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ABBREVIATIONS

A	<i>Āṅguttara-nikāya</i>
AO	<i>Acta Orientalia</i>
AM	<i>Asia Major</i>
As	<i>Aṭṭhasālinī</i>
BEFEO	<i>Bulletin de l'Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient</i>
BHSD	F. Edgerton, <i>Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar and Dictionary</i>
BM	<i>Burlington Magazine</i>
BSOAS	<i>Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies</i>
BSR	<i>Buddhist Studies Review</i>
CIS	<i>Contributions to Indian Sociology</i>
CPD	<i>Critical Pāli Dictionary</i>
CSSH	<i>Comparative Studies in Society and History</i>
CSLCY	<i>Chin-so liu-chu yin</i> , in TC, no. 1015
D	<i>Dīgha-nikāya</i>
Dīp	<i>Dīpavaṃsa</i>
EA	<i>Études Asiatiques</i>
EFEO	<i>Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient</i>
EJS	<i>European Journal of Sociology</i>
EI	<i>Epigraphia Indica</i>
ERE	<i>Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics</i> , edited by James Hastings, Edinburgh, T.&T. Clark, 1911
HJAS	<i>Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies</i>
HR	<i>History of Religions</i>
IASWR	<i>Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions</i>
IBK	<i>Indogaku Bukkyōgaku kenkyū</i>
IHQ	<i>Indian Historical Quarterly</i>
IJ	<i>Indo-Iranian Journal</i>
IT	<i>Indologica Taurinensia</i>
JA	<i>Journal Asiatique</i>
JAS	<i>Journal of Asian Studies</i>
JHR	<i>Journal of the History of Religions</i>
JIABS	<i>Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies</i>

<i>JNCBRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JNRC</i>	<i>Journal of the Nepal Research Centre</i>
<i>JPTS</i>	<i>Journal of the Pali Texts Society</i>
<i>JRAS</i>	<i>Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society</i>
<i>JS</i>	<i>Journal des Savants</i>
<i>Kv</i>	<i>Kathāvatthu</i>
<i>Kv-a</i>	<i>Kathāvatthu-aṭṭhakathā</i>
<i>MCB</i>	<i>Mélanges Chinois et Bouddhiques</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Majjhima-nikāya</i>
<i>Mhbv</i>	<i>Mahābodhivaṃsa</i>
<i>Mhv</i>	<i>Mahāvāṃsa</i>
<i>Mp</i>	<i>Manoratha-pūranī</i>
<i>MSMS</i>	Monumenta Serica Monograph Series
<i>Paṭis</i>	<i>Paṭisambhidā-magga</i>
<i>PTS</i>	Pali Text Society
<i>RH</i>	<i>Revue Historique</i>
<i>RO</i>	<i>Rocznik Orientalistyczny</i>
<i>S</i>	<i>Samyutta-nikāya</i>
<i>SBE</i>	Sacred Books of the East
<i>Saddhamma-s</i>	<i>Saddhamma-saṅgaha</i>
<i>SLJBS</i>	<i>Sri Lanka Journal of Buddhist Studies</i>
<i>Sp</i>	<i>Samantapāsādikā</i>
<i>SSAC</i>	<i>Studies in South Asian Culture</i>
<i>T</i>	The Taishō edition of the Buddhist Canon in Chinese (vol. no.)
<i>Th</i>	<i>Theragāthā</i>
<i>TMKFTCC</i>	<i>Tao-men k'o-fa ta-ch'üan-chi</i> , in TC, no. 1215
<i>TP</i>	<i>T'oung Pao</i>
<i>TC</i>	The Taoist Canon, text numbered in accordance with the Harvard-Yenching Index to its titles
<i>TTD</i>	Tibetan Tripitaka, sDe-dge Edition
<i>TTP</i>	Tibetan Tripitaka, Peking Edition
<i>UCR</i>	<i>Univeristy of Ceylon Review</i> , Colombo
<i>VBA</i>	<i>Visva-bharati Annals</i>
<i>Vin</i>	<i>Vinaya-piṭaka</i>
<i>Vism</i>	<i>Visuddhimagga</i>
<i>WZKSO</i>	<i>Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- (und Ost) asiens</i>
<i>ZDMG</i>	<i>Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft</i>

The rNying-ma Interpretation of Commitment and Vow

Gyurme Dorje

1. Preamble

The persecution of Buddhism in 838 marked a great watershed in the history of Tibet, one which may well turn out to be even more divisive than the events of the last forty years. It heralded a dark age which was to endure for over a century until the Buddhist restoration of 953, and which effectively ended the powerful Yarlung dynasty in 869. In retrospect, historians have considered this period to demarcate decisively the earlier phase (*snga'-dar*) and the later phase (*phyi-dar*) of Buddhist propagation in Tibet.¹ Those who adhered to the transmissions and teachings introduced during the earlier phase became known as the rNying-ma-pa, in contrast to the proponents of the various new translation schools, who were known as gSar-ma-pa. However, the hardening of attitudes during the tenth and eleventh centuries, which is clearly evident in the rNying-ma writings of Rong-zom Chos-kyi bZang-po, as well as in the ordinances of Lha bLa-ma Ye-shes 'od, and in the polemical broadsides of 'Gos-khug-pa Lhas-btsas and 'Bri-gung dPal-'dzin, more accurately reflects certain differences between the Indian Vajrayāna Buddhism of the seventh/eighth centuries and that of the tenth/eleventh centuries.² The texts transmitted during the earlier period, notably the tantras of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga, are referred to as the “ancient translations” (*snga'-gyur*) when contrasted with the “later translations” (*phyi-gyur*) of Anuttara Yogatantra. As distinct genres of Buddhist literature, these texts undoubtedly exhibit differences in terminology, style, versification, and *maṇḍala* formation, with the former in many cases appearing to conform iconographically to even earlier developments within the *sūtra* and tantra traditions of Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism and the latter appearing to incorporate more non-Buddhist imagery.³

¹ e.g. 'Gos Lo-tsa-ba, tr. by G.N. Roerich, *The Blue Annals*, Delhi, 1976, 60 ff.

² G. Dorje, “The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary”, PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1987, 14–17, 61–72.

³ D.L. Snellgrove, *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*, London, 1987, 147–160.

Historians have sought to explain this development within Indian Buddhism as a reaction either to the resurgence of Hinduism in India, or to the Islamic incursions and persecutions, and it is indeed interesting to note that the Indian Buddhist tradition itself describes Anuttara Yogatantra as the preferred mode of practice during periods of social degeneration.⁴ Nonetheless, the internal evidence of the rNying-ma philosophical systems and literature reveals that such differences as there are arose, not in an abrupt divisive manner, but rather by way of a gradual transition.

From the Tibetan perspective also, it is clear that the events of 838 act as a watershed not because the earlier lineages of Padmasambhava, Vimalamitra and Buddhaguhya disappeared but because the eleventh-century Tibetans responsible for the restoration of Buddhism were exposed to a new generation of Indian masters—Naropa, Gayadhara, Virūpa and Atiśa, with their own distinct lineages, in addition to the earlier traditions. Tibetan polemicists of the rNying-ma school have sometimes sought to distinguish the ancient and new translations on the basis of their translation style rather than their textual content, attributing the earlier to be meaningful and the later as lexical interpretations of the Sanskrit originals.⁵

While such differences in translation style are undeniably present, we know from the *sGra-'byor-bam-gnyis* that, with the notable exception of the inner tantras, the Tibetan Buddhist terminology had been subjected to continuous revision since the time of the religious kings.⁶ Again the process seems to be one of gradual transition. The eleventh-century scholar Rong-zom-pa appears to have been well-versed in both 'ancient' and 'new' translation styles.⁷ Conversely, certain proponents of the new translations schools have attempted to disprove the authenticity of a number of rNying-ma tantras which were not included in the bKa'-gyur by Bu-ston because he had no access to their Sanskrit originals. More often than not, these controversial arguments have been eclipsed by the subsequent discovery of the relevant Sanskrit manuscripts.⁸

It is not the purpose of this paper to elaborate further on the Indian background or the Tibetan polemics which gave rise to the rNying-ma/gSar-ma division. This would merit more attention than could possibly be given in the space available. Rather, it will focus on the concept of commitment or sacrament (*dam-tshig*, Skt. *samaya*) as found in the tantras according to the rNying-ma tradition, and its relationship with the vows maintained by adherents of the *sūtras*.

⁴ D.L. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, 149-50; bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *The Nyingma School of Buddhism*, London & Boston, forthcoming, vol. 1, Book I, 269–69.

⁵ G. Dorje, "The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary", 17, notes 12–13.

⁶ *ibid.*, 28, note 55.

⁷ bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book II, 703–9.

⁸ e.g. G. Dorje, *op. cit.*, 69–70.

2. Definition of commitment and the distinctions between commitment and vows

In his Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, Professor Snellgrove indicates the subtle range of meanings which this term conveys.⁹ The Tibetan term *dam-tshig*, which translates the Sanskrit *samaya* has three traditional definitions:¹⁰

Firstly, the ‘commitments’ are laid down because benefits are obtained when they are guarded. As it is said in the *sGyu-’phrul-rdo-rje*:¹¹

“If one who has obtained empowerment and consecration
In the intention of the genuine (or committed) ones
Acts precisely according to the genuine commitments (*dam*).
Discrepancies will be burnt away (*tshig*).”

Secondly, ‘commitments’ are so-called because retribution is exacted when they degenerate. The same text indeed says:

“One who swears to maintain the injunctions
And blessings of the genuine (*dam*) ones
Naturally becomes accomplished.
One who transgresses these commitments (*dam*)
Is burnt away (*tshig*), even when belonging to
(The vehicle of) indestructible reality.”

Thirdly, ‘commitments’ are so-called because a conventional oath of allegiance is taken. It says in the *Jñānottarapariṣcchā-sūtra*:

“In order that the most secret amazing
Doctrine of the conquerors
Might be firmly held without degeneration,
Pledges of allegiance are steadfastly upheld
In accordance with the teaching given by the *guru*.
This is explained to be ‘commitment’.”

Giving this definition, kLong-chen Rab-’byams-pa equates the keeping of commitments with the “virtuous nature of one who perseveres with body, speech and mind not to break the pledges one has undertaken concerning the renunciation of what should be renounced, and the attainment of what should be attained.”¹² As for the distinctions between commitments (*dam-tshig*, Skt. *samaya*) and vows (*sdom-pa*, Skt. *saṃvara*): Vows depend on individual mental control, whereas commitments are held by maintaining the Buddha-body, speech and mind without degeneration. In terms of the observance of vows, there are three kinds, namely, the vows of *prātimokṣa*, Bodhisattva, and awareness-holder (*vidyādhara*). The eight classes of *prātimokṣa* vows should be guarded by one who desires peace and

⁹ D.L. Snellgrove, *op. cit.*, 165–66.

¹⁰ G. Dorje, *op. cit.*, ch. 19, 1190–91.

¹¹ *rNying-ma-rgyud-’bum*, vol. 15.

¹² *ibid.*, ch. 19, 1191.

happiness for oneself alone, for the duration of one's life. The Bodhisattva vows bind the mind with moral discipline which has a dual purpose—they cause one to attain realization and extraordinary enlightened attributes through the gathering of the virtuous doctrine, and they benefit others by actions on behalf of sentient beings. The vows of the awareness-holders bring a great wave of benefit for others and transform conflicting emotions (*kleśa*) into pristine cognition (*jñāna*). Commitments, on the other hand, are said to guard the indestructible nature of the Buddha-body, speech and mind without degeneration, so that one is consequently and exclusively devoted to activity for the sake of others.

3. Commitments and vows and the views of the Nine Vehicles

The holding of vows and commitments has always had great importance for the social cohesion of Buddhism and indeed for those intent on spiritual progression within it, to the mystification of many a student confronted by the apparent trivialities which gave rise to early schisms within the saṅgha.¹³ A study of the nine vehicles, into which the rNying-ma-pa have traditionally classified the diverse levels of Buddhist experience, reveals that at each sequence of the path, the philosophical view maintained by its adherents requires the concomitant observance of specific vows or commitments.

The distinctions between the nine vehicles, or sequences of the vehicle, are discussed in the many philosophical treatises of the rNying-ma school which focus on philosophical systems.¹⁴ The present account is derived from Lo-chen Dharmaśrī, *gSang-bdag-zhal-lung* and bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *bsTan-pa'i-rnam-gzhag* who, following the Anuyoga text *sPyi-mdo-dgongs-pa-'dus-pa*, make a fundamental distinction between the first three *sūtra*-based vehicles, i.e. *Śrāvakayāna*, *Pratyekabuddhayāna* and *Bodhisattvayāna*, “which control the cause of suffering” (*kun-'byung 'dran-pa'i theg-pa*), adopting a causal approach to enlightenment or Buddhahood, and the last six or tantra-based vehicles which maintain the resultant view that Buddhahood is atemporally or primordially attained, and realized as such by the removal of the obscurations covering enlightened mind. As for the remaining six tantra-vehicles, the outer *Kriyātantra*, *Ubhayatantra* and *Yogatantra* are known as “vehicles of the outer tantras of austere awareness” (*phyi dka'-thub rig-pa'i rgyud-kyi theg-pa*), while the inner tantras of Mahāyoga, Anuyoga and Atiyoga are known as “vehicles of overpowering means” (*dbang-bsgyur thabs-kyi theg-pa*). Lo-chen Dharmaśrī emphasizes that this enumeration of nine is itself provisional because the structure

¹³ e.g. The second council, on which see M. Hofinger, *Étude sur le Concile de Vaiśālī*, Louvain, 1946, and J. Nattier and C. Prebish, “Mahāsāṅghika Origins: The Beginnings of Buddhist Sectarianism”, *HR*, 1977, 237–72.

¹⁴ S.G. Karmay, “Origin and Early Development of the Tibetan Religious Traditions of the Great Perfection”, PhD thesis, SOAS, University of London, 1986, 254–314.

may be simplified, e.g. into the twofold classification of Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna, or extended, e.g. by adding the mundane Maṇuṣyayāna or Devayāna as preliminaries.¹⁵ Despite the rather stereotyped presentation, we should bear in mind that the nine sequences of the vehicle are viewed as a single dynamic momentum, because a *śrāvaka* or Solitary Buddha in one situation could well be a Bodhisattva or yogin in another.

4. Commitments and vows in the Causal Vehicles

Śrāvakayāna: This vehicle is entered when one disillusioned with suffering comprehends the four truths and aspires towards peace and happiness. In view, selflessness of the individual (*pudgalanairātmya*) is realized, but selflessness of phenomena (*dharmanairātmya*) remains unrealized because the substrata of objective atomic particles and subjective time moments of consciousness are held to be ultimately real and discernible, either in association with each other, as is postulated by the Vaibhāṣika, or forming a single sensum, as held by the Sautrāntika. While in meditation the *śrāvaka* practises tranquillity (*śamatha*) and higher insight (*vipaśyanā*) in order to experience sixteen aspects of truth in sixteen successive moments, the spiritual path in question is characterized above all by renunciation (*spang-ba*). In order to become a stream-winner, or indeed an arhat, the *śrāvaka* is required to observe a number of vows, corresponding to the eight classes of *prātimokṣa*. In the case of more advanced renunciates, the twelve ascetic virtues (*dvadaśadhūtaguṇa*), which entail further restrictions on diet, attire and residence, will also be observed.¹⁶

Pratyekabuddhayāna: This vehicle is entered when one of highest, mediocre or inferior provisions is born without a master and alone comes to meditate on and understand dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*) and its reversal in a single sitting. In view, the selflessness of the individual and the selflessness of objective atomic particles are realized, but the ultimate reality of subjective time moments is maintained. For this reason, they are said to be realized in “one and a half parts of selflessness”. In order to become a full-fledged arhat “with supreme bliss of purpose”, the Solitary Buddha will naturally maintain the same monastic vows which the *śrāvaka* strenuously observes since his meditative abilities are enhanced by the fusion of tranquility, higher insight and dependent origination. However, he is distinguished from the samyaksambuddha by an inability to verbalize his realization for the sake of others, and instead must rely on communication through symbolic gestures.¹⁷

Bodhisattvayāna: This vehicle is entered by one who seeks enlightenment (*bodhi*) through great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*) in order to remove the sufferings of all

¹⁵ Lo-chen Dharmaśrī, *gSang-bdag zhal-lung*, 17–19.

¹⁶ bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 223–27.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, vol. 1, Book I, 227–31.

sentient beings, and who realizes through discriminative awareness (*prajñā*) the two aspects of selflessness and the quiescence of all conceptual elaboration (*prapañca*). The Bodhisattva comprehends the two truths (*dviśatya*) within the context of the Mahāyāna philosophical schools. From the standpoint of Vijñānavāda *abhidharma* he equates the relative truth (*samvṛtīśatya*) with the subject-object dichotomy, and ultimate truth (*paramārthāśatya*) with the consciousness of the ground-of-all (*ālayavijñāna*), although the objects of consciousness may or may not be independent existents. Through Svātantrika reasoning, he analyses the relative to be either correct or false in terms of its causal effectiveness, and the ultimate to be with or without synonyms. Through Prāsaṅgika dialectic, he realizes the relative to comprise both worldly and non-worldly appearances, and the ultimate to be without synonyms. Then, through the experiences of Great Madhyamaka, he comprehends the relative as the “disharmony of the abiding and apparitional natures”, i.e. of emptiness and the appearance of Buddha-attributes, and the ultimate as the “harmony of these abiding and apparitional natures”.¹⁸ To sustain this compassionate and discriminating vision, and to make possible the attainment of *samyaksambuddhatva*, the Bodhisattva meditates on the so-called thirty-seven aspects of enlightenment (*bodhipakṣadharmā*). As a discipline, he is required to gather virtue (i.e. the six *pāramitā*), to act on behalf of sentient beings, and to control malpractices by avoiding the root downfalls and observing the Bodhisattva vows which lead to the cultivation of enlightened mind (*bodhicittotpāda*).

Second turning *sūtras* and commentaries enumerate nineteen or twenty root downfalls (*rtsa-ltung bcu-dgu/nyi-shu*), as follows:¹⁹ There are five root downfalls certain for kings, namely, to steal the wealth of the Three Precious Jewels, to punish disciplined monks, to direct a renunciate away from his or her training, to commit the five inexpiable sins, and to hold wrong views; five for ministers, namely, to subjugate towns, countryside, citadels, cities, and provinces; eight for ordinary persons, namely, to teach emptiness to those of unrefined intelligence, to oppose those who enter into the greater vehicle, to join the greater vehicle having rejected the *prātimokṣa* vows, to uphold or cause one to uphold the vehicles of *śrāvakas* and Solitary Buddhas, to praise oneself and depreciate others, to speak of one’s own patience as profound, to give and receive the wealth of the precious jewels, and to give the riches of tranquillity to those who are loud-mouthed; and one which is common to all, namely, to abandon the enlightened attitude of aspiration (*smon-pa’i sems-bskyed*). The enumeration of twenty root downfalls

¹⁸ *gnas-srang mthun mi-mthun*. On the philosophical schools, from the rNying-ma standpoint, see bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book 1, 156–86.

¹⁹ *Ākāśagarbha-sūtra*, as summarised in Śāntideva’s *Śikṣāsamuccaya*, ch. 4; and kLong-chen-pa, *Grub-mtha 'mdzod*, 200.

includes that which occurs when the enlightened mind of undertaking or entrance (*'jug-pa'i sems-bskyed*) is also abandoned.

The cultivation of enlightened mind requires observance of the six or ten transcendental perfections (*pāramitā*), but monastic vows, as observed by *śrāvakas* and Solitary Buddhas, are optional.²⁰ As for the third turning commentarial tradition, the *Bodhisattva-saṃvaravimśaka* mentions forty-six transgressions (*nges-byas zhe-drug*),²¹ which include thirty-four contradicting the gathering of virtuous doctrines and twelve contradicting activity on behalf of others. The former comprise seven contradicting liberality, nine contradicting moral discipline, four contradicting patience, three contradicting perseverance, three contradicting concentration, and eight contradicting discriminative awareness. The latter comprise those transgressions which separate living beings from both general and particular acts of benefit.

5. Commitment in the Outer Tantras

In Buddhism, the term *tantra* is well known to refer not only to the various cycles of texts which bear the name *tantra*, but to the three continua of ground, path and result which underlie the experience of these same texts, indicating the abiding nature of reality (*gnas-lugs*) which is to be realized, the means of realizing it (*thabs*), and the culminating Buddha-body (*sku*) and pristine cognition (*ye-shes*) resulting from that realization. It is this structure of ground, path and result around which the *tantra*-texts, both rNying-ma and gSar-ma are developed.²²

Tantra-texts are said to surpass the *sūtras* for a number of reasons, notably because they are able to make the actual result of Buddhahood into the path and can bring relative appearances into the path without renouncing them. They are therefore distinguished by their limitless approaches, by their diverse skilful means, their swiftness, bliss and so forth. The *Rali-Cakrasaṃvara-tantra* enumerates fifteen such ways in which the *tantras* are superior.²³

A number of commentaries on the *tantra*-texts have identified ten categories or topics, which form the actual subject matter of the *tantras* (*rgyud-don-gyi dngos-po bye-brag-tu phye-nas bcu*).²⁴ These are a view of the real (*de-kho-na-nyid lta-ba*), determinate conduct (*la-dor-ba spyod-pa*), *maṇḍala* array (*bkod-pa dkyil-'khor*), successive gradation of empowerment (*rim-par bgrod-pa dbang*), commitment

²⁰ e.g. Śākyaśrī's response to Nyang-ral's sons in bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book II, 758.

²¹ See M. Tatz, trans., *Candragomin's Twenty Verses on the Bodhisattva Vow and Its Commentary*, and 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul, *Shes-bya kun-khyab mdzod*, vol. 2, 114–117.

²² bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 263–67, and for a specific example, “The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary”, 59–61.

²³ Enumerated and explained in bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 243–56.

²⁴ G. Dorje, *op. cit.*, 114-23, which is based on Mi-pham rGya-mtsho, *gSang-snying spyi-don 'od-gsal snying-po*.

which is not to be transgressed (*mi-'da'-ba dam-tshig*), enlightened activity which is displayed (*rol-pa phrin-las*), fulfilment of aspiration (*don-du gnyer-ba sgrub-pa*), offerings which brings the goal to fruition (*gnas-su stobs-pa mchod-pa*), unwavering contemplation (*mi-g.yo-ba ting-nge-'dzin*) and *mantra* recitation (*zlos-pa sngags*), accompanied by the seal which binds the practitioner to realization (*'ching-ba phyag-rgya*). Within this structure, commitment is regarded as an important linch-pin, enabling one who has received the appropriate empowerments (*abhiṣeka*) to focus more clearly upon the goal.

Kriyātantra: This vehicle is entered by a yogin who receives the water and crown empowerments, and who then performs ablutions and regards the meditational deity (*yi-dam*), sacraments of offering (*dam-rdzas*) and *mantras* as objects of purity. In view, he understands ultimate truth to be mind-as-such (*sems-nyid*) or pristine cognition (*jñāna*) beyond conceptual elaboration (*prapañca*) and extremes, and the relative truth to comprise both the correct relative appearances of divine *maṇḍalas* and the incorrect relative appearances of mundane perception. In order to attain the status of a *rigs-gsum rdo-rje 'dzin-pa* within sixteen life-times, the yogin meditates symbolically on himself as the visualized *samayasattva*, into which the *jñānasattva* will be invited to confer accomplishments, and non-symbolically on the alternation of the two truths.²⁵

This practice is sustained by the basic commitments (*rtsa-ba'i dam-tshig*) not to abandon the Three Precious Jewels, the *bodhicitta*, the *mantras* and seals, the *vajra* and bell, or the deity and the *guru*; and the ancillary commitments (*yan-lag-gi dam-tshig*) not to eat meat/garlic/radishes, drink ale, or sleep on a high bed. In other words, by relating to the meditational deity as a servant to a master, the *Kriyātantra* emphasizes external observances of diet, cleanliness, attire, astrology and so forth.²⁶

Ubhayatantra: This vehicle is entered by a yogin who receives the *vajra*, bell, and name empowerments. Its discipline and conduct conform to *Kriyātantra*, and its meditation to *Yogatantra*, although there is more emphasis on the recitation of *mantra*. In result, the yogin is said to become a *rigs-bzhi rdo-rje 'dzin-pa*.²⁷

Yogatantra: This vehicle is entered by the *vajrācārya* empowerment. In view, the yogin understands ultimate truth to be inner radiance (*prabhāsvara*), emptiness (*sūnyatā*), and absence of conceptual elaboration (*niḥprapañca*) with reference to all phenomena, and relative truth to comprise both the correct appearances of the *vajradhātumaṇḍala* and the incorrect mundane appearances. In order to become a *rigs-lnga rdo-rje 'dzin-pa* within three lifetimes, he meditates symbolically on the generation of the *samayasattva* by means of five awakenings (*pañcābhisambodhi*)

²⁵ bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 348–52.

²⁶ *ibid.*, vol. 1, Book I, 350–51.

²⁷ *ibid.*, vol. 1, Book I, 352–53.

and on the invitation of the *jñānasattva* to confer accomplishment by means of the ‘four miracles’ (*cho-’phrul bzhi*).²⁸ The union of *samayasattva* and *jñānasattva* is then secured by means of the four seals (*phyag-rgya bzhi*)—the great seal (*mahāmudrā*) which secures the body as Buddha-body and the mirror-like pristine cognition (*ādarśajñāna*), the doctrinal seal (*dharmamudrā*) which secures speech as Buddha-speech and the pristine cognition of discernment (*pratyavekṣanajñāna*), the commitment seal (*samayamudrā*) which secures *kleśa* consciousness (*kliṣṭamanovijñāna*) as Buddha-mind and the pristine cognition of sameness (*samatājñāna*), and the action seal (*karmamudrā*) which secures the five senses as Buddha-activity and the pristine cognition of accomplishment (*kṛtyupasthānajñāna*). In non-symbolic meditation, there is no dichotomy between non-symbolic ultimate reality and its divine apparition or blessing.

In order to sustain this meditation, the yogin cultivates *bodhicitta* as in the *Bodhisattvayāna*, and observes the fourteen commitments associated with the *pañcajina*, along with the commitments to avoid contact with those who have violated their own commitments. The fourteen commitments are to guard against: disparaging the teacher; transgressing the three levels of vows; hostility to *vajra* brothers and sisters; rejection of loving kindness for sentient beings; abandoning the enlightened mind; disparaging one’s own doctrine or that of others; divulging secrets to the immature; abusing the five components (*pañcaskandha*) which are primordially pure; narrow views concerning the intrinsic purity of phenomena; lack of compassion for evil beings who harm the doctrine; application of conceptual thought to wordless natures; belittling those who have faith; violating the commitments that have been undertaken; disparaging women, the source of discriminative awareness.²⁹

We can see from this synopsis of the six lower vehicles that the observance of vows and commitments is intimately connected with the view and meditation upheld at each stage of development. The Śrāvakayāna which emphasizes the selflessness of the individual requires vows of arduous renunciation. The Pratyekabuddhayāna with its subtler appreciation of dependent origination can sustain the same vows with less effort. The Bodhisattvayāna with its base in compassion and discriminative awareness requires commitments of total sacrifice for the sake of others. The Kriyāntātra requires the yogin to adopt an attitude of purity vis-à-vis the meditational deity, and Yogatantra requires the yogin to reject those views which distance him from union with the meditational deity, and at the same time maintain purity by avoiding contact with violators of the commitments.

²⁸ On the *pañcābhisambodhi* and *cho-’phrul bzhi*, see bDud-’joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 353–57.

²⁹ Aśvaghōṣa’s *Mūlāpattisaṃgraha*, as quoted by F. Lessing and A. Wayman, *Mkhas Grub Rje’s Fundamentals of the Buddhist Tantras*, The Hague & Paris, 1968, 328.

6. General commitments of the Inner Tantras

The three classes of inner tantras are distinguished from the outer tantras in a number of ways. sGro-phug-pa identifies five such distinctions, namely: the inner tantras identify mind-as-such with the Great Identity (*bdag-nyid chen-po*, i.e. the central Heruka of the *maṇḍala*); they consider attainment to be intrinsically present, they are entered through the three higher empowerments; they retain elements of *samsāra* through skilful means; they may lead the yogin to the desired result in one lifetime.³⁰ In particular, Mahāyoga emphasizes the ground, *utpattikrama* and ritual activities. Anuyoga emphasizes the path, *sampannakrama* and contemplation (*samādhi*), while Atiyoga emphasizes the result, great perfection (*rdzogs-pa chen-po*, Skt. *mahāsandhi*), and view.³¹

The general commitments upheld by yogins of the inner tantras comprise five basic observances which elaborate on the basic commitments followed by adherents of the Kriyātantra, with the addition of ten ancillary commitments.³²

“Basic commitments are said to be those which, in the manner of the roots of a tree, are the source of attributes when they are guarded and cultivated but not when they are unguarded. Ancillary commitments are said to be the skilful means and aids through which those (basic commitments) are guarded.”

The five basic commitments are: not to abandon the unsurpassed vehicle; to venerate the guru; not to interrupt the *mantras* and seals; to have loving kindness for those who enter the Mahāyāna; not to divulge secret truths to others.³³

The first basic commitment, not to abandon the unsurpassed vehicle, means that, according to the ground, the yogin should not abandon all sentient beings because they abide primordially as the Three Precious Jewels. According to the path, he should not abandon the two aspects of enlightened mind (*bodhicitta*), ultimate and relative, which unify the creation stage (*utpattikrama*) and the perfection stage (*sampannakrama*); and according to the result, he should not abandon the three Buddha-bodies (*trikāya*), their Buddha-speech which comprises the *sūtra* and tantra-texts along with their respective realizations, and the Buddhist community.

The second basic commitment, veneration of the teacher, concerns the various categories of teacher and the means of veneration. The former are five in number, namely, those teachers who guide or introduce one of the doctrine or the renunciate vows (*pravrajyā*); who liberate one's mundane consciousness by

³⁰ On these distinctions, see bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 346-48.

³¹ *ibid.*, 358-59.

³² G. Dorje, *op. cit.*, ch. 19, 1191.

³³ The source for this section on the five basic commitments is “The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary”, ch. 19, 1192–1204.

expounding the doctrine; who teach the esoteric instructions (*upadeśa*) and, as spiritual benefactors (*kalyānamitra*), grant transmissions (*āgama*) concerning the cultivation of enlightened mind; who repair violations of the commitments; who grant the commitments and empowerments. In addition to these types there is also explained a sixth, namely, the teacher whom all venerate as a holy being, and from whom all obtain a little kindness.³⁴

As for the means of veneration, all teachers in general are to be regarded as a genuine object of offering. Consequently:³⁵

“The self is considered as a disease, the teaching as a medication, its experiential cultivation to be efficacious in the mind, and the spiritual benefactor to resemble a learned physician.”

The ‘master of indestructible reality’ (*vajrācārya*), however is to be venerated in three special ways: as a fourth precious jewel, as the Buddha’s equal or superior.

The third basic commitment, that the mantras and seals should not be interrupted, has two aspects. The *mantras* are a skilful means for attaining the accomplishments of the different deities, in which recitation is performed in five sequential steps.³⁶ This attainment is then actually secured by the four seals, namely, the doctrinal seal of thought, the commitment seal of speech, the action seal of transformation, and the great seal of the deity’s body.³⁷

“The best way not to interrupt these (*mantras* and seals) is when their continuity resembles the flow of a river, the mediocre way is when one abides in sessions (of meditation) by day and night, and the worst is when they are not interrupted for a set period of months or years (in retreat), beginning on the fifteenth or eighth day of the month.”

The fourth basic commitment is loving kindness for those siblings who enter the Mahāyāna. In general, six types of sibling are recognized: all sentient beings who are said primordially to be one’s own ‘universal siblings’; all adherents of Buddhism who are described as ‘siblings in the unique teaching’; all ‘harmonious siblings’ who hold identical views and conduct; ‘dear siblings’ who have the same teacher; ‘close siblings’ who listen to the doctrine together; and ‘intimate siblings’ or *vajra*-brothers who receive empowerment together.³⁸

The fifth basic commitment, not to divulge secret truths, indicates that the profound view, meditation, conduct and result of the secret *mantras* are most

³⁴ Vilāsavajra/Lilāvajra, *Clarification of Commitments (Samayavivṛtya)*, TTP, vol. 83, 147.2.4–149.4.8.

³⁵ G. Dorje, *op. cit.*, ch. 19, 1196.

³⁶ These are enumerated in G. Dorje, *op. cit.*, ch. 9, 850. They concern the visualization of oneself, the deity, the mantra, its recitation and the emanation and absorption of light.

³⁷ G. Dorje, *op. cit.*, ch. 19, 1197.

³⁸ *ibid.*, ch. 19, 1198.

secret to unworthy recipients. As stated in the *Propensity for the Commitments* (TTP. 4745), profound view, profundity of conduct, retention of the deity’s name, and signs of accomplishment are described as the ‘four general secrets’. The places, times, assistants, and sacraments for attainment (*sgrub-rdzas*) are the ‘four interim secrets’. The sacraments of commitment (*dam-rdzas*) including the first fruits of offering and *tgator-ma* are the ‘worthy secrets’ which it is improper to display.³⁹ The action of maintaining secrecy is also known as ‘entrustment’ (*gtad-pa*).

Concerning those from whom secrecy should be maintained, the same text says they should be kept secret:⁴⁰

“From all those whose commitments have been violated,
From those who have erred in their commitments,
And those without commitments
Who have not seen the *maṇḍala*,
Whether they are intimate or not.”

If such secrecy is kept, then, as is said in the *Jñānāścaryadyuticakra*.⁴¹

“The mind should not think to teach,
The body performs all its activities covertly,
And speech should not be expressed,
Even though one has the tongue of indestructible reality.”

Among these basic commitments, the first three are “commitments to be attained” because they enable the yogin to attain extraordinary enlightened attributes, while the latter two are “commitments to be guarded” because they guard against contradictions respectively of the teacher’s mind, and of the secret *mantra*.

Now these five basic commitments are said to be inherent in the three fundamental Mahāyoga commitments of Buddha-body, speech and mind.⁴² For example, in the commitments not to abandon the unsurpassed, to venerate the teacher and to have loving kindness for siblings, the yogin should practise veneration through body, praise through speech and respect through mind. Then, the commitment not to interrupt the *mantras* and seals also utilizes the body, speech, and mind in their entirety; while the commitment to secrecy is itself maintained by activities of body, speech, and mind.

The ten ancillary commitments comprise five not to be abandoned (*spang-bar mi-bya-ba lnga*) and five to be acquired (*blang-bar bya-ba lnga*).

³⁹ The Tibetan terms for these ten categories are given in “The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary”, ch. 19, 1201, note 6; see also Lo-chen Dharmaśrī, *gSang-bdag dgongs-rgyan*, 419–20.

⁴⁰ Vilāsavajra/Līlāvajra, *Samayānuśayanirdeśa*, TTP, vol. 83, 149.4.8–150.3.8.

⁴¹ Quoted in “The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary”, ch. 19, 1202.

⁴² On these commitments of buddha-body, speech and mind, see below, 83.

The former are the five conflicting emotions (*pañcakleśa*), which are not to be abandoned for three reasons, corresponding to the ground, path and result.⁴³

Firstly, they are known to be the seeds of Buddha-nature and to be naturally pure, without having to be accepted or rejected. Ultimately they are without inherent existence, and even on a relative level they need not be abandoned since they resemble a mirage. Secondly, when retained by skilful means, conflicting emotions assist the path. This is because the yogin who knows them to be the nature of the five pristine cognitions (*pañcajñāna*), resorts to a short path by experientially cultivating them according to the esoteric instructions. When known correctly, they do produce the enlightened attributes of Buddhahood because they are experienced as pristine cognition. Nor do they bind beings within negative existences, because the yogin is utterly unblemished. The same object endowed with conflicting emotion, which is seen as an object of renunciation by *śrāvakas* and Solitary Buddhas, is seen as an object of conduct by Bodhisattvas, as an object of purity by ordinary adherents of the secret *mantras*, and it is seen as an object to be acquired by the uncommon yogins.⁴⁴

“For example, just as things fashioned from gold have a single nature but are dirty when made into a wash-basin, clean when made into a trough, ornamental when made into bracelets, and become receptacles of offering when made into the representative images of deities, although (conflicting emotions) are conditionally perceived in that way by the different vehicles, their essence is primordially pure pristine cognition. This is truly why the nature of conflicting emotions which are transformed into the realities of ground, path and result are not to be renounced.”

Thirdly, conflicting emotions are not to be abandoned because they themselves are described as the resultant Buddha-bodies and pristine cognitions:⁴⁵

“In this way, delusion is the commitment of Vairocana, who has the pristine cognition of reality’s expanse and belongs to the enlightened family of the Tathāgata. Hatred is the commitment of Akṣobhya who has the mirror-like pristine cognition and belongs to the enlightened family of the vajra. Pride is the commitment of Ratnasambhava who has the pristine cognition of sameness and belongs to the enlightened family of gemstones. Desire is the commitment of Amitābha who has the

⁴³ The source for this section on the ancillary commitments is “The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary”, ch. 19, 1204–11.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, ch. 19, 1208–9.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, 1209–10, based on Vilāsavajra, *Samayavivṛkti*.

pristine cognition of discernment and belongs to the enlightened family of the lotus. And envy is the commitment of Amoghasiddhi who has the pristine cognition of accomplishment and belongs to the enlightened family of activity. Therefore, it is taught that from the moment of the appearance of the five conflicting emotions which arise in all the minds of living beings they are not to be abandoned because they are present as the Buddha-bodies and pristine cognitions.”

As for the five commitments to be acquired: these are the five nectars (*pañcāmṛta*). They are to be acquired for four reasons: Firstly, they are actually regarded as “a display of primordial reality where there is neither acceptance nor rejection”. Secondly, they are the essential nature of the Buddhas of the five enlightened families (*pañcakula*), as it is said in the *sGyu-'phrul thal-ba*:

“The five nectars are the bodies (flesh),
Excrement, urine, and seminal fluids
Of the five enlightened families.”

Thirdly, they are sacraments for attaining accomplishment (*sgrub-rdzas*),⁴⁶ fourthly, dependent on the five nectars and the five meats, the *ḍākinīs* are gathered and accomplishments are approached.⁴⁷ The nectars are therefore to be acquired because they assist the yogin in the conduct of ascetic discipline.

The five basic and ten ancillary commitments, which have been described are said to have three hundred and sixty branches, of which one hundred and sixty are derived from the five basic commitments, and two hundred are derived from the ten ancillary commitments.⁴⁸ Furthermore, the branches of these commitments are also regarded as inconceivable since they may equal the number of ideas accumulated by sentient beings.⁴⁹

7. Commitment in Mahāyoga

This vehicle is entered by the yogin who receives the eighteen aspects of empowerment, known as “beneficence, ability and profundity” (*phan-nus-zab-dbang*). These comprise ten empowerments of beneficence which employ the sacramental objects of crown-ornament, diadem, rosary, armour, victory-banner, seals, parasol, vase, food and drink, and the five nectars (*pañcāmṛta*) as well as five inner empowerments of ability (*nang-nus-pa'i dbang-lnga*) and three secret empowerments of profundity (*gsang-ba zab-mo'i dbang-gsum*).⁵⁰ In view, the

⁴⁶ i.e. through the sacrament of the *pañcāmṛta*, accomplishments (*siddhi*) are received. See *ibid.*, 1210.

⁴⁷ The five meats (*pañcamāṃsa*) are those of human flesh, elephant, horse, dog, and cow (or in other traditions—lion and peacock). See *ibid.*, 1211.

⁴⁸ See *ibid.*, 1211–13, where each basic commitment is subdivided into thirty-two aspects according with *prajñopāya* and buddha-body, speech and mind, attributes, activities, etc., and where each ancillary commitment has twenty aspects, comprising *prajñopāya*, the *pañcajñāna* and the *pañcadhātu*.

⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, 1213, which cites verses from Vilāsavajra, *Samayayiyakti*.

⁵⁰ “The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary”, ch. 10, 865–81.

yogin realizes ultimate truth to be awareness (*rig-pa*) that is spontaneously present without conceptual elaboration, and the relative truth to be the mental energy of this awareness (*rig-pa'i rtsal*) manifesting as a *maṇḍala* of Buddha-body and pristine cognition. Then the non-dual truth (*advayasatyā*) is realized to be the unity of emptiness/awareness and pure appearance.⁵¹

In order to realize the *pañcakāya*, either in one lifetime or in the *bar-do* (Skt. *antarābhava*), the yogin applies the non-symbolic contemplation of ultimate reality and symbolic meditation of the two stages. The latter comprises the creation stage (*utpattikrama*) and the perfection stage (*sampannakrama*). In the creation stage, the indivisibility of deity and thought is gradually visualized through three contemplations (*ting-'dzin gsum*), namely great emptiness (*stong-pa chen-po*) which purifies death, great compassion (*snying-rje chen-po*) which purifies the intermediate states after death (*bar-do*) and the seals and attainment of the *maṇḍala*-clusters (*phyag-rgya dang tshom-bu tshogs-sgrub*) which purify life itself, from conception to old age. In the perfection stage visualization focuses on the energy channels, currents and seminal points (*rtsa-rlung thig-le*) in the body—either in the ‘upper door’ of one’s own body (*rang-lus steng-sgo*) or the ‘lower door’ (sexual centre) of one’s partner’s body (*gzhan-lus 'og-sgo*).⁵²

Twenty-eight commitments (*rnal-'byor chen-po'i dam-tshig nyi-shu-rtsa-brgyad*) are upheld in relation to this meditative practice, renunciation and attainment.⁵³ These are, namely, the three basic commitments of Buddha-body, speech and mind, and twenty five ancillary commitments, namely, five aspects of *sbyor-sgrol*, which are to be practised (*spyad-par bya-ba*), five conflicting emotions of desire, hatred, delusion, pride, and envy which are not to be renounced (*spang-par mi-bya-ba*), five nectars of semen, blood, urine, excrement, and flesh to be adopted (*blang-bar bya-ba*), five aspects to be known (*shes-par bya-ba*), namely, the components, elements, sense-objects, sacraments of the five meats which are considered taboo by mundane beings, and propensities in their pure nature, and five aspects to be attained (*bsgrub-par bya-ba*), namely, Buddha-body, speech, mind, attributes and activities.

8. Commitment in Anuyoga

This vehicle is entered by one who receives the thirty six basic and eight hundred and thirty one ancillary empowerments which are derived from all nine sequences of the vehicle, including the *sūtras*.

⁵¹ bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, book I, 359–63.

⁵² See the section on the paths of Mahāyoga in bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 278–81.

⁵³ These twenty-eight commitments are enumerated in Vilāsavajra, *Samayaviviyakti*, 147–48, and 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul, *Shes-bya kun-khyab-mdzod*, vol. 2, 182–185.

The view of Anuyoga is that all phenomena are the primordial *maṇḍala* of Samantabhadrī (*ye ji-bzhin-pa'i dkyil-'khor*), the uncreated awareness if the spontaneously present *maṇḍala* of Samantabhadra (*rang-bzhin lhun-grub-kyi dkyil-'khor*), and the supreme bliss of their offspring is the fundamental *maṇḍala* of enlightened mind (*byang-chub sems-kyi dkyil-'khor*), without duality of expanse and pristine cognition. In order to realize the body of supreme bliss (*mahāsukhākāya*) with its twenty-five Buddha-aspects in one lifetime, the yogin practices meditation according to the path of skilful means (*thabs-lam*) or the path of liberation (*grol-lam*). The former utilizes the energy channels, currents and seminal points either with reference to one's own body or in union with a partner, and the latter comprises the non-conceptual contemplation of reality (*dharmatā*) and symbolic contemplation of the deities, who are said to appear instantly “in the manner of a fish leaping from the water”.⁵⁴

To sustain this practice, Anuyoga requires the nine enumerations of commitments which are described in the sixty-sixth chapter of the *mDo dgongs-pa 'dus-pa*. These are derived from all the nine vehicles in common, and when abridged they comprise commitments with and without limits to be guarded:⁵⁵

- (a) four commitments definitive to the important Anuyoga *sūtras* (*gal-mdo nges-pa'i dam-tshig bzhi*), namely, purity of body, speech, mind and the entire perceptual range.
- (b) twenty-eight common commitments (*thun-mongs-gi nyi-shu rtsa-brgyad*) which are identical to the commitments of Mahāyoga.
- (c) four superior commitments (*lhag-pa'i bzhi*) which derive from Atiyoga, namely, there are no limits to guard because the essence of commitment is free from transgression and violation; there is an attitude of apathy and evenness because the forms of the subject-object dichotomy have been transcended; all diverse commitments are gathered in the single expanse of mind-as-such; there is commitment to reality (*dharmatā*) itself.
- (d) twenty-three commitments relating to ascetic discipline (*brtul-zhugs-kyi nyer-gsum*), which sustain the paths of the inner tantras in general. Since these are described in fine imagery, I cite them here in full:

“(1) In the manner of a fox (*va*) who has been trapped, and turns away without regard for life itself, having had a limb torn off, the yogin guards the commitments even at the cost of life itself. This is the skilful means which destroys disharmonious aspects and enters into the power of the commitments.

⁵⁴ On Anuyoga, see bDud-'joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 284–89, 363–69.

⁵⁵ These nine enumerations of commitments are all given in 'Jam-mgon Kong-sprul, *Shes-bya kun-khyab mdzod*, vol. 2, 188–192.

- (2) In the manner of the all-knowing horse (*cang-shes*) who knows everything and swiftly encircles everything in a moment, discriminative awareness is unimpeded discipline with respect to all things with individual and general characteristics that can be known.
- (3) In the manner of a Gyiling steed (*gyi-ling*) which roams anywhere with great energy, the respectful body disciplines itself with perseverance and without idleness in the dance, *mudrās* and exercises.
- (4) In the manner of a rutting elephant (*glang-chen spyod*), who, incensed, destroys whatever enemies appear without investigating them, one who knows *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* to be indivisible performs conduct which destroys the four enemies of view and conduct.⁵⁶
- (5) In the manner of a tiger (*stag*) whose aggressive spirit is fierce, overbearing and hostile, the powerful discipline of heroic contemplation which realizes the abiding nature performs rites of ‘liberation’ (*sgrol-ba*) and transference of consciousness (*saṃkrānti*) for those students who are aggressive.
- (6) In the manner of a great *garuḍa* (*khung-chen*) who glides effortlessly through the sky and discerns all without special regard, the view is one of effortless conduct, realized in the indivisibility of the expanse and pristine cognition.
- (7) In the manner of a bear (*dom*) who terrifies and crushes whatever it focuses upon without hesitation, one who has plumbed the depths of the view and conduct of yoga is disciplined in the rites of *abhicāra* and sexual union without hesitation.
- (8) In the manner of an ocean (*rgya-mtsho*) whose golden depths are unmoved, is the discipline of firm unchanging mind which is able (to understand) the profound secret meaning and experiential cultivation.
- (9) In the manner of a dumb mute (*lkug-pa gti-mug-can*) who neither accepts nor rejects, is the discipline which reaches the limit of discriminative awareness, realizing selflessness by impartial meditative absorption.
- (10) In the manner of unmoving Mount Sumeru (*ri-rab mi-g.yo-ba*) is the discipline of skilful means which depends on the unwavering antidote of unchanging loyalty to teacher and friends, and on contemplative absorption.
- (11) In the manner of the vast and extensive sky (*nam-mkha*) which accommodates everything without acceptance and rejection is the

⁵⁶ *lta-spyod-kyi dgra bzhi*. Perhaps these are to be identified with the *caturmāra*, namely, the four ‘demons’ of *devaputra/kāmadeya*, *kleśa*, *mṛtyupati*, and *skandha*.

discipline which is warm, and hospitable to fraternal yogins and the conduct which, without shunning the vehicles of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, remains within this view and conduct of the Great Identity.

(12) In the manner of a thunderbolt (*thog-geng*) which falls and destroys is the discipline which unimpededly destroys all enemies and obstacles by forceful contemplation.

(13) In the manner of Vajrapāṇi (*lag-na rdo-rje*) who destroys all who hold erroneous views, the yogin performs the discipline through which, having meditated on the wrathful deity, one cuts through and destroys these views without hesitation.

(14) In the manner of a crow (*bya-roq*) who looks out for both enemies and plunder at the same time, is the discipline of skilful means which perseveres simultaneously in constant renunciation and acceptance.

(15) In the manner of an elephant (*glang-chen*) who plunges into water without regard for wetness and dryness, one who has plumbed the depths of the view and conduct of Great Identity practises without the duality of renunciation and acceptance; and practises the four rites of enlightened activity without discriminating among those who require training.

(16) In the manner of a friendless lion (*seng-ge*) who sits alone, is the discipline which sustains the view and meditation by abiding in solitude after renouncing those disharmonious associations in view and conduct.

(17) In the manner of a swan (*ngang-pa*) who easily associates without marriage, so is the discipline which associates without ties and the skilful means causing sentient beings to reach the happiness of liberation through compassion and loving kindness.

(18) In a manner of a magician (*sgyu-ma-mkhan*) who constructs illusions, one who meditates and teaches, having understood the components and activity fields to be the apparitional *maṇḍala* of the conquerors, enacts discipline through skilful means.

(19) In the manner of a pig (*phag*), who eats everything without discerning purity and impurity, are the discipline and conduct of sameness, without accepting and rejecting the five sacramental substances.

(20) In the manner of a jackal (*ce-spyang*), who likes to kill without impediment, is the discipline of skilful means which ‘liberates’ heretical thoughts through compassion experienced in view and conduct, and then perfects the provisions by arraying such (deluded) consciousness in an uncorrupted (realm).

(21) In the manner of lightning (*glog*), which illuminates everything swiftly and simultaneously, is the discipline which perseveres so that one's own and others' benefit be swiftly attained through experiential cultivation of the path.

(22) In the manner of a vulture (*bya-rgod*), who avoids the taking of life as a moral discipline, is the discipline which delights in and sustains commitments associated with the Great Identity (i.e. Heruka) but appears not to indulge in other vehicles connected with austere observances.

(23) In the manner of a modest king (*rgyal-po bag-ldan*), who rules the kingdom and dearly protects his subjects rather than himself, the yogin performs acts of pure delightful discipline, protects living beings by realising all things on behalf not of himself but of others and overpowers the kingdom by the discipline which strives through skilful means to experience and realize the indivisibility of the expanse and pristine cognition as supreme bliss. ”

- (e) twenty commitments concerning the attainments (*sgrub-pa'i nyi-shu*), which internalize the fourteen commitments of Yogatantra in combination with the five basic commitments of the inner tantras.
- (f) four of daily conduct (*spyod-lam rgyun-gyi bzhi*) which are associated with Ubhayatantra and Kriyātantra, namely, to abandon sleep which interrupts concentration; to abandon alcohol; to propound the symbolic language of the secret mantras; to destroy idleness.
- (g) four enemies to be destroyed (*dgra-bzhi gzhom-pa*) which are associated with the Bodhisattvayāna, namely, artificiality of view, meditation and conduct; prattle about lower views and trainings; violations of basic and ancillary commitments; deprivation of the goal through speculation and idleness.
- (h) five demons to be renounced (*bdud-lnga spang-ba*), which are associated with the Śrāvakayāna and Pratyekabuddhayāna, namely, insecurity caused by divisive thoughts; laziness with respect to equanimity; caprice with regard to pleasure and social diversions; the sharp sword of harsh speech; fierce wrathful disturbances.
- (i) Lastly there is the commitment of the view (*lta-ba'i dam-tshig*), which unifies all the previous commitments.

9. Commitment in Atiyoga

This vehicle is entered by one who receives the empowerment of the expressive power of awareness (*rig-pa'i rtsal-dbang*) in its elaborate and unelaborate aspects. In view, things of *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* are primordial Buddhahood in the unique seminal point (*thig-le nyag-gcig*) or *dharmakāya*. Liberation occurs in this primordial Buddhahood without hope or doubt. In order to attain the goal at the

present moment on this level of spontaneously perfect Samantabhadra, there are three classes of meditation—mental, spatial and esoteric instructional (*sems-klong man-ngag gi sde-gsum*)—the last of which includes the esoteric instructions of Cutting Through Resistance (*khregs-chod*) and All-Surpassing Realization (*thod-rgal*), which actualize the dharmakāya respectively as the “youthful vase body” (*gzhon-nu bum-pa’i sku*) and the “body of great transformation / rainbow-light body” (*’ja’-lus ’pho-ba chen-po’i sku*).⁵⁷

In conformity with this goal, conduct is without discipline, including the commitments of nothingness, evenness, uniqueness and spontaneity.⁵⁸

10. Integration of the Three Vows

Aware of the dynamic momentum formed by these diverse vehicles and the particular ways in which their philosophical views are associated with the holding of commitments or vows, rNying-ma authors have sought to integrate and present them as a unified blueprint for the practitioner. Perhaps the best known work of this type is mNga’-ris Pañ-chen’s *Ascertainment of the Three Vows* (*sDom-gsum rnam-nges*). The present account is derived from kLong-chen-pa, *Phyogs-bcu mun-sel*, Chapter 19, which concerns the gathering of the three trainings of the *prātimokṣa*, Bodhisattva and *mantra* vows without contradiction.

Despite the apparent contradictions between the commitments of *guhyanmantra* and the *prātimokṣa* vows of the *śrāvakas* who regard the four inimical defeats (*catuḥparājikadharmā*) as the basic transgressions to be avoided, and maintain ancillary prohibitions on the drinking of ale and so forth, there is in fact no such contradiction.⁵⁹

“When the defeat of murder occurs, four elements are required to complete it—the ground or the human being, the thought of hatred which freely incites murder when it is not bewildered in other respects, the main part which is the impeding of the life-breath with weapons and so forth, and the aftermath or satisfaction. In this context (of the secret *mantras*) however, when the rites of ‘liberation’ are performed, there is no defect at all because the aspect of the ground (of murder) is incomplete—the form (of the victim) is visualized as the syllable *hūṃ*, and because it is essentially uncreated, there is no human being, non-human animal or other creature. The aspect of the thought (of murder) is incomplete because one has compassion which desires to separate (the

⁵⁷ On Atiyoga see bDud-’joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 294–345, 369–72.

⁵⁸ On the textual references for these four commitments of Atiyoga, see H.V. Guenther, *Matrix of Mystery*, Boulder & London, 1984, 238. The terms ‘nothingness’ and ‘apathy’ are reminiscent of, but quite distinct in meaning from their usage in *laukikadharmā*. See bDud-’joms Rin-po-che, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, Book I, 63–67.

⁵⁹ G. Dorje, “The Guhyagarbha-tantra and its Commentary”, ch. 19, 1218–20.

being) from suffering and the attitude of a wilful murderer is not present; the aspect of the main part (of the murder) is also incomplete because there is neither an object to be killed, nor a subject which kills, so that there is neither life nor the taking of life; and the aspect of the conclusion (of the murder) is incomplete because afterwards there is no satisfaction motivated by hatred.

Similarly when stealing occurs, the foundation is the need to acquire property as one's own possession. Here however (in the secret *mantras*), because oneself and others are realized to be without duality, one takes property which is self-manifesting in the manner of a dream, and rather than the need for the thought of theft, in this context there is no thought of theft because (the property) is simply the appearance of one's own mind, and is a self-manifesting display. As for the main part (of the action), quite apart from taking possession of (the property) by conceiving elaborately of its full value, that too is incomplete. There is no conceptual elaboration because in the manner of an apparition or a dream there is no duality. As for the aftermath (of the theft), rather than having the thought that one has acquired something, here there is no apprehension of an obtained object or an obtaining subject.

Again, when the defeat of sexual misconduct occurs, the foundation is the need for another man's woman and so forth. However in this context (of the rites of sexual union) the individual (yogins and yoginīs) are creatively visualized as deities. Rather than the need for one who has inserted the penis into the vagina to experience a climax (*bags-rim 'das-pa*), (here) these two organs are visualized as a *vajra* and a lotus, and they are not therefore complete with independently existing characteristics. Even the aspect of thought (associated with sexual misconduct), namely, the desire to experience bliss with an unbewildered attention is incomplete (in this context) because here (bliss) is known within the three *maṇḍalas*.⁶⁰ Therefore there is no defect.

Then, when lies are told, one has to convey a distorted perception to other beings, as when saying that one sees a deity though one actually does not. In this context, however, one knows that all phenomena are considered to be lies, and may be beneficially expressed for the sake of others. Therefore, there is no defect.

Similarly when ale is drunk, it is transformed (through the secret *mantras*) into nectar. The statement that it is improper to taste ale is not contradicted.”

⁶⁰ Tib. *dkyil-'khor gsum*, i.e. those of the male consort, the female consort, and their coalescence.

In order to avoid these four ‘inimical defeats’ within the *śrāvaka* tradition, it is necessary to be a monk or nun, unbewildered by objects and undistorted in perception. However, according to the *guhyamantra*, the *prātimokṣa* vows are not contradicted because all phenomena in this instance are transformed into the *maṇḍala* of deities.

Nor are the Bodhisattva vows contradicted by *guhyamantra* although they oppose the performance of acts harmful to sentient beings. The great compassion and skilful means which desire to benefit others are retained by both the great spiritual warriors (*mahāsattva*) of the *sūtras* and the yogins who follow the tantras.

It is mind-control and purity of vision with respect to the conflicting emotions which enable the yogin to gather and integrate all these levels of training. The *śrāvaka* vows are gathered to bind the mind in order that the yogin might be released from his own suffering.⁶¹

“At the time when life is taken (by the rites of ‘liberation’), there are no non-virtuous thoughts of hatred and so forth. Indeed, the vow which renounces killing is actually subsumed in that rite in order to control one’s own corrupt components with their individual characteristics. The remaining (*prātimokṣa* vows) are similarly incorporated. However coarse the conduct of skilful means may appear, all vows of the *śrāvakas* are essentially and absolutely gathered because the corrupt components with their individual characteristics are under control. For example, when certain doctors prepare a cooling medication for the sickness of fever, they are opposed by some but benefit comes swiftly through the cure. Although these two seem contradictory there is in fact no contradiction. Likewise, although the skilful means of the path appear contradictory, they are actually in complete harmony with the renunciation of conflicting emotions and the attainment of virtue in one’s own mind.”

Similarly, the Bodhisattva vows are gathered in the following way:⁶²

“At the time when one engages in any conduct, the moral discipline of control is present because the wilful indulgence of ordinary conflicting emotions is controlled. Dependent on this, the moral discipline which gathers virtuous doctrines is present because the enlightened attributes of the path are further increased. And, through that skilful means the moral discipline of action on behalf of sentient beings is present because others are benefited and taken into one’s following.”

⁶¹ G. Dorje, *op. cit.*, ch. 19, 1221–22.

⁶² *ibid.*, 1222.

Benefits and retributions

Those who have successfully guarded their commitments are said to accomplish all their purposes, provisional and conclusive. As is said in the *Array of the Three Commitments* (*Dam-tshig gsum-bkod*).⁶³

“One who keeps the commitments of secret *mantras*,
(The vehicle of) indestructible reality,
Will fulfil all aspirations,
And will always be guarded by the deities.
The conquerors, supreme conquerors and their sons too
Assuredly think of that one as their son.
There are inestimable attributes of contemplation,
And one achieves the genuine awareness of Samantabhadra.”

Conversely, the same text describes the retribution exacted when commitments have been violated or divulged to others with a defective attitude:

“When the commitments have been transgressed,
One’s happiness consequently declines.
One experiences diverse unpleasant things
And abides for ten million ‘countless’ aeons
In the suffering caused by terrestrial fires.”

Restoration of commitments

On the question of the repairing or restoration of broken commitments, kLong-chen Rab-'byams-pa says:⁶⁴

“According to the *śrāvakas*, it appears that degenerations can be restored seven times if not kept secret, but if kept secret they cannot be restored even once, just like a broken clay vase. To Bodhisattvas, (this reparation) resembles a broken vase made of gemstones, because degenerations can be restored by relying on a spiritual benefactor, just as a craftsman can (use the gemstones) to make a container superior to the previous one. According to the secret *mantras*, (degeneration) resembles a container of gemstones which has been broken, but can be restored by its own power. It is as if that which has been destroyed is rectified by its own creative energy without the need for a craftsman (*mgar-ba mkhas-pa*).”

Therefore, while *śrāvakas* claim there are no means of restoring broken vows, the secret *mantras* apparently do possess the means capable of repairing violations of the commitments. Purification is said to occur when one has practised fulfilment and confession, attempting to apply one’s own body, speech and mind to the

⁶³ *ibid.*, 1213–14.

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, 1215–16.

foremost commitments of Buddha-body, speech and mind, which have been violated and broken. It says in the *Jñānāścaryadyuticakra*:

“If, when degeneration of commitments has occurred,
One understands the importance of pleasing one’s venerable lord,
This (degeneration) becomes a source of fulfilment.
If one has abused one’s *guru* and siblings,
And if, pleasing them during this very lifetime,
One is remorseful, with fervent confession,
That (abuse) becomes a supreme mode of fulfilment.
If one passes away from this life
Without having fulfilled (violations of commitments)
Relating to oneself or to one’s *guru* and siblings,
One will transgress the bounds of fulfilment.
If one’s pledge of Buddha-speech has been torn to shreds,
Meditate on oneself as Vajradharma,
And recite many hundreds of thousands of times
The pledge which one has lost.
If one’s pledge of Buddha-mind has been torn to shreds,
Meditate on oneself as Vajrasattva,
And without speaking for three years,
Be well united in meditative concentration.
If ancillary pledges have been torn to shreds,
They are fulfilled by means of the different
Respective enlightened families (of deities).”

Conclusion

Future detailed studies of the integration of commitments and vows will derive much information from mNga’-ris Paṅ-chen’s *Ascertainment of the Three Vows* (*sDom-gsum rnam-nges*), the most important practical manual for the living monastic tradition of the rNying-ma school, which maintains the ‘Lower Tibetan Vinaya Lineage’ in O-rgyan sMin-grol-gling and its branch monasteries. The present discussion provisionally indicates some aspects of the relationship between commitment and view, and between commitment and vow, within the context of the nine vehicles in general. In particular, it clarifies that the *sbyor-sgrol* practices of Mahāyoga are fundamentally in harmony with the *prātimokṣa* and Bodhisattva vows. In view of the anxiety which has occasionally been expressed regarding the public reaction to the treatment of the rites of ‘liberation’ (*sgrol-ba*) in Part Five of *bDud-’joms Rin-po-che’s rNying-ma’i chos-’byung*, which will shortly appear in its English version, I would argue that the clarity of kLong-chen-pa’s interpretation should remove such doubts and anxieties. While a very strong case can undoubtedly be made for keeping secret from ‘unworthy recipients’ the actual

means for attainments (*sādhana*) and esoteric instructions which enable the yogin to practice such rites, the publication of general works which clarify these practices from the theoretical standpoint of the view can help remove many misconceptions. Indeed, as the biographies of the great lineage-holders of the *bka'-ma* tradition outlined in Part Five of this text themselves reveal, such attainments and abilities are the products of limitless years or lifetimes of intensive application, rooted continuously in compassion, and rarely seen in this world. They are the preserve of a minute number of yogins, whose attainments of the nine vehicles are beyond the perceptual range of mundane beings such as the beggarly author of this paper, who on account of his clouded thoughts has not the slightest chance of reaching even the first Bodhisattva level.