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# Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 November 2008

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As normal, it is good to set the proper motivation for receiving the teachings, which is developing the bodhichitta attitude: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from all suffering, I need to first achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.'

It is good to remind ourselves that this motivation encompasses the main core of the practice. The whole purpose of engaging in study and the practices is to actually be of benefit to other sentient beings. That attitude of wishing to benefit sentient beings is something that must be kept at heart at all times. Then try to engage in that practice as much as possible.

In fact the attitude of wishing to benefit others, which is based on the attitude of being kind to others, is something that is really worthwhile for ourselves. As I usually stress, losing that attitude is a great personal loss that can be likened to losing a most precious object. I definitely consider the attitudes of love and compassion as being a most worthy and meaningful possession, and if we lose that then we lose something priceless.

In fact when we look into normal everyday life situations, we can definitely see the consequences for relationships when that essential, basic altruistic state of mind of love and compassion is lost. So that's why, even from a general perspective, I can see that this attitude is most necessary. I don't know what you would feel about that; if it's something that you agree with, you can put your head down in acceptance, and if not then you can raise your head up. Whether you agree with me or not doesn't make much difference. However, I personally would choose to be amongst those who bow their head to these precious attitudes, and I would not associate myself with those who raise their head thinking 'this is not important'. I am making a significant point here. I think that basically it relates to being master of oneself. If one can identify with the essential tools that one needs, then one can really be master of oneself, otherwise one is a slave to others.

## 2.2.2. MAHAMUDRA ACCORDING TO SUTRA

In our previous session we covered the explanation of the literal meaning of mahamudra, in accordance with the explanations in the auto-commentary.

### Different teaching traditions

Now we come to the point where the auto-commentary reads:

Even though there are eighteen different schools of thought in the Buddha's doctrine, all are similar in seeking the means to achieve liberation. Likewise, even though there are different tenets presenting mahamudra with different points of view, they are all similar in striving to achieve the resultant mahamudra, the ultimate state of unification.

The first sentence refers to the Vaibashika school of Buddhism, where there are eighteen different sub-divisions. Even though there are eighteen different sub-systems, with their own presentations of certain points, they are all seeking the means to achieve liberation—the state of being completely free from delusions. So they have the same aim of overcoming the delusions at their very root and thus achieving the state of self-liberation, or nirvana. Using that analogy, even though there are different presentations of mahamudra, they are all striving for the same ultimate goal, which is the ultimate state of unification. There is no difference whatsoever in the ultimate goal that is sought.

One therefore needs to be careful not to judge the presentations of other schools, criticising them just because they seem to have a different manner of presentation, or because they use different terms to express their views. It is a great fault to assume that these different presentations are faulty and thus criticise them. One needs to understand that if the ultimate goal to be achieved is the same, then the means to achieve that must also be essentially the same, even though they may differ in terminology.

The auto-commentary then continues:

In order to illustrate the great masters' skill of thorough analysis the following is presented:

11. *There are numerous oral tradition teachings, such as those of simultaneous production and union, the joined amulet box, possessing five, the six equal tastes, the four letters, the pacifier, the cutting-off, the great encompassment [dzog chen] and the profound Madhyamaka theory.*

12. *These individual oral tradition teachings have different names and titles. But, if an experienced yogi, who is truly a master of scripture and logic and who can differentiate correctly between scriptures of definitive and interpretive meaning, were to examine them all, he would see that all these theories and teachings are non-contradictory. He would see how all these different explanations and methods lead in the end to the same point—a true understanding of voidness.*

The different presentations of the great masters are presented here in order to illustrate the thorough analyses they have employed to explain the meaning of the mahamudra. In verse eleven the author lists the different presentations of mahamudra. These are: simultaneous production and union, the joined amulet box, possessing five, the six equal tastes, the four letters, the pacifier, the cutting-off, the great encompassment, and the profound Madhyamaka theory. In explaining these we will just refer to the auto-commentary, and not go into too much detail.

1. The presentation of **simultaneous production and union** or spontaneously arising in union is given by one of Milarepa's great disciples, who is known in Tibetan as Dagpo Lhaje or, more commonly, the great Gampopa.

The auto-commentary says

The glorious Gampopa presents the six doctrines with five characteristics, and he nurtures the disciples by the means of simultaneous production and union. Even though there are few different presentations on the meaning of simultaneous production and union:

As Gampopa mentions:

The simultaneously arising mind itself is dharmakaya, a body encompassing everything;  
Simultaneously arising conceptual minds are the waves of dharmakaya;

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Simultaneously arising appearances are the brilliance of dharmakaya;  
Thus appearance and mind simultaneously arise, inseparably.

Another commentary explains why Gampopa's presentation is referred to as the simultaneous production and union. In particular, 'simultaneous' is used specifically to indicate that the mind and emptiness are actually the same. The mind, characterised as cognising or knowing is also clear, which is inseparable from bliss and emptiness. So in this context 'simultaneous' actually has the connotation of being inseparable. This differs a little from the usual presentation of mahamudra where 'simultaneous' refers to mind and emptiness as arising together, whereas Gampopa refers to the mind and emptiness as being inseparable at all times, and so actually they are one and the same. There is further discussion of what 'simultaneously' means in other commentaries, however we won't go into those details right now.

The main point is that the presentation of simultaneous production and comes from Gampopa, who was the main disciple of Milarepa.

2. The master presenting the **joined amulet box** is Khedrup Kyungpo. As mentioned previously, the Kagyu tradition has two main lineages—the Dagpo Kagyu and the Shangpa Kagyu. The Dagpo Kagyu is a lineage derived mainly from Marpa and the lineage masters following him. The Shangpa Kagyu is the lineage founded by the master Khedrub Kyungpo. The Shangpa Kagyu tradition is one of the prominent lineages that also elaborate the practices of Mahakala. According to one of the practices of Mahakala, the presentation of the joined amulet box is primarily a tradition of presenting phenomena as being like dreams and illusions.

One of the praises to Mahakala explains that everything that exists and appears is similar to dreams and illusions. The author of another commentary says: 'Even though it would be difficult for someone like me to explain it according to their actual profound views, if I were to interpret that in relation to our own Gelug tradition, then the meaning of all phenomena and all appearances being like dreams and illusions could be related to phenomena lacking inherent existence. All appearances that are perceived with the misconception of true existence are just like a dream and an illusion, and do not actually exist'.

In explaining the reference to all appearances being like illusions, the author of this other commentary explains further that even though things lack even an atom of inherent existence, the ability to perceive conventional phenomena and the functions of conventional phenomena is similar, for example, to the horses and elephants that are conjured by a magician. Even though those conjured horses and elephants do not exist as real horses and elephants, their ability to appear and function is similar to the illusion of seeing things as inherently existent.

Then the author goes on to elucidate the combined meaning of the simultaneously arising non-dual bliss and wisdom. He refers to perceiving emptiness as the mere negation of the object of negation, where nothing appears in place of that. That then covers the brief explanation of the joined amulet box.

3. The explanation of **possessing the five** is by the Kagyu master called Drikung Rinpoche also known as Jigten Gonpo.

The commentary states:

The explanation of possessing five was given by Jigten Gonpo, who is the founder of the Dagpo Kagyu lineage. He presents this in a spiritual song.

With the racehorse-like mind of bodhichitta,  
If the racetrack-like training to benefit others is not applied,  
You will not receive the appreciation of gods, humans and wrathful female deities,  
Thus, you must pay careful attention to this forerunner of minds.

For the king-like generation of one's body into the aspect of the deity,  
If unwavering stability is not obtained,  
You will not be able to gather the retinue of dakinis,  
Thus, you must pay careful attention to generating the body of the deity.

For the snow mountain-like four bodies of the lama,  
If the sun-like faith does not shine forth,  
The water-like blessings will not come forth,  
Thus, you must pay careful attention to developing a mind of faith.

In the space-like nature of mind,  
If the cloud-like disturbing conceptions are not cleared,  
The planet and star-like omniscient minds will not sparkle forth,  
Thus, pay careful attention to the non-conceptual mind.

For the wish fulfilling jewel-like collections,  
If the cleansing-like aspirations are not applied,  
The desired enlightened activities will not be obtained,  
Thus, pay careful attention to the dedication at the end.

The five basically encompass the 1) preliminary, 2) the actual (which is meditating on the deity), 3) generating faith, 4) meditating on disenchantment with samsara, and 5) dedication.

4. **The six equal tastes** is explained particularly by the commentaries from the lineage of Choeje Gyaray, better known as Drogon Tsangpa Gyaray. The six equal tastes basically encompass 1) taking conceptions into the path, 2) taking delusions into the path, 3) taking sicknesses into the path, 4) taking harms of gods and spirits into the path, 5) taking suffering into the path, and 6) taking death into the path.

5. Next is the presentation of **the four letters**, or syllables. Those four syllables are *a-ma-na-si*, which comprise the Sanskrit term 'not to take to mind'. The meaning of this is presented with four points: 1) cutting the very basis of the mind, 2) method of settling the mind, 3) cutting the mind that has gone astray, and 4) presenting a method of utilising the mind on the path.

6. The **pacifier** tradition is a presentation that comes from Dampa Sangye (believed to be a different person to the Pa Dampa-sanggyay who was the first Panchen Lama's teacher). He presents the pacifier as 'the pure Dharma that pacifies suffering'. This presentation is said to be derived from the passage from the *Heart Sutra* that refers to 'the mantra that pacifies all suffering'. Explaining that, the auto commentary says:

Dampa Sangye presents 'the pure dharma that pacifies suffering', in the following:

Based on the Dharma that pacifies suffering,  
When the male and female spirits and demons are

subdued,  
 The asceticism of magical wheels has been  
 established,  
 When sickness befalls on one's body,  
 The unity of basic space and awareness is integrated.  
 When the slightest disturbing conception arises,  
 To be able to cut through the delusion immediately,  
 When lying down secretly by oneself,  
 To be able to affirm the naked awareness,  
 When sitting amongst a large gathering,  
 To be able to observe all appearances,  
 When laxity occurs, freshen up the mind with the  
 sound of Phet.  
 If distraction occurs, the root is severed,  
 Thus, when excitement occurs, come back to the  
 natural state,  
 When the mind wanders off to external objects,  
 Focus on the meaning of suchness.  
 By using the Dharma that pacifies suffering,  
 When adverse circumstances occur take it on as good  
 fortune,  
 Be amused with the disturbing conceptions,  
 If sickness occurs, take it as a gain,  
 Be glad about all that occurs,  
 When death occurs, take it on the path,  
 Be glad with the lord of death,  
 This Dharma that pacifies suffering,  
 Is the intent of the buddhas of the three times.

7. The **cutting-off** is the practice that is known as *chod*, or the rite of cutting-off. The founder of this practice is Machig Labkyi-drolma. As the commentary reads:

The cutting-off is the practice called 'the object to cut off' which is derived from Machig Labkyi-drolma, which transmits the renowned and profound practice of chod.

The practice that is called *chod* in Tibetan is literally translated as 'the cutting-off'. It refers to the practice that is done on the basis of generating the conventional and ultimate bodhichitta, which involves cutting off one's self-grasping. There are particular rituals and so forth that are done, which mainly encompass the practice of cutting-off the self-cherishing mind or attitude, on the basis of generating bodhichitta.

8. Next is the great encompassment or *dzog chen*, which is comes from the great master Padmasambhava. As explained in the other commentaries the literal meaning of 'encompassment' refers to all non-purified phenomena such as delusions, faulty appearances, dualistic appearances and so forth that are encompassed in the fundamental nature of the mind. When one is withdrawn to the most subtle of minds, then there is nothing left. All of the delusions and all of the faulty states of mind completely subside, as they are all encompassed by that fundamental state of the mind. As that is the great method of realising the ultimate nature of one's mind, it is called great encompassment (or *dzog chen* in Tibetan).

The great encompassment tradition derives from the heart essence of the mind of Padmasambhava.

The dzog chen tradition was elucidated further by the Great Fifth Dalai Lama. Amongst his various works two particular texts explain this view in detail. They are *Words of Manjushri*, which is actually a lam rim text, and *Rinchen Shalung*, which is translated as *Precious Words*. Thus, as another commentary explains, the explanations of *dzog chen* are quite exhaustive in the works of the Great Fifth Dalai Lama.

9. The final tradition that is presented in the root text, is the profound Madhyamaka theory, which is what our Gelug

tradition follows. As the author says in the auto-commentary:

The profound Madhyamaka theory and so forth have been presented by many great scholars. These may have different names and titles, but when the great scholars thoroughly investigate the definitive and interpretative meanings with logic and sound citations it comes to the same intended point at the end. Thus they are not contradictory like cold and hot.

The author of the auto-commentary then reiterates his earlier point by citing the text *The Stainless Light*.

It is as *The Stainless Light* states:

A precious gem found in the earth,  
 Because of various different languages,  
 May have many different names for it,  
 However there is no difference in the gem itself.

The analogy used here is that a precious jewel will have the same value everywhere, even though it may have different names. Depending on where that gem is found, different terms and names might be used, but the fact remains that it is a valuable jewel. By using this analogy the author is explaining that the essence mahamudra is the same even though various different terms are used to explain it.

Then the author continues:

If asked what are the techniques for meditating on mahamudra:

Then he presents verse thirteen from the root text:

13. *There are two [general methods for practising the mahamudra meditations according to the sutra system.] The first is to develop an initial understanding of the theory of voidness, and then strive to achieve single-minded concentration on that understanding. The second method is to strive for an understanding of the theory of voidness based on prior development of single-minded concentration in mental quiescence meditation.*

The first method, as explained here, is to develop an understanding of the theory of voidness and then strive to achieve single-pointed concentration. The second method is to first develop single-pointed concentration and then strive to gain the understanding of voidness. What the author explains is that we will follow the second method.

However, what needs to be understood in relation to this presentation is that the first method does not refer to a practice where special insight is developed first and then calm abiding is developed later. That of course is not possible. Special insight always follows from calm abiding.

What is to be understood from this presentation is that there are some individuals who first gain quite a good conceptual understanding of emptiness. Then that understanding as the focus point, they develop calm abiding. There are others who take conventional phenomena as an object of meditation and develop single-pointed concentration first, and then develop the understanding of voidness or emptiness.

What is being explained is that this presentation will use the method of developing calm abiding first by focussing on conventional phenomena, followed by achieving an understanding of voidness, which is the second system outlined in verse thirteen. Thus, the author explains in the auto-commentary:

There are two systems and one may adopt either approach. However the Lord Shantideva says:

Having understood that disturbing conceptions are completely overcome,  
By superior insight endowed with calm abiding,  
First of all I should search for calm abiding.

At a literal level this could be misunderstood to mean that special insight has to be developed first. However the third line of the verse clearly indicates that calm abiding needs to be developed first. As he specifically says 'First of all I should search for calm abiding'. In order to gain the special insight in relation to emptiness, one must first develop calm-abiding or single-pointed concentration. Thus the main meaning of Shantideva's presentation is that one gains the understanding that all disturbing conceptions (which are the cause of all of one's misfortunes, suffering and so forth) are completely overcome through superior or special insight that is endowed with calm abiding. And in order to achieve that one must first develop calm abiding.

The auto-commentary then continues:

Also in the *Ratnakuta Mahayana sutra* it says:

By relying on morality one obtains concentration,  
After having obtained concentration one then meditates on wisdom.

This is basically presenting the **three higher trainings**, which are the higher training of **morality**, the higher training of **concentration** and the higher training of **wisdom**. They are presented in the same order as their sequence of development. Morality serves as the basis as it is the very foundation of our practices. Then based on morality or moral ethics, one can develop the single-pointed concentration that then serves as the basis for further enhancing wisdom, in particular analytical wisdom.

Observing morality, or moral ethics, allows the very distracted mind to be subdued. As we refrain from engaging in frivolous or meaningless activities, the mind naturally withdraws from those distractions. Thus through observing moral ethics, the mind naturally becomes subdued to the point where one is then able to focus more intently. Then based on morality, one can then further develop concentration. Thus the practice of subduing oneself through morality helps us to overcome the manifest levels of distractions.

When one engages in the practice of concentration based on the foundation of morality one can then overcome the gross obstacles that hinder our practice, which are laxity and excitement. Then one develops concentration by progressing through the nine stages of developing calm abiding. As one progresses through the nine stages and develops calm abiding, one then thoroughly pacifies the two main gross obstacles, excitement and laxity.

The subtle obscuration that is the grasping at the self is overcome through the development of special insight, or wisdom. The development of wisdom, particularly the wisdom of selflessness or emptiness, overcomes the subtle obscurations within oneself, which is grasping at the self.

It is good for us to derive an understanding of the process of the practice of the three higher trainings. Moral ethics helps us to overcome the gross levels of external distractions. Using that as a basis, one then further develops one's concentration, which overcomes the gross obscurations of excitement and laxity. Then based on the development of single-pointed concentration, one then overcomes the subtle obscurations within oneself by applying wisdom.

The auto-commentary concludes this section by saying:

Just as it has been presented in these texts, the presentation here is from the method of striving for an understanding of the theory of voidness based on prior development of single-minded concentration.

That being the case, if asked what is the method for meditating on calm abiding. This is presented with the preliminaries and the actual.

At this point the author begins his presentation of the actual techniques for developing calm abiding. There are two main categories:

2.2.2.1. The preliminaries for developing calm abiding

2.2.2.2. The actual method for developing calm abiding

We will leave the explanation of this for the next session. In the following session after that, we will actually combine the teaching session with some meditation. Even though the actual presentation of calm abiding will be in accordance with the presentation in the text, it is good for you to acquaint yourself with other sources that describe the techniques for developing calm abiding, prior to coming to the teaching. That will make it easier for you to relate to the explanations given in the teaching.

It would be particularly good for you to acquaint yourself with the five faults that have to be overcome, in addition to the eight remedies that overcome the five faults. The nine stages of the development of calm abiding have been explained in the past, so try to become familiar with what those nine stages are. Then there are the six powers and the four placements, which are not specifically described in the auto-commentary. So you will need to use other sources that explain calm abiding. It is important to be familiar with these points.

In relation to the actual technique for developing calm abiding there is the explanation of needing a conducive environment, which has five characteristics. This is explained in accordance with the teachings from Maitreya's text. So identifying the five characteristics of a conducive environment, and the things one needs to have intact on a personal level are also important to know.

In relation to the preliminary stage, there are actually six preliminary practices that are necessary before engaging in the actual practice of meditation. These preliminaries are not to be taken lightly, as one cannot engage in the actual practice without them. Thus you need a good understanding of what the preliminaries are, and based on that a further understanding of the actual techniques.

The reason why we find our meditation practice difficult, and that we constantly seem to be distracted, is because we are not paying attention to the conducive factors, which are the preliminaries. So without all the prerequisites being intact, it is not possible for the actual practice to bear fruit.

Thus the next session will begin with a quiz on the five faults, as well as the eight remedies to overcome these five faults. These are presented very clearly in the extensive lam rim teaching—the graduated path to enlightenment. In fact the explanation there is amazingly clear. If you do not really comprehend and understand fully the techniques of how to engage in the practices of calm abiding, which are explained in the great exposition of the graduated path to enlightenment, you will not be able to really engage in the practice. So it is essential that you grasp these points.

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# Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

18 November 2008

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As usual it would be good to generate a positive motivation along these lines: 'In order to liberate all sentient beings from suffering and to bring them to ultimate happiness, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So towards that end I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'.

## 2.2.2. MAHAMUDRA ACCORDING TO SUTRA

In our last session it was explained that the auto-commentary states that the instructions on how to develop calm abiding will be described under two headings, actual and the preliminaries.

### 2.2.2.1. THE PRELIMINARIES

There are six prerequisites for developing calm abiding.

#### 1. A suitable place

The auto commentary quotes from the *Sutra of Maitreya*, which states:

The intelligent practice in the place  
Which is accessible, is a good place to live,  
Offers good ground and good companions,  
And has the requisites for good yogic practice.

This indicates the five necessary conditions of an appropriate place to achieve calm abiding. Thus those who are keen to develop calm abiding do not need to ask 'What kind of place do I need? Where do I need to go?' as this is all explained clearly in Lord Maitreya's text. There is nothing more that we need to adopt – these five qualities listed by the Lord Maitreya are sufficient.

##### a. An accessible place

As explained in the text, living in a place that is accessible refers to having easy access to sufficient clothing and food. The lack of these basic elements of survival is, in itself, a hindrance to the development of calm abiding. Thus a place that has easy access to sufficient clothing and food is considered to be very conducive.

This description refers to the practical requirements needed to sustain someone who wishes to engage in the practice. There is also, however, a saying in the teachings: 'The meditator does not have to roll down the mountain to find food, as food will roll up the mountain to the meditator'. That is, of course, an indication that someone who is really serious about practising meditation need not spend too much time and energy trying to look for food, as the right conditions will come about naturally for an earnest seeker, when they are ready to practice. This phrase is particularly relevant to people who are not very committed, and who have various excuses for not practising meditation. What this saying is indicating is that if one is really determined to engage in the practice of meditation, then one need not worry about basic survival needs as they will come about.

##### b. A good place

A place that is free from enemies as well as fierce animals and the like, is the right environment for practice. If it is a dangerous place with enemies or wild animals and so forth,

then that can hinder one's concentration, as there will always be a part of one's mind wondering whether or not danger might be present. Thus a place that is free of immediate dangers is conducive to the practice of developing one's concentration.

##### c. Good grounds

There are some places that may not be conducive to physical health, so the chosen ground should be a place that is free from adverse conditions to maintaining good health.

##### d. Good companions

Having good companions refers to being near people who are like-minded in both views and conduct. Being in an environment of like-minded people is conducive for one's practice.

##### e. The requisites for comfortable yogic practice

The last line, a place that 'has the requisites for comfortable yogic practice' refers to a place that is free from distractions. If the environment for the practice of meditation is one where there are a lot of distractions, such as beautiful sights or sounds, then those in themselves would become distractions from practice. Thus a prerequisite for comfortable yogic practice is a place that is free from external distractions.

These are the five qualities of a suitable place. The other five prerequisites for developing calm abiding are:

**2. Having little desire**, which indicates that the meditator has few desires, and therefore doesn't have many needs.

**3. Having contentment**, which refers to being content with the bare necessities, such as food and clothing, to sustain oneself, and not wanting more.

**4. Abiding by pure ethics**

**5. Abandoning multiple or excessive activities**

**6. Abandoning disturbing conceptions**

This refers to the disturbing states of mind such as worries and anxiety, or excessive wants or needs. As another commentary indicates, a remedy for overcoming all the different kinds of disturbing conceptions is to meditate on, for example, the impermanence of things, understanding that all possessions will ultimately disintegrate, and thus material things have no real essence. There is no real lasting pleasure in any material gains. By contemplating the impermanent and unsatisfactory nature of samsara in general, one can overcome disturbing conceptions. Basically, as indicated in the commentary, meditating on a sense of renunciation will help to overcome the different disturbing conceptions.

As the other commentary further explains, when the sixth condition for successful practice has been met, it will be conducive to engage in the practice of developing calm abiding. Then this other commentary goes on to quote from the *King of Concentrations sutra*, which indicates that one who is free from the condition of being excessively attached to material gain, fame and so forth, who is free from desire for excessive needs and able to be sustained with meagre supplies, who has moral ethics and is free from fears can definitely achieve single-pointed concentration.

As indicated in the text and clarified in different commentaries, it is important that we pay attention to the prerequisite conditions for developing calm abiding, so that we understand what is needed if one is to actually engage in that practice. As mentioned earlier, one of the main adverse circumstances is having disturbing conceptions. Living a

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very worldly life means having to deal with many worldly activities where the mind becomes preoccupied with worldly conceptions, which we call disturbing conceptions.

Attempting to engage in the practice of meditation without having overcome those disturbing conceptions means that the prerequisite conditions are not intact, and therefore it is not possible to develop calm abiding. This text mentions that there are times in one's practice of meditation where it may seem that disturbing conceptions and discursive thoughts actually seem to be increasing, despite having all the conditions intact and engaging in the proper technique.

This is actually an indication that one is becoming more aware of the subtle disturbing conceptions in one's mind. It is not as though the disturbing conceptions are increasing but rather it is that one is actually able to clearly identify them. Initially it may seem as if the disturbing conceptions are increasing, but in fact that is a sign that one has been able to identify the disturbing conceptions. That indication comes on the basis of having all of the prerequisite conditions intact, and actually engaging in the proper calm abiding technique. It is not referring to minds that are already filled with many disturbing worldly conceptions.

If we wish to develop calm abiding then it is important that we take notice of these prerequisite conditions and make sure that first of all we make an attempt to acquire them. As mentioned in the teachings, when all the conditions are met, the sincere practitioner can actually achieve calm abiding even in the short time of six months.

In all too many cases people hear that calm abiding can be developed in six months, and they commence with that expectation. But they do so without having ensured that they have gathered all of the prerequisite conditions before they attempt to develop calm abiding. Then, when they reach a point where there is no progress, the danger arises that they will develop the wrong view that the techniques that are presented do not work, and they then develop a wrong view of the practice itself. So there is that great danger.

As the great masters have emphasised in their commentaries, Lord Maitreya's advice is that a sincere practitioner should make sure they have all the conducive conditions. These can be subsumed into being free from the adverse external physical circumstances (in relation to environment and so forth), as well as being free from the adverse internal circumstances i.e. being free from disturbing conceptions.

Two of the essential conditions are having less desires and so fewer needs, and having contentment. Furthermore having good moral conduct or ethics is essential for developing concentration, as the main hindrance to concentration is a distracted mind. So withdrawing from negativities of body, speech and mind allows the mind to become more settled. It allows the mind to be free from the gross distractions that are related to the sensual pleasures. Thus for someone wishing to develop concentration followed by calm abiding, it is essential to live by a good moral code. That is the most conducive condition for settling down the mind. These are the essential points that Maitreya has made.

In relation to the particular prerequisite conditions of having little desire and contentment, it is important that we don't misinterpret these conditions. Having little desire doesn't mean that we have to get rid of all our belongings and worldly possessions and live in poverty—that is not

indicated at all. The practice of having little desire means to lessen one's attachment to or desire for things that one already owns, and to be content with the things that one has. Having less desire or attachment to the things one already has means not being too obsessed with them, but rather using them as the means to sustain oneself. Being content also means being happy with what one already possesses as a means to sustain oneself.

With excessive attachment or desire for another person, such as a male being excessively obsessed with attractive women and constantly thinking about them, there is no possibility of achieving a really good concentrated meditation. It is the same with a woman who is excessively attached to men; if she is obsessed with and attracted to different men and constantly thinking about that, there is no possibility of developing really stable concentration. One may be able to sit erect in an appropriate posture, but being able to focus and concentrate on the object, even in daily practice, will not occur, because the mind is constantly busy with the objects of desire.

## 2.2.2.2. THE ACTUAL MEDITATION

### 2.2.2.1.1. Preparation

#### The sitting place

According to further instructions in the commentaries, it is appropriate to meditate facing the east. Now of course if that is not possible because of the chosen area, then one need not worry too much about that. However if it is appropriate, then the advice is that it can be more conducive for practice if one faces the east. I'm mentioning this for people who ask 'What direction do I have to face when I meditate?' To overcome any disquiet about not being able to face the east physically, one can imagine that one is facing the east, which can also help to derive that benefit. Actually these are good points to remember.

*14. Sitting on a comfortable meditation platform in the sevenfold posture, you should rid yourself of defiled thoughts and extraneous mental activity by first practising the nine breathings.*

#### Comfortable seating

The next piece of advice is to be comfortably seated, which means to have a comfortable cushion to sit on. Of course for ordained Sangha there is a particular seating cover that is required, however in general it refers a comfortable cushion. The technical term used for a comfortable cushion is 'seat of concentration'. Actually the sangha mat is specifically made to resemble a seat of concentration, and has a particular measurement and so forth.

Under the comfortable seat one draws a swastika, to represent stability. The swastika represents the vajra seat, which also signifies that the place where one is sitting is blessed. As mentioned in the teachings, the seating upon where which the Buddha became enlightened was not an ordinary seat made of gross matter, but it was a vajra seat blessed by indestructibility – a diamond seat. The further significance of having a seat that resembles the diamond hard seat, or vajra seat, is to signify the blessed seat of the Buddha.

As indicated in the history of the Buddha's life, while seated upon a vajra or diamond seat in Bodhgaya he vanquished what are called the four demons, at which point he became enlightened. Amongst the four demons the most prominent and significant to overcome is the inner demon of grasping at true existence, grasping at the self. So when one sits upon an appropriate cushion it should be a reminder to develop

the determination to overcome one's inner foes, which are grasping at true existence, and grasping at the self. So think 'I will definitely vanquish the foes and thus achieve the goals of the realisations'.

It is important to develop this determination in order to overcome any doubts or sense of inadequacy, thinking 'I'm not sure of whether I will succeed in this practice of meditation' or 'I'm not sure if I am capable'. To overcome all of these doubts, as emphasised further in this other commentary, it is really important to develop the determination to vanquish the internal foes. And that determination can be developed on the basis of contemplating the conducive factors that one already possesses: one has a precious human re-birth, one has met with the perfect teachers who have given sound instructions about how to engage in the practice. One has also engaged in practices of accumulating merit, and even though one may have engaged in previous negative karmas, one has had the opportunity to engage in practices of purification. Based on these conducive conditions that one already possesses, it is both practical, and important to develop the determination to fulfil the aim of one's practice.

This means not having a relaxed attitude like 'if I achieve my goal then that's fine, and if not that's also okay'. If one begins the practice half-heartedly, then that is not very conducive to success. Rather one must develop the very strong determination at the onset that 'because of all the good conditions I already have there is nothing that will stop me. Thus I will embark on my journey, doing the practice to fulfil my aims'.

Two different grasses are placed on top of the swastika—durva (or long-life) grass, and kusha grass. The significance of the kusha grass is that it represents cleanliness and virtue. Thus having the kusha grass signifies that one will ensure being in a clean environment and increase virtue. You place the tip of the durva grass, which signifies longevity, inwards with each blade of grass placed separately around. Thus placing that particular grass under one's seat signifies that, one will have a stable and long life in order to prolong one's practice. According to the history of the Buddha, when Buddha Shakyamuni sat under the bodhi tree to engage in the practice of meditation, he sat upon durva grass. Thus it is also considered as a blessed grass. For ordained Sangha it also symbolises having less desire and contentment.

The appropriate seating, which as said earlier, is technically referred to as the seat of concentration, also has the back slightly raised, which helps one's meditation posture. Having the back slightly higher apparently helps to prevent the *nadis*, or channels from sinking, which brings on lethargy. When the back of the cushion is raised, the *nadis* are raised up a bit, which helps to keep the mind fresh and the energies flowing well. The cushion itself is square and on top of that an ordained person, places a *dingwa* (a custom made seat cover for ordained monks and nuns). In reference to verse fourteen, we have now covered the first part, which is sitting on a comfortable meditation cushion.

### The seven-fold posture

The next point is sitting in the seven-fold posture that is suggested in order to engage in the practice of meditation. The seven-fold posture has a particular significance in relation to the Buddha's advice. What is being explained here is how to adopt the sevenfold seating posture of Buddha Vairochana. Some texts give the list as eight points, which also includes the breathing technique as well. The seven-fold posture is explained in accordance with a tantric

teaching called *dorje tengwa*, and it is also explained clearly in Kamalashila's *Concise and Medium Stages of Meditation*. We will now go over the main points.

1. The first point is that one crosses **the legs** in the vajra position. The full vajra posture (also called the full lotus posture) is where one places the left foot on the right thigh and the right foot on the left thigh. You may like to try to sit in that posture now if you are able to do so. It is good to begin with that posture and then if you are not comfortable you can come back to your normal sitting position. The significance of sitting in the full lotus posture is that it enables concentration to become stable. It also has the significance of avoiding harm from adverse circumstances, such as demons and so forth. The Buddha is said to have adopted this posture when engaging in the practice of meditation, and he taught this posture to his disciples. Thus adoption of the seven-fold posture is definitely of great significance.

Another reference to the vajra posture is the posture of Vajrasattva. This is not the full lotus or vajra posture, but has the right foot on the left thigh, with the left foot underneath the right thigh. That is also referred to as a half lotus posture. These postures are the traditional postures for engaging in meditation. However the main point is to develop concentration in one's mind. Thus if either of these traditional postures are not comfortable, then one may adopt any comfortable posture that is conducive for developing concentration.

The teachings mention that there are actually five different benefits arising from adopting the traditional full lotus or half lotus. For example it actually prevents physical hardships; when one is used to that posture it is very conducive for eliminating weariness; it enables one to develop concentration rapidly; it is a posture which has the blessing of the buddhas because it is a posture that was adopted by the Buddha himself and then passed on to his disciples. These are some of the beneficial points mentioned in the teachings. When the lamas of the past gave instructions for meditation, they were very strict and would emphasise that one needs to sit in the appropriate posture. They would relate stories describing how, at the time of the Buddha, there were some monks who would lean and sleep and how they actually created the karma to be re-born as animals, such as cows and so forth. Therefore, strictly speaking, it is advised that in order to not create such negative karmas, one should adopt the appropriate posture.

2. The appropriate gesture for the placing of **the hands** is to place the right hand on top of the left with the thumbs touching to form a triangle. Some texts indicate that for a male the right hand is placed upon the left palm, and for a female the left hand is placed upon the right palm. But you can adopt the appropriate hand gesture that feels comfortable for you. I say this because otherwise our discursive minds starts thinking 'I don't want to place my hands in the male way (or in the female way)'. However according to our tradition, the general posture for all is to place the right hand on top of the left. The actual placement of the hands is on one's lap near the navel. It is said that the hands themselves should be about four finger-spans below the belly-button, so the actual belly-button is right in the middle of that triangle.

According to the instructions, one must place one's hands on one's lap, and point the tips of one's thumbs towards the navel. The significance of having the tips of the thumbs touching is that the thumbs are said to have the endings of the bodhichitta channel. By placing the thumbs together at

the navel where the heat is generated, the combination of the bodhichitta channel touching the navel and heat being generated at one's navel, will allow all the channels in our body to become supple, and thus it will be easier to generate love and compassion and bodhichitta within one's mind. It also helps to develop strong concentration and to stabilise one's focus on the object. Actually if you try this gesture according to the instructions, you will definitely get some good feeling.

Placing the hands in this gesture at the navel is said to be significant in inducing the generation stage practices. The heat at the navel is called the *tummo* heat, and when that *tummo* is rising up our channel it melts what we call the white drop at one's crown. The combination of the heat rising and the bodhichitta (the white drop at one's crown) descending induces the example clear light mind. When the meaning clear light becomes apparent, one experiences the non-dual bliss and wisdom, which is when the generation stage of the practice is induced.

Thus the placement of the hands has great significance. If you place your hand posture at the navel you will actually feel the heat generated there. Right now, of course our clothing prevents us from actually touching the navel, but even with our clothing on, we will definitely feel there is some heat being generated. Of course if one were to actually touch the navel, then it would be even more apparent. Even the initial experience of heat being generated at our navel will definitely help to experience the significance. There is some interpretation of how each side of the triangle represents the three doors of emancipation, and the vacant space in the middle of the triangle represents the dharmakaya or truth-wisdom body of an enlightened being.

3. The next instruction is to have a **straight spine**. It is really important to allow the spine to be straight. That means adopting a sitting posture that is free from leaning forward, backward or sideways. The analogy that is given is that the back should be likened to a stack of coins. One reason for having a straight back is that it prevents dullness, stupor, drowsiness, and sleepiness.

The main significance of having a straight back, however, is that it allows the channels within the body to straighten out. When the channels are straightened out then the wind element or energy will flow well within the channels. In turn the wind flowing freely through one's channels leads to the mind being fresh and alert to the point of being able to focus well on the object of concentration. We can use the analogy of pipes here: when pipes are bent, then water in the pipes will not be able to flow freely, and the flow will be slower. The main point of the analogy to be understood here is that there will be obstruction to the free flow of water if the pipes are bent. Likewise when our back is not straight, that in turn affects the channels and the wind element does not flow well through the body, which can affect the concentration and alertness of the mind.

4. The next part of the instruction is to how to place **the lips and teeth**. As explained in the teachings, the instruction is to place the lips and teeth in their natural position. Of course this has been explained many times, however to go over it again, the tip of the tongue needs to touch the palate and is placed behind the front row of the upper teeth. Having the teeth or the lips very tight will prevent the natural flow of air and proper ventilation of the mouth. If the lips are too open then too much air will flow in, thus drying up the mouth and throat, which would be an obstruction. Thus placing the lips in this natural position will regulate a natural airflow.

Placing the tongue behind the front row of the upper teeth helps to prevent excessive saliva from forming, as well as preventing thirst, because the right amount of moisture will be maintained in the mouth.

5. Next is the instruction of how to place **the head**. It is instructed to have the head bend slightly forward. If one has the head raised up too much then it can cause excitement to arise, and if it is lowered too far forward, then that can also cause drowsiness. So the right placement is for the head to be just slightly bent forward, which helps to regulate the two extremes.

6. It is instructed that **the eyes** should not be completely shut, nor too wide open. The gaze of the eyes should be lowered to the tip of the nose. As the Dalai Lama mentioned in his last teachings, there is an advantage there for those who have a big nose, because they can see the tip of their nose quite easily. Those who have a shorter nose will have to strain a bit to try and see the tip of their nose.

The significance of having the eyes slightly open and gazing down towards the tip of the nose also indicates a manner that is free from the two extremes of being wide open or closed shut. There are some who indicate that having one's eyes opened at any level will cause excitement to arise, and so they say that it is better to have the eyes shut so that you don't see anything. However, even though having the eyes completely shut might seem quite conducive initially, it is very easy for that to cause stupor and drowsiness when one goes deeper into the meditation.

If the eyes are wide open then that will cause excitement, because you see things quite vividly. There is no danger with the eyes being slightly open. In the practice of meditation one should not fear the danger of excitement arising because of seeing things, because according to the instructions one focuses on the object primarily with the mental consciousness, and not with the eye consciousness. When one reaches the point of being able to focus on the internal object, then one will not be affected by what one sees externally. However initially, in order to prevent excitement it is advised that one does not have the eyes wide open, but rather just slightly open, thus being free from the two extremes.

7. Next is the instruction on placing **the shoulders**. One should not hunch the shoulders or have **the arms** touching the body. Make sure, however, that the shoulders and arms are not too loose, so that one is stooping over. Rather, broaden the chest with the shoulders in a natural level position, where the arms are not touching the body. Placing the arms in this way also prevents drowsiness as air passes through the armpits.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
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Edited Version  
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# Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇམ་དགེ་ལུན་ལུག་ཀྱི་ཚེན་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

25 November 2008

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As usual we begin by generating a positive motivation such as the bodhichitta motivation: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

## 2.2.2. MAHAMUDRA ACCORDING TO SUTRA

### 2.2.2.1. THE PRELIMINARIES (CONT.)

We are up to verse fourteen of the root text, which reads:

*14. Sitting on a comfortable meditation platform in the sevenfold posture, you should rid yourself of defiled thoughts and extraneous mental activity by first practising the nine breathings.*

#### 1. Physical posture

We covered the sevenfold posture last week. As mentioned then, although the sevenfold posture is the usual technique presented, in some texts it mentions an eightfold posture, which includes focusing on the breath. As the presentation here includes focussing on the breath, let us actually spend a next few minutes now focusing on our breath.

#### 2. Settling the mind by regulating the breath

We begin by adopting the sitting posture to the best of our ability. Then we can start to focus on our breath. One of the main points about breathing is that it has to be silent and effortless. One must reach a state where the breath flows naturally. This means that it should not be laboured in any way and be very gentle. It should also be balanced, meaning that both inhalation and exhalation are neither longer nor shorter than the other.

There are three specific points about the breath. It should not be laboured or unbalanced, and not involve a tactile physical sensation at the nostrils when you are breathing in or out. If you feel the breath at the nostrils then since that feeling is associated with the tactile consciousness, it can cause the mind to become distracted; if you notice a tactile sensation it can become a distraction. The main reason for regulating the breath is because the entire focus on the breath must be done with the mental consciousness. As we need to be focusing on the mental image of the breath, one needs to regulate the breath so that it becomes suitable for the mental consciousness to focus on, rather than the physical breath itself.

The seven or eight point postures for meditation are called the postures of Buddha Vairochana, because they are the concentration meditative posture of Vairochana. There is also the tantric explanation, which is that adopting Buddha Vairochana's meditative posture now implants the imprint to actually achieve Vairochana's enlightened state in the future. One of the main features of tantric practice is to take the resultant state into the

practice at the time of the causal state, which in this case means that adopting the postures of Buddha Vairochana now becomes the cause to achieve the resultant state of Buddha Vairochana later.

Verse fourteen states that 'you should rid yourself of defiled thoughts and extraneous mental activity by first practising the nine breathings'. The nine breathings refer to the nine-round breathing technique. There is also the practice of settling down the disturbing conceptual states of mind through regulating the breath and just focusing on the natural breathing. These breathing techniques are specifically relevant for bringing about a settled and clear state of mind.

#### Settling the mind

As another commentary explains, the reason we need to settle down and regulate the breathing is because the breath, or air element, is closely related to our mind. Due to this close relationship, the clarity of the mind is affected when the wind (our breathing) is not regulated and cleared. Thus, in order to achieve a clear state of mind one adopts the technique of regulating one's breath. We should combine the technique of regulating our breath with an awareness of the state of our mind. When we engage in the practice of focusing on our breath, we need to maintain an awareness of what is happening in our mind as well.

The meditation practice of focusing on the breath becomes a Buddhist practice when it is combined with the following visualisation. Check the state of one's mind before beginning the practice, and if it is in a virtuous state, then begin by inhaling with the visualisation that all the good qualities of all buddhas and bodhisattvas are entering through the left nostril in the aspect of white light. As the white light enters into oneself it increases one's virtuous mind, imbuing it with bodhichitta, love and compassion, faith and so forth.

If one finds that prior to engaging in meditation practice the mind is in a bit of a disturbed state, then begin by exhaling and imagine that every kind of disturbed state of mind leaves the left nostril in the form of black light. With the exhalation of black light, one imagines that all forms of negativities, disturbances, delusions, and obstacles that are the causes of suffering, are completely dispelled, abandoned and purified, never to occur again. It becomes a much more significant practice if this visualisation accompanies the breathing.

If we engage in this breathing technique and associated visualisation, inhaling and exhaling over seven, eleven or twenty-one rounds, then we will notice that the mind becomes really settled and clear. Even though the breathing exercise is a widely practised technique, combining it with this visualisation makes the practice a unique Buddhist practice. This technique of combining breathing with visualisation is explained in Vasubhandu's *Abhidharma* and other texts as well.

Having explained the technique, we can now adopt the meditative posture again, and then focus on the breath while combining it with that visualisation. We can try to maintain our focus for at least seven rounds of our breath. Doing it diligently with full attention and focus makes it most meaningful.

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(Pause for meditation)

### The nine round breathing technique

The nine round breathing technique is specifically a tantric technique that involves visualisation of the central channel accompanied by the right and left channel. Although this is a specific tantric practice the text mentions that using the nine round breathing technique without that particular visualisation can still be effective. On the other hand if the technique involving the visualisation of the channels is not done properly, it is said that there could be complications and some danger. So to be on the safe side, we will adopt the simpler technique and not visualise the channels.

The reason it is called the nine round breathing technique is because it involves alternating between the right nostril, the left nostril and both nostrils. One begins by breathing in through the right nostril and breathing out through the left nostril three times. Then one breathes in through the left nostril and exhales through the right nostril three times. Finally breathe in with both nostrils and exhale through both nostrils three times, which makes a total of nine rounds.

Do you think that you will be able to breathe in through the right nostril and out of the left nostril without physically closing your nostrils? At first you might find it hard to do that. So initially you can physically close the right nostril with your finger while inhaling to the left, and shut the left nostril while exhaling through the right. This technique of alternating breathing in through the right and exhaling through the left, and breathing in through the left and exhaling through the right and then using both nostrils, is a thorough technique that clears the air passages, allowing the breath to flow freely in a regulated way. This makes the breath very subtle and calm. Because of the close relationship between the mind and the air element, which in its gross form is the breath, the mind becomes very clear and sharp when the breath is regulated and flows freely. This then allows the mind to accurately focus on the chosen object. So the nine round breathing technique allows the mind to become clear, sharp and focused, ready to engage in the actual practice of meditation.

### 3. Taking refuge and generating bodhichitta

The root text states:

*15. Sorting out your dull states of mind from the clear, you should begin by taking refuge and developing an enlightened attitude of bodhichitta with a pure and virtuous motivation. You should then perform the profound meditation of guru yoga. After making fervent requests a hundred times or more with intense faith, you should visualise your guru as dissolving into you.*

Having adopted the technique of clearing the air passages and regulating the breath helps to clear the mind, or as specifically stated here, sort 'out the dull states of mind from the clear'. When one's mind reaches the state of being clear and fresh, one can then transform it into the most virtuous states of mind, which are taking refuge and generating bodhichitta. To take full advantage of that clear and pure state of mind, it is good to do a glance

meditation on the whole path leading to enlightenment, which means covering the main points of the graduated stages of the path to enlightenment. Using that fresh clear state of mind will allow the mind to focus on those points easily. Being able to cover the points of the entire path leading to enlightenment will definitely implant a very positive imprint on the mind.

This concludes the prerequisites for the practice of developing calm abiding. As mentioned here, the preliminary practices are adopting the right posture, engaging in the breathing meditation to develop a very clear and fresh state of mind, and taking refuge and generating bodhichitta. Then spend some time going over as many of the main points of the graduated path to enlightenment as possible as the utmost way to accumulate merit and engage in purification.

### 4. The profound guru yoga practice

The auto commentary gives a very brief explanation of verses fourteen and fifteen:

Developing the pure mind by first developing bodhichitta, meditating on the profound guru yoga contains the points of the entire path. The guru yoga practice is done as presented separately. The remaining part of the verse can be understood from its context.

Here the auto commentary gives a very brief explanation, however there are explanations from other commentaries that combine mahamudra with the practice of the Guru Puja, or *Lama Chopa* in Tibetan, which translates as Offerings to the Guru.

According to that explanation, the guru yoga practice is done in the form of presenting various types of offerings to the guru. The preliminary guru yoga practice was presented earlier which is basically the same practice presented here, and the difference lies in the degree of elaboration. The visualisation of the guru in the Guru Puja involves visualising the merit field. The lam rim teachings also present an extensive explanation of the merit field. The visualisation of the merit field is done in accordance with how it is presented in those teachings.

The Guru Puja begins with the lines, 'From within great bliss, I arise as a guru-deity' so it begins with the practice of generating oneself as the guru and deity. Having visualised the guru, one then engages in the seven limb practice, which begins with prostrations followed by making extensive offerings that include external offerings, internal offerings, secret offerings and offerings of suchness. Making offerings is followed by confession, rejoicing, requesting the turning of the wheel of Dharma, and requesting to remain.

Then one goes on to the practice of meditating on the stages of the path. When it comes to the point where the guru dissolves into and merges with oneself then, as explained in the root text, the actual practice of mahamudra begins. In this way we can understand the guru yoga practice as a preliminary for the actual mahamudra practice. If the preliminary practice to engaging in the mahamudra practice is the whole Guru Puja, then that just gives us a hint as to how profound the mahamudra practice itself is. We don't have too much time to go through the profound guru yoga practice in

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detail, so you can refer to the text and familiarise yourself with the practice.

When one does the guru yoga practice in an elaborate way with the Guru Puja then the deity practice of the instantaneous generation of Yamantaka becomes the preliminary to the guru yoga practice. Then when we actually come to the point of visualising the guru in the external aspect of Lama Tsong Khapa, one actually visualises all the thirty-two deities of Guhyasamaja within the joints of Lama Tsong Khapa's body. This visualisation is from the Guhyasamaja practice, whereas the rituals, such as offerings, mudras and so forth are from the Heruka practice. So in this way doing an elaborate guru yoga practice actually includes all three main deity practices. This is as explained by the previous great masters.

What one should understand at this point is that according to Gelug tradition guru yoga practice and the Guru Puja or Offering to the Guru are the same. The Kagyu use the terminology *la dup*, which can be translated as 'accomplishing the guru', which basically has the same meaning as guru yoga practice, whereas the Nyingma use the term *Rin-chen Don-dup* to refer to the guru yoga practice. So in every tradition the Guru Puja or Offering to the Guru is the fundamental practice.

### Different techniques

Among the different techniques of guru yoga practice, the one called the combining-all-into-one-jewel visualisation of the guru, is as presented in an earlier session, visualizing Lama Tsong Khapa as the main guru. This is similar to the visualization presented in the guru puja where one visualises Lama Tsong Khapa on top of one's crown, with Buddha Shakyamuni at his heart, and Vajradhara at the heart of Buddha Shakyamuni. As mentioned previously the practice involves dissolving the guru into oneself, which in fact comes at the end of every guru yoga practice.

The guru yoga practice presented in the Lam Rim teachings is visualising the merit field with Lama Tsong Khapa in the centre surrounded by all the buddhas and deities. The elaborate technique of doing the guru yoga practice is to visualise each individual deity and then engage in the practices of accumulating merit and purifying negativities in relation to that visualisation.

In the guru yoga practice of *The Hundred Deities in the Land of Joy*, the combining-all-into-one-jewel visualisation of Lama Tsong Khapa is presented. Lama Tsong Khapa is normally depicted with the mudra of turning the wheel of Dharma. However in the merit field Lama Tsong Khapa is depicted with the right hand in the preaching the Dharma gesture, and the left holding a begging bowl filled with nectar.

You may wonder about the significance is of this depiction of Lama Tsong Khapa in the merit field. This is said to be the gesture showing Lama Tsong Khapa as a wheel turning king, or buddha. Doing that visualisation as part of the guru yoga practice implants the seed for us to become the foremost disciples of Lama Tsong Khapa when he turns the wheel of Dharma as a buddha in this world. So it is good to know the significance of that.

In relation to the line in verse fifteen that reads 'after making fervent requests one hundred times or more with intense faith you should visualise your guru as dissolving into you' you may wonder how to make those requests. This can be done by either one hundred recitations of the prayer of the lineage gurus from the mahamudra text, or making the requests in conjunction with reciting the nine line praise to Lama Tsong Khapa, which is in accordance to Gyalwa Ensapa's tradition or lineage.

For those of us who are not able to visualise elaborately, it is good to understand that there is no fault in doing the visualisation of Lama Tsong Khapa on top of one's crown with the understanding that the all enlightened beings of the merit field are within him. This visualisation is referred to as the combining-all-into-one-jewel visualisation, because it combines the entire merit field within the guru. This is also how all the enlightened beings of the merit field are understood as being manifestations of the main guru. With that understanding the visualisation becomes very significant.

Personally, I find that making fervent requests, and visualising Buddha Shakyamuni as combining all jewel refuges, is very effective for my mind. Somehow making strong requests with the understanding that 'You are the source of all goodness, the manifestations of all the other deities, and thus I have no other refuge than you', along with visualising the guru in the aspect of Guru Shakyamuni or Lama Tsong Khapa somehow seems to make a stronger impact on my mind. If one has strong faith in the guru in that aspect it seems to really help to shift one's mind and make it much more receptive to the blessings, and provide and impetus to engage in further practices.

As mentioned previously one visualises the three syllables at the three points, OM at the crown, AH at the throat and the HUM at the heart, with light radiating out and invoking all other enlightened beings that dissolve into the guru. The visualisations mentioned in earlier sessions are similar to what is presented here, so one just refers to the earlier descriptions and does the same practice at this point.

One can adopt either visualisation according to one's capacity. If doing the combining-all-into-one-jewel visualisation, the supplication can be done using either the verse of supplication from the mahamudra lineage prayer or the nine round Lama Tsong Khapa praise. After doing the supplication and making the request one visualises that the guru accepts the request. And as mentioned previously, there is the acceptance of the guru in the dharmakaya aspect and acceptance in the nirmanakaya or emanation form of the guru. The main significance of dissolving the guru into oneself is that the ultimate state of non-dual bliss and wisdom of the guru's mind becomes inseparable from one's own mind.

Having dissolved the guru into oneself, one tries to really invoke that feeling of being inseparable from the guru's mind. As will be presented later on in the text, one maintains the blissful feeling and awareness of being in the state of being inseparable from the guru's mind. If you do this practice to the best of your ability, it will actually induce a special feeling in your mind. As will be

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mentioned later in the text, one then remains in the state of one's mind merging with the guru for some time.

This practice is really significant for enhancing the positive energy of our mind. For those with some familiarity with this practice it is worthwhile to take some time to do it particularly when one feels unsettled or disturbed. Spending some time doing guru yoga practice in relation whatever deity practice one has is much more worthwhile and helpful than just running around and getting more and more confused. For those who have more affinity with Tara then the guru is in the aspect of Tara, and for those with a strong affinity for the practice of Avaloketishvara, the buddha of compassion, the guru is in the aspect of Avaloketishvara.

The techniques of these practices are exactly the same and can be applied to any deity practice. In relation to Tara practice, one does the visualisation of Tara and recites the praises to Tara. After the twenty-one praises one can do the short Tara mantra and at the point of dissolving Tara into oneself visualise the inseparable non-dual bliss and wisdom in the mind of the guru or Tara dissolving into and merging with oneself, becoming inseparable from one's own mind, thus blessing one's mind.

For those who do the Cittamani Tara practice, as explained in the sadhana, the main visualisation is one's own guru with Tara at his heart. At Tara's heart is the syllable TAM surrounded by the six-syllable mantra of Tara. When one does the practice of dissolving Tara into oneself in accordance with the Cittamani Tara sadhana, one then takes the four initiations. If one is familiar with one particular practice then one can relate that to every other practice that one engages in.

In fact if one does this practice quite sincerely one will definitely feel a real shift in one's mind, especially when one feels troubled and anxious. If one does this practice even for a short time, particularly the part of dissolving the guru (whether the aspect is Tara, Avaloketishvara, Buddha Shakyamuni, or Lama Tsong Khapa) one can actually feel one's mind becoming very soothed providing relief from one's troubles.

We may be keen to meditate, but without having first done the preliminaries there will not be much progress. Even though one sits the right posture and so forth and tries to engage in meditation there won't be much of a feeling from that. If, however, having done the preliminaries mentioned here, adopting seven or eight point posture of Vairochana, generating the refuge and bodhichitta, performing a guru yoga practice, and dissolving the guru into oneself then one will notice that there is a tremendous difference compared with the practice of meditation without having done those preliminaries.

This point does not just relate just to those who are interested in calm abiding meditation, as these preliminary practices are important for any practice or meditation that one wants to do. The significance of having done the preliminary practices, specifically generating refuge and bodhichitta, and reflecting upon the main points of the path is that when one actually engages in the practice of meditative concentration, then

one will develop a single-pointed concentration that is imbued with renunciation and bodhichitta.

One may engage in the proper technique of developing single-pointed concentration, but without the preliminaries one's mind will be devoid of renunciation or bodhichitta. Then what real purpose would the achievement of single-pointed concentration serve? Not much, as without renunciation and bodhichitta there will be no great purpose for one's practice.

If, however, one's practice has been preceded by the preliminaries of taking refuge, which includes the generation of renunciation and bodhichitta, then even though those states of mind may not be manifest when engaged in single-pointed concentration, one's mind stream will be imbued with the states of renunciation and bodhichitta due to the power of the earlier intentions. And when one actually achieves single-pointed concentration one will be able to utilise that achievement with those states of mind.

In relating to the main topic of the mahamudra text, which is of the technique for developing calm abiding we have now completed explaining the prerequisites. The text then goes on to present the different types of objects of meditation for developing calm abiding, followed by the specific objects to adopt, which is the mind itself.

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

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# Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

2 December 2008

As usual, let us begin by adopting the positive motivation that is encompassed by the prayer of taking refuge and generating bodhichitta that we have just recited. So, with a mind of going for refuge and generating the bodhichitta attitude, we can adopt the seven-point meditative posture of Buddha Vairochana that was explained in our last session. Then adopt an appropriate technique of focusing on the breath. As explained in our last session, there are two types of breathing techniques—the nine round breathing technique and the settling down the breath technique. *[Pause for meditation]*

## 2.2.2.2.2. ACTUAL METHOD OF DEVELOPING CALM ABIDING

According to the outline in the auto-commentary we have covered the preliminaries for developing calm abiding, and now we come to the actual method of developing calm abiding. The auto-commentary states:

Having thus first explained the preliminaries, the method for accomplishing mental stabilisation is presented in the following verses:

- 16 *[After these preliminaries, you should formally begin the meditation] by concentrating without the slightest mental wandering, single-mindedly on an unstructured or undetermined state of mind. This is a state of mind devoid of any preconceptions, doubts, wishes or aspirations [for either temporary or ultimate purposes concerning either the future or the past.*

### Identifying concentration and calm abiding

This verse and the following ones explain how to develop concentration and calm abiding. Before identifying the objects of concentration it is important to identify the concentration that one is seeking to develop. Without doing that there is not much point in talking about the objects of meditation. It is essential to accurately identify what concentration is first, because it is possible to be misled into thinking that perhaps the mind itself is concentration, or that perhaps mindfulness itself is actually concentration.

### The two attributes of concentration

According to the explanation in the teachings the concentration to be developed has two main attributes. One is that the nature of concentration is clear and intense, and the second attribute is that it is able to unwaveringly focus single pointedly on the object.

The definition of *concentration is a mental factor that through its own power is able to maintain a single-pointed stability on an object*. So, in accordance with this definition concentration is not a primary mind but rather a secondary mind.

In presenting the two attributes of single-pointed concentration one comes to understand why there are also two main obstacles to developing concentration. Laxity obstructs the development of clarity and intensity, and excitement obstructs unwavering stability on the object. By

relating to laxity and excitement to the nature of concentration, one can understand why they are presented as the two main obstacles to single-pointed concentration.

### The mental factors

Concentration, as mentioned previously, is a mental factor that through its own power is able to focus single-pointedly on an object. So, even though our mind focuses on the object of meditation it is clear, according to the definition, that the primary mind itself is not concentration. Furthermore mindfulness also is not concentration. Rather while the primary mind is observing the object, it is an accompanying mental factor called concentration that focuses single-pointedly on the object. To understand the type of mental factor that concentration is, it would be good to refer to the classification of the mental factors. Older students who studied *lo rig*, or mind and cognition in 2001, will recall that they were presented clearly then<sup>1</sup>. The five omnipresent mental factors were also presented recently in a Lam Rim teaching session<sup>2</sup>.

### The five ascertaining mental factors

The five ascertaining mental factors are faith, aspiration, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom. So concentration is clearly not the first, second, or third ascertaining mental factor.

The lower Vaibashika Buddhist school asserts that the five omnipresent as well as the five ascertaining mental factors are associated with all minds. However, according to the higher Buddhist schools, the five ascertaining mental factors are particularly associated with virtuous states of mind.

In order to clearly identify what concentration specifically is, it is important to relate to, and understand the other mental factors as well. The definition presented earlier is that concentration is a mental factor that from its own side, or by its own power, is able to focus single-pointedly on an object. So thus one needs to understand that concentration accompanies the main mind, but it is not a primary mind itself. Rather, concentration is a secondary mind, which through its own power is able to focus single-pointedly on an object.

It is really crucial that we identify the specific attributes of concentration. As mentioned previously, these include clarity and being able to focus unwaveringly on an object. The more clearly we understand these attributes the more likely we will be able to overcome the obstacles to developing concentration, which are laxity and excitement.

It is explained that it is hard to determine when laxity occurs, whereas excitement is a little bit easier to identify, although at more subtle levels it is also difficult to identify. The main point is that the more clearly we are able to

<sup>1</sup> The five omnipresent mental factors are:

1. *Feeling*, which experiences the object as pleasurable, painful or neutral.
2. *Discrimination*, which enables the mind to discern the specific characteristics of the perceived object, and to discriminate between that object and other objects.
3. *Intention*, which directs the mind to the object.
4. *Contact*, which serves as the basis for the mind to experience the object. For instance when the consciousness, its object and the sense organs come together there is contact, and then you can experience that particular object.
5. *Attention*, which directs the mind to the particular object of observation.

See Lati Rinpoche, *Mind In Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 36. The transcripts on Mind and Mental Factors are available on the annual CD of teachings.

<sup>2</sup> Wednesday 5 November 2008.

identify the attributes of concentration, the more likely it is that we will be able to recognise faults or obstacles when they occur during meditation. It will also enable us to safeguard our minds against these obstacles.

### **The definition of consciousness**

The definition of *mind or consciousness is that which is clear and knowing*. So mind is also explained as having two attributes, which are clarity and the ability to know, or cognise.

I have presented the definition of consciousness numerous times, I could even say over one hundred times, and some of you might wonder why I am repeating it again. That is because it is really important to be able to identify what consciousness or mind means according to Buddhist teachings.

Saying that the nature of the mind is clear implies that even though the mind is non-physical as it is devoid of shape and colours it is, by its very nature, clear like glass or a mirror.

The function of the mind is to cognise or know. Just as external objects are reflected in a mirror, so too our mind, having the nature of being clear, has the ability to reflect or know whatever objects are presented to it.

Once I defined the mind in this specific way to Lama Zopa Rinpoche who, being a bit curious about my explanation said, 'Are you sure this is not an interpretation from some other texts?'. I replied, 'actually I am quite certain that this is the way to explain the mind'.

### **The six primary minds**

There are six primary minds. To refer to the eye consciousness as an example, in accordance with the definition of consciousness, things just appear to our eye consciousness without any effort, and when we open our eyes things just appear right away.

Everything appears to your eye consciousness very clearly and vividly. If you were to close your eyes, then there is an obstruction to the function of the eye consciousness, so external objects do not appear to you, but as soon as you open your eyes, things spontaneously appear to the eye consciousness.

In one of his teachings His Holiness the Dalai Lama explained that if one reflects inwards one might have very clear images in one's mind even if one's eyes are closed. Even though the eyes are not open there is still an image that one can see clearly. That in itself, as His Holiness explained, validates the existence of mental consciousness, as what cognises or perceives those images is the mental consciousness, and not the eye consciousness. It is good to understand that.

In explaining the meaning of verse 16 the auto-commentary reads:

The type of concentration that is indicated here is one that has two branches or attributes, intensity and clarity and non-discriminate single-pointed concentration. An authentic achievement of calm abiding originates from the single-pointed concentration developed outside a meditative equipoise in the desire realm.

Having explained the first part earlier, the second part of this explanation is that there are nine stages in the development of concentration, culminating in the achievement of calm abiding at the ninth stage. As the commentary states, the 'authentic achievement of calm abiding originates from the single-pointed concentration

developed outside a meditative equipoise in the desire realm', which is the final ninth stage.

The auto-commentary continues:

It is as explained by Lord Maitreya:

It originates from the causes of having abandoned,  
The five faults and relied upon the eight antidotes.

As Maitreya's text states, calm abiding is obtained as a result of having abandoned the five faults and relied upon the eight antidotes. We can go over these in later sessions.

Then as the author mentions:

As mentioned, the nine stages of mental abiding are obtained by abandoning the five faults and by relying on the eight antidotes. As explained by Asanga in his work *Compendium of Ascertainment*, the nine mental abidings are to be accomplished with the six powers, accompanied with the four mental engagements.

In an earlier session I warned you that I would quiz you on these, however assuming that you have done your homework we might leave it for the time being. It seems that some have assumed that there might be a test today, and have not come to class for fear of that.

### **The objects of focus for single-pointed concentration**

The auto-commentary further reads:

If one were to ask what type of object should one focus on to achieve single-pointed concentration?

Having explained the definition of calm abiding, the next topic is the types of objects used to develop calm abiding.

It is worth taking note of the sequence of the teachings, which is very logical and systematic. For example, having described the two attributes of single-pointed concentration and the benefits of calm abiding, one may wonder, 'Oh developing concentration sounds good, but I wonder what object I should focus on to develop concentration?' So the author provides an answer to that query:

In general the Buddha presented numerous different objects such as 1) pervasive objects, 2) objects that purify your behaviour, 3) objects for the wise and 4) objects that purify delusions.

The use of these objects is not limited to developing calm abiding, as they are actually objects that can be used to develop any level of concentration.

#### **1. Pervasive objects**

Anything that exists can actually be an object for developing calm abiding. 'Pervasive objects' implies that any object that exists can be an object of calm abiding.

#### **2. Objects that purify your behaviour**

There are either four or five classifications of this object. To mention four that I can recall, they are objects that help to purify or overcome desire for those who have intense attachment, objects that help to overcome anger for those who have intense hatred, objects to overcome ignorance for those who have deep rooted ignorance and objects to overcome pride for those with intense pride.

Objects that help to purify the behaviour of someone with **intense desire** can also be divided into objects to help overcome an extreme, medium or lesser intensity of desire. We will not go into those details right now, but rather just use the example of someone with intense desire. Someone who has had strong acquaintance with desire in previous lifetimes and not applied any antidotes to that desire are born into this lifetime with such intense desire that even the

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slightest contact with an object instils an intense desire in their mind.

An individual with that sort of intensity of desire needs to acquaint themselves with the faults of the particular object of intense desire.

For those individuals whose behaviour is dominated with **intense hatred or anger** I regularly mention that the main antidote is meditating on love and compassion.

For individuals who are dominated by **intense ignorance**, the teachings suggest meditating on interdependence, which also implies emptiness. So meditating on emptiness is the antidote to overcome intense ignorance.

For those who are dominated by **intense pride** the object presented in the teachings is to meditate on the different constituents within the body. If we analyse our body from the top of our head to the bottom of our soles and then up from the bottom of our soles back up to the top of our head, we realise that there are so many aspects and parts of our own physical body that we don't know about. Relating to the ignorance that we have even about ourselves can definitely help to reduce pride.

Also for those who are dominated with a lot of **discursive thoughts**, the object is focusing on one's breath.

### 3. Objects for the wise

The objects for the wise include concentrating on, the **five aggregates**, the **eighteen constituents**, the **twelve sources** and concentrating on **sources and non-sources**.

**Sources** refers to the fact that happiness always has virtue as its source, and suffering always has non-virtue as its source. **Non-sources** is the opposite in that virtue is never the source of suffering, and non-virtue is never the source of happiness.

### 4 Objects for purifying delusions

Objects that purify the delusions refers particularly to developing concentration by seeing the faults of the pleasures of the desire realm and aspiring to achieving the pleasures of the higher realms such as the form and formless realms. By developing single-pointed concentration on the faults of the joys or pleasures of one's own realm, and aspiring to qualities of the pleasures of the higher realms, one acquires clairvoyance and so forth.

From seeing the faults of the pleasures of one's own realm and aspiring to the pleasures of the higher existence, one then reaches a point of seeing the faults of all pleasures and then aspires to develop a state of equanimity. That is how the four different levels of concentration are obtained in the formless realm.

I have listed these objects just from my memory, so it is good for you to go over them more specifically in the texts and make sure that they are accurate.

### The importance of applying this to daily life

We could go into even more detail about the many different objects, but what we can resolve upon is the advice of the previous masters, which is that for an individual who aspires to transform themselves, the best objects to use are the antidotes that overcome whatever delusion or disturbing state of mind that is most prevalent at the present time. What is implied in this advice is that whether one is able to develop single-pointed concentration or not, one needs to actually identify the disturbing states of mind within oneself.

These disturbing states of mind accompany us at all times and constantly disturb us, whether we are sitting, sleeping

or moving about. Having identified the most prevalent or dominant disturbing states in our mind it would be most worthwhile to apply the appropriate antidotes to overcome those disturbed states of mind, and thus transform oneself. In that way, even if one were not able to develop single-pointed concentration right away, there is still a great benefit from the practice.

The appropriateness of applying this instruction to our daily life cannot be underestimated. The practice of identifying the most prevalent delusions or disturbing states of mind as the main opponent to be overcome and then applying the antidotes, is most beneficial for our life. Having become interested in Buddhism and in Buddhist practices, this will encourage us to engage in some meditation. It will not be beneficial in the long run if one neglects working on one's own mind, while adopting some esoteric or fancy object on the side. One could come to a point where, despite having attempted to focus on an object for a long time, the delusions have not yet been reduced. There is the danger then of losing faith in the practice.

That situation is definitely prevalent, as we hear many who say, 'I have studied and practised for many years but I haven't changed a bit. I am still the same'. Then there is the danger of completely abandoning Dharma practice. That would be a pity, and in fact the great fault of criticising the Dharma or the practices arises from that, when in fact the reason for the failure is not paying attention to applying the practice in the right manner. As we have already embarked on the journey of engaging in Dharma practice, it is worthwhile doing it in an effective way.

If someone is in this negative state of mind and were to keep it to themselves then only one individual is harmed. However the greatest fault is when they start going around telling everyone that the practice is not effective, thus creating doubts and negative states of mind in others. That is when the real fault arises, and that is a pity.

If one actually puts into practice the advice given earlier, then one will definitely begin to notice the delusions beginning to subside, which is a clear sign that the practice of meditation has been effective.

If you can recall a time when you had a lot of problems and were feeling quite miserable, and notice that since engaging in the practice of meditation you have become more joyful and happy, then that is a clear sign that the meditation has been effective. It is much more worthwhile to reflect upon the positive outcomes that one has experienced, to rejoice and encourage oneself further, rather than reflecting upon the negative side of things.

The main points that we have covered so far in this evening's session are the two attributes and the definition of concentration, the distinction between mindfulness and other mental factors, and that concentration is a separate secondary mental state. We have also covered the definition of mind or consciousness itself, which is a significant point to remember, and finally the various types of objects that can be used to develop single-pointed concentration.

Having presented the four specific types of objects that are listed in the sutras, the auto-commentary goes on to explain.

However most lineage gurus of this tradition have used the mind itself as an object for obtaining calm abiding; likewise it is this method that is presented here.

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Thus, it is significant to recall the definition of mind as it can be used as an object for obtaining calm abiding. The mind that is referred here is the entity that is clear and knowing.

As another commentary explains, the mind itself will not appear vividly in one's first attempt to focus on the mind, so one resolves to focus on an image of the mind to begin with—that is sufficient.

As the auto-commentary presents, the referent mind that is initially used as an object for developing calm abiding is the conventional mind, which has three attributes. The **first attribute**, which was covered earlier, is that it has the nature of being clear and the function of knowing. The **second attribute** is that mind itself is devoid of all form, meaning that it is not made of matter and so forth. The **third attribute** is that it is the basis of the appearance of all phenomena.

As the commentary further explains, the benefit of focusing on such an object is that it will help one to actually realise the voidness or the actual emptiness of the mind itself later on. Another benefit is that focusing on the mind helps to lessen one's preoccupation with external objects or distractions. It is also easier to develop calm abiding by using the mind itself as an object.

It is easier for us to focus on the breath and experience the benefits of that, because the breath is devoid of colour and shape. The mind also has the same attributes of being devoid of colour and shape. When one is actually able to focus on the mind then all the benefits that were mentioned earlier will definitely be present.

The auto-commentary then continues its explanation of the meaning of the verses:

After having generated intense faith in the lama [referring to the earlier explanation on visualising the lama on top of one's crown] to the point where tears roll down from one's eyes and the hairs on one's body stands on end, one then makes strong supplications from the depths of one's heart, at which point the lama dissolves into oneself and blesses one's mental continuum.

Within the state of great awe leaving aside all conceptions regarding temporary and ultimate hopes and aspirations, and all doubts that something undesirable may happen now and in the future; thus being in a state where one is not recalling past memories, greeting the future or having discursive thoughts in the present, without modifying one's state of mind one remains in the state of awe for a short duration.

Having done the appropriate practice of envisioning the lama, and having made supplications, at the point where the guru dissolves into oneself, one develops an intense feeling of admiration for, and faith in, the lama. One then just remains in that state of being completely overwhelmed with being one and inseparable with the lama's mind.

Without much familiarity with the practice it may initially be hard to imagine this, but with practice one arrives at the desired state where the mind is devoid of any concerns.

As mentioned specifically in the commentary, this is a state where there are no past memories, and as literally translated 'not greeting the future' i.e. thinking about future plans and so forth, or even being concerned of the present. Rather, one remains in that overwhelmed state of awe, with no discursive thoughts, and no worldly concerns, and focuses on that.

We can now adopt that meditation for a few moments. Imagine the guru (in whatever aspect one is familiar with) dissolving into oneself, and maintain that awareness of being inseparable from the guru's enlightened mind. Try to feel the awareness that does not have any particular concerns with the past, future or present but just being aware of the inseparability of oneself from the guru, and focus on that. *[Pause for meditation]*

As we would have noticed in these few moments there is definitely a good effect from attempting to meditate in this way. It is good to try to refer to the commentaries to gain a clear understanding of the technique and then try to apply that to our life.

An explanation of meditating using the mind as an object is found the concise Lam Rim teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa, where it mentions reflecting inwards and focusing on the mind itself without any discursive thoughts, or analysis of the mind, and just being aware of our awareness or consciousness, and then using that as an object. The mahamudra presents this in a slightly different way but basically it uses the mind itself as the object. It is good to become more familiar with this technique.

In the Kagyu commentaries this meditative state is explained as the mind being devoid of any discursive thoughts, so although different words are used it comes to the same point that is explained in the Lam Rim teachings. The object of the mind is just being aware of the state of mind itself.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama presents a slightly different technique, which may be in the commentaries that people have, and I will also present that technique in later sessions.

Now you have all been presented with the technique of meditating upon the mind using the mind as an object/Right? Some years ago on some Wednesday evenings we did some meditation using the mind itself as an object, with the addition of a little bit of the technique that is presented here in the mahamudra. We spent some time meditating with that technique. There were quite a few who responded saying that it was a very effective and good technique, but I don't know whether they followed it up or whether it became effective in their life.

As people are aware, the next session is the discussion week and it is good for you to continue with that. It is also good to become clear about the points mentioned earlier in the teachings such as identifying the seven-point posture of Buddha Vairochana, and being clear about the significance of adopting that posture. As presented earlier adopting the Buddha Vairochana's posture implants the imprint in our mind to actually attain the state of Vairochana in the future. Then the posture becomes much more meaningful. So it is good to further clarify those points.

Following the discussion is the test. As mentioned previously it is good for people to attend the discussion and the test as well, as it is part of the learning process. A meaningful discussion is beneficial for everyone, and if the discussion can actually benefit someone then it serves a purpose.

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
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## **DISCUSSION**

## **Block 7**

### **Week 1 (11 November 2008)**

1. The different presentations of the great masters are presented here in order to illustrate the thorough analyses that they have employed to explain the meaning of the Mahamudra. **List four** of these different presentations with a brief explanation of each.

### **Week 2 (18 November 2008)**

2. Name the six prerequisites for calm abiding.

3. a) List the three main points of preparation under the heading " The actual meditation."

b) Explain the seven-fold Vairochana posture.

### **Week 3 (25 November 2008)**

4. How does the meditation focusing on the breath become a Buddhist practice?

5. Explain the nine round breathing technique.

6. With regards to the different guru yoga practices, what did Geshe Doga say seems to make a stronger impact on his mind?

### **Week 4 (2 December 2008)**

7. Give the two attributes of the concentration to be developed.

8. Give the definition of concentration.

9. Give the definition of mind.

10. Give the three attributes of the conventional mind.

**Exam**

Name:

Block: 7

Mark:

Week: 6 (16 December 2008)

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1. The different presentations of the great masters are presented here in order to illustrate the thorough analyses that they have employed to explain the meaning of the Mahamudra. **List four** of these different presentations with a brief explanation of each. [8]

2. Name the six prerequisites for calm abiding. [6]

3. a) List the three main points of preparation under the heading " The actual meditation." [3]

b) Explain the seven-fold Vairochana posture. [7]

4. How does the meditation focusing on the breath become a Buddhist practice? [4]

5. Explain the nine round breathing technique. [6]

6. With regards to the different guru yoga practices, what did Geshe Doga say seems to make a stronger impact on his mind? [2]

7. Give the two attributes of the concentration to be developed. [4]

8. Give the definition of concentration. [3]

9. Give the definition of mind. [2]

10. Give the three attributes of the conventional mind. [3]