from these vibrant seed-syllables that the fully manifest visualizations of buddha-mind, mantra sounds of buddha-speech and sealing hand-emblems indicative of buddha-body all subsequently emerge.

##### Introduction

Through the enlightened intention of all the tathāgatas, a cyclical garland of seed-syllables emerges from the indestructible buddha-body, -speech and -mind in order to reveal the sameness and great perfection of actual reality (v.1).

The commentator, Longchen Rabjampa, at this point elucidates the general significance of the garland of syllables. The Sanskrit akāra (syllable) is defined as the "unchanging essence" or the "true nature of mind", which sustains the buddha-body, -speech and -mind within the energy channels of the subtle body. The basic Sanskrit syllables comprise sixteen vowels and thirty-four consonants. However in the context of the present mandala, one hundred and three seed-syllables are enumerated, namely those of the forty-two peaceful deities which are located in the heart, those of the fifty-eight wrathful deities which are located in the skull, and the seed-syllables OḂ, Äy, HÜÆ, which are respectively located in the crown, throat and heart centers and which have the function of purifying the six mundane seed-syllables that generate birth among the six classes of living beings. All one hundred and three seed-syllables of this garland emanate from the uncreated syllable A and emerge as a cloud-mass from which the mandala is visually generated. Yet they abide naturally within all sentient beings.

Apart from their natural occurrence within the subtle physical body, these seed-syllables are also associated with the diverse meditational deities of the mandala, visualized within their celestial palaces, because it is from these seed-syllables that the fully manifest forms of the deities emerge during the generation and perfection stages of meditation. Then, from another perspective, the seed-syllables are considered to be miraculous emanations in the mandalas of the buddha-body of perfect resource (sambhogakāya), purposefully acting on behalf of sentient beings, and also phonic syllables that are intoned in the course of mantra recitation, which purposefully effects the spiritual accomplishment of the secret mantras.

## Content

The cyclical garland of syllables is presented initially as an object of meditation from the standpoint of both the generation and perfection stages, as well as from that of the ensuing four rites of enlightened activity. All spiritual accomplishments are said to derive from this cyclical garland of syllables because they are the causal basis of the pristine cognition of buddha-mind (vv.2-3). At this point, the actual emanation of the garland of syllables occurs, beginning with the syllable A, and it visibly resonates throughout the world-systems of living beings (vv.4-5).

The tathāgatas then expound the inner meaning of the syllables, referring to the uncreated syllable A on the level of the buddha-body of reality, to the forty-two syllables which emerge in conjunction with it on the level of the buddha-body of perfect resource, and to the words and letters which they form on the level of the buddha-body of emanation (vv.6-10). The mandalas of buddha-body, -speech and -mind are all gathered in the forty-five syllables, ie. the forty-two seed-syllables of the peaceful deities combined with their three punctuation marks (v.11). The true nature of mind is successively identified with the uncreated syllable A, with the spontaneously present forty-two syllables and with their symbolic written forms in which there is no duality of appearance and emptiness, corresponding respectively to the three buddha-bodies (vv.12-14)

Then there follows a detailed analysis of each seed-syllable in turn, preceded by the three punctuation symbols which demarcate the seed-syllables (v.15). The forty-two seed-syllables in this context actually become manifest in the following sequence: That of Samantabhadri (v.16), those of the five male buddhas beginning with Vairocana (v.17), those of the five female buddhas beginning with Ākādhātviāvarī (v.18), those of the inner male bodhisattvas, beginning with Kēitigarbha and ending with the gatekeeper Yamāntaka (v.19), those of the inner female bodhisattvas beginning with Lāsya and ending with the gatekeeper Mahābala (v.20), those of the outer male bodhisattvas beginning with Maitreya and ending with the gatekeeper Hayagrīva (v.21), those of the outer female bodhisattvas and female gatekeepers beginning with Dhūpā (v.22), those of Samantabhadra and the six sages (v.23), and finally those of Amōtakuōçalin and the glow of the wrathful deities (v.24). However, it is emphasised that this cyclical mass of syllables abides primordially as the essence of buddha-body and pristine cognition (v.25).

Finally, there is a summary which interprets the emergence of the wheel of syllables as an expression of the buddhas' emanational nature, as a presence within the subtle physical body, where they are the causal basis for the attainment of buddhahood, and as objects of meditation according to the paths of liberation and skillful means (vv.26-27).

## CHAPTER FIVE: MEDITATIVE STABILITY THAT ATTAINS THE MAGICAL NET

The purpose of this chapter is to disclose how spiritual attainments emerge from the cyclical garland of syllables.

### Introduction

At this juncture, the mandala of meditational deities inherent in the seed-syllables is described as a magical emanation (sgyu 'phrul), in which skillful means and discriminative awareness are without duality, and the sequence of meditative attainments corresponding to this cloud-mass of syllables is then presented (v.1).

### Content

Spiritual accomplishments are to be attained in the following sequence: The true nature of mind is revealed as the basis of spiritual accomplishment (v.2); the supreme accomplishment of buddhahood is perfectly present in all mandalas because they unite the mandala of magical emanation (sgyu 'phrul) or seed-syllables in the mandala of the net (drva ba) or discriminative awareness (v.3); the ordinary spiritual attainments are associated with the four rites of enlightened activity (v.4); the attainment known as the consummation of the five elements then ensues (v.5); along with the eight lesser rituals, including exorcism and attraction (v.6). All these meditative attainments are said to emerge in the manner of light from darkness, like the alchemical transmutation of iron into gold, or like the cure of an efficacious medication (v.7).

Now, there are five prerequisites for yogins seeking this spiritual attainment that accords with the cloud-mass of syllables: They are required to make offerings to their spiritual teacher, to clearly realize the meditations pertaining to the deities and their seed-syllables, to undertake the corresponding commitments, to recite the corresponding mantras correctly, and to securely seal the practice by enacting the corresponding hand-gestures (v.8). Thereby the essence of spiritual accomplishment will be attained (v.9).

As far as the actual meditative stability or skillful means which brings about such attainments is concerned: initially there is the meditative stability in the cyclical garland of seed-syllables (v.10). This entails meditation on discriminative awareness which cultivates the non-referential ultimate truth and non-dual pristine cognition associated with the buddha-body of reality (vv.11-12) and meditation on skillful means which cultivates the generation and perfection stages associated with the buddha-body of form, securely sealing the display of pristine cognition in the seal of primordial buddhahood (v.13). By way of a synopsis, the text emphasizes that supreme accomplishment, the nature of Samantabhadra, is attained through these meditative stabilities and through their ancillary applications of mantra recitation and sealing hand-gestures (v.14).

## CHAPTER SIX: EMERGENCE OF THE MANDALA

The purpose of this and the following two chapters is to project the mandala of buddha-mind that is visualized through meditative stability as emerging from the cyclical garland of seed-syllables, along with its aspects— the mandalas of buddha-speech and buddha-body, which are symbolized respectively by mantra recitation and sealing hand-gestures.

### Introduction

The focus here is on the emergence of the mandala of meditational deities who are to be visualized by means of meditative stability that accords with the volition of the tathāgatas (v.1).

The commentator, Longchen Rabjampa, at this point includes an extensive overview concerning the term mandala. The Sanskrit mandala is generally defined as a central deity encircled by a retinue, but more specifically classified according to the mandalas of the ground, path and result. The mandala of the ground is the atemporal presence of the mundane world and its inhabitants as primordial buddhahood. The mandala of the path includes those symbolic mandalas which are drawn on cotton, or with colored powders, or laid out schematically with focal points and flower-clusters prominent. Yet it also refers to the mandalas of genuine buddha-body, -speech and -mind which are to be attained through meditative stability, as well as those of the supporting celestial palace, the meditational deities supported within it, and their non-dual pristine cognition. The mandala of the result comprises the effortless, spontaneous presence of the five mandalas of buddha-body, -speech, -mind, -attributes and -activities.

### Content

The mandalas of ground, path and result all emanate from the cyclical garland of seed-syllables. Among them, the natural and spontaneous mandala of the ground is that in which the elements, psycho-physical components and dissonant mental states of unenlightened beings are primordially present as the female buddhas, the male buddhas and the pristine cognitions respectively (v.2).

The mandala of the path which is the focus of the yogin's meditative stability comprises the actual mandala with its celestial palace (v.3), ornaments (v.4), teaching-thrones (v.5), and meditational deities (vv.6-7), along with their symbolic hand-held implements (v.8), body-colors (v.9), and general appearance (v.10), as well as the effulgence of light rays that they emit (v.11). Yet it also refers to the fruitional result that is achieved through this attainment, namely, the resultant buddha-body of form (rūpakāya) which arises from the body of reality (v.12) and the consequent illusion-like enlightened activity (v.13) which it performs on behalf of ordinary beings, pious attendants, hermit buddhas, and bodhisattvas (vv.14-17). Consequently, living

beings are liberated, either through the causal paths which gradually refine obscurations (v.18), or through the resultant paths and levels associated with the indivisibility and spontaneity of the five buddha-bodies (vv.19-22). In this way, the mandala of the path radiantly emanates throughout all world-systems (v.23).

The mandala of the result is then described as the non-dual pristine cognition without objective or subjective referent, which emerges fully manifest and radiant in the context of this mandala of meditative stability (vv. 24-25). The final verse may also be interpreted from the standpoints of ground, path or result individually.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: ABSORPTION OF THE MANDALA AND THE SECRET MANTRAS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the mandala of the secret mantras of buddha-speech, which is an aspect of the aforementioned mandala of meditative stability. Once the visualized mandala has been emanated through meditative stability, the secret mantras then emerge from the indestructible buddha-body, -speech and -mind of all the tathāgatas in order to disclose the mandala of buddha-speech (v.1).

### Content

First, there is a description of the actual syllables and words forming the secret mantras of the forty-two peaceful deities in the order in which they emerge, followed by the mantras that confer empowerment and blessing.

The actual mantras are enunciated in the following sequence: Those which visually generate the mandala palace (v.2) and the meditational deities within it (vv.3-8), followed by those which invite and absorb the genuine deities into the visualization (v.9), and make offerings to them (v.10). A prayer for spiritual accomplishment ensues (v.11). Consequently, the mantra syllables resonate throughout the world-systems (v.12).

Next, there are the mantras which confer empowerment through the five pristine cognitions and the five enlightened families (vv.13-15). These, in turn, give rise to a blessing which dissolves indivisibly with the mundane body, speech and mind of trainee practitioners, transforming the mundane world and its inhabitants into the mandala of deities (v.16).

More generally, the inner significance of buddha-speech is then clarified and established through an exposition of its inexpressible essence (v.17), its inconceivability (v.18), its originally pure abiding nature (v.19), its apparitional nature (v.20), and its non-deviation from the expanse of actual reality despite its diverse manifestations as the teachings of the nine vehicles (v.21). In fact, the indestructible buddha-speech discernibly manifests through its disposition of



compassionate spirituality for the sake of living beings (v.22), but there is a paradox: it remains essentially unspoken while being ostensibly spoken (v.23).

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONSECRATION OF ALL LIMBS OF THE BODY AS THE MANDALA AND EMERGENCE OF THE GESTURES OF SEALING

The purpose of this chapter is to disclose the mandala of the hand-gestures of sealing and their symbolic hand-held emblems, which are indicative of buddha-body. This, like the previous chapter, is considered to be an aspect of the aforementioned mandala of meditative stability. At the outset then, the tathāgatas, having divulged the mandala of secret mantras and its blessings, consecrate the limbs of the body as a mandala of meditational deities (v.1).

### Content

The mandala of sealing hand-gestures comprises those of the ground, path and result. The first indicates that all phenomena, manifestly perfect in the Magical Net (sgyu 'phrul drva ba), are sealed primordially and spontaneously by Samantabhadra, in the seal of supreme enlightenment (v.2).

The sealing hand-gestures of the path are then said to emerge in three successive phases: Firstly, the causal basis for their emergence is the hand-gesture known as "the indestructible palms" (rdo rje thal mo), according to which the seed-syllables of the male and female buddhas located respectively on the finger-tips of the right and left hands are joined together, giving rise to the sealing hand-emblems of the various deities (v.3). Secondly, the all-embracing hand-gesture (spyi'i phyag rgya) is executed by joining the index finger of the right hand with the middle finger of the left hand, and the remaining fingers are also joined together in pairs, indicating that the central male and female deities of the mandala are united, along with their surrounding deities, and giving rise to the supreme bliss of spiritual accomplishment (v.4). Thirdly, the various hand-held emblems (phyag mtshan) indicative of the diverse deities of the mandala then become manifest from their respective seed-syllables through the hand-gesture of the "indestructible fist" (rdo rje khu tshur, vv. 5-19).

The sealing hand-gestures of the result refer to the natural seal, which is the true nature of mind, the abiding nature of reality (v.20), and to those seals associated with provisional and conclusive results. In the course of meditative experience and feast-offering ceremonies there are provisional hand-gestures of sealing which are made, whereby the limbs of the central deity are emanated as the forty-two peaceful deities (v.21), and subsequently as the thousand buddhas (v.22), twenty-one thousand buddhas (v.23) and even inconceivable buddhas (v.24). By contrast, the conclusive seal of buddha-body securely acts on behalf of living beings through its diverse manifestations (v.25) and the diverse teachings of the nine vehicles (v.26). Though unified in the

nature of the body of pristine cognition (v.27), the conclusive seal assumes indefinite appearances for the sake of trainee practitioners (v.28) and it gathers within the abiding nature of reality all physical movements (v.29).

## CHAPTER NINE: SECRET COMMITMENTS OF THE INDESTRUCTIBLE ARRAY

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the aforementioned mandala of meditative stability and its aspects of mantra recitation and sealing hand-gestures are made manifest by means of the symbolic mandala of images, enabling empowerments to be conferred.

### Introduction

Having revealed the mandala of meditative stability and its aspects, the Great Joyous One (dgyes pa chen po) who is the Supreme Embodiment of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri combined then becomes equipoised in the meditation of "the sequence of empowerments which accord with the various mandalas of images", and reveals the following teaching in order to manifest the aforementioned mandalas for the sake of trainee practitioners (v.1).

Longchen Rabjampa includes a very extensive overview at this juncture, concerning the construction of symbolic mandalas and the conferral of empowerment through them. The discussion refers to the intricate stages of mandala construction, the generation of the deities within the symbolic mandala through meditative stability, and the offerings and mantra recitations which are then to be made. Empowerments are subsequently conferred as follows: After burnt offerings have been performed as a preliminary purification, the student enters the mandala and receives empowerment, thereby undertaking to meditate through the generation and perfection stages until the result known as the rank of the four kinds of awareness-holder (vidyādhara) is achieved.

### Content

This chapter presents the natural mandala of the body of the female and male consorts— in which those of highest potential are empowered, and the symbolic mandala constructed of colored powders in which those of lower potential are empowered.

As far as the mandala of the female consort is concerned, its location is revealed to be the secret or sexual center of the female consort (v.2) and this is considered in terms of its dimensions (v.3), the pitching of the mandala lines which purify her mental continuum (v.4), and the celestial palace and symbolic seal which are visualized to be drawn within this mandala (vv.5-6). Offerings are prepared, especially those associated with the female deities of the mandala which generate bliss (v.7). Burnt offerings are made as a preliminary purification (vv.8-9), followed by

the relative and ultimate offerings of meditative stability (vv.10-12), and the secret offerings of skillful means and discriminative awareness which generate supreme bliss. Thereby, all the buddhas and sentient beings are provisionally delighted by the display of inner radiance free from conceptual elaboration, and buddhahood is conclusively attained (vv.13-16).

Once the master who confers empowerment has entered the mandala (v.17), the student is urged to enter and receive empowerment with an attitude of total renunciation which purifies broken commitments (vv.18-19). The actual empowerments are then conferred in the following order: the ten empowerments of beneficence (phan pa'i dbang bcu), followed by the five empowerments of ability (nus pa'i dbang lnga), while the three higher empowerments of profundity (zab dbang gsum) are implicit in the disclosure of this very mandala (v.20).

There is also, however, another tradition according to which the higher empowerments are received in the mandala of the secret or sexual center of the male consort (v. 21).

The symbolic mandala of color powders, in which those of lower potential are empowered, is materially constructed on a small, intermediate or large scale (vv.22-24). It is actually consecrated through the generation of the visualized form of the meditational deity, known as the Being of Commitment (samayasattva), after which an invitation is made to the actual meditational deity, known as the Being of Pristine Cognition (jñānasattva) to enter, and these two are then absorbed without duality (vv.25-27). Consequently, provisional accomplishments such as the four rites of enlightened activity and the complete array of supreme accomplishments associated with buddha-body, -speech and -mind are attained in order that all beings may benefit (vv.28-30).

Having received empowerment, the trainee will swiftly become accomplished by persevering through skillful means in the five aspects of meditative stability, the five prerequisites for meditation practice and the five aspects of attainment advocated by the mantra-texts (vv.30-31). In these ways he or she will then achieve the provisional results as an awareness-holder (v.32) and the conclusive result of buddhahood (vv.33-36).

The chapter ends with a brief synopsis concerning the nature of the faith or devotion required if those on whom empowerments are conferred are to become accomplished. Conversely, if empowerments are conferred on those lacking faith or those who are degenerate in their commitments, the outcome will be negative (v.37).

## CHAPTER TEN: CONFERRAL OF EMPOWERMENTS

The purpose of this chapter is to disclose the actual empowerments that are conferred in respect of the aforementioned mandalas. Having revealed all the mandalas in which empowerment is to

be conferred, Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then enters the meditative stability called "the conferral of the king" in order to express the actual empowerments (v.1).

#### Content

The three empowerments of profundity, namely, those of secrecy (gsang dbang), discriminating pristine cognition (shes rab yes shes kyi dbang) and word and meaning (tshig don gyi dbang), are conferred on the basis of the mandala of the female consort. At the outset, the appropriate visualizations should be made, the master and student should enter into the mandala, the lower empowerments should be successfully conferred, and the female consort should be consecrated in the appropriate manner (v.2).

The lower empowerments which are the first to be conferred comprise those of ability and beneficence. The five inner empowerments of ability are those of the listener, the meditator, enlightened activity, the expositor, and the king of indestructible reality, which are respectively associated with Ratnasambhava, the Central Deity (i.e., Vairocana/ Akêobhya), Amoghasiddhi, Amitâbha, and all five enlightened families together (vv.3-7). Without receiving these, no progression through the secret mantras is possible (v.8).

The ten outer empowerments of beneficence are those of the crown-ornament, the diadem, the rosary, the armor, the victory banner, the seals, the parasol, the vase, food and drink, and the five nectars. These are said to confer excellence, to remove obstacles and to reveal the indivisibility of cyclic existence and nirvana (v. 9).

In brief, those who have received all the empowerments possess the means to achieve swiftly the provisional and conclusive results (v.10).

## CHAPTER ELEVEN: MANDALA OF THE FEAST OFFERINGS

The purpose of this and the following two chapters is to present the paths through which the aforementioned mandalas of the ground are to be attained. In particular, chapters eleven and twelve concern the generation stage of meditation (utpattikrama) which reverses common attachments, while chapter thirteen reveals the perfection stage (sampannakrama) in which the essential meaning of the practice is penetrated.

#### Introduction

Having conferred empowerment in the mandala of the ground, Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then enters the meditative stability called "the king or transformation of the Magical Net", which is the coalescence of skillful means and discriminative awareness, in order to reveal the generation stage of skillful means.

## Content

As a preparation, there are four axioms of correct view which clarify the mandala of the spontaneous ground which is to be realized through the generation stage. These are known as single basis, modality of seed-syllables, blessing and direct perception, and they respectively concern the primordial emptiness that gives rise to cyclic existence and nirvana, the indivisibility of appearances and emptiness, the innate purity of all things in the primordial mandala, and the realization that all phenomena are the deities of the mandala (v.2).

The actual experiential cultivation of the path has two aspects, namely, the discernment that all appearances are pristine cognition and the display of the mandala of feast offerings. According to the former, all subjective psycho-physical components are discerned as the mandalas of peaceful and wrathful male deities (v.3), all objective elements are discerned as the mandalas of the female consorts of the peaceful and wrathful deities (v.4), and all their offerings, ornaments and so forth are discerned as the mandala of the indivisible display of the male and female deities (v.5). In particular, the indivisibility and natural purity of the paths of skillful means and "liberation", which employ the secret offerings, are discerned as follows:

The path of skillful means (thabs lam) concerns the mandala of great bliss in which sexual union is naturally pure. In general, there are three kinds of mudrā or female yogic partner—the devi aged twelve, the nāginī aged sixteen and those of inferior genus aged twenty, who are respectively the consorts of buddha-mind, buddha-speech and buddha-body (v.6). In particular there are six types of female yogic partner, known as the lotus, conch, marked, doe, elephant and diverse types, each of which is associated with one of the six different enlightened families and classified according to superior, mediocre and inferior characteristics or signs. The signs are said to be clearest in girls under the age of twenty.

As for the development of pristine cognition in this path of skillful means, there are the preliminary practices, namely: ritual service (bsnyen pa) which induces bliss by means of relaxation, dietetics and medicinal elixirs (rasāyana), massage (bskum nye), conversation and so forth; rites of attainment (sgrub pa) which require the male and female yogins to be visualised as the male and female consorts and to engage in foreplay; and rites of great attainment (sgrub chen) which require the union of the male and female consorts (v.7). The actual foundation or main practice then concerns the four delights (dga' ba bzhi) which are experienced through the descent of seminal energy through the central channel of the subtle body (v.8), and the pristine cognition experienced through the subsequent re-ascending of this seminal energy (v.9). The result of the practice of the path of skillful means includes supreme accomplishments such as the level of Samantabhadra and the buddha-body of indestructible reality, and common accomplishments which are endowed with supernormal cognitive powers (v. 10).

The path of "liberation" (sgrol lam) which forcibly transfers the consciousness of negative beings to a higher realm of rebirth in order to compassionately thwart their negative intent is also discerned to be naturally pure. There are ten objects or "fields of compassion" suitable for the application of such "liberating" techniques, including those who are hostile to the Three Precious Jewels (triratna) and spiritual teachers, those who misinterpret the commitments and those trapped in evil existences (v.11). The actual skillful means which effect this "liberation" are meditative stability, mantra recitation combined with hand-gestures of sealing, and the burnt offering of an effigy, which are respectively for yogins of superior, mediocre and inferior potential (v.12). The benefit of this practice is that beings destined for rebirth in lower realms are "liberated" and transferred to higher realms (v.13).

The paths of skillful means and "liberation" are discerned to be naturally pure because in each case, the mandala of magical pristine cognition is untainted by the defects associated with past actions (karma) (v.14).

Secondly, the experiential cultivation of the generation stage of meditation sets the aforementioned refinements of pure view within the context of the feast offering ceremony. The Sanskrit term ganachakra is defined as "a feast or assembly of the extraordinary supports, persons and implements associated with the deliberate practice of the secret mantras". Now, the yogin who discerns through the axioms of the three purities and four samenesses that all phenomena comprising the mundane world and its inhabitants are the feast-offering of Samantabhadra, primordial buddhahood itself, will swiftly attain supreme spiritual accomplishment (v.15-16).

The diverse modes of the feast-offerings which emerge from the feast-offering of Samantabhadra are classified according to the number of participants or the kinds of mandala they form. Those of the peaceful deities may form five, three or a single pair of male and female yogins, while those of the wrathful deities may form their own distinctive clusters. Altogether, there may be a hundred or even a multitude of participating yogins and yoginīs (vv.17-20).

Feast-offerings may also be classified according to the diverse outer, inner and secret hand-implements which the participants hold, the diverse deities who confer accomplishments in the course of the ceremonies, and the provisions of merit and pristine cognition that are gathered within them.

As far as the actual procedures for the performance of the feast offerings associated with the peaceful and wrathful deities are concerned: The participants should enter the assembly according to the correct ritual sequence. This means that the mandala of the single cluster is entered first of all (vv.21-22), followed by the mandala of three clusters (v.23), then the mandala of five clusters (v.24) and then the mandala of indestructible expanse (v.25). On the basis of the symbolic mandala which is constructed in accordance with these clusters, suitable offerings and implements are arrayed and transformed through meditative stability before being offered to the

visualized deities and enjoyed by them. The ceremony concludes with the prayers and benedictions which dedicate the merit of the practice for the sake of all beings.

The chapter ends with a synopsis of the basic elements necessary for attainment through the feast-offerings, namely meditative stability (v.26), the appropriate location and implements (v.27), and the specific time for its performance (v.28).

## CHAPTER TWELVE: ATTAINMENT OF THE FEAST OFFERINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to disclose the particular aspects of the mandala of feast-offerings, namely, the meditative stabilities associated with the visualized deities and offerings, and the attainments of the awareness-holders which ensue.

### Introduction

Having explained the mandala of feast-offerings, Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then enters the meditative stability of "the array of ornaments", which are enjoyed by buddhas and sentient beings and are laid out within the mandala of feast-offerings (v.1).

### Content

This chapter begins with a general discussion of the meditative stabilities connected with the feast-offerings and their beneficial attributes: Spiritual accomplishments are achieved through the various meditative stabilities which perceive all things as the Magical Net (v.2). These include: the meditative stability focusing on the meditational deities' dance-steps and hand-gestures, which confer the benefit of unimpeded motion (v.3), the meditative stability focusing on the seals of their songs, which confer the benefit of unimpeded sound (v.4), the meditative stability focusing on the seals of their ornaments and raiment, which confer the benefit of protection, along with the major and minor physical marks of the buddha-body (v.5), the meditative stability focusing on their food and drink which confers the benefit of buddha-body and the nectar of buddha-speech (v.6), and the meditative stability focusing on the seals of sexual yoga and forceful "liberation", which confer all accomplishments and enlightened activities (v.7).

By retaining the correct view concerning the coalescence of appearance and emptiness, and practicing the generation and perfection stages of meditation, the yogin will gradually attain the mature status of an awareness-holder and then be confirmed on the buddha-level (vv.8-9). Thus, the results achieved through the performance of the feast-offerings and their meditative stabilities are known as the attainment of the four classes of awareness-holder, which are to be differentiated in terms of their emanational birth, and their association with provisional results

and levels, including the ten transcendent perfections (vv.10-11), and with the conclusive attainment of the buddha-levels (v.12).

The chapter ends with a synopsis describing the all-embracing mandala which supports the feast-offerings: By visualizing and meditating on Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri in union, which is the true nature of mind, the yogin comes to meditate on all mandalas (vv.13-14), and thereby attain the accomplishment of all mandalas (v.15). Understanding all things to be the true nature of mind, there will be no defect with respect to the result, whatever the yogin's degree of proficiency in the generation stage (v.16).

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN: NUCLEUS OF MOST SECRET ESOTERIC INSTRUCTIONS

This chapter expounds the perfection stage of the path, including the Great Perfection of inner radiance, which is the culmination of experiential cultivation, bringing about the result of perfect buddhahood.

### Introduction

Having revealed the generation stage of the path of meditation, Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then enters the meditative stability which is "the cloud-like array of the nucleus of most secret commitment", in order to reveal the perfection stage. Accordingly, all things are revealed to be spontaneously present in the primordial Great Perfection (v.1).

### Content

There are two aspects to the exposition of the perfection stage— the first concerning the manner in which the secret truth abides in the mind of the spiritual master of the tantras (vajracarya), and the second concerning the natural Great Perfection itself. Now, this secret truth abides in the minds of the diverse spiritual teachers (v.2), whose teaching may partake of diverse views, encompassing those non-Buddhists whose views are held to harbor no understanding and wrong understanding, as well as the adherents of the Hinayana who have partial understanding, the followers of the Mahayana causal vehicles whose understanding approaches completion, and the adepts of Kriya, Caryä, Yoga and Mahayoga tantra who maintain distinct understandings. However all these teachings culminate in the natural secret truth which is the Magical Net. In brief, this secret truth is fully present in the syllables and sounds of the Guhyagarbha Tantra itself (v.3), and its concealed and hidden meanings are revealed by the vajracarya (v.4).

The exposition of the three aspects of the natural Great Perfection which follows is given in the form of a brief outline and then as an extensive exegesis. The former comprises: the generation stage of skillful means (v.5), the perfection stage of discriminative awareness (v.6), and the stage



of inner radiance which is without duality (v.7).

As for the latter, the extensive exegesis of these three stages: The outer generation stage is that in which all phenomena, psycho-physical components and so forth are visualized as the mandala of meditational deities (v.8). The inner perfection stage concerns the meditations on bliss and emptiness, along with their result (vv.9-10); while the secret stage of inner radiance concerns the Great Perfection and entails the recognition of inner radiance as the ground (v.11), the recognition of the appearance of pristine cognition in meditative stability as the path (v.12), and recognition of the supreme spiritual accomplishment of buddhahood as the result (v.13).

The commentator, having already expounded the outer generation stage, at this juncture provides extensive overviews concerning the inner perfection stage and the secret stage of inner radiance, which is the Great Perfection. The former includes both the path of skillful means and the path of liberation.

In the context of this perfection stage, the path of skillful means comprises the control of vital energy with respect to the yogin's subtle body and also when in union with a yogic partner. In the first case, the yogin utilizes the four energy centers, the seventy-two thousand energy channels and twenty-one thousand six hundred vital energies within the subtle body. The purpose of this training is to transform the coarse vital energy associated with past actions into vital energy of pristine cognition, within the central channel, where it transforms the energy centers into globes of light and thence into the meditational deities of the enlightened families. This practice brings about provisional results such as the supernormal cognitive powers and the conclusive result of the buddha-level.

The purpose of the second kind of training which refines the movement of seminal energy when the yogin is in union with a yogic partner, is to transform dissonant mental states into the path of purification. There are four kinds of delight experienced by the yogin during this practice, and these are differentiated through the degrees to which conceptions are renounced and bliss is present, as well as by their locations within the subtle body. This generation of bliss is activated by the downward movement of seminal energy, which gives rise to the perfection of the causal paths and levels, along with the transcendent perfections, while the upward movement of seminal fluids in reverse gives rise to the resultant paths and levels, along with the six supernormal cognitive powers and the major and minor marks of the buddha-body. This practice results in the attainment of both supreme and common spiritual accomplishments.

In addition, there are subsidiary instructions concerning the generation of inner heat (*gtum mo*), which assists the practitioner on the path of skillful means. During the meditation on the *avadhuti* energy channel which connects with the heart center of the subtle body, the syllable *AH*, located below the navel center, is visualized as if blazing on fire, in consequence of which it melts the syllable *HAM* located in the crown center, thereby generating an inner heat within the body. This

warmth gives rise to the pristine cognition of bliss and emptiness, which acts as an aid to the two aforementioned kinds of training.

The path of liberation includes meditative stability on the apparitional meditational deities which transforms all conceptualization into the mandala, and meditative stability on emptiness or actual reality which integrates the practices of tranquility (zhi gnas) and higher insight (lhag mthong) during periods of meditation and post-meditation. As a result, both provisional and conclusive enlightened attributes are accomplished.

The secret inner radiance of the Great Perfection is then considered in three phases: Firstly, the inner radiance of the mandala of the ground is present within the heart and crown centers of the subtle body in form of the clusters of peaceful and wrathful deities respectively, and yet these are concealed in the form of glowing seeds or seminal points which only become fully manifested through the generation and perfection stage practices when attained by the four kinds of awareness-holder.

Secondly, when pristine cognition is recognized as the path through the yogin's experiential cultivation, this refers to darkness meditation during which the yogin assumes the so-called seven postures of Vairocana and experiences the various signs of inner radiance, and to daylight meditation during which he or she is absorbed in a non-referential meditative equipoise. The fusion of these two coalesces tranquility and higher insight, and brings about the cessation of coarse vital energy and the manifestation of the vital energy of pristine cognition, resulting in the attainment of the four kinds of awareness-holder (rig 'dzin rnam bzhi) and the buddha-level.

This manifestation of pristine cognition occurs through four successive visionary appearances (snang ba bzhi), each of which has its own internal and external signs. In the first, the mundane body, speech and mind become blissful, radiant and non-conceptual. In the second, all things become apparition-like forms. In the third, all appearances manifest naturally as mandalas of deities, and in the fourth, liberation from the snare of the physical body and its appearance is achieved, along with the twenty-five resultant realities of the buddha-level. These instructions of the Great Perfection are potently combined with bar do instructions to effect liberation in the intermediate state after death.

In brief, the atemporal mandala of buddha-body and pristine cognition is obtained in a spontaneously present manner through study, reflection, and meditation (v.14).

The text then analyses the superiority of the natural Great Perfection over other teachings, and the worthy recipients to whom it should be given. The superiority of Atiyoga is known through the greatness of the individuals who accomplish it (v.15), and through the greatness of the path of Atiyoga, which is the result of all paths (v.16), traversed by all the buddhas (v.17), through which all yogins accomplish the conclusive result (v.18) and which is superior to that of the

causal vehicles (v.19). In brief, there are no paths superior to this (v.20).

The worthy recipients to whom it should be given should be endowed with discriminative awareness born of study, reflection and meditation, and noble in their attributes of spiritual wealth. They should not fear the profound meanings, they should have renounced evil through their virtuous and noble aspirations, and be steadfast in their faith. Such individuals should offer their body, speech and mind to the spiritual teacher and the sacred teachings (v.21). On the other hand, the Great Perfection should not be given to unworthy recipients who would misunderstand it, act erroneously, or deviate in their vows and commitments, in their practice of the generation and perfection stages, or from the accumulation of the two provisions (tshogs gnyis). In such cases retributions are severe (v.22).

#### CHAPTER FOURTEEN: THE PLEASING EULOGY

Following the continuum of the ground and the continuum of the path, which have been revealed in the previous chapters in respect of the peaceful deities, the continuum of the result is now presented in the form of a eulogy to the resultant buddha-body and pristine cognition, in the fully manifest mandala of the peaceful deities.

##### Introduction

Having divulged the mandalas of the generation and perfection stages of the path, Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, sings the following eulogy to the fruitional mandala of the result, which coalesces buddha-body and pristine cognition (v.1).

##### Content

This chapter contains a general eulogy in five verses to the buddhas of the five enlightened families and the five pristine cognitions, which are also identified respectively with buddha-body, -speech, -mind, -attributes and -activities (vv.2-6). It concludes with a particular eulogy to the Supreme Embodiment of Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri in union (v.7).

#### CHAPTER FIFTEEN: CLOUD-LIKE EMERGENCE OF THE NATURAL MANDALA OF WRATHFUL DEITIES.

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the natural spontaneous presence of the wrathful deities within the primordially pure ground, the enlightened intention that gives rise to their manifestation, and the modality of their mandala array.

## Introduction

Having revealed the mandala of peaceful deities, Samantabhadra, the Supreme Embodiment, then manifests as the primordial buddha-body of perfect resource in the mandala of naturally manifesting wrathful deities, which is their emanational basis (v.1).

There are therefore two major aspects to the emergence of the mandala of wrathful deities which Longchen Rabjampa discusses in an extensive overview, namely, the spontaneous presence of the wrathful deities in the ground and the consequent emanation of the wrathful deities, including Rudra, from the ground.

At the outset, the Sanskrit term *krodha* is defined as a deity "triumphant over disharmony and acting on behalf of living beings through the enlightened activity of wrath". There are three types of wrathful deity, corresponding to the three buddha-bodies, and these are said to have four attributes through which their wrath is forcefully expressed, i.e., their reality cannot be symbolized, their pristine cognition is undeluded, their deeds are effortless, and their enlightened activity is ostensibly wrathful for the sake of those beings who are dominated by anger or hatred and its concomitant self-cherishing pride or envy. This prevalence of anger, pride or envy is said to occur owing to a disproportionate excess of energy emitted by the wrathful mandala, which abides naturally within the skull of the subtle body. In terms of the ground therefore, wrathful deities are primordially present as the mandala of blood-drinkers in the crown-center of the subtle body. In terms of the path, they are visually generated through meditation, and in terms of the result, they are spontaneously and fully manifest in the Ghanavyūha realm.

As far as the emanation of the wrathful deities from the spontaneous ground is concerned: The mandala of wrathful deities is recognized to be both natural and emanational without contradiction because there is a movement from its natural manifestation in the crown center to its extraneous manifestation in the world. Through the energy of the natural mandala of wrathful deities, Rudra, the archetype of rampant egohood, emerges to display unenlightened wrath and the wrathful deities of pristine cognition emerge to subdue him. Although Rudra and his followers appear to have mundane forms and powers, and in the context of a narrative are said to be subdued by Heruka and placed around him in the mandala, actually Rudra is a contrivance of the wrathful deities for didactic purposes and not an individual living being who experiences suffering. Fundamentally, Rudra is atemporally and naturally manifest as Samantabhadra, and his taming indicates the reversal of the sufferings of cyclic existence through the reversal of rampant egotism.

There is no contradiction between the tantras which describe this subjugation in beginningless time and those sūtras which ostensibly refer to the subjugation of Rudra in a specific temporal

setting; nor is there a fundamental distinction between Heruka who tames Rudra in the tantras and Guhyapati who does so in the sūtras because these are respectively inner or natural and outer or emanational aspects of the same wrathful mandala.

## Content

This chapter concerns the emergence of mundane wrathful deities, endowed with the chronic patterns of corrupt past actions, such as Rudra, and their consequent subjugation by the wrathful deities of pristine cognition.

As to the former: On account of egotism and having violated their former tantric commitments (vv.2-3), beings are reborn in unbearable hellish domains (v.4) and then as tormented spirits (v.5). Then, once their coarse obscurations have diminished, they are consequently born in a monstrous ogre-like form which is harmful to others, on the basis of the subtle obscurations of having perversely meditated in the past on a wrathful deity and misinterpreted the correct conduct of the secret mantras. In this guise, they then come to dominate the mundane world-systems of desire and form, terrifying their inhabitants (v.6).

The subjugation of such negative forces by the wrathful deities of pristine cognition emerges as follows: Samantabhadra in the form of Heruka observes Rudra and his activities (v.7) and, to bring about their subjugation, he assumes the meditative stability of the "kingly Magical Net of wrathful deities" (v.8). The actual subjugation is carried out in four steps by means of the "four miracles": First, Samantabhadra and Samantabhadri appear in union as Krodhīâvara and Krodhīâvari (v.9). Second, through their enlightened intention they emanate a cloud of seminal energy (v.10). Third, the mandala of wrathful deities, vast as the world-systems, is emanated therefrom (v.11). Fourth, this mandala then generates fifteen great signs, indicating how cyclic existence is liberated in actual reality, in order to conquer Rudra and his acolytes (v.12).

Once subjugated, Rudra is wrathfully eradicated in the following manner: Samantabhadra transforms into the three-headed Mahottara or Buddha Heruka (v.13), with a retinue comprising the Herukas of the four other enlightened families (vv.14-15). Then, responding to the ferocious reaction of Rudra and his twenty-eight followers (v.16), the nine-headed form of Mahottara manifests in order to "liberate" them by wrathful sorcery (vv.17-18) and to gather together their twenty-eight consorts, the îvari, through which he absorbs the entire mundane world and its inhabitants (vv.19-20). Through further meditative stability, the five Herukas then reappear to enter into non-dual union with these consorts (vv.21-23), and from their wombs, the retinue of the wrathful Mâtaraë, Piâäcī and Female Gatekeepers emanates (vv.24-27), taking their places along with them on the periphery of the mandala (v.28).

Rudra and the proud malign forces who follow him are then revived and granted ablution, after

which they are placed within the mandala on the seats of the Herukas and come to acquire a certain vision of the pure mandala (vv.29-31). Following their subjugation, which occurs simultaneously throughout the chiliocosms of the universe (v.32), they are accepted as retainers after taking an oath of allegiance. Their former consorts, the *îâvari*, also request the conferral of the various rites that they might obey (vv.33-35), in response to which they are granted empowerments and injunctions (v.37).

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN: EMERGENCE OF THE MANDALA OF BUDDHA-SPEECH OF THE GREAT ASSEMBLY OF WRATHFUL DEITIES

The purpose of this and the succeeding four chapters is to present the continuum of the path through which the natural mandala of the wrathful deities is actually attained. In sequence, these chapters present the wrathful mantras which arouse the continuum of buddha-mind (Ch.16), the mandala of images to be visualized through meditative stability (Ch.17), the offerings which are then made to this mandala (Ch.18), the corresponding commitments which practitioners are encouraged to adopt (Ch.19) and the ensuing enlightened activities which are performed (Ch.20). Practically, this implies that on the basis of the three kinds of meditative stability the celestial palace and deities of the wrathful mandala are visually generated. Then, the genuine beings of wrathful pristine cognition are invited and supplicated with the clasped flowers, symbolic of the yogin's awareness. Dissolving into the visualized mandala, they confer commitments and are pleased by the feast-offerings, which are made in conjunction with the recitation of mantras and clear visualization of the deities.

Consequently, enlightened activities are performed, along with concluding rituals of benediction and dedication of merit.

### Introduction

Having arrayed the natural mandala of the wrathful deities, Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then brings forth their mandala of buddha-speech, the wrathful mantras, in order that this naturally manifesting array might be perceived externally by bodhisattvas and accomplished by yogins (v.1).

### Content

This chapter presents the five categories of mantras through which the wrathful mandala is activated or energized. There are mantras which visually generate the fifty-eight wrathful deities (vv.2-5), mantras which invite the Beings of Pristine Cognition (*jñānasattva*) corresponding to those deities (v.6), mantras which scatter the flowers of the yogin's awareness as a request for commitments to be imparted (v.7), mantras in the form of a prayer for spiritual accomplishment

and the conferral of commitments (v.8), and mantras through which tormas-offerings are made for the sake of enlightened activity (v.9).

Finally, as an extraordinary sign of the efficaciousness of these mantras, all non-virtuous acts of body, speech and mind are incinerated and the purified body, speech and mind then blaze forth as buddha-body, -speech and -mind. The entirety of space is filled with the mandalas of buddha-body, -speech and -mind.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN: REVELATION OF THE MANDALA OF WRATHFUL DEITIES

Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then presents the mandala of images, visualized through meditative stability, which are the necessary supports clarifying the forms assumed by those wrathful deities, along with their mantras (v.1).

### Content

This chapter describes the supporting celestial palace and the mandala of wrathful deities within it. The palace (v.2) is adorned with ornaments of skulls, snakes, corpses and light (v.3) and seats in the form of bull, buffalo, leopard, tiger and bear, surmounted in turn by the proud malign forces who were subjugated (v.4). Therein, the five Heruka are present (v.5), with their diverse ornaments and thunderous roars (v.6), hand-held emblems and queens (v.7). The retinue surrounding them includes the twenty female wrathful deities, i.e., the Mātaraë, Piâäcī, and Gatekeepers (v.8), along with the twenty-eight *îâvarī* (v.9).

As a wondrous indication of this visualization, the blazing mandala of wrathful deities is said to radiate with the apparitions of buddha-body, -speech and -mind (v.10).

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: REVELATION OF THE SACRED OFFERINGS

Having revealed the wrathful mandala, Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then describes the outer, inner and secret offerings which are designed to please the wrathful mandala through skillful means (v.1).

### Content

The secret offerings are associated with the paths of liberation and skillful means. The former includes the authentic offering of the primordially pure true nature of mind and the offering of forceful compassionate "liberation" which benefits the ten kinds of being endowed with negative attitudes (v.2). The latter refers to the seminal or blissful energy produced by the embrace of the male and female deities (v.3).

The inner and outer offerings are collectively known as the "desirable attributes" of the five senses, which are sacramental substances. The former are the five nectars, namely, excrement, urine, human flesh, blood and semen, through which cyclical existence is identified as nirvāḥa (v.4). The latter are the outer sacraments of food, drink, clothing and all else that possesses the desirable attributes of the senses (v.5). All these sacraments are offered to the deities of pristine cognition (v.6).

The benefits attained through the making of such offerings are the common accomplishments associated with the four rites of enlightened activity (v.7) and the supreme accomplishment of the three buddha-bodies consequent on the practice of symbolic and non-symbolic meditation (v.8). In sum, all worlds are filled with pleasing offerings (v.9).

## CHAPTER NINETEEN: COMMITMENTS

Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then divulges the supreme commitments in order that yogins of secret mantra might swiftly accomplish the result to which they aspire (v.1).

### Content

This chapter is an exegesis of the commitments associated with the mandala of wrathful deities. The Sanskrit term samaya is defined as “ a commitment requiring the taking of a conventional oath of allegiance, which is laid down because benefits are obtained when it is guarded and retribution is exacted when it degenerates”.

The essence of the supreme commitments, the hallmark of their superiority, is that dissonant mental states may be engaged without accruing negative acts because the vows maintained by adherents of the lower vehicles are fully integrated with these commitments. Therefore they integrate the lower vows which comprise: the mind-control generated through the seven levels of prātimokha vow taken for the sake of individual peace and happiness; the bodhisattva vows which bind the mind with an altruistic moral discipline to achieve realization and benefit others; and the vows of the awareness-holders which benefit others by transforming dissonant mental states into pristine cognition. All these three trainings are gathered without contradiction in the commitments of the secret mantra (v.2).

In this integration the most minute defects in the observance of the lower vows are purified (v.3). Even the four inimical defeats— murder, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct, which pious attendants guard against through the prātimokha vows are not contradicted because phenomena are transformed into the mandala of deities. Similarly, the vows of the bodhisattvas are not contradicted because they are retained by extraordinary compassion and skillful means. The means of gathering all such vows within the commitments of the secret mantras are inherent in



the rites of "liberation" and the practices of sexual yoga because mind-control and the three kinds of moral discipline known to bodhisattvas are always present (vv.4-7).

As to the classification of the commitments, five basic and ten ancillary commitments have been enumerated (vv.8-10). The former are the commitments never to abandon the Three Precious Jewels, to venerate the spiritual teacher, not to interrupt the recitation of mantras and securing of the sealing hand-gestures, to have loving kindness for those who enter the genuine path, and not to divulge the secret truths. These are defined as aspects of buddha-body, -speech and -mind to be guarded and attained in order that the seed of buddha nature, latent in all beings, might not be obscured (v.11). The ancillary commitments comprise five dissonant mental states which are not to be abandoned and five nectars which are to be acquired because they assist the observance of the basic commitments (v.12). The benefits which follow from the keeping of commitments are the attainment of buddhahood itself, while the unpleasant results of suffering and lack of accomplishment are the retributions exacted when they are broken (vv.13-16).

While all these commitments are subsumed by the indestructible reality of buddha-body, -speech and -mind (v.17), there is also a more detailed enumeration of three hundred and sixty subdivisions of the basic and ancillary commitments (vv.18-19), and, beyond that, they may even be considered inconceivable in numerical terms, owing to the inconceivable nature of appearance and emptiness (vv.20-21).

Consequent on keeping the commitments, the yogin is venerated by mundane beings (v.22), blessed by sublime beings (v.23), and attains the rank of an awareness-holder within the perceptual range of the buddhas (v.24). He or she integrates all vows and commitments in the aforementioned manner (v.25), and has the ability to restore broken commitments (v.26).

## CHAPTER TWENTY: CONSECRATION OF SPONTANEOUS ENLIGHTENED ACTIVITY

Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, then becomes absorbed in the meditative stability known as "the consecration of the spontaneous commitment" in order that those who keep the commitments might engage in enlightened activity (v.1).

### Content

This chapter begins with an explanation of the four kinds of enlightened activity, symbolized in succession by the shapes of the sacred Sanskrit letters *Evam Mayā*. These are respectively the rite of wrath (vv.2-4), the rite of subjugation (vv.5-7), the rite of enrichment (vv.8-10), and the rite of pacification (vv.11-13), each of which is presented in three phases, namely the making of a burnt offering, the piercing with the ritual dagger (*kīla*), and the enactment of the dance-steps that oppress negative forces.

Particular injunctions are subsequently given to those mundane beings on the periphery of the mandala who consume the residual offerings of the feast, exhorting them to maintain the former oaths administered to them by Mahottara Heruka (vv.14-15).

The main part of the enlightened activity of the wrathful mandala however is known as the rite of the dance steps and hand-gestures (v.16). This action, when performed by the five central Heruka and their consorts, brings about the accomplishment of all five kinds of enlightened activity (v.17). When engaged by the eight Mätaraë, it brings about subjugation, enrichment and pacification (v.18). When engaged by the eight Piâäcī it brings about wrathful destruction (v.19), and when engaged by the twenty-eight îâvari, it fulfils curses and imprecations (v.20).

Corresponding to the four kinds of enlightened activity, which culminate in the wrathful rite of "liberation" are the places conducive to the attainment of their respective activities, namely, firepits for the rite of wrath, solitary tree-trunks for the rite of subjugation, thickets for the rite of enrichment, and trees or woodland for the rite of pacification. Each of the rites also requires a distinctive meditative stability (v.21). Thereby, all the tathägatas are trained in the performance of enlightened activities (v.22).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE: EULOGY TO THE WRATHFUL DEITIES

The purpose of this chapter is to present the continuum of the result, as fully manifested in the mandala of wrathful deities.

The assembled host of Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, having perfectly presented these enlightened activities of the wrathful mandala, then sings a eulogy to the naturally manifesting buddha-body and pristine cognition (v.1).

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The actual verses of the eulogy are dedicated to the enlightened families of buddha-body (v.2), buddha-speech (v.3), buddha-mind (v.4), buddha-attributes (v.5) and buddha-activities (v.6), ie. to the central pairs of the Herukas and their consorts. These culminate in a particular eulogy to Mahottara Heruka and Krodhîâvari, who embody the celestial palace of the wrathful mandala itself (v.7).

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO: THAT WHICH IS PLEASING AND RETAINED

The final chapter concerns the manner in which the Guhyagarbha Tantra is taught and entrusted to its worthy recipients or lineage holders.

Having perfectly revealed the peaceful and wrathful mandalas of the Magical Net, Samantabhadra, the Great Joyous One, now emphasises that this tantra-text must be firmly retained for the sake of posterity (v.1).

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This tantra-text is considered to be the ground, path and result, and the very essence of all the tathāgatas (v.2), while other paths associated with the different vehicles are merely stepping stones in its direction (v.3). It should not be given to those who would not benefit by receiving it since the preliminaries and lesser paths will suffice for them (v.4). The expositor who confers the empowerments and instructions associated with this tantra is actually identified with Samantabhadra (v.5).

This tantra which expounds the reality of the ground, path and result is the most secret of all teachings, devoid of exaggeration and depreciation, and is divulged only to worthy recipients (v.6). Prophetic declarations are given to the effect that those who retain and teach it will attain all levels and become awareness-holders (v.7).

Moreover, it is significant that on its conclusion, the teacher, Samantabhadra, and the assembled retinue of tathāgatas reveal their continuing presence as ornaments in the buddhafield of the Bounteous Array, without change or transition, unlike the teachings of lesser vehicles where the five excellent circumstances surrounding the teachings fade at the conclusion of these teachings (v.8).

## THE PERFECT CONCLUSION

Commenting on the original colophon of the Guhyagarbha Tantra, Longchen Rabjampa points out that it is derived from the Great Tantra of the Magical Net of Vajrasattva in One Hundred Thousand Chapters. In particular, within that cycle, it is known as the all-embracing universal transmission of all vehicles, and the supreme basis of the unsurpassed secret mantras.

## **TEN ASPECTS OF THE GUHYAGARBHA TANTRA – Mipham Rinpoche Commentary**

In contrast to the structural approach, outlined above, which presents the content of the Guhyagarbha Tantra in terms of the continua of the ground, path and result or from the standpoints of Mahāyoga, and Atiyoga, a quite different analysis is made by Ju Mipham Namgyel in his Summary of the Guhyagarbha entitled Nucleus of Inner Radiance (sPyi don 'od gsal snying po). This commentary focuses on the so-called ten topics or aspects of the mantras (mantradaāatattva), which are generally recognized, indicating how they are fully contained within the actual verses of the root-text. These ten aspects, each of which is discussed in turn, are enumerated as follows:

A view of reality, determinate conduct, mandala array, successive gradation of empowerment, commitment which is not transgressed, enlightened activity which is displayed, fulfillment of aspiration, unwavering meditative stability, offerings which bring the goal to fruition, and mantra recitation accompanied by the sealing hand-gestures which bind [the practitioner to realization].

VIEW (LTA BA), SPYI DON, PP. 66-113

This is generally defined as the intellectual perspective of reality once exaggeration and depreciation have been eradicated by means of discriminative awareness (shes rab). The status of sentient beings is ascertained, in terms of the true establishment of this view, to comprise those of no understanding, those of wrong understanding, and those who do not fully understand genuine reality (i.e., the adherents of the causal vehicles), as well as those who understand the meanings of spiritual discipline, intention, secrecy, and the naturally secret truth (i.e., the respective adherents of Kriyātantra, Ubhayatantra, Yogatantra and Mahāyogatantra).

In particular the view of Mahāyoga epitomized in this tantra is that phenomenal existence is ascertained to be fundamental reality by means of four axioms of correct view, namely, the axiom of the four kinds of realization (rtogs pa bzhi), the axiom of the three purities (dag pa gsum), the axiom of the four modes of sameness (mnyam bzhi), and the axiom of supreme embodiment (bdag nyid chen po).

i) The four kinds of realization are indicated in Ch. 11, v. 2:

Single basis and modality of the seed-syllables,

Blessing and direct perception:

Through [these] four kinds of excellent realization,

All things are the great king, manifestly perfect.

Now, the axiom of single basis (rgyu gcig pa) establishes all things to be naturally present and uncreated, modality of the seed-syllables (yig 'bru'i tshul) establishes all things to be an unceasing display of pure appearance, blessing or consecration (byin gyis brlabs pa) establishes all things as an indivisible essence of uncreated sameness and pure appearance, and direct perception (mngon sum) establishes all phenomena [as the deities of the mandala], without intellectual characteristics.

ii) The axiom of the three purities establishes the mundane world, its inhabitants and the mind-stream as a great purity.

iii) The axiom of the four modes of sameness, namely, emptiness, the coalescence of appearance and emptiness, the freedom from conceptual elaboration and sameness itself, establishes all things subsumed in relative and ultimate truth as a great sameness.

iv) The axiom of supreme embodiment establishes all things to abide primordially in the embodiment of a single pristine cognition (ye shes), which is the true nature of mind (sems nyid). The ascertainment of this abiding nature of reality (gnas lugs) is indeed the fundamental view or goal of Mahāyoga, and its axiomatic exegesis is explored by Mipham Rinpoche in three topics which he outlines as follows:

i) The view of apparitional reality is the view that the mundane world and its inhabitants are present as a great purity in the mandala of supportive buddha-body and supported pristine cognition, respectively.

ii) The view of reality itself is that all things partake of a great indivisible sameness.

iii) The view of intrinsic or intuitive awareness is that in which one is to become individually aware that the superior truth of the indivisibility of purity and sameness is the great buddha-body of reality (mahādharma-kāya).

In the Summary entitled Nucleus of Inner Radiance (sPyi don 'od gsal snying po), pp. 69-107, he sets forth his statements in support of this view, comprising a proof of the superiority of the mantra view over that of the sūtras and a proof of sameness, purity and indivisibility with reference to the mantra view itself. In conclusion (pp. 107-113) he shows how each of the other ten aspects of mantra depends on purity and sameness of view.

#### MEDITATIVE STABILITY (TING NGE 'DZIN), SPYI DON, PP. 113-127

This is essentially defined as the equipoised awareness abiding one-pointedly with reference to or in harmony with a visualized object, without obscuration or agitation. Meditative stability is initially acquired when a practitioner applies the appropriate motivation, effort, mindfulness, alertness, and equanimity. Then, the experience of tranquility (âamatha/ zhi gnas) is refined by nine kinds of skillful means which enable the mind to abide in its natural state, giving rise incidentally to experiences of bliss, radiance and non-conceptualization.

According to the inner classes of tantra, meditative stability specifically refers to the practice of the generation stage (bskyed rim) and the perfection stage (rdzogs rim). The meditative stability of the generation stage, in its most extensive form, refines propensities associated with the four places of birth, develops the five awakenings during the course of one's life and the four rites of indestructible reality. In its middling form it refers to the so-called the three rites. These are both associated with Mahāyoga. Then, in its concise form it refers to the spontaneously perfect meditative stability associated with Anuyoga; and in its most concise form it refers to the instantaneous recollection, associated with Atiyoga.

The meditative stability of the perfection stage includes the path of skillful means (thabs lam) by which the energy channels, currents of vital energy and points of seminal energy (rtsa rlung thig le) in the subtle body are controlled and the coalescent path of liberation (grol lam), which concerns non-conceptualizing yoga and is effected in three steps: willfully applied meditation, otherwise known as the yoga of blessings, effective meditation, also known as the yoga of the imaginary, and instantaneous meditation, also known as the yoga of perfection.

#### CONDUCT (SPYOD PA), SPYI DON, PP. 127-136

Conduct essentially refers to all the activities associated with body, speech and mind which are to be engaged when the practices of skillful means (thabs) and discriminative awareness (shes rab) are applied. It comprises spiritual discipline on the path of skillful means (thabs lam brtul zhugs kyi spyod pa) and careful restraint on the path of liberation (grol lam bag yod kyi spyod pa). In periods of meditative absorption, conduct refers to meditative stability itself, whereas in post-meditation, it concerns the phenomenal display which arises before the mind. The distinctive conduct associated with the practice of Mahāyoga includes the rites of sexual yoga (sbyor ba) which generate delight and rites of "forceful liberation" (sgrol ba), which are the wrathful application of compassion.

#### MANDALA (DKYIL 'KHOR), SPYI DON, PP. 136-144

The term mandala essentially refers to a central deity embodying fundamental reality surrounded by peripheral clusters of deities, but it may also be defined as the basis through which essential enlightened attributes are apprehended. It is classified according to the mandalas of ground, path and result. The mandala of the ground refers to the primordial presence of the mundane world and its inhabitants, respectively as the supportive meditational deities and supported pristine cognition. The mandala of the path refers to the symbolic or illustrative images of meditation and the genuine mandalas of buddha-body, -speech and -mind, while the mandala of the result refers to the conclusive fruition, the "rank of Samantabhadra" whereon buddha-body and pristine cognition are present, without conjunction or disjunction.

#### EMPOWERMENT (DBANG BSKUR), SPYI DON, PP. 144-152

Empowerment is essentially defined as the initial dissipation of stains covering the body, speech and mind, which facilitates the conferral of mature pristine cognition. It is generally classified according to the vase-empowerment ('bum dbang) which purifies the subtle body and its energy channels (rtsa) into the buddha-body of emanation body (sprul sku), the secret empowerment (gsang dbang) which purifies subtle speech and its vital energy (rlung) into the buddha-body of perfect resource (longs spyod rdzogs pa'i sku), the empowerment of discriminating pristine

cognition (shes rab ye shes kyi dbang) which purifies the subtle mind and its point of seminal energy (thig le) into the buddha-body of reality (chos-sku), and the empowerment of word and meaning (tshig don gyi dbang) which purifies these three in equal proportion into the buddha-body of essentiality (ngo bo nyid kyi sku).

According to Mahāyoga in particular, there are three categories of empowerment: those of beneficence (phan dbang), ability (nus pa'i dbang) and profundity (zab dbang), the first two of which correspond to the vase empowerment and the last to the other three.

#### COMMITMENT (DAM TSHIG), SPYI DON, PP. 152-185

Commitment is essentially defined as a limit which is not to be transgressed. When classified, there are general commitments including the monastic vows concerning individual liberation (prātimokêa), the bodhisattva vows concerning the cultivation of an altruistic intention (sems bskyed) and the commitments of the tantras, as upheld by the Sarmapa mantra traditions. In particular, according to Mahāyoga, there is an enumeration of twenty-eight commitments, or another comprising five basic and ten ancillary commitments. The five basic ones are not to abandon the unsurpassed teachings of Mahāyoga, to venerate the spiritual teacher, not to interrupt the continuity of mantra recitation and sealing hand-gestures, to maintain loving kindness for neophytes entering the path of the sacred teachings which leads to buddhahood, and not to divulge secrets to unworthy recipients. The ten ancillary commitments are not to abandon the five poisons and to accumulate the five nectars.

#### ATTAINMENT (SGRUB PA), SPYI DON, PP. 185-202

Attainment is essentially defined as the acquisition of supreme and common spiritual accomplishments through the extraordinary means of the secret mantras. It is therefore classified according to the accomplishments (dngos grub) which are either supreme or common. The ancillary supports (rten) of attainment include material sacraments, mantra recitation, meditative stability, and physical postures. The essence (snying po) of the practice which brings about spiritual attainment is the generation and perfection stages of meditation; and its modalities (sgrub tshul) are the so-called four aspects of ritual service and attainment (bsnyen sgrub).

In particular, Mahāyoga includes the extraordinary attainments of the feast-offerings (tshogs), whereby male and female yogins attain the rank of the awareness-holders by means of the four aspects of ritual service and attainment.

#### OFFERING (MCHOD PA), SPYI DON, PP. 202-215

Offerings are essentially defined as the means for venerating and producing delight in the meditational deities because the making of offerings precedes all virtuous actions and

engagement in all activities. When classified, offerings include the outer offerings of everyday resources (phyi nyer spyod kyi mchod pa), the inner offerings of commitment (nang dam rdzas kyi mchod pa), the secret offerings of sexual yoga and "forceful liberation" (gsang ba sbyor sgrol gyi mchod pa), and the real offerings of great sameness (de kho na nyid mnyam pa chen po'i mchod pa). These are all integrated in the course of the feast-offering ceremony.

#### ENLIGHTENED ACTIVITY (PHRIN LAS), SPYI DON, PP. 215-226

Enlightened activity is essentially defined as the extraordinary skillful actions, expressed by bodhisattvas for the sake of others through the four immeasurable aspirations (tshad med bzhi). It is classified, according to its diverse goals, into supreme and common activities, the former generating the seed of liberation in other minds and the latter manifesting provisional blissful results.

Also, among the ancillary supports for enlightened activity, there are outer activities that relate to the external sacraments and inner activities of body, speech and mind. Now, some activities are said to benefit sentient beings while others eradicate obstacles, notably the four rites of pacification (zhi), enrichment (rgyas), subjugation (dbang) and wrath (drag). When the motivation behind activities is considered, there are common self-centered activities and supreme altruistic activities. All these may be attained through the practice of the perfection stage, the generation stage or through the recitation of mantras.

#### SEALING (PHYAG RGYA), SPYI DON, PP. 226-237

Sealing is essentially defined as the means of resolutely securing the buddha-body, -speech, -mind and -activities. It is classified generally according to the seals of ground, path and result. Among these, in the case of the generation stage of meditation, the seals of the path comprise: the Great Seal of buddha-body (sku phyag rgya chen po), the Teaching Seal of buddha-speech (gsung chos kyi phyag rgya), the Commitment Seal of buddha-mind (thugs dam tshig gi phyag rgya) and the Action Seal of buddha-activity (phrin las las kyi phyag rgya). In the case of the perfection stage, these same four seals are secured by engaging with a female consort (gzungs ma), by cultivating the path to buddhahood, or through the four resultant pristine cognitions. The act of sealing is symbolically represented by the diverse hand-gestures.

#### MANTRA (SNGAGS), SPYI DON, PP. 237-259

Mantra is essentially defined as "the extraordinary skillful means which protects the subtle mind and its discriminative awareness". Now, the syllables of buddha-speech, including all the vowels and consonants, are considered to abide naturally within the subtle body, to generate the celestial palace of the meditational deities, to generate the miraculous emanational array of the meditational deities, and to be vocalized as sounds and letters. These four modalities of buddha-



speech have their corresponding attainments since they respectively relate to the essential nature of actual reality, or emptiness, to the nature of apparitional reality, to the blessings of the buddhas, and to the unimpeded potency of their speech. The results attained through the recitation of mantras include both provisional and conclusive levels of realization.

In terms of their practical application, mantras are said to be of three kinds: secret mantras (gsang sngags), gnostic mantras (rigs sngags) and retentive mantras (gzungs sngags), the first so-called because their skillful means is secret, the second because their essence is awareness or pristine cognition, and the third because consecration occurs when they are retained.

In the course of his summary, Mipham Rinpoche concludes each of these ten sections with a statement showing how all the ten aspects of the secret mantra practice are completely interrelated. For such reasons, the Guhyagarbha Tantra fulfils all the criteria required of an unsurpassed tantra-text.