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The Four Supreme Skills Using Syllables

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KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

mchog tu gyur pa yi ge'i sgyu rtsal bzhi

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INTRODUCTION

This text is one element in a collection entitled *Essence of the Beautiful Jewel Ornaments of Necessary Practices*. This diverse collection of practices to be applied in different circumstances spans almost 200 pages in Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo’s Collected Works.¹ Khyentse Wangpo explains in the collection’s colophon:

This collection of just a few necessary practices, drawn from authentic sūtras and tantras and many scriptures of India and Tibet, was written by the free renunciate Mañjuḥṣa. May it be meritorious!

Our text here draws on the particular doctrines of the Shije (Pacification) lineage introduced by the South Indian master Padampa Sangye on the cusp of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. In this tradition, the sacred vowels and consonants of the Sanskrit alphabet, known in Tibet as the *ālikāli*, are considered to have a particular power.

Without adding a title, Khyentse Wangpo opens with a quote from the *Mahāmudrā Symbol Tantra, the Secret in the Hearts of All Ḍākinīs*,² evoking the “unimpeded power” of these syllables.

The four sections of this practice go on to explain how to use the *ālikāli* to achieve extraordinary results, which would normally demand far more complex and arduous practices. The first is to infuse one’s ordinary speech with the power of mantra. The second is to transform ordinary thoughts into wisdom. The third is to transform the specific negative emotions of attachment, anger, jealousy, pride, and ignorance into the five wisdoms. The fourth is addressed to the *tsa lung* (“channel-wind”) practices concerning the system of chakras, channels, winds, and wisdom drops of the vajra body. Normally these advanced practices require a long and arduous training combining control of the breathing, visualization, and physical yogic movements. Here,

the practice is to chant the syllables while visualizing them on the branch channels radiating from the chakras or “channel wheels” situated at different points along the central channel (Khyentse Wangpo uses the Sanskrit term *avadbhūti*). These channels spread out from the chakra’s central hub. Each chakra has a different number of channels, facing up or facing down, rather like the spokes of an umbrella.

This series of instructions first purifies the everyday habits of useless speech and wandering thoughts, progressing to the transformation of negative emotions into wisdom the moment they arise, and culminating with a yogic practice leading to a deep experience of the nature of mind.

The vowels and consonants have been included in full for our translation, in Indian Devanāgarī and Tibetan script, along with Sanskrit transliteration and approximate Tibetan phonetics. The original Tibetan text is more succinct, assuming that practitioners must already know them by heart.

མཚོག་དུ་གུར་པ་ཡི་གེའི་སྐུ་ཚུལ་བཞི།

The Four Supreme Skills Using Syllables

From the *Mahāmudrā Symbol Tantra*, a very sacred Dharma of the Pacification of Suffering:

There are four supreme skills using syllables—
This is the heart speech of the dākinīs.

If, though caught in the cycle of obscurations,
At dawn and dusk you say three times the syllables of means and wisdom,
Whatever you say will be transformed into mantra.
By their unimpeded power all goals will be attained.

It explains this subject in great detail.

The Four Instructions

1. The pith instruction on practicing the stages of approach and accomplishment of secret mantra while engaging in meaningless chatter.
2. The pith instruction on simultaneously perfecting the two accumulations of merit and wisdom in one's stream of being while remaining in one's ordinary body.
3. The pith instruction on practicing to perfect the power of *samādhi* with a mind endowed with afflictive emotions.
4. The pith instruction on making the channels and winds workable without having to rely on the upper and lower doors. [297]

Regarding the First

If, in the morning, before the sound of the crows is audible, you chant the Sanskrit vowels three times:

अ आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | ऋ ॠ | लृ ॡ | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अं अः

A Ā | I Ī | U Ū | Ṛ Ṝ | Ḍ Ḍ̄ | E AI | O AU | AṂ AḤ

अःआः | इःईः | उःऊः | ऋःॠः | लृःॡः | एःऐः | ओःऔः | अंःअः

a a | i i | u u | ri ri | li li | e e | o au | ang ah

and in the evening, when the singing of the little birds has ceased and people and cattle are going to sleep, you chant the Sanskrit consonants three times:

क ख ग घ ङ | च छ ज झ ञ | ट ठ ड ढ ण

KA KHA GA GHA ṄA | CA CHA JA JHA ṆA | ṬA ṬHA ḌA ḌHA ṆA

काखगघङ्गा | च्छजझञ्ज | त्ठडढण

ka kha ga gha nga | tsa³ tsha dza dzha nya | ta tha⁴ da dha na

त थ द ध न | प फ ब भ म | य र ल व | श ष स ह क्ष

TA THA DA DHA NA | PA PA BA BHA MA | YA RA LA WA | ŚA ŚA SA HA KṢA

त्थदधन | प्फबभम | यरलव | शषसहक्क्ष

ta tha da dha na | pa pha ba bha ma | ya ra la wa | sha zha sa ha ksha

distinctly, every day, separate from and uninterrupted by ordinary human speech and other activities, then no matter what you say, everything will be transformed into mantra.

Regarding the Second

Awakening from sleep at daybreak, chant the Sanskrit consonants three times, recognizing all external, deluded, projected appearances as the display of your own mind:

क ख ग घ ङ | च छ ज झ ञ | ट ठ ड ढ ण

KA KHA GA GHA ṄA | CA CHA JA JHA ṆA | ṬA ṬHA ḌA ḌHA ṆA

काखगघङ्गा | च्छजझञ्ज | त्ठडढण

ka kha ga gha nga | tsa tsha dza dzha nya | ta tha da dha na

त थ द ध न | प फ ब भ म | य र ल व | श ष स ह क्ष

TA THA DA DHA NA | PA PHA BA BHA MA | YA RA LA WA | ŚA ŚA SA HA KṢA

त्थदधन | प्फबभम | यरलव | शषसहक्क्ष

ta tha da dha na | pa pha ba bha ma | ya ra la wa | sha zha sa ha ksha

And then chant the Sanskrit vowels three times, recognizing that the mind too is uncreated like a magical illusion.

अ आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | ऋ ॠ | लृ लृ | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अं अः

A Ā | I Ī | U Ū | Ṛ Ṝ | Ḍ Ḍ̄ | E AI | O AU | AM AH

अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा रंरं रंरं अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा

a a | i i | u u | ri ri | li li | e e | o au | ang ah

Just before falling asleep, chant the Sanskrit consonants three times, while recognizing all ordinary conceptual thought patterns as the display of mind, and then chant the Sanskrit vowels three times, recognizing that mind, too, is like uncreated space. Through this, the delusion of grasper and grasped will be purified without having to abandon it, swiftly giving birth to unsurpassable primordial wisdom.

Regarding the Third

Whatever afflictive emotional thoughts appear when cognition comes into contact with objects, without abandoning them, make them arise as wisdom. For example, when a thought of attachment or desire arises, immediately look at it directly. Recognizing its nature, chant:

ॐ | प फ ब भ म | अ आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | ऋ ॠ | लृ लृ | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अं अः

OM | PA PHA BA BHA MA | A Ā | I Ī | U Ū | Ṛ Ṝ | Ḍ Ḍ̄ | E AI | O AU | AM AH

ॐं प'फ'ब'भ'म' अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा रंरं रंरं अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा

om | pa pha ba bha ma | a a | i i | u u | ri ri | li li | e e | o au | ang ah

twenty-one times. Thus, individual thoughts of desire and attachment will arise as discriminating wisdom.[298] Similarly, for anger and hatred, chant:

ॐ | ट ठ ड ढ ण | अ आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | ऋ ॠ | लृ लृ | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अं अः

OM | Ṭ ṬHA ḌA ḌHA ṆA | A Ā | I Ī | U Ū | Ṛ Ṝ | Ḍ Ḍ̄ | E AI | O AU | AM AH

ॐं त'ठ'ड'ढ'ण' अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा रंरं रंरं अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा

om | ta tha da dha na | a a | i i | u u | ri ri | li li | e e | o au | ang ah

For jealousy, chant:

ॐ | च छ ज झ ञ | अ आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | ऋ ॠ | लृ लृ | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अं अः

OM | CA CHA JA JHA ÑA | A Ā | I Ī | U Ū | Ṛ Ṝ | Ḍ Ḍ̄ | E AI | O AU | AM AH

ॐं च'छ'ज'झ'ञ' अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा रंरं रंरं अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा

om | tsa tsha dza dzha nya | a a | i i | u u | ri ri | li li | e e | o au | ang ah

For pride, chant:

ॐ | क ख ग घ ङ | अ आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | ऋ ॠ | लृ लृ | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अं अः

OM | KA KHA GA GHA ÑA | A Ā | I Ī | U Ū | Ṛ Ṝ | Ḍ Ḍ̄ | E AI | O AU | AM AH

ॐं क'ख'ग'घ'ङ' अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा रंरं रंरं अंज्वा अंज्वा अंज्वा

om | ka kha ga gha nga | a a | i i | u u | ri ri | li li | e e | o au | ang ah

For ignorance, chant:

ॐ | त थ द ध न | अ आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | ऋ ॠ | लृ | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अं अः
OM | TA THA DA DHA NA | A Ā | I Ī | U Ū | Ṛ Ṝ | Ḍ Ḍ̄ | E AI | O AU | AṂ AḤ
ॐ | त्थ द्द ध्ध न्ना | आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | रि रि | लि लि | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अङ्गः
om | ta tha da dha na | a a | i i | u u | ri ri | li li | e e | o au | ang ah

Through practicing these mantras, together with their unique qualities, each particular afflictive emotion will be entirely purified, dissolved into the inherent nature of the mind. Those experiences will arise as the mirror-like, all accomplishing, equanimity, and dharmadhātu wisdoms respectively.

Regarding the Fourth

In the four channel wheels, which are the essence of the four empowerments of the vajra body, speech, mind, and primordial wisdom of the guru, clearly visualize the following: on the branch channels at the top of the head, spontaneously arisen and perfected, are the thirty-two consonants:

क ख ग घ ङ | च छ ज झ ञ | ट ठ ड ढ ण
KA KHA GA GHA ṄA | CA CHA JA JHA ṄA | ṬA ṬHA ḌA ḌHA ṆA
काखगघङ्गा | च्छजझञ्ज | त्ठडढण
ka kha ga gha nga | tsa tsha dza dzha nya | ta tha da dha na

त थ द ध न | प फ ब भ म | य र ल व | श ष स ह क्ष
TA THA DA DHA NA | PA PHA BA BHA MA | YA RA LA WA | ŚA ŚA SA HA KṢA
त्थ द्द ध्ध न्ना | प्प फ्फ ब्ब भ्भ म्म | य् य र् र ल् ल व् व | श्श ष् ष स ह क्क्ष
ta tha da dha na | pa pa ba bha ma | ya ra la wa | sha zha sa ha ksha

At the throat are the letters of the sixteen vowels:

अ आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | ऋ ॠ | लृ | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अं अः
A Ā | I Ī | U Ū | Ṛ Ṝ | Ḍ Ḍ̄ | E AI | O AU | AṂ AḤ
आ | इ ई | उ ऊ | रि रि | लि लि | ए ऐ | ओ औ | अङ्गः
a a | i i | u u | ri ri | li li | e e | o au | ang ah

At the heart center are these eight syllables:

अ क च ट त प य श
A KA CA ṬA TA PA YA ŚA
अकात्तपयशा
a ka tsa ta ta pa ya sha

At the navel, the thirty-two consonants are arranged clockwise and also counter-clockwise:

क ख ग घ ङ | च छ ज झ ञ | ट ठ ड ढ ण

KA KHA GA GHA ṄA | CA CHA JA JHA ṄA | ṬA ṬHA ḌA ḌHA ṄA

ཀཁ་ཀ་ཀྱ་ཀྱ་ ཅཅ་ཅཅ་ཅཅ་ ཇཇཇཇཇཇ

ka kha ga gha nga | tsa tsha dza dzha nya | ta tha da dha na

त थ द ध न | प फ ब भ म | य र ल व | श ष स ह क्ष

TA THA DA DHA NA | PA PHA BA BHA MA | YA RA LA WA | ŚA ŚA SA HA KṢA

ཏཐ་དཏཏ་ཏཏ་ པཕ་བཕ་བཕ་ ཡར་ལམ་ ཤཤམ་ཤམ་

ta tha da dha na | pa pha ba bha ma | ya ra la wa | sha zha sa ha ksha

Clearly visualize the syllables standing on the same number of branch channels. As you visualize them, chant all the mantras on the channels three times each, from the top of the head down to the navel.

To conclude the practice session, chant all the syllables on the branch channels again three times each, starting with those at the navel, and ending with those at the top of the head. The syllables then melt into bodhicitta and dissolve into the central *avadhūtī* channel. Feel that they are absorbed into the direct, naked state that is the empty, ineffable nature of simplicity.

In this way, by maintaining the combined experience of skillful means at the beginning and wisdom at the end of the session, [299] the elements are purified. They melt into their innate nature, and, through immaculate bliss, the potential of the channels and winds becomes workable.

This special instruction is extremely precious for all practices, so one should practice it diligently and know in detail the auspicious connections⁵ of other instructions on the vowels and consonants.

NOTES

1. *nyer mkho'i chos spyod mdzes rgyan nor bu'i snying po*; Kabum 2014, vol. 20, 139.1–335.6.
2. Sarah Harding explains in her translator's introduction to volume 13 of Jamgön Kongtrul's *Treasury of Precious Instructions* (*gdams ngag rin po che'i mdzod*): "This tantra consists of twenty-one chapters presenting basically the same message of alphabetical practices. In fact, three whole chapters are given over to the explanation of just the suchness of letters (*yi ge'i de kbo na nyid*). The main speaker is not the Bhagavān Buddha but the Bhagavatī Buddha, mistress of the realm, surrounded by goddesses and dākinīs." See https://gdamsngagmdzod.tsadra.org/index.php/Gdams_ngag_mdzod_Shechen_Printing/Volume_13/Introduction.
3. Tibetans traditionally write and pronounce the Sanskrit syllables *ca cha ja jha* as *tsha tsha dza dzha*.
4. Here "th" and "ph" are pronounced as an aspirated breathy version of "t" and "p," and not as in English "thing" and "phone."
5. The auspicious connections (*rten 'brel*) of the letters of the *ālikāli* is a specific teaching of this tradition.

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GLOSSARY

avadhūtī

ཙ་དབུ་མ། • *rtsa dbu ma*

The main psychic channel running up the middle of the body.

branch channel

ཙ་དབ། • *rtsa dab*

The channels arranged in a circle to form the chakra, like the spokes of a wheel or the petals of a flower.

chakra

འཁོར་ལོ། • *'khor lo*

“Wheels.” Focal energy points where smaller channels fuse with the central channel.

channels and winds

ཙ་རླུང། • *rtsa rlung*

The winds (*rlung*) are currents of psychic energy flowing along the channels (*rtsa*). When these winds are in harmony, the mind is in harmony. When they are disturbed, the mind is disturbed. “Tsalung” often refers to practices for controlling the winds and untying the knots in the channels as a path to awakening.

Mañjughoṣa

འཇམ་དབྱངས། • *'jam dbyangs*

The Sanskrit version of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo’s name. Often Mañjughoṣa refers to the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.

Padampa Sangye

པ་དམ་པ་སངས་རྒྱལ། • *pha dam pa sangs rgyas*

Eleventh-century South Indian master who visited Tibet several times, transmitting diverse esoteric teachings and also his famous *100 Pieces of Advice for the People of Dingri*.

wisdom drop

ཐིག་ལེ། • *thig le* • bindu

Wisdom drop has a number of meanings in different contexts. In this type of practice, it is the wisdom essence to be cultivated within the channels.

Zhije

སྤུག་བསྐྱེད་ཞི་བྱེད། • *sdug bsngal zhi byed* • duḥkhaśamaṇa

“The Pacification of Suffering.” The teachings brought to Tibet by Padampa Sangye.