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The Consonant Dohā

kakhasyadohānāma

· Toh 2266 ·

Degé Tengyur, vol. 52 (rgyud, zhi), folios 55.b–57.b
For referencing Tibetan sources, please see our Scholar's Edition

TRANSLATED INTO TIBETAN BY

Vairocanavajra

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Summary

s.1 *The Consonant Dohā* is a song of realization by the mahāsiddha Saraha with thirty-three stanzas that correspond to the consonants of the Indic alphabet. The verses aim to encourage, inspire, and instruct the yogi on the path of mahāmudrā by means of esoteric instructions. Saraha's instructions largely concern subtle body and consort practices, though the precise meaning is often shrouded in obscure language and metaphor.

Acknowledgements

ac.1 This text was translated by the Subhashita Translation Group. The translation and introduction were produced by Lara Braitstein, Julia Stenzel, Benjamin Ewing, and Lowell Cook. We would like to thank Thupten Jinpa for elucidating several obscure passages and Pema Wangyal Rinpoche for granting us the reading transmission.

ac.2 The translation was completed under the patronage and supervision of 84000: Translating the Words of the Buddha. Jeremy Savage Manheim edited the translation and the introduction, and Ven. Konchog Norbu copyedited the text. Sameer Dhingra was in charge of the digital publication process.

Introduction

i.1 *The Consonant Dohā* is one of fourteen *dohās*, or songs of realization, attributed to the mahāsiddha Saraha (ca. ninth or tenth century CE) in the Tengyur. Saraha is listed as one of the eighty-four mahāsiddhas, or great accomplished tantric masters, renowned for their unconventional conduct and teachings. While little is known about Saraha's life for certain, a number of themes from his hagiography occur regularly: he is said to have been born into a brahmin family and is frequently referred to by the epithet of the Great Brahmin; he apprenticed as a fletcher to a female arrowsmith, famously drawing parallels between arrow making and undertaking a life devoted to meditation; and the teacher who finally pushed him to attain his ultimate realization was his young female consort who, when he emerged after twelve years absorbed in samādhi, scolded him for asking for a radish curry out of season.

i.2 Saraha predominantly taught in the form of spontaneous song with pithy and often hilariously cutting verses. Eschewing the high literary forms associated with *kāvya* belles-lettres, Saraha favored dohā couplets with their vernacular rhythms and earthy imagery as the medium to convey his profoundly esoteric teachings. Though preserved as written text, it is highly likely that his songs were initially composed and transmitted orally. It was through Saraha's dohās that Marpa the translator famously transmitted Saraha's mahāmudrā (Tib. *phyag chen*) lineage to Tibet, transforming the lived religious experience of Tibetans and sparking new directions in Tibetan poetry expressing religious experience and insight.

i.3 *Mahāmudrā* is one of many terms Saraha uses to describe the final goal of the spiritual path, synonymous with the realization of emptiness, the clear light of great bliss, deathlessness, the ultimate, the natural mind, and *sahaja*. The literal translation of *mahāmudrā* is "the great seal," alluding to the view that every moment of experience is innately sealed by awakening. Equally important in Saraha's work is the term *sahaja*, which is used both as a noun

and an adjective: coemergence and coemergent. Alternatively translated as "born simultaneously," "connate," or "innate," it refers to the inseparability of opposites: Every moment of ordinary experience contains the effervescent freshness of the awakened mind. All phenomena—outer and inner—are born simultaneously in each moment of awareness. Epistemologically speaking, this means that when awareness is perfected, so too is the experience of phenomena.

i.4 Mahāmudrā and sahaja can be realized in various ways. In this dohā, Saraha directs meditators to attain the "four joys" through practices belonging to the Yoginī or Mother tantras. Such practices are secret and the instructions we find in the verses are therefore cryptic, the metaphors enigmatic. The dohā presumes that the audience has prior knowledge of these tantric practices. Following such instructions requires faith, devotion, a pure view, and above all the guidance of a qualified guru.

i.5 The supreme practice to bring about this highest realization is that of sexual union (*karmamudrā*), as Saraha asserts in the very first verse. It is superior to any type of conceptual meditation. In this dohā, the partners of the union practice are the yogi and his consort—a youthful low-caste girl, a *ḍoṃbī*—who is regarded as a goddess in spite of (or perhaps precisely because of) her low caste. Because of this emphasis on union, we self-consciously use the gendered pronoun "he" in the translation when the consort is specified as female and the yogi male. When the text permits, we keep the pronouns ambiguous.

i.6 The verses of the dohā and its commentary[1] describe the experience of sexual union in terms of the flows of subtle energies that circulate in the three main channels—the central channel (*avadhūtī*, *dbu ma*), and the right (*rasanā*, *ro ma*) and left (*lalanā*, *rkyang ma*) channels. The side channels are referred to in the dohā as being the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā, the two most powerful and sacred rivers of India. The flow of energy therein, which in a dualistic, confused state is driven by basic afflictions such as attachment, aversion, and ignorance,

comes to a complete stop when the experience of sexual union peaks. Through repeated union practice, the yogi masters the subtle energies and experiences great bliss. The progression toward this goal is based on the theory and practice of the four joys, stated in the commentary in the order of joy, supreme joy, joy-beyond-joy, and coemergent joy. There has been some debate over the position of coemergent joy. While Saraha's *Body Treasury*[2] places coemergent joy as the penultimate, the commentary to this dohā places it in the ultimate position, but mentions that "you can also understand coemergent joy as being between supreme joy and joy-beyond-joy,"[3] which means the third position.

i.7 The experience of the four joys is brought forth by the yogi's mastery of his subtle psycho-physical aspects, namely the energy centers (*cakra*, *'khor lo*), channels, winds, and drops. Through sexual union and meditation, *bodhicitta*, the vital essence that resides at the crown of the head, descends through the main channel in the form of drops, producing the experience of the four joys in descending order. The commentary explains that "bodhicitta is brought down, reversed, retained, and spread."[4] *Reversing* refers to the four joys in ascending order. *Retaining* refers to the control over the emission of semen, and thus over sexual desire-attachment, while *spreading* describes the distribution of bliss throughout the body.

i.8 The dohā also alludes to another set of four—the four moments—referred to as manifold appearances, maturation, consummation, and freedom from defining characteristics. They correlate with the four joys in the following manner: The first stage, joy (*ānanda*, *dga' ba*), is the blissful experience resulting from the first moment, called *manifold appearances* (*vicitra*, *rnam par sna tshogs*) because it involves manifold types of physical contact, such as embracing, touching, kissing, and so forth. At this first level of joy, the meditator produces blazing heat in the emanation-cakra at the navel, which in turn provokes the melting of bodhicitta at the crown, in the great bliss-cakra, which Saraha simply calls "sky" or "space" in the dohā. Supreme joy (*paramānanda*, *mchog dga'*), the second stage, is the experience of blissful awareness during the "yoga

of churning,"[5] i.e., sexual union, called the moment of *maturation* (*vipāka*, *rnam smin*). The third stage is joy-beyond-joy (*viramānanda*, *dga' bral gyi dga' ba*) and is associated with the moment of *consummation* (*vimarda*, *rnam nyed*). And, finally, the fourth, coemergent joy (*sahajānanda*, *lhan cig skyes pa'i dga' ba*), arises with the moment called *freedom from defining characteristics* (*vilakṣaṇa*, *mtshan nyid dang bral ba*). This joy should be understood as being qualitatively different from all the previous stages as it corresponds to the realization of mahāmudrā.

i.9 Typical for the coded language of dohās, Saraha gives a variety of metaphors that express the vibrant, energetic quality associated with the four joys and the realization of mahāmudrā. "Milking the sky" describes the experience of bliss, while "dripping foliage in springtime" illustrates the movement of bodhicitta in the subtle body. The final realization of mahāmudrā is not static but "resounds with an indestructible sound," and inspires the yogi to "dance with vigor." The final realization is also personified as the "lady of the house." Described as Vajrayoginī, this is the integration of emptiness and compassion. Saraha exhorts his listeners, "Do not abandon emptiness or compassion out of confusion!" thereby affirming the Mahāyāna basis of the sexual practices that he praises throughout this dohā.

i.10 As its title suggests, *The Consonant Dohā* was "composed," or more likely sung, in a form of acrostic poetry known as *abecedarian*. This is a form in which the first letter of the words or verses of a poem follows alphabetical order, in this case approximating the Sanskrit alphabet. This poetic form appears throughout world literature ranging from the Hebrew Bible, to medieval Japan, to the work of the modern American children's author Edward Gorey. Little scholarly work has been done on the subject of abecedarian verse in South Asia and it is hard to know exactly how prevalent this form is in that context. Nevertheless, our preliminary research has turned up a number of Indian Buddhist texts that employ the alphabet in a poetic manner. Perhaps the earliest of these are the second-century Gandharan birch-bark fragments containing praises to the

Buddha that employ acrostic form with the Arapacana alphabet. Other notable appearances of alphabetical forms in Indian Buddhist literature are in *The Play in Full*,[6] and in "The Garland of Letters" in the *Mahāyāna Mahāparinirvāṇa Sūtra*. The abecedarian form would go on to exert a major influence on Tibetan poetics where acrostic forms like *ka rtsom* and *ka bshad* continue to be highly popular.

i.11 While *The Consonant Dohā* closely follows the order of the Sanskrit alphabet, it is not a perfect fit. In addition, the actual language of the text appears to be a form of Apabhraṃśa, a late Middle Indo-Aryan language. Apabhraṃśa is derived from spoken languages and often used in Sanskrit literature to convey a colloquial or vernacular flavor. The connection to Apabhraṃśa is signaled by the absence of certain nasals and the interchangeability of others, such as the absence of *ṇya* and the conflation of *ṅa* with *ṇa*. At the same time, the alphabet represented begins with the consonants (*ka kha*) in the style of the Tibetan alphabet, instead of the vowels. This is a curiosity, and may suggest that the source language is a Himalayan hybrid instead of Apabhraṃśa.

i.12 Both *The Consonant Dohā* and its commentary were translated by Vairocanavajra, an Indian master who traveled to Tibet in the twelfth century and is credited with the translation of six dohā texts in the Tengyur. Born to a royal family in the kingdom of Kośala in present-day Orissa, Vairocanavajra left his home and traveled to the famed Nālandā University where he received transmission of the dohā songs from his teacher Surapela. Over the course of his life, Vairocanavajra traveled throughout Tibet and is remembered particularly for establishing the dohā tradition in Tibet. Both texts translated here are described in their colophons as "self-translated" (*rang 'gyur*), meaning that Vairocanavajra translated them on his own. That Vairocanavajra translated these texts without the help of a Tibetan native speaker might explain some of the nonstandard language and usage of particles.

i.13 *The Consonant Dohā* and its commentary have received little modern scholarly attention and there are no Indic or Tibetan commentaries other than the one translated here. Quotes from the dohā on the *ka* and *kṣa* stanzas do, however, appear in *The Emanated Scripture of Pure Perception* (*dag snang sprul pa'i glegs bam*) of the famous Tibetan yogi Shabkar. While *The Consonant Dohā* has been translated into modern Hindi by Rahul Sankrityayan (1893–1963), it had not been translated into English until very recently. Three English translations have been independently produced: this one by the Subhashita Translation Group, who began work on this dohā and its commentary in 2020; one by Karl Brunnhölzl (*Sounds of Innate Freedom*, 2023), with whom the translators engaged in lively discussions about these texts; and one by Roger Jackson (*Saraha: Poet of Blissful Awareness*, 2024).

i.14 The English translation offered here is based on the version preserved in the Degé Tengyur with reference to variant readings found in other editions of the Tengyur. *The Consonant Dohā* and its commentary present unique challenges to translation because of their form as well as the inclusion of a number of transliterated Indic words. We chose to largely follow Vairocanavajra's translation in introducing each letter at the beginning of its verse rather than attempting to find an English word to match the Indic phoneme. We further followed Vairocanavajra's lead by preserving any Indic words that he left untranslated in his Tibetan translation. While we have been unable to find an extant version of these texts in any Indic language despite consultation with several scholars working on Saraha, dohās, and Apabhraṃśa, Sukumar Sen's *Etymological Dictionary of Bengali: c. 1000–1800 A.D.* included many of the mysterious Indic words that are not in any Sanskrit dictionaries.

The Translation

The Consonant Dohā

1.1 Homage to the Blessed One, Glorious Heruka!

1.2 *Ka* is for that which rests in the consort's lotus.
Bodies join together and ambrosia drips;
As the youthful ḍoṃbī[7] embraces you around the neck,
Camphor drips. This is spring[8] foliage.

1.3 *Kha* is for space, emptiness abiding in the forehead.
Naked, unclothed by virtue or nonvirtue,
Dwelling in nirvāṇa even while eating and drinking—
What a joy it is to adopt the ways of the naked yogi!

1.4 Pure space is pervasive and stable.
Ga is for space; milking and milking it, you drink.
Completely bind the Gaṅgā and the Yamunā.
Going and coming will be severed by living in cyclic existence.

1.5 *Gha* is for the bell whose sound delights the glorious Heruka.
Nairātmyā embraces him around the neck, again and again.
The yoginī transfers the winds again and again,
Shifting them into the innate state of mind, the lady of the house.

1.6 *Ṅa* is for the innate nature that is empty of nature,
The innate lady of the house who is not pervaded by virtue and nonvirtue.
If the yogi is able to continuously engender great bliss,
As the darkness of night ceases, empty luminosity emerges.

1.7 *Ca* is for the four joys and being perfectly endowed with them.

O, seize hold of the mind free from the four extremes!
The four moments should be understood from the words of a genuine guru;
The habit of being deluded prevents you from understanding the four drops.

1.8 *Cha*! Abandon the sense faculties and apply the pure nature!
Abandon the sense pleasures, the real and unreal!
Cast away nonsensical talk!
Let go of the taste, and enjoy the sky!

1.9 *Ja* is unborn, ageless, deathless sky.
Wherever you look, the sky is all you see.
Whatever it is, it is just so: suchness.
Whatever is seen, it is just so: the ultimate.

1.10 *Jha*! If you partake of the seeds of many flowers,
That variety will accomplish your body.
If you can drink both honey and oil through the nose,
You will, doubtless, live for a long time.[9]

1.11 Listen! *Ṭa* is the authentic guru's speech that[10] makes the drop descend;
The ground trembles and the drop drips down from the sky.
Hey yogis! Don't lose the path and babble nonsense!
If you babble nonsense, you won't realize coemergence.

1.12 Repeat the mantra with the sound of *ṭhaṭha*.
By embracing the letter *ṭha*, you will find the ground.
If practiced properly, samādhi will unfold.
Understanding space through an authentic guru, there is awakening.

1.13 *Ḍa* is for reciting mantras and taking up with a ḍombī.
Blazing with inner heat, the fluids come trickling down.
The ḍamaru resounds with the language of *anaha*;[11]

By holding the ḍamaru, there is the sound of the yoginī.

1.14 *Ḍha* is for droplets flowing and blending into one.
By flowing, the mind reaches supreme coemergence,
The five senses also flow and integrate with coemergence.
The hidden lady of the house cannot be seen as any *thing* whatsoever.

1.15 *Ṇa* is for the nature of the natural state, empty of nature.
If you understand the natural mind, you will be untainted by virtue and nonvirtue;
They will be driven out by coemergence, the natural lady of the house.
If you attend to her constantly, there will be no birth, death, or bondage.

1.16 *Ta* is for the three bodies, which should be understood relying[12] on the three scriptures.
Meditate relying on the three letters, the words of Saraha!
Allow the mind to be equal!
Look at suchness—what is the point of explanations?

1.17 *Tha*! Stabilize the moon in the sky!
If you cannot keep it stable, how will your body become excellent?
But if you can maintain this stability, the vital winds will dry up.[13]
If it remains stable, your lifespan will increase.

1.18 *Da* is for Saraha's words that incinerate everything and bring immortality.
Perform the ablutions to Great Bliss with the two milks!
If you understand the two drops, that is the pure nature.
Terrible suffering is neither real nor unreal.

1.19 *Dha* is for the true nature of the *dha* [*ḍoṃbī*] who washes.
Though she washes she cannot be seen; she has gone within.
She cannot be seen yet she washes from within.

Welcome the washerwoman according to Saraha's words.
Take deception to be the nature of space.

1.20 *Na* is for the variety that projects[14] from the singular.
Not understanding that, worldly beings assert a variety of things.
To be free of fear, you must pay the toll.
No saṃsāra, no nirvāṇa; nothing else exists.

1.21 *Pa* is for pouring the five ambrosias into the nose,
And for uniting the lotus and vajra again and again, until equanimity is achieved.
Honor the vajra throne with the lotus flower.
Without understanding the nature of the lotus, you will not be the king of great bliss.

1.22 *Pha* is for this sky-like mind that emanates and reabsorbs;
Emanating and unseen, it is said to be like the sky.
The sounds *phaṭ* and *hūṃ* unfold,
Unfolding just like the wish-fulfilling tree.

1.23 *Ba* is for the forest laden[15] with tens of millions of budding Brahmā flowers.
Well laden and beautiful, the fruits of desire are like springtime boughs.
Gaining in mastery, you will then truly dance with vigor.
Whether going or sitting, bring the yoginī to your own body.

1.24 *Bha* is for *bhaga*; the nature of the bhaga abides as emptiness.
I, the archer, say that it is beyond good and bad.
Following the guru's instructions, feast on the five sense pleasures.
Don't be confused! The essence of mind is space.

1.25 *Ma* is for mead, steadily dripping over and over.
Understand the root by serving the glorious guru.

If you can unite mind and awareness at their root,
With the mind perished and severed, there is but one nature.

1.26 *Ya* is for when *nāda* and drops are mixed.[16]
At that moment you realize coemergence[17] through the sound of the yoginī.
Remain in whatever state brings you pleasure.
You will achieve fearlessness in the face of death and rebirth.

1.27 *Ra* is for the drops of sun and moon, beyond death, like space.
When filled by the sun, the way of great bliss is utterly captivating.
Bring drop after drop down into the *rasanā*.
Day and night, wake up[18] to the state of the natural mind!

1.28 Listen! *La* is for the winds, the lady of the house—bring her home!
Bring the *nāda* and drops; they are themselves stainless phenomena.
From the channels *lalanā*, *rasa*, and *avadhūtī* the drops drip—
How amazing! So drink!

1.29 *Va* is for the most supreme of fluids. Drink with enjoyment! Ho!
Vajrayoginī flourishes through enjoyment.
When you delight the glorious yoginī with coemergence,
Then the ḍamaru resounds with the voice of *anaha*.

1.30 *Śa* is for anyone who uses the natural, spontaneous sound of *anaha*
To bring the drops down—they are the master of the yoginī.
Saraha's words have a cooling sound.
Milk the sky again and again and drink the drops that descend.

1.31 *Ṣa* is for when you are delighted by supreme coemergence,
That is when the habit of "self and other" ceases.
Sameness or nonsameness, there is no doubt you will accomplish the yoginī.
Hey! I, the archer, say there is no doubt about this!

1.32 *Sa* is for all things being equal in their lack of existence.
Do not abandon emptiness or compassion out of confusion!
Always delight in coemergent joy!
Supreme coemergence cannot be bound by anything.

1.33 *Ha* is for laughing with a "hey!" and being content with whatever happens.
Ah ha! Delusion is snatched away. Although you are satiated, there is no enjoyment.
Bind your body with the colorless lord!
When you do, the unexcelled will be playfully accomplished.

1.34 *Kṣa* means bodhicitta will go to waste if lost in the object.
If you have the capacity to dry up even oceans with the sound of *kṣakṣa*,[19]
This acts like a whetstone; find joy with sharpened absorption.
Hey! Have no doubt that nakedness is certain to trick everything.

1.35 *This completes "The Consonant Dohā," which was spoken by the great lord of yogis, the glorious great brahmin Saraha.*

Colophon

c.1 It was translated alone by the great master and yogi from the land of Kośala, Vairocanavajra.

Abbreviations

D Degé

N Narthang

Q Kangxi (Peking late 17th c.)

Notes

1. *The Written Explanation to the Consonant Dohā* (*Kakhasya dohāṭippaṇa*, Toh 2267).

2. Saraha's "Body Treasury," verse 95, in Braitstein 2014, p. 143.

3. See the section that begins "*Ca* is for *cautha* or 'four' etc. in *The Written Explanation to the Consonant Dohā* (*Kakhasya dohāṭippaṇa*, Toh 2267, 1.25). The implications of the different positions have been explained at length by Harunaga Isaacson, Francesco Sferra, and Klaus-Dieter Mathes in Isaacson and Sferra 2014.

4. See the commentary on the dohā verse of the letter *la*. Toh 2267, 1.130.

5. See the commentary on the dohā verse of the letter *ṭha*. Toh 2267, 1.48.

6. *The Play in Full* (*Lalitavistara*, Toh 95), 10.16– 10.23.

7. Reading *DoM bI* instead of *DoM bi*.

8. This word "spring" (Skt. *vasanta*, Tib. *dpyid*) could refer to Vasanta, a particular form of Heruka, who is a personification and the god of spring. The section 6.63 from *Emergence from Sampuṭa* suggests such a connection: "He is called Vasanta because, like spring, He brings joy to the hearts of embodied beings."

9. There is no stanza for the letter *ña* at this point. The commentary only explains this by saying, "As for *ña*, it is the same as *ṅa*."

10. Reading *gis* instead of *gi*.

11. We have yet to determine what is meant by this term.

12. Reading *brten* from Q and N instead of *brtan*.

13. Reading *ni* from N instead of *gis*.

14. Following the commentary, reading *'phro ba* for *'pho ba*.

15. Following N in reading *ljid* instead of *rdzing* as in D.

16. While the Tibetan reads *smras na*, it is likely that this is a textual error as it is difficult to make sense of. We are reading *sres na* instead on the advice of Dr. Thupten Jinpa and in light of the commentarial gloss.

17. Reading *pa* from N and Q instead of *par*.

18. Reading *sad* in place of *sod* because the meaning fits the context and the commentary, and it would be an easy mistake to make.

19. As it is often the last letter of the alphabet, *kṣa* is associated with the end of phenomena, destruction, disappearance, and so forth.

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Glossary

avadhūtī

a wa d+hU tI, rtsa dbu ma

ཨ་ཝ་དྷཱུ་ཏཱི།, ཙ་དབུ་མ།

avadhūtī

The body's main subtle channel (Skt. nāḍī, Tib. rtsa), running along the spinal column.

bhaga

b+ha ga

བྷ་ག

bhaga

channel

rtsa

ཙ།

nāḍī

The channels are subtle psycho-physical routes that run through the body. There are typically said to be 72,000 channels in the body. Of these, however, the most important are the three main channels: the central channel (Skt. avadhūtī, Tib. dbu ma), the right channel (Skt. rasanā, Tib. ro ma), and the left channel (Skt. lalanā, Tib. rkyang ma).

coemergence

lhan cig skyes pa

ལྷན་ཅིག་སྐྱེས་པ།

sahaja

The final state of realization or wisdom, achieved through the tantric practice of the four joys, notably through sexual union practice. Tantric adepts equate it

with the realization of mahāmudrā, emptiness, or suchness and describe it as transcending all dualistic conceptualizations.

coemergent joy

lhan cig skyes pa'i dga' ba

ལྷན་ཅིག་སྐྱེས་པའི་དགའ་བ།

sahajamudita, sahajānanda

The fourth of the four joys.

ḍamaru

Da ma ru

ཌ་མ་རུ།

ḍamaru

A small two-headed drum played with one hand.

ḍoṃbī

DoM bi

ཌོཾ་བི།

ḍoṃbī

A low-caste woman, specifically of the washer caste.

drop

thig le

ཐིག་ལེ།

bindu

Also translated as "sphere" or "essence," in tantric yogic practices, these are the nucleus or seed of the awakened mind. They are said to have correlates on the physical plane as white and red fluids.

five ambrosias

bdud rtsi lnga

བདུད་རྩི་ལྔ།

pañcāmṛta

The five ambrosias typically include feces, urine, semen, menstrual blood, and brains (sometimes also marrow or phlegm), though this can vary according to tradition.

five sense pleasures

'dod yon lnga

འདོད་ཡོན་ལྔ།

pañcakāma

The five sense pleasures are pleasing visual objects, sounds, fragrances, tastes, and tactile sensations.

four drops

thig le bzhi

ཐིག་ལེ་བཞི།

caturbindu

The four drops correspond to body, speech, mind, and wisdom.

four extremes

mtha' bzhi

མཐའ་བཞི།

catuṣkoṭi

While there are several classic enumerations of the four extremes, here the four extremes are eternalism, nihilism, the real, and the unreal.

four joys

dga' ba bzhi

དགའ་བ་བཞི།

caturānandā

The four joys are joy (ānanda, dga’ ba), supreme joy (paramānanda, mchog dga’), joy-beyond-joy (viramānanda, dga’ bral), and coemergent joy (sahajānanda, lhan cig skyes dga’).

four moments

skad cig bzhi

སྐད་ཅིག་བཞི།

catur kṣaṇa

The four moments are manifold appearances, maturation, consummation, and freedom from defining characteristics.

Gaṅgā

gang gA

གང་གཱ།

gaṅgā

The most important holy river in India, more commonly known in English as the Ganges.

Great Bliss

bde mchog

བདེ་མཆོག

Saraha uses this term with a double valence to possibly refer to both the deity Cakrasaṃvara (Tib. ’khor lo bde mchog) and the experience of that deity, which is the nature of great bliss.

Heruka

he ru ka

ཧེ་རུ་ཀ

heruka

A general term for wrathful deities. Also a specific way of referring to Cakrasaṃvara.

inner heat

gtum mo

གཏུམ་མོ།

caṇḍālī

This term has a number of connotations including an outcaste woman, one of the female deities in the retinue of Hevajra, and the mystic heat below the navel, personified as a goddess. Tantric literature often plays with these to create multiple levels of understanding.

Kośala

ko sa la

ཀོ་ས་ལ།

kośala

The region in India where Vairocanavajra was born. Known today as Orissa.

lalanā

la la nA, rkyang ma

ལ་ལ་ན།, རྐྱང་མ།

lalanā

The subtle channel (Skt. nāḍī, Tib. rtsa) on the left side of the body, parallel to the avadhūtī.

nāda

nA da

ན་ད།

nāda

Nairātmyā

bdag med ma

བདག་མེད་མ།

nairātmyā

Nairātmyā literally means “no-self.” She is Heruka’s consort personifying the absence of self.

rasanā

ra sa nA, ro ma

རྲ་ས་ནཱ, རོ་མ།

rasanā

The subtle channel (Skt. nāḍī, Tib. rtsa) on the right side of the body, parallel to the avadhūtī.

samādhi

ting nge ’dzin

ཏིང་ངེ་འཛིན།

samādhi

A state of mental absorption or one-pointed concentration.

Saraha

mda’ bsnun, sa ra ha

མདའ་བསྣུན།, ས་ར་ཧ།

saraha, śaraha

One of the eighty-four mahāsiddhas, known for his dohās. Lived circa ninth century ce.

suchness

de nyid

དེ་ཉིད།

tathātā, tattva

The ultimate nature of things, which cannot be conveyed in conceptual, dualistic terms.

three bodies

sku gsum

སྐུ་གསུམ།

trikāya

The Buddha is often described in terms of three bodies: the dharmakāya, the saṃbhogakāya, and the nirmāṇakāya.

Vairocanavajra

bai ro tsa na badz+ra

བཻ་རོ་ཙ་ན་བཛྲ།

vairocanavajra

Vairocanavajra was an Indian paṇḍita from South Kośala who was active in Tibet during the twelfth century. He is remembered in the Tibetan tradition for translating and transmitting many dohās and their commentaries.

Vajrayoginī

rdo rje rnal ’byor ma

རྡོ་རྗེ་རྣལ་འབྱོར་མ།

vajrayoginī

A Buddhist goddess.

wind

rlung

རླུང་།

prāṇa, vāyu

A subtle form of energy that travels through the body’s channels (Skt. nāḍī, Tib. rtsa). It is manipulated in tantric practices to achieve high levels of realization.

Yamunā

ya mu na

ཡ་མུ་ན།

yamunā

A river in North India, still called by the same name today.