



Music to Adorn the Illusory Display A Concise Explanation of the Nature of the Feast Gathering

by Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thayé

Sarva dikshu shubha jayantu.

I shall, in brief, explain the method for awakening
through the vast, swift yogic disciplines of means and insight—
twin accumulations that bind the net of unity's great bliss.
Awareness-holding guru, deep in my heart's center, I pay homage to you!

This conduct, both easy to apply and great in meaning
because of its preeminence in cause and means,
is taught in the unsurpassable yoga tantras.
All you with such good fortune, rejoice!

For as long as the realms of beings and the expanse of space remain, the compassionate activities of the victors will continue without end. Thus our teacher, Lord of the Shakyas, both taught and continues to teach, throughout past, present, and future, giving remedial Dharma teachings, infinite in scope and equal in number to the endless array of concepts held by beings. All these myriad teachings are contained within the Causal Vehicle of Characteristics and the Resultant Vajra Vehicle.

For those whose aim is their own sole benefit, the Buddha taught the tripitaka of the shravakas. These teachings comprise: the view of lack of a personal self; the meditations of calm-abiding (shamatha) and clear-seeing (vipashyana); the conduct of not harming; and the result of becoming a shravaka arhat within three human lifetimes and a pratekyabuddha after one hundred eons.

For those who are able to aim for awakening for others' benefit, the Buddha taught the tripitaka of the perfection of wisdom. These teachings comprise: the view of the two types of selfhood; the meditation on non-conceptuality; the conduct of the ten perfections and the four ways of attracting disciples; and the result of becoming a great regent after three countless eons, upon reaching the end of the tenth bhumi.

For those of exceptionally sharp faculties, the Buddha taught the tripitaka of Mantra. These teachings comprise: the view of the equality of samsara and nirvana; the meditation of the melting into bliss through the two stages; the conduct with and without elaboration; and the result of actualizing the wisdom kaya in this life, or within sixteen lifetimes.

The content of each of these tripitakas, or three precious trainings, is alike in establishing devoted individuals on the path to liberation. However, the Mantra Vehicle¹ is superior above all other vehicles, particularly in the following three ways, and more:

1. It contains many *skillful means*—such as empowerment, the two stages,² the samayas, yogic disciplines, and the conjoining with the immediate cause—that are not taught in the other vehicles.
2. It is *a swift path* that enables one to reach awakening in a single lifetime of one hundred years, without needing to rely on any other path. Even in the case of the Kriya-tantras, at the maximum one will reach awakening within eight eons, no longer than that.
3. It is *a blissful approach* to accomplishing the siddhis, for this path can be accomplished regardless of one's past karma, however positive or negative, such as the inexpiable deeds. Furthermore, it does not require austerities or hardships; on the contrary, it uses the sense pleasures as the path.

In the Resultant Vehicle, the cause is sealed with the result and the result is sealed with the cause. In this way, the equality of ground and result is practiced, and the result is taken as the path. The very name of this exalted Vajra Vehicle of Secret Mantra is heard so incredibly seldom—only once in a blue moon, in the past, present, or future—that it is even rarer than a wish-granting jewel or the udumvara flower. Even more rare than encountering these Secret Mantra teachings is to gain confidence in the profound view and conduct contained therein. And even rarer is the ability to practice the Secret Mantra exactly as it is taught.

The two continuums—the *resultant* continuum, the blissful bond of great equality that unites all buddhas, and the *ground* continuum, the element of beings that is enshrouded by discards yet unstained by them—constitute that which is pervaded and that which pervades. These two continuums are engaged in during the *path* continuum of the indivisible truths, free from all duality of discards and remedies, through the trainings with and without characteristics. At first a yogin—a person who engages in this path—should practice the trainings in secret. Then, once he or she has attained the middling and greater stages of heat,³ through the immediate causes of the central channel and the “all-victorious conduct,” it will not take long to accomplish the vajrakaya.

As taught in *The Two Segments*, *The Vajra Tent*, *The Samputa Tantra*, and elsewhere in the great collection of tantras, the gathering-wheel (*ganacakra*) should be performed as an enhancement. If the gathering-wheel is performed in an isolated house, on the evenings of the full and new moons, and with a gathering of practitioners adept in either the generation or completion stage, it is known as a *common gathering*. If it is performed in a very isolated place, such as a charnel ground, on the evening of the tenth lunar day and with spiritual heroes and heroines who have gained accomplishment in the practice, or who are naturally accomplished, it is known as an *uncommon gathering*. If the gathering-wheel is performed in an extremely isolated place, such as a sacred site where sky-dancers gather, in an assembly hall that has three stories or layers of chambers, for six months, or for three years and three months, and solely with a gathering of adept practitioners, it is known as an *elaborate gathering*.

Furthermore, when an equal number of male and female practitioners matching the number of deities gather, it is known as an *actual gathering-wheel*. When solely male practitioners gather, with the exception of a single female practitioner seated to the left of the presiding master in order to partake of the alcohol, it is called a *spiritual heroes' banquet*. When solely female practitioners gather, with the exception of a single male practitioner seated to the right of the presiding master in order to partake of the meat, it is called a *spiritual heroines' banquet*.

All participants should know the symbolic gestures and their responses, and should be engaged in deity yoga, untainted by ordinary thoughts. The offerings, having been consecrated by the master, should first be presented to the mandala. Beginning with the alcohol and the five amritas, the practitioners should revel to their full satisfaction in the gathered food and drink, such as the five meats, and should take delight in the scents, flowers and other enjoyments.

If the gathering-wheel is performed in connection with empowering a vajra master, the source of the accomplishment of all siddhis, the transcendental third empowerment⁴ should be bestowed directly, before anyone partakes of the feast.

One should then perform an invocation with the *Song of the Spring Queen*.⁵ Endowed with deep confidence in the view gained through realization and habituation, with the meditation imbued with the three perceptions,⁶ and with the conduct of union infused with skillful means, one cultivates the immediate cause, these four branches of approach and accomplishment.⁷ By this means, before long, the state of a sky-dancer, an awareness-holder of the desire or form realm, or indeed the wisdom kaya will be accomplished.

The *actual gathering-wheel* is the domain of fortunate individuals of the highest faculties, such as the great Indian masters Indrabhuti, Luipa, Krishnacarya, Ghantapada, Darika, Virupa, Tilopa and Naropa. We practitioners can perform something similar to this by practicing with an equal number of male and female practitioners of the two stages, by relying on a wisdom consort,⁸ and by

establishing the five meats and five amritas through samadhi. As for the scriptural source for this approach, the *Pañcasamaya* states:

You should join with your consort.
If you are unable to do so, then visualize her.

And:

If you cannot obtain them,
Or if unfit disciples are scared,
The five amritas and five meats
Can instead be cultivated through samadhi.

The term *ganacakra*, translated as *gathering-wheel*, is a practice infused with the unique means and insight of Mantra. It is the *gathering* of exceptional supports and individuals, and the setting in motion of the *wheel* of yogic discipline without limits.

A gathering-wheel performed by a group of individuals who engage in different deity practices is known as a *gathering of friends*. A gathering-wheel performed during a consecration or a fire puja is called a *caru feast*.⁹ A gathering-wheel performed amid dances, while donning the deity's attire and deity masks, is called a *buddha dance*. An offering made solely to sky-dancers, transcendental or mundane, of fixed or unfixed number, is called an *offering to the noble ladies*, or a *maidens' feast*. These and other forms of the gathering-wheel are taught in the tantras as part of yogic discipline.

Generally speaking, the Secret Mantra's skillful means are so vast that there is nothing that cannot become a gathering-wheel. The environment and its inhabitants—the symbolic and imputed mandalas with natural, spontaneous presence as their decoration—are known as the *self-existing outer gathering-offering*. The uncontrived, unbound display of perceived sense pleasures and the perceiving six collections of consciousness¹⁰ are known as the *naturally-arising inner gathering-offering*. To dissolve the subtle channels, subtle winds, and essence drops within the vajra body, to bring them all together through enjoyment, and to engage in this constantly, is the *secret gathering-offering of great bliss*. Whatever appears is the wheel of the intrinsic nature, beyond affirming and negating, beyond acceptance and rejection, radiantly manifest as the innate mudra, unconfined and beyond extremes—this is called the *gathering-offering of suchness*. By recognizing the way things are within their natural condition, everything becomes a gathering-offering.

Moreover, the prepared material offerings form the *gathering of substances*, the illusory body constitutes the *gathering of the aggregates*, and one's daily food and drink form the *ongoing gathering*. These and the many other types of gatherings

are the supreme and unsurpassable skillful means for gathering the accumulations.

From among them all, the gathering-offering as practiced these days is what is known in the Secret Mantra of the New Schools as a *banquet feast*. This will be explained in terms of seven points:

- I. Essence
- II. Literal Meaning
- III. Divisions
- IV. Purpose
- V. How it is Performed
- VI. Benefits
- VII. Results

I. Essence

It is an extraordinary gathering that accomplishes, in particular, the wisdom *kaya*. This it does by uniting together the accumulation of merit (with concepts) and the accumulation of wisdom (without concepts).

II. Literal Meaning

The Sanskrit term *ganapuja* is translated as *tshok chö* in Tibetan, and literally as “gathering-offering” in English, for it is the *gathering* of the five special articles¹¹ and so on and the *offering* of the skillful means of great bliss and the insight that abides in neither of the two extremes, filling the basic space of phenomena to the brim.

III. Divisions

The Vajra Net,¹² a tantra of the Early Translations, states:

A gathering of many friends
Is called “the gathering of practitioners.”
When all the yogic ingredients are present,
It is called “the gathering of delightful enjoyments.”
When the deities and oath-bound ones gather together,
It is called “the gathering of the great assembly.”
Continuously perfecting the two accumulations
By enjoying everything, while free from fixation,
Is termed “the great gathering.”

Accordingly, four divisions of the gathering are taught: the gathering of fortunate individuals, the gathering of material articles, the gathering of delighted deities, and the gathering of the two accumulations.

IV. Purpose

The General Secret Tantra states:

Do not resent the deities;
Instead, make offerings to them at the relevant times.

Likewise, in the yoga and unsurpassable yoga tantras it is taught:

As the samaya for the karma family,
Worship the deities as much as you can.

In particular, *The Lightning Bolt of Wisdom*, a tantra of the Early Translations, states:

Best is to recite continuously,
Or three times during the day and another three at night,
remaining all the while free of distraction, throughout both day and
night.
Next best is to recite on the six special days of each month,
And to maintain the recitation throughout the four seasons.
At the least, aspiring practitioners should exert themselves
on the special days at the beginning and end of each month.
If they fail to do even that,
The seed of awakening will be destroyed.
The same applies to the offerings of gatherings and tormas.
At the very least, you should perform these practices once a month or
once a year.

Thus, with the five suchnesses,¹³ you should exert yourself in the recitation of mantra, the four mudras, and in the subsidiary practices for dispelling obstacles and enhancing, namely making Feast Gathering and torma offerings. At best, you should do this every evening. Next best, you should do this on the full moon, new moon, and eighth lunar days, and in particular in the early morning or evening of the tenth days of the waxing and waning moon.¹⁴ At the least, you should perform such offerings four times a year—at the summer and winter solstices and the spring and autumn equinoxes. Apply yourself to this, seriously and consistently.

In particular, practitioners engaged in deity practice should consecrate their food and drink as the five meats and five amritas, and should thus revel in the outer and inner gatherings. This is the main samaya of food to be adopted.

Furthermore, a practitioner may, through a gathering-offering, perform a fulfillment that is specifically related to one of the four activities. For instance, this may be for the pacifying activity of replenishing samaya and purifying

obscurations; for the increasing activity of enriching lifespan, merit, meditative experience and realization; for the magnetizing activity of bringing appearances under control; or for the wrathful activity of annihilating wicked, malicious beings. By these means, the respective siddhis are swiftly attained. Thus, there are many purposes for performing Feast Gathering.

V. How the Gathering is Performed

The Practitioners

The fortunate individuals present should, as a basis for engaging in the gathering-offering, have received the four empowerments for one of the great mandalas of unsurpassable yoga and should be maintaining the samayas without letting them decline. They should never separate the actions of their three gates of body, speech, and mind from the practice of their supreme deity. Furthermore, unhindered by concepts of accepting and rejecting, affirming and negating dualistic appearances, they should engage in the three vajras, the wheel of equality.

The Offerings

On the relative level of the mere illusion, all self-existing, self-arising appearances are Samantabhadra offering clouds. The ornamental display of the array of the charnel grounds—boundless oceans of mandala wheels, as many kayas and pure realms as there are atoms within every atom, beyond all limits and measure of both time and space, endless phenomena completely filling the all-encompassing expanse—this is what is meant by the gathering-offering. These are the illustrative samaya substances.

The Heruka Galpo states:¹⁵

Arrange *dorjé tsé* (dough),¹⁶ *galché* (sweet curd)
Jamdé (butter), *datrom* (confection),¹⁷ *dagyé* (pastries),
Tsetri (berries), *jagad* (alcohol), *jagati* (meat),
Trenmo (supplements),¹⁸ *shamo* (fruits), *kuntugyü* (salt),
Amra (human flesh), *günbrum* (elephant meat), *agaru* (horse meat),
Nali (cow meat), *gegyé* (dog meat), and the like.

Arrange whatever enjoyments you can afford and acquire—principally the substances mentioned above, and any other sense pleasures—all without stinginess or attachment. In particular, as stated in the *Union Tantra*:

The various foods
Made with meat and alcohol
Are the greatest delights, the most delectable dish.
They are supreme among the highest samayas.

The Secret Tantra states:

Maha-mamsa and amrita
Are the indispensable siddhi substances.
Food, drink, liquor, and fruits
Comprise all the other sense pleasures.

Thus, the most important items are the indispensable food and drink—the *madana*¹⁹ and *bala*.²⁰ Food is the nature of skillful means and drink is the nature of insight. Primordially pure of the polluting stains of adventitious deluded thought, the five great meats and amritas are therefore, by nature, undefiled wisdom amrita which, through the awakened intent of purification, realization, and increase, become unstinting offerings and gifts of vajra-amrita from which absolutely everything desired appears.

The Guests

Imagine that the guests of samsara and nirvana, who are in essence the natural expression of primordial wisdom, appear as the mandala circle which, just like the sun and its light, is not distinguished in terms of higher or lower.

The Outer Gathering-Offering

To this gathering of guests comprised solely of spiritual heroes and yoginis, the gathering-offering is distributed. Violations and breaches of samaya are thereby purified, and the desired siddhis attained. Imagining this constitutes the outer gathering-offering.

The Inner Gathering-Offering

As the practitioners partake of the gathered food and drink, they do so with the support of the external twenty-four sacred places, such as Pulliramalaya at the crown of the head, housing the male and female deities within the spiritual heroes' skulls, and the supported—the vajra body, with the abiding subtle channels, the moving subtle winds, and the arranged essence-drops all intact—all the while recognizing the aggregates, elements, and sense sources as the circle of the deities of the three seats of completeness.

This should be performed while free from the two extremes—the extreme of the shravakas who, bound by ordinary fixation, are inhibited by their conceptual trainings and are thereby unable to partake of the gathering-offering food and drink; and the extreme of indulgence, which is to act carelessly and partake of the gathering-offering food and drink with common desire and craving.

Be advised, your conduct must be appropriate and suitable to the context. Thus, free of these two extremes, you should partake of the food and drink. While doing so, imagine that the candali at the navel melts the essence-drops at the chakra of great bliss and so on, and that the pure essence of the union of the white and red essences permeates the entire inside of the body, thereby pleasing the naturally present deities. This constitutes the inner gathering-offering.

The Secret Gathering-Offering

The wisdom deities are invoked by the sounds and signs of bliss from the union with a karma or wisdom mudra, endowed with the three perceptions. At this, the entire field of accumulation pervading the whole of space is melted by intense passion into the essence of bodhicitta, and the three-thousandfold universe merges into a state of one taste, as if it were just a single mustard seed. Through the progression of the four joys, in forward and reverse order, and distinguished by the four intrinsic natures and the four luminosities, the experience of illustrative wisdom is attained, thereby making the practitioner fit and ready to realize ultimate wisdom. This constitutes the secret gathering-offering.

The Suchness Gathering-Offering

The subject is unimpeded natural awareness, free from arising, ceasing, and abiding. The object is emptiness free from conceptual fabrication, beyond all boundaries and extremes. The natural expression of their primordial union as one great equal taste, all appearances of samsara and nirvana, is the perfectly present vajra-mandala, pure and equal in nature. To be infused with the view that fully comprehends this, free from the three conceptual spheres, is the suchness gathering-offering.

Practitioners should assume self-confidence in whichever of these views and intents best suits their capacity, be it higher, middling, or lesser. Even the most elementary practitioners should train in the manner explained by Lord Marpa:

When partaking of sense pleasures, I visualize myself as the deity.
While savoring these exalted flavors,²¹ I maintain the visualization.
Though I see these pleasures as food and drink, I remain fearless,
For I am confident in perceiving them as Feast Gathering.

So, as Lord Marpa taught, you should understand or seal your body as the deity, your speech as mantra, and your mind as the display of the intrinsic nature. By simply doing that, your three gates will not remain ordinary. Likewise, do not view the gathering substances as ordinary. Rather, imagine the environment to be the Display of Great Mystery charnel ground, the buildings to be the celestial palace of great liberation, the inhabitants to be spiritual heroes and yoginis, and

the samaya offering substances to be lotus and skull vessels filled with the five meats and five amritas. Maintaining this outlook is of utmost importance.

Furthermore, when seated in the gathering you should avoid all general and specific negativity of body, speech, and mind, such as fooling around, quarreling, chattering, and all other actions that are downfalls of the branch samayas. Partake of the sacred substances as siddhis with joy and satisfaction, but free from grasping and attachment.

On appropriate occasions, enhance your meditative experience and realization through vajra song and dance. Issue the command-residual to the sky-dancers who guard the lands, and take it to the “ogres’ dining spot”²². Make dedications and aspirations to reach the indestructible state through the inner path of the Vajra Vehicle. Then shower down a rain of flowers with prayers for auspiciousness, and with the concluding stages of the practice dissolve all appearances into the formless state. Henceforth, you should observe the samaya of the great assembly: to serve and respect your fellow practitioners with the affection suitable among intimate friends and relatives. And, with a constant flow of natural mindfulness, you should not let your three gates stray from the state of the three vajras.

VI. The Temporary Benefits of Performing Such Feast Gathering

The Naturally Arisen Perfection Tantra states:²³

The virtues of performing Feast Gathering
Are such that the obscurations of countless past and future lives
Will be purified in a mere instant in the presence of the peaceful and
wrathful deities.

The two obscurations, the habitual tendencies, the general downfalls of transgressing the three vows, and the particular transgressions of the root and branch samayas of Secret Mantra that have been accumulated since time without beginning—all of these are purified and restored. The tantra continues:

Wherever you are born in your lives to come,
You will never lack necessities,
The wheel of Dharma will always turn for you,
And you will always have an abundance of wealth,
Enjoyments, sustenance, and belongings.

As the karmic ripening, you will have mastery over a sky treasury of both spiritual and material enjoyments. You will be blessed with an excellent environment, pure intentions, and vast accumulations of merit and wisdom. Such benefits will be reaped not just in your future lives, but you will experience them in this life too. Moreover, *The Vajra Net Tantra* states:

From among all types of merit, the practice of gathering-wheels is supreme.

Through these, all your aims for this life will be fulfilled,
And all negative forces and obstacles pacified.

In your future lives, in the pure realms of victorious awareness-holders,
You will reach the level of Samantabhadra.

As stated, all adversities—such as diseases, harmful forces, and hardships—will be pacified, and your lifespan, merit, and prosperity will increase. The infinite activities of pacifying, increasing, magnetizing, and subjugating will all be accomplished, just as you desire. The sacred bonds of the boundless three roots will be fulfilled. The protectors and guardians of phenomenal appearance will be delighted, all beings of the six classes will be satisfied, and all siddhis will be effortlessly attained. In short, the benefits are limitless. As *The Two Segments Tantra* states:²⁴

Whatever is eaten, all the sense pleasures
Of the practitioners will transform into siddhis.

VII. The Ultimate Results

The Naturally Arisen Perfection Tantra continues:

There are also the higher qualities that you will receive:

In the intermediate state, you will recognize your own perception as
The wisdoms.²⁵

Being liberated there, you will remain on the unchanging ground.

Filling the three-thousandfold realm with emanations, you will fulfill
the benefit of beings.

Qualities like this you will attain!

By manifesting as the deity in accord with both the ground and fruition, and through engaging in the conduct of profound passion, the subtle karmic winds are brought into the central channel and thereby confused appearances are forcefully brought to a halt. The methods of Secret Mantra are thus *swift in effect*. By upholding the samaya of the definitive supreme mystery of all the victors, it is possible, through the power of the blessings of the herukas, and so on, to avert the full ripening of karma. Thus, it is a *powerful aid*. Whatever dualistic appearances arise, they are all taken onto the path, without affirming or negating. Thus, *the conduct is vast*. By means of these three factors—being swift in effect, a powerful aid, and of vast conduct—the view and conduct of unsurpassable Secret Mantra is sure to be accomplished by those who maintain pure samayas and remain free from doubt.

Those of the highest capacity will experience their innate, intrinsic nature dawning from within while seated in the gathering, and delusion will thereby

dissolve without trace. For those of middling capacity, through the cause of gathering the two accumulations through the gathering-offering, they will capture the stronghold of accomplishment after death. For those of lesser capacity, when the bardo appearances manifest, they will be invited to the pure celestial realms by spiritual heroes and yoginis, accompanied by displays of offerings and a symphony of music. There they will be reassured and uplifted by the vajra gurus abiding at the levels of great awareness-holders, and will be established at the supreme state.

The Concise Supreme Bliss Tantra states:

When practitioners pass away,
Glorious herukas and yoginis
Will welcome them with flower-filled hands.
So-called “death” will greet them
With victory banners and parasols,
With symphonies of music
And choruses of song,
And will lead them to the celestial realms.

Another tantra states:

By visualizing clearly the wisdom deity,
The accumulation of merit is perfected.
By understanding the deity to be like the moon reflected in water,
The accumulation of wisdom is perfected.

By practicing the generation-stage of the indivisible samaya and wisdom deity that recognizes things exactly as they are—that all phenomenal appearances are primordially perfected as the deity and the celestial palace—fixation on ordinary appearances is cast aside and the accumulation of vast merit is perfected. By practicing the view of the natural state of all phenomena, free from all arising, cessation, and abiding, and the meditation of self-existing naturalness, one arrives at great equality, free from the bondage and liberation of the extremes of imputation and denigration, and the accumulation of profound wisdom is perfected.

Furthermore, by visualizing the objects of offering as deities, the field of accumulation is transformed into buddhas. By transforming the samaya substances into vajra-amrita, objects cease to be ordinary. By reveling in the intrinsic nature in the manner of the intrinsic nature, the mind is set free from grasping and attachment. Due to these three special factors, the Vajra Vehicle of skillful means is distinguished by exceptional insight.

While the Vajra Vehicle accords with the common vehicle, at the same time it contains practices of the six perfections which are uniquely profound and vast: the generosity of making offerings to guests throughout the whole of space; the discipline of maintaining samayas and yogic disciplines; the patience of not feeling daunted by the Vajra Vehicle's vast skillful means and not being intimidated by its profound insight; the diligence that serves as a support for all the other perfections; the meditation which focuses on the melting bliss of the deity's wisdom form; and the wisdom that is utterly free of the three conceptual spheres. Because these six perfections are so profound and so vast, they actualize, either in this life or the next, the mahamudra wisdom kaya of indivisible bliss and emptiness.

Through these exceptional skillful means and exceptional insight,
All infused with the imputed—the ritual,
With the dependent—the deity,
And with the perfectly present—great wisdom itself,²⁶
Instantly the state of union is reached.

Whatever virtue has accrued through my extolling here
The amazing ways of this supreme secret mystery,
May it empty out the ocean of cyclic existence
So that all may attain the invincible three vajras!

At the command of Karma Ngedön Tenpa Rapgyé, sovereign of the three trainings, I, Yönten Gyatso (Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Tayé), one concerned only with the three thoughts,²⁷ composed this concise explanation of the gathering-offering as it is practiced by tantric practitioners these days, at the seat of Palpung.

May virtue and excellence increase!



Translation Origin

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English

Adzom Gyalse Gyurme Dorje. *A Concise Explanation of Ganacakra*. Trans. Samye Translations, 2018.

1 The terms Mantra and Secret Mantra, the Mantra Vehicle, the Secret Mantra Vehicle, and the Vajra Vehicle are used synonymously throughout the text.

2 The “two stages” here refer to the generation stage and the completion stage.

3 Heat (*drod*) is the first of four stages of the path of joining (*sbyor lam*). The path of joining is one of the five paths of the Great Vehicle.

4 Reading *dbang gsum* as *dbang gsum pa*, following the oral guidance of Khenpo Tsöndru Sangpo, Ka-nying Shedrub Ling.

5 A gathering song (Tib. *tshogs glu*), such as Longchenpa’s *Lemön Tendrel*.

6 The three perceptions are (1) to perceive oneself as the deity, (2) to perceive the consort as a deity, and (3) to perceive the act of union as receiving the siddhis.

7 In this context, the four branches of approach and accomplishment could be understood as being the *approach* of invoking with a gathering song, the *close approach* of deep confidence in the view, the *accomplishment* of meditation imbued with the three perceptions, and the *great accomplishment* of the conduct of union. Khenpo Tsöndru Sangpo, Ka-nying Shedrub Ling.

8 A visualized consort.

9 Tib. *tsA ru*, Skt. *caru*. The Tibetans borrowed this term from the Sanskrit. The *Tsikdzö Chenmo* (*Tshig mdzod chen mo*) explains that it consists of pure substances such as the “three whites” (i. e. milk, butter, and curd). Monier Williams defines the Sanskrit term *caru* as an oblation (of rice, barley, and pulses), boiled with butter and milk. Adzom Gyalsé explains that this means that the ganacakra for this practice “should not include impure substances such as meat, alcohol, garlic, and onions.”

10 The six consciousnesses of eye, ear, nose, taste, body, and mind.

11 The five special articles are the conditions for accomplishing the siddhis. They are explained by Longchenpa in his *Dispelling Darkness in the Ten Directions* as (1) a practice place that is pleasant and obstacle-free, (2) companions who are qualified and endowed with excellent karma, (3) food and sustenance that fall into neither of the two extremes of austerity or indulgence and that are not acquired unethically, (4) accomplishment (siddhi) substances, and (5) samaya substances.

12 *The Magical Net of Vajrasattva, The Mirror of All Secrets* (*Vajrasattvamāyājālaguhyasarvādarśa*, *Rdo rje sems dpa’i sgyu ’phrul dra ba gsang ba thams cad kyi me long*), attributed to the translators Vimalamitra and Jñānakumāra.

13 Tib. *de kho na nyid lnga*. The suchness of mantra, the suchness of mudra, the suchness of self, the suchness of dharma, and the suchness of the deity.

14 Jangñon Kongtrul instructs practitioners to especially strive in practice on the 8th (Medicine Buddha & Tara), the 10th (Guru Rinpoché), the 15th (New Moon & Amitabha), the 25th (Sky-Dancer), and the 30th (Full Moon & Buddha Shakyamuni) days of the Tibetan calendar.

15 *The Pal Heruka Galpo* (shriherukavashyaka, *dpal he ru ka rgal po*), ‘*The Essence of shri Heruka*’, belongs to the cycle of scriptures dedicated to the ishtadevata (*yi dam*) shri Heruka (*yang dag heruka*). *The Heruka Galpo* outlines a variety of rituals common to the Nyingma schools and is frequently quoted as such by Tibetan authors, especially when commenting on the ganacakra.

16 Tib. *zen*. The dough is made from mixing roasted barley (*tsham pa*) with hot water or tea. One of the main traditional foods of the Tibetans.

17 Tib. *thud*. is a confection of roasted barley, butter, sugar, and dried curd.

18 This refers to supplements (*tshod pa*) that are added to some traditional Tibetan foods, such as dried cheese, dried fruits, oots, etc.

19 The *madana* is the alcohol that is offered during the ganachakra.

20 The *bala* refers to meat. The meaning can be translated as “strength.”

21 Exalted flavors (*ro tho*), in the sense of being undefiled by ordinary grasping.

22 The ogres’ dining spot (Tib. *srin po’i za lam*) refers to a place seventy footsteps away from the place of practice.

23 The tantra entitled *Naturally Arisen Perfection* (rdzogs pa rang byung gi rgyud) is one of the eighteen tantras of the pith instruction class (*man ngag sde*) of the Great Perfection teachings.

24 *The Two Segments* (*brtag pa gnyis pa*) is commonly used in reference to *The Tantra of Hevajra, He Who Affords Protection Through Nets of Sky-Dancers* (Töñ. 418, *kye’i rdo rje mkha’gro ma dra ba’i sdom pa’i rgyud*).

25 This refers to the five aspects of primordial wisdom: (1) the wisdom of dharmadhatu, (2) mirror-like wisdom, (3) the wisdom of equality, (4) the wisdom of discernment, and (5) all-accomplishing wisdom.

26 Kongtrül Rinpoché is referring to the three natures (*rang bzhin gsum*): the imputed (*kun brtags*), the dependent (*gzhan dbang*), and the perfectly present (*yongs grub*).

27 Tib. *’du shes gsum*. A busuku, someone concerned only with the three thoughts of sleeping, eating and drinking, and urinating and defecating.