



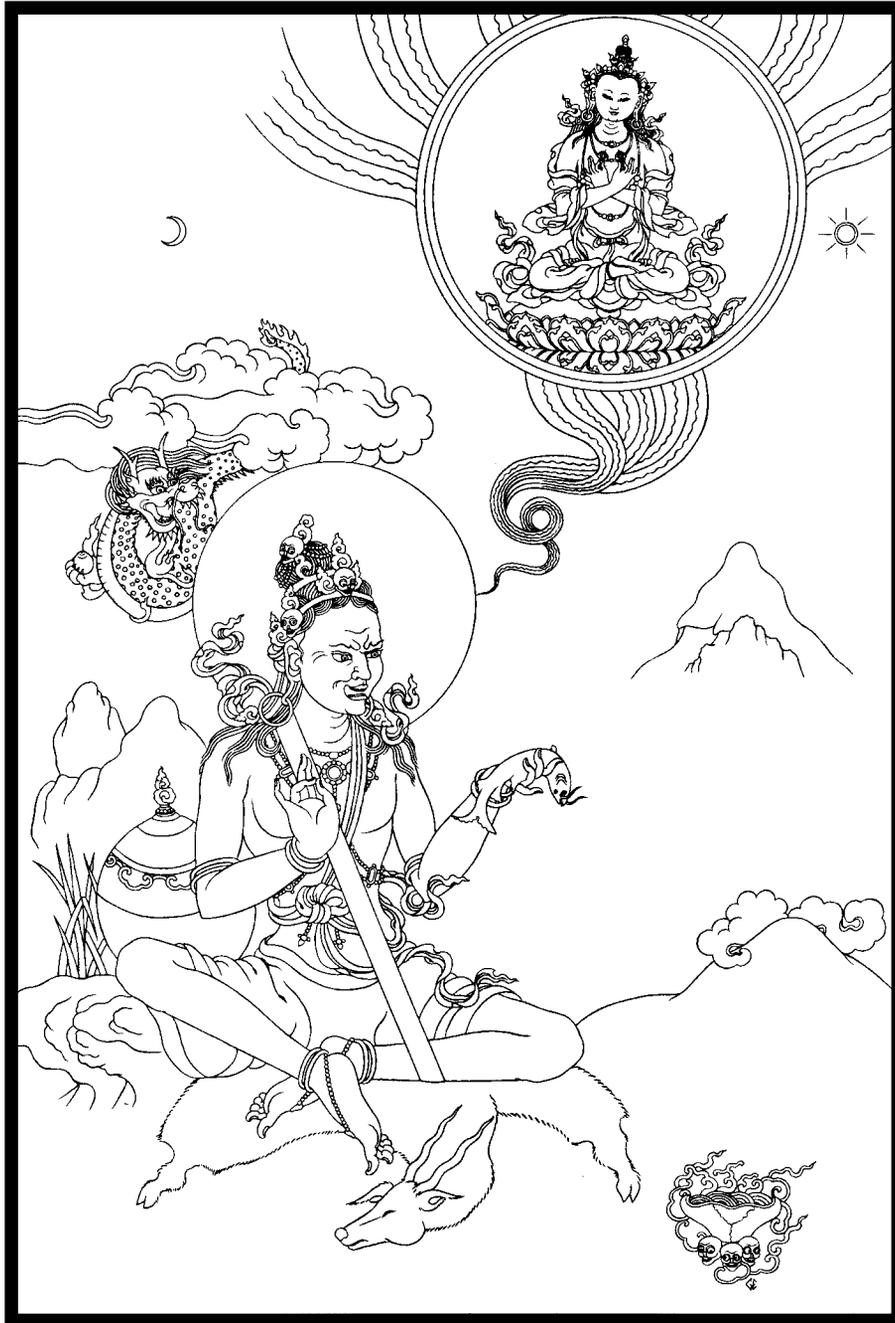
Shenpen Ösel

The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings



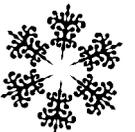
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The intellect cannot see that which is beyond conceptual mind, and you will never realize that which is uncreated through created dharmas. If you wish to attain or realize that which is beyond the intellect and is uncreated, then scrutinize your mind and strip awareness naked.

—Tilopa



Shenpen Ösel

The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Beings



Volume 3

Number 3

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This issue of Shenpen Ösel is devoted to a series of teachings given by The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche in Vancouver, British Columbia, in June of 1998. In addition to the translated, transcribed, edited text of the teachings, we have included two versions of the text that was the subject of Rinpoche's commentary.

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Shenpen Ösel is a tri-annual publication of Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC), a center for the study and practice of Tibetan vajrayana Buddhism located in Seattle, Washington. The magazine seeks to present the teachings of recognized and fully qualified lamas and teachers, with an emphasis on the Karma Kagyu and the Shangpa Kagyu lineages. The contents are derived in large part from transcripts of teachings hosted by our center. Shenpen Ösel is produced and mailed exclusively through volunteer labor and does not make a profit. (Your subscriptions and donations are greatly appreciated.) We publish with the aspiration to present the clear light of the Buddha's teachings. May it bring benefit and may all be auspicious. May all beings be inspired and assisted in uncovering their own true nature.

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Introduction

The teachings in this issue of *Shenpen Ösel*, Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary on *Mahamudra Upadesha*, contain the mahamudra pointing-out instructions given on the banks of the Ganges River by the Indian mahasiddha Tilopa to his foremost disciple, the great pandit and mahasiddha Naropa, sometime in the eleventh century of the common era. Tilopa is regarded as preeminent among Indian siddhas. According to tradition, it was based on these instructions that Naropa attained enlightenment.

Now for nearly a thousand years these instructions have been transmitted through an unbroken lineage of realized teachers, beginning with Marpa the Translator, the first of the Tibetan holders of the lineage, all the way down to the Sixteenth Karmapa and the present generation of enlightened Tibetan and Himalayan teachers. Thus, the publication of this commentary of the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche represents something quite wonderful and quite extraordinary.

For practitioners of long standing who have received the fourth initiation or other mahamudra pointing-out instructions, this text will represent the lama in the form of the dictates of the sugatas, and will remind them of and enhance their understanding of their own mahamudra practice and help them to fine-tune it. For the very rare and extraordinary beginner, this text may serve as an effective practice manual, but for most beginners in the study and practice of dharma, as simple as this text may sound, it will serve as a kind of roadmap of future practice possibilities. For all practitioners, the experience of studying and meditating on this text will be enhanced by receiving its transmission from one of our great Kagyu lamas. The text is very pithy, some 120-130 lines, and most lamas could give the transmission of it in five or ten minutes. I may get in trouble for suggesting this, but the next time such a great lama for whom you have great devotion is teaching in your neighborhood, don't be shy to tell him or her that this commentary of Thrangu Rinpoche's has been published and ask for the transmission of the text; ask for a *lung* or a *lung-tri*. We would offer the same advice for the other texts that have been published in the pages of *Shenpen Ösel*, the study of which will be enhanced by receiving the appropriate transmission—*The Aspiration Prayer of Mahamudra*, the teachings on the bardo by Tsele Natsok Rangdrol, the mahamudra instructions of the great Indian and Tibetan mahasiddhas from The Ninth Karmapa's *Ocean of Definitive Meaning*, etc.

To receive the greatest benefit from these words of Tilopa's, a practitioner must give rise to strong, uncontrived, single-pointed devotion to the instructions and to the root and lineage lamas conveying them. An increase in devotion means an increase in realization. Such devotion is not always spontaneously present. But it can be easily cultivated through the practice of ngöndro and various yidam practices, and by contemplating the qualities of

the lama and of the buddha, dharma, and sangha. It may take many years of practice to effect the kind of mental purification necessary to realize fully the meaning of these instructions. Preparation is everything. If one accomplishes the preliminary practices properly, the more advanced practices will be accomplished very quickly, even instantly.



We would like to draw the readers' attention to the following errors in the last issue of *Shenpen Ösel*. On page 59 and elsewhere in the body of the commentary, the first hinayana tenet system, was misspelled as Vaibhasheka. It should be spelled either Vaibhashika or Vaibhasika. Also, the editor's note on page 71 states that "the principal Buddhist views in ascending order are the hinayana schools of Sautrantika and Vaibashika . . ." They should be given the other way around: the Vaibhashika (the Particularist School) and the Sautrantika (the Sutra School).



We would like to give special thanks to the members of the Karme Kagyu Center of Vancouver for sponsoring these teachings and for their cooperation in their publication. We would also like to thank Shambhala Publications for giving us permission to reprint the line drawing of Tilopa from Chögyam Trungpa's *Cutting through Spiritual Materialism*, and for their permission to reprint Trungpa Rinpoche's translation of *Mahamudra Upadesha*, originally published in his book, *The Myth of Freedom*. It should be pointed out that there are at least two versions of this text transmitted in the various Kagyu lineages. A careful reader will therefore notice that the translation and order of verses as they are presented in *The Myth of Freedom* are considerably different from their presentation in Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary. The essential meaning, however, is the same. ㊦

—Lama Tashi Namgyal

Mahamudra Upadesha

Although mahamudra cannot be taught, intelligent and patient Naropa, tolerant of suffering, who is engaged in austerity and is devoted to the guru, fortunate one, do this with your mind.

For example, in space what is resting on what?

In one's mind, mahamudra, there is nothing to be shown.

Rest relaxed in the natural state without attempting to alter anything.

For example, it is like looking in the middle of the sky and not seeing anything. In the same way, when your mind looks at your mind, thoughts stop and you attain unsurpassable awakening. If this fetter or bondage of thought is loosened, there is no doubt that you will be liberated.

For example, just as the vapor that, arising from the earth, becomes clouds and dissolves into the expanse of space, not going anywhere else and yet not continuing to abide anywhere, in the same way the agitation of the thoughts that arise from the mind and within the mind is calmed the instant you see the mind's nature.

For example, just as the nature of space transcends color and shape, and just as space is therefore unaffected or unchanged and unobscured by the various colors and shapes that occur within it, in the same way the essence of your mind transcends color and shape, and, therefore, is never obscured or affected by the various colors and shapes of virtue and wrongdoing.

For example, it is like the luminous heart of the sun, which could never be obscured even by the darkness of a thousand eons. In that way, that luminous clarity, that is the essence of the mind, is never obscured by the samsara of innumerable kalpas.

For example, just as we apply the term empty to space, in fact, there is nothing within space that we are accurately describing by that term. In the same way, although we call the mind clear light or luminosity, simply calling it so does not make it true that there is actually anything within the mind that is a true basis for that designation.

In that way the nature of the mind has from the beginning been like space, and there are no dharmas that are not included within that.

Abandoning all physical actions, the practitioner should rest at ease.

Without any verbal utterance, your speech becomes like an echo, sound inseparable from emptiness.

Think of nothing whatsoever with the mind and look at the dharmas of the leap.

The body is without meaning, empty like a bamboo stalk. The mind is like the midst of space. It is inconceivable. Rest relaxed within that, without letting it go or placing it. Rest relaxed in that state without sending it out, or placing it in, letting it go or attempting to place it. . . . [If mind has no direction, it is mahamudra.] . . . with this you will attain unsurpassable awakening.

Those who follow tantra and the vehicle of the paramitas, the vinaya, the sutras, and the various teachings of the Buddha with an attachment for their individual textual traditions and their individual philosophy will not come to see luminous mahamudra, because the seeing of that luminosity or clear light is obscured by their intention and attitude.

The conceptualized maintenance of vows actually causes you to impair the meaning of samaya. Without mental directedness or mental activity, be free of all intentionality. Thoughts are self-arisen and self-pacified like designs on the surface of water. If you do not pass beyond the meaning which is not abiding and not conceptualizing or focusing, then through not passing beyond that, you do not pass beyond or transgress samaya. This is the torch which dispels all obscurity or darkness.

If, free of all intention, you do not abide in extremes, you will see without exception the meaning of all the Buddha's teachings or of all the takas, the sections of the Buddha's teachings.

If you rest in this you will be liberated from the prison of samsara.

If you rest evenly within this, all of your wrongdoing and obscurations will be burned.

This is called for those reasons the torch of the doctrine.

Foolish people who have no interest in this will only be continually carried off by the river of samsara. Those foolish people experiencing intolerable sufferings in lower states of existence are worthy of compassion.

Wishing to attain liberation from intolerable suffering, rely upon a wise guru. When the guru's blessings enter your heart, your mind will be liberated.

Kye ho!

These things of samsara are meaningless or pointless, the causes of suffering. And since all of these things that have been done or made are pointless, look at that which is meaningful.

If you are beyond all grasping at an object and grasping at a subject, that is the monarch of all views.

If there is no distraction, that is the monarch among all meditations.

If there is no effort, that is the monarch among all conducts.

When there is no hope and no fear, that is the final result, and the fruition has been attained or revealed.

It is beyond being an object of conceptual focus, and the mind's nature is lucidity. There is no path to be traversed and yet, in that way you enter the path to buddhahood.

There is no object of meditation, but if you become accustomed to this you will attain unsurpassable awakening.

Thoroughly examine mundane things or the things of the world. If you do you will see that none of them persist, none of them are capable of permanence, and in that sense, they are all like dreams and magical illusions. Dreams and magical illusions are meaningless. Therefore, generate renunciation and give up mundane concerns.

Cut through the bonds of attachment and aversion toward those around you and your surroundings and meditate in isolated retreats, forests, and so forth, living alone. Remain in that state without meditation. When you attain that which is without attainment you have attained mahamudra.

For example, if the single root of a tree with a trunk and many branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit, is cut, the ten thousand or one hundred thousand branches will automatically die. In the same way, if the root of mind is cut through, the branches and leaves of samsara will dry up.

For example, just as the darkness that has accumulated over a thousand eons is dispelled by the illumination of one lamp or one torch, in the same way, one instant of the wisdom of the clear light of one's mind dispels all of the ignorance, wrongdoing, and obscurations accumulated throughout numerous eons.

The intellect cannot see that which is beyond conceptual mind, and you will never realize that which is uncreated through created dharmas. If you wish to attain or realize that which is beyond the intellect and is uncreated, then scrutinize your mind and strip awareness naked.

Allow the cloudy water of thought to clarify itself or to clear itself.

Do not attempt to stop or create appearances. Leave them as they are.

If you are without acceptance and rejection of external appearances, all that appears and exists will be liberated as mudra.

The all-basis is unborn, and within that unborn all-basis, abandon or relinquish habits, wrongdoing, and obscurations. Therefore, do not fixate or reckon. Rest in the essence of the unborn or in the unborn nature. In that state, appearances are fully apparent; but within that experience of vivid appearances allow concepts to be exhausted or to dissolve.

Complete liberation from all conceptual extremes is the supreme monarch of views.
Boundless vastness is the supreme monarch of meditations.
Being directionless and utterly impartial is the supreme monarch of conduct.
Self-liberation beyond expectation or hope is the supreme result or fruition.

[For] a beginner [mind] is like a river with a fast current running through a narrow bed or a narrow defile.

In the middle or after that, it becomes like the gentle current of the River Ganges. In the end, it is like the flowing of all rivers into the mother ocean, or it is like the meeting of mother and child of all the rivers.

Those of little intelligence, if they find they cannot remain in that state, may apply or hold the technique of the breathing and emphasize the essence of awareness, and through many techniques or branches such as gaze and holding the mind, tighten awareness until it stays put, exerting tension or effort until awareness comes to rest in that state or in its nature.

If you rely upon karmamudra, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness will arise. Enter into union having consecrated the upaya or method and the prajna or knowledge. Slowly let it fall or send it down, coil it, turn it back, and lead it to its proper place. Finally spread it or cause it to pervade your whole body. If there is no attachment or craving, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness will appear.

You will possess longevity without white hair and you will be as healthy as the waxing moon. Your complexion will be lustrous and you will be as powerful as a lion. You will quickly attain the common siddhis or attainments, and you will come to alight in or attain the supreme siddhi as well.

These instructions of the essential point of mahamudra, may they abide in the hearts of worthy or fortunate beings.

This was bestowed on the banks of the River Ganges by the Great and Glorious Siddha Tilopa, who had realized mahamudra, upon the Kashmiri pandit who was both learned and realized, Naropa, after Naropa had engaged in twelve hardships or austerities. This was translated and written down at Pullahari in the north by the great Naropa and the great Tibetan translator, the king among translators, Marpa Chokyi Lodro.

This text was translated into English orally by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso in the course of translating the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary.



The Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Mahamudra Upadesha

Tilopa's Most Significant Teaching, Received Directly from Vajradhara

In June of 1998, the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche gave a series of teachings in Vancouver, British Columbia, on Tilopa's Mahamudra Upadesha. Rinpoche gave the teachings in Tibetan; they were orally translated by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso. The following is an edited transcript.

Iwould like to express my pleasure at being able to meet with all of you here this evening and to be able to begin to talk to you about Tilopa's *Mahamudra Upadesha*. I would like to thank you for giving me the opportunity to present this material to you.

Next I am going to recite the lineage supplication. While I do so, please join me in the supplication with an attitude of faith and devotion to both the root and lineage gurus. [See page 11.]

To begin the session I want to talk a little bit about the appropriate motivation for receiving these teachings, which is bodhicitta. Because you have decided to come here to hear this

dharma of mahamudra, it is quite likely that your motivation for doing so is an excellent one, that you want to receive these teachings in order to be able to do this practice, in order to be able to benefit all beings. If that is your motivation, of course that is excellent. But as we are ordinary individuals, while our basic motivation is good, it is possible that from time to time our motivation may slip a little. This is not abnormal for human beings. If you find that the motivation that is present within you right now is inappropriate, then recognizing it to be so, simply let go of it and replace it with the consciously generated good intention and good motivation of wishing to receive these teachings in order to be able to practice meditation, in order to be able to liberate all beings.

It is extremely fortunate to have this opportunity to study Tilopa's *Mahamudra Upadesha*. The reason why it is so significant is that it is an extremely useful and beneficial text to be exposed to. When we examine what it is that all of the great siddhas of Tibet have practiced, we find that in both their study and their practice they emphasized not so much the Buddha's original teachings as the commentaries upon them composed by the great siddhas and scholars of the past. You would think that between the Buddha's actual teachings and the commentaries, that the original teachings of the Buddha would be of greater importance and of greater

practical use. However, it has traditionally been the case in Tibet that more emphasis was placed on both the study and the practical implementation of the *shastras*, or commentaries, for the simple reason that these commentaries contain the condensed essence of the Buddha's teachings and are therefore more convenient to study and implement.

Among the various types of *shastras* that exist, those that are of the greatest importance, because they are the source of practical instruction and guidance, are the class that are called *upadeshas*

Among the various types of *shastras* that exist, those that are of the greatest importance, because they are the source of practical instruction and guidance, are the class that are called *upadeshas*, which are texts of practical or methodical instruction. These texts are the most important texts that exist in Buddhism because they are the texts that actually explain how one is to go about meditation practice—how one is to perform the generation stage, the completion stage, and so forth. It is through emphasizing these texts in their study, and therefore in their practical implementation as well, that many individuals have been able to obtain the state of unity of Vajradhara in one life and one

body, and that others have been able, after living a life devoted to practice, to attain that state immediately [upon their death in the bardo], and that countless others have been able to bring samsara to a definite end.

The virtue of *upadeshas* lies as well in the fact that they are easy to remember, easy to understand, and easy to apply. Therefore, *upadeshas* in general, and especially the style of *upadesha* which is known as the *doha*, or vajra song, are of foremost importance. The importance is indicated as well by the fact that practically every siddha of both India and Tibet has left a wealth of such songs of instruction behind him or her.

Dohas were composed by all of the great

Supplication to the Takpo Kagyus

Great Vajradhara, Tilo, Naro,
Marpa, Mila, Lord of Dharma Gampopa,
Knower of the Three Times, omniscient Karmapa,
Holders of the four great and eight lesser lineages—
Drikung, Taklung, Tsalpa—these three, glorious Drukpa and so on,
Masters of the profound path of mahamudra,
Incomparable protectors of beings, the Takpo Kagyu,
I supplicate you, the Kagyu gurus.
I hold your lineage; grant your blessings so that I will follow your example.

Revulsion is the foot of meditation, as is taught.
To this meditator who is not attached to food and wealth,
Who cuts the ties to this life,
Grant your blessings so that I have no desire for honor and gain.

Devotion is the head of meditation, as is taught.
The guru opens the gate to the treasury of oral instructions.
To this meditator who continually supplicates the guru,
Grant your blessings so that genuine devotion is born in me.

Awareness is the body of meditation, as is taught.
Whatever arises is fresh—the essence of realization.
To this meditator who rests simply without altering it,
Grant your blessings so that my meditation is free from conception.

The essence of thoughts is dharmakaya, as is taught.
Nothing whatever but everything arises from it.
To this meditator who arises in unceasing play,
Grant your blessings so that I realize the inseparability of samsara and nirvana.

Through all my births may I not be separated from the perfect guru
And so enjoy the splendor of dharma.
Perfecting the virtues of the paths and bhumis,
May I speedily attain the state of Vajradhara.

This supplication was written by Pengar Jampal Zangpo. The last stanza is a traditional verse of aspiration.
Translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee, slightly amended by the KSOC Translation Committee.

siddhas of India, which means in general by the eighty-four mahasiddhas and in particular by the eight foremost mahasiddhas, and so forth, for the benefit of their immediate disciples and for students of future generations. So there are quite a number of them. But of all of them, the ones that bear the greatest blessing and are the most beneficial are those composed by Tilopa, because, unlike other teachers, Tilopa met Vajradhara face to face and received the transmission of mahamudra directly from him. Therefore, Tilopa's songs are extremely important. In particular this exposition of mahamudra is perhaps the most important in the *doha* class of exposition of mahamudra, especially for those who have the good fortune to practice mahamudra, but also for the world in general.

Some of you may not know who or what Vajradhara is, and, if so, you are probably wondering right now, "Is Vajradhara a person or not, and if Vajradhara is not a person exactly, what is it?" As you know, what we call buddhadharma or Buddhism are the teachings of the Buddha Shakyamuni. Therefore the fundamental source and teacher of all Buddhists is Buddha Shakyamuni. And as you also know, Buddha Shakyamuni was born in India, attained buddhahood at Bodh Gaya or Vajrasana, first turned the dharmachakra at Varanasi and passed into parinirvana or passed away at Kushinagara. Saying that the Buddha passed into paranirvana means that his physical body passed away. His mind and the wisdom of his mind did not pass away, which is to say that the qualities of his awakening—the wisdom that knows the nature of each and every thing and the wisdom that knows the variety of things, the compassion that is dedicated to the liberation of all beings, and the actual ability or capacity to bring about the liberation of all beings—these three qualities of wisdom, compassion, and ability, did not and never will change. This unchanging wisdom mind of the buddha is called the dharmakaya. What passed away at Kushinagara 2,500 years ago is called a supreme nirmanakaya. The dharmakaya does not stop, does not change. Therefore, because of its un-

changing quality, we consider the dharmakaya to be permanent, and because it is permanent, we call the dharmakaya "Vajradhara." We call it "vajra" because vajra means permanence, that which does not change. And it is called "dhara," or that which holds the vajra, because the mind of the buddha holds this wisdom beyond fluctuation or change within it or in its heart.*

The dharmakaya Vajradhara is that mind, that awakened mind of loving kindness, wisdom, and the ability to actually benefit beings. In that sense, it is the root of all actual achievement of benefit for beings. But on the other hand, it cannot itself act directly, for the simple reason that the dharmakaya cannot be experienced or encountered directly by any being. For the dharmakaya to benefit beings it must therefore display itself in a form. This form can be what is called the nirmanakaya—as, for example, a supreme nirmanakaya like the Buddha Shakyamuni—which is experienced by more or less ordinary beings, or it may be the form called the sambhogakaya, which is experienced in a

***Editor's note:** The buddha, with a small "b," is the dharmakaya, which predates and remains after the Buddha Shakyamuni or any other particular nirmanakaya of the buddha. The Buddha, with a capital "B," refers to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, held to be the fourth supreme nirmanakaya of this particular kalpa, which, it is taught, will see one thousand supreme nirmanakayas. We often refer to someone as having attained buddhahood, and in Tibet it was said that thousands or tens of thousands of people attained buddhahood. Thus their rebirths, whether as human or animal or god, are all considered to be nirmanakayas of the buddha. What distinguishes a supreme nirmanakaya such as Shakyamuni from other nirmanakayas is that a supreme nirmanakaya, like the Buddha Shakyamuni, appears and attains buddhahood and teaches at a time when all teachings leading to enlightenment have died out in whatever particular world system they appear. Each supreme nirmanakaya teaches three great cycles of teaching, called the three dharmachakras, or the three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma, which then become the basis for the subsequent development of the buddhadharma of that era as well as tremendous inspiration to other positive developments in the evolution of the culture of sentient beings. If one examines the history and culture of our own world system before the life of the Buddha Shakyamuni, which was roughly around 500 years before the common era, one will see a desolate, brutal, and barbaric place. Whereas, beginning in and around the same time, one sees throughout the world all sorts of positive movements in the development of human civilization. All of this activity, all activity that truly serves to uplift sentient beings and is conducive to their ultimate liberation from suffering, is regarded as buddha activity.

pure environment or pure realm by beings with pure or purified perception. The Vajradhara that is depicted in paintings, the figure that is blue and holding a vajra and bell and so forth, is the sambhogakaya Vajradhara, which is the display of the dharmakaya Vajradhara in a pure environment as the sambhogakaya, which is experienced by those of pure perception. As for who can encounter or experience such a sambhogakaya, it is bodhisattvas abiding on any of the ten bhūmis who will encounter this. And encountering this, they receive instruction and transmission from the sambhogakaya. This is exactly what happened in Tilopa's case. He encountered the sambhogakaya Vajradhara in a pure realm and received instruction from him.

This means that Tilopa was quite unlike other mahasiddhas in that he would sometimes go to pure realms to receive instruction and at other times appear in impure realms to teach what he had received. Normally bodhisattvas and mahasiddhas may choose to be reborn in either a pure or an impure realm, but if they are born in a pure realm then they remain in that pure realm, and if they are born in an impure realm then they remain for the duration of that life in that impure realm. They do not usually have the ability to move freely from one to another within a given life. Tilopa had this ability, which is extraordinary. He was one of the few people who are supposed to have been able to do this. This means that he received these teachings—a vast number of tantras and transmissions—in pure realms from Vajradhara, and then taught them to his disciples in this world.

Among his teachings, that which is of the greatest significance is this short text which is referred to as *Mahamudra Upadesha*. *Upadesha*, which means practical instruction, is

Tilopa was quite unlike other mahasiddhas in that he would sometimes go to pure realms to receive instructions and at other times appear in impure realms to teach what he had received

very significant as both the title of the text and the explanation of what makes this text so special. It is taught in the sutras and in the commentaries on the sutras that for an ordinary individual to attain buddhahood they must first go through three periods of innumerable eons of gathering the accumulations of merit and wisdom. The significance of the term *upadesha* is that it refers to practical methods that are so efficacious that they obviate the need for such a long path or long period of training.

The actual title of the text is *Mahamudra Upadesha*, but it is commonly known as *Ganges Mahamudra*. The reason for this is that this was not taught by Tilopa in a pure realm; it was taught on the banks of the River Ganges in this realm. This mahamudra teaching was not something he could give to all his disciples. It was given [only] to his foremost disciple, the pandit Naropa, and it was given to him on the banks of the River Ganges in a very simple and direct way. [The simplicity of his presentation notwithstanding,] this text given in that way to Naropa is

considered to be the cause of Naropa's realization.

The first stanza in the text says, ***Intelligent and patient Naropa, tolerant of suffering, who is engaged in austerity and is devoted to the guru, fortunate one, do this with your mind.*** [See lines 3-5 on page 72]

Tilopa begins by referring to Naropa as someone who is engaged in austerity. Naropa underwent austerities while he was seeking Tilopa, while he was attending Tilopa, and finally, while he was practicing Tilopa's instructions. He underwent what are called the twelve major and twelve minor hardships or austerities. The reason for all of this earnest seeking and hardship on Naropa's part was that before meeting Tilopa he had already met a number of

extraordinary, great teachers and mahasiddhas, but Tilopa was predicted by Naropa's yidam to be his karmically destined teacher or guru. Because of that prediction, Naropa undertook an arduous search for Tilopa. This search was not based on blind faith or wishful thinking. Before meeting Tilopa, Naropa was already an extremely well-trained scholar and was extraordinarily intelligent. His search for Tilopa was based upon a well-founded confidence in the prediction that he had received. Addressing Naropa, Tilopa refers to him as a fortunate or worthy one. "Fortunate" or "worthy" here means that Naropa had such great faith and devotion that he was able to engage in these austerities and find his teacher. And it was because of this faith and devotion that it was appropriate for Tilopa to give these instructions to Naropa, because only someone with faith and devotion is capable of understanding their meaning, and only someone with faith and devotion is capable of actually using them as a basis for practice.

Tilopa's presentation of the mahamudra in this instruction consists of seven topics. These are (1) the view of mahamudra; (2) the conduct of mahamudra; (3) the meditation of mahamudra; (4) the samaya of mahamudra; (5) the benefit of mahamudra practice; (6) the defect of not practicing mahamudra; and (7) how actually to practice mahamudra.

The first of these seven topics is the view, and the function of the view is to reveal the ground. Ground means the ground on which everything occurs and within which everything arises. The ground includes the ground of meditation, the ground of conduct, the ground of samaya, and so on.

The ground or the nature of things can be pointed out by the view in two ways, which are called the common view and the uncommon view. The common view consists of the view arrived at through logical inference or inferential valid cognition. This consists of using your intellect and logical analysis to infer or logically determine that emptiness is the nature of things. The uncommon view, which is the view of *upadesha* or practical instruction, uses direct experience

or direct valid cognition. The reason why in the uncommon view one avoids using the intellect as a tool of logical inference or logical analysis is that absolute truth is not an object of the intellect, because the intellect is itself a relative truth. This means that because the intellect is itself bewildered it cannot transcend its own realm of bewilderment. So therefore, in the generation of the uncommon view, one simply looks directly at things or directly at one's own mind to determine its nature. This is using direct experience and direct valid cognition in order to arrive at the view, and that is the special characteristic of the view of mahamudra.

Because what Tilopa is presenting here is the view of direct valid cognition or direct experience, he begins by saying, ***Although mahamudra cannot be taught . . .*** [Line 2]

Mahamudra cannot be taught because it is absolute truth and therefore cannot be expressed in words or even in concepts. As was said by Shantideva, "Absolute truth is not an object of the intellect because the intellect itself is a relative truth." The intellect is an aspect of ignorance and therefore the intellect is always ignorant. The intellect is always wrong. It never sees things straight. It never sees things as they are. The intellect, being a symptom of delusion, can only see in a deluded way. So, you cannot use the intellect to experience mahamudra. Therefore, mahamudra cannot be described in conceptual terms. The only thing you can do is practice meditation and allow that innate intelligence which is aware of itself to emerge.*

The *Ganges Mahamudra* says, ***For example, in space what is resting on what?*** [Line 57, page 73]

Here Tilopa is using the image of space to communicate something about the ground or mahamudra. Space by definition is physical emptiness; it is an expanse. As such it is the

***Editor's note:** In this context all teachings and all conceptual knowledge, including the teachings of the Buddha, are inaccurate and delusive. They can be conducive to discovering the truth, but are not the truth itself. They are like the finger pointing at the moon. The finger indicates the whereabouts of the moon, but is not the moon itself.

fundamental medium which allows other things to be present. But because space is nothing in and of itself, it does not require any kind of support. Space does not have to rest on something or be supported by something. Therefore, space cannot itself support anything else. Nothing can rest on space. Things can only rest *within* space. In the same way, because mahamudra is emptiness, because it is the absence of substantiality of the mind, it therefore cannot be shown. Because it is not anything, it cannot be pointed out as being anything. In the next line it says, ***In one's mind, mahamudra, there is nothing to be shown.*** [Line 58]

Well, if that is the case, if there is nothing to be shown and nothing to be said about it, what are we to do? The next line tells us: ***Rest relaxed in the natural state without attempting to alter anything.*** [Line 59]

When you hear that you cannot use logical inference to realize mahamudra, and that mahamudra cannot be taught at all, it all sounds hopeless. But in fact it is not. You can know the meaning of mahamudra and you can realize mahamudra and you do not need logical inference to do it and you do not need it to be pointed out to you or communicated to you by a teacher. The only thing that you need to do is what Tilopa says in this line, which is, “Rest relaxed in the nature”—which means the nature of your mind—“without alteration.”

When we say “the mind,” it means your mind just as it is. Normally when we think about our minds we think of them as miserable, even pitiful, and quite afflicted. And indeed they may seem to us from time to time to be like that. But in fact, that is not the true condition of your mind. As was said by Saraha, “Homage to the mind that is like a wish-fulfilling jewel.” A wish-fulfilling jewel is something that in legends is supposed to be able to grant any wish. And the

reason the mind is compared to this legendary wish-granting or wish-fulfilling jewel is that, if you attend to your mind, if you look at your mind, then by coming to know it you will realize the nature of everything. And in order to do this you do not need to attempt to alter what your mind is. Not altering the mind means that you simply rest in your mind as it is. If your mind is something, then rest in that something; and if your mind is nothing, then rest in that nothing. Do not feel that you have to turn it into nothing if it seems to be something, or turn it into something if it seems to be nothing. Of course, the mind is not something. It has no substantial characteristics. And it is not nothing, because it is lucid cognition. It is simply your mind and you just rest in it as it is without attempting to make it into anything other than what it is. And if you can do that, then you will realize the view of mahamudra.

Maybe it is easy to rest your mind in a relaxed way in its own nature without altering it. But maybe, on the other hand, it is very difficult to do so. One might ask, “How do I do this? I have never done this. I do not know how to relax my mind in its own nature.” This is not an unreasonable question. For example, Paldar Bum, when receiving instructions from Jetsun Milarepa, sang him a song, saying, “I can meditate on the mind, but what do I do with thought?” And her point was simply that it is true, as you say, my mind is my mind. I can rest in my mind because it is my mind, but what do I do when within my mind thoughts start flying all over the place? We have this experience all the time as practi-

tioners. When thoughts arise, they seem to prevent us from resting and prevent us, therefore, from practicing mahamudra. Tilopa answers this implicit question in the lines where he says, ***For example, it is like looking in the middle of the sky and not seeing anything. In***

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the same way, when your mind looks at your mind, thoughts stop and you attain unsurpassable awakening. [Lines 36-40]

What this means is that, regardless of whatever is arising in your mind, if you look directly at it, it dissolves. When thoughts appear in your mind, they do so by arising and then remaining as an experience and then dissolving. If at any point in this process you look directly at the thought, it will dissolve. For example, if, when a thought arises, you look to see whence it arose and how it arose and what arising means in the case of a thought; or if, while the thought is present, you look to see where it is and what it is and how it is; or if, while it dissolves, you look to see where it is going and how it is going and what it is that is going; if, at any time, you look at the thought in that way, it will dissolve, it will not be there any more. And if you cultivate this practice, then gradually it will lead to liberation from the bondage of thought, which is unsurpassable awakening. Therefore, Tilopa says, ***If this fetter or bondage of thought is loosened, there is no doubt that you will be liberated.*** [Line 60]

This view of mahamudra is something that sometimes we experience and sometimes we do not, and when we do not experience it, then we become discouraged. We think, “This is impossible, I cannot practice this, even if I try to practice this, I will not see it, I will not realize it.” But it is not impossible. It is quite possible

You have to remember that mahasiddhas started out as ordinary practitioners like yourselves, and they became mahasiddhas by doing this practice

and quite workable. But you need to really emphasize this in your practice. You need to actually take the time to look at your mind, because by doing so you can know and experience and realize this directly.

Often we think things like, “Well, of course, mahasiddhas can realize this. That is what makes them mahasiddhas. But I cannot.” It is okay to think about and be impressed by the qualities of mahasiddhas, but you have to remember that mahasiddhas started out as ordinary practitioners like yourselves, and they became mahasiddhas by doing this practice. So it is not impossible. Sometimes you may think, “I cannot look at my mind. How can my mind look at itself? Something cannot look at itself.” But your mind can look at your

mind. If I were to ask you to look at somebody else’s mind, then that would be difficult. You cannot do that. But your mind is your mind. You can look at it any time you want to.

I am going to stop there for tonight. I would like to thank you for your enthusiasm for the buddhadharma in general and especially for your enthusiasm for mahamudra, which is an appropriate enthusiasm, because this teaching is very timely. Thank you also for your enthusiasm in both listening to and actually practicing these instructions. Finally I would like to dedicate the merit. 



Mahamudra Upadesha

The Path of Liberation Is Like Leaping Over the Top of a Mountain

*Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thranguo Rinpoche's teaching on
Tilopa's Mahamudra Upadesha.*

Thank you for coming back. I am going to continue from where we left off last night explaining Tilopa's *Mahamudra Upadesha*, and as I did last night, I am going to begin by reciting the lineage supplication. The reason why I begin with this recitation is that I myself have no compassion or blessing, so in order to generate the blessing I pray to the lineage first. So please join me in doing so with the utmost faith and devotion. [See page 11.]

Continuing from last night, from among the various aspects of mahamudra—the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition—we are looking at the view. Yesterday we saw that first of all this nature that we call mahamudra, which we may at times regard to be substantial or to be something, has no substantiality and therefore is said to be empty or emptiness. Although we might think that, since it is emptiness, it is somehow obscured or impeded by the presence of thought, we saw last night that, when the nature of thought is seen, then thoughts vanish, and that, therefore, even thoughts do not obscure this emptiness that is the mind's nature.

You might ask, "If that is the nature of the mind all the time, what is the

use or function of practice?” While we are still within samsara we have a lot of mental and physical suffering. Mental suffering consists of the arising in the mind of kleshas which make you suffer right at the time that they arise. They make you miserable right away and they cause you to become even more miserable, depressed, and worried later on. And there are, of course, all kinds of physical suffering, damage or harm to one’s body and loss of possessions, and so on. Physical suffering and mental suffering can be prevented through the practice of mahamudra.

How the practice of mahamudra relieves and prevents mental suffering is explained in the next stanza with a further image. Tilopa says, ***For example, just as the vapor that, arising from the earth, becomes clouds and dissolves into the expanse of space, not going anywhere else and yet not continuing to abide anywhere, in the same way the agitation of the thoughts that arise from the mind and within the mind is calmed the instant you see the mind’s nature.*** [Lines 41-44, page 73]

The mental suffering that we experience consists of all the thoughts that arise in our minds, that themselves are miserable and are of the nature of suffering—thoughts of worry, agitation, and so on—as well as all the various kleshas that are not only unpleasant at the time they arise, but are the causes of future suffering as well. At any given time we are both experiencing suffering and creating the causes of [future] suffering. If you ask, “Can we just stop this?” you will find that you cannot. Even though you try to stop this process it will still continue to happen.

An alternative to attempting forcibly to stop this seemingly ceaseless flow of thoughts, kleshas, and suffering is the practice of mahamudra, which entails looking at *the nature* of the thoughts that arise, which enables you to

transcend them. When a thought arises within your mind, you can look directly at it to see what exactly it consists of: What is a thought? Does a thought have a certain shape, a certain size, a certain substance; does it have a certain color? If it has any of these characteristics, exactly what shape, what color, what size, and so on, does it have? If it does not have any of these characteristics, what characteristics if any does it have? If a thought had any such characteristics, you would surely be able to see them, because they arise in the mind. But in fact, thoughts do not have any such characteristics; they are by nature pure. You may remember that last night I quoted the mahasiddha Saraha, who said, “I pay homage to the mind that is like a wish-fulfilling jewel.”

The significance of the image of the wish-fulfilling jewel is that it is something that is completely flawless and always beneficial. The mind, while we erroneously regard it as somehow inherently miserable, is in fact, in its true nature—when that true nature is seen—flawless and inherently free of misery.

The second type of suffering that we experience is physical suffering. The way in which the practice of mahamudra helps to alleviate physical suffering is explained in the next stanza, which says, ***For example, just as the nature of space transcends color and shape, and just as space is therefore unaffected or unchanged and unobscured by the various colors and shapes that occur within it, in the same way the essence of your mind transcends color and shape, and, therefore, is never obscured or affected by the various colors and shapes of virtue and wrongdoing.*** [Lines 45-48]

The implication or meaning of this verse is that the practice of mahamudra will help alleviate physical suffering because the characteristic or essential quality of your mind is like space

The mind, while we erroneously regard it as somehow inherently miserable, is in fact, in its true nature . . . flawless and inherently free of misery

and therefore is inherently unaffected by what occurs within it. When you engage in wrongdoing, you accumulate a certain type of karma that will definitely ripen as unpleasant experiences for yourself alone.* And these karmic seeds will ripen; they will not disappear by themselves. And when they mature or ripen they are experienced by you as upheaval, impediments, and various kinds of unpleasant circumstances. However, as this experience of suffering, which is physical—and therefore also includes mental suffering—occurs within the expanse of your mind, and because the *nature* of your mind is itself free of solidity and the characteristics of solidity, then when you rest in that nature through the practice of mahamudra, you will not experience what would otherwise be experienced as suffering at all. Or, if you experience it as slight suffering, it will be far less intense than it would be in ordinary circumstances.

The fundamental reasons for the practice of meditation are that initially it pacifies mental suffering and eventually it also helps one deal with external and physical suffering as well. But

***Editor's note:** Negative actions almost invariably affect other sentient beings, so it might be asked, "Will not my wrongdoing ripen as unpleasant experiences for others as well?" The answer is yes, your wrongdoing does cause negative experiences for others, but from the perspective of karma, that particular wrongdoing, though it harms others, sows the causes of suffering for yourself alone. From the perspective of the affected parties—those who receive or experience the wrongdoing—that negative action and the suffering it causes are the ripening of karmic seeds that they have sown in the past, and not at all the accumulation of karma that will ripen as unpleasant experiences for them in the future. If any unpleasant experiences arise for them in the future, they will occur exclusively as a consequence of their own wrongdoing, as a consequence of their own negative actions of body, speech, and mind performed in reaction to the original wrongdoing. Therefore, if, in response to others' wrongdoing, we do not engage in dualistic negative actions of body, speech, and mind, the original wrongdoing will only serve to drive away, or exhaust, our own negative karma, while it remains powerless to sow seeds of future suffering for us.

The fundamental reasons for the practice of meditation are that initially it pacifies mental suffering and eventually it also helps one deal with external and physical suffering as well

you might ask, "Does it do anything else? Does one actually generate any qualities or virtues through the practice of meditation?" The answer is yes. Although the nature of your mind is emptiness—which is to say, it is free of any kind of substantiality or substantial characteristic, and, in being empty, it is also free of possessing any ground or basis for the presence of inherent defects—at the same time, the mind is not absolutely nothing. For example, in the *Prajnaparamita Sutra* it says, "No eyes, no ears, no tongue, no nose, no tactile consciousness," and so on. And it goes through a list of all the things that one might think to exist—all relative truths that appear to us—and points out

that all of them have no inherent, substantial existence and therefore are emptiness. But while it is saying that all of these things are emptiness, it is not saying that they are nothing whatsoever. The true nature of things, that is their emptiness, is at the same time what was taught by the Buddha in the sutras as buddha nature or sugatagarbha, which is to say that this emptiness, which is the nature of your mind, contains within it the inherent potential or seed of all of the qualities of buddhahood. This means that although, when you look at your mind, you do not see anything substantial, nevertheless, the mind is not absolutely nothing.

When it is said that you cannot find any substantial characteristics in the mind, this also means that you cannot find the mind itself anywhere. When you look for the mind experientially, you can look for it with the greatest scrutiny in all the parts of your body from the top of your head to the tips of your toes and you will not find the mind itself anywhere. Often, when people look for the mind and fail to find it, their first thought is that the reason they have not found it is that they are not looking

hard enough, or that they do not know how to look. But that is not why you do not find it. The reason you cannot find the mind is that its true nature is emptiness. Well, you might think, if I cannot find my mind, if my mind has no existence, am I just a walking corpse? Obviously, you are not a walking corpse, and the reason for this is that your mind has the capacity to know. Your mind is something that knows but cannot be found anywhere. It is nowhere to be found, and this nature or fundamental characteristic or essence of the mind is therefore a unity of an innate cognitive clarity and an emptiness or absence of substantial existence. And that unity of clarity and emptiness is, in fact, the wisdom of the buddha. Therefore, inherently your mind is a lucid awareness that is, however, free of any kind of substantiality. The text continues with an analogy for this: ***For example, it is like the luminous heart of the sun which could never be obscured even by the darkness of a thousand eons.*** [Lines 49-50]

This means that your mind has an innate lucidity, and when this lucidity is revealed, then in an instant that lucidity illuminates whatever it encounters. And it does not matter how long or for how many eons that which it illuminates has been in darkness. In the instant that the lucidity of mind is present, it is completely illuminated. The darkness is not cumulative.

The text continues, ***In that way, that luminous clarity, that is the essence of the mind, is never obscured by the samsara of innumerable kalpas.*** [Lines 51-52]

As the nature of your mind is always cognitive lucidity or luminosity, then, when this nature is recognized, even though you abide in samsara and even though you have abided in samsara for innumerable eons, the ignorance of the mind is dispelled automatically, simply because ignorance consists of the absence of

recognition of that cognitive lucidity. That inherent lucidity of your mind is always there, and the recognition of it is therefore all that is necessary in order to dispel ignorance. Therefore, when we talk about buddha nature, what we mean is this inherent cognitive lucidity, because that inherent lucidity is itself the potential for awakening. It is through coming to familiarize ourselves with this inherent cognitive lucidity that we gradually attain buddhahood. As for the qualities of the mind, its inherent lucidity, and so forth,* they are never lost and never affected, and therefore they are always ready to be recognized through the practice of meditation.

While we refer to the mind as empty or emptiness in order to explain and emphasize that the mind is without a true or substantial existence, it is actually not true that the mind is just empty or just emptiness. And while we refer to the mind as luminosity or clear light because it has the inherent quality of cognitive lucidity—causing us to call the mind's nature wisdom or intelligence, and so forth—it is not the case that the mind actually is something. Therefore, as was taught by the Buddha, the absolute truth, the true nature of the mind, is inexpressible, inconceivable, and indescribable.

Which means that we cannot accurately say that the mind is either something or nothing. In order to describe the mind's emptiness we make it sound as though it were nothing, and in order to describe the mind's cognitive clarity we make it sound as though it were something. But in fact, the nature of the mind, buddha nature or

***Editor's note:** These qualities include all positive virtues, which are in fact one unitary virtue that we can only point to with such terms as the union of wisdom and emptiness, lucidity and emptiness, awareness and emptiness, bliss and emptiness, and compassion and emptiness. So long as we are bound in samsara, we use terms like loving kindness, compassion, primordial intelligence, devotion, primordial confidence, etc., to refer to these virtues that are really just one virtue.

Your mind has an innate lucidity, and when this lucidity is revealed, then in an instant that lucidity illuminates whatever it encounters

mahamudra, is inexpressible. And because it is inexpressible and inconceivable, it can only be understood through direct experience. In the text it says, ***For example, just as we apply the term empty to space, in fact, there is nothing within space that we are accurately describing by that term. In the same way, although we call the mind clear light or luminosity, simply calling it so does not make it true that there is actually anything within the mind that is a true basis for that designation.*** [Lines 53-56]

What this means is that in order to describe the mind roughly we use these terms, but we have to remember that they do not actually describe what the mind really is. That can only be experienced directly through one's own insight. This was expressed by Marpa the Translator as being like a mute person tasting sugar. The person has a very clear experience of it, which they know within themselves, but they are incapable of describing it. In the same way, Marpa said that he had an experience of the nature of his mind through his training under Naropa, but was unable to express it in words.

Up to this point the text has been dealing with the first topic, the view of mahamudra, which has been explained using six analogies. Of these six analogies, one was clouds, another was the sun. The other four analogies used the metaphor of space to describe the mind. As you can see by rereading the text, either in translation or in the Tibetan, these four analogies, all of which use space as an image, are not repetitious because they each have a distinct meaning. There is an outline of this text that was written by the Third Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. In his outline he explains the particular intention of these four uses of space as an image for the mind. The first time it occurs, what is being pointed out is the insubstantiality of the nature of the mind or

But in fact, the nature of the mind, buddha nature or mahamudra, is inexpressible. . . . it can only be understood through direct experience

mahamudra. The second time space is used as an image, it is pointing out that when you look directly at your mind, thoughts cease or vanish as though into space. The third time that space is used as an image, it is pointing out that although you may engage in positive and negative activities that create obscurations of the mind, nothing that you do in the way of positive and negative action can obscure the clear light, the radiant clarity or luminosity of the mind's true nature. And the fourth time that space is used as an image, it is to point out that the nature of the mind is indescribable or inexpressible.

The next two lines in the text are a summary of the presentation of the view, and therefore, in a sense, they are a summary of the six analogies or images that have been given. The text says, ***In that way the nature of the mind has from the beginning been like space, and there are no dharmas that are not included within that.*** [Lines 61-62]

The nature of the mind is like space, and therefore, everything that you experience is included within that space of the mind. This is an answer to the implicit question, "Even though the mind's nature is what you have explained, what good does knowing that do me? My problems come from outside. My enemies are not within my mind, my enemies are outside me. Sickness, harm from the elements,

and disasters all come from outside. What use is it for me to meditate upon the nature of my mind? The nature of my mind is not the problem."

Although the nature of your mind is not your problem, it is of great use to meditate on it. While it may appear that disasters and so forth come from outside yourself, in fact, most true disasters start within. The way we experience things, which consists basically of intoxicated delight, depressive misery, intense aggression, and addictive desire and attachment—all of

these things—come from within our mind. And as soon as we recognize the nature of our mind, all of these afflicted states are pacified. It is not external disasters that need to be avoided and external enemies that need to be tamed, but the internal enemies and the internal disasters that need to be subdued.

It was said in this connection by Shantideva that if you attempt to avoid suffering by subduing external enemies and other external sources of suffering, you actually find that for every one you subdue two arise to take its place. Rather than doing this, the only thing you can do that will actually work is to subdue the inner enemy, which is your own aggression. And if you subdue your own aggression, then the external enemies will not arise. “For example,” Shantideva said, “it is like walking barefoot in the forest and discovering that there are thorns and other things that harm your feet. If you think, therefore, that you should cover the forest floor with leather, you will find that no matter how much distance you cover, eventually you will walk too far and run out of covering. You can never cover the whole world with leather. On the other hand, if you cover your feet with leather, it has the same effect as having covered the entire forest floor or the entire world.” You cannot control the external world completely, so you must learn instead to control your own mind.

Thus, one needs to come to a correct view of the nature of the mind and one needs moreover to experience the nature of mind. And that is also why, according to the view of mahamudra, one must have direct experience of the mind’s nature, rather than mere inferential understanding.

Following the description of the view, the next section of the text describes the conduct of mahamudra, which is explained as the conduct of body, speech, and mind.

In order to attain the ultimate result or supreme siddhi, we engage in the path, and essentially our path [as vajrayanists] has two aspects, or consists of two complementary paths. One is called the *upaya marga* or path of method, which consists, for example, of various elaborate practices, including the setting up of physical offerings, various physical actions, the repetition of mantras, the performance of visualizations, and so on. And the other path is called the path of liberation, which is mahamudra—simple and direct meditation on the mind’s nature. Therefore, the conduct of body, speech, and mind that is part of mahamudra is really the conduct of this path of liberation.

With regard to body, the text says, ***Abandoning all physical actions, the practitioner should rest at ease.*** [Line 63]

In the practice of mahamudra it is not necessary to run or jump or dance, or to do anything physically elaborate, like sitting in absolute darkness or staring at the sun, or any of those things. You simply rest in a state of physical ease. In the same way with regard to speech it says, ***Without any verbal utterance, your speech becomes like an echo, sound inseparable from emptiness.*** [Line 64]

In the practice of mahamudra, the practice of speech does not consist primarily of the recitation of mantras, or other uses of speech such as shouting or exclaiming things. It consists simply of resting without any kind of attachment to speech or sound. With regard to mind, while we may think that the mental aspect of mahamudra conduct or practice involves intentionally stopping thought, or on the other hand, intentionally thinking of something, the text says, ***Think of nothing whatsoever with the mind and look at the dharmas of the leap.*** [Line 65]

In this expression, “look at the dharmas of

The only thing you can do that will actually work is to subdue the inner enemy, which is your aggression. And if you subdue your own aggression, then external enemies will not arise

the leap,” the term “leap,” here used metaphorically, literally means to get beyond the pass—pass here meaning a mountain pass. The significance of this is that when you are trying to cross over a mountain, the conventional way of doing so is to find a pass that you can use to get through. If you follow the pass you will go first to the right and then to the left, and so on, as required by the actual shape of the mountain. The image that has been given here is the idea of jumping or leaping right over the pass. What these images refer to is the distinction between the path of method and the path of liberation. Whether you are practicing the path of method or the path of liberation, you are doing so in order to come to recognize the nature of your mind, so the point of both is the same. But in the case of the path of method, you are using an approach which is similar to crossing a mountain by using a pass and going first to the right and then to the left. It is in a sense very gradual or indirect, because you use one method after another to gradually come closer to this recognition. But in the path of liberation, there is no other method than simply looking straight at your mind and simply seeing right on the spot its nature, which is instantly revealed. Therefore, the practice of the path of liberation is like leaping or jumping over the top of a mountain.

That completes the section of the text that describes the conduct or practice of mahamudra in general. And as there was not time for questions last night, I will ask you for your questions now. You can ask about your experiences of this, your understanding of this, your thoughts about this, anything that you wish to ask about and if I can answer your questions I will, and if not I will apologize.

Tilopa was sitting there with a pile of fish . . . snapping his fingers and thereby causing the consciousness of each fish to be liberated into the dharmadhatu, after which he would eat the fish

Question: Out of curiosity, in the picture of Tilopa, he is holding a fish, and I am wondering if there is any connection with him or why is there a fish?

Rinpoche: The depiction of Tilopa holding a fish is based upon the story of Naropa’s first meeting with Tilopa. When Naropa went to look for Tilopa he had no real idea where exactly he was. Naropa was just going on a prediction he had received that told him that the one who would be his guru, Tilopa, was somewhere in Eastern India and that his name was Tilop or Tilopa. He had no idea beyond that of what Tilopa looked like or exactly where he was. And therefore he had a lot of difficulty finding him. Having gone through a lot of difficulty already and still not having found him, one day he tracked him down to a certain locality, and when he arrived there, he asked the local people if the Mahasiddha Tilopa lived there. The person he spoke to said they had never heard of any Mahasiddha Tilopa, but that there was a beggar Tilopa who was right over there, indicating a place nearby. Naropa was inspired by this because he thought Tilopa was a mahasiddha, and therefore he could be living as a beggar. What he saw when he went over to meet Tilopa for the first time was Tilopa sitting there with a pile of fish that he had caught, snapping his fingers and thereby causing the consciousness of each fish to be liberated into the dharmadhatu, after which he would eat the fish. As this was

the first one of Tilopa’s more famous recorded miraculous displays, and was the first occasion when Naropa actually came into his physical presence, it is commemorated by the traditional depiction of Tilopa holding a fish.

Question: Rinpoche, in shamatha sometimes I have a thought that comes up and I do not particularly look at it but, boom, it is gone! It disappears so I have not looked at it to examine its parts but it seems to be gone . . . [inaudible]

Rinpoche: That is not really anything at all. Thoughts just do that. Whether you look at them or not, whether you are meditating or not, thoughts vanish. Eventually thoughts just vanish. They do not stay around forever.

Question: Rinpoche, within the context of mahamudra, what is “true love” as experienced by most Western people, couples? What is the Buddhist view of love, and how and why does it occur? And the second one: What is the role of causes and conditions with respect to this?

Translator: By true love do you mean sexual love, romantic love?

Same questioner: Most people say that true love that transcends time exists. I mean, “pure true love.” [laughter]

Rinpoche: Well, there is nothing wrong with that kind of love, according to dharma. It does not contradict it. After all, it says in dharma that we need to love all sentient beings, which means all beings limitless as space, but you have to start with those who are close by. It does not make much sense to say that you love all sentient beings who equal space if you are aggressive and cold to those who are close to you. [laughter] The only addition to that, in a specifically mahamudra context, would be that whatever arises in your mind—including love, compassion, any kind of positive emotion—would still be perceived as empty in the sense that you

would see its nature, which is always emptiness.

It does not make much sense to say that you love all sentient beings who equal space if you are aggressive and cold to those who are close to you

Question: Rinpoche, Kalu Rinpoche used to speak about the nature of mind as being empty, clear, and unimpeded. I was wondering if you could say something about what unimpeded means. It is *mang gakpa* in Tibetan and I never really understood that.

Rinpoche: *Mang gakpa*, the unceasing manifestation of the mind, is an aspect of lucidity. If you describe the mind using the two concepts, emptiness and cognitive lucidity, then that would include the aspect of unceasing manifestation or unimpededness. But in more detail, you can say

that the mind is empty of essence, naturally lucid, and of unceasing manifestation. It is easiest to explain this by going back to the emptiness of the mind. As you know, the mind is called empty because when you look for it, it is not there to be found. It has no substantial characteristics, and it has no substantial existence. When we try to embrace this conceptually—this not having any substantiality—we generate a concept of nothingness or nothing or nonexistence. If the mind were nothing, then you would not be alive. Your body would be inert matter. So while it is true to say that the mind is empty in the sense that it has nothing substantial within it or is nothing substantial that can be found, it nevertheless never stops. And the fundamental meaning of *mang gakpa* is that while there is nothing there that never stops, it never stops. It never stops in the sense that you can think, you can remember, you continue to experience. What it is that never stops, if you have to give it a name, is the lucidity. It is the unimpededness or unceasing quality of the lucidity itself. Therefore, it is usually called the unceasing manifestation—*nangpa mang gakpa*—or the unceasing gleam or display or image.

Question: Rinpoche, with the image of going to the mountain and using the passage from the right to the left, and actually leaping over the hill, what enables one to avoid the long path of going around and what enables one to actually have the capability of leaping over? Because in the stories of Naropa and

Milarepa it seems that before they actually realized the nature of mind, each one of them underwent tremendous difficulties. Do we need in modern culture to undergo similar hardships? Is this somehow a preparation for us to leap over?

Rinpoche: A distinction needs to be made between the simple recognition of the mind's nature and the full revelation or realization of the mind's nature. In order to recognize the nature of your mind, heroic austerities like those of Jetsun Milarepa are not necessary. But in order to fully realize the nature of your mind they might be. For example, when Jetsun Milarepa first received instruction from Marpa, he instantly recognized the nature of his mind because that is what Marpa was explaining to him, and Milarepa understood it. But all of his subsequent austerities and practice were undergone in order to realize fully what he had already recognized.* As for how necessary such austerities are in the present day, well, if you can engage in that degree of austerity, then of course that is the very best, because the result will be very quick, and the result will be indeed extraordinary in other ways. But you should not think that the

***Editor's note:** The first recognition of the nature of mind, which is brought about in the student's experience through the intervention of the lama—whether during a teaching, a ritual ceremony, or guided meditation—becomes the basis for the student's subsequent practice of dharma, the purpose of which is to enable the student to become accustomed and habituated to experiencing the world in the manner first pointed out. When, through the practice of the path, the student's experience reaches the ineffable fruition of buddhahood, he or she is said to have fully realized the nature of mind.

Any degree of realization of your mind's nature will make your practice and your life completely worthwhile and meaningful

success or failure of your practice is based upon your ability or inability to do what Milarepa did. Because any degree of realization of the mind's nature will make your practice and your life completely worthwhile and meaningful. If you can generate one hundred percent of the realiza-

tion of Milarepa, of course, that would be magnificent. But even fifty percent or twenty-five percent or ten percent or five percent or even one percent would still be extraordinary. You should not think that you are in some way disqualified as a practitioner merely because you cannot equal the example of Jetsun Milarepa. Any amount of mahamudra practice you do will be strongly beneficial.

Question: Rinpoche, I understand that following your teachings, Tenga Rinpoche will be teaching the chöd practice. I am assuming that the teachings will be about mahamudra and chöd and I am thinking about the various demons and hindrances that are discussed in chöd practice as they relate to the realization of mahamudra. I am wondering if you could explain a little bit what some of those hindrances are that we might encounter in our practice. For example, could you explain further the demon or hindrance of blocking or solidity?

Translator: Blocking or solidity—is that one of the four talked about in chöd, is it *top che dup*? And exactly what are you asking about it? Why does it happen, or how do we deal with it?

Question: Yes. Both.

Rinpoche: First of all, chöd is mahamudra. Chöd is a style or tradition of mahamudra practice. In fact, the name of it is *chödyul chakgya chenpo*, chöd mahamudra. Chöd is a way of practicing or implementing the mahamudra view. What we normally refer to as chöd practice is the enhancement of the view of mahamudra by

using that which inspires fear or kleshas. You are working with situations that cause internal kleshas, or cause you to be afraid of external things, such as spirits and so forth. You are learning to cut through your fear and your conceptualization about those situations. If you can cut through those most stressful situations, then you can rest in the recognition of your mind's nature under all circumstances. The point of chöd practice is to widen and deepen your recognition of mahamudra or the nature of the mind.

Four maras are talked about in the chöd tradition: the substantial mara, the insubstantial mara, the mara of arrogance, and the mara of delight. The substantial mara is present when, because of various circumstances, specifically the presence of kleshas within you and various conditions such as certain energies moving within the channels, you perceive externally something that you would identify as a mara, as an external manifestation which appears to be external to you and to be substantial and separate from you. It is therefore called the substantial mara. The key point in working with this is to understand that you do not see these things when your mind is at rest. You see them when your mind is agitated through an imbalance of the elements or other similar conditions. The way to relate to the maras is simply to cut through any kind of conceptualization of their inherent and separate existence. You recognize that they are simply the natural manifestation of your own internal being and processes. In that way, through experiencing them and cutting through fixation on their existence, you come to a further recognition of dharmata.*

Question: Rinpoche, could you say more about the conduct of speech?

***Editor's note:** For further discussion of the substantial mara, see *Shenpen Ösel*, Vol. 3, No. 1, page 36.

Rinpoche: The main point in the presentation of the conduct of speech here is that, because mahamudra is the path of liberation, there is not anything to be chanted or practiced verbally. The practice of speech connected with mahamudra is basically silence. And connected with that is perceiving sound or relating to sound as insubstantial like an echo or like the unity of sound and emptiness. The point of this whole section is the same for body, speech, and mind. Whether you are talking about the body, about speech, or about the mind, the essence of mahamudra is that there is no special effort involved. This does not mean that if you are practicing mahamudra you must abandon the recitation of mantras, or that it is forbidden for a mahamudra practitioner to recite mantras, or that if you are a mahamudra practitioner that you must cease working, or that it is forbidden for a mahamudra practitioner to move. It does not mean this. It means that there is no specific form of physical activity and no specific form of verbal activity, such as the recitation of mantra or liturgy or ritual, that is required for mahamudra practice.

Question: But what Rinpoche said about insubstantiality . . . [further clarification of previous question]

Rinpoche: The section of the line that says, "sound inseparable from emptiness like an echo," is explaining the reason for this approach to speech in mahamudra. The reason why no particular speech is regarded as necessary or more important than another, is that speech and sound are just emptiness arising as sound. They are just one of the expressions of emptiness. And in that sense they are like an echo. They are not something real. They are just something that you are experiencing. So therefore, whatever speech arises has that same fundamental quality or

What we normally refer to as chöd practice is the enhancement of the view of mahamudra by using that which inspires fear or kleshas

same fundamental nature, and therefore does not especially need to be cultivated.

Question: Rinpoche, could you say something about where devotion comes into mahamudra; what the relationship is between mahamudra and devotion?

Rinpoche: Devotion has two functions in the practice of mahamudra. One of them you could think of as an immediate function or immediate benefit of devotion, and the other one is the main or true function of devotion. The immediate function is that sometimes, when you supplicate the root and lineage gurus with intense devotion, your perception, your outlook, changes completely. In an instant there is a great change in how you experience the world, and the result is that on the spot there will be considerable progress. For example, if up to then you had had no experience or recognition of your mind's nature, then you might have that experience. And whatever recognition and experience you have had will increase. So that is kind of an immediate or short-term benefit of devotion, which is simply that devotion brings blessings and blessings bring progress. But the function of devotion is even simpler or more basic than that. It is that the more trust and the more

If you have one hundred percent confidence in mahamudra, you will have one hundred percent diligence. If you have fifty percent confidence, you will have fifty percent diligence

interest and confidence you have in something, the more you will put into it. To the extent that you trust mahamudra, that you are interested in mahamudra, that you regard it as authentic and trustworthy, to that extent you will actually engage in practicing it. If you lack devotion, which means, if you are suspicious of mahamudra, if you think, "How could it be so easy, how could this actually work—something so simple as this?"—if you think that, if you think there is something a little fishy about it and you do not trust it, obviously you are not

going to practice it. And when someone takes that attitude of suspicion, no matter how many times mahamudra is taught to them and no matter how much instruction they receive, obviously it is not going to do them any good, because they do not buy it. If you have one hundred percent confidence, and here devotion is the same as confidence, if you have one hundred percent confidence in mahamudra, you will have one hundred percent diligence. If you have fifty percent confidence, you will have fifty percent diligence. Here, we are talking about mahamudra, but this function of devotion is actu-

ally common to all endeavors, whether spiritual or mundane. The more confidence you have in something, the more you will put into it and the more you will get out of it.

So we could stop there for this evening. 

On the Necessity of Cultivating a Strict Mindfulness in Meditation

Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching on Tilopa's Mahamudra Upadesha.

Last night we discussed the second of the seven sections of this text, *Mahamudra Upadesha*. You will remember that the first two sections were the view of mahamudra and the conduct of mahamudra. Now we come to the third of the seven sections, which is the meditation of mahamudra. The view is the recognition of the ground, which is also the ground of meditation.

The conduct is how to use your body, speech, and mind to practice dharma in a way that is founded in or based upon the recognition of that view. The third topic, the topic of meditation, is specifically how to familiarize yourself with the view that has been recognized. So, meditation in this context is basically further familiarization with the view.

Meditation here has two aspects, which are the preliminary practices of meditation and the main practice of meditation. In the next line the text begins a description of the preliminaries: ***The body is without meaning, empty like a bamboo stalk.*** [Line 66, page 73]

Experientially, there are two aspects of how we regard ourselves. The first is our body, which is a physical thing compounded of substances such as flesh and blood, and the second is our



mind, which is a mental thing that is simply lucid cognition. For the duration of this life these two are somewhat interdependent or co-exist in the same space. If you think about the nature of experience, you will easily come to the conclusion that of these two, your mind is the more important and the more significant. But normally, in the way we act and in the way we think, we seem to regard the body as more important. Because of that, most of what we do is done either directly or indirectly to sustain, cherish,

or protect our bodies. Although the body is really just an agent of the mind, we make the mind a slave or a servant of the body, and we are constantly agitated and we constantly make ourselves miserable mentally with such things as, for example, fear that something terrible will happen to our bodies, and so on. From the long-term point of view, this is meaningless, because the body is a very temporary thing. We regard it as somehow intrinsically valuable, but, in fact, from another point of view it has no value or meaning whatsoever. The actual implementation of this understanding consists of the preliminary contemplations on the difficulty of acquiring the freedoms and resources of the precious human existence, impermanence and death, the results of actions, and the defects of samsara. One of the benefits of these contemplations is that your

obsession with your physical body, and with all the related issues that come out of that, will lessen, which will give you the space to actually practice.

When one performs such contemplations, which are often referred to as the common preliminaries, the result is that one becomes inspired to practice meditation, which naturally leads to exertion or diligence in that practice. The actual practice of meditation itself has two stages to it, which are tranquility and insight or shamatha and vipashyana. These can be presented from the beginning as a unity—the technique presented can be unified shamatha/vipashyana from the beginning—or, alternatively, they can be presented in a sequence. The most elaborate or complete presentation of the meditation technique would have to begin with the physical posture and then the mental technique, and also the use of breathing, and so on. In this text, because it is brief, the physical posture is not gone through. It is assumed that you understand that the physical posture necessary for meditation practice is the one in common use, which is called the seven dharmas of Vairochana or the sevenfold posture.* As I am confident that all of you have had instruction in this, I am not going to go through the posture here, except to say one thing. It is true that in order to practice most fully you do need to use this type of meditation posture. But sometimes when people place their bodies in meditation posture, they do so in a way that is very tight or very tense. And while it is true that you need to have a straightened spine, and so on, if the way that you create or maintain this posture involves too much tension, then it becomes counterproductive. It was therefore said by Machig Labdron, “The physical posture or the

physical technique is to relax the four limbs,” which means that the rule of a correct posture includes that your limbs, all of the muscles of your two arms and two legs, be as relaxed as possible. So although you need to pay attention to posture and so forth, make sure that you do not become too tense by doing so.

This is also discussed by the Ninth Gyalwa Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje, in his mahamudra instruction text, *Pointing Out the Dharmakaya*. There he points out that, while we need the meditation posture of the seven dharmas of Vairochana in order to practice meditation, we have to ensure that the way we hold or generate this posture is relaxed. The reason this comes up is that often, when we fix our minds on something, or when we concentrate, we automatically generate a state of physical tension along with that. If you become physically tense when practicing meditation, you may experience some kind of heat or discomfort or pain. If these sensations arise they are not a

‘Maintain a posture that is free of tension, too much exertion, or a feeling of being coiled up; in other words, make the posture relaxed and comfortable’

big deal, because they just come about from the physical tension of your posture. Nevertheless, in order to avoid them, The Ninth Karmapa makes the following recommendation: “Maintain a posture that is free of tension, too much exertion, or a feeling of being coiled up; in other words, make the posture relaxed and comfortable.” These words seem somewhat unimportant and perhaps what they are saying sounds obvious right now, but when you actually practice meditation these instructions become very significant and important, and very helpful in generating a stable meditation experience and in preventing the arising of unnecessary obstacles or impediments. Again, the reason for this is simply that when we concentrate our minds, somehow we tend to make our body tight or tense at the same time. It is important to remember that as focused as your mind may be,

***Editor’s note:** For a further description of the seven dharmas of Vairochana, see *Shenpen Ösel*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pages 11-13, and Vol. 3, No. 1, page 41.

you also have to maintain a loose and relaxed physical state or posture.

The mental technique of meditation, the technique of placing the mind, is next explained in Tilopa's instruction. With regard to meditation techniques in general, perhaps the most common single technique used in all Buddhist traditions—including the Theravada, Zen, and Vajrayana traditions—is following the breath, which is an excellent technique and extremely useful. This was taught by the Buddha himself when he said, "In the case in

which there are many thoughts, follow the breath." Breathing meditation is not taught in this text, so, from one point of view, you could think that the instruction that is given is for a practitioner who has already developed some state of tranquillity or stability in meditation. Another way to look at it is that within the mahamudra tradition in general there are two types of meditation techniques: those that employ what is called a support, which means something on which you are focusing the mind, and

those that employ no support. In this case, meditation using a support or focus is not expressly taught. What is taught is meditation without a support: ***The mind is like the midst of space. It is inconceivable. Rest relaxed within that, without letting it go or placing it.**** [Lines 67-68]

The first line, which states that the mind is like the midst of space in being inconceivable, is saying that when you look at your mind, you do not see anything. In a sense it seems that there is nothing there. But there is so much "nothing there" that you cannot even say that there is nothing there, because that insubstantiality is at the same time itself a cognition. It is the unity of

***Editor's note:** Placing here means placing the mind on an object of concentration, or in a particular mental state.

emptiness and cognitive lucidity or clarity. This is something that anyone can *experience* directly by looking at their own mind. But it is something that no one can *conceive of*. You can experience the mind but you cannot accurately think about it, because it transcends the realm of thought. In that sense, it is something that you cannot conceive of or imagine, but that nevertheless you can directly experience—something that is at the same time devoid of any kind of substantiality and yet is vivid clarity. It is like, in that sense, the midst of the sky or the midst of space.

With regard to meditation techniques in general, perhaps the most common single technique used in all Buddhist traditions . . . is following the breath

The nature of your mind is beyond thought, but nevertheless it is your mind, so it is not beyond experience. The mind is empty in that when you look for it there is nothing to find, nothing to see. But it is a lucidity, a clarity that is mind. It cognizes. It knows. It is important to understand that the clarity or lucidity or luminosity of the mind refers to cognitive lucidity, not to physical lucidity like a physical light or something like that. So on the one hand there is nothing to find, but on the other hand there is cognition. And yet when you look at cognition, when you look at that which knows, that

which experiences, that which is aware, you cannot say anything about it. What you experience when you experience your own mind, your own cognition, is something that is indescribable and inconceivable even to the experiencer, because that which is conceivable to us, that which we can think about, has to be either something or nothing. It either exists or it does not. But the mind is beyond being something and beyond being nothing. So, being beyond all of that it is beyond thought. Fortunately you do not need to try to figure it out or to think about it, because you can experience it directly. And it is for that reason as well as others that we refer to the mind as a wish-fulfilling jewel—because it is something we can experience directly that is right there and that we do not have to figure out.

In the text it says, ***Rest relaxed in that state without sending it out, or placing it in, letting it go or attempting to place it.*** [Line 68]

When it says, “do not send the mind out or place it in, do not let it go or force it to rest,” what it means is that it does not matter what is happening within your mind. When you look right at your mind or the nature of your mind, if a thought arises, that is not a problem. If a thought arises then you will see or look at the nature of that thought, and in that way you will see the nature of your mind. If a thought does not arise you do not have to regard that as a problem, you do not have to try and cause a thought to arise, you simply look at the nature of that mind in the absence of thought. You do not have to alter the state of your mind in this practice of meditation. You do not have to attempt to force it to have any specific characteristics. If you experience no clarity or lucidity in your mind, you do not have to go looking for it. You just look directly at what you do experience. And the way to do this is by relaxing. If you relax your mind, then you will see the nature of your mind and you will be able to remain relaxed within that direct experience of your mind's nature.

This instruction is extraordinarily useful and important, because if you lack this instruction, you are liable to think that meditation consists of stopping thoughts, and your goal in meditation will be not to think. This is impossible, because if you have that aim in mind, even if you succeed in stopping the emergence of normal thoughts, what will happen is that you will observe the cessation of thought, and that observation will become a thought. If you are involved in an attempt to vanquish or conquer thoughts, you can never win. If, on the other hand, you take the mahamudra approach and simply look at the nature of whatever arises in your mind, then without your having to chase them away,

To the extent that we get involved in fighting with thoughts in meditation, we become tired and discouraged because it is endless

thoughts become pacified of themselves, simply through having been seen as they are. In that way you have no need to fight thoughts, or to view thoughts as somehow threatening. To the extent that we get involved in fighting with thoughts in meditation, we become tired and discouraged, because it is endless. To the extent that we simply look directly at the nature of thoughts, it is effortless, because thoughts themselves, through being

seen as they are, are self-liberating and pacify themselves. In order for this to work, however, according to all teachers of the past, you do need the faculties of mindfulness and alertness. In fact, you need a very crisp or strong mindfulness, as was taught by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal in the text *Moonbeams of Mahamudra*, in which he says, “Your mindfulness here needs to be tough and crisp, or sharp and crisp.” And in the *Bodhicharyavatara*, Shantideva says, “To those who wish to grasp hold of their mind I say, emphasize

ing its importance by joining my palms in an attitude of reverence and begging, exert yourselves in mindfulness.”

That is how to rest your mind. Then, within that state of resting the mind, you practice vipashyana or insight. The difference between the basic meditation of tranquillity or resting the mind or shamatha and the practice of insight or vipashyana is that in shamatha, which is devoid of vipashyana, while your mind comes to rest within its own nature, there is no *recognition* of that nature. In order to develop vipashyana some further instruction is necessary, and that is given next. The text says, . . . ***[If mind has no direction, it is mahamudra.] . . . with this you will attain unsurpassable awakening.*** [Lines 69-70]

Direction here means looking at something. The definition here of insight or vipashyana is that you are not looking at anything, because there is nothing to look at. If there were direction to your mind, then you would be looking for

a certain location where the mind could be sought or you would be looking for certain substantial characteristics in that location, such as shape and color, and so forth. In fact, the nature of the mind that is recognized is the absence of any such location, or any substantial characteristic. So that nature, which is mahamudra, is that with which you are to familiarize yourself. Familiarization with this nature is the practice of mahamudra. The Buddha explained this in different ways in different contexts. He taught the selflessness of individuals or persons, the selflessness of things or phenomena in general. He called that emptiness, and in another context he called that buddha nature. All of these things are included in this one understanding, because this nature of the mind that is itself beyond any kind of location or direction and is experienced by a mind that is free of direction, this nature of the mind, is the selflessness of persons. It is the selflessness of things. It is emptiness. It is buddha nature. If you familiarize yourself with this, then that will lead you to unsurpassable awakening.

All kinds of things constantly arise in our minds. We become sad, we become fearful, we become angry, we experience doubt, we experience guilt. Whatever of these things we experience, they are all unpleasant, and whatever particular thing we are experiencing, we want it to stop. But we simply do not know how to make it stop. The more you identify these unpleasant mental states as solid, the more sad and the more angry you will become, the more guilt you will feel, the bigger a grudge you will bear. Finally, if you maintain this strongly enough, you become so unhappy mentally that you will become ill physically. The solution is to see right through them, because as long as we are attempting to flee from or run away from an unpleasant mental state, it seems very powerful

If you become intensely sad, when you look right at the sadness, you find there is nothing there that you can really, honestly call sadness

and threatening. But when you look right at it there is nothing there. For example, if you become intensely sad, when you look right at the sadness, you find that there is nothing there that you can really, honestly call sadness. Conventionally we regard anger as very powerful and very dangerous, and in the context of the way things function relatively, of course, it is. But that is only true so long as you are turned away from it. If you look right at your anger, there is nothing there. And this is true with any mental afflictions or unpleasant mental states. If you recognize its nature, whatever it is, it will no longer harm you. So this point is important, not only in the ultimate attainment of buddhahood, but also in the immediate or short term ability to live happily.

That completes the third of the seven topics, which is meditation. Now we come to the fourth topic, which is the samaya of mahamudra. Samaya refers to a pledge or promise or commitment—something you undertake. And the way it is explained in the tantras and in traditional texts of explanation, it sounds extremely dangerous, like some kind of horrific control, a complete lack of personal freedom, in which, if you make any attempt to assert personal freedom, you will be cast immediately into the depths of the lowest hell. It is actually explained this way for a reason, which is that, in order to accomplish anything, you need to maintain a certain consistent direction and diligence. This is obvious and true in anything we attempt to do. It is not true that by attempting to assert personal freedom or by impairing samaya you immediately throw yourself into the depths of the lowest hell, but it is true that it is very important to keep samaya. In order to understand what samaya is and why it is so important to keep it, it is helpful to understand the Tibetan word for samaya, which is *dam-tsig*. *Dam-tsig*

has two syllables, each of which is a distinct concept. The first syllable, *dam*, means a promise. The second syllable, *tsig*, means words. So together, *dam-tsig* means words of promise or pledge. Basically, therefore, what *dam-tsig* or samaya consists of is saying to yourself or someone else, “I will do such and such a thing.” Any action that is intentional begins with such a thought, “I will do such and such a thing.” In order to actually accomplish the action, that thought, “I will do it,” has to be maintained. If at some point you abandon that, if you think, “I will not do it,” then obviously you simply will not do it. So if you want to accomplish anything, you have to maintain the momentum of your intention or your commitment. This is true with anything whatsoever, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem to be. For example, if I want to drink some water I have to first think, “I will drink this water,” and then I have to maintain that commitment or intention until I have drunk the water. If before I have drunk the water, I change my mind and I think, “I will not drink this water,” then the result will be that I will not drink any water. So the basic idea of samaya is that if you abandon your intention, you will not accomplish it. And this is true for anything you might attempt to accomplish in the world or spiritually, no matter how significant or insignificant it might seem to be. The samaya talked about in dharma is basically such concepts or commitments as “I will practice dharma,” “I will practice mahamudra,” or “I will practice the generation stage of such and such yidam,” “I will take such and such empowerment,” and so on. If you do not maintain the momentum of that undertaking or commitment, then you will not accomplish whatever it was that you intended to do by doing those things. So on the one hand, failing to keep samaya is not something that can cast you into the depths of the *avici* hell of uninterrupted torment. But on the other hand, samaya is essential to keep in order to get anything done.

The basic idea of samaya is that if you abandon your intention, you will not accomplish it

The initial presentation of samaya in the text is in the next five lines which say, ***Those who follow tantra and the vehicle of the paramitas, the vinaya, the sutras, and the various teachings of the Buddha with an attachment for their individual textual traditions and their individual philosophy will not come to see luminous mahamudra, because the seeing of that luminosity or clear light is obscured by their intention and attitude.*** [Lines 88-91 and 95]

On the face of it, this seems a little odd. It seems what Tilopa is saying here is that none of these aspects of Buddhism are of much use. But he is not saying that. He is not saying that these various traditions and vehicles or aspects of training are useless. He is pointing out that, since they are all ultimately methods for realizing mahamudra, then if they are practiced in the absence of that intention and that view, then they will not lead to that realization which is their true purpose. For example, the first mentioned are those who follow secret mantrayana or vajrayana. And when he says that vajrayana will obscure mahamudra, what he is saying is that if you attempt to practice vajrayana, which is a method for the realization of mahamudra and a very effective one, if you attempt to practice it in a different way, forgetting about mahamudra, doing it for some other reason, doing it without the view of mahamudra and without the intention of realizing mahamudra, then obviously no matter how much of it you practice, it will not lead you to that realization of mahamudra. The same is true with the practice of the paramitas or perfections. If you practice the six perfections, of course this will lead to the realization of mahamudra, provided that the understanding of mahamudra is there from the beginning. But if you simply practice the perfections in the absence of that mahamudra view and that intention to realize mahamudra, then you will not realize it. You cannot simply hope that by prac-

ting something other than mahamudra, it will cause you in the future at some point to suddenly pop into a state of mahamudra. And this is true with any aspect of dharma, because all of these various aspects of the dharma, or of the Buddhist tradition, are methods for the realization of mahamudra. But they cannot take their effect as such unless the view of mahamudra is there from the beginning. If the view is not present, then you consider what you are doing with these aspects to be some kind of alteration. And that concept or wish or intention that you derive incorrectly from the specific tradition or aspect of your training actually obscures the nature that you are trying to recognize.*

The main point here is that, whatever you practice—the vajrayana, the paramitas, the vinaya, whatever aspect of dharma—it should be combined with the practice of mahamudra. The connection between this point and samaya is that ultimately the true samaya is the samaya to recognize the mind's nature through transcending or pacifying the agitation of thoughts. Therefore the text continues, ***The conceptualized maintenance of vows actually causes you to impair the meaning of samaya.*** [Line 96]

Or you could say, ***to waiver from or diminish the meaning of samaya.*** The meaning of this is that, since ultimately samaya is transcending the fixation and grasping of

***Editor's note:** For example, if one practiced the Meditation of Chenrezig with the intention of replacing angry thoughts with compassionate thoughts, then one would inevitably become involved in trying to suppress anger and trying to generate a feeling akin to some feeling of compassion one might have experienced in the past. In both efforts one would be involved in reinforcing clinging to duality, which would prevent one from recognizing the true nature of mind, which transcends duality and all forms of conceptuality. One needs to remember that the very wisdom of mahamudra that recognizes the true nature is itself compassion, and that the very act of recognizing the true nature of mind or the true nature of thought, in this case the thoughts of anger, is itself an act of compassion.

Ultimately the true samaya is the samaya to recognize the mind's nature through transcending or pacifying the agitation of thoughts

conceptuality—that which impedes the recognition of your mind's nature—then conceptual grasping of the samaya itself is a violation of samaya. By grasping at samaya in a conceptual way, you diminish or impair your recognition of your mind's nature. Recognition being the essence of samaya, such grasping at samaya is therefore a violation of samaya. If you become conceptual about the samaya, you create a situation in which you are at cross purposes with the purpose or essence of mahamudra. Of course this does not ultimately affect the true nature itself, but it does affect whether or not you attain the result, which is the recognition and realization of that nature.

The instruction continues, ***Without mental directedness or mental activity, be free of all intentionality.*** [Lines 92-93]

This means, do not try to figure it out or think too much about thoughts that arise. Mahamudra deals with thought the way a snake deals with the knots that it can tie itself into. It naturally uncoils itself. Someone does not have to come along and help the snake out. In the same way, thoughts will dissolve of themselves. You do not have to do something to them. Thoughts, so to speak, uncoil themselves.**

The instruction continues, ***Thoughts are self-arisen and self-pacified like designs on the surface of water.*** [Line 94]

As a thought arises it is already dissolving, so that, aside from seeing the nature of the thought, there is no need to do anything to it. Attempting to do something to it will actually only obstruct or prevent the recognition of the thought's nature. Just as a design on the surface of water does not have to be erased but takes

****Editor's note:** It has been taught that in the beginning thoughts liberate themselves like meeting an old friend; next, they liberate themselves like a snake uncoiling; and finally, they liberate themselves like a thief entering an empty house.

care of itself, in the same way, thoughts do not have to be erased. If you can look at the nature of thoughts, then all thoughts, including suffering and agitation, and so forth, will be naturally pacified without your having to intentionally do anything to them.

The text continues, ***If you do not pass beyond the meaning, which is not abiding and not conceptualizing or focusing, then through not passing beyond that, you do not pass beyond or transgress samaya. This is the torch which dispels all obscurity or darkness.*** [Lines 97-98]

The basic idea of samaya, as we saw, was maintaining an undertaking, and your undertaking here is the attitude, I want to recognize mahamudra, the nature of my mind. In order to do that, I have to meditate on mahamudra, I have to meditate on the nature of my mind. Meditation here refers simply to looking directly at the nature of your mind and at the nature of whatever arises in your mind. So samaya here consists of the samaya to look directly at your own mind. As we have seen, this nature of mind, that is the object of meditation here, is emptiness, which is also selflessness. Therefore, while emptiness or selflessness is in a sense what we are looking at—or, you could even say, what we are looking for—because it is emptiness, it is not a place. So you are not looking in a certain place and you are not resting your mind in a certain place. There is no place to rest your mind while looking at the nature of mind. And you are not focusing on anything in particular, because it is emptiness. The way you keep samaya, the way you look at your mind's nature, is by being free of the idea of a place or focus.

Even though the nature of your mind is beyond location or focus, it nevertheless is something you can experience. The looking at the nature of mind is not a state of blank or

vacant stupidity. There is an actual clarity. There is an actual experience or recognition. It is also not a state of distraction. Distraction and mental blankness on the one hand, and recognition of the mind are different things. Recognition is not stupidity and not distraction. If you remain in that, if you remain in that *direct looking at your mind's nature* without its becoming blankness or distraction, then you remain within samaya. And

you remain within the only true samaya, because the samaya is to recognize your mind's nature. By resting in the recognition of your mind's nature, in fact, you are doing more than simply keeping samaya because you are illuminating the darkness that has afflicted you all along. You are lighting the torch that in an instant dispels the darkness of innumerable eons. You are dispelling the darkness of ignorance, and therefore you are removing the suffering that comes from ignorance. The point of all of this is that we need to

keep samaya by resting in the recognition of our mind's nature. And the role of diligence is being diligent in doing that.

That completes the fourth topic of the seven, which is the samaya. The fifth topic is the benefit of mahamudra practice. The text continues, ***If, free of all intention, you do not abide in extremes, you will see without exception the meaning of all the Buddha's teachings or of all the takas, the sections of the Buddha's teachings.*** [Lines 99-100]

Through your practice of mahamudra, intense immersion in your mind's nature free of extremes, or even through a partial attempt at such immersion—such as an appreciation of the view and an interest in the mind's nature—you will come to recognize and understand the meaning of the sutras, the vinaya, the abidharma, and all of the vajrayana, because what you are appreciating or working with is the essence of all of them. And further it says, ***If you***

By resting in the recognition of your mind's nature . . . you are lighting the torch that in an instant dispels the darkness of innumerable eons

rest in this you will be liberated from the prison of samsara. [Line 101]

This means that, if you rest in this recognition of your mind's nature, you will free yourself from all the sufferings of samsara: the sufferings of the lower realms, present sufferings, the sufferings of all kinds of rebirths such as human with all of its attendant sufferings, animal rebirth, and so on.

And further it says, ***If you rest evenly within this, all of your wrongdoing and obscurations will be burned.*** [Line 102]

There are generally two types of impediments to the recognition of the mind's nature. One is called wrongdoing, but in this case refers to the actual results of wrongdoing, what we often call bad karma, the traces within you of the negative things you have done with body, speech and mind. In order to purify those traces, we normally engage in various common practices such as the Vajrasattva meditation, the application of the four powers of confession, and so on.* The un-

***Editor's note:** The four powers, according to Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye, in *The Torch of Certainty*, are: "1. The 'power to renounce' and regret your previous misdeeds [mentally before the Three Jewels and the Three Roots] as vigorously as if you had swallowed poison. 2. The 'power to refuse to repeat a harmful deed,' and to firmly resolve, 'Even if my life is at stake, I will never do it again.' 3. The 'power to rely' on Taking Refuge and Engendering the Enlightened Attitude. 4. The 'power to carry out all types of remedial wholesome acts to purify harmful ones,' including the 'Six Gates of Remedy,' and others. and so on." The Six Gates of Remedy are to say the names of buddhas and bodhisattvas; to set up images, holy books, and stupas; to make offerings to the buddha, dharma, and sangha, and to the lama, yidam, and dakas, dakinis, and dharma protectors; to recite the sutras and tantras taught by the Buddha; to recite the "hundred-syllable mantra of the Tathagata," the mantras of Vairocana, Akshobhya, and other profound mantras; confident in the potentiality of buddhahood, while meditating and reciting, to meditate on the significance of nonself (emptiness) and three-fold purity, i.e., without regard for the obscurations to be purified, an instrument of purification, and a purifier, and between meditation sessions, to concentrate on the unreality or illusoriness of all phenomena.

common practice of mahamudra itself can remove or purify all of this negative karma.

The other impediment to realization is obscuration in general, which includes the mental afflictions or kleshas and ignorance itself. All of this, wrongdoing and obscurations in general, can be purified or removed through resting in the nature of your mind.

Next, the text says, ***This is the torch of the doctrine, or this is called for those reasons the torch of the doctrine.*** [Line 103]

The doctrine, of course, means the Buddha's teaching. Here mahamudra is being called "the torch of the Buddhist teachings" because it is the essence of them, which actually dispels our ignorance. The benefits that have been explained here, which are essentially threefold, really are

all included in this removal of all ignorance, and therefore the benefit of mahamudra is simply that, through removing all ignorance, it causes one to acquire or attain all virtuous or positive qualities and to be free of all defects.

The benefit of mahamudra is simply that through removing all ignorance, it causes one to acquire or attain all virtuous or positive qualities and to be free of all defects

The sixth section or topic of the text is the defects or problems with not meditating on mahamudra. The text continues, ***Foolish people who have no interest in this will only be continually carried off by the river of samsara.*** [Lines 104-105]

In spite of the fact that mahamudra is extremely easy or convenient to practice and vastly beneficial, people generally have no interest in it. Even though it is a way to effectively accomplish all positive qualities and free oneself from all defects, people who could be, strictly speaking, extraordinarily intelligent, are in the long term or in effect foolish, in that they have no interest in something that is exactly what they need. The problem with not being interested in recognizing the nature of your own mind is that,

not being interested in it, you will not attempt to do it. Therefore, you will not realize mahamudra or your mind's nature, you will not end samsara, and you will instead be continually carried off in samsara.

The text continues, *Those foolish people experiencing intolerable sufferings in lower states of existence are worthy of compassion.* [Line 106]

The previous line ended with: "If you are not interested in mahamudra you are just going to continue to be carried off in samsara."

The problem with being carried off by samsara, by continuing to experience uncontrolled rebirth, is that exactly what you are going to be reborn as is by no means certain. You could possibly be reborn in what are called lower states of existence as an animal, a hungry ghost, or a hell being. And regardless of where you are reborn, exactly what is going to happen to you is also uncertain. And a great deal of what happens to us in samsara is pretty miserable. As long as you continue to experience uncontrolled rebirth, you will continue to be exposed to a great deal of uncontrolled and intolerable suffering—mental suffering of all kinds, physical suffering of all kinds, unpleasant circumstances affecting you, your friends, your family, and so on. All sorts of things can happen and will continue to happen as long as you reject this single point of allowing what arises in your mind to be pacified of itself. As long as you reject that method or that technique or that point, your suffering will never end. In this line, Tilopa is expressing great and sincere compassion for those who, of course, have no wish whatsoever to suffer, but by rejecting the only thing that can really end suffering, will definitely continue to do so for as long as they continue to reject it.

People who could be, strictly speaking, extraordinarily intelligent, are in the long term or in effect foolish, in that they have no interest in something that is exactly what they need

That completes the sixth of the seven sections of the text. I am going to stop here for this evening. The seventh and last section, which is extensive, is how to actually practice mahamudra. This text of instruction by Tilopa—who was regarded as being like the monarch of all mahasiddhas, the king of all mahasiddhas—is quite concise. It consists of about twenty-eight stanzas. And it is really valuable, to the extent that one could say that every line in it has a distinct value, a distinct meaning, which is worthy of continued reflection and investigation. So please read it again and again and think about what it means and use it as a basis for your actual practice of meditation. You might have a number of different reactions to this, of course. Through working with this text and this type of instruction and practice, you might have some kind of realization of your mind's nature. You might have received a great deal of instruction from various teachers and have some realization of it. If you have realization or recognition of your mind's nature, do not be satisfied with just that. Use that as a basis for the continued lifelong application of mindfulness and alertness until you attain full awakening, so that you can really and truly free yourself forever from suffering. Or you might find that you lack realization. You might find this all a bit of a mystery. You might think, "Well exactly what is this mahamudra, what is this nature of mind? I want to know what it is, I want to realize it." That is good enough. If you have that kind of inquisitiveness and that kind of enthusiasm, that will bring you to a recognition of the mind's nature. Or you might have a third reaction, which is that you might not be that interested in it to begin with. But that is why Tilopa gives us reasons for being extremely interested in it. The reason for being interested in mahamudra, which means being interested in working with

your own mind directly in direct experience, is that only by doing so can you be of true and great benefit to yourself and to others. In any case, whether you have a realization of your mind's nature or not, and whether you are particularly interested in this or not, if you look at your mind, you will get it.

Some people have said that they are not going to be able to be here for the empowerment of Tilopa. Being here is not strictly a requirement in order to practice this, but because they are not going to be here they have asked me to

give the reading transmission for the text, so I will give it. Having heard it, you will receive both the instruction and the reading transmission which makes the text a workable basis for practical use. [Rinpoche gives *lung*.]

I would like to conclude by dedicating the virtue or merit of this teaching to the realization by all beings of mahamudra and to the freedom of all beings, until they come to attain liberation, from warfare, sickness, famine, disputation, and disasters of all kinds. ㊦



If you have realization or recognition of your mind's nature, do not be satisfied with just that. Use that as a basis for the continued lifelong application of mindfulness and alertness until you attain full awakening, so that you can really and truly free yourself forever from suffering.

Mahamudra Upadesha
**Only With Reliance
Upon a Wise Guru
Will You Receive
the Blessing of
Liberation**



Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching on Tilopa's Mahamudra Upadesha.

Iwould like to begin by wishing you all good morning, and then, as we have been doing, I would like to chant the lineage supplication. [See page 11.] It is my hope that this explanation of the *Mahamudra Upadesha* will actually be helpful to your minds and your practice. Whether or not it will be helpful depends upon our cultivation of faith and devotion, so please chant the supplication with faith and devotion directed to the root and lineage gurus.

As I mentioned yesterday, according to the Third Gyalwa Karmapa's division of Tilopa's *Mahamudra Upadesha*, there are seven sections to the text, of which we completed the sixth last night. Today we are going to look at the seventh

and last section, which teaches how to actually practice mahamudra. The first six were the view, the conduct, the meditation, the samaya, the benefits of practicing mahamudra, and the defects of not practicing mahamudra.

The presentation here of how to practice mahamudra follows the two-fold format of the preliminaries and the main practice. It first explains what a beginner needs as resources, and then, how one actually goes about the main practice. Continuing from where we left off in the text, it says, ***Wishing to attain liberation from intolerable suffering, rely upon a wise guru. When the guru's blessings enter your heart, your mind will be liberated.*** [Lines 107-108, page 74]

The first prerequisite for the entrance into this path is that you wish to attain liberation from intolerable suffering. Intolerable suffering

refers, in the main sense and in the long-term sense, to all sufferings of samsara and especially to those of the lower realms. But in the short-term sense it also refers to one's present sufferings, the sufferings we experience within this life. Indeed there is a vast variety of problems, disasters, upheavals, and so forth that afflicts us even in this life. So wishing to attain liberation is wishing to attain freedom from all of these sufferings. The understanding that goes along with the wish for liberation here is the recognition that every sentient being, without exception, wishes to be happy and wishes to be free from suffering.

That is fundamentally what all beings want. In order to achieve that end we have to actually enter into the path and specifically practice mahamudra, through which you can free yourself from suffering, through which you can attain a state of stable happiness. This practice cannot be done on your own without the influence or instruction of someone else. There are some things in the world that can be self-taught, but the recognition of and the familiarization with the nature of your mind cannot be done without resort to a teacher. The person whose influence and instruction you need in order to practice this path is referred to in the text as a wise or learned guru.

The reason that we need the guru's influence and instruction is that our intellect is directed away from itself. Your mind tends to look outward rather than inward. That is one of its basic qualities or characteristics. The intellect is also limited in what it can know or appreciate. The intellect can only conceive of an existent or a nonexistent. The intellect can only conceive of something or nothing. Which means that the intellect cannot directly encounter or appreciate the nature of things because the nature of things, the nature of each and every thing, is beyond these concepts of something and nothing. There-

fore, your conceptual mind or intellect can never correctly know the truth or the true nature. It was therefore said by Shantideva, "Absolute truth is not within the realm of the intellect because the intellect itself is relative truth." This means that you cannot figure out the nature of your mind or the nature of things, so you need to approach it in a different way. The way that it has to be approached is by working with a teacher who can give you precise practical instructions or *upadesa* that enable you to encounter your mind's nature. Of course, it is

your own mind you are looking at. The reason, however, that you need guidance in looking at your mind is that from beginningless time you have always looked outward. Your mind has always looked away from itself. The guidance that the teacher gives you consists, fundamentally, of showing you how to turn inward, how to turn in and face your own nature and look at your own nature. In the text, the guru is qualified as being learned or wise. The term "wise" here means that the guru has experience of meditation and therefore can methodically

and accurately guide the student's practice of mahamudra.

The second line of this couplet says, "When the guru's blessing enters your heart, your mind will be liberated." This refers to the previous line which indicated that the successful practice of the path depends upon receiving the instructions of and practicing under the guidance of a wise guru. What exactly is the benefit of working with such a teacher? Exactly how does this benefit accrue or occur? All of the benefits of working with a wise or authentic guru are included in this concept of blessing. The word "blessing" normally conveys the connotation of some kind of power or energy that is transmitted to us by our teacher, and so forth. The Tibetan word for blessing is *jin lap*, and the first syllable

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jin is the past tense of the verb “to give.” It means that which has been given or imparted, and by implication, that which has been given to you or transmitted to you by your teacher. The second syllable, *Iap*, means “waves.” Waves is a metaphor for the actual power or energy of the teacher’s blessing, which engulfs you.

How is this blessing transmitted? What exactly is this blessing or energy or power, which somehow causes your practice to take effect? It really consists of two related processes, both of which can be called blessing. The first of these is the natural, or one could say, the automatic result of someone’s faith and devotion. If you have strong faith and devotion, somehow just through having them, your appearances, your projections, your experiences will change, especially your experience of your own mind. And it will change possibly quite radically, so that, for example, in the case of someone whose mind has no stability, no tranquillity, if they develop this kind of faith and devotion, they will develop at the same time a state or quality of tranquillity. If someone has some degree of tranquillity, with an increase of devotion, that tranquillity will increase accordingly. This is also true with clarity. Whatever degree of clarity there is will increase with the increase of devotion. This is true of any kind of meditation experience or realization. When someone has no experience or realization and cultivates devotion, they will gain experience. And if they have some degree of experience, it will increase upon the development of devotion. This natural or spontaneous result of devotion is one thing that is referred to as blessing.

The other aspect of blessing is the result of hearing the teachings of the guru. When you

hear the guru’s teachings, you are benefited by them directly. Through that instruction you come to recognize your own nature. You come to understand dharma and, therefore, to have confidence in it. That confidence in dharma automatically leads to diligence, which leads to meditation experience, which, when it was not there before, will be there, and if it was there before, it will increase. So in a sense, this whole

process is the blessing of the guru’s speech through the power of the guru’s speech. So the guru’s speech can also be called blessing. When it says in the text that these blessings enter your heart, it means that these blessings actually enter your mind, enter your experience.

When it says in the text that through the blessings of the guru entering your heart, your mind will become liberated, it means that the nature of your mind will become manifest. As was said by Saraha, “The mind is in its nature like a wish-fulfilling jewel.” Saraha made the famous statement, “I pay homage to the mind that is like a wish-fulfilling jewel.” The meaning of this is that, intrinsically, the mind is free of defects and possesses all possible qualities in completeness and in abundance. In other

words, the potential to benefit not only yourself but all other beings is innate within your mind, already present. For example, all of the qualities and activities of Buddha Shakyamuni, starting from his attainment of unsurpassable awakening, his turning of the dharmachakra and his subsequent establishment of innumerable beings in various states of liberation, all of these abilities to benefit beings in this way came from the qualities that were always innate within the mind of Buddha Shakyamuni, and which he recognized when he attained buddhahood. Buddha Shakyamuni is not the only one who pos-

The difference between a buddha and ourselves is that our qualities are effectively dormant, because they are obscured by what the mahasiddhas of our lineage have called the cocoon of conceptuality

sesses these qualities. We all possess these qualities. The difference between a buddha and ourselves is that our qualities are effectively dormant, because they are obscured by what the mahasiddhas of our lineage have called the cocoon of conceptuality. With our thoughts we create a cocoon that completely covers all of the qualities that are innate and always there, always present within the mind—which is a waste. We waste the nature of our mind, not in the sense of its being damaged, but in the sense of its being so hidden that it is effectively dormant. Liberation refers to the bringing of the mind out from this covering, this obscuration or cocoon.

The text continues with *Kye ho*, which is an exclamation that has the function of calling one's attention. ***These things of samsara are meaningless or pointless, the causes of suffering. And since all of these things that have been done or made are pointless, look at that which is meaningful.*** [Lines 15-16]

The path begins with relying upon a teacher, then receiving his or her blessing, and then practicing meditation. When you actually practice meditation, what you discover is a wonderment at the experience of your mind's nature. The initial exclamation, "Kye ho," is an expression of this wonderment. But the wonderment goes together with a recognition of the relative pointlessness of samsara. Samsara refers to a state of being in which your mind is bound or fettered or encased within thought or conceptuality. This means that from the moment we awake in the morning until the moment we go to sleep at night, one thought follows after another. Some of these thoughts are necessary, but most of them are useless. And in fact, it is worse than that. They are worse than useless. They are actually harmful in that they make us miserable. It is true that some of our

thoughts make us happy. We have two kinds of thoughts. We have happy thoughts and we have miserable thoughts. If you closely follow the thoughts that run through your mind from the beginning of the day to the end of the day, you will find that the majority of them are thoughts of sadness, regret, fear, worry, anxiety, and so on, and far fewer of them are thoughts of any kind of happiness, satisfaction or pleasure, which means that we torture ourselves constantly, which is worse than useless or pointless.

Since this process of following after thought, which we call samsara, is pointless, why not do that which is meaningful, which is not useless or pointless, which is to look at the nature of our mind under all circumstances. Look at that which has some meaning, some benefit. The meaning or benefit of looking at the mind's nature is that it dispels suffering. It frees one and it liberates one from all kinds of sufferings.

The practice of meditation, of course, needs to be founded upon a formal sitting practice of meditation. This is clear from the instructions of the gurus of our tradition. Nevertheless, while formal meditation practice is essential, the continuous maintenance of mindfulness and alertness in post-meditation is equally essential; otherwise, we end up with an approach to practice and living in which we are extremely careful when we are practicing formal meditation, and then completely careless when we are in post-meditation.

The problem with that approach is that every time you are in post-meditation, because of the interruption, because of the occurrence of the state of unmonitored carelessness of mind, the process which has begun in meditation stops. So there is no progress. The progress is impeded by the carelessness or mindlessness in post-meditation. The solution to this is to be undistracted, that is to say, to preserve bare

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mindfulness and alertness in all activities, whether you are working, whether you are sitting around, no matter what. This will strengthen and reinforce and enhance the formal practice of meditation. The absence of this kind of post-meditation mindfulness will, as I said, stop or interrupt the practice of meditation. And this type of post-meditation mindfulness and alertness will in no way inhibit or diminish the quality of your life, and it will bring direct progress to your practice.

The next line is concerned principally with post-meditation practice, but really with both formal meditation and post-meditation practice. In one of his songs Lord Marpa the Translator makes the statement, “I possess 108 instructions—mixing and transference foremost among them.” Based on this and other similar statements, we can see that the most important instructions that Lord Marpa emphasized were those of mixing and transference. Among those two, that of primary importance is this instruction or concept of “mixing.” Mixing refers to mixing whatever occurs with meditation. Often we are overpowered by our fear, by feeling intimidated by something, by our anxiety, or by one klesha or another. If you mix whatever klesha or fear arises with meditation, you will not be overpowered by it. Mixing anxiety, for example, with meditation means that you look at the fear. Instead of looking away from the fear, at whatever it is you are afraid of, you look at the fear itself. You look to see where it is. You start with the feeling, “I am afraid,” or “I am worried.” You think, “Where is this worry, where is this fear, what is its substance, what is its nature?” You look directly at it. Whenever you look directly at whatever is present in your mind, such as fear, or anxiety, or worry, you will see its natural emptiness. And seeing its emptiness, seeing its nature, you will not be overpowered by it. This is also true of

When you turn inward and look directly at your fear or your klesha, it is like popping a bubble, because you discover that there is nothing there

kleshas. Often we are overpowered by anger or overpowered by desire. If you mix these with meditation when they arise, and do the same with any upheaval or reaction to upheaval that occurs within your mind, they will have much less power. Whereas, before you have looked right at them they seem massive and solid and threatening, when you actually look directly at these emotions and fears, you perceive that they are like bubbles that arise on the surface of water. Bubbles can become quite large but they are hollow and they are very fragile. As soon as a bubble is touched, it pops and then there is nothing there, and there was not very much there to begin with. In the

same way, when you turn inward and look directly at your fear or your kleshas, it is like popping a bubble, because you discover that there is nothing there. And this is what the Buddha meant when he said that the nature of all things is emptiness. By looking directly at what arises in your mind, you can directly experience that nature within your own mind, which will enable you not to be overpowered by mental afflictions and fears.

That completes the presentation of the preliminaries. Next, the main practice of mahamudra is presented initially in the four topics of view, meditation, conduct, and fruition or result—in that sequence. The first of these is the view, which is summarized here in one line, ***If you are beyond all grasping at an object and grasping at a subject, that is the monarch of all views.*** [Line 74]

This notion of being beyond all grasping at a truly existent object and a truly existent subject sounds extremely profound and very far removed from our ordinary or present experience. But in fact, it is not far away from us. It might be difficult to easily transcend the projection of subject and object in our relationship to external objects or phenomena. But it is easy to transcend

this by looking at your own mind and experiencing that nature beyond subject and object. When you look at your mind, you do not find anything. You do not find anything that is being looked at, and you also do not find anything that is looking at something that could be looked at. Simply by looking at your own mind, you experience that your mind is beyond being a subject or being an object. So you experience the emptiness of supposed subject and object. Sustaining this looking at your own mind is the supreme view or the monarch among all views.

Next, with regard to meditation, it says, ***If there is no distraction, that is the monarch among all meditations.*** [Line 75]

Normally when we think of meditation we regard it as some kind of effortful forcing of the mind into a state of rigid concentration, but what is being pointed out by Tilopa here is that this is not at all what meditation is. Meditation is simply not straying from or not being distracted from this looking at or awareness of our mind as it is. And our mind as it is empty, and yet it is cognitive lucidity. Not being distracted from this means preserving the faculty of mindfulness and the faculty of alertness. Practically speaking, this means that when a thought arises, or a klesha arises, or an impediment or a potential distraction arises, you simply look directly at it, and that maintains this viewing of the mind's nature beyond distraction.

With regard to conduct, it says, ***If there is no effort, that is the monarch among all conducts.*** [Line 76]

Effort here means the effortful or intentional application of conceptual energy to meditation. For example, instead of looking at the mind and thinking, "I will look at the mind. I must look at the mind. I will practice mahamudra. I must practice mahamudra," to transcend that and look directly at the mind is the supreme conduct.

And finally, with regard to the fruition, it

says, ***When there is no hope and no fear, that is the final result, and the fruition has been attained or revealed.*** [Line 77]

The point here is that hope and fear are unnecessary and inappropriate with regard to our mind. It was said by Lord Maitreya, "There is nothing in this that needs to be removed, and there is nothing at all that needs to be added to this." This is the same idea that was expressed in the statement by Saraha which says, "I pay homage to the mind that is like a wish-fulfilling jewel." In that the mind's essential nature is emptiness, and in that its defining characteristic is clarity or cognitive lucidity, it is perfect just as it is. It does not need to be altered or improved upon or cleaned up, or to have anything removed from it in any way. So, hope of improvement of the mind or fear of the lack of improvement of the mind are unnecessary and off the track.

When, through experiencing your mind's nature, you no longer have such hope or such fear, that is the fruition or result.

The next three lines summarize or clarify what went before: ***It is beyond being an object of conceptual focus, and the mind's nature is lucidity.*** [Line 71]

The first line means that your mind, in being emptiness in its essential nature, is not and cannot be an object of conceptual or intentional focus. It is not something to which your mind

can be directed in a certain or exclusive way. And this means simply that the mind has no substantial characteristics such as color, shape, and location. It not only lacks such characteristics, it even lacks the characteristic of nothingness. The mind is as much beyond being nothing as it is beyond being a solid substance, because, although it is completely free of any kind of substantial or solid existence, it nevertheless is unceasing as cognition. The cognition never stops, in spite of the fact that there is no solid thing that is not stopping. Therefore, Gampopa

Hope of improvement of the mind or fear of lack of improvement of the mind are unnecessary and off the track

said about the view, “Look at your mind, because that is definitely the view.” So, if you look at your mind, on the one hand, it is beyond any kind of conceptual focus, but on the other hand, because it is cognition, it can be experienced, it can experience itself or view itself. Then the text continues: ***There is no path to be traversed and yet, in that way you enter the path to buddhahood.*** [Line 72]

On the one hand, there is no path to be traversed because the mind’s nature is what it is. It does not need to be changed or improved upon, and in fact cannot be. So, in that sense there is no process to be gone through. Nevertheless, the recognition of this nature, which is beyond process, is the process or path that produces awakening. And then in the third line it says, ***There is no object of meditation, but if you become accustomed to this you will attain unsurpassable awakening.*** [Line 73]

There is nothing in the practice of mahamudra that you are focusing on as an object of meditation, such as light you might see, or anything you might visualize or imagine. There is no object of meditation in that sense. But this process of getting used to or becoming more familiar with your own nature is what is called meditation in the mahamudra tradition. And that familiarization with your own nature is what will lead to buddhahood. So in that way, the text summarizes the view, the meditation, the conduct, and the fruition.

The next two stanzas are concerned with the importance or virtues of practice in solitude or isolation. They begin by extolling the virtues of solitude: ***Thoroughly examine mundane things or the things of the world. If you do you will see that none of them persist, none of them are capable of permanence, and in that sense, they are all like dreams and magical illusions. Dreams***

and magical illusions are meaningless. Therefore, generate renunciation and give up mundane concerns. [Lines 7-10]

The point of the first four lines is that there is no reason to be obsessed with mundane concerns. Because all of these things, with which we allow ourselves to become so obsessed or to which we allow ourselves to become so attached, are in their very nature unfit for attachment because they are constantly changing. They cannot, as much as we may want them to, remain the same. Therefore, it is inappropriate to make an emotional investment in their remaining the same. In fact, this obsession, this attachment to things and the resulting aversion towards other things, produces all kinds of problems, impediments, suffering, and so forth.

The text continues, ***Cut through the bonds of attachment and aversion toward those around you and your surroundings and meditate in isolated retreats, forests, and so forth, living alone.*** [Lines 11-12]

These two lines mean that if you want to practice you have to become independent from what is around you. What is being especially extolled here is the virtue of practicing in a situation of isolation. The last two lines say, ***Remain in that state without meditation. When you attain that which is without attainment you have attained mahamudra.*** [Lines 13-14]

The meditation practice that is to be conducted in that way, in solitude and so forth, is, in a sense, free from meditation, because there is no object of meditation. And what is attained through that meditation, because it is not a fundamental

change in the nature of things or the nature of the mind, is, in a sense, attaining nothing new. It is an attainment that is beyond what we would conventionally call attainment. But when you

All of these things . . . to which we allow ourselves to become so attached, are in their very nature unfit for attachment because they are constantly changing

realize that there is nothing to be changed, nothing to be attained, that is the attainment of mahamudra.

Tilopa speaks further of the benefits of the practice of mahamudra. He says, *For example, if the single root of a tree with a trunk and many branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit, is cut, the ten thousand or one hundred thousand branches will automatically die. In the same way, if the root of mind is cut through, the branches and leaves of samsara will dry up.* [Lines 24-27]

The meaning of this is that the practice of the secret mantra in general, and especially the practice of the instructions of mahamudra or of dzogchen, consists fundamentally, most basically and most centrally, of looking at the nature of your mind. The most essential form of instruction in both the mahamudra and dzogchen traditions, and the most essential form of practice in both traditions, is looking directly at the nature of your own mind. The function of this in both traditions is to cut through or resolve that nature, to recognize that nature once and for all. The various accessories to these traditions are distinct, and the distinction among various traditions can be drawn in that way. But the fundamental practice and the essence of these traditions are the same. If you want to free yourself from all of the various sufferings that grow on the tree of samsara like branches and flowers, if you attempt to free yourself from these adverse conditions and various sufferings one by one, it is very difficult. It is like trying to kill a tree by removing each branch separately. So therefore, just as when you want to cut down a tree, you cut it at the root and the whole tree will die, if you want to free yourself from the various physical and mental sufferings of samsara, then, if you recognize the nature of your mind, automatically all sufferings are pacified and you are liberated from all of them.

I would like to stop there for this morning, but if you have any questions please go ahead.

Question: Rinpoche, the text said that the practice of mahamudra involves no focus or mindfulness of the mind with particular focus. Another teaching from Tilopa's text is that whenever a klesha arises you look directly at it. So, it seems as if in the practice of mahamudra you are going from an unfocused resting of the mind to a focused direct looking at something, a klesha, or whatever. Particularly this movement from nonfocus to focus becomes difficult in post-meditation when there are so many distractions. I experience this when driving down Granville during rush hour. You become fearful, anxious, but you must pay attention to the road, and then to look at the mind undistractedly at this time seems very difficult.

The essence of post-meditation practice is simply not being distracted from whatever you are doing

Rinpoche: First of all, in essence, as you say, there is no object of meditation or object of focus in mahamudra, but that is from the point of view of an unconfused or unbewildered state. From the point of view of a bewildered context, there is a focus. There is an object. For example, you mentioned what you do when a thought arises. When a thought arises, then at the initial moment of directing your awareness to looking at the nature of that thought, there is, as you indicated, a conceptual focus. Because the thought arising is a bewilderment, it is a relative truth and is bewilderment; so you are entering a context or working in a context of bewilderment. When you see the nature of that thought, through having focused on that thought's nature, when you actually see that nature, the thought is not there; there is no focus. So when you look, there is a focus, but when you see, there is no focus. With regard to post-meditation, in fact, the essence of post-meditation practice is simply not being distracted from whatever you are doing. There is far less danger in driving if you are not

distracted, if you are mindful or alert, than there is in driving if you are distracted. So, in fact, post-meditation mindfulness and alertness should alleviate the fear of an accident on Granville Street. [laughter]

Question: Rinpoche, if the nature of all things is emptiness, and if we look at the bubble and it pops and there is nothing there, if we look at fear and we touch it and there is nothing there, I'm just wondering about when we look at family or friends. Are they also bubbles when we touch them and they pop and there is nothing there? Is it the same emptiness?

Rinpoche: There exist, of course, logical demonstrations of the emptiness of all things and all persons. But these are not applied or entertained in the context of meditation practice. Because we are concerned with direct experience, and the easiest direct experience of emptiness is the direct experience of the emptiness or nature of your own mind. So, in the practice of mahamudra, we do not analyze or examine the existential status of external objects or persons, but only of thoughts that can be experienced directly without recourse to analysis. It is said in our tradition, "Do not attempt to get rid of or create or alter external appearances. Just leave them as they are, because they do you no harm and bring you no benefit." The external appearances are not the issue here; it is the mind and the mind's grasping, which is thought. Therefore, we take thought and mind as the basis for meditation.

Question: Rinpoche, you spoke of the quote on mixing and transference. I wonder if you could expand a bit more on the transference aspect?

Rinpoche: The reason why I did not talk about transference, the other aspect of Marpa's instructions, is that it has nothing directly to do

with the subject here, so I did not talk about it and I am not going to talk about it. The reason why I did talk about mixing is that it has very much to do with the subject here. The basic concept or idea of mixing is very helpful in understanding mahamudra practice. To understand mahamudra you need to really get a handle on mixing, and for the time being you can forget about transference. [laughter]

Question: Rinpoche, I wonder if you could give some clarity on the meditation instruction in mahamudra. I understand that the meditation when kleshas arise is to feel the texture of that klesha, feel the context of the klesha, feel the essence of the distraction without the content. Is this similar to looking directly at the klesha?

To understand mahamudra you really need to get a handle on mixing [whatever occurs with meditation]

Rinpoche: These two ways of working with kleshas are different; they are distinct. The approach that you described in which you try to feel the texture, as you put it, of the klesha, and appreciate the origin of the klesha, and so on, as you explained it, is based upon maintaining the concept or the illusion of the klesha's existing in the first place. Basically what

you are doing in such an approach is treating the klesha as something. Here what is being done is not working with what the klesha *seems* to be, but what it really is. And in looking directly at it without becoming concerned with the appearance of it—which klesha it is and so on—then you experience it as being more like nothing than being something. The significance of this is that the actual way that you let go of kleshas is through determining their nonexistence, through seeing that they have no substantial existence whatsoever. The technique here is to look directly at them and in that way see their nature. What you see or what you experience was explained earlier in the text as seeing them as ripples on water or designs drawn on the surface of water. As they are emerging, they are

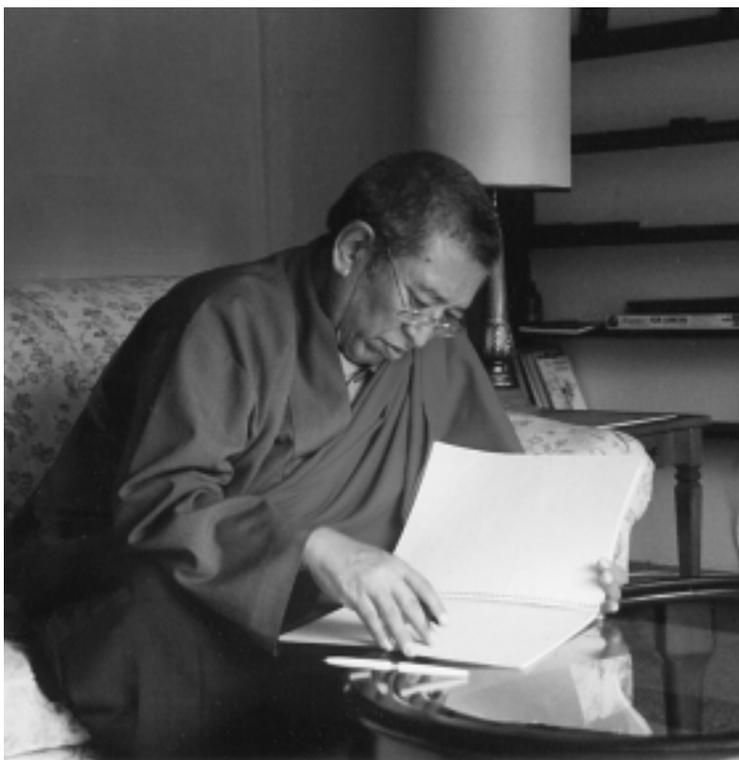
dissolving already.

Question: Rinpoche, this is a question on mixing. How do you mix the practice of mahamudra and working as a scholar, especially for us as dharma students, or for myself, as someone who is learning new concepts and accumulating knowledge? How do we mix them together?

Rinpoche: Something that is important to understand about mixing in general, and especially in the context that you just brought up, is what does and what does not constitute distraction. It was said by Tilopa, “Child, it is not by appearances that you are fettered, but by craving. Therefore, Naropa, relinquish or cut through craving.” The distinction needs to be made between appearances and our craving for or grasping at them. Appearances themselves are not a problem. Grasping or craving is prob-

lematic. When you study you are training your intellect through the acquisition of knowledge and training yourself in learning more efficiently, and so forth. That training of the intellect, that cultivation of the prajna of study is not a problem, because essentially what you are working with is the cognitive lucidity, which is one of the qualities of your mind, the other quality being emptiness. The problem is grasping at the concepts or fixating on the concepts acquired through study or knowledge. The way to work with this is simply to study in a way in which you cultivate a mindfulness within the performance of study analogous to that of meditation, and if there is mindfulness while you are studying, and alertness, then the study will not generate grasping and in that way can be mixed to some extent with practice.

We will conclude for the morning with the dedication of merit. ㊦



It was said by Tilopa, “Child, it is not by appearances that you are fettered, but by craving. Therefore, Naropa, relinquish or cut through craving.”

Mahamudra Upadesha

At the Instant of Mahamudra Realization, All Ignorance and Negative Karma Are Purified



Continuing the Very Venerable Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche's teaching on Tilopa's Mahamudra Upadesha.

Good afternoon. I would like to begin as before by reciting the lineage supplication. The particular lineage supplication that we use is the one in common use in all the major seats of the Kagyu tradition, such as Tsurphu and Palpung. It is used in communal assemblies of recitation by all the lamas and monks and nuns. It is used also in personal practice, not only within the monasteries, but by all lay people who practice mahamudra. The reason why this particular lineage supplication is so much emphasized is that it was composed by the great teacher Penkar Jampal Zangpo, who received the transmission of mahamudra from the Sixth Gyalwa Karmapa, Thongwa Dönden, and, having received it, went into retreat on an island in the middle of a lake called Sky Lake in northern Tibet. He remained in retreat on that island for eighteen years, practicing mahamudra. At the end of his retreat he composed the lineage supplication, which is regarded as being a summary of his experience and realization, gained through eighteen years of intense practice, and, therefore, it is held to have unparalleled blessing. So I recommend that you use it in your liturgical practice, whether you recite it in Tibetan or English. And so we will now chant it, and please do so with faith and devotion. [See page 11.]

The text is now talking about the benefits of meditation on mahamudra, and we have seen how the practice of mahamudra can bring about the relinquishing of the kleshas. The next thing pointed out is how mahamudra can dispel all ignorance and all accumulated obscurations and wrongdoing. This is presented with an image or analogy: ***For example, just as the darkness that has accumulated over a thousand eons is dispelled by the illumination of one lamp or one torch, in the same way, one instant of the wisdom of the clear light of one's mind dispels all of the ignorance, wrongdoing, and obscurations accumulated throughout numerous eons.*** [Lines 28-31, page 72]

The image here is of a place that has never seen any light, like the recesses of a deep cave. No matter how long it has been since that cave has seen light, as soon as a torch is lighted in that cave, it becomes illuminated. The length of time during which it has been dark does not in any way inhibit the torch's power or capacity to illuminate the cave. At the instant the torch is lighted, all of the darkness of that entire period of time is dispelled. In the same way, when someone realizes mahamudra, at that instant all of their ignorance and all of their obscurations and all of their negative karma are purified right away.

You might doubt this. You might say, for example, that in the sutras the Buddha taught that one cannot attain buddhahood without undergoing three periods of innumerable eons or kalpas of the accumulations of merit and wisdom, at least—and in some sutras this is seven, and so on. And even to begin to realize dharmata takes an extremely long time, according to the sutras. Yet in the mahamudra tradition we are told that one can attain the state of complete awakening, the state of unity or Vajradhara, in one lifetime and one body. Surely if one of these is true, then the other must not be. If it takes three periods of innumerable kalpas to attain

buddhahood, then what does it mean to say that it can be done in one life? And if it only takes one life, why is there mention of this very long period? In fact, it is not a contradiction. If someone possesses the essential instructions or *upadesha*, then it is possible to attain buddhahood in one lifetime. And in the absence of the method or instructions of *upadesha*, then it will take an extremely long time. When someone engages in the path and does

not have the special instruction that we call mahamudra, then essentially what they are doing is taking inferential valid cognition as their technique, as the basis of their path, which is to say that they use logical analysis to ascertain or establish the emptiness of all things. Using logical analysis, you can determine the emptiness of all things as a logical certainty, and it being a logical certainty, you can thereby have some confidence in that. But the certainty or confi-

If one possesses the essential instructions or *upadesha*, then it is possible to attain buddhahood in one lifetime

dence that is generated in that way is very difficult to apply in actual meditation practice. Therefore, in order to be able to apply that logical certainty to meditation practice, you need to gather a tremendous amount of merit over a very long period of time. And that is why the path that takes logical inference as its technique or basis takes so long.

The tradition according to which one can attain the state of Vajradhara in one lifetime is the tradition that is based upon these practical or essential instructions. And the essence of all of these instructions is that you do not attempt to use logical analysis to ascertain emptiness by analyzing external objects or appearances. You work with your mind. The reason why you work with your mind in the tradition of *upadesha* or special instructions is that, while other things have to be logically proven to be empty, your mind is obviously empty. You can experience the emptiness of your own mind at any time. Therefore, because you are working with something that is obviously or manifestly empty, you experience that same emptiness—which is otherwise arrived at through logical analysis—directly

from the beginning when you have learned to meditate. So, therefore, in the tradition of practical or essential instructions, one is taking direct experience or direct valid cognition as the primary technique or basis of the path. Because of the fact that there is from the beginning of this approach a direct experience of the nature of mind, then it is possible to attain full buddhahood in one lifetime.

This statement of the possibility of attaining buddhahood in one lifetime is not simply an expression or a slogan. Many mahasiddhas have done it. For example, in the case of Jetsun Milarepa, at one time his students approached him and said to him that, since he had such extraordinary diligence, extraordinary insight, uncommon austerity and practice, and a result or fruition surpassed by none, clearly he must be the emanation or incarnation of a buddha or bodhisattva. And they said, “Please tell us which buddha or bodhisattva you are the emanation of.” He replied, saying, “The fact that you regard me as the emanation of some buddha is evidence that you have great faith in me and a great misunderstanding of dharma. Because implied by your statement is that an ordinary person could not possibly attain what I have attained, and that the dharma therefore is not that effective, that it does not really have that much power.” He went on, saying, “I was an ordinary person and I attained what I attained because I met a qualified teacher, received his teachings, and practiced them with diligence.”

The text continues, ***The intellect cannot see that which is beyond conceptual mind, and you will never realize that which is uncreated through created dharmas. If you wish to attain or realize that which is beyond the intellect and is uncreated, then scrutinize your mind and strip awareness naked.*** [Lines 17-20]

The intellect is a faculty that employs concepts, so that which is beyond any concept cannot be appreciated or recognized by it

The basic point of this stanza is that you cannot realize the nature of things through any other method than looking directly at your own mind and experiencing that nature within your own mind. You cannot realize the nature of things through logical inference or inferential valid cognition, because the faculty that is employed in the use of logic is the intellect, and the intellect cannot realize that which cannot be conceptualized. The intellect is a faculty that employs concepts, so that which is beyond any concept cannot be appreciated or recognized by it. This means that you cannot use any kind of concept or thought about the mind to realize the mind or to realize the mind's nature. And in the same way, you cannot use conceptualized virtues or effortful practice to realize the nature of mind either. That is to say that all of the things you might do that are not resting in your mind's nature can be extremely helpful and can accumulate a great deal of virtue, and can be very beneficial, but nothing other than looking at your mind

can bring the realization of the nature of your mind. So if you wish to realize the mind's nature, which is beyond the intellect and is uncreated—and therefore cannot be realized through engaging in elaborate virtuous practices that consist of a creation of virtue—if you wish to realize this, the single thing you must do is scrutinize your mind.

“Scrutinize” can be taken in two different ways. We might understand “scrutinize” to mean analyze the mind, but that is not what it means here. Analyzing the mind of course is thinking about it. It is trying to determine through reasoning or logic exactly what the mind must be like. So, it is not using direct experience. When you try to think about the mind, the process is endless. There are endless thoughts or concepts that can be generated about the mind: “The mind appears to exist because it functions. Logically, anything that functions must be there. The mind generates thoughts. We experience thoughts, so

they must exist too. And we experience kleshas, so they must also exist.” And in that way you end up with an endless procession of things that appear to exist.

Here “scrutinize” means to look directly at the mind, to try to experience directly whether it is something or nothing. If it is something, what is it? What is it like? If it is nothing, what is that like? Through looking directly at the mind you come to have a direct experience of the mind that is beyond any concept that you might generate about it, such as its being something, its being nothing, its being something in between something and nothing, its being both something and nothing, or its being something altogether different, neither something nor nothing. All of these are concepts you can generate about the mind when you think about it, but what you experience when you look directly at it is beyond all of that. Through doing that, through scrutinizing the mind in that direct way, in effect you strip the mind free of conceptualizations about it. And that is called “stripping awareness naked.” The kernel or essence of mind, which is awareness, is revealed when you stop conceptualizing or thinking about what the mind is like. If you do that, and if you rest in that direct experience of your mind’s nature, then you will come to realize that meaning which is beyond the intellect and beyond any attempt to create anything.

When you practice in that way, of course thoughts will continue to arise from time to time. And the thoughts that arise can be either fully manifest or coarse thoughts, or the undercurrent of subtle, almost imperceptible, thoughts. Therefore, the text continues, ***Allow the cloudy water of thought to clarify itself or to clear itself.*** [Line 21]

When for example, you have a glass of water with sediment in it and you leave it undisturbed, the sediment all falls to the bottom and the water becomes clear, and is no longer cloudy. In

the same way, if you place your mind at rest, the apparently cloudy or obscuring quality of thought will naturally subside or dissolve, and your awareness will not be obscured by thoughts. With regard to appearances it says in the text, ***Do not attempt to stop or create appearances. Leave them as they are.*** [Line 22]

Stop or create means to change in any way, to reject appearances that are unpleasant, or to attempt to increase or develop those that are pleasant. We continue, of course, to experience various appearances, and normally we regard what we experience as either pleasant or unpleasant. But whatever you experience as an

external appearance, which is to say, what you see or hear and so on, your mind is of greater importance in determining whether it is pleasant or unpleasant than the characteristics of the apparent thing itself, which means that as long as your mind is not lost to appearances you will not be particularly affected by them. You become affected by appearances when your mind is lost to them,

Remember that
the root of
pleasure and
pain is not
external
appearances, but
your own mind

and it was for that reason that Tilopa said, as was quoted earlier, “Child, it is not by appearances that you are fettered, but by craving. Therefore, Naropa, cut through craving.” Essentially, as far as practical instruction is concerned, this means, do not conceptualize as good or bad or as inherently pleasant or unpleasant whatever you see, hear, and so forth. And remember that the root of pleasure and pain is not external appearances, but your own mind. And because of that the text says, ***If you are without acceptance and rejection of external appearances, all that appears and exists will be liberated as mudra.**** [Line 23]

With regard to the instruction here, which is essentially that the mind looks or should look at its own nature, there is something that I need to clarify. If you read the *Bodhicharyavatara* by Shantideva, you will come across the statement,

*Editor’s note: i.e., mahamudra.

“There is no such thing as self-awareness. The mind cannot see or know itself.” He says this clearly. There is no question about that. Also, if you read the *Madhyamakavatara* by the glorious Chandrakirti, you will find many similar statements: There is no self-awareness, the mind cannot see or know itself. I mention this because some of you, no doubt, have read these texts and others of you no doubt will read these texts in the future. And when you encounter this you might think, well, Shantideva and Chandrakirti say that the mind cannot know itself, so what I heard elsewhere must have been nonsense, or perhaps I misunderstood it. Since it is quite possible that you might find this confusing, I had better clear it up now. The context in which the statements by Shantideva and Chandrakirti were made is in the refutation of the mind as a substantially existent thing. What is being refuted or denied here is that the mind could, as a substantial thing, experience itself directly as a substantial thing. The mind, of course, does not experience itself as substance, which means that, when you look at your mind’s nature, you do not experience any substantial characteristic. When you do experience the mind, you are not experiencing what Shantideva and Chandrakirti say you cannot experience. There is, in fact, no contradiction here. When you look at thoughts or you look at the mind itself, what you experience is the nature of those thoughts, the nature of that mind, which is emptiness. You do not experience a substantial presence. You experience something that is beyond elaboration, beyond any kind of conceptualization. But because it has this innate capacity of cognition, we characterize it as a unity of emptiness and cognitive lucidity. So the context in which Tilopa, in the *Mahamudra Upadesha*, states that the mind can know itself, and uses the term self-awareness, and the context in which Shantideva and Chandrakirti say that the mind cannot know itself and thus refute the term

When your mind looks at itself it does not see anything, but in not seeing anything, it does experience its own nature

self-awareness, these two contexts are distinct from each other. That distinction has to be made. When your mind looks at itself it does not see anything, but in not seeing anything, it does experience its own nature.

The text continues: ***The all-basis is unborn, and within that unborn all-basis, abandon or relinquish habits, wrongdoing, and obscurations.*** [Line 78]

The term “all-basis” is used, for example, in the Mind Only tradition to refer to the all-basis consciousness [Sanskrit: *Alaya*; Tibetan: *kun shi*] which is the basis for all of samsara, for all impure phenomena. Here it is being used in a different way. It is being used to refer to the ground of everything, the nature of everything. And that ground is the absence of true generation; it is the unborn quality,

which is emptiness. And within that recognition of that nature, all habits, and so on, are exhausted or let go of. The text goes on to say, ***Therefore, do not fixate or reckon. Rest in the essence of the unborn or in the unborn nature.*** [Line 79]

Again, if you let go of concepts and experience the nature of your mind directly, without fixating on it conceptually or trying to characterize it, or reckoning it to be one thing or another, you will come to rest within that nature itself, which is here called the unborn nature. The text goes on, ***In that state, appearances are fully apparent; but within that experience of vivid appearances allow concepts to be exhausted or to dissolve.*** [Line 80]

This is much the same as what was referred to earlier with regard to allowing appearances to be just what they are. In other words, when you are experiencing these appearances, they will be extremely vivid, because their vividness is not being diminished by involvement in conceptualization. Because there is no conceptualization, there is an exhaustion of the projection that is produced by concepts. In that

way, experiencing your mind is the root of experience. Then by not conceptualizing the experience you become free from the bond or the fetter that that conceptualization produces.

Next, Tilopa again summarizes in four lines the view, meditation, conduct and fruition. You remember that he did so several verses before this. [See lines 74-77] The difference between his previous summary and his present one is that his previous one is essentially a summary of the view, meditation, and so on, as they could be understood by a beginning practitioner of mahamudra. Here he is summarizing these four from the point of view of the culmination of the path or the fruition. The first is, ***Complete liberation from all conceptual extremes is the supreme monarch of views.*** [Line 81]

In other words, when there is a complete and full liberation from conceptualization of anything, or the nature of mind, that is the supreme monarch of views. And then, ***Boundless vastness is the supreme monarch of meditations.*** [Line 82]

In other words, you have meditation that is free from any limitation whatsoever under any circumstances. And then, ***Being directionless and utterly impartial is the supreme monarch of conduct.*** [Line 83]

And finally, ***Self-liberation beyond expectation or hope is the supreme result or fruition.*** [Line 84]

What is meant by self-liberation beyond hope or expectation is that the self-liberation consists of the direct experience or recognition of the single nature of all things. Therefore, there is no hope for liberation since it is recognized that things are self-liberating.

Next, Tilopa describes the experiences of practitioners of the three levels. The three levels are: when you are starting to practice meditation, when you are trained in meditation practice, and when you have realized meditation practice. The

analogies that he gives suit both the practice of tranquillity or shamatha and the practice of insight or vipashyana and can also be applied to the integrated practice of unified shamatha/vipashyana. He says, ***[For] a beginner, mind is like a river with a fast current running through a narrow bed or a narrow defile.*** [Line 85]

The meaning of this is that when someone starts to practice meditation, whether it is tranquillity or insight, there is not much stillness in their mind. They have an experience of a great deal of agitation and a great deal of speed. There might be moments of stillness but they will probably be followed by an even stronger upsurge of thoughts. This is explained in all

commentaries on meditation as being an experience in which the beginner will think that in fact there are more thoughts arising in their mind than there were when they did not practice meditation. In fact, what is happening is that they have provided enough space through the meditation technique that they are actually for the first time aware of how many thoughts have been in their minds all the time. So it is not really that there are more thoughts, but nevertheless it

will seem to that person as though there are. Next, the text says, ***In the middle or after that, it becomes like the gentle current of the River Ganges.*** [Line 86]

The River Ganges does not have huge waves or turbulence, but it does have a current. It is moving. So when someone has become practiced in meditation they experience their mind as not still, yet having a more or less constant flow of thought, but without the turbulence and uncontrolled speed that they experienced earlier. And then finally it says, ***In the end, it is like the flowing of all rivers into the mother ocean, or it is like the meeting of mother and child of all the rivers.*** [Line 87]

The beginner will think that in fact there are more thoughts arising in their mind than there were when they did not practice meditation

And this refers to a point in practice where, from the point of view of shamatha, there is such stillness or tranquillity that the mind has become immovable. And from the point of view of vipashyana, because of the stillness, there is a clarity that is more or less constant because it is not diminished or obscured by any kind of agitation in the mind.

Next the text gives methods that can be used by beginners who find that the simple or bare technique of looking directly at the mind is insufficient. It says in the text, ***Those of little intelligence, if they find they cannot remain in that state, may apply or hold the technique of the breathing and emphasize the essence of awareness, and through many techniques or branches such as gaze and holding the mind, tighten awareness until it stays put.***

[Lines 32-35]

These various techniques are given for the practice of shamatha, if your mind simply will not remain at rest without some kind of technique. And they are given with reference to the practice of unified shamatha/vipashyana, when you find that, because your mind is not remaining at rest, there is too much fluctuation in the clarity of insight, so that you cannot maintain a steady clarity. It is a common experience for beginners to have glimpses of the nature of their mind through meditation practice, but to find that these glimpses are immediately followed by some kind of distraction, at which time they are lost. In the case of extraordinary teachers dealing with extraordinary students, it may be sufficient for the teacher to simply point out the nature of the mind directly to the student, and then the student will be able to rest within that, and that will bring progress. But often, even though the student may have some kind of recognition at the time of the pointing out, it is likely to be so fragile and unstable, and depen-

dent upon the condition of the teacher's presence in pointing out, and so on, that it is very hard for them to work with practically, in which case it may be necessary to use some kind of supportive techniques, such as the ones that are suggested here. These techniques are generally used to increase both the tranquillity or stillness of the mind and also the clarity or lucidity of insight.

The first thing mentioned is using the technique of breathing. That can mean several different things. It can mean following the breath. It can mean counting the breath, for example, as is taught in *Pointing out the Dharmakaya*—counting each breath as it passes out of one's nostrils. And it can mean holding the breath in various ways. One way in which the breath is held or

used is called vajra repetition, in which one evens the breath out so that the period of inhalation, a brief period of retention and the period of exhalation are of the same duration. One identifies the inhalation with the sound OM, the retention with the sound AH, and the exhalation with the sound HUNG. These can be coordinated in other ways such as HUNG AH OM, and so on. The actual coordination varies with each tradition. Or there can be the more forceful technique of the vase breathing, in which the air that has been inhaled is forcefully retained below

the navel and so forth.* The function of all of these techniques of using the breath is to allow the practitioner's mind to come to rest and thereby promote the clarity of insight.

Also mentioned in the same line of the text is a bringing out or exposing of the essence of awareness. Awareness here refers to the dual

***Editor's note:** This technique should definitely *not* be used without formal instruction and guidance from a qualified lama, who has learned and practiced this or similar techniques according to the strict traditions of the lineage. Otherwise there is the danger of damaging one's health and sanity.

The text gives methods that can be used by beginners who find that the simple or bare technique of looking directly at the mind is insufficient

faculty of mindfulness and alertness, which, as we saw before in the quote from Dakpo Tashi Namgyal, needs to be sharp and clear for the mahamudra practitioner. It may be helpful, therefore, to intentionally sharpen your awareness for very brief periods of time within a longer meditation session for perhaps a minute or two, or three, or four. The reason this may be helpful is that if you can cultivate the faculty of sharp mindfulness and alertness, then you will be free from distraction, because whenever you lose mindfulness you immediately become distracted.

Next, the text talks about the use of gaze and ways of holding the mind. These techniques refer to remedies for defects that arise in meditation. There are, of course, many defects that can occur in meditation, and there are different enumerations of them, such as the five defects of samadhi, and so on. For the convenience of practitioners in recognizing these defects when they occur, and applying remedies to them, they can all be summed up as two, namely torpor and agitation. Torpor is a state of mind in which you feel sleepy or dull or devoid of mental clarity. Agitation is a state in which your mind is out of control. Your mind is wild, excited, and all over the place. You need to prevent these two defects, or remedy them. The first remedy is to use the gaze. When you are afflicted by torpor, then you raise the gaze, you look upward, and you also open your eyes fairly wide. On the other hand, when you are afflicted by agitation you lower the gaze and you keep the eyes half closed.

Another technique for holding the mind is the use of visualization. If you are afflicted by torpor you can visualize a drop or sphere of white light and think that this rises up through your body to the top of your head, and then hold your mind to that. And if you are afflicted by agitation or excitement, you can visualize a sphere or drop of black light and think that that

descends into your seat or meditation cushion and hold your mind to that.* Other ways of holding the mind are, for example, when afflicted by torpor, to recollect the qualities of the Buddha or of bodhisattvas, to recollect the benefits of mahamudra, and so forth. And when afflicted by agitation or excitement, to recollect the defects of samsara, to contemplate impermanence, and so on. All of these techniques are applied as needed at the discretion of the practitioner, based upon what is happening in your practice. And what you are doing here is, as the text says, ***Exerting tension or effort until awareness comes to rest in that state or in its nature.*** [Line 35]

What you are doing is using an intentional effort or conscious additional exertion of mindfulness and alertness to bring awareness back into the meditative state.

The next stanza describes another method that can be used to enhance the practice of mahamudra. And this is for someone who has a stable practice but is not able to achieve the intense wisdom of mahamudra. The text says, ***If you rely upon karmamudra, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness will arise. Enter into union having consecrated the upaya or method and the prajna or knowledge. Slowly let it fall or send it down, coil it, turn it back,***

***Editor's note:** cf. *Shenpen Ösel*, Vol. 1, No. 2, pages 19-20: "... when you are experiencing torpor, you can visualize in your heart, which is to say in your body at the level of the heart, a white, four-petalled lotus, which is very, very bright and brilliant; and in the center of this lotus is a tiny white sphere of light. And then, having visualized that, you think that the sphere of light comes up through the center of your body and shoots out the top of your head. That visualization is very helpful for dispelling torpor. . . . in [the case of agitation] you visualize that this four petalled lotus in your heart is jet black in color, and the little sphere of light in its center is also black. And this time, instead of going up, you think that it, the little sphere of light, drops down from the lotus, goes straight down the middle of your body, out of the bottom, and keeps going down, into the ground; and that will help very much to calm you down."

and lead it to its proper place. Finally spread it or cause it to pervade your whole body. If there is no attachment or craving, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness will appear. [Lines 109-113]

This is a supplementary technique that is used in order to enhance or intensify the wisdom of mahamudra. This technique, which is called karmamudra or the action seal, has two styles or varieties of practice. And they are called the upper door or upper gate and the lower door or lower gate. The lower door or lower gate is very dangerous, so very few people actually practice this. There are a few great yogis and yoginis who do it, but most do not.* What is more commonly practiced in this connection is the upper gate or upper door style of karmamudra practice, which is the practice of *chandali* [Sanskrit] or *tummo* [Tibetan] as found for example in the Six Dharmas of Naropa. Essentially, what this technique involves is using the preexisting channels, winds, and drops within your physical body to produce or to allow to arise the wisdom of bliss and emptiness. The special benefit of this is that in the fundamental or central mahamudra practice, the wisdom of mahamudra is the unity of cognitive lucidity and emptiness. Here that same wisdom arises, because of the difference in technique, in a slightly different way. Instead of being primarily lucidity and emptiness, it is primarily bliss and emptiness, because of the physical technique. Essentially what occurs is that physical bliss arises in your body, and then, looking at the nature of that, which is emptiness, you experience or realize the unity of bliss and emptiness. In more detail, through the correct application of the preexisting channels, winds, and drops within your physical body, you generate a special type of warmth or heat. And that warmth or heat produces a sensation and an affect of bliss. This

***Editor's note:** Karmamudra using the lower gate refers to the actual use of sexual union as a path to enlightenment.

What is of utmost importance in either form of karmamudra . . . is that there be no craving for the bliss

bliss becomes the environment or basis for the realization or experience of emptiness. The technique involves visualizations such as of bodhicitta dripping down from the HAM syllable visualized in the top of the head and the *chandali* blazing up from the AH stroke visualized below the navel. That is what is described in the text when it says bring it down, coil it, stop it, send it back up, and so on. The details of all of this, how to actually do it, are normally taught in long retreat sessions like the three-year retreat, and so on.** What is of utmost importance in either form of karmamudra—either the upper gate, or the lower gate version of this practice—is that there be no craving for the bliss, that there be no attachment to it. The purpose, of course, is to use the bliss as a basis for the realization of emptiness. So if there is no attachment to the bliss, then you will see the emptiness of it, and as the text says, the wisdom of bliss and emptiness will arise.

The next stanza describes the results or benefits of this practice of mahamudra. The actual words in which they are described are fairly clear, but you need to understand that there is often a hidden meaning in the presentations of secret mantra, including this one. There is a literal meaning and also a hidden meaning. The text says, ***You will possess longevity without white hair and you will be as healthy as the waxing moon. Your complexion will be lustrous and you will be as powerful as a lion. You will quickly attain the common siddhis or attainments, and you will come to alight in or attain the supreme siddhi as well.*** [Lines 114-116]

The literal meaning of this is that through the realization of mahamudra your channels and winds become straightened out or corrected, and as a result, you become healthy, so that you will

****Editor's note:** As with vase breathing, this practice should not be attempted without the instruction and guidance of a qualified lama.

have a long life without white hair and all those other things that were mentioned. The hidden meaning is that when it talks about unchanging longevity that is free of the signs of aging, such as white hair, it refers to the unchanging realization of Vajradhara. When it talks about being as healthy as the waxing moon, that refers to the fully expanded wisdom of mahamudra. Wisdom in this case is prajna, which can be the knowledge or insight coming from hearing, contemplating, or meditating. Here it refers to the wisdom that comes from meditating, specifically the realization of the true nature through mahamudra practice. Your wisdom will be stable and luminous. And when it says you will be as powerful as a lion, it means that you will possess the uncommon qualities of buddha, which are the ten powers, the four-fold fearlessness and so on.*

The last two lines of the text itself are an aspiration. This is the aspiration that is the

intention or wish with which Tilopa accompanies his instruction. And he says, ***These instructions of the essential point of mahamudra, may they abide in the hearts of worthy or fortunate beings.*** [Line 117]

In other words, his aspiration is that these instructions reach and actually be imbibed and understood by those who are going to practice them. And when he says these instructions, which are the essential point of mahamudra, he means that what he has presented here is the essential central point or central essence and technique of all mahamudra practice. Following that there is the colophon, which says, ***This was bestowed on the banks of the River Ganges by the Great and Glorious Siddha Tilopa, who had realized mahamudra, upon the Kashmiri pandit who was both learned and realized, Naropa, after Naropa had engaged in twelve hardships or austerities.***

***Editor's note:** The ten powers, the four fearlessnesses, the eighteen distinctive qualities, etc. of a perfect being are discussed in *The Changeless Nature, the Mahayana Uttara Tantra Sastra*, by Arya Maitreya and Acarya Asanga, in the chapter entitled, "Sixth Vajra Point—The Qualities of Buddhahood." The ten powers of perfect knowledge are 1) perfect knowledge of the appropriate and the inappropriate, referring to an appropriate result corresponding to the nature of an action, and an inappropriate result lacking such correspondence; 2) perfect knowledge of the full maturation of actions; 3) perfect knowledge of the various sorts of faculties of beings; 4) perfect knowledge of their different temperaments; 5) perfect knowledge of their wishes; 6) perfect knowledge of the paths which lead everywhere; 7) perfect knowledge of meditative stability, etc.—that which is unstained by the negative affects; 8) perfect knowledge of remembrance of former states; 9) perfect knowledge of divine vision; and 10) perfect knowledge of peace—the way to exhaust impurity. These ten powers are said to be like a vajra because they penetrate ignorance's armor, shatter its walls, and hew down its tree.

Because, when enlightenment is reached, everything to be purified has been purified and everything to be realized is realized, buddhas are endowed with four fearlessnesses: 1) fearlessness in knowledge of their perfect enlightenment with respect to every phenomenal domain; 2) fearlessness in teaching the obstacles and how to stop them; 3) fearlessness in teaching the path; and 4) fearlessness in stating their achievement of cessation of suffering.

Buddhas can truthfully tell others of their own realization and in so doing are completely unhindered, 1) because they themselves know and help others know every aspect of the knowable; 2) because they themselves have relinquished and help others relinquish those things which must be relinquished; 3) because they teach and make taught what ought to

be taught; 4) because they have attained and help others attain the utterly stainless highest attainment. In this regard, "what is to be known" is the truth of suffering; "what is to be given up," karma and the kleshas, is the truth of the origin of suffering; "what is to be relied upon," what ought to be taught, is the truth of the path; and "the goal to be achieved" is the truth of cessation.

The eighteen distinctive qualities of buddhas are that 1) buddhas make no mistakes, 2) they do not chatter noisily, 3) their mindfulness is never at fault, 4) their mind is never not resting in meditation, and 5) they do not harbor ideas and thoughts of various kinds; 6) their impartiality is never something undeliberate; 7) their mighty aspiration to help beings is never subject to degradation, 8) nor is their diligence, 9) their memory, 10) their perfectly pure and immaculate prajna, 11) their constant perfect liberation, or 12) their perception through the *jnana* [primordial awareness] of perfect liberation, which sees all aspects of the knowable; 13) the actions of their perfect bodies are preceded by *jnana*, 14) as are the actions of their pure speech, and 15) their noble mind; 16) their *jnana* is unobscured with respect to the past, 17) the present, and 18) the future.

Since buddhahood is *jnana* or primordial awareness, then buddha activity is the spontaneous activity of *jnana* and is always preceded and accompanied by *jnana*. Therefore, all three activities—body, speech, and mind—are preceded by and accompanied by primordial awareness. The perfect knowledge of buddhas constantly and extensively penetrates the three times without hindrance. These eighteen powers having been realized, those victors, the buddhas, endowed with compassion's magnificence, accomplish a perfect and fearless turning of the great wheel of the true dharma for beings. — Adapted from *The Changeless Nature*, by Arya Maitreya and Acarya Asanga, published in Scotland by Karma Drubgyud Darjay Ling (Karma Kagyu Trust).

That completes the twenty-nine stanzas of the vajra words of mahamudra spoken by Tilopa. Tilopa taught this to Naropa after the last of Naropa's twelve greater hardships. Naropa underwent what are called the twelve minor austerities while looking for Tilopa, and then, after he found him, underwent twelve even greater hardships or austerities. After the last of these, Tilopa gave him this instruction.

And then finally, the statement of the derivation of the Tibetan text is as follows, ***This was translated and written down at Pullahari in the north by the great Naropa and the great Tibetan translator, the king among translators, Marpa Chokyi Lodro.***

We are finished now. If you want to ask any questions, please go ahead.

Question: While Rinpoche was discussing karmamudra, I found myself thinking about an aspiration to offer bliss as mandala and wondering if it is grasping to wish to have something that you in turn wish to offer up for the benefit of others. That is the first question. And the other was, while Rinpoche was talking about karmamudra, I found myself remembering a yidam from Shingon vajrayana, Japanese vajrayana, and that is *izen yoho raga raja vidi raja* and I was wondering if Rinpoche is familiar with the Tibetan equivalent of the *raga raja vidi raja*, and if you could say anything about this yidam.

Rinpoche: With respect to your first question, normally the things we offer are things that are in the external world, that are of a perception common to different individuals. You will offer things like all of the beautiful flowers there are in the world, all the valleys full of medicinal herbs, all of the inspiring or uplifting mountains there are in the world, and so on. That is a more normal or standard type of offering that would be included within a mandala. But one would not particularly offer one's own sensations, pleasant

or otherwise.

With regard to the deity of Shingon Buddhism that you mentioned, I have a great deal of respect for the Japanese vajrayana tradition and am confident that the sadhanas, fire pujas and other practices that they do are complete and authentic, but I do not know anything in detail about the specific deities for the simple reason that I neither speak nor read Japanese. Therefore, I have been unable to really learn

anything precise about the vajrayana traditions of Japan, and therefore I have to apologize; I cannot really comment on this particular deity.

Question: I have a lot of difficulty with understanding how to look at the nature of mind. When there is instruction in the text on looking at external appearances without altering them, without projection, is that the same technique that one uses when one looks at one's mind, and if not, what are the actual mechanics of how to look at the nature of your mind?

Rinpoche: These two techniques are slightly different. The difference between looking directly at appearances and looking directly at the nature of the mind is that, because we have a beginningless habit of samsara, we experience external appearances as substantial, and we will continue to experience them as though they had substantial existence until there is some extraordinary level of realization. It is very difficult to work with external appearances in meditation in the beginning, because they seem so solid, and therefore it is recommended in this tradition to just leave them alone, since they are not the problem. They do not particularly pose much harm or help. Your mind, on the other hand, is manifestly insubstantial, and you can experience this by looking for substantiality within it. If you find it difficult to look directly at the mind and perceive its insubstantiality, then you can select various substantial characteristics and look for them in turn. For example,

Tilopa taught this to Naropa after the last of Naropa's twelve greater hardships

you can look for a color, look for a location, look for a shape, look for a size, and so on. And if you take it step by step like that, sooner or later you will definitely come to experience directly the mind's insubstantial nature.

Question: Rinpoche, I have two questions, if I may. The first is about kindness and how kindness seems to arise from space. Through your great blessings and not my merit particularly, I have some experience and understanding of resting in clarity. I am wondering how it is that when one really does rest the mind and allow that experience of the insubstantiality, the vastness [to arise], that from that arises a feeling of rawness and tenderness and a longing to be more kind to others?

Rinpoche: This sounds good. In the Third Karmapa's *Aspiration of Mahamudra* he says that beings in their nature are always buddha, but through not realizing this they wander in samsara. This type of understanding is something that you naturally arrive at through experiencing your mind's nature. When you experience to some extent your mind's nature, then right away you experience the benefit within yourself. And you also realize at that time that anyone could do this, anyone could have this same experience, this same realization, and derive the same benefit, because all beings have the same nature of the mind. Since all beings could experience this same realization and benefit—as they all possess buddha nature—and yet do not experience it, and in not doing so, suffer tremendously, you are naturally touched or inspired to be compassionate. This seems to always go along with mahamudra experience.

Question: Rinpoche, this is a favor, if I may ask. Many of your students, our hearts are so full of

appreciation and love for you, we feel so fortunate that you have given us these teachings, and I am wondering if you would allow us to express this in whatever limited way we can? Could we say your long life prayer after the teachings?

Rinpoche: Certainly.

Question: Rinpoche, this morning, according to my recollection, you said that Marpa said that the two most important aspects were mixing and transference, and I was wondering if you would say a few words about transference.

Rinpoche: Really what I should be talking about, if we have time to talk about things that are off the topic, and this is still as much off the topic as it was this morning, is the eight consciousnesses, because I would like to explain them in some detail, as I think it is helpful to understand them in order to practice mahamudra. But I have not had time to explain the eight consciousnesses because we have only had five sessions to go through this text. So if I do not have time to explain the eight consciousnesses,* which is less off the topic than transference is, I am not going to explain transference, which is completely off the topic. If I were to explain in detail the meaning of every word or reference that we encounter in an explanation like this, it would be endless, and we just do not have time for that. Transference itself is very good to practice. If you practice it and you become trained in it, that is beneficial. Simply knowing about it or hearing an explanation of it is not beneficial. I excused myself from explaining it this morning, and once again I

If you find it difficult to look directly at the mind and perceive its insubstantiality, then you can select various substantial characteristics and look for them in turn

***Editor's note:** For a treatment of the eight consciousnesses, see *Shenpen Ösel* Vol. 1, No. 2, pages 16-18.

excuse myself from explaining it this afternoon.

Question: Rinpoche, I wanted to ask about relaxing the mind, when you are looking at the mind. What is it exactly that relaxes, and is relaxing the mind somehow connected with merit and having merit to do that.

Rinpoche: The opposite of the type of relaxation that is being suggested here is a type of tension that is based upon fear, such as the thought, “I can’t think, I musn’t think, I will not think, oh I thought, oh I stopped that thought, I did not stop that one, it slipped by,” and so on. That type of attitude toward meditation turns the whole thing into a fight. What is meant by relaxation is an attitude toward meditation, and therefore a conduct of meditation, where, when thoughts arise, you just let them arise, and you look at them directly. It means less effort and also a different kind of attitude or environment for the practice. As for the relationship between the ability to relax in meditation and the accumulation of merit, the accumulation of merit is helpful in any aspect of meditation. It is always helpful, and that is why it is recommended that people have completed the preliminary practices before receiving the instructions on mahamudra. By doing the prostrations you have increased your faith and devotion, which enhances your commitment and involvement with the practice. By doing the Vajrasattva practice, you have removed some of the tendencies that would cause uncontrolled thoughts to afflict you in practice. By performing the mandala offering, you have gathered accumulations that make it more possible or workable for you to do the practice of mahamudra, and by practicing guru yoga you have received the guru’s blessing, which brings experience and realization. All of these practices, which lead to the accumulations of merit and wisdom, are helpful in many ways in the practice of mahamudra. However, you should not mistake

These words of the Mahasiddha Tilopa are utterly reliable and free of error

these words to mean that someone who has not completed these practices cannot do mahamudra practice. They can. It is just that these practices are very helpful.

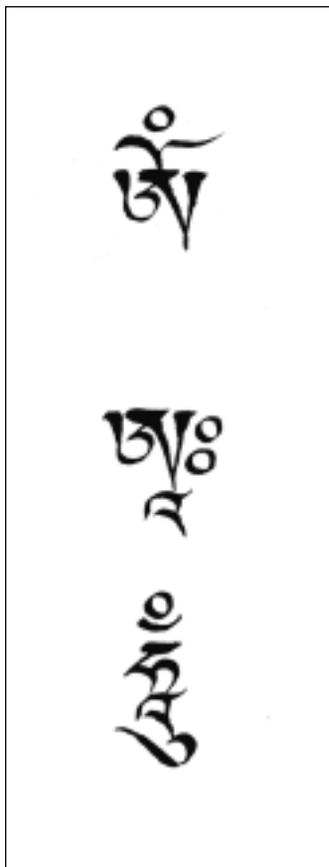
You have all come here out of a great interest in the dharma in general and especially out of devotion for the profound dharma of mahamudra. With that as your motivation, you have come here and listened to this explanation and asked questions about what was unclear to you, and all of this is delightful to me. I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to take part in this, because, whereas I myself have no real ability to benefit you under my own power, nevertheless, these words of the Mahasiddha Tilopa are utterly reliable and free of error. So I am certain there is great benefit in this, especially since you are committed practitioners of meditation who have undertaken this practice and are attempting to bring it to its fruition. So I delight in what we have done here and have enjoyed it very much, and I thank you all for making it possible.

Now I would like to talk briefly about a project of my own. But when I say my own, I do not mean something that is particularly only for my own benefit. I have created a foundation here that is called the Vajra Vidya Institute, the purpose of which is to help ensure that these teachings of the vajrayana remain undiminished, and if possible increase and flourish into future generations. The basic purpose of the foundation is to help the continuance of dharma. As everyone knows, Tibetan Buddhism in particular has been very much harmed by political events of this century. Given that that is the case, we have to put extra effort into ensuring that our tradition, and especially the uncommon instructions of the vajrayana and the texts that contain them and the facilities for studying and practicing them, be preserved and maintained undiminished. So, in order to help facilitate all of that, I have founded the Vajra Vidya Institute.

In Tibet, women have had far less opportunity to practice intensively than men have had. There have always been fewer monasteries for women than for monks. And even in the cases where there were monasteries for nuns, the amount and quality of training and education offered in them was generally less intense and of a lower quality than what was available to the monks. In order to help remedy this situation, I have created the Tara Abbey for women. My aim in creating this is that there be an institution in which women have systematic access to a full course of study and practice in our tradition. John Fox knows more of the details of the Vajra Vidya Foundation. So if you are interested in helping, you would be better off asking him. Any help whatsoever that any of you can give would

be very much appreciated. [See page 63 for details.]

Now I would like to dedicate the merit of these teachings and make aspirations, which means that we are dedicating the virtue that I have accumulated by teaching and that you have accumulated by listening to the dharma to the liberation and the realization of mahamudra of all beings. And also, we are dedicating all of this merit so that this world may be free from warfare, sickness, and famine until all beings are liberated, and then also to the long life of all the holders of the teachings, and in particular for His Holiness, the Gyalwa Karmapa, and since you asked, you can also chant my long life supplication as well. And so let us do that. ྐྱ



To Ensure That the Vajranana Teachings Endure

Thrangu Rinpoche's Vajra Vidya projects include the following:

Primary and Secondary Boarding School

Near Boudhanath in Nepal, the Vajra Vidya Foundation provides a primary and secondary boarding school offering secular education for Tibetan and Himalayan children. Many of these children's parents are able to pay their fees, but quite a number cannot. The school also educates a number of orphans who require sponsorship. Funds are urgently needed for such basics as desks, writing materials, books, toilets, improvement of the water supply, and additional dormitories. Without the basic education that this school provides, it will be impossible for children of this region to lift themselves out of poverty, or to pursue the full Buddhist path.

Tara Abbey

Tara Abbey for nuns near Kathmandu consists of a building that has ten sleeping rooms, a kitchen, and a dining room which doubles as the shrine room for the nuns' Tibetan Buddhist practices. In 1995, when the nuns first moved into this monastery, they numbered thirty-eight; now there are sixty-nine, with more wishing to join every year. The women of this region have an intense interest in studying and practicing Buddhism. They sleep six to eight in a room, and because of lack of space, they often eat their meals on the balconies, which is difficult in the winter.

The nuns have basic living needs, such as food, clothing, medicine, books, and all types of basic furnishings. Teachers need to be hired for basic education, and Tibetan Buddhist studies, to which women historically have had little access. Also, a number of nuns are now prepared to pursue a higher education in

Tibetan Buddhism. For this they need funds to attend the Institute for Higher Buddhist Studies in Sarnath, India, or other like institutions. It is expected that many of these women will become khenpos and lamas, teaching in Buddhist centers throughout the world.

Namo Buddha Monastery and College

Located two-and-a-half hours from Kathmandu, the Namu Buddha Monastery and Monastic College offers a ten-year program of studies and meditation retreats, which trains monks to become skilled teachers of Tibetan Buddhism. They will pass on this religious tradition to less experienced monks and nuns in various monasteries in the Nepal/India region. This facility requires funds to support the monks' daily needs, such as medicine, food, clothing, bedding, and books. There are also the costs of the monk instructors, the khenpos in residence, and the costs of visiting teachers.

Medical Clinic and Dispensary

The Vajra Vidya Foundation supports a clinic that is completely reliant on donations. Free medical care is given to the local people, most of whom are extremely poor, as they live only on what they can cultivate on their small holdings of land. This clinic has helped thousands of people since it was founded three years ago. In consultation with the clinic doctor, the Vajra Vidya Foundation seeks to improve medical care by upgrading the medicine and medical equipment at its disposal.

For more information on Vajra Vidya, contact John Fox at the Vajra Vidya Foundation, 6171 Riverdale Drive, Richmond, BC, Canada, V7C 2E7. Phone: 614-275-8277.

On Achieving Exertion on the Path

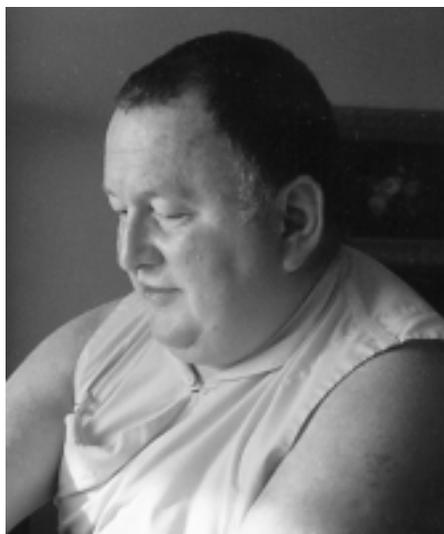
Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind to Dharma

The following transcript is from a question-and-answer period after a talk that Lama Tashi Namgyal gave at KSOC in the fall of 1996.

Student: I'd like some advice about defeating slothfulness and achieving persistent exertion.

Lama: The classic answer to that question is the four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma. Maybe we can talk about this next time. I'll give it to you briefly this time, and I'll give you more detail later, because you should understand this very deeply, and you should hear it over and over again.

The first thought that turns the mind to dharma is meditation on precious human birth. This particular situation you're in—you just don't know how rare it is. You think it's very cute; you get on the bus or get in the car and you come over to the local lama and sit in his living room and talk about the dharma and laugh and it seems like any other PTA or glee club that you ever went to, right? It seems like any other kind of social organization. But actually this situation is extraordinarily rare. In fact, until the late 1960s it did not exist in America. There was not this kind of intelligence operating in America. And if you go back through American history it wasn't operating then either. And if you go back through European history, it wasn't operating then either. In fact, this situation is extraordinarily rare because—according to the way it's presented in the buddhadharma—given the periodic formation and dissolution of the uni-



Lama Tashi Namgyal

verses, it's very, very difficult for a fully enlightened buddha to appear. And when they do appear, they don't always teach the dharma. And when they do teach the dharma, it doesn't always survive. And when the dharma survives, it doesn't always come with unbroken lineages of enlightened teachers who have perpetuated this dharma and continued to realize the dharma in their own mental continuums—who have realized enlightenment. And these

centers where you can learn the dharma don't always exist. Some generous person has provided this facility, and some generous person has bought all of these things. So these five conditions that come about as a consequence of others, which create the situation in which dharma teaching occurs, have not always existed.

According to the Buddhist tradition, the time period in which we live lies within a particular kalpa. A kalpa is a huge number of years; I once saw it estimated at about 435 million years. In this particular kalpa one thousand fully enlightened buddhas will appear. And when we say a thousand buddhas, it means that one buddha will appear and teach, and then those teachings will endure for many hundreds or thousands of years until that lineage of enlightenment is broken, until it exhausts itself. At that point there will no longer be any enlightened beings in this world system, and the dharma dies out. There's no dharma, no buddha, no enlightened tradition. Then at some point another buddha appears, gets enlightened, and turns the wheel of dharma again. And then there's another period of time in

which there are enlightened teachings, and people can then attain enlightenment, and so forth. A thousand of these fully enlightened buddhas will appear in this particular kalpa, according to the Buddhist tradition.

According to Kalu Rinpoche, after this particular kalpa there will be twenty kalpas in which no buddha will ever appear. It will be “clan of the cave bear;” there will be no effective expression of loving kindness and compassion, just a very primitive existence. Then there will appear another kalpa of a thousand buddhas. Then there will be something like eighty kalpas when no buddha will appear in this particular world system. There are billions of world systems going on, but the situation is pretty bleak.

And so the actual coincidence of being born in a time in which a buddha actually did appear and teach, and further that those teachings still exist to this day, that there are enlightened teachers like the ones on the wall here who are still manifesting, still teaching this dharma—who have the ability to point out the nature of your mind, and so forth, when you’re ready for that—and finally that we have the conditions which enable us to practice dharma, the fact that all of this happens is extraordinarily rare. Somehow we don’t understand that, or we don’t really believe it.

And even further to that, coming from your own side, there’s the fact that you were born at this time as a human being in a country to which the dharma, during your lifetime, has spread, and that none of your sense faculties are so impaired that you cannot study and practice dharma. It is easy for you to hear the dharma, and it is easy for you to read the dharma. And there’s the fact that you’re not engaged in a way of life that’s totally destructive of positive val-

ues, which would make it difficult for you to study dharma, and the fact that when you meet the dharma you actually like it. Most people are bored when they hear the dharma; they don’t like it and so avoid it. That’s why we have twelve people in this room now rather than six or seven hundred. If I were Madonna you could be sure that we’d have to wall off all of Wallingford because that’s what more people are interested in. So you see how rare it is that someone would be interested.

The people who have precious human birth are those people who have actually come in contact with the dharma and actually like the dharma and actually persevere in studying and practicing dharma

All of this is very, very important to understand. Understand that you’re not a hell being, you’re not a hungry ghost, you’re not an animal, all of which vastly outnumber human beings. Among human beings, the people who have *precious* human birth—all human beings have human birth—are those people who have actually come in contact with the dharma and actually like the dharma and actually persevere in studying and practicing dharma.

So you have to think about this and think about it and think about it and read about it and think about it. Because otherwise you’re going to waste your life. And that’s a tremendous shame because when this opportunity is lost—and it will be lost if you don’t make good use of it—it won’t come back again for as long as we can imagine. Who knows when it will ever come again? Which means that you could go through a seemingly endless period of abject misery.

So contemplating your precious human birth is the first thought that turns the mind to dharma. The next one is death and impermanence—the fact that this birth is here today and gone tomorrow. If you don’t think carefully about this, you’re going to be on the brink of death

before you realize it. If I live as long as my parents, I have less than ten years left. Maybe I won't even live that long. But it seems like just yesterday that I was a sixteen-year-old kid. This life goes so fast, and it can be lost so easily. And when it's lost, you no longer have this precious human birth, and who knows what kind of opportunity for birth you will get next.

Then there's the meditation on the law of karma, the law of cause and effect. Because most of us have vaguely middle-class backgrounds, we tend to have the feeling that everything's going to be all right. That we can do what we want to do and basically it's going to be all right. This is because we've gotten away with so much. When we were naughty our parents might have gotten a little upset with us, but then they loved us again. Even though we hear of the notion of karma, we don't really believe it. Even to this day I almost don't believe it. Even to this day I have a tendency to think that I can get away with almost anything, because, look at me, I'm sitting pretty. I've done all sorts of things, and here I am. I have this notion that I'm going to get away with everything.

But we do not get away with *anything*. Everything is absolutely cause and effect. So therefore, if you engage in virtuous action, you're going to have a positive effect, you're going to have happiness. And if you engage in negative actions, you're decidedly and definitely going to have negative reactions, you're going to have suffering. The suffering that we have in this life comes about by and large because of our negativity in previous lives, and the happiness and good fortune that we have in this life—for instance in this dharmic situation—represents a tremendous accumulation of very positive action in our previous lives.

But we must continue to apply ourselves to positive actions, or we can have no certainty of

ever meeting such favorable circumstances again; and we must be absolutely clear in our minds that we're not going to get away with any of our negative actions. We are going to pay for every one of them. When we practice vajrayana we think, "Oh, that's okay, if I do wrong then I can say OM VAJRASATTVA HUNG and I can do the long Dorje Sempa mantra and I can do prostrations and everything." Well yes, but that's like trying to drive up a mountain covered with axle grease. You just spin your wheels and don't get anywhere. You go a little bit and then you do something negative, and then you go backwards; and then you purify that, and then you again go backwards, and so on. You must absolutely recognize the law of cause and effect; it's very important.

If you spend your time sleeping in bed in the morning when you could be getting up practicing dharma, well, that's what animals do. Animals sleep and then they wake up and run around and wag their tails until they get something to eat. And then they eat and as soon as is feasibly possible they go back to sleep. If we spend all of

our time in bed not doing anything—who's to say we're not going to end up as animals? Of course we have to earn a living, so you have to get up and go to school and teach and, so forth, which is virtuous action. I'm not saying that you're not engaged in virtuous action, but you have to recognize the entire situation.

When we have this opportunity to practice dharma and we don't, then we're throwing our life away—because we have this opportunity to genuinely create the causes for attaining happiness in the short run, and for complete liberation in the long run. Understanding how things work through the law of karma is very important, but what we must do once we really gain that understanding is three things: We have to give up evil deeds, engage in positive deeds, and train the mind. Those three things. Train the mind to perfection, train the mind to understand its own true nature—in order to be able to establish all

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away with
anything.
Everything is
absolutely cause
and effect

sentient beings in buddhahood. You don't need anything beyond that. That's the whole story. We have the teachings at hand, we have the opportunities at hand. If we don't do it, what a shame.

So one should think about that. And then finally, one should think about the vicious state of samsara. We don't like to hear these things—it sounds too raw. So sometimes we say the “unsatisfactory” nature of samsara, since we still harbor the notion that we're going to get happiness in this life. But what do we have? We have abject suffering interspersed with moments of happiness, which, because of their transitory, ephemeral nature, are really just suffering. If one happens to be doing very well in this life, those moments of happiness may seem quite long. This is the plight of those who live god-like existences. But when one awakens from one's dream-like absorption in the god's realm, it doesn't matter whether it lasted fifty years, a million years, a few minutes, or a few seconds. When it's over it's over. And one finds oneself wandering lonely again through painful foreign lands.

We've forgotten our gestation in the womb and birth, but it is taught to be fraught with suffering. In the West we have the notion that returning to the womb would be an ideal way of finding happiness, but if you read Buddhist books, life in the womb is painful and cramped. It is taught that when your mother eats too much, you feel like you're being crushed by rocks; when she doesn't eat enough, you feel like you're suspended in space; when she eats something too hot, you feel scalded; when she eats something too cold, you freeze; when she has too much intercourse, it's like you're being whipped with thorny branches. This experience may vary according to one's karma, but if there is any

truth in this, who wants to go through that again? And then birth?

And then you get a brief honeymoon, which is youth. Of course we spend our entire youth being fraught with identity crises, with “who am I and how am I going to make it in this world and what kind of job will I have? Will anybody love me?” etc. Youth has all of that kind of anxiety.

Then you have the aging process, which is no fun I can tell you. I've reached that part. It's no fun—your body begins to deteriorate, that's just the way it is. And that aging process brings sickness and death, which is no fun. When we're young and we don't have too much bodily discomfort we think, “Well, that'll be all right, that's just the way it is. I'll grow old with dignity, I'll grow old gracefully.” But actually, when it comes, it's painful. Death is painful. Old age is painful. Sickness is painful. Of course we have lots of drugs to drug ourselves with, but these drugs make us a little stupid.

So the situation is dire, even the human state, which from the Buddhist point of view we regard as the best place to be in order to practice dharma, the best place, because we're not so caught up in suffering that we're incapacitated. We have the capacity and incentive to practice, because we have some suffering, but not so much suffering that we can't practice. And we have intelligence and the natural desire to want to improve ourselves. It's an ideal situation.

But the lower realms get worse and worse as one goes down. Of course as modern, sophisticated, educated people, we don't believe in hell any longer—that's some sort of Dark Age notion that went along with primitive religions—nail him up on a cross and then pray to him and then you get to go to heaven, you won't have to go to hell. And if you don't pray to him you're going to go to hell. Most “sophisticated” people have

What do we have? We have abject suffering interspersed with moments of happiness, which, because of their transitory, ephemeral nature, are really just suffering

rejected all of that. But the fact of the matter is that hellish states do exist, according to Buddhism. They all exist. All of that stuff you read in Dante exists—those people being boiled in caldrons of oil and people being sawed up . . . do you remember Vlad the Impaler? Do you remember Franz Kafka? He wrote about a man having a little black design on his back, and this buzz-saw is cutting him up into pieces along the lines of the design. In hell realms people are getting cut up and the instant that they're cut up and die in horrible pain they're alive again and they're being cut up again. According to the Buddhist tradition these states go on for millions of years. And we don't believe it because we're afraid, we don't want to believe it. But these hellish states do exist. Just look around the world and extrapolate; since everything is mind, anything that you can think of can happen, and somewhere probably is happening. I'm not saying that that's where you're likely to end up, because I'm sure that people who end up in those kinds of places are people who are vicious and so forth. But there are definitely all kinds of lower realms.

There's the animal realm, and there's the hungry ghost realm. Being a hungry ghost is when you want, want, want. You want to be loved and you want this and you want that, so you keep taking and taking and you never give anything back. And you take when you shouldn't take and pretty soon people don't even want to see you. What happens is that pretty soon they *don't* see you. You become invisible. Hungry and thirsty and invisible. And then you become a demon if you're angry about it, or you become a miserable, puny, hungry ghost if you're just forlorn and have no self-esteem and are filled with "Nobody loves me, boo-hoo"—like a wallflower. All of these states exist, but it's very difficult to believe that they exist. When I first read these teachings I thought, "this isn't spiritual." I was looking for something about cosmic

consciousness and all the goodies and great powers I was going to get when I became spiritually awake. But when Buddhists start talking about dharma to people in the East, they start talking right at this level. We just went through a retreat with Bokar Rinpoche and he talked for ten days about this. We sat there with him in the shrine room from six in the morning until eight at night and he talked about these four thoughts

that turn the mind to dharma over and over again, interspersed, of course, with some other teachings as well. But this is what you have to meditate on.

Kalu Rinpoche said that if you meditate on these four thoughts, really meditate on them and take them seriously, if you meditate on them every day and really internalize them—then you'll never stop practicing dharma. But if you don't meditate on them every day you

won't practice dharma. So it's a pretty sobering message.

Bodhicitta is the heart of dharma, the essence of dharma. It's the milk of loving kindness and compassion. But the four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma are the adrenaline of the dharma, the kick in the backside. They are a tremendous motivator. They appeal to your grosser nature, your lesser nature, but it's sometimes necessary to appeal to that nature.

Then the best motivation for practicing dharma is if you can develop, further and further, a genuine heartfelt desire to help others, not just to make your living, not just to do a nice job in the classroom, which I'm sure you do, but genuinely to develop the ability at a very profound level to benefit other beings, by developing the genuine aspiration to attain buddhahood in order to lead all other suffering sentient beings to the liberation, the omniscience, and the great happiness of buddhahood, regardless of whether it's going to take you one lifetime or sixteen or twenty lifetimes. I remember when I first read that if you took refuge in the vajrayana tradition

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you'd get enlightened in, at maximum, sixteen lifetimes. I heard that and I was so depressed. The idea of spending sixteen lifetimes, of having to spend sixteen lifetimes . . . but now I think, "Wow, that's great." When you learn and know that you've been being born and then dying, and then born and dying, and born and dying in an infinite regression of previous existences, and that you could actually be liberated in sixteen lifetimes, that's fantastic!

But you could be liberated much faster if you so decide. Twelve years was a very standard figure for the Indian mahasiddhas to get enlightened. Lama Norlha said that it was not at all uncommon in Tibet for people to get enlightened in their second three-year retreat. They say that tens, hundreds of thousands of Tibetans over the past thousand years have attained enlightenment. It can be done. And if one does that, it is a tremendous benefit to oneself and to others. Then, after that, you don't have to worry about whether or not you're going to be beneficial to other sentient beings. You don't have to have constant identity crises—whatever one does will automatically and spontaneously and effortlessly benefit sentient beings, even if they don't think they're being benefited. So, therefore, one can motivate oneself by recognizing that the attainment of buddhahood is the only way to bring about the ultimate benefit of sentient beings, and that, therefore, it is truly valuable and beneficial to get up in the morning and practice.

Apart from that I don't have any answer. To the extent that one engages in samsaric activities it tends to put you to sleep, but there are things that one can do to try to bring the dharma into your daily life. Whatever you do, in all of your activities, try to see very clearly where you are, what you're doing, and what you're experiencing, and try to be doing so in order to attain buddhahood, in order to liberate

Almost a precondition for being able to practice dharma is to curtail the expression of negative emotions

sentient beings. Use your life as best you can. Try to see every moment of your life as a dream or as an illusion. Keep reminding yourself that it *is* a dream, it *is* an illusion. Doing so helps to cut through one's attachments. Curtail the expression of negative emotions. Actually, for people who are living in the world, that's perhaps the number one thing that they can do; almost a precondition for being able to practice dharma is to

curtail the expression of negative emotions. And then have faith and devotion, meditate on the four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma, and have compassion for sentient beings.

Then of course you could leave your wife [the lama is still addressing the student's question] and go to a monastery and become a monk—that would help. But I don't think you're going to do that. And it's not necessary, although it's very

helpful. But you're in a very fortunate situation, since your wife is also extremely interested in dharma and practices dharma, so you can practice it together, which is great. Meditate on the four thoughts that turn the mind to dharma over and over every day.

Student: I think that's a great answer. If you're practicing there's no room in the day for slothfulness—there's no place for it. If you wake up in the morning and practice, you don't have to deal with slothfulness.

Lama: Well yes, that is, if you get up in the morning. One of the things that they say for dharma practitioners is, when you go to sleep at night, develop a very, very strong intention to get up the minute you wake up. The minute you wake up, get out of bed, regardless of how you feel, regardless of how cushy it would be to roll over and turn off the alarm clock and sleep another five minutes, which turns into an hour or an hour and a half. If you make that determination, then get up. That's a good discipline. It's

good for your character to do so; it strengthens your character to do so. Then maybe you should buy Tony Robbins' tapes. Do you know Tony Robbins? He is one of these great motivators. I'm just teasing you, you don't have to buy the tapes. But make changes in your life. When you see something that you ought to change, change it. Just do it. Just like the Nike commercial. Don't say, "I'll change next week," or "I'll practice next month after I've done such and such." When you see that you're being slothful, change it. Do it, you can do it. All you have to do is do it.

There's nothing else worth doing, actually. There are other things that are kind of enjoyable and diverting, but the dharma is good in the beginning, good in the middle, and good at the end. And it's endlessly interesting. The dharma will never let you down in terms of interest. It goes on and on. It has within it an endless amount of knowledge and information, both in terms of what's in the books, but also what's inside your mind, in the increasing depth and expanse of your own mind. So actually it's the most interesting thing in the whole world, in my experience. And, ultimately, it's the most blissful, happy thing. We usually think that sexual union is the pinnacle of human happiness, but really it doesn't hold a candle to the bliss/emptiness that arises out of true nonattachment. In the mundane sexual experience, you just sort of plug in or connect, crank it up for a time, expend yourself, and then roll over and go to sleep. In the higher reaches of human existence there is more romance, more foreplay and afterplay, and deep meaningful discussions, flowers, wine, music, food of a thousand tastes, but the basic features are the same. As an ornament of an already liberated experience, these activities are fine. Through seeing their true nature, they can

all be transformed, and utilized as path and to benefit beings. But, in the absence of deep awareness, they are exhausting and as often as not lead to turmoil. Dharma isn't like that. Dharma leads to self-perpetuating happiness, if one practices it properly, inexhaustible happiness, permanent happiness. Self-perpetuating bliss/emptiness, not the fleeting bliss of samsara, is the potential in dharma. It does not exist in samsara. We waste our lives trying to squeeze happiness out of samsara; we try to figure out a thousand different ways we can make our lives happy by one further samsaric experiment. The whole situation is sad and ridiculous. It doesn't work. But we never get the message.

We waste our lives trying to squeeze happiness out of samsara; we try to figure out a thousand different ways we can make our lives happy by one further samsaric experiment

The message is, stop doing it and practice dharma. Dharma is the only thing that's going to bring the happiness that we seek and end the suffering that we want to end. That's the greatest kindness that you can do for sentient beings. Yogis and yoginis, tantric practitioners who sit in their caves or retreats meditating, bring about immense benefit for sentient beings even though they look like they're just one step up from the homeless people on the street. Lama Norlha's root guru, for all of the time that Lama Norlha knew him, usually dressed in one sheepskin. Such a yogi—and this goes for yoginis as well— has one

bowl, every meal he eats he takes from that one bowl, has one dishwasher [lama licks imaginary bowl], when he's finished eating from his bowl he washes his dishes, puts it in there [lama puts bowl in puja table], has one teapot, one bag of tea, one bag of tsampa, a little bit of dried cheese, maybe a bit of butter that someone gave to him, maybe some dried meat. He sits there practicing dharma. Then mealtime comes and he makes a little fire (he doesn't even have to get up), puts water in the pot, puts some tea in

there, boils the tea, puts the tsampa in the bowl (tsampa has been roasted and ground by the villagers who give it to him), pours the water into the bowl, stirs it, puts a little butter in, eats it, cleans it, puts it down, and then carries on. Life is very simple. But there is immense happiness compared to what we experience.

But in samsara, particularly in our society, we've gone hog-wild trying to create happiness through samsaric means. We have more toys and more gadgets—you can't believe it. You have a birthday party for a child and you give them all of these toys and gadgets and they're bored. You give them fifty things and they're bored with all of them within a half an hour, or within a day or two. We gave Yangsi Kalu Rinpoche all sorts of different presents. What he really liked was a little puppet. He played with that for a long time. All the high-tech, fancy gadgets he was bored with in no time. All of the things that we think we have to have in terms of material things don't really make happiness. Having

sixteen pairs of shoes for sixteen different kinds of occasions doesn't make happiness. The minute the weather changes by five degrees we have to leap up and change our clothes. The Tibetans don't do that. When it's cold they're cold, but they don't mind. When it's hot they're hot, they don't mind that so much either. They have one pair of shoes. They don't have a pair of shoes that they wear for dancing, and then hiking boots, and running shoes...

Student: What do the yogis and yoginis accomplish for humankind by just sitting? I'm assuming they're doing nothing else, they're not out there interrelating.

Lama: That's what you'll have to find out for yourself.

Student: Well I may never get there.

Lama: Well I hope such a pathetic statement doesn't come true. I'm sure you will. 



Dharma is self-perpetuating happiness, if one practices it properly. It's inexhaustible happiness, permanent happiness.

Mahamudra Upadesha

Oral Instructions on Mahamudra Given by Sri Tilopa to Naropa on the Banks of the Ganges River. Translated from the Sanskrit into Tibetan by Chogyi-Lodro Marpa the Translator.

- 1 Homage to the Co-emergent Wisdom!
- 2 Mahamudra cannot be shown;
- 3 But for you who are devoted to the guru, who have mastered the ascetic practices
- 4 And are forbearant in suffering, intelligent Naropa,
- 5 Take this to heart, my fortunate student.
- 6 Kye-ho!
- 7 Look at the nature of the world,
- 8 Impermanent like a mirage or dream;
- 9 Even the mirage or dream does not exist.
- 10 Therefore, develop renunciation and abandon worldly activities.
- 11 Renounce servants and kin, causes of passion and aggression.
- 12 Meditate alone in the forest, in retreats, in solitary places.
- 13 Remain in the state of non-meditation.
- 14 If you attain non-attainment, then you have attained mahamudra.
- 15 The dharma of samsara is petty, causing passion and aggression.
- 16 The things we have created have no substance; therefore, seek the substance of the ultimate.
- 17 The dharma of mind cannot see the meaning of transcendent mind.
- 18 The dharma of action cannot discover the meaning of non-action.
- 19 If you would attain the realization of transcendent mind and non-action,
- 20 Then cut the root of mind and let consciousness remain naked.
- 21 Let the polluted waters of mental activities clear.
- 22 Do not seek to stop projections, but let them come to rest of themselves.
- 23 If there is no rejecting or accepting, then you are liberated in the mahamudra.
- 24 When trees grow leaves and branches,
- 25 If you cut the roots, the many leaves and branches wither.
- 26 Likewise, if you cut the root of mind,
- 27 The various mental activities will subside.
- 28 The darkness that has collected in thousands of kalpas
- 29 One torch will dispel.
- 30 Likewise, one moment's experience of luminous mind
- 31 Will dissolve the veil of karmic impurities.
- 32 Those of lesser intelligence who cannot grasp this,
- 33 Concentrate your awareness and focus on the breath.
- 34 Through different eye-gazes and concentration practices,
- 35 Discipline your mind until it rests naturally.

36 If you perceive space,
37 The fixed ideas of center and boundary dissolve.
38 Likewise, if mind perceives mind,
39 All mental activities will cease, you will remain in a state of non-thought,
40 And you will realize the supreme bodhicitta.

41 Vapors arising from the earth become clouds and then vanish into the sky;
42 It is not known where the clouds go when they have dissolved.
43 Likewise, the waves of thoughts derived from mind
44 Dissolve when mind perceives mind.

45 Space has neither color nor shape;
46 It is changeless, it is not tinged by black or white.
47 Likewise, luminous mind has neither color nor shape;
48 It is not tinged by black or white, virtue or vice.

49 The sun's pure and brilliant essence
50 Cannot be dimmed by the darkness that endures for a thousand kalpas.
51 Likewise, the luminous essence of mind
52 Cannot be dimmed by the long kalpas of samsara.

53 Though it may be said that space is empty,
54 Space cannot be described.
55 Likewise, though it may be said that mind is luminous
56 Naming it does not prove that it exists.
57 Space is completely without locality.
58 Likewise, mahamudra mind dwells nowhere.

59 Without change, rest loose in the primordial state;
60 There is no doubt that your bonds will loosen.
61 The essence of mind is like space;
62 Therefore, there is nothing which it does not encompass.

63 Let the movements of the body ease into genuineness,
64 Cease your idle chatter, let your speech become an echo,
65 Have no mind, but see the dharma of the leap.

66 The body, like a hollow bamboo, has no substance.
67 Mind is like the essence of space, having no place for thoughts.
68 Rest loose your mind; neither hold it nor permit it to wander.
69 If mind has no aim, it is mahamudra.
70 Accomplishing this is the attainment of supreme enlightenment.

71 The nature of mind is luminous, without object of perception.
72 You will discover the path of Buddha when there is no path of meditation.
73 By meditating on non-meditation you will attain the supreme bodhi.

74 This is the king of views—it transcends fixing and holding.
75 This is the king of meditations—without wandering mind.
76 This is the king of actions—without effort.
77 When there is no hope and fear, you have realized the goal.

78 The unborn alaya is without habits and veils.
79 Rest mind in the unborn essence; make no distinctions between meditation and post-meditation.
80 When projections exhaust the dharma of mind,
81 One attains the king of views, free from all limitations.

82 Boundless and deep is the supreme king of meditations.
83 Effortless self-existence is the supreme king of actions.
84 Hopeless self-existence is the supreme king of the fruition.

85 In the beginning the mind is like a turbulent river.
86 In the middle it is like the River Ganges, flowing slowly.
87 In the end it is like the confluence of all rivers, like the meeting of mother and child.

88 The followers of tantra, the prajnaparamita,
89 The vinaya, the sutras, and other religions—
90 All these, by their texts and philosophical dogmas,
91 Will not see the luminous mahamudra.

92 Having no mind, without desires,
93 Self-quieted, self-existing,
94 It is like a wave of water.
95 Luminosity is veiled only by the rising of desire.

96 The real vow of samaya is broken by thinking in terms of precepts.
97 If you neither dwell, perceive, nor stray from the ultimate,
98 Then you are the holy practitioner, the torch which illumines darkness.

99 If you are without desire, if you do not dwell in extremes,
100 You will see the dharmas of all the teachings.

101 If you strive in this endeavor, you will free yourself from samsaric imprisonment.
102 If you meditate in this way, you will burn the veil of karmic impurities.
103 Therefore, you are known as “The Torch of the Doctrine.”

104 Even ignorant people who are not devoted to this teaching
105 Could be saved by you from constantly drowning in the river of samsara.

106 It is a pity that beings endure such suffering in the lower realms.
107 Those who would free themselves from suffering should seek a wise guru.
108 Being possessed by the adhishtana, one’s mind will be freed.

109 If you seek a karma mudra, then the wisdom of the union of joy and emptiness will arise.
110 The union of skillful means and knowledge brings blessings.
111 Bring it down and give rise to the mandala.
112 Deliver it to the places and distribute it throughout the body.

113 If there is no desire involved, then the union of joy and emptiness will arise.
114 Gain long life, without white hairs, and you will wax like the moon.
115 Become radiant, and your strength will be perfect.
116 Having speedily achieved the relative siddhis, one should seek the absolute siddhis.
117 May this pointed instruction in mahamudra remain in the hearts of fortunate beings.

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The reason for being interested in mahamudra, which means being interested in working with your own mind directly in direct experience, is that only by doing so can you be of true and great benefit to yourself and to others.

— from Thrangu Rinpoche's commentary
on Tilopa's *Mahamudra Upadesha*

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