



The Tantric Vows

*explained
by Alexander Berzin*

The Common Root Tantric Vows

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The Secondary Tantric Vows

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The Common Root Tantric Vows

Overview

As with bodhisattva vows, there are root and secondary tantric vows, which we promise to keep until reaching enlightenment and which continue on our mental continuums into future lives. The Gelug, Kagyü, and Sakya traditions confer these vows with any empowerment (*dbang*, initiation), subsequent permission (*rjes-srang*, permission), or mantra-gathering (*sngags-btus*) for any practice from one of the two higher classes of tantra – yoga or anuttarayoga – according to their fourfold classification scheme. The Nyingma tradition confers them with any of the above three rituals for any practice from one of the four higher tantra classes – yoga, mahayoga, anuyoga, or atiyoga (dzogchen) – according to its sixfold scheme.

Most details from the discussion of bodhisattva vows pertain to the tantric vows as well.

The root tantric vows are to refrain from fourteen actions which, if committed with the four binding factors (*kun-dkris bzhi*), constitute a root downfall (*sngags-kyi rtsa-ltung*) and precipitate a loss of the tantric vows. Without these vows shaping our lives, we cannot gain attainments or realizations from tantric practice. This is because our practice will lack the necessary supporting context. Except for one of the tantric root downfall actions, giving up bodhichitta – the same as with the root bodhisattva vows – a transgression of any of the other thirteen, without the four binding factors being complete, merely weakens the tantric vows. It does not eliminate them from our mental continuums.

There are two variations of the root tantric vows, one specific to Kalachakra and one common to all yoga and anuttarayoga tantras, including Kalachakra. Here, we shall follow the explanation of the common root tantric vows given in *An Explanation of Secret Mantra Ethical Discipline: A Cluster of Fruit of Actual Attainments* (*gSang-sngags-kyi tshul-khrims-kyi rnam-bshad dngos-grub-kyi snye-ma*) by the early fifteenth-century Gelug founder Tsongkapa (*Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang grags-pa*). We shall supplement it from *A Lamp to Illuminate the Closely Bonding Practices* (*Dam-tshig gsal-ba'i sgron-me*) by the late fifteenth-century Gelug master Kaydrub Norzang-gyatso (*mKhas-grub Nor-bzang rgya-mtsho*).

The Fourteen Common Tantric Root Downfalls

(1) Scorning or deriding our vajra masters. The object is any teacher from whom we have received empowerment, subsequent permission, or mantra-gathering into any class of tantra, full or partial explanation of any of their

texts, or oral guidelines for any of their practices. Scorning or deriding such masters means showing them contempt, faulting or ridiculing them, being disrespectful or impolite, or thinking or saying that their teachings or advice were useless. Having formerly held them in high regard, with honor and respect, we complete this root downfall when we forsake that attitude, reject them as our teachers, and regard them with haughty disdain. Such scornful action, then, is quite different from following the advice in *The Kalachakra Tantra* to keep a respectful distance and no longer study or associate with a tantric master whom we decide is inappropriate for us, not properly qualified, or who acts in an improper manner. Scorning or belittling our teachers of only topics that are not unique to tantra, such as compassion or voidness, or who confer upon us only safe direction (refuge), or either *pratimoksha* or bodhisattva vows, does not technically constitute this first tantric root downfall. Such actions, however, seriously hamper our spiritual progress.

(2) Transgressing the words of an enlightened one. The objects of this action are specifically the contents of an enlightened being's teachings concerning pratimoksha, bodhisattva, or tantric vows – whether that person be the Buddha himself or a later great master. Committing this downfall is not simply to transgress a particular vow from one of these sets, having taken it, but to do so with two additional factors present. These are fully acknowledging that the vow derives from someone who has removed all mental obscuration, and trivializing it by thinking or saying that violating it brings no negative consequences. Trivializing and transgressing either injunctions we know an enlightened being has imparted other than those in any of the three sets of vows we have taken, or advice we do not realize an enlightened being has offered, does not constitute a tantric root downfall. It creates obstacles, however, in our spiritual path.

(3) Because of anger, faulting our vajra brothers or sisters. Vajra brothers and sisters are those who hold tantric vows and have received an empowerment into any Buddha-figure system of any class of tantra from the same tantric master. The empowerments do not need to be received at the same time, nor do they need to be into the same system or class of tantra. This downfall occurs when, knowing full well that certain persons are our vajra brothers or sisters, we taunt or verbally abuse them to their face about faults, shortcomings, failings, mistakes, transgressions, and so on that they may or may not possess or have committed, and they understand what we say. The motivation must be hostility, anger, or hatred. Pointing out the weaknesses of such persons in a kind manner, with the wish to help them overcome them, is not a fault.

(4) Giving up love for sentient beings. Love is the wish for others to be happy and to have the causes for happiness. The downfall is wishing the opposite for any being, even the worst serial murderer – namely, wishing someone to be divested of happiness and its causes. The causes for happiness are fully understanding reality and the karmic laws of behavioral cause and effect. We would at least wish a murderer to gain sufficient realization of these points so

that he never repeats his atrocities in future lives, and so eventually experiences happiness. Although it is not a tantric root downfall to ignore someone whom we are capable of helping, it is a downfall to think how wonderful it would be if a particular being were never happy.

(5) Giving up bodhichitta. This is the same as the eighteenth bodhisattva root downfall, and amounts to giving up the aspiring state of bodhichitta by thinking we are incapable of attaining Buddhahood for the sake of all beings. Even without the four binding factors present, such a thought voids us of both bodhisattva and tantric vows.

(6) Deriding our own or others' tenets. This is the same as the sixth bodhisattva root downfall, forsaking the holy Dharma, and refers to proclaiming that any of the Buddhist textual teachings are not Buddha's words. "Others' tenets" refer to the sutras of the shravaka, pratyekabuddha, or bodhisattva (Mahayana) vehicles, while "our own" are the tantras, also within the Mahayana fold.

(7) Disclosing confidential teachings to those who are unripe. Confidential (secret) teachings concern actual specific generation (*bskyed-rim*) or complete stage (*rdzogs-rim*) practices for realizing voidness that are not shared in common with less advanced levels of practice. They include details of specific *sadhanas* and of techniques for actualizing a greatly blissful deep awareness of voidness with clear light mental activity. Those unripe for them are people who have not received the appropriate level of empowerment, whether or not they would have faith in these practices if they knew them. Explaining any of these unshared, confidential procedures in sufficient detail to someone whom we know fully well is unripe so that he or she has enough information to attempt the practice, and this person understands the instructions, constitutes the root downfall. The only exception is when there is a great need for explicit explanation, for example to help dispel misinformation and distorted, antagonistic views about tantra. Explaining general tantra theory in a scholarly manner, not sufficient for practice, is likewise not a root downfall. Nevertheless, it weakens the effectiveness of our tantric practice. There is no fault, however, in disclosing confidential teachings to interested observers during a tantric empowerment.

(8) Reviling or abusing our aggregates. Five aggregates (Skt. *skandha*), or aggregate factors, constitute each moment of our experience. These five are: (a) forms of physical phenomena such as sights or sounds, (b) feelings of happiness or unhappiness, (c) distinguishing one thing from another (recognition), (d) other mental factors such as love or hatred, and (e) types of consciousness such as visual or mental. In brief, our aggregates include our bodies, minds, and emotions.

Normally, these aggregate factors are associated with confusion (*zag-bcas*) – usually translated as their being “contaminated.” With anuttarayoga tantra practice, we remove that confusion about reality and thus totally transform

our aggregates. Instead of each moment of experience comprising five factors associated with confusion, each moment eventually becomes a composite of five types of deep awareness that are dissociated from confusion (*zag-med ye-shes*), and which are the underlying natures of the five aggregates. These are the deep awareness that is like a mirror, of the equality of things, of individuality, of how to accomplish purposes, and of the sphere of reality (Skt. *dharmadhatu*). Each of the five is represented by a Buddha-figure (*yi-dam*): Vairochana, and so on, called in the West “the five *dhyani*-Buddhas.”

An anuttarayoga empowerment plants the seeds to accomplish this transformation. During generation stage practice, we cultivate these seeds by imagining our aggregates already to be in their purified forms through visualizing them as their corresponding Buddha-figures. During complete stage practice, we bring these seeds to maturity by engaging our aggregates in special yoga methods to manifest clear light mental activity with which to realize the five types of deep awareness.

The eighth root downfall is either to despise our aggregates, thinking them unfit to undergo this transformation, or purposely to damage them because of hatred or contempt. Practicing tantra does not call for a denial or rejection of the sutra view that regarding the body as clean and in the nature of happiness is a form of incorrect consideration (*tshul-min yid-byed*). It is quite clear that our bodies naturally get dirty and bring us suffering such as sickness and physical pain. Nevertheless, we recognize in tantra that the human body also has a deeper nature, rendering it fit to be used on many levels along the spiritual path to benefit others more fully. When we are unaware of or do not acknowledge that deeper nature, we hate our bodies, think our minds are no good, and consider our emotions as evil. When we hold such attitudes of low self-esteem or, in addition, abuse our bodies or minds with masochistic behavior, unnecessarily dangerous or punishing life styles, or by polluting them with recreational or narcotic drugs, we commit this tantric root downfall.

(9) Rejecting voidness. Voidness (emptiness) here refers either to the general teaching of *The Sutras on Far-Reaching Discriminating Awareness* (Skt. *Prajnaparamita Sutras*) that all phenomena, not only persons, are devoid of impossible modes of existence, or to the specifically Mahayana teachings of the Chittamatra or any of the Madhyamaka schools concerning phenomena being devoid of a particular impossible way of existing. To reject such teachings means to doubt, disbelieve, or spurn them. No matter which Mahayana tenet system we hold while practicing tantra, we need total confidence in its teachings on voidness. Otherwise, if we reject voidness during the course of our practice, or attempt any procedure outside of its context, we may believe, for example, that our visualizations are concretely real. Such misconceptions only perpetuate the sufferings of samsara and may even lead to a mental imbalance. It may be necessary, along the way, to upgrade our tenet systems from Chittamatra to Madhyamaka – or, within Madhyamaka, from Svatantrika to Prasangika – and, in the process, refute the voidness teachings of

our former tenet systems. Discarding a less sophisticated explanation, however, does not mean leaving ourselves without a correct view of the voidness of all phenomena that is appropriate to our levels of understanding.

(10) Being loving toward malevolent people. Malevolent people are those who despise our personal teachers, spiritual masters in general, or the Buddhas, Dharma, or the Sangha, or who, in addition, cause harm or damage to any of them. Although it is inappropriate to forsake the wish for such persons to be happy and have the causes for happiness, we commit a root downfall by acting or speaking lovingly toward them. Such action includes being friendly with them, supporting them by buying goods they produce, books that they write, and so on. If we are motivated purely by love and compassion, and possess the means to stop their destructive behavior and transfer them to a more positive state, we would certainly try to do so, even if it means resorting to forceful methods. If we lack these qualifications, however, we incur no fault in simply boycotting such persons.

(11) Not meditating on voidness continually. As with the ninth tantric root downfall, voidness can be understood according to either the Chittamatra or Madhyamaka systems. Once we gain an understanding of such a view, it is a root downfall to let more than a day and night pass without meditating on it. The usual custom is to meditate on voidness at least three times during the course of each day and three times each night. We need to continue such practice until we have rid ourselves of all obstacles preventing omniscience (*shes-sgrub*) – at which point we remain directly mindful of voidness at all times. If we place a limit and think we have meditated enough on voidness before reaching this goal, we can never attain it.

(12) Deterring those with faith. This refers to purposely discouraging people from a particular tantric practice in which they have faith and for which they are fit vessels, with proper empowerment and so forth. If we cause their wish to engage in this practice to end, this root downfall is complete. If they are not yet ready for such practice, however, there is no fault in outlining in a realistic manner what they must master first, even if it might seem daunting. Engaging others like this, taking them and their interests seriously rather than belittling them as incapable, actually boosts their self-confidence to go ahead.

(13) Not relying properly on the substances that bond us closely to tantric practice (*dam-rdzas*). The practice of anuttarayoga tantra includes participating in periodic offering ceremonies known as *tsog pujas*. They involve tasting specially consecrated alcohol and meat. These substances symbolize the aggregates, bodily elements and, in Kalachakra, the energy-winds – ordinarily disturbing factors that have a nature of being able to confer deep awareness when dissociated from confusion and used for the path. The root downfall is to consider such substances nauseating, to refuse them on the grounds of being a teetotaler or a vegetarian, or alternatively, to take them in large quantities

with gusto and attachment.

(14) Deriding women. The aim of anuttarayoga tantra is to access and harness clear light mental activity to apprehend voidness so as to overcome as quickly as possible confusion and its instincts – the principal factors preventing liberation, omniscience, and the full ability to benefit others. A blissful state of awareness is extremely conducive for reaching clear light mental activity since it draws us into ever deeper, more intense and refined levels of consciousness and energy. Moreover, when blissful awareness reaches the clear light level and focuses on voidness with full understanding, it becomes the most powerful tool for clearing away the instincts of confusion.

During the process of gaining absorbed concentration, we experience increasingly blissful awareness as a result of ridding our minds of dullness and agitation. The same thing happens as we gain ever deeper understanding and realization of voidness, as a result of ridding our minds of disturbing emotions and attitudes. Combining the two, we experience increasingly intense and refined levels of bliss as we gain ever stronger concentration on ever deeper understandings of voidness. In anuttarayoga tantra, men enhance the bliss of their concentrated awareness of voidness even further by relying on women. This practice involves relying on either actual women (*las-kyi phyag-rgya*, Skt. *karmamudra*) visualized as female Buddha-figures so as to avoid confusion, or, for those of more refined faculties, merely visualized ones alone (*ye-shes phyag-rgya*, Skt. *jnanamudra*). Women enhance their bliss through men in a similar fashion by relying on the fact of their being a woman. Therefore, it is a tantric root downfall to belittle, deride, ridicule, or consider as inferior a specific woman, women in general, or a female Buddha-figure. When we voice low opinion and contempt directly to a woman, with the intention to deride womanhood, and she understands what we say, we complete this root downfall. Although it is improper to deride men, doing so is not a tantric root downfall.

The Secondary Tantric Vows

Introduction

The common root tantric vows and those specific to Kalachakra both entail a promise to refrain from eight thick actions (*sbom-po*, heavy actions) that weaken meditation practice and hamper progress along the anuttarayoga tantra path. The damage we inflict is proportionate to the number and strength of the binding factors (*kun-dkris*) that accompany them. As with the forty-six faulty actions that we promise to refrain from with the secondary bodhisattva vows, committing any of the eight, even with all four binding factors present, does not rid us of our tantric vows.

The Eight Thick Actions

(1) Appropriating discriminating awareness by force. Discriminating awareness (*shes-rab*, Skt. *prajna*, wisdom), here, is another name for women. By relying on the bliss and joy that come from union with one, without orgasmic release, a male enhances his blissful discriminating awareness of voidness. A female can accomplish the same while in union with a man, also without orgasmic release, by relying on the fact of her being a woman.

This thick action is alternatively called relying on an unqualified sealing partner (*phyag-rgya*, Skt. *mudra*). Sealing partner and pure awareness partner (*rig-ma*, knowledge woman) are other names for women. They help in realizing *mahamudra* – the great seal of voidness comprehended with clear light mental activity – or pure awareness (*rig-pa*), the equivalent of this in the Nyingma system of dzogchen.

As with the fifth Kalachakra root downfall, regarding ordinary sex and the bliss of orgasmic release as a path to liberation or enlightenment totally defeats tantric practice. This point provides the context for understanding this and the next thick action in both Kalachakra and other anuttarayoga systems. Even if we are not at the stage of having some level of blissful awareness of voidness – which sexual union without orgasmic release can enhance – and even if we lack the ability, gained through mastery of our energy-winds through yoga methods, to avoid orgasm when in union; nevertheless, as someone with tantric vows, we would naturally admire and sincerely wish to reach these stages. We need to regard our sexual lives within this perspective.

For this resolve not to weaken, it is important that our sexual partner share our attitude toward sex. An unqualified partner is someone who does not view sex from a tantric perspective. More specifically, our partner needs to have received empowerment, uphold tantric vows, and keep close bonds with the practices. Most importantly, she or he needs to safeguard purely the fifth Kalachakra root

vow and not regard ordinary sex and the bliss of orgasmic release as something spiritual, or as a path to liberation or enlightenment.

When we view sex from a tantric perspective and our sexual partner simply wishes to share love and comfort, we do not need to feel that our two attitudes are mutually exclusive. Enhancing our blissful awareness of voidness through union with a partner is built on a foundation of sharing love and support with each other. However, if our partner is merely obsessed with greed and attachment for carnal pleasure, or views achieving a healthy orgasm as the cure for all psychological disorder, we easily fall prey to such emotions or ideas, and lose our perspective.

If we already have a sexual partner and become involved with tantra, while she or he does not, we certainly do not forsake that partner, or pursue extramarital relations with someone holding tantric vows. Nor do we need to convert our partner to Buddhism and pressure her or him to take initiation. On the other hand, we do not exploit this person for our spiritual practice, being dishonest with our feelings, or begrudgingly have sex as our duty while harboring resentment. We look to the bodhisattva vows and trainings for guidelines. Since our partner might understandably become totally repelled by tantra, Buddhism, and ourselves if we were haughtily to denounce her or him as unqualified and unworthy of sharing our bed, we continue having sex with the person motivated by love and compassion, at least to avoid this from happening. As with the practices to enhance our pledged state of aspiring bodhichitta, we then avoid causing our partner to regret positive actions, such as showing us love and wishing to give us happiness. Instead, if receptive, we gently encourage her or him to overcome shortcomings and realize potentials through effective methods, not ordinary sex. In this way, we try to make our two attitudes toward sex, if not the same, at least more compatible.

Further, a potential partner must not have been coerced to enter sexual union – either by subtle psychological pressure or by force. An example of the former is flattering the person as spiritually advanced, saying that she or he is helping us, as great tantric bodhisattvas, advance on the path and help others more. Forcing may be by hitting, pushing the person down, or humiliating her or him.

Even if a potential partner has received empowerment, keeps tantric vows, and shares our perspective on sex, we also incur this first heavy action if we force her or him to sit in union with us when circumstances are inappropriate. This might occur if the person were sick, married to someone else, under someone's guardianship, keeping other vows that restrict such conduct, shy, or unwilling. All these guidelines likewise apply to our sexual behavior in general.

(2) Appropriating her nectar by force. This thick action is alternatively called sitting in union devoid of the three recognitions. This means being in sexual union, even with someone sharing our attitudes, without following the tantric procedures. When using the bliss of union to enhance our blissful awareness of

voidness – whether with an actual physical partner or merely a visualized one in our imaginations – we distinguish and regard our minds, speech, and bodies as being dissociated from confusion (*zag-med*, uncontaminated). We call this the three recognitions (*‘du-sheḡ gsum*). Without such an attitude, the bliss of union enhances only our desires and attachment, rather than our blissful awareness of voidness.

Firstly, our state of mind while in union is a blissful awareness of voidness, on whatever level we can maintain it. We do not harbor ordinary thoughts or worries, for instance about how our sexual performance ranks with that of other people.

Secondly, our speech labels phenomena as what they conventionally are when not apprehended by a confused mind, but by one that is a blissful awareness of voidness. We represent this by using one aspect of our minds, which on a deeper level is still blissfully aware of voidness, to visualize our own and our partner’s sexual organs dependently arising – from seed syllables – in the form of vajra and bell. These two ritual objects, used extensively in tantra practice, symbolize blissful awareness and discriminating awareness of voidness. We imagine them marked by these syllables as a further indication of pure mental labeling. With confusion and its attendant attachment, we label sexual organs as desirable objects for gaining the fleeting bliss of orgasmic release. Free of confusion, we label them in a purer manner, as objects that can help us enhance our blissful discriminating awareness of voidness.

Thirdly, our bodies and those of our partners appear in the forms of Buddha-figures which our minds give rise to while simultaneously maintaining, on a deeper level, blissful awareness of voidness. Since the mind that generates this appearance is not one of longing desire, this visualization is not at all the same as fantasizing ourselves and our partners as sexy movie stars.

Again, we must remember that even if we maintain this pure way of regarding our minds, speech, and bodies while in sexual union, if we consider the bliss of orgasmic release experienced within this context as a means for achieving liberation or enlightenment, we incur a tantric root downfall. This occurs whether we purposely cause that orgasmic release or experience it unintentionally. Furthermore, even when we visualize our own and our partner’s bodies in pure forms as Buddha-figures, we do not lose sight of the conventional existence of ourselves as persons. Thus, we always remain sensitive to our own and our partner’s feelings and needs. This is pertinent whether our partner shares our attitude and visualization, or is not involved in tantric practice.

(3) Showing confidential objects to improper vessels. With the seventh common root tantric downfall, we disclose confidential teachings to those without empowerment. Here, we show confidential objects to such persons, or to those with empowerment who lack respect for them. These objects include pictures, paintings, or statues of Buddha-figures, books containing explicit

instructions for tantric practice, and our ceremonial vajra and bell. Although we do not lose our tantric vows by leaving these objects on public display in our homes, we devastate our practice when people make rude and lascivious remarks to us about Buddha-figures depicted in union, mock us as being superstitious or mad, or use our ritual items as paperweights. It is best to cover such items, or keep them in a private room. Tibetans, for example, hang a curtain in front of their paintings of Buddha-figures – especially those whose forms are open to misunderstanding by the uninitiated – and undrape them only when meditating or performing rituals.

(4) Arguing during an offering feast of *tsog*. During *tsog* pujas, we visualize ourselves as Buddha-figures, with a deeper level of our minds blissfully aware of voidness, and make special offerings with the wish for everyone to enjoy them purely and be happy. We do this in order to build up positive force (merit) and deep awareness. When we argue or fight during such ritual, we forget about our visualizations and appropriate states of mind. Consequently, our participation in the puja becomes ineffective for enhancing our spiritual paths.

(5) Indicating discrepant teachings to those with belief in fact (those with faith). This thick action is alternatively called giving false answers to sincerely asked questions. When someone who is a fit vessel, with proper empowerment, asks a sincere question about tantric practices, if we avoid the question by either changing the topic and speaking about something extraneous, or answering on a level different from that on which the person asked, we commit this thick action. Such evasive behavior is karmically detrimental to our own future receipt of straightforward answers to our questions. Even if someone with faith in tantra but lacking empowerment sincerely asks us a question, we do not ignore it. We answer, however in such a way as not to disclose explicit instructions that are to be kept confidential.

(6) Staying more than seven days among shravakas. In this context, *shravakas* (listeners) do not refer to Theravada practitioners, but to anyone who trivializes or makes fun of tantra. Staying for a long time among such persons discourages us from our paths, especially if they are actively hostile toward our meditation practice. Further, if the people with whom we live are only concerned about their own welfare and continually tell us we are stupid to try to help others, their self-centered outlooks slowly infect us. There is no fault, however, if we have no choice about whom we live with, such as at a training camp or needing to stay in a hospital ward. It is crucial in such situations, however – and even simply when living in a non-supportive and unsympathetic society – to keep our tantric practices and beliefs totally private. If we sit counting rosary beads and chanting mantras aloud in a crowded prison cell, we may be beaten to death!

(7) Falsely holding the pride of being a yogi, also called boasting to be a yogi, without properly being one. It is a thick action, detrimental to our progress, to

imagine and boast that we are highly accomplished practitioners when we have merely recited a daily sadhana for some time or completed a meditation retreat during which we repeated a few mantras a hundred thousand times and gained no realization.

(8) Indicating the hallowed Dharma to those who will disbelieve what is fact. With the seventh common root tantric downfall, we disclose confidential teachings to those lacking empowerment. Here, we reveal them to those having empowerment, but lacking faith and respect in them. Some people take an empowerment in order to purify themselves from tantric root downfalls and to retake their vows, or to revitalize their vows if they have weakened them. If they do this at an empowerment into a tantric system in which they have no particular interest or belief, it is a thick action to teach them explicit practices specific to this system.

Three Auxiliary Thick Actions

Some texts supplement the list of eight secondary tantric vows with three auxiliary thick actions that also hamper our tantric practice. The twentieth-century Gelug master Phabongkha (*Pha-bong-kha Byams-pa bstan-'dzin 'phrin-las rgya-mtsho*), for example, included the three in the list of secondary tantric vows when he expanded the First Panchen Lama's *Extensive Six-Session Yoga* (*Thun-drug rnal-'byor rgyas-pa*) with the recitation of the lists of vows.

(1) Improperly engaging in mandala-rites, such as without a retreat. We may confer empowerment on others or perform the self-initiation (*bdag-'jug*) to restore our lost or weakened tantric vows only if we have completed the meditation retreat of the appropriate Buddha-figure, repeating the prescribed mantras hundreds of thousands of times, and offered the concluding fire-puja (*sbyin-sreg*).

(2) Transgressing our pratimoksha or bodhisattva vows when there is no need. Unless there is an urgent need to transgress them in order to benefit others, and there is no alternative, we safeguard our vows at all times.

(3) Acting counter to the teachings of *Fifty Stanzas on the Guru* (*Bla-ma lnga-bcu-pa*, Skt. *Gurupanchashika*). This text by the tenth-century Indian master Ashvaghosha II is the source of instructions for disciples' behavior toward their tantric masters. When time permits, spiritual mentors teach this text before conferring empowerment.

