SUMTHRANG SAMDRUP CHODZONG · URA · BUMTHANG

Sumthrang Kangsol

A five-day Vajrakila practice of sacred dances and blessings

23 – 27 DECEMBER 2026



DORJE ZHÖNNU · VAJRAKILA

23 DAY 1	**Opening of the Kangsol**	Procession of the Choje to the temple, cleansing rites and Chamju
24 DAY 2	**Dragtsen Dorji Dradul**	The Sumthrang Horse Dance inside the temple, its second episode in the courtyard, and other dances
25 DAY 3	**Vajrakila Dance**	Chaging and Tshog ging–Vajrakila deity dances; evening wine offering from the cauldron of Pema Lingpa's treasure
26 DAY 4	**Torma Hurling**	Torma hurling, Chung zhi and other dances
27 DAY 5	**Thongdrol of Nyo Gyalwa Lhanangpa**	Unfurling of the Thongdrol, Sumthrang's unique Nga Chung Drukdir Ngacham, and Sumthrang's relics displayed for public blessing



PRESIDED OVER BY

The 28th Sumthrang Dungzin Sonam Nyenda

All are welcome

About the Kangsöl



Kangsöl (བསྐང་གསོལ་) literally means fulfilment and supplication. The community fulfils the wishes of the spiritual deities by making amends for wrongdoing and lapses, and supplicates them for protection and support. The prayers are made especially to the Vajrakila deities and their retinue, to seek their blessings and protection for the lineage and the community, and their speedy action to promote the teachings of the Buddha.

This ritual of making amends and supplication is conducted with many offerings of food, drinks and other items. While the core of the ceremony is meditation practice involving visualization of the Vajrakila or Dorjé Phurpa (རྡོ་རྗེ་ཕུར་པ་) deities and the recitation of mantras, it is also a festive event with a robust culture of fun and enjoyment.

When it is held

Traditionally, Sumthrang Kangsöl is held annually between the 26th and 29th days of the tenth lunar month, which is considered the month for 'tantric practitioners to hurl wrathful cakes' (སྔགས་པ་རོར་འཕེན་ཐེ་དུས་). In recent times it is sometimes held on the same days of the ninth or eleventh lunar months, according to the convenience of the organizers.

Bhutan's first festival

Sumthrang Kangsöl is probably the first religious festival in Bhutan. It was first conducted in Sumthrang after the establishment of Sumthrang Lhakhang in the 1220s. Sumthrang Ngacham (སུམ་འཐྲང་ང་ཆམ་) is thought to be the first mask dance ever choreographed and performed in Bhutan.

The Sumthrang Kangsöl consists of tantric rituals, recitation of mantras associated with the wrathful Buddha Vajrakila, performances of mask dances, and festive fun in the evenings, when lay people and priests go around the village on alcohol rounds known as Changkor.



The Five Days

The Sumthrang Kangsöl is conducted over five days, with a programme of activities that follows the ritual text of the Vajrakila practice. In the morning the priests begin the ritual and recitation of the Kila practice, and during the day they perform mask dances. The priests then continue the rituals and religious practice in the temple until evening.

Day 1 · Tagön (སྟག་མོན་), Preparation

The first day is for preparing the activities for the rest of the festival. The ritual dough figures called tormas are completed, and the shrine is fully laid out and arranged according to tradition.

In the evening the ritual of exorcism, gektré (གེགས་བསྲད་), is conducted. It dispels all evil forces so that the community is freed from evil and the Kangsöl is completed without obstacles. It involves a mask dance inside the temple by two or four dancers wearing the male and female ging masks.

After the dance in the temple, a procession of lamas, the ging mask dancers and the villagers visits each household in Sumthrang village to drive all evils out of the houses and the neighbourhood. The procession meets at a place confirmed by an astrologer-priest, where a homkhung, a conical structure of hay and old bamboo baskets on a pole, is built for a bonfire. The homkhung is burnt to create glorious flames that burn away or expel the evils.

Day 2 · Tsan Cham (བཙན་འཆམ་)

The second day is dedicated to Sumthrang's tutelary deity, Draktsen Dorjé Dradül (བྲག་བཙན་རྡོ་རྗེ་དགྲ་འདུལ་), a mountain god of the tsen (བཙན་) class of spirits. As every day, the Vajrakila ritual and practice begins at around three in the morning. On this day the practice focuses on the constructive visualization through which practitioners develop the selfless Vajrakila form.

The main proceedings of the day are the gratification of and supplication to Draktsen Dorjé Dradül, making amends for any failure and asking him and his retinue for protection and support. The dance of Draktsen and his attendants is therefore the main dance of the day.

After breakfast the priests perform the special ritual of Draktsen. When the invitation of Draktsen Dorjé Dradül and his attendants to the feast offering begins, his huge image is received into the temple in procession, with the mask dance of his attendants, the kings of the four cardinal directions.

Once the Draktsen ritual and dance in the temple are complete, the day's mask dances are performed in the courtyard after lunch:

1. Sidpa Phomo, or the Sumthrang Gadpo Ganmo Dance
2. Shinjé Sacha Phomo Cham
3. Tacham, the horse dance of Draktsen's attendants, the kings of the four directions



The Five Days, continued

Day 3 · Draklé

The rituals inside the temple on the third day remain the same as on previous days, while another set of mask dances is performed in the courtyard. The Vajrakila practice on this day includes the violent activity (དྲག་ཡས་) of liberation and subjugation, so in the evening the daplé (གདབ་ལས་) ritual, the action of 'piercing the evils' with the dagger of Vajrakila, is performed. After breakfast, these mask dances are performed:

1. Sacha Chung Dzam
2. Gomazhi
3. Chaging (Throwo Chui Cham)
4. Tsoging (Thromo Chui Cham)

In the evening, as part of the ritual exhorting the Buddha Vajrakila to speedy action, a libation ritual known as the Püchang Gutsi (ཕུར་ཆང་དགུ་རྩེ་), or nine-fold alcohol offering, is made. The alcohol is carefully fermented from nine different cereals for this event. The püchang, the first portion of the alcohol, is offered in a cauldron said to have been discovered by Tertön Pema Lingpa.

After the libation, the incumbent chojé (ཆོས་རྗེ་), or religious lord, offers his apologies to the deities and dharma protectors for any misconduct and shortcomings, followed by an impressive liturgy of supplication asking them to be more active, strong and powerful in carrying out their duties. The püchang is then offered to all those gathered in the temple.

The püchang is followed by the daplé, in which the chojé, dressed as a tantric master with a black hat, subjugates the evil. An effigy of the evil laid in a triangular box is brought out by four dancers wearing the masks of four different birds, the gomazhi (སྒོ་མ་བཞི་) or door guardians of the Vajrakila mandala. The box is placed on a black cloth held at its four corners by the door guardians.

The chojé, in the form of a ngagchang (སྔགས་འཆང་) or tantric master, follows the ritual text to pierce and crush the evil forces. The ritual ends with the offering of the remains of the evil to the mandala of Vajrakila and his retinue.





The Five Days, concluded

Day 4 · Torgyab (གཏོར་རྒྱབ)

The rituals and practices in the temple continue as on the previous days. The mask dances performed on the day of Torgyab are:

1. Sha Dzam
2. Durda Cham
3. Zhanak Nak Cham
4. Nyulema (Zhawri, as it is known locally)
5. Chung Zhi

The torgyab, or exorcism by hurling a ritual effigy, is generally attended by large crowds. It is another event of the Kangsöl associated with exhorting speedy action. Termed phanglé (འཕངས་ལས་), the action of casting, in the Vajrakila ritual, it is the throwing of the wrathful effigy, which represents a wrathful divine force that scares away and destroys the evil forces harming the Buddha's teachings, the practitioners and the patrons.

The ritual effigy is taken in procession to the place where the homkhung is erected from a pile of hay, old bamboo baskets and a pole. Following the ritual text, six dancers, the two garudas and the four gomazhi or door guardians, together with the tantric master in the form of the black hat dancer, throw the main wrathful cake of Vajrakila into the flaming homkhung. The procession returns to the temple courtyard reciting the words of victory, and everyone gathered performs the victory dance in rejoicing.

Day 5 · Thongdrol of Nyo Gyalwa Lhanangpa

On the final day the Thongdrol of Nyo Gyalwa Lhanangpa (1164–1224) is unfurled, and Sumthrang's relics are displayed for public blessing.

The public spectacle of the day is Sumthrang's unique Sangwé Ngacham. This dance is connected with the Ngachung Sangwé Drukdir, the small sacred drum that helped the founder find Sumthrang.

The main rituals of the Kangsöl conclude in the temple with the trashi monlam (བཀྲ་ཤིས་སྨོན་ལམ་), prayers for auspiciousness.



The Dances of Sumthrang

The mask dances of Sumthrang Kangsöl are unique to Sumthrang. Only some temples in eastern and central Bhutan that were once branches of Sumthrang perform some of its dances. Based on its history and the biographies of the chojés, Sumthrang Kangsöl is likely the first annual public religious festival in Bhutan, and its mask dances perhaps the first mask dances of Bhutan.

Sumthrang's Sangwé Ngacham, choreographed and introduced by the founder himself, is probably Bhutan's first mask dance. Other dances seem to have been added over the following centuries by later lineage holders of Sumthrang as the festival developed. Even these later additions predate most of Bhutan's popular mask dances; Sumthrang's dances were certainly performed before the famous dances associated with Pema Lingpa that are now popular across Bhutan.

All the dances except the Tsencham, the dance of Sumthrang's tutelary deity, are based on the forms, actions and concepts of the Buddha Vajrakila and his retinue. They are therefore unique to Sumthrang, passed down through the generations of Sumthrang chojés and their community of priests.

1 · Sangé Ngacham (གསང་གཉིད་འཆམ་), the Secret Drum Dance

Exclusive to Sumthrang, this dance is performed by twelve men wearing the masks of eleven animal heads, including two dog faces. It was choreographed by Sumthrang's founder, Nyöton Trulzhig Chojé (1179–1265), in gratitude and homage to the small sacred drum that helped him find the destined place of Sumthrang. The drum is called Ngachung Sangwa Drukdir (ངའུང་གསང་བ་འབྲུག་སྡིར་), the small secret drum with the dragon's resonance.

Its steps portray the Vajrakila deities performing the dance of victory over evil, and it is considered the tercham (གཏེར་འཆམ་), the esoteric treasure dance, of Sumthrang. This and the black hat dance are probably the only two dances performed in the founder's time, after he established his seat at Sumthrang in the 1220s.

2 · Tsencham or Tacham (བཙན་འཆམ་ / རྟ་འཆམ་), the Horse Dance

This dance is performed by dancers representing the kings of the four directions, each riding a horse of a different colour: white, yellow, red and green. They are not the common kings of the four directions seen in the murals of dzongs and temples, but the attendants of Sumthrang Draktsen, the local tsen deity of Sumthrang.

Draktsen has been a deity of Sumthrang since time immemorial, but he was recognized and elevated as a protector after Nyöton Trulzhig Chojé founded his seat, and he has played many important roles as Sumthrang's special spirit. The Tsencham was introduced into the Kangsöl by the 6th Sumthrang Chojé, Jamyang Drakpa Özer (1382–1442), who is said to have composed its steps after Draktsen and his four attendants performed the dance for him.



The Dances, continued

3 · Zhanak Ngacham (ཞྭནག་སྐྱགས་འཆམ་)

Performed by ten men, this dance represents the tantric practitioners of the ten forms of Vajrakila and depicts Vajrakila yogis subduing the evil forces. It is hard to say when it was introduced. It may have been performed since the time of the founder, the only Vajrakila practitioner to establish a centre for this practice in Bhutan; alternatively, it may have been introduced by the 3rd Sumthrang Chojé, Vajra Düpa (1262–1296), together with two other dances with similar steps that are credited to him.

4 · Tsoking (རྩོགས་གིང་)

This dance of the ten male wrathful deities of the Vajrakila mandala was first performed under the 3rd Sumthrang Chojé, Vajra Düpa, who saw the dances in a vision of Guru Rinpoché's great Copper-Coloured Palace. He is also said to have made the Vajrakila scroll paintings of Sumthrang, the main one reputedly bearing the chojé's own face: he is said to have posed with a wrathful expression, saying that Dorjé Zhönnu, Vajrakila, should look something like this.

5 · Chaging (བཅའ་གིང་)

The dance of the ten female wrathful deities of the Vajrakila mandala, also introduced by Chojé Vajra Düpa.

6 · Chungzhi (གཅུང་གཞི་)

Originally from Sumthrang, the Chungzhi is also performed at Ura Yakchö after Gaden Lam taught it to the Ura dancers; until it was taken to Gaden and later to Ura, it was performed only in Sumthrang. It has two parts: the Nyeleyma (རྙལ་ལེ་མ་) or Zhawri, depicting the evil force, and the dance of four male and female garudas, the enlightened force that destroys the evil.

7 · Gomazhi (སྒོ་མ་བཞི་)

The dance of the four door guardians of the Vajrakila mandala. The dancers carry out an effigy of the evil forces to be subdued and place it in the middle of the ground for the dance that offers the remains, which at Sumthrang is done during the Tsoking cham.

8 · Sachak Shinjé (ས་བཅག་གཤིན་རྗེ་)

Danced by a pair wearing bull-head masks on the morning of the first day, before the other dances, to sanctify the space and surroundings so that the performances that follow are not disturbed. It is performed in other dzongs and monasteries too, but Sumthrang's has unique steps related to the Vajrakila practice.



The Remaining Dances

9 · Sacha Chungzam (ས་བཅག་ཕྲུང་རྩམ་)

An exclusive dance by four dancers in garuda masks, performed on the morning of the second day before the other dances to sanctify the ground.

10 · Sacha Shadzam (ས་བཅག་ཤ་རྩམ་)

Performed by four dancers in stag masks on the morning of the third day, before any other dances, also to sanctify the surroundings.

11 · Durdak (དུར་བདག་)

The dance of the guardians of the cremation grounds is widely performed in Bhutan, though Sumthrang's has some unique steps. The dancers carry out the effigy of evil to be destroyed by the Zhanak Ngacham that follows.



All are welcome

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texts.mandala.library.virginia.edu/text/sumthrang-kangsöl