



## The Ganacakra Ritual

by Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen

*With devotion I prostrate to my noble teacher!  
Bowling to my teacher, The single embodiment of all the buddhas,  
To bring accomplishment of the accumulations of merit and wisdom,  
I shall explain the ritual which does so.*

If you wish to perform the ganacakra taught in the niruttarayoga tantras—the highest yoga tantras—such as those of the tathagatas shri Hevajra or shri Cakrasamvara, there are three points:

- I. How to perform the ritual
- II. The refutation of objections
- III. The divisions of the ritual

### I. How to Perform the Ritual

First, the manner in which the ritual is performed consists of six points:

1. Time
2. Place
3. Fellow practitioners
4. Substances
5. The ritual itself
6. Necessity

#### 1. Time

- a) Periodic occasions
- b) Special occasions

##### a) Periodic Occasions

These fall on the eighth, tenth, fourteenth and fifteenth days of the waxing and waning moon.

##### b) Special Occasions

These occur when empowerments are given, during a consecration, when a fire offering is performed or when the tantras are taught.

## 2. Place

A beginner performs the ritual in places hidden from those who have not received the empowerment, such as in one's own home or a shrine room. Those who have stabilized their minds perform the ritual in such places as charnel grounds or sacred mountain caves. Those who have reached accomplishment perform the ritual in locations such as the twenty-four sacred places.

## 3. Fellow Practitioners

One's fellow practitioners should be viras and yoginis<sup>1</sup> who have received the empowerment and have not broken their samayas.

## 4. Substances

Although the substances consist of whatever articles you are able to acquire, the indispensable substances for the wisdom dakinis are *madana* and *bala*.<sup>2</sup>

## 5. The Ritual

The ritual is divided into three parts:

- a) The preparation
- b) The main part
- c) The conclusion

### a) The Preparation

The preparation consists of six points:

- i. Decoration of the practice place
- ii. Arrangement of the outer and inner offering articles
- iii. Invitation of the vajra master to come and preside over the ceremony.  
iv. Communication through secret hand-gestures for entering the place.  
v. Performance of the deity yoga and requesting the deities to take their seats.  
vi. Recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra for purifying the mind

### i. Decoration of the Practice Place

First, clean the practice place. Then anoint it with the five substances of a cow, sprinkle scented water, hang canopies and flower garlands, and set up a painting of the deities. If the focus of the practice lies mainly on the self-visualization, in accordance with the number of deities of the self-visualization, such as of Hevajra or Cakrasamvara, arrange seats covered with tiger-skins or charnel ground shrouds. If you do not have these it is fine to arrange other appropriate seats. Arrange the seats in a circle according to how the deities are seated within the mandala.

If the focus lies mainly on the front-visualization, arrange an accomplishment mandala, as taught in the traditional scriptures such as the *Hevajra* or *Cakrasamvara*. With the vajra master taking the principal seat of the assembly, the other practitioners sit according to seniority. The practice focusing mainly on

the self-visualization is taught in *The Two Segments*.<sup>3</sup> The practice focusing on mainly the front-visualization is taught in such scriptures as the *Samputa-tantra*<sup>4</sup> and elsewhere. It is said that it is easier for beginners to offer the feast mainly to the front-visualization.

## **ii. Arrangement of the Outer and Inner Offering Articles**

According to *Hevajra* three or four water offerings should be arranged. According to the *Cakrasamvara*, the water offerings can be confined to the two for drinking and washing the hands and feet. Here, the additional water offerings are part of the arranged offerings.<sup>5</sup> Thus when you recite “we present the offerings (... *chöpar bul*),” all the water offerings are included within the arranged offerings.

When you offer the four waters: first, mix the water for washing the hands and feet with pleasant smelling substances such as camphor and saffron; second, mix the water for washing the face with the three sweets; third, prepare clean water for drinking; and, fourth, decorate the offering water with white flowers. Then prepare whatever you can afford for the remaining five offerings of the flowers and so forth. Arrange the shrine as elaborately as possible.

According to the traditional scriptures of *Hevajra* and *Cakrasamvara*, you should place one torma for the supermundane deities, one torma for the primary mundane dharmapalas, and one torma for the local deities. If required you can also arrange further tormas. If you can afford the expense, the more abundantly you can arrange the shrine, the better.

Next, fill the *padma-bhajana*<sup>6</sup> with *madana* and place it in front of you with the skull's forehead facing you. Place the samaya implements of vajra and bell in order, to the right and left before you. Arrange, too, whatever delightful articles you are able to acquire. Take care of all these necessities as the preliminary to the following steps.

## **iii. Invitation of the Vajra Master**

Offer as many mandalas and flowers to the vajra master as you can and request the following:

Please preside as the vajra master over this assembly to perform this offering of all the mundane and supermundane for the benefit of all sentient beings.

If you make offerings primarily to the self-visualization, the vajra master sits upon a specially prepared seat in the centre of the assembly. When emphasizing the front-visualization, the vajra master sits upon a specially prepared seat at the head of the assembly.

## **iv. Communication through Secret Hand Gestures for Entering the Place**

With the vajra pride of being Niladanda,<sup>7</sup> the ritual assistant holds the activity vase and remains at the entrance to the practice place. By communicating

through secret signs with the initiated, he is able to identify those who are unqualified to enter and send them away.<sup>8</sup> In order to gain entrance the initiated then recite the following verse together:

Dark blue ferocious one, your conduct according to the samayas is splendid! Holder of the bejewelled staff of accomplishment, let us heroes and heroines gather! Let us enter the circle of celestial yoginis!<sup>9</sup>

Then, the guard, Niladanda, cleanses them with the water from the activity vase and replies:

Behold all phenomena as excellent!  
Have no doubts regarding all that is gathered.  
Eat and regard brahmins, dogs, and untouchables  
As equal in nature!<sup>10</sup>

Having recited the verse, the guard then grants access. Since it is difficult to perform this entrance ritual correctly and it can reduce the power of the main ritual if done incorrectly, should the participants lack sufficient knowledge, they can simply arouse the pride of being the deity and mindfully enter the practice place. Then once the vajra master has taken his seat first, the other practitioners follow according to seniority.

#### **v. Invocation**

The ritual assistant offers the general mandala and places flowers in the hands of those assembled. Prostrating with joined hands, he recites:

With great cloud-like offerings of Samantabhadra's magical display,  
we viras and yoginis make offerings in order to pacify obstacles for  
the benefactors and gather the two accumulations. Please preside  
over us, therefore, in non-dual samadhi.

It is also possible to recite the abbreviated request: "Please preside over us within the yoga of your main deity." Following this, the ritual assistant collects the flowers again and offers them to the teacher. The teacher in turn offers them to the lineage masters and yidam deities, then places the flowers in the centre of the mandala.

#### **vi. Purifying the Mind**

In order for the assembly to confess breakages of samaya, meditate on Vajrasattva on the crown of your head and recite an appropriate number of hundred-syllable mantras, according to the pith instructions. Then recite the following words from the *Abhidhana*:<sup>11</sup>

In my ignorance and delusion  
I have gone against and corrupted my samaya.  
Guru, protector, be my refuge!

Chief of all the mandalas, vajra holder, Embodiment of great compassion,  
Chief of all living beings, in you I take refuge!

## b) Main Part

The main part consists of the sixfold satisfaction. According to the explanatory tradition of the embodiment of all the mahayoga tantras, the *Samputa-tantra*, these are:

- i. To satisfy the samadhi-mandala with vast offerings
- ii. To satisfy the wisdom deity in the heart with the taste of amrita
- iii. To satisfy the outer hordes of spirits with the tormas
- iv. To satisfy the samaya-holders, the viras and yoginis, with the inner fire offering
- v. To satisfy the outer and inner dakinis with offerings of songs and dance
- vi. To satisfy the body mandala with co-emergent wisdom

### i. Satisfying the Samadhi-Mandala with Vast Offerings

According to the *Hevajra*, you should begin the practice by following the extensive or condensed visualization for the invitation of the field of merit until the protection circle. Among the ten topics,<sup>12</sup> in order to carry out the branches of protection and averting, recite the *ushnisha*-mantra<sup>13</sup> as many times as possible. The mantra will grant protection from obstacles now and create the auspicious conditions for overpowering the maras on the eve of your awakening. According to the *Cakrasamvara*, we simply meditate on the protection circle, and it is not necessary to recite the mantra at this point. Next, meditate gradually on the development and completion phases according to whichever ritual text you follow, such as the *Hevajra* or the *Cakrasamvara*.

Then, focus on reciting the respective root, heart, and quintessence mantras of the main deity, and recite the mantras of their retinue as many times as you can. Through practicing the development and completion stages together with the mantra recitation you will accomplish the accumulation of merit and wisdom at the time of the cause, purify buddha-fields, ripen sentient beings, and purify the negative tendencies of body, speech and mind which cause rebirth in the lower realms. You will thus set the auspicious conditions for attaining the three or four kayas and create the auspicious conditions for attaining awakening in Akanishtha, and for accomplishing the benefit of sentient beings with immeasurable emanations in countless realms at the time of the fruition. This is how to cultivate the samadhi-mandala.

Regarding the satisfaction of the samadhi-mandala with vast offerings: according to the *Hevajra*, first, recite “*om vajramrita-kundali hana hana hung hung phat,*” and sprinkle the *madana* with the tip of the vajra in order to purify the physically arranged outer offerings. According to the *Cakrasamvara*, imagine purifying the offerings with the ‘*shumbha-ni* mantra’<sup>14</sup> and dissolving all objects—the offerings, the practitioner(s) who offer(s) them and the act of offering—into emptiness with the ‘*svabhava* mantra.’<sup>15</sup> Then, imagine that out of emptiness the previous

concepts of the offerings, the practitioner(s) who offer(s) them and the act of offering, now arise in the form of the deity like a dream-like, magical display. Imagine all these offerings as arisen from the virtue of both the mundane and supermundane, excellent, clean, pure, unobstructed, filling the sky entirely, and continuously appearing for as long as samsara remains.

Now offer them with mantra, samadhi and mudra as taught in the tantras. Using mantras and mudras that are not taught in the tantras would render the ritual impure, with the result that the buddhas would not delight in your offerings. If you wish to delight the buddhas, you must use the actual words spoken by the buddhas. Then consecrate the inner offerings of amrita just as you did with the torma. Sprinkle the inner offerings with the left thumb and ring-finger and offer them first to your root teacher, then to the lineage master and the yidam deities. Next, offer them to the dharmapalas, spirits and so forth while reciting the individual mantras of the respective deities.

## **ii. Satisfying the Wisdom Deity in the Heart with the Taste of Amrita**

With your ring finger put a drop of amrita on the tip of your tongue, between your eyebrows and on the crown of your head while reciting:<sup>16</sup>

To each yogini in turn,

The yogin makes offerings

With a sprinkle of the thumb.

Visualizing the yoginis in the three places of his body

The clever yogin makes offerings To the tip of the tongue, the bindu, and above.

According to the *Hevajra*, you then ring the bell and recite offerings and praises, such as, “Picturing him, the venerable one, in the sky above...,”<sup>17</sup> the offering of the eight goddesses, the praise beginning with “All you yoginis who have gathered in this ganacakra...,”<sup>18</sup> and *The Praise in Twenty Verses*.<sup>19</sup> According to the *Cakrasamvara*, you recite offerings and praises, such as *The Praise to the Buddhas in the Ten Directions*,<sup>20</sup> the praise by master Bhuri,<sup>21</sup> and *The Eight-Part Root Mantra of the Tathagata*.<sup>22</sup> To avoid confusion, I shall not go into more detail here. Should you require further explanations, consult such texts as *The Offering Garland* by our precious teacher.<sup>23</sup>

## **iii. Satisfying the Hordes of Spirits with the Torma**

When giving the torma to spirits that have not received the empowerment, the torma must be covered with a cloth as it is carried outside. The torma offered to those spirits who *have* received the empowerment does not need to be covered by such a cloth. Perform the torma offering ritual for the supermundane deities according to the respective tantra of your practice, such as the *Hevajra* or *Cakrasamvara*. To offer the torma for the mundane deities to the dharmapalas, follow the ritual as given in the respective practice text. Next, give the general torma of the dakinis to all the spirits. Then, when giving the torma of the local

deities and the other tormas, focus on the recipients of the tormas and recite the mantra for giving the torma that begins, “*om akaro...*”<sup>24</sup> All the spirits will thereby become delighted and satisfied. The torma ritual itself is explained in detail in other texts.

#### **iv. Satisfying the Samaya-Holders, the Viras and Yoginis**

To satisfy the samaya-holders, the viras and yoginis, present them with offerings of the five sensory pleasures, such as flowers and so forth. As regards the feast articles, there are two traditions: one for those who have taken ordination and observe the precepts, and one for yogins. According to the first, the ordained should merely taste<sup>25</sup> the offerings and tormas that contain substances such as meat and alcohol. Furthermore, they bless the tormas containing sugar, fruits and other clean substances, and consume them while imagining that they contain the five meats and five amritas. This way none of the thirteen root downfalls can occur and the buddhas, bodhisattvas and wisdom dakinis will bestow their blessings. The *Guhyasamaja* states:

Although the substances do not even contain meat  
Create all the substances through your imagination.  
When these are consumed joined with the vajra,  
All the buddhas will grant their blessings.

The *Samputa* also states:

Although it is not meat, imagine it to be meat.  
Whatever worldly people eat is consumed.<sup>26</sup>

This is the tradition of practicing the ganacakra according to the master aryadeva, who was the spiritual heir of the Indian master Nagarjuna, and according to Asanga and Vasubandhu, the great lord Atisha, my learned teacher shakyashribhadra, and others. It is excellent, therefore, for the ordained to perform the ganacakra in this way on such occasions as empowerments.

For the yogins' tradition of practicing ganacakra, cleanse as before whatever samaya substances you can acquire, such as *madana*, *bala*, and so forth. Sprinkle the substances with cleansing water while reciting “*om ah hung ha ho brih.*” Imagine that with *ha* their appearance becomes irresistible, with *ho* their aroma becomes irresistible, and with *brih* their potency becomes irrepressible. With *om*, *ah*, and *hung*, they transform into wisdom nectar. Pour a little bit of *madana* for each participant, but imagine that everyone drinks it from the same bowl.

Then, present the main offerings to the master and the mandala. Next, offer whatever tormas you have prepared. If an empowerment is to be given, the master will now practice the mandala of the tathagatas.<sup>27</sup> During meditative equipoise, he will maintain the generation and completion phases of the mandala of the tathagatas and make offerings to the deities of consecration. All recipients of the torma, including any spirits, should be seen as buddhas when given the offerings. If not, it is said that the fault of ‘a king worshipping his servants’ or ‘a monk

worshipping the householders' will occur.

Doing this correctly will create the auspicious circumstances for the buddhas to be delighted and the spirits to be satisfied. Next, pour *madana* into the *padma-bhajana* and with your left ring finger take some *bala* and perform the lotus mudra. Hold the *padma-bhajana* in your right hand while partially covering it with your left hand and offer it. The recipients likewise perform the lotus mudra and then receive it. As the *Two Segments* states:

Offered with lotus hands,  
It is received with lotus hands.

The leader then recites:

Behold all phenomena as excellent!  
Have no doubts regarding all that is gathered.  
Eat and regard brahmins, dogs, and untouchables  
As equal in nature!

The recipients reply:

The teaching of the Sugata is priceless!  
With devotion I pay homage to suchness,  
Which is free from stains such as passion,  
And devoid of grasping and grasped.

You should know the meaning of these verses. While the leader and the recipients then both say “*aho sukha*” the offerings are distributed. These verses, which derive from the *Samputa-tantra*, were originally composed in Prakrit not Sanskrit.<sup>28</sup> Since they were difficult for the lotsawas to comprehend, a few translation errors occurred. The translation above, however, is flawless.

Next imagine that you bless the offerings as before and enjoy them as an offering to the mandala. Practitioners of *Cakrasamvara* should now perform the ‘hand worship.’<sup>29</sup> The significance of receiving from the same bowl is explained in the *Two Segments*, while different bowls are used according to the *Samputa*.

The ritual assistant should not put the primary bowl directly on the ground without a support until all the students have received the offerings. There is however no fault in putting the bowl on the floor after the vajra students have received the offerings. Once you have distributed the offerings, do not turn the bowl upside down until you leave. Do not leave the bowl empty either. It is auspicious to leave just a little food and drink in the bowl.

Do not argue or joke about during the ganacakra. Discuss only what delights the mind or is on the subject of Dharma. Do not leave the assembly without permission from the guru or the assembly. Do not become intoxicated. Do not allow ordinary perception to take over. Do not forget to maintain the perception



of the yidam deity. Do not entertain thoughts about samaya-holders being good or bad, or harbour concepts regarding the purity or impurity of the blessed substances. Instructions such as these on proper and improper behaviour may be found in the ganacakra commentaries called the *Five Samayas* and *Advice on the Uncommon Meaning* and elsewhere.<sup>30</sup>

When a beginner or someone with a steady mind practices the ganacakra conduct in one of the twenty-four sacred places but fails to communicate with secret signs, the wisdom dakinis will not confer blessings and the activity dakinis will create obstacles. The *Two Segments* states:

O mahasattva Vajragarbha,  
The secret language is wondrous.  
Whatever I teach you,  
You must retain with devotion.  
Once you have received the Hevajra empowerment,  
If you do not use the secret language,  
Your samayas will decline.  
There is no doubt about this.

And:

After you have received the specific samayas,  
If you do not employ the language,  
The dakinis of the four sacred places  
Will show you their wrath within this lifetime.

Similar statements are to be found in all the tantras, including the *Cakrasamvara* and others. Gain expertise, therefore, in the secret language: *madana* means alcohol; *bala* means meat; *triptikara* are foods such as grains; *tindhana* are vegetables and herbs; *padma-bhajana* is a skull, and even if the vessel is not a skull, you should visualize it as a skull and call it *padma-bhajana*; *kripita* is a hand-drum; *kaliñjara* are those who have received the empowerment and uphold the samayas; *dundura* are those who have not received the empowerment and do not uphold the samayas; *prekhana* means arriving; *kheta* means going; and, *niramshuka* refers to bone ornaments. These are some of the secret words to be used.<sup>31</sup>

Men are referred to with the syllable *da*, and women with the syllable *di*. These are two samples of the secret signs that are to be used.<sup>32</sup> The practitioner should gain expertise in the secret language taught in the *Hevajra* and *Cakrasamvara*. The tantras teach that if you do not know the secret language obstacles will arise when practicing the ganacakra and when traveling to the twenty-four sacred sites. But those who do know the secret language will swiftly reap the siddhis.

#### **v. Satisfying with the Offering of Song and Dance**

Offering a song or dance will attract the wisdom dakinis, stabilize the visualization of the mandala of the tathagatas and provide protection for oneself

and those assembled. If a man offers a song, he should generate the vajra pride of being Amitayus, and if he offers a dance, he should generate the vajra pride of being Vairocana. If a woman offers a song, she should generate the vajra pride of being Pandaravasini, and if she offers a dance, she should generate the vajra pride of being Buddhacana. The *Two Segments* states:

One should perform song and dance  
By singing and dancing as Vajradharma, Buddhacana,  
The yoginis, and the matrix.  
Just this protects the assembly And oneself as well.  
Just this magnetizes the world,  
And this performs mantra recitation.

When the viras and yoginis who hold the samaya perform song and dance, there will be the scent of garlic, vultures, camphor, or sandalwood, and the sounds of swans, bees, and wolves. These signs indicate that the wisdom dakinis have gathered, according to *Hevajra*.

#### **vi. Satisfying with Co-Emergent Wisdom**

If the viras are practitioners of the Path of the Messenger<sup>33</sup> and are able to retain the winds, they can perform the actual practice of the Path of the Messenger at this point. However, if they do not practice the Path of the Messenger and are unable to retain the winds, they can sprinkle a little bit of butter, ghee, or *madana* on their heart centre and simply rest in meditative equipoise while visualizing themselves as the heruka in union, with their guru resting on their crowns, and while recollecting that all appearances are the mandala of the tathagatas. Thus, rest in the samadhi of bliss and emptiness. The master dombi Heruka said:

Thus apply butter and ghee  
To your heart.

This concludes the explanation of the main part, the six satisfactions.

#### **c) Conclusion of the Ritual**

i. The remainder is offered to entrust the outer spirits with activities; ii. Prayers of dedication and auspiciousness are recited for the wisdom dakinis to remain present; iii. The hundred-syllable mantra is recited to make up for additions or omissions to the ritual; iv. Aspiration prayers are recited so that accumulated merit bears the right fruition; v. The guests of the front visualization are requested to depart and the torma is dispatched; vi. Protection is established and after the ritual, the visualization is dissolved.

#### **i. Offering the Remainder**

Place the remainder torma in the front and put a little *madana* in your mouth. Pick up the remainder with the 'blazing hand mudra' while saying *bhrum* or *phem* and spit on it.<sup>34</sup> Bless it with the three syllables—*om*, *ah* and *hung*—and recite the mantra "*om akaro mukham sarvadharmanam adyanutpannatvat om ah hung phat*

*svaha.*” Alternatively, recite “*om ucchishta-balingte bhakshasi svaha.*” Repeat these mantras three or seven times. Imagine that all the spirits who receive the remainder are thereby satisfied.

## **ii. Prayers of Dedication and Auspiciousness**

In order for the wisdom dakinis to remain present and grant their blessings and auspiciousness, hold the vajra and bell and recite the vajra song that begins “*kollaire ttia...*”<sup>35</sup> as well as such prayers of auspiciousness as “Apparent magnificence, like a mountain of gold...” etc.<sup>36</sup> At this point it is not permissible to chant songs and verses of auspiciousness that were composed by ordinary people, only songs and verses of auspiciousness spoken by the buddhas. Still, there is no fault in chanting such songs and verses of auspiciousness before gathering the remainder inside and offering the torma.

Mix the select portion with the remainder<sup>37</sup> and dispose of them somewhere outside, such as at a crossroad. According to the *Samputa*, you should draw a mandala with the toe of your right foot, play the damaru made of two skulls, and say the name of the dakini whom you entrust with activities together with “*phrem hung.*” For example, if you entrust Tarangini with activities, say “Tarangini! *Phrem hung!*” Then dispose of the torma outside, and chant vajra songs and verses of auspiciousness inside, so that the wisdom dakinis gather.

Furthermore, to guard against the evil influences of shadow spirits,<sup>38</sup> place a candle next to the torma and only then dispose of it. Praises to the dharmapalas, entrustment with activities, offerings made by the sponsors, and prayers for auspiciousness should be recited before offering the remainder torma. Rituals for restoring the samayas can be done at this point or together with offering the torma to the supermundane guests. The remaining activities are to be performed afterwards.

## **iii. Recitation of the Hundred-Syllable Mantra**

To make up for additions or omissions to the ritual, physically join your vajra palms at your heart and mentally confess all wrongdoing. Imagine that all additions or omissions to the ritual are remedied thereby while reciting the hundred-syllable mantra. Then recite aloud the verses that begin:

In my ignorance and delusion  
I have gone against and corrupted my samaya.  
Lama protector, be my refuge!...

And:

For anything lacking or incomplete,  
For any mistakes I made or had others make,  
Due to my ignorance and confusion,  
Protectors, please forgive them all!

And:

Whatever mistakes I, a mere beginner, may have committed—such as unclear samadhi, a dull or agitated mind, improper performance of the ritual, impure substances, excess or decline—please forgive them all, I pray!

#### **iv. Recitation of Aspiration Prayers for the Accumulated Merit to Bear the Right Fruition**

Join your vajra palms at your heart, and recite the following verses from the *Hevajra*:

In this life and all my lives to come,  
May I always be born into a noble family and uphold the samayas.  
With my senses intact, may I receive and teach the Hevajra,  
And be kind-hearted and devoted to my teacher!  
In this life and all my lives to come,  
May I always bear the vajra and bell,  
Understand the profound Dharma,  
And enjoy with equality the essence of women.

Also recite the following verse from the *Cakrasamvara*:

Goddesses are the truth as samayas are the truth.  
Thus their speech is likewise the highest truth.  
By the power of the truth of this practice,  
May the goddesses always care for me!

Recite this verse from the *Samputa* as well:

May all beings be happy!  
May all beings be well!  
May they traverse the path  
By which they will attain awakening!

Recite these and other aspiration prayers found in the tantras. Then recite whatever dedication prayers you know from the sutras, such as “Just as the bodhisattva Mañjushri attained omniscience...”<sup>39</sup> Thus dedicate the merit extensively with a mind free from the three spheres and mental poisons. Depending upon the occasion, you could also add prayers aspiring to a long life, good health, prosperity and good fortune, or whatever you desire.

#### **v. Requesting the Guests of the Front Visualization to Depart**

Recite the hundred-syllable mantra followed by:

*Om!* You who’ve served all beings:  
Grant us the respective siddhis!  
Even though you now depart for your buddha realm,  
I pray that you may return.

With this verse the jñanasattvas of the front visualization are requested to depart

and the visualization dissolves into you. You do not need to request the jñanasattvas of the self-visualization to depart according to the Mahayoga tradition.

#### **vi. The Protection and the Dissolution after the Ritual**

According to the *Hevajra*, bringing to mind the Heruka of the session breaks will bless your sense faculties and their objects as well as your body, speech and mind. According to the *Cakrasamvara*, reciting the *sumbhani*-mantra<sup>40</sup> and snapping your fingers ensure that you are guarded everywhere and protected by the armour of the male and female viras, and by the great armour. Seal the practice with the eight-part mantra<sup>41</sup> and dissolve the main visualization after the ritual.<sup>42</sup> Then rest as you like. This concludes the explanation of the conclusion of the ritual.

### **6. Necessity**

All the accumulations of merit and wisdom are included within this ritual. *The Vajra Tent* states:<sup>43</sup>

This is the vajra-like samadhi of the oceanic accumulation of merit and wisdom.

It is called “the vajra delight”<sup>44</sup> and so forth, since it pleases the buddhas, the bodhisattvas abiding on the ten *bhumis*, the eight types of shravakas, the dull and sharp pratekyabuddhas, the worldly gods of the desire, form and formless realms, the protectors and guardians of the Dharma, the worldly guests such as hell-beings and pretas, and all the supermundane guests. They are all pleased and fully satisfied.

The *Vajra Tent* elaborates upon this further. However, this will not be shared here and those who are interested can read the tantra itself. The ritual will likewise bring about all the worldly and transcendent siddhis. The *Two Segments* states:

Whatever one eats, all the sensual delights  
Will transform into siddhis for practitioners.

The tantras also speak of the ritual’s countless further benefits, so you can consult these scriptural sources directly.

## **II. Refutation of Objections**

This consists of three points:

1. View
2. Meditation
3. Conduct

Some noble shravakas believe that first, the **view** of the Mahayana is at fault. They argue that while the Mahayana establishes form and the rest as valid cognitions, the *Prajñāparamita* states that “there is no form, no sensation...etc., up to and including no omniscient Buddha.”<sup>45</sup> Therefore, our scriptures and reasoning

contradict one another.

Second, they claim that **meditation** is at fault, since an ordinary person's body, speech, and mind will not become those of a buddha simply by meditating upon them as being the buddha.

Third, they believe **conduct** to be at fault, since the Mahayana states that the conduct of an ordained person's body and speech must be pure, but also states that pure and impure are equal.

Let us respond to these objections.

### 1. View

Regarding the **view** of emptiness, there is no fault. While you would be correct if we negated appearances, such as form, there is no fault in the Mahayana, since we negate their true existence. The elaborate answer to this is provided in Mahayana scriptures such as *The Ornament of Sutras* in its chapter on "Establishing the Buddha's Words".<sup>46</sup>

### 2. Meditation

Second, the **meditation** is not at fault. Meditating on the pervasiveness of earth, for example, will give rise to the corresponding samadhi of the earth and so forth.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, meditating on your yidam deity will bring about the samadhi of the yidam deity. Similarly, when the shravakas imagine skeletons, for example, in their meditation their perception changes accordingly.

### 3. Conduct

Third, regarding Mahayana **conduct**, there are three objections to be refuted with regard to:

- a) The object of veneration
- b) Time
- c) Substances

#### a) Object of Veneration

Some shravakas say that it is illogical to worship the buddhas by making offerings to oneself. Our bodies are made of impure substances and our minds are filled with anger and attachment. If that were the case, it would also be illogical to make offerings to statues or paintings (as they do), since the artist has anger and attachment, and the paint too is made of impure elements. Nevertheless, it is stated in the sutras that merit is obtained by venerating them in the belief that they are buddhas. Meditating upon oneself as a buddha and making offerings therefore yields the merit of making offerings to the buddhas. This is stated in both the sutras and tantras. As *Maitreya's Lion's Roar* says:<sup>48</sup>

Whoever wishes to worship the Buddha should worship oneself.

Whoever wishes to worship the relics of the Buddha should worship

oneself.

The Tantra *Purifying Evil Destinies* states:<sup>49</sup>

If, when you assume the being of Vajrasattva,  
Whatever you eat or do is unstained by any fault,  
What need is there to speak of having compassion?

Since this is likewise explained in detail other tantras, for the sake of brevity I will not elaborate further.

### **b) Time**

Some assert that the time for offering to the buddhas is in the morning and that to offer in the evening is illogical. Yet when the deities gather on auspicious days, such as the eighth day of the lunar month, you [shravakas] consider that a good time to make offerings. In the same way, since the wisdom dakinis gather at night, the evenings present an auspicious occasion. As the *Vajradaka* states:<sup>50</sup>

The women of this land  
Will grant siddhis to the practitioners.  
Always active during the night,  
Always gathering during the night.  
Great celestial accomplishments,  
So difficult to obtain, will be granted.

*The Secret Tantra of the Common Procedures* states:<sup>51</sup>

Since the deities gather at sunset,  
It is certainly a sacred occasion.  
Thus it is virtuous to offer to them  
And request their departure before sunrise.  
The night is therefore said to be a sacred time when blessings are  
conferred.

Moreover, regarding the downfalls of the shravakas, there are those that consider matter as primary and those that consider perception as primary. Since the sole reference is the mind that thinks of morning and evening, polluted and unpolluted, killing and stealing and so forth, of the two, perception is clearly the more important. Thus there is no fault in eating in the evening if you are able to maintain the perception that it is morning, whereas there is a fault in eating in the morning if you maintain the perception that it is evening. If you maintain the perception that women are men, there is no fault in touching them, whereas there is a fault in touching men if you maintain the perception that they are women. Although you know that they are women, if you are able to fully control your perception, it is possible to avoid the corresponding downfalls. The *Ratnakuta* states:<sup>52</sup>

The bodhisattva Ganapravara<sup>53</sup> using the door of Dharma in which the external element is one with the internal earth element,<sup>54</sup> took the hand of a woman and sat upon a seat. In that moment, ananda developed a lack of

faith. Ganapravara then displayed a miracle, which dispelled ananda's misconceptions. Thus, there was no downfall in this case.

Likewise, if you meditate on the garuda, then even if you consume poison the toxins will not affect you. If you engage in rejuvenation practice (*rasayana*) without knowing how to practice it, it will prove fatal. Similarly, if you know how to meditate on the mandala of the tathagatas, consuming food will become a cause for buddhahood, while not knowing this will become a cause for rebirth in the lower realms. This was confirmed by the master aryadeva, who said:

By meditating on the garuda, You will be able to consume any poison.

It is also said:

Even a small lump of iron  
Will sink to the bottom of the sea.  
However, if you mould it into a vessel,  
It can become a ship that carries you to liberation.

### c) Substances

#### i. Refutation of Objections Regarding Foods and Drinks

Some shravakas maintain that the offerings to the Buddha should consist of such pure substances as the three whites and three sweets, while impure substances like meat and alcohol should not be offered. Substances like the three whites, three sweets and water are indeed virtuous and pure offerings for the Buddha. Offerings to the wisdom dakinis, however, require meat and alcohol, in order that the auspicious circumstances may be created for attracting the wisdom dakinis. You need water to attract swans, flowers to attract bees, and meat to attract flies. If you lack knowledge, substances such as mercury and calcareous sinter may harm you, but if you know how to use them, they can become substances of rejuvenation and cause your lifespan to rival that of the sun and moon. Similarly, if you do not know the nature of the five meats and five amritas, they will become a cause for rebirth in the lower realms, but if you do know, they will become a cause for buddhahood. Using the three medicinal fruits<sup>55</sup> in rejuvenation practice cannot kill you, just as it cannot enable you to live as long as the sun and the moon. Substances such as the three sweets, when consumed, cannot lead to the hell realms, just as they cannot serve as causes for buddhahood. The master Ravigupta said:

If someone is able to harm you,  
He is also able to help you,  
Like the sun which causes both drought and rain.  
The moon does not have this capacity.

Likewise, the five meats and five amritas are easy to find and not unwholesome. They are blessed by the wisdom dakinis and said to be endowed with the three qualities.



## ii. Refutation of Objections Regarding Vessels and Decoration

Some shravakas state that it is best to use vessels made from oyster or conch shells and decorations using pearls and ivory. And for textiles, it is best to use silk. They ask if it is not inappropriate to use such extremely impure objects as skulls for vessels, human bone for decoration, and human hair for thread.

In response, I would ask whether human or animals are better.<sup>56</sup> If the response is that a human body is far better since it results from merit, whereas an animal body results from non-virtue and is therefore inferior, I would ask why hair and bones that are produced by merit are bad while bones produced by non-virtue are good. Put your mind at ease! Tantras such as the *Cakrasamvara* state:

If conch, oysters and pearls  
Are the result of the causes,<sup>57</sup>  
Who would criticize the use of skulls  
From the form of the dharmakaya?  
For heroes, wearing a skull garland  
And necklace of bones<sup>58</sup> as a means of purification  
Is said to be a stage of the sacred Dharma.

Thus, my teacher, the great Vajradhara in person,<sup>59</sup> said, “The view, meditation and conduct of the Secret Mantra are entirely established by logic based on facts.” The extensive logical arguments and scriptural citations that establish the validity of the Secret Mantra vehicle can be found in such works as those by the noble teachers Nagarjuna and aryadeva, the master Buddhajñānapada’s *Introduction to the Art of Self-Accomplishment*,<sup>60</sup> and the master Shantarakshita’s *Establishing Suchness*.<sup>61</sup>

## III. Distinctions of the Ritual<sup>62</sup>

1. The participants
2. The occasions
3. The deity yogas
4. The purposes
5. The objects of offering

### 1. Participants

When both viras and yoginis gather together that is called a ‘ganacakra’. If only viras gather, it is called a ‘viras’ feast’; whereas if only yoginis gather, it is called called a ‘yoginis’ feast’.

### 2. Occasions

When performing an empowerment or a consecration, or a fire offering it is called a *caru banquet*.<sup>63</sup>

### 3. Deity Yogas

If the gathering consists of varying practitioners of different deity yogas, such as Hevajra or the Cakrasamvara, it is called a ‘gathering of friends’.

#### 4. Purposes

All the mandala deities adopt the dancing posture to invoke the compassion of the buddhas so that all the harm in the world may be pacified. When the combination of song and dance causes the wrathful kings to laugh and the dance of mind invokes the wisdom minds of the buddhas, pacifying beings' suffering, it is called 'the dance of the buddhas'.

#### 5. Objects of Offering

The women who are supports for the worldly and the world-transcending dakinis are marked by symbols such as a skull or an axe. The consort who is offered to the leader of the ritual should possess the proper characteristics. The women are to be offered within the mandala house. Gather the requisite number of virgins, corresponding to the number of deities in the mandala—whether five, seven or thirty-seven—in front of the curtains of the mandala house. Serve them food, drink and clothing. This is called 'the feast of maidens'.

This concludes my explanation of the stages of the practice of the great and glorious Sakyapa, kings of dharma, based on the niruttarayoga tantras, the commentaries of the siddhas, and the pith instructions of the gurus.

*The Vajradhara in human form,  
Who upholds the lineage of accomplished gurus,  
And resides at the seat of the Sakyas, extracted and taught this ritual  
In accord with the meaning of the stainless tantras.*<sup>64</sup>

*Since his perfect explanation was a little unclear to some,  
At the request of several supplicants, The one named Kunga,  
Who revered the dust at his feet, Composed this clarification.  
Through this virtue,  
May all infinite beings, as vast as space,  
Swiftly perfect the accumulations of merit and wisdom  
And within this life reach the state of Vajradhara.*

*Thus, at the request of supplicants, the glorious Sakya Pandita further clarified the teaching on the stages of practice of the ganacakra according to the niruttarayoga tantras by the Dharma-King who is adorned by a crowning Victory Banner (Gyaltzen).*<sup>65</sup>



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Toh. 369: *Abhidhana, mngon brjod rgyud bla ma, rgyud, ka* 247a1–370a7.

Toh. 373: *shamvarodayatantra, bde mchog ’byung ba’i rgyud, rgyud, kha* 265a1–311a6.

Toh. 381: *Samputanamamahatantra, yang dag par sbyor ba’i rgyud chen po, rgyud, ga* 73.b–158.b.

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Toh. 418: *Hevajra, kye’i rdo rje, rgyud, nga* 13b5–30a3.

Toh. 419: *Vajrapañjara, rdo rje gur, rgyud, nga* 30a4–65b7.

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1 Throughout this text Sakya Pandita mostly uses the terms *vira* (*dpa' bo*) to refer to the male practitioners and *yogini* (*mal 'byor ma*) to refer to female practitioners. The terms denote the male and female deities of the mandala or, as in this case, the yogins and yoginis who practice the tantra.

2 *Madana* refers to alcohol and *bala* to meat. Sakya Pandita mostly uses their 'secret' Sanskrit terms rather than translating them into Tibetan. Following Sakya Pandita, the terms are kept in Sanskrit rather than translated into English here. Sakya Pandita later explains the meaning of these and other secret terms used in the context of a ganacakra ritual.

3 *The Two Segments*, (*brtag pa gnyis pa*) is a common name for *The Tantra of Hevajra, He Who Affords Protection Through Nets of dakinis* (Toh. 418, *kye'i rdo rje mkha' 'gro ma dra ba'i sdom pa'i rgyud*).

4 The *Samputa-tantra* or "Emergence of Samputa" (Toh. 381, *samputodbhava, yang dag par sbyor ba*). For a description of this tantra, see the introductory section to the tantra's English translation, published on 84000.co.

5 Arranged offerings here principally refers to the eight traditional offerings or eight 'offerings bowls' (*mchod pa brgyad*).

6 *Padma-bhajana* refers to a skull-cup.

7 Niladanda is a dark blue, wrathful form of Vajrapani holding a staff.

8 That is to say, the fellow practitioners prior to the performance of the ganacakra ritual use a specific hand gesture. By correctly showing the hand gesture to the guard, the fellow practitioner will be allowed to enter. Those who are unable to show the hand gesture correctly will not be permitted to enter. The guard is thus able to distinguish between those who are authorized to participate in the ganacakra and those who are not.

9 This verse serves as a 'password song' allowing the participants to pass the guards. The song was originally composed in Apabhramsha. For a discussion of the verse and its various interpretations, see: Szántó 2012, 363–364.

10 This verse encourages the participants to drop all dualistic concepts. For a discussion of the verse and its various interpretations, see: Szántó 2012, 335–337.

11 This famous verse is frequently recited during confession practices. Its source is the *Abhidhanottarat Tantra*, the *Appendix to the Discourse Tantra* (Toh. 369, *mngon brjod rgyud bla ma*). The *Abhidhana* is an 'appendix' to the *Laghushamvara, The Smaller Samvara* (Toh. 368, *bde mchog nyung ngu*), the root tantra of Cakrasamvara.

12 The ten topics (*dashatattva, de kho na nyid bcu pa*) comprise a list of ten ritual aspects. The list varies depending upon the source consulted. Mastery of all ten aspects is often counted as one of the qualifying marks of a ritual officiant. For a brief discussion, see Szántó 2012, 425–426.

13 A specific longer protection mantra beginning with "om ushnisha-vajracakra..."

14 The *shumbha-ni* mantra appears in slightly varying versions depending on the text. The *shumbha-ni* mantra from the Samputa tantra reads: "om shumbha nisumbha hung hung phat | om grihna grihna hung hung phat | om grihnapaya grihnapaya hung hung phat | anaya ho bhagavan vidyaraaja hung hung phat svaha ||"

15 The svabhava mantra is: "om svabhava shuddhah sarvadbarmah svabhava shuddho 'ham ||"

16 The following verse stems from the *Catushpitha, The Scripture in Four Chapters* (Toh. 428, *gdan bzhi pa*). The English translation of this complex verse closely

follows Szántó's examination (Szántó 2012, 334–335).

17 The famous verses indicated here by Sakya Pandita are also found in the *Samputa-tantra*. A full translation of the verses is found on 84000.co: Toh. 381 Emergence from Samputa, verses 2.119c – 2.122d.

18 A translation of this famous verse beginning with “all you yoginis who have gathered in this ganacakra...” (*khvod ni rnam 'byor ma tshogs yongs su bskor*) has not been made available yet.

19 *The Praise of Śrī Hevajra in Twenty Verses* by Saroruhavajra (Toh. 1225, *shrihevajrabhattarakastotra, dpal kye rdo rje'i bha da ra ga'i bstod pa*)

20 *The Praise to the Buddhas in the Ten Directions* (*phyogs bcu'i sangs rgyas kyi bstod pa*)

21 This may refer to a passage from Bhuri's *Elaborate Daily Confession for the śrī Cakrasamvara* (Toh. 1533, *shricakrasamvaravistaraprabandha, dpal 'khor lo bde mchog gi rgyun bshags rgyas pa*)

22 *The Eight-Part Root Mantra of the Tathagata* (*bcom ldan 'das kyi rtsa sngags rkang pa brgyad pa*) beginning with “om namo bhagavate viśeṣāya...”

23 This likely refers to *The Offering Garland of śrī Cakrasamvara* (*dpal 'khor lo bde mchog gi mchod phreng*) by Sönam Tsemo (1142–1182) who was Sakya Pandita's nephew.

24 The full mantra reads “*om akaro mukham sarvadharmanam adyanutpannatvat om ah hung phat svaha* ||”

25 Literally ‘merely touch with their tongues’ (*lce la myang ba tsam bya*).

26 This appears to be a paraphrasing of the following passage found in the fifth chapter of the *Samputa-tantra*: “When meat cannot be found anywhere, in order to partake of it he should imagine something else in the form of meat and eat that.” (*gang gi sha yang za bar ma gyur na gzhan du rnam par rtog pa'i sha'i rang gi ngo bos bza' bas bza' bar bya ste/*).

27 Here this implies the mandalas of either Hevajra or Cakrasamvara.

28 According to Szántó, the verse's “*locus classicus*” is the *Catushpūṭha-tantra*. As discussed by Szántó, since the verse was originally composed in *apabhramsha*, its interpretation and translation by Indian and Tibetan authors differ (Szántó 2012, 336–338).

29 Hand worship (*hastapuja, lag pa'i mchod pa*). A particular type of offering practice taught in the *Cakrasamvara-tantra*.

30 Padmakara's *Five Samayas* (Toh. 1224, *samayapañca, dam tshig lnga pa*) and dombi Heruka's *The Advice on the Uncommon Meaning* (Toh. 1230, *asadharanarthopadesha, thun mong ma yin pa'i don la gdams pa*).

31 The same list appears, albeit slightly more elaborately, in Chapter 7 of the *Samputa-tantra*.

32 The first two samples form the beginning of a more elaborate list, as, for example, in Chapter 7 of the *Samputa-tantra*.

33 This refers to the higher yogic practices, such as the practice of Inner Heat (*candali, gtum mo*) etc.

34 This is usually advised only to be done by a highly realized master. Commonly the remainder is simply sprinkled with madana.

35 This vajra song is taught at the beginning of the fourth chapter of the *Samputa-tantra*. 84000.co has published an English translation as well as the original song in the accompanying Sanskrit edition. The English translation of this vajra song begins with: “The vajra is in Kollagiri...”

36 This is the beginning line of the tantra entitled *Verses of Auspiciousness* (Toh. 826, *mangalaghata, bkra shis tshigs su bcad pa*). A translation of this famous prayer of auspiciousness is found in Jikmé Lingpa's *Adornment of Lord Nagarjuna's Wisdom Mind*

37 The select portion and the remainder are also sometimes referred to as the pure (*gtsang lbag*) and impure remainders (*bitsog lbag*).

38 A particular type of spirit that can pollute the offerings or foods (*caya, grib gnon kyi gdon*).

39 A famous verse of dedication from *Samantabhadra's "Aspiration to Good Actions"* (*Zangchö Mönlam*).

40 That is: "om sumbha nisumbha(ni) hung | grihna grihna hung | grihnapaya grihnapaya hung | anaya ho bhagavan vidyaraaja krodha hung phat ||"

41 The mantra beginning with "om namo bhagavate vireshaya..."

42 This section implies that the practitioner dissolves the elaborate visualization generated for the ganacakra and merely maintains the simple visualization of the main deity in post-meditation.

43 *The Vajra Tent* (Toh. 419, *vajrapañjara, rdo rje gur*)

44 In the same above quoted tantra.

45 A quotation from the famous *Heart Sutra*.

46 This refers to the second chapter of *The Ornament of Mahayana Sutras* (Toh. 4020, *mahayanasutralankara, theg pa chen po'i mdo sde'i rgyan*). For translation of the relevant section, see e.g., Asanga 2018, 5–9.

47 Referring here to a specific type of meditation.

48 Maitreya's *Lion's Roar* (Toh. 67, *maitreya-simhanada, byams pa'i seng ge'i sgra*)

49 The Tantra *Purifying Evil Destinies* (Toh 483, *durgatiparishodhana, ngan song shyong rgyud*)

50 The *Vajradaka* (Toh. 399, *rdo rje mkha'gro*)

51 Otherwise known as *The Tantra of the Procedures Common to All Mandalas* (Toh. 806, *sarvamandalasamanyavidhinam tantram, dkyil'khor spyi'i cho ga'i rgyud*)

52 The *Ratnakuta* or 'Heap of Jewels' (*dkon mchog brtsegs pa*), is a collection of 49 independent sutras comprising one of the major sections (Toh. 45–93) into which the Tibetan Canon is divided.

53 Tentative reconstruction of the Sanskrit of the Tibetan name *tshogs can rab mchog*.

54 The door of Dharma in which the external earth element is one with the internal earth element (*phyi rol sa'i khams dang nang gi sa'i khams su gcig pa'i chos kyi sgo*) likely refers to a particular type of samadhi.

55 The three medicinal fruits (*triphalā, 'bras bu gsum*), which are native to India and used in traditional Ayurvedic medicine, are: 1. Amla (*Emblica officinalis*), 2. Bibhitaki (*Terminalia bellirica*), and 3. Haritaki (*Terminalia chebula*).

56 The substances listed in this example by the shravakas all come from animals.

57 Implying that due to having accumulated negative karma in the past, these beings have taken rebirth in a lower form within the animal realm.

58 *mchod phyir thogs*, sometimes translated as "sacred thread".

59 Likely referring to Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltsen (1147–1216), Sakya Pandita's main teacher.

60 Buddhajñānapada's *Introduction to the Art of Self-Accomplishment* (Toh. 1860, *atmasadhanavatara, bdag sgrub pa la 'jug pa*)

61 Shantarakshita's *Establishing Suchness* (Toh. 3708, *tattvasiddhi, de kho na yid grub pa*)

62 In the following section Sakya Pandita briefly mentions other types of ganacakra rituals. Depending upon context, the ritual may be performed differently and would thus receive a different name. E.g., if only male participants gather, the ritual is not called a 'ganacakra' but rather a 'viras' feast'.

63 This may imply either that the offerings should specifically include the *caru* substances (i.e. pure substances such as three whites-milk, butter and curd) or that tantric substances should not be distributed during rituals involving participants who have not received the necessary empowerments.

64 This refers to Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltzen's (1147–1216) *Abridged Ganacakra Ritual* (*tshogs 'khor 'bring po*). Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltzen was Sakya Pandita's main teacher.

65 A play on the last part of Jetsün Drakpa Gyaltzen's name, that is Gyaltzen, which means victory banner.