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# Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇམ་དགེ་ལུན་ལྷན་རྒྱལ་གྱི་ཆེན་པོ།

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As usual we set a good motivation, and the best motivation is encompassed with the bodhichitta motivation. Such a motivation is 'in order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment and for that purpose I shall listen to the teaching and put it into practice'.

## The four preliminary practices

### ACCUMULATING MERIT AND PURIFICATION (CONT)

The fourth verse from the root text begins:

4. *As the realisation of the void nature of the mind is completely dependent upon your collection of merit and elimination of obstacles,*

We have covered specific explanations as to what it means to gain realisations of the nature of the mind. As explained earlier, the ultimate nature of the mind is said to be its lack of inherent existence, or the mind being void of true existence. Other terms are the emptiness of the mind, or the suchness of the mind. The emptiness of the mind is the lack of inherent existence of the mind. It is referred to as the ultimate nature of the mind because, in the final analysis on the mind, one realises that it is the lack of inherent existence that is the final mode of existence of the mind. As explained in verse four of the root text, in order to realise that ultimate nature of the mind one needs to collect merit.

The main point being made in this verse is that in order to gain the realisation of the ultimate nature of the mind, which is the emptiness of the mind, one needs to (as also explained in many other teachings) first accumulate merit and purify negative karma. Without purification and the accumulation of extensive merit, the conditions conducive to gaining the realisation of the emptiness of the mind will not be present.

### The importance of understanding the law of karma

When we realise the importance of needing to accumulate merit and purify negative karma then the next thing is to look into how that is done. What are the prerequisites for accumulating merit and purification? In order to generate a keen interest in accumulating merit and engaging in purification practices one needs to first be familiar with the explanation of karma. The intention of wanting to accumulate merit and engage in purification practice will not come about without some basic understanding of karma.

We can all relate to the fact that we all wish for happiness and do not wish to experience suffering. So we need to know what the causes of happiness are and what the causes of suffering are. What are the circumstances that lead us to experience suffering and what are the circumstances that lead us to experience happiness? This is explained clearly in the teachings on karma. Thus with a good understanding of karma, the need to create the appropriate causes for happiness and eliminate the causes for suffering becomes clear.

If one does not wish to experience suffering then one needs to abandon the causes of suffering. Likewise if one wishes to experience happiness then one needs to create the correct

causes for happiness. Merely wishing to not experience suffering and to experience happiness will not bring about those desired results. If it were that simple we would all be experiencing happiness all the time, because that is what we naturally wish to experience. It is clear that the desired result of happiness does not come about without creating the causes. Even though we wish to experience happiness, we do not experience it and that is clearly because we have not engaged in creating the causes. Likewise even though we do not wish for suffering it seems that is what we experience most of the time. So the experience of happiness and the experience of suffering must be understood as being totally reliant on their causes.

From this we can understand that without an understanding of karma there is no possibility for us to really develop further. The basis of the path is to understand the law of cause and effect, and by understanding karma one also comes to understand the interdependent nature of things. So an understanding of interdependent origination can come from an understanding of karma.

As mentioned earlier, a sound understanding of karma is crucial for a real transformation to take place within oneself. As explained in the teachings if the negative karma one creates is not purified then one will definitely experience the consequence, which is suffering. That is the natural law of cause and effect. The reverse is that if one engages in generating virtue and accumulating merit then it is definite that one will experience the positive results of joy and happiness, but only for as long as it is not destroyed by negative states of mind such as anger. That is the natural cause and effect sequence of negative and positive karmas, and without that understanding one's practice will not bear much fruit.

In effect without a profound understanding of karma we may find that even though we may seemingly engage in practices such as a purification practice, then far from creating the causes for happiness by purifying negative karma, we may actually be creating causes for further suffering.

The reason is not because there is a fault in the practice itself, but rather because one lacks a true understanding of karma. For example, if we engage in the practice of purification with the expectation of some quick result, and lack the understanding that a deeper transformation will take place in the future, then one may actually lose faith in the practice. We may start to develop the state of mind of wrong view, and think 'even though I engage in this practice, it doesn't seem to bring any positive result, so it must not be a valid practice'. Then one may begin to doubt the effects of karma itself. In this manner, if one does not have a profound understanding of how the practice works then it may become a cause for a negative state of mind to develop, rather than a positive one.

As mentioned here specifically, gaining profound realisations as well as temporary realisations is dependent on the accumulation of merit and the purification of negative karma. So one should try to include that understanding in one's daily practice, and through that, understand how the accumulation of merit serves to enhance one's practice.

As mentioned in the commentary one must not take these preliminary practices lightly, and must actually engage in the practices outside of the formal meditation sessions. One must be diligent with the practices of accumulating merit and purification at all times.

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## How to purify negative karma

As mentioned in the auto-commentary, the main means for purifying negative karma and accumulating merit in our tradition is the practice of Vajrasattva with the recitation of the hundred-syllable mantra, as well as the practice of prostrations to the thirty-five buddhas.

One can do the Vajrasattva practice in accordance with one's individual level. If one has not received any higher tantric initiations, then in our ordinary human form, one can visualise Vajrasattva on the top of one's crown and then do the purification practice.

Those who have received highest yoga tantric initiations can do the practice in relation to whatever deity practice they are engaged in. For example, if one is doing Yamantaka practice or Vajrayogini practice then one visualises oneself as the respective deity and visualises Vajrasattva on top of one's crown and then does the purification practice. Those who have received the highest yoga tantra initiation can also generate themselves as Vajrasattva and do the practice in that way.

In general the most suitable way to practice would be to maintain one's ordinary human aspect and visualise Vajrasattva on top of one's crown, and then do the visualisation of nectar and light coming from Vajrasattva, entering and purifying oneself. Doing this practice as an ordinary person is very effective, because it directly relates to the perception we have of ourselves, and thus with the visualisation, we receive the deity's blessings for purification.

Although the auto-commentary does not go into the details of the practice, it does mention the benefits of doing the Vajrasattva practice. The benefits are explained in these lines:

As mentioned particularly in the text *The Essential Ornaments*:

By engaging in the 100 syllable mantra,  
The downfalls will not increase;  
This is proclaimed by the supreme practitioners,  
Thus, engage in this practice during the breaks.

'By engaging in the one hundred syllable mantra' has the connotation of engaging in the ritual of reciting the one-hundred-syllable Vajrasattva mantra, which are the specific instructions from the earlier masters on how to engage in the practice. That is what is implied here. So if one does the recitation based on those specific instructions then, through the blessing of the mantra, with each twenty-one recitations the downfalls will not increase.

The specific instructions on how to do the visualisations accompanying the one-hundred-syllable mantra are explained in the sadhanas. To explain it briefly, one visualises the Vajrasattva deity on top of one's crown and then one invokes the wisdom beings in the front, which then merge with the visualised Vajrasattva on top of one's crown. Then one invokes the initiating deities and requests the initiation. After the initiation is bestowed, the initiating deities dissolve into Vajrasattva, and then one does the visualisation of receiving the nectar and light.

When one does the recitation of the mantra with the appropriate visualisation as described in the sadhanas, then through the blessing of the mantra (as mentioned here in the verse), 'the downfalls will not increase'. This means that, as a result of the appropriate visualisation of the blessing of the mantra, whatever downfalls one may have incurred will not increase. The negativity of that downfall will stop increasing.

Here 'downfalls' refers, for example, to any root infraction of either the bodhisattva or tantric vows and commitments. If on a particular day one incurs an infraction of a root bodhisattva or tantric vow and one does not purify it right away, then it is said that by the next day the intensity of that negativity will multiply. The negative consequences of an infraction of a root vow will increase just like we accumulate interest if we borrow money. If we don't pay the money back then the interest on it increases for every day that we don't pay it back. That is the deal we make when we borrow money. Likewise when we take vows and make commitments, we do so with the intention of keeping those vows every day for the rest of our lives, so if we break that commitment then naturally there will be undesirable consequences.

The auto-commentary continues with the quote from *The Essential Ornaments*:

If a hundred thousand are recited,  
A complete purification takes place,

The author then explains:

Just as it has been explained, if this mantra is recited twenty one times daily, it stops the increasing of the downfalls. If recited a hundred thousand times, even a root infraction is completely purified. Thus with the four opponent powers intact, engaging in the practice of Vajrasattva through mediation and recitation...

This explains the benefits of the Vajrasattva practice. When one sees these benefits one will develop an interest in doing the practice. I have explained the actual practice according to the sadhana a few times previously, and it is also available in text form, so we will not spend more time going over it now.

As a practitioner, purification is one of our jobs, which means that at our level our practice consists of purifying negative karma and accumulating of merit.

The great Indian master Nagarjuna mentioned clearly that one initially engages in the preliminary practices of purification and accumulating merit, and then in the middle one engages in meditation practices. This is really a very sound advice on how to practice. If we find that right now our meditation is not very clear, and that we are not able to visualise and focus well, then that is due to the negative states of mind prevalent within us. Therefore if we take the initiative to engage in purification practices, we will notice that the focus in our meditation will be much clearer after embarking on the purification practice, and that the mind will be clearer. Those positive effects can definitely be felt. Otherwise it is difficult to gain the positive results from meditation practice.

Even though we will not go into specific details in our explanation now, the text refers to the preliminary practice of making mandala offerings of the universe. The mandala offering also needs to be understood as being a very profound practice.

It is good to understand that whatever practice we engage in, whatever deity it may be in relation to, they all need to be preceded by preliminary practices such as making mandala offerings to accumulate merit, engaging in Vajrasattva practice, and doing prostrations as part of the thirty-five buddha purification practice, as well as taking refuge and generating bodhichitta. These practices are most powerful practices that make our mind suitable for engaging in further meditation practices.

The nun Gelong Palmo is said to have engaged in the meditation practices on Avaloketishvara, the buddha of compassion for some period of time. But no matter how many times she tried, she never had a very clear visualisation of the deity and so she was not able to accomplish her practices. Then she embarked on making a lot of mandala offerings and it is said that after a significant number of mandala offerings, her visualisation became very vivid and she was able to accomplish the Avaloketishvara practice. She actually perceived a clear vision of Avaloketishvara as a result of her practice.

In relation to the earlier explanation the auto-commentary then reads:

...and likewise engaging in the practice of prostrations to the thirty-five buddhas, must be taken to heart.

As mentioned here, prostrations in relation to the thirty-five buddhas are said to be a very powerful means of purification, particularly when combined with all four opponent powers. That is also true for the Vajrasattva practices and any other purification practice. When all four opponent powers are present then the purification practice becomes very powerful indeed.

It is good to remember the specific advice in the text, which is that if one does not purify one's negative karmas then day-by-day it will increase, just like inflation. So in order to prevent that negativity from increasing in one's mind it is good to engage in a purification practices such as Vajrasattva practice or the thirty-five buddha prostration practice, both of which have to be done with all four opponent powers.

#### **THE FOUR OPPONENT POWERS**

It is good to have an understanding of what the four opponent powers are. As explained in the teachings, if all four opponent powers are not present then no matter what purification practice is done, it will not be a complete purification. As many of us are already engaging in purification practices, it is good to be aware of how to do it in a complete way.

For instance, in the evening, before we retire for the night, it is good to reflect upon one's day. How many times has one engaged in positive deeds and positive states of mind? If one finds that one has engaged in positive deeds and had positive states of mind then one can rejoice in that, being happy to have had the opportunity to accumulate virtue. Then dedicate that to the welfare of all sentient beings, so that they may be free from all suffering and gain the ultimate state of happiness. If one dedicates one's virtue in this way then that is the greatest way to secure one's merit and increase it further.

If on reflection about one's day one recalls that one has engaged in non-virtue, or a negative state of mind then try to develop strong regret feeling, 'how unfortunate that I was led into committing such negative deeds'. With a sense of regret one can engage in the practice of purification. If one does the purification practice with the all four opponent powers, then that negative karma is definitely purified.

In fact, if one checks one's mind in that way at the end of the day and does the appropriate mental practices (either rejoicing and dedicating, or else purifying one's negative karma), then even if one doesn't wake up the next morning, all would be fine. There is no doubt one would be saved from an unfortunate rebirth in the next life. Since we all have to die, it is said that the best time to die is when one is engaged in virtue, in purifying negative karma, or

accumulating merit. The best time to die would be while engaged in a purification practice.

There was a time when, through some incident, I was bleeding a lot, and I had heard previously that death could occur if one bleeds excessively. So because I was bleeding a lot there came a time when I felt that my death could be approaching. However my mind was quite clear and I felt that if I had to die now, then since my mind was quite clear it would be a good time to die. I didn't mind dying and felt that it was a good opportunity, however after a certain period of time death didn't come. So even though I was prepared mentally, apparently it was not my time to die yet.

It was only later that I recalled that one of my main teachers, Geshe Ngawang Dhargey, had casually advised me (even though normally he didn't give that sort of advice) that it is good to recite one hundred thousand Tara mantras. I had actually done such a recitation, and it was very much later that it occurred to me that having done that practice had actually saved my life by overcoming the major obstacle of bleeding

The four opponent powers are:

#### *1. The power of reliance*

Taking refuge and generating bodhichitta is the power of reliance.

#### *2. The power of applying the antidotes*

The teachings present a general list of the antidotes for overcoming negative karma, such as meditation on emptiness, reciting mantras, reciting sutras and so forth. There are actually six specific ways of doing those practices, however what we basically need to understand is that all virtue accumulated with the intention of purification can become an antidote for purifying negative karma.

#### *3. The power of regret*

This means generating strong regret for the negativities one has engaged in, similar to the regret one would have after consuming a poison. As soon as one realised that one has consumed poison, with strong regret about having consumed it, one would want to get rid of the poison immediately. One should develop a similar attitude with negative karma. The reason why we would feel regret is because we know the consequences of consuming poison. At worst, death could definitely occur, and at the very least one will experience a lot of pain, misery and suffering. So with strong regret one would want to try to remedy that suffering and try to get rid of the poison from one's system in any possible way.

Likewise when one reflects on the consequences of negative karma one will develop a strong sense of urgency: 'If I do not to purify negative karma then the consequences or results of that negative karma are only suffering. In future lifetimes there will be no way for me to experience any happiness, and because of my negative karma there will only be immense suffering'.

The better the understanding, and the more conviction and faith one has in karma, the stronger the sense of regret will become. Actually, the teachings explain that of the four opponent powers the power of regret is one of the most important ones to develop. As the teachings mention, strong regret in itself actually purifies half of the negative karma one has accumulated.

#### 4. The power of resolution

Resolving not to commit negative karma again is very much dependent on the strength of the regret one develops. If one develops strong regret with the understanding that it has been negative and harmful for oneself, then the wish to not commit that deed again will develop quite strongly.

Resolution involves making a commitment to not engage in that negative deed again. In making such a resolution some may worry that 'if I resolve to not commit a negative deed again and happen to engage in that negative deed then would that be a lie? Would I be lying to the objects of refuge?'

Here one should understand that one can resolve to the best of one's capacity to not commit a certain negative deed for a certain period of time. Having made that resolve, if due to some conditions and circumstances one unwillingly and unintentionally happens to engage in negative karma again, then one will not incur the fault of lying, because earlier one did not have the intention to lie. So if one makes a strong commitment and intention to not engage in negative deed, but due to circumstances and conditions one happens to engage in that again, then that is out of one's control, so to speak, and would not be a lie.

It may be difficult to promise not to commit certain negative karmas for the rest of our life. But if one were to commit to not engaging in a negative deed for two or three days, a day, or even for a few minutes, then during that period of time one has kept that commitment of not engaging in that negative deed.

To explain how to do this practice in a formal way, we can do it in the evening, for example, before going to bed. In the space before oneself, one visualise one's own guru in the aspect of Vajradhara or Buddha Shakyamuni. In the presence of the object of refuge, which is the reliance, one then recalls whatever negative deed one has engaged in. Then with a strong sense of regret, one generates refuge and bodhichitta and then recites the one hundred-syllable mantra or any other practice. That, in itself, is the antidote or remedy for overcoming the negative karma.

Then at the end of the practice one makes a resolution. In that way, within a few minutes our practice becomes a complete practice of purification. It takes only a few minutes but the benefit we gain saves us from suffering in numerous lifetimes in the future. When in just a few minutes we can engage in a very powerful practice from which we can gain incredible benefit, isn't it worthwhile then to spend a few minutes in this way?

That completes the explanation of the two preliminary practices of accumulating merit and purification.

#### THE GURU YOGA PRACTICE

Guru yoga is the fourth preliminary practice, which is described in verse five of the root text:

*5. Then you must make repeated heartfelt requests to your root guru, whom you recognise as inseparable from the buddhas of the past, present and future, to be able to realise voidness.*

This refers to the doorway to receiving the blessings, which is making supplications to the guru. As the auto-commentary explains:

Then meditate on the lama by seeing him as inseparable from the buddhas of three times, who is the source of all goodness in this life and all future life times, who exemplifies the deeds of all buddhas and bodhisattvas,

and who is kind in the three ways. Meditate on the lama by seeing him as the essence of the Three Jewels. While meditating on the guru yoga, which is the profound practice of the path, make strong supplications to the guru from the depths of your heart. To do this practice consistently and repeatedly is a vital point of the practice.

The guru yoga practice is done in an elaborate form in the *Guru Puja*. However, in essence, there is one way to understand what guru yoga is. As explained in some teachings the guru yoga practice consists of meditating on the physical aspect of the lama, applying his advice in one's daily life, and making strong supplications to obtain the qualities of the lama's mind within oneself.

When one does the guru yoga meditation, one visualises the lama. As explained in the teachings, there are different areas where you can visualise the lama, either on the palm of your hands, or in your heart, or in every joint of your body, or in the space before you, or on the top of your crown.

Another text explains that the significance of doing the guru yoga practice with visualisations and so forth is that one will actually receive the blessings of the thousand buddhas. This text explains that the main point of the practice is to develop the recognition that the essence of all enlightened beings is presented to us in the aspect of the lama. So the lama serves as the manifestation of all enlightened beings, who manifests in an aspect that we can relate to, in order to guide us and lead us to enlightenment. The lama is thus the essence of all enlightened beings, and with that understanding the guru yoga practice becomes a uniquely powerful practice.

When one does the actual guru yoga practice it is also important to visualise that the lamas who have passed away are also constantly present, blessing and guiding oneself.

When the auto-commentary says 'Then meditate on the lama by seeing him as inseparable from the buddhas of three times', it is quite clear that the buddhas of the past, present and future, and the visualised lama must be seen as inseparable from them, which means that the essence of the lama is the buddhas of the three times.

'He who is the source of all goodness in this life and all future life times' is the lama who guides us, and who is the source of the goodness and well-being of ourselves in this and all future lifetimes. So the lama is the embodiment of the buddhas of the three times, as well as exemplifying 'the deeds of all buddhas and bodhisattvas and who is kind in the three ways'.

'Meditate on the lama by seeing him as the essence of the Three Jewels' points out that the lama is inseparable from the buddhas of the three times. How he is actually the essence of the Three Jewels can be explained in more detail in a future session. However, in brief, the physical aspect of the lama represents the Sangha jewel, the teachings of the lama represent the Dharma jewel, and the mind of the lama represents the Buddha jewel. So one visualises the lama inseparable from all buddhas and bodhisattvas and as the essence of the Three Jewels.

When that visualisation has been done appropriately, then the next piece of advice in the auto-commentary is 'Thus meditating on the guru yoga, which is the profound practice of the path, make strong supplications to the guru from the depths of your heart'. Supplication from the depths of one's heart will come about naturally when one has done the earlier practices appropriately. As the auto-commentary does not go into detail about reliance on the guru it is

necessary to refer back to the lam rim teachings, which explain in great detail how to rely on the lama. This includes how to rely on the lama mentally and through one's actions, and also the benefits of relying on a spiritual teacher or guru, and the disadvantages of not relying on a spiritual teacher. These are explained in great detail in the lam rim and it is good to refer to that in order to gain a proper understanding.

The auto commentary further reads:

Once when someone asked the great master in a loud voice, 'Atisha, please give a personal instruction' he laughed and said, 'Ha, ha. My hearing is quite good, but for me to give personal instructions you need faith, faith - faith!'

As the auto-commentary explains, thinking that Atisha didn't hear him, someone asked Atisha in a loud voice to give a particular instruction. Atisha said, 'I actually have quite good hearing but if you want to have instruction you have to have faith', which he emphasises by repeating 'faith, faith'.

Then the auto-commentary reads:

Lord of the Dharma, Sakya Pandita says:

Thus, once you have received the initiation,  
If you make supplications to the lama,  
By seeing the lama as the one who encompasses,  
The culmination of all Three Jewels;  
You will surely receive the blessings.

Sakya Pandita advises that when making a supplication to the guru, it is important to do it in the appropriate way, which is to see the lama as one who encompasses the essence of the Three Jewels. When the guru yoga practice is done in that way then the blessings will flow into one. Just reciting prayers, or verses without the appropriate visualisation and understanding will not, in itself, have much effect.

The main point being made here is that having received an initiation from a lama, doing guru yoga practice in relation to that lama or guru means visualising the lama as the essence of the Three Jewels. That is how the practice of guru yoga needs to be done. You have missed the point if you see the Three Jewels and the guru as being separate entities. If you have received an initiation from a particular lama you must envision the lama as the essence of the Three Jewels, and that the Three Jewels and the lama are inseparable and of one entity. That is how to do the practice of guru yoga if one wishes to receive the blessings.

The auto commentary then reads:

The great lord (Padampa Sangye) also says:

When you allow the lama to guide you,  
You will reach your ultimate destination,  
Thus, people of Dingri, extract the essential advice,  
And offer devotion and respect to the lama.

Padampa Sangye mentions clearly that if you rely on and have trust in the lama then you will reach the desired destination, as the lama will take you there.

Then the auto commentary continues:

The Venerable Milarepa also says:

After the lord dissolves into you,  
In order to never forget the lama,  
Place him at the centre of your heart.  
Periodically meditate on the appearance of the lama.  
When you have the appearance of the lama,  
Place him at the top of your crown,  
And make supplication to become inseparable.

When the lord dissolves into you, have the lama placed always in your heart in order to never forget him. 'When you have the appearance of the lama' implies that the appearance of the lama is to be taken as the object of refuge. This emphasises again that the objects of refuge and the lama are not separate, and that the lama is the essence of all the buddhas, and the essence of the objects of the Three Jewels. So when the lama appears, place him on the top of your crown, and make supplications to be inseparable from the lama who is in essence the Three Jewels and all the buddhas.

The actual practice of guru yoga and guru yoga realisation is said to be a profound realisation that is not easily gained, which is particularly true for us.

My own master, Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey went into retreat for ten years. He would emerge from retreat to give some teachings to his disciples, but most of the time he was in retreat. It was known that he was meditating on the guru yoga practice.

Even to our ordinary perception Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey seems to have had definitely attained the realisation of the guru yoga practice. That was quite apparent. After he completed the retreat it is said that he offered his realisations to His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

I happened to be present when Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey was at a teaching session of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, and a message was sent for Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey to come and see His Holiness. At their meeting His Holiness praised Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey's practice and said 'I admire the way you have spent ten years in retreat while continuously guiding and teaching other disciples, and I greatly rejoice in your deeds. At this time I have a request to make of you, which I hope you will not refuse'.

His Holiness explained that the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives had been established, and would be completed in about two months, and said 'I would like you to be the teacher there to teach students who are interested in Buddhism'. His Holiness then advised Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey to hand him a summary of the teachings that he conducted at the Library. The first book published on Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey's teachings was *The Tibetan Tradition of Mental Development*. I hear that it encompasses the essential teachings and that many westerners who used that text actually became translators themselves, just by studying that text with its essence of all the teachings.

In Kopan monastery in Nepal there was a man called Karma who was very keen on becoming a translator, and he wanted to learn how to do so. At one point we were having a meal together with Lama Choedak, and Karma praised the translations of Jeffrey Hopkins. Lama Choedak made the comment, 'Well Jeffrey Hopkins may be all well and good, but if you are really keen on becoming a good translator you must read Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey's work. Many who are keen to become translators have studied that text and have actually learned a lot, so I would advise you to do that'.

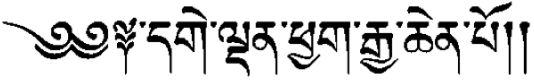
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We begin by generating a positive motivation, which can be based on bringing to mind the meaning of the words of the Refuge and Generating Bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited. While reciting the words of that prayer it is important that we try to generate those thoughts in our mind. Hearing the meaning of something is necessary if we are to be able to understand what we are to think about. Once we have heard something, then we can think about it and meditate on the meaning of it. That seems to be the appropriate procedure. It is good to keep in mind that this procedure is applicable at all times when studying the teachings. We must not underestimate the hearing part of the process, as it is so important. Then the thinking that we do about what we have heard becomes the basis upon which to meditate.

If doubts arise in the course of meditation practice, then one can refer to what one has previously heard. Because of the imprints left on the mind from the hearing and thinking process, the meanings of what one has heard can become really vivid in one's mind, and thus assist us in the practise of meditation. Just the mere fact of hearing a teaching is said to have great benefit, but in order to establish it firmly in our mind, and leave a strong imprint, it needs to be followed by the thinking process. The main point in relation to the motivation is that when we recite the Refuge and Generating Bodhichitta prayer it is good to reflect upon what it means and actually try to generate that state of mind within ourselves.

In the teachings there is a general mention of the benefits of acquiring the imprints of hearing. My interpretation of what 'imprints of hearing' means is that when you hear a teaching and spent some time thinking about it, then at a later stage when you actually engage in some practice. Even though you may not recall every word, you will still be able to remember the main points, which will assist you in your practice. This ability to recall the main points is, I think, due to the imprints of hearing. Anyway that is my interpretation and you may find other explanations.

The great Kadampa masters are said to have first engaged in extensive hearing of the teachings, then based on their extensive hearing they naturally had the ability to think extensively. The combination of extensive hearing and thinking then served as the basis for them to meditate on the profound topics. So understanding this process of hearing, thinking and then meditating can give us guidelines for doing our own practice.

If one does not refer to this process then there is the danger that after hearing quite a few teachings one may be left feeling, 'Oh I have heard a lot of teachings, but I don't have a clue as how to engage in the practice?'

Last week we covered the basic explanation of guru yoga in the auto-commentary. I mentioned then that I might go into a bit more detail on this point. The auto-commentary states:

Then meditate on the lama by seeing him as inseparable from the buddhas of three times, he who is the source of all goodness in this life and all future life times, who exemplifies the deeds of all buddhas and bodhisattvas and who is kind in the three ways. And/or meditate on the lama by seeing him as the essence of the three jewels. Thus meditating on the guru yoga, which is the profound practice of the path, make strong supplications to the guru from the depths of your heart.

These few lines are a profound way presentation of how to do the guru yoga practice. If you are vague about this then you will not derive much benefit from that practice. The main points, as elucidated in these few lines, are to see the lama as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, and as the essence of the Three Jewels. How do we see the lama as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times and as being the essence of the Three Jewels? I felt it would be good to explain these points a bit further.

First of all, we need to know the literal meaning of the term 'guru yoga'. In English the Sanskrit term 'yoga' is used, but that doesn't convey the literal meaning of the Tibetan word *nal jor*, which consists of two syllables. *Nal* has the connotation of being true or genuine whereas *jor* has the connotation of bringing yourself close to that. So the literal meaning of *nal jor*, which is translated as 'yoga', means a practice that brings oneself closer to a genuine object, in this case the guru. So the actual meaning of the word *nal jor* refers to bringing one's mind towards the genuine guru, and that is what is called the guru yoga practice.

The term yoga refers to the practice itself, whereas the one who engages in the practice would be called a yogi. So *nal jor pa* is the Tibetan for yogi (or the person who engages in the practice), and *nal jor* is the actual practice itself. The texts further establish that there is the conventional genuine guru and ultimate genuine guru.

**The conventional genuine guru** is a being who has overcome all faults, and acquired all qualities, and who has the ability to engage in activities of propounding the teachings of the buddhas. **The ultimate genuine guru** is the emptiness of the mind of the conventional genuine guru. In brief, the one who has all positive qualities and the ability to engage in the virtuous activities of the enlightened beings is called the conventional genuine guru.

In relation to the activities of the buddhas, it might also be good to point out that there is a distinction between the virtuous activities and the knowledge of the Buddha. Even though in essence there is no big difference, based on the literal meaning there is a distinction between the knowledge and the activities of the Buddha. The qualities and knowledge of the enlightened body, speech and mind imparted to sentient beings by an enlightened being are the enlightened virtuous activities, while the ability of to propound or impart this to others, is referred to as the enlightened being's knowledge.

The Tibetan word for virtuous activity of enlightened beings, is *tin ley*. All enlightened activities arise spontaneously from the knowledge or potential the enlightened being has to be able to impart the qualities of the enlightened body, speech and mind to the disciples. Thus all activities that come from

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the knowledge or potential of the buddhas, are the virtuous activities of the enlightened beings. So within this context we can also understand the reference in the texts where it is said that 'every virtue within the minds of sentient beings, are the virtuous activity of the buddhas'. Thus all virtues are said to be the virtuous activity of the enlightened beings. When one has a deeper understanding of what a virtuous activity is, then one will have a glimmer of understanding as to why all virtues within the minds of sentient beings are the actual virtuous activity of the enlightened beings.

It has been explained that virtuous states of mind arise within sentient beings as a direct result of the virtuous activities of enlightened beings. Thus when we offer the long life prayer to the guru, we are making a supplication for the lama to please live long and for his virtuous activities to increase, in order to benefit the disciples and all sentient beings. With the proper understanding, we can derive a deeper appreciation of what this means.

#### **INSEPARABLE FROM THE BUDDHAS OF THE THREE TIMES**

The teachings say that one should see the conventional genuine guru as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, as is mentioned in the auto-commentary. This can be explained by referring to the three points of view found in the teachings.

In the **Vinaya** system the guru is to be seen as being similar to the buddhas. According to the *Prajnaparamita* or the *Perfection of Wisdom* teachings the guru is to be regarded as being exactly like the actual Buddha, whereas in the **Tantrayana** teachings, the guru is to be regarded as the actual Buddha. Of these different explanations, we rely on the ultimate explanation of the Tantrayana, which is that the guru is the actual Buddha.

#### **1. The Vinaya point of view**

In the Vinaya sutra teachings, the guru is regarded as being similar to the buddhas, because activities engaged in to benefit the guru are similar to benefiting all the buddhas and whatever activities one engages in that harm the guru is similar to harming all buddhas. Furthermore, according to the Vinaya sutra teachings, the activities that harm or benefit any sentient being are said to be similar to engaging in the activity of harming or benefiting the buddhas. So that is how one understands the explanation of the need to see the guru as being similar to the Buddha.

The point about the similarity of benefiting and harming sentient beings, and to benefiting or harming the buddhas is actually a very profound instruction that we should take to heart. This explanation is derived from the Buddha's own words where he said: 'When you benefit any sentient being, it is the same as benefiting me and if you harm any sentient being, it is the same as harming me'. So in this manner the great and compassionate Buddha gave us instructions to treat all sentient beings with kindness and respect, just as you would treat him.

#### **2. The Prajnaparamita point of view**

The *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras say that we should regard the guru as being similar to the actual Buddha in respect of his deeds and activities. The Buddha, or Enlightened Being, manifested in whatever guise or form necessary to subdue beings. For those in need of a peaceful aspect, the Buddha manifested in a peaceful aspect, and for those in need of a wrathful aspect the Buddha manifests in a wrathful aspect. The guru also benefits sentient beings by adopting similar guises.

#### **3. The Tantrayana point of view**

From the Tantrayana or Tantra vehicle point of view the guru must be regarded as the actual Buddha. Those who do the practices such as the Six Session Guru Yoga practice, will be familiar with how the guru is actually regarded as Vajradhara.

When we go to the most profound level of explanation, what we understand from this presentation is that the guru is inseparable from the buddhas of the three times. The Tantrayana explanation of seeing the guru as the actual Buddha means seeing the guru as inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, because he is the source of all goodness, and has overcome all negativities and imperfections.

The auto-commentary refers to the lama as 'he who is the source of all goodness'. Here the term 'holder of the lineage' would be a more literal translation of the Tibetan word *rig-gyi dak-po*. The holder of the lineage is one who has perfected all qualities and overcome all negativities. If one can begin to understand that the essence of the guru is an entity which is free of all negativities, imperfections and defilements, and who encompasses every good possible qualities, then one can come to understand how the guru is actually inseparable from the buddhas of three times.

The words 'he who is the source of all goodness' also implies that the nature of the lama is that he has overcome all imperfections, which is also the nature of an enlightened being. The essence of an enlightened being is one who has overcome all negativities and perfected all qualities. So in that way we can understand how the buddhas and the guru are inseparable.

#### **Visualising the merit field**

When one actually engages in the guru yoga practice it is not enough to have the understanding that the lama or the guru is inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, but one actually needs to envision the lama in the centre of the merit field. Thus one envisions the lama as being the main figure in the merit field, with the other enlightened beings in the aspect of buddhas and so forth surrounding the lama, which are seen as manifestation of the guru. The text further explains, 'because all other enlightened beings surrounding the guru in the merit field are actually manifestations of the guru, one confirms that all enlightened beings are inseparable from the lama'.

Another commentary explains that the main point of envisioning the lama in the merit field is to practise generating faith. So the main essence of the guru yoga practice is to practise generating strong faith in the guru. In accordance with the earlier explanations, the guru is the actual Buddha, an enlightened being who possesses all the positive qualities, and by thinking about his kindness, faith in the guru is generated.

The main point being stressed here is that in every guru yoga practice, one needs to see the lama as the Buddha. When one understands why that is done, it will make more sense. The manner of seeing the lama as Buddha, is to practise seeing the lama as endowed with all good qualities and free from all imperfections and negativities. When one trains one's mind to see the lama in this way then one is able to regard the lama as actually being the Buddha. This doesn't necessarily mean seeing the lama as having all the major and minor signs of the Buddha, such as having an *ushnisha* and a halo and all the other features that the Buddha is portrayed as having. Rather one develops the

recognition that the lama is free of all negativities and endowed with all qualities. It is in fact definitely possible to see the lama in that light, if one trains one's mind consistently.

As another commentary on Mahamudra explains, having engaged in the practice with this understanding and generating faith in the guru, the next step is to make supplications to the guru from the depths of one's heart. As the auto-commentary also indicates, the practice of making strong supplications to the guru from the depths of one's heart is based upon the earlier practice of training the mind in seeing the guru as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times. Once one has developed the state of mind that sees the guru as being inseparable from the buddhas of the three times, then making supplications from the depths of one's heart will follow naturally.

The commentary goes on to explain that the only purpose of becoming enlightened is to benefit sentient beings, there is no other purpose in becoming enlightened. As each practitioner becomes enlightened, they simultaneously manifest all the enlightened virtuous activities that benefit sentient beings. The very purpose of becoming enlightened is to display the enlightened activities of benefiting sentient beings, which is to lead beings out of suffering, and the one who displays those enlightened virtuous activities is our own guru. Buddha Shakyamuni is the buddha of our era, and we regard him as benefiting and helping us, however we do not receive teachings directly from Buddha Shakyamuni, thus he must be helping us indirectly. Who do we receive the teachings directly from then? It is our gurus who display the virtuous activity of the Buddha himself by giving us teachings and personal instructions. In this way we can see that we directly benefit from the guru's guidance and the teachings he gives. That is why we regard the guru as being even kinder than the buddhas of the three times, even kinder than all other enlightened beings.

### Developing faith in the guru

By remembering how the guru guides us and benefits us we recall the kindness of the guru again and again. Then one makes strong supplications to the guru from the depth of one's heart to be able to continuously fulfil the wishes of the guru, to never forsake the guru, and to always be guided by the guru. This is how we make supplications to the guru. The essence of the explanation given so far has been how to generate strong faith and respect towards the guru by recalling his kindness.

As mentioned in previous sessions, by recalling and familiarising oneself with the advantages of relying on the guru and the disadvantages of not relying on the guru, one engages in the practice of pleasing the guru, which means putting his advice into practice to the best of one's ability. The ability to put the guru's advice into practice follows from engaging in the practice of developing faith and respect for the guru by seeing his kindness. Then the wish to follow the guru's advice comes naturally to one's mind. When one practises in that way, and it becomes evident to the guru that the disciple is practising to the best of their ability, this is what pleases the guru's mind. So pleasing the guru is the actual genuine guru yoga practice.

The other commentary further explains that with such an understanding one tries as much as possible to engage in the guru yoga practice that is explained in the extensive Guru Puja. However the commentary goes on to explain that it is best to engage in the general mode of practice as has been

just described. The commentary goes on to present a brief guru yoga practice that is of a form that one can manage in one's daily life.

### Brief form of the guru yoga practice

#### Visualisation

##### *Manjushri*

The particular visualisation in the brief form of the guru yoga practice seems to be related to the specific practice of Mahamudra. On top of one's crown one visualises a throne supported by four snow lions, and top of the throne is a lotus seat upon which is a sun and moon disc. Seated on the sun and moon disc is the deity Manjushri. His right hand holds a sword of wisdom lifted above his head, and his left hand holds the *Perfection of wisdom sutra* at his heart. He is orange in colour and has a beautiful smiling face, and is uttering the beautiful sounds of the Dharma.

The significance of this particular visualisation, which also relates to other practices/visualisations, is that

- ∞ The snow lions holding up the throne represent the four fearlessnesses.
- ∞ The lotus, sun and moon disc represent the **common point of view** of the three principals of the path, which are renunciation, bodhichitta and the realisation of emptiness. From the **uncommon point of view** those three represent the clear light, the illusory body and unification. Thus the lotus, sun and moon disc actually represent the qualities of the guru's mind.

##### *Vajradara*

On the top of Manjushri's crown one visualises Vajradhara with consort. Vajradhara is the holder of the lineage and the essence of all enlightened beings and is represented in two colours:

- ∞ When in the aspect of Vajrasattva the colour is white,
- ∞ When in the aspect of Vajradhara the colour is blue.

The colour depends upon the nature of the practice: for those who engage in the six-session guru yoga practice the visualisation is normally a blue Vajradhara, but in a purification practice it is a white Vajradhara.

##### *Lama Tsong Khapa*

At the heart of Manjushri one visualises Lama Tsong Khapa who represents the wisdom being. Lama Tsong Khapa is seated in a lotus position, he has a smiling face and a pinkish complexion, and is wearing a yellow pandit's hat. His hands are in the mudra of turning the wheel or teaching the Dharma. On both shoulders there is a stem and a lotus flower, on top of which one visualises texts.

- ∞ The technical description of the colour of Lama Tsong Khapa's complexion is white with a reddish tint, which we normally translate as pink. The description of Lama Tsong Khapa's complexion as white with a reddish tinge represents the unification of method and wisdom.
- ∞ The mudra or the hand gesture represents the unification of sutra and tantra, Lama Tsong Khapa's mind being endowed with the practices of sutra and tantra, as well as emptiness and interdependent origination. The mudra itself is called the mudra of teaching and it represents Lama Tsong Khapa imparting the teachings.
- ∞ On top of the stem and the lotus on Lama Tsong Khapa's right shoulder there is a sutra and top of that a sword.
  - The lotus represents the bodhichitta mind with which Lama Tsong Khapa imparts his teaching. One



of the qualities with which Lama Tsong Khapa is endowed is bodhichitta mind.

- The text represents Lama Tsong Khapa's mastery of composition. Today we have eighteen volumes of Lama Tsong Khapa's works that we can study and refer to, so the text represents the quality of composing
- The sword represents dialect or debate with a sharp intellect.

It is good to understand the qualities of great beings such as Lama Tsong Khapa. These are teaching, composing and debate or dialect. It is said that beings such as Lama Tsong Khapa, who are endowed with these three qualities have enabled the teachings of the Buddha to remain and endure for a long time. The **teaching** of the Buddha's doctrine is a direct means of propounding and spreading the teachings. **Composing** commentaries and so forth on the Buddha's teachings is a means of preserving the Buddha's teachings, because if it is not written down and recorded then it may not endure over time. Thus a composition in textual form has the ability to be preserved for a long time. That is the purpose of composition. **Debate or dialectics** ensures the teaching that has been given or composed is free from any flaws and faults.

- ∞ Another quality is to be endowed with pure morality, which is represented by the three robes that Lama Tsong Khapa wears.
- ∞ The yellow pandit's hat represents the unmistakable teachings of the Buddha that are presented after analysis. Just as gold is analysed through cutting, rubbing and burning, the teachings are analysed thoroughly and presented in a flawless manner. The yellow colour comes from the Vinaya tradition. The pointed tip of the hat represents gaining the pinnacle of the most profound perfected aspect of the ultimate view of emptiness.
- ∞ Lama Tsong Khapa is seated in the Vairochana's meditative sitting posture. In different circumstances that would represent different aspects or qualities, but in Lama Tsong Khapa's case it represents the qualities of Lama Tsong Khapa's mind being free of all adversities and having gained all realisations. When White Tara, for example, is seated in that posture it specifically represents never being reluctant to help sentient beings. Another interpretation of sitting in the lotus meditative posture is that it represents the four sets of sixteen in relation to the tantric practices. These are the sixteen drops, the sixteen channels, the sixteen winds, which relate to being able to bring the winds into the central channels and so forth, and the sixteen unities of bliss and emptiness. This will be presented in more detail later on when we come to explanations on the completion stage practices.

In summary the lama on top of one's crown is visualised as the deity Manjushri, and on the top of Manjushri is Vajradhara with consort, and at Manjushri's heart is Lama Tsong Khapa who represents one's own guru.

### Contemplation

The next point of the practice is to generate a very strong sense of, 'It is through the kindness of my root guru at the top of my crown that I am delivered from all suffering and saved from all misfortunes, as he has come at the right time

for me to be subdued'. By recalling from the depth of one's heart, the kindness of the lama again and again, and how one has been guided and taught and so forth by him, the lama's incredible kindness becomes very clear—he is kinder than all other forms of enlightened beings.

The kindness of one's root guru or lama is equivalent to being given a meal when we are extremely impoverished and hungry. If someone were to actually give us a meal when we have nothing to eat, we would always remember that extremely kind person. To take that analogy further, if someone gave us some food when we have plenty to eat it would not be considered such a big deal.

Like that analogy, at this time when one is spiritually impoverished, without any realisations, and lacking any true qualities, the one who guides and helps us is the lama. Later on, when one gains realisations with direct sights of the buddhas and deities and receiving instructions and so forth, that is great; but what actually enabled us to reach that point is the kindness of lama, who helped us at a time when we were most destitute of realisations and qualities.

The main point is that this guise of the lama is the most appropriate aspect for us. Thus one thinks, 'My root guru, who I visualise on top of my crown, is the most appropriate aspect to guide and subdue me right now; he is the manifestation of all enlightened beings who appear in this guise to guide and help me'.

As the commentary further explains, having visualised the lama in this way and generated strong faith and respect towards him, one engages in the practices of taking refuge, generating bodhichitta, the four immeasurables, the seven limb practice, and makes mandala offerings. After having made extensive offerings to the lama then we need to receive something back—the mandala offering particularly is an indication of 'I need something in return'.

The actual supplication practice is similar to how it is presented in the lam rim teachings. There are two supplication practices, the common supplication and the uncommon supplication, but we can leave these until our next session.

This abbreviated version of visualising the lama is actually very useful, or in lay terms a very 'handy package', for doing the guru yoga practice. It is good for us to understand that it is an abbreviated and easy way to practice guru yoga.

With this visualisation it is not helpful to visualise the throne as actually touching the top of one's head, because it might feel uncomfortable, or wobble when one moves one's head. It is best if it hovers a few centimetres above one's crown, not too high and not too low. Also the throne and the visualisation itself should not be too large or too small, but of an appropriate size.

Someone once misinterpreted the actual visualisation and rather than thinking that the lama was to be visualised at the top of the crown, he actually thought that he himself must be visualised on top of the lama's crown. As the lama happened to be bald, he kept imagining that he was sliding off.

If one feels that there is a danger of the throne wobbling and so forth then actually that is an indication that one is fully engaged in visualisation, because that danger arises only if one can visualise something. So those uncomfortable aspects might arise for those who are able to actually do the visualisation. Also, if one happens to be bald oneself then there might be the danger that the lama slips off one's head!

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## *THE ESSENCE OF THE THREE JEWELS*

The next point is seeing the lama as being the essence of the Three Jewels. At the point where one makes supplication to the lama, one brings that particular aspect of the practice to mind, which is to see the lama within the merit field, so that what is normally regarded as the Buddha is actually the lama. What is represented as the Sangha is actually the lama as well, and what is represented as the Dharma is in essence the lama too, along with the protectors, and the titular deities. So in that way one generates a strong recognition that the lama is actually in essence the Three Jewels.

### *Visualising the merit field*

Seeing the guru as the essence of the Three Jewels is the practice of 'encompassing all jewels into one' visualisation of the lama, which is one of the three ways of doing a visualisation of the merit field.

The other forms of visualising the lama in the aspect of the merit field is where the surrounding deities are actually facing the lama in the centre, however in the images they are depicted as looking down upon us, drawn in such a way to make it easier for us to visualise how the deities look. However they should all be actually facing the main guru in the middle.

There is also the stacking visualisation where the lamas are envisioned as being stacked one on top of the other, which is in the Yamantaka practice.

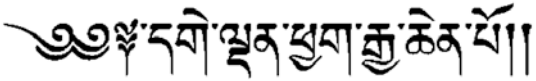
As some techniques of the guru yoga meditation have been presented, it would be worthwhile to put it into practice when you go back to your rooms'.

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne  
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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

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First we generate a positive motivation, a bodhichitta motivation, such as: 'In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings, and put them into practice as best as I can'.

## 2. PRESENTING THE ACTUAL MATERIAL OF THE COMPOSITION

### 2.1. Preparatory practices

#### 2.1.4 GURU YOGA

##### MAKING SUPPLICATIONS TO THE GURU

In our earlier sessions we went through the guru yoga practice including the visualisation of the guru. Having done that visualisation appropriately, one then makes supplications to receive the blessings from the guru. Such a supplication begins by taking refuge and generating bodhichitta, generating the four immeasurable thoughts, and engaging in the seven limb practice, followed by a mandala offering. When the mandala offering is made in accordance with the ritual practice, the significance in lay man's terms, is basically something like, 'I have made offerings to you guru, now I need to ask for something in return.'

In accordance with the lam rim teachings, one is making supplications to the guru to receive the three great meanings or purposes.

The requesting prayer found in the lam rim teachings is:

I prostrate and go for refuge to the guru and the Three Precious Jewels,

Please bless my mind.

I am requesting you to immediately pacify all the wrong conceptions, from incorrect devotion to the guru, up to the dualistic view of a self that exists in my mind, and in the minds of all mother sentient beings.

I am requesting you to immediately generate all the correct realisations, from guru devotion up to enlightenment in my mind, and in the minds of all mother sentient beings.

I am requesting you to pacify all outer and inner obstacles to actualising the entire graduated path to enlightenment in my mind, and in the minds of all mother sentient beings.

In this prayer, we are requesting the guru to:

1. Assist in eliminating all misconceptions such as not paying proper respect to the guru, and seeing the self with a dualistic view.
2. Please bestow blessings to gain the realisations of properly paying respect to the guru, all the way up to the realisation of being free from the dualistic view of inherent existence.
3. Give the blessings to enable one to eliminate all external and internal obstacles.

Such a supplication is referred to as a supplication to obtain the **common siddhis** or realisations. This supplication is actually explained clearly in the extensive lam rim, as well as in the intermediate lam rim. It would be good to refer to those texts in order to become more familiar with this supplication.

The **uncommon siddhis**, which relate to the tantric realisations, is to make the above supplication with this extra request, 'please pacify all the wrong conceptions to be free from the subtle dual view of the white, red and dark visions'.

In our last session we went over the visualisation where one visualises Manjushri on top of one's crown, with Vajradhara on top of Manjushri's crown, and Lama Tsong Khapa at Manjushri's heart. Another commentary explains in verse form how one makes supplications to this three-fold visualisation of the guru on top of one's crown.

The embodiment of wisdom Manjushri, is crowned by Vajradhara,  
At whose heart is Lama Tsong Khapa the wisdom being,  
To you the precious guru who encompasses all,  
I make this supplication;  
Please kindly bestow upon me the realisations of mahamudra, the ultimate unification.

After this supplication, if one has time, then one can do the supplication from The Foundation of all Good Qualities. Then, if one has particular guru mantras, one can recite them in combination with this practice. Otherwise one could do a brief supplication from mahamudra.

The second verse of the supplication to the lineage gurus of mahamudra is the request to quickly bestow the realisations of mahamudra. This is done with a mind that is imbued with bodhichitta.

May I be blessed to completely sever the continuum of clinging to the self-grasping,  
To generate loving kindness, compassion and the pure mind of enlightenment,  
And quickly attain mahamudra, the path of unification.

This request includes three main points:

1. To sever the dualistic mind of grasping to true existence.
2. For the mind imbued with bodhichitta to be cultivated within one.
3. For mahamudra, the inseparable path of unification, to be spontaneously realised within oneself. Here, 'inseparable' indicates the unification of bliss and wisdom that is to be realised within one's mind.

Having made supplications to the lama in this way, one needs to develop the conviction that the lama accepts the request. The texts explain the request being accepted by the by the lama in the rupakaya aspect, which is the form body of the lama, and acceptance by the lama in the dharmakaya aspect. The acceptance by the rupakaya aspect of the guru is where the guru verbally tells us that he has accepted our request. With the dharmakaya acceptance, one imagines that the guru with his primordial wisdom mentally accepts one's request. That is the difference between the two modes of acceptance.

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In making a supplication to the dharmakaya aspect, or the primordial wisdom-mind, of the guru, one is also making a supplication to the guru/Buddha visualised within oneself. Then, having made these supplications, one needs to visualise the guru actually entering into oneself from the top of one's crown to reside in one's heart. Then one can continuously recall the guru at one's heart. Of course there are particular times in deity visualisations, where one has to dissolve oneself completely into voidness, at which moment everything dissolves into voidness. However one needs to understand that while dissolving the guru at one's heart, the ultimate state of the mind of the guru is always inseparable from oneself. In whatever activity one engages, it is good to constantly remember that the guru is at one's heart.

Maintaining mindfulness of the guru at one's heart is of great benefit to our daily life. When consuming food or drink, or when engaged in other pleasant activities, such as strolling in a beautiful garden or visiting a beautiful area, one can offer all this to the guru at one's heart. Making offerings to the guru actually is the same as making offerings to the Three Jewels – the guru is the Buddha the supreme guide, the Dharma the actual liberator, and the Sangha who are the assistants. In addition to the Three Jewels the guru also encompasses all the *vidams* or tutelary deities. So we receive help in gaining realisations from the tutelary deities or *vidams*, as well as the guru.

Through this we receive the blessings to enable us to accomplish our virtuous activities. Maintaining that awareness means that whatever activity we engage in will always be an opportunity to engage in the practices of accumulating merit and so forth. It is very useful to think in this way.

Personally, I always maintain an awareness of my guru in the aspect of Buddha Shakyamuni, with Lama Tsong Khapa at his heart, on the top of my crown. So when I sit, go out for a walk or sleep, the lama is always with me. In that way one is inseparable from the guru and the Buddha at all times. If someone were to ask me if whether I have any company, then my answer can be 'Oh yes, I always have the Three Jewels on top of my crown'.

Maintaining an awareness of the guru as being with oneself at all times really helps in many practical ways. For example it can help to prevent one from engaging in negative deeds. In particular, that awareness can help to develop a conscientious mind that encompasses a sense of shame in relation to oneself and consideration in relation to others. These two states of mind are said to protect us from all misdeeds. Without shame and consideration there is nothing to stop us from engaging in negative deeds.

Thus an awareness and visualisation of the guru encompassing all the buddhas is very helpful in our daily lives. We rely upon the supreme object, the guru, when we have difficulties in life. He is a constant source of inspiration; to whom we direct our supplications to quickly accomplish virtues that we have not yet accomplished, and for the virtues that we have already accomplished to not decline but increase even more. We

have now gone over all four preliminary practices, which are:

- ∞ Taking refuge, the doorway for becoming a Buddhist, and generating bodhichitta, the doorway to the Mahayana. It is good that we really try to understand these main points, with an awareness of their significance.
- ∞ Making mandala offerings, one of the optimum ways to accumulate merit, which we have covered briefly.
- ∞ Visualisation and recitation of Vajrasattva mantras, which is one of the optimum purification practices.
- ∞ Guru yoga practice, the optimum way for receiving blessings, which we have just covered.

In this way, we have briefly covered the four preliminary practices. If we are inclined to study and practice mahamudra, then it is essential that we engage in these preliminary practices.

## 2.2. The Actual

The verse from the root text reads:

6. *There are many different ways of approaching the actual teachings of mahamudra. In general, these can be divided into two basic classifications – the mahamudra teachings of the sutras and those of the tantras.*

In other commentaries and traditions there are more elaborate listings of the different presentations on mahamudra. In the auto-commentary there is a brief explanation of the different mahamudras, and in order to avoid complicated details we will just briefly go over the listings for now.

The auto-commentary states:

As listed in the following there are various different approaches of presenting the actual mahamudra. The lord Drigungpa elucidates the intentions of Drogon Rinpoche...

Lord Drigungpa was one of the followers of Drogon Rinpoche, who was one of the founders of the Kagyu tradition. Although there are many different lineages within the Kagyu tradition, the two main ones are the Shangpa Kagyu and the Dagpo Kagyu, with the Dagpo Kagyu tradition having further sub-divisions. As explained in the auto-commentary, Drigungpa elucidates the main intention of Drogon Rinpoche. After we escaped from Tibet we lived in close proximity to some of the followers of that Kagyu lineage. Amongst other practices they were known to be very skilled in the *powa* practice, which is the practice of transference at the time of death.

The auto-commentary then continues:

The lord Drigungpa elucidates the intentions of Drogon Rinpoche and explains mahamudra in relation to the three vehicles that cover all four types of mudras, including mahamudra.

Drigungpa then states in one of his works:

The profound mudra is of fourfold,  
As clearly explained by the elder Drogon;  
These are the methods for obtaining the three types  
of awakening,  
Which are presented as the four mudras of the path.

For instance, the body speech and mind of the hearers,  
Never separating from the three vows  
Is *action mudra*.  
While the realisation of selflessness,  
Is said to be the *Dharma mudra*.  
The *pledge mudra* is separation from the delusions,  
And the liberation of a non-remainder,  
From the contaminated aggregates, is *mahamudra*.

Here the 'body, speech and mind of the hearers' never 'being separated from the three vows' refers to the self-liberation vows. This is referred to as *action mudra*. The realisation of selflessness is said to be the *Dharma mudra* and separation from the delusions, is referred to as the *pledge mudra*. And the liberation of a non-remainder from contaminated aggregates is *mahamudra*.

Thus these lines explain one of the views of the four mudras, the action mudra, dharma mudra, pledge mudra and mahamudra.

The quote from lord Drigungpa continues:

The three doors [body, speech, mind] of a bodhisattva,  
Never separating from the six perfections,  
Is *action mudra*.  
Being free from mental fabrications and illusions,  
Is the *Dharma mudra*  
Unstained by self-interest,  
Is the *pledge mudra*,  
The equal taste of compassion and emptiness,  
This is *mahamudra* itself.

Among the various pledges of a bodhisattva, the ultimate pledge is to not be stained by self-interest. So if at any time a bodhisattva lapses and falls into self-interest, then that is a lapse of the pledge mudra. Here mahamudra is explained as the equal taste, or union, of compassion and emptiness.

Then lord Drigungpa continues with another two interpretations:

According to the secrete tantric paths;  
Relying on a consort, is *karma-mudra* [action mudra],  
And never parting from the union of subtle mind and wind,  
Is the *Dharma mudra*.  
Never declining from the commitment is *pledge mudra*.  
Simultaneously arising primordial wisdom,  
This is *mahamudra*.  
According to the personal instructions on *tummo* - a path to liberation  
While viewing the body like a machine,  
The branches of the winds are *karma-mudra*.  
Experiencing the non-dual bliss and wisdom,  
Is *Dharma mudra*.  
The *pledge mudra* is non-attachment.  
And spontaneously-accomplished is *mahamudra*.

Then the auto-commentary further reads:

The great Go Lotsawa Zhonnupel asserts that the non-conceptual exalted wisdom ascertaining emptiness is itself mahamudra.

So without going into much detail now, what we notice is that there are quite a few different interpretations of what the term mahamudra refers to. It is good for you to go

over these explanations, keep them in mind, and investigate the different types of mahamudra further.

The text then quotes Lotsawa Zhonnupel's assertion:

As he says in the introduction of his treatise:

I will henceforth introduce mahamudra, which is the seal of the entirety of the Buddha's doctrine on practices and insights, beginning from the self-liberation vows, which are the bases, all the way up to the practices of the Guhyasamaja.

In these few lines, 'the bases' refers to the self-liberation vows. Adopting and keeping those self-liberation vows are considered as the bases of the Buddhist doctrine, which lead all the way up to the practices of the Guhyasamaja which, as mentioned previously, is renowned as the king of the tantras. Thus, the Guhyasamaja tantra is considered as the pinnacle of the tantric teachings.

The author then further explains in the auto-commentary:

Thus, even though there are many different presentations, in summary mahamudra is classified into two, that of sutra and of tantra.

As explained here, mahamudra is essentially classified into two, that of sutra and that of tantra. We touched on this at the beginning. Why is mahamudra subsumed into only two – sutra and tantra?

*Student: Is it objective and subjective?*

Of course we did talk about the subjective and objective mahamudra, the subjective mahamudra being the primary one. How would you relate that to the sutra and tantra classifications?

*Student: I thought the objective one was the sutra because it is the emptiness of all phenomena, and the tantric one was the emptiness of the mind holding the object.*

The objective mahamudra being emptiness, the non-inherent existence of all phenomena, was basically explained earlier. Some question whether there is in fact a sutra mahamudra, but the author of this text explains that there is a sutra mahamudra, and supports this with a quote from the Buddha himself. The sutra says that the non-inherent existence of all internal and external things is the great seal. Within that context, all non-inherent existence of all phenomena is objective mahamudra.

So to be specific, the difference between the sutra and the tantra mahamudra does not lie in the object – emptiness – but rather the subject – the actual wisdom realising emptiness – which according to sutra is a grosser level of mental consciousness compared to the wisdom realising emptiness that is explained according to the tantra. According to the tantric teachings, the exalted wisdom realising emptiness is the clear light mind, which is further sub-divided into *example clear light* and *actual or meaning clear light*. There is no other wisdom realising emptiness, which does not subsume into the sutra and the tantric explanation.

Having mentioned that mahamudra is classified into sutra and tantra the author of the auto-commentary then goes on to say:

In this treatise the first is explained more elaborately [the sutra mahamudra], while the later is presented first to indicate that it takes up fewer words.

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So the tantric mahamudra is explained first in the text.

### 2.2.1. TANTRIC MAHAMUDRA

The auto-commentary then quotes these verses from the root text:

7. *For the later, you must concentrate on the energy channels of your vajra-body, and especially on the central energy channel. From following such methods as this and others, you can come to experience the blissful realisation of the Clear Light of Voidness on the finest level of consciousness*
8. *The explanation of mahamudra as the blissful realisation of voidness attained by channelling your body's energy winds into the central energy channel is attested to by Saraha, Nagarjuna, Naropa and Maitripa. [It is taught specifically in The Seven Texts Of The Mahasiddhas and The Three Core Volumes Of Saraha.] These mahamudra teachings, thus, are the quintessence of the highest classification of tantra, anuttarayoga. This then, in brief is the explanation of mahamudra according to the tantra system.*

The auto-commentary then goes on to explain:

If asked, why is it called mahamudra? To quote from *The Drops of Mahamudra*,

*Chak* refers to the primordial wisdom realising emptiness,

*Gya* refers to the state of being free from cyclic existence,

*Chenpo* refers to the union of these two states,

Thus it is called *chak-gya chenpo*.

The text called *The Drops of Mahamudra*, explains the literal meaning of the Tibetan word for mahamudra, which is *chak-gya chenpo*. As this text explains, each syllable has a particular meaning. *Chak*, which relates to the *mu* in mahamudra, refers to the primordial wisdom realising emptiness. *Gya*, which relates to the *dra* in mahamudra, refers to the state of being free from cyclic existence. *Chenpo*, which relates to the *maha* of mahamudra, refers to the union of these two states. Thus the literal explanation of mahamudra refers to the actual realisation of emptiness.

The auto-commentary further reads:

Just as it has been mentioned, according to tantra, mahamudra is: Having first received the four initiations intact and upholding the vows and commitments well, develop a firm familiarisation with the generation stage, actualising concentration on the vital points of vajra-body and so forth. With external and internal skilful methods, the wind enters, abides and dissolves into the central channel. When the primordial wisdom of great bliss spontaneously arising from that realises emptiness conceptually, it is called *example clear light*. When that primordial wisdom realises emptiness directly, it then becomes the *actual clear light*.

1. Based on having first taken refuge and generated bodhichitta, the first stage is that one receives the four initiations intact. Then having received the four initiations, one needs to uphold the vows and commitments well. These vows and commitments include the root and auxiliary vows of the bodhisattva, as well as the root and auxiliary tantric vows.
2. Having upheld the tantric vows and commitments well, the next step is to develop a firm familiarisation with the generation stage. As clearly presented here, one

needs to first be familiar with the generation stage before one can practice the completion stage. In brief actualising the generation stage means to familiarise oneself on both the gross and subtle levels of the generation stage.

3. On the **gross level** of the **generation stage**, it is said that one gains the ability to focus on the entire external image of the deity as well as the mandala of the deity (while remaining free from the two obscurations of excitement and laxity), and not lapsing from one's concentration for even for a second for the duration of one sixth of a day (in accordance with the day being divided into six parts). When one is able to concentrate unwaveringly for one sixth of a day without distraction for even a second on a vivid, clear image of the physical aspect or image of the deity and the entire mandala, then that would be an indication of mastering the gross level of the practice of the generation stage.

Accomplishing the **subtle generation stage** is where one is able to envision an image of the deity along with the mandala that is as small as an atom, and then focus on that for one sixth of a day, without the mind wavering even for a second while remaining free of the obscurations of excitement and laxity. If I were to go into any further detail, then that would be explaining too many details of the tantric practices, which is not appropriate right now.

However, what one needs to understand is clearly in order to accomplish the practices of the completion stage, one must first master the practices of the generation stage. So, as explained in the teachings, it is quite evident that this is not an easy task. Nevertheless, what we can relate to is that in order to engage in any tantric deity practice, one must first receive the appropriate initiations. Another translation of 'initiation' is empowerment, which carries more of the literal meaning of the Tibetan word *wang*, which has the connotation of getting permission. Thus, through the blessing of receiving the initiation/permission from the lama, one engages in the practices of hearing the teachings on tantra first, thinking about the specific points of tantra, and finally putting them into meditation practice. So initially, one is given permission and empowered to engage in that level of tantric practice.

Through familiarity and persistent practice, one's mind will mature and develop. One then ascends to the different stages of realisations all the way up to the ultimate realisation, where one gains the full capacity to utilise the omniscience and primordial wisdom of the deity. Being able to utilise the actual primordial wisdom of the deity is the ultimate meaning of empowerment or initiation, and by receiving the initiation one is empowered to go to that ultimate level.

4. As presented in the auto-commentary, familiarisation with the generation stage, and then actualising one's concentration on the vital points of vajra-body and so forth, is done with external and internal skilful methods. So, with external and internal methods one actualises the concentration on the vital points of the vajra-body. Then, the wind enters, abides and dissolves into the central channel. So through the practice of actualising the concentration on the vital points within one's body, which is basically focussing on the different channels

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within one's body, one is able to bring the wind into the central channel, where it enters, abides and then dissolves.

5. When the wind dissolves into the central channel and the primordial wisdom of spontaneously arising great bliss realises emptiness conceptually, (although not yet directly) then at that point it is called *example clear light*.

To re-emphasise an earlier point, in terms of the actual presentation of emptiness, there is no difference in the subtlety of emptiness explained in the sutras and tantra. The difference is found in the subtlety of the wisdom realising emptiness.

In comparison to the tantric wisdom realising emptiness, the wisdom realising emptiness according to sutras is at a grosser level of consciousness. As explained here, in the tantra the wisdom realising emptiness is much subtler, as the mind that realises emptiness is the mind of clear light. Within the clear light there are grosser and subtler levels, which is the distinction between *example clear light* and *meaning or actual clear light*.

When we come to understand the tantric explanation, we gain a better and deeper understanding of how the ultimate realisation of the body of ultimate unification is obtained. As explained in the tantric teachings when the subtle wind serves as a substantial cause and the subtle mind serves as the co-operative condition for the *example clear light* to be perfected, then that results in obtaining the impure illusory body. When the subtle wind serves as a substantial cause and the subtle mind serves as the co-operative condition for the *actual clear light* to be perfected, then that results in obtaining the pure illusory body, which is the actual vajra body of the deity, an enlightened being.

The main point is that the more one familiarises oneself with this explanation and reflects upon it, the stronger the imprint that is left upon the mind, which will kindle the potential for us to obtain those realisations ourselves. The difference between the impure form of the illusory body and the pure form of the illusory body is obtained through the familiarity with *example clear light* and *meaning clear light*, which is of great importance for those who are inclined to practice tantra. So, it is good to familiarise oneself with that understanding.

For that, it is good to become familiar with the text that you have, and not just rely on the translation. Familiarising yourself means that you actually become familiar with the topic that has been covered. That means that if in our next session I were to quiz you on what was particularly mentioned at a certain point, then you need to be able to recall those points. If you don't have the text then, of course, there is not much you can do. But if you do have access to the text, then it would be good to become familiar with it.

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Edited Version*

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engages in the tantric practice of taking the intermediate state into the path.

At the time of death, when the actual dissolution takes place, the five aggregates along with the four elements dissolve. Within the four elements when the gross wind element dissolves, it dissolves into the aggregate of consciousness, and at that point the external breath ceases.

The next stage of death is where the white, red and clear light visions take place. This occurs after the breath stops. At the point when the gross wind element completely dissolves into the consciousness, the eighty conceptual minds, which are gross levels of mind, all dissolve and cease as well. So the dissolution is a process whereby the mind goes into subtler and subtler levels.

The first stage (after the breath has ceased) is called the **white appearance**. To explain briefly, the essential substance received from the father, called the white seed or drop (semen), descends from the crown down to the heart, which is where the indestructible seed is located. The descent of the white seed serves as the cause for the white vision to occur.

The next stage is the **red appearance** when the red vision occurs. The cause of the red vision is when the essential red seed/blood received from the mother ascends from the navel up towards the indestructible seed at the heart. As a result of the red substance ascending, the red vision occurs.

When the white seed and red seed actually enter and meet within the indestructible seed at the heart, then temporarily everything becomes dark; that is the **dark appearance** and the dark vision occurs.

In the earlier part of the dark vision the person becomes completely unconscious with no awareness at all. The later part of the dark vision transforms into to what is called the **clear light**, which is the most subtle state of mind of a person in the last stages of the death.

Within the clear light, the first stage is called the **basis clear light**. According to the sutra teachings, the last stage of death is simply referred to as the subtlest mind of death. Whereas according to the tantric teachings, the last stage of death is specifically described as the state of basic clear light mind.

For an ordinary person, when the wind serves as the substantial cause and the mind serves as the co-operative condition, the person then goes into the intermediate state and assumes the body of an **intermediate state being**. The body of the intermediate state being is a subtle wind body. A practitioner, or yogi, who is trained in the practices, will then transform that basis clear light into the clear light of the path. That is when the yogi actually utilises that stage of the death process to into the path by transforming it into the illusory body.

In brief, that is how, in relation to the death process of an ordinary person and how they obtain the intermediate state body, a yogi engages in the practice of utilising that stage into the path by transforming the subtle wind body into the illusory body of the deity.

So, as mentioned previously, according to the tantra mahamudra is the clear light.

### **Masters attesting to this explanation**

The next verse of the root text reads:

8. *The explanation of mahamudra as the blissful realisation of voidness attained by channelling your body's energy winds into the central energy channel is attested to by Saraha, Nagarjuna,*

*Naropa and Maitripa. These mahamudra teachings, thus, are the quintessence of the highest classification of tantra, anuttarayoga. This then, in brief is the explanation of mahamudra according to the tantra system.*

The auto-commentary further explains:

The mind that is in the nature of that clear light is called the ultimate *atung*, *indestructible drop*, *the uncontrived mind*, *ordinary mind*, *fundamental mind* and so forth. According to the explanations of the great Indian and Tibetan masters such as the lord Dewa Chenpo or otherwise known as Tsokyi Dorje, as well as the great mahasiddha Saraha, Nagarjuna, Lord of Hermits, Tilopa and Naropa, Maitripa and so forth, as well as the Kagyu lineage masters from Pak-tru [district in Lhokha, Tibet] such as Marpa, Milarepa and Gampopa; they have also presented their final intentions of mahamudra as the great bliss of clear light that comes from the wind entering, abiding and dissolving into the central channel.

Here the author is referring to the authentic sources for presenting clear light as the mahamudra of tantra. To show their authenticity the auto-commentary explains that we first rely upon authentic Tibetan great masters who have gained great realisations. The treatises that these great Tibetan masters composed also relied upon the authentic sources of the great Indian masters. In this way an authentic source is shown to be one that relies upon its earlier authentic sources. That is how we know that what is being presented here is authentic and reliable.

As the auto-commentary further explains verse 8:

This is the inner most essence of the main subject of *The Seven Texts of the Mahasiddhas* and *The Three Core Volumes of Saraha* which are treatises on the ocean-like teachings on highest-yoga tantra.

Here 'this' refers to the clear light mind which is the inner most essence of the main subject of 'The Seven Texts of the Mahasiddhas' and 'The Three Core Volumes of Saraha' as also presented in the root verse.

What is being explained is that the tantra mahamudra is really the innermost essence of all these treatises. In other words tantric mahamudra is the core of all of the teachings of the great mahasiddhas. So, as explained in the auto-commentary, the subject mahamudra from the tantric tradition is the innermost essence of all tantric teachings.

*The Seven Texts of the Mahasiddhas* and *The Three Core Volumes of Saraha* are mentioned because these particular treatises have unique ways of explaining the clear light, and also include a lot of experiential presentations, which are a unique way of explaining the mahamudra. For that reason the author of the auto-commentary particularly cites these texts from among the many other tantric teachings.

*The Seven Texts of the Mahasiddhas* are then presented in the auto-commentary:

1. *Sangwa Dupa - Guhyasamaja (Accomplishment of Secrets)* composed by the Lord Dewa Chenpo. This text primarily elucidates the intentions of the treatise called *The Collections of Root Tantra* for it says, 'There is nothing greater than the glorious collections, for it is the one and only jewel in the entire universe'. Thus by mentioning the qualities of the collections, it also briefly presents the generation stage, and in particular presents the implicit meanings of the root tantra, which is the path of non-dual bliss and emptiness, the realisations attained on the highest levels of the completion stage. This text is also

considered as the main reference point for the rest of the seven texts.

The *Sangwa Dupa* is the main treatise as it serves as the essential text on which all other texts rely. As mentioned here, it presents the realisations attained at the highest level of the completion stage, *the path of non-dual bliss and emptiness*. Because this text presents that very clearly and uniquely, it serves as the main reference text.

Within the two classes of tantra—the father tantra and the mother tantra—this text mainly relates to the father tantra. The remaining six treatises are primarily presentations of the mother class of tantra<sup>1</sup>.

*Three Core Volumes of Saraha* are known as the *Three Dohas*, which translates as ‘the spontaneous spiritual songs of the mahasiddhas’. These volumes are very poetic and give song-like explanations on mahamudra.

There are slightly different interpretations of *The Three Core Volumes* or *Three Dohas* of Saraha. These include the *Common Doha* and the *King’s Doha* and so forth. Apparently these are the poetic expressions of realisations and so forth of Saraha himself. Sometimes when he was awake and sometimes when he was lying down he would recall his own experiences of the teachings of emptiness.

The auto-commentary continues:

Some scholars such as the omniscient Bu-dön, assert that the *Common Do-ha* is authentic while the other two are pretense.

Of the three core volumes of Saraha, some are considered to be authentic and some are considered to be forgeries, but not all scholars assert that.

We will conclude the explanation of mahamudra according to the tantra tradition here, because as mentioned previously, going into too much detail would be inappropriate.

### 2.2.2. MAHAMUDRA ACCORDING TO THE SUTRAS

Again, the author makes a pledge to compose the next part of the treatise, which is the explanation of the mahamudra according to the sutra tradition.

This refers to verses 9 and 10 in the root text:

9. *As for the previous one, the mahamudra teachings of the sutras, this refers to the ways of meditating on voidness as taught in the three Prajnaparamita sutras and in all three traditions of the shravakas, pratyeka buddhas and bodhisattvas. Nagarjuna has said that except for these methods there is no other path to liberation.*

10. *Therefore, following the wishes and teachings of Nagarjuna, I shall now explain in this discussion of mahamudra the methods and ways of*

*introducing yourself to the true nature of the mind in accordance with the teachings of the gurus of unbroken lineage.*

By saying, *introducing yourself to the true nature of the mind in accordance with the teachings of the gurus of unbroken lineage*, the author is pledging to compose the text in accordance with instructions from his own guru whose lineage comes from the masters of the past.

As the auto-commentary reads:

There are two different techniques for meditating on mahamudra. To present the previous which is the sutra tradition; it is the technique of meditating on the wisdom realizing emptiness as explicitly presented in *The Mother*—the extensive, middling and abbreviated Prajnaparamita or perfection of wisdom sutras. In *The Mother* teachings of the Buddha, this [wisdom realising emptiness] is praised as the very life of the paths of the three vehicles, and the supreme Arya Nagarjuna also attested, ‘besides this there is no other path that leads to liberation’.

Those who have already studied the Madhyamaka text will remember that the short, medium and extensive prajnaparamita sutras explicitly present the subject of emptiness, while implicitly presenting the extensive deeds of the practices. Here the author states that he is presenting sutra mahamudra to be the wisdom realising emptiness, which is in accordance with the prajnaparamita sutras. These sutras of the Buddha explain how the wisdom realising emptiness is an unmistakable method, and it is this wisdom that needs to be actualised in one’s meditation. The author explains that the auto-commentary relies upon the explicit meaning of the prajnaparamita sutras is a way of authenticating his work.

More specifically, introducing the subject mahamudra as being the wisdom realising emptiness. in accordance with the explicit presentation of the prajnaparamita sutras, has the connotation that the mind realising mahamudra has to be a reliable and unmistakable mind. There are other presentations of realising emptiness from the lower schools, such as the mind that realises subject and object to be distinct, or the mind realising that objects are void of substantial existence and so forth. However the wisdom realising these levels of emptiness is not the wisdom realising emptiness according to the mahamudra explanation.

To be more specific, of the different tenets, this explanation is according to the Prasangika point of view. Students who have studied the tenets will recall that there is an emptiness that is presented in accordance to the Svatantrika point of view as well as the emptiness that is presented in accordance with the Chittamatra or Mind-only school. There are also the lower Buddhist schools’ presentations of selflessness according to the Sautrantika and Vaibashika. What is being specifically explained is that the wisdom realising emptiness as presented here is in accordance with the highest school of the Prasangika. Those who have studied the tenets previously can now actually relate to all of this, which gives a deeper understanding of the points being made here.

The auto commentary specifically describes the wisdom realising emptiness as being the *very life*, or essence, of *all three vehicles*. This should be understood to mean that the wisdom realising emptiness serves as the main method for obtaining the ultimate results of each of the three vehicles, the hearer vehicle, the solitary realiser vehicle and the bodhisattva vehicle. So in order to achieve one’s own

<sup>1</sup> The other six are:

2. *Dorje-tap-she Dupa*, (accomplishment of Indestructible method and wisdom) composed by Kamadeva who was a disciple of the former mahasiddha.

3. *Yeshe Dupa* (accomplishment of Wisdom) composed by Indra Bodhi who is the disciple of the former.

4. *Nyi-me Dupa* (accomplishment of non-duality) by Cham-la Kimkara who is the disciple of the former.

5. *Lhen-chik-kye Dupa* (accomplishment of spontaneously arising) by Do-me-ba Heruka.

6. *Sangwa-chenpo-de-kona-nyii Dupa* (accomplishment of suchness, the great secret) by Darikapa.

7. *Dro-wai-de-konna-nyii Dupa* (accomplishment of suchness, after having clarified phenomena) by Naljorma Tsita.

ultimate goal, one must rely upon the wisdom realising emptiness.

The auto-commentary then quotes a verse from Nagarjuna's works:

In order for buddhas, solitary-realiser as well as the  
hearers,  
To gain the state of liberation,  
You proclaimed this alone is the path and none other,  
Thus, this is definitely to be relied upon.

According to the Vajrayana Vehicle as well, there is no superior realisation to the wisdom realising emptiness. To understand this point, you must understand that as far as actual presentation of the object emptiness is concerned, there is no difference between the presentations of the Prajnaparamita Vehicle and Tantra Vehicle. However the Vajrayana or Tantra Vehicle presents the meaning clear light mind as the wisdom realising emptiness directly. Therefore the difference between the prajnaparamita and the tantra lies in subject mahamudra.

There is no difference between the Prajnaparamita Vehicle and the Tantra Vehicle as far as how emptiness itself is presented. Therefore, you do not find different tenets for Prajnaparamita and Tantrayana. There are no texts that make a distinction between the tenets of the Prajnaparamita and Tantrayana. This proves that as far as the tenets are concerned, there is no difference between the Tantrayana and Prajnaparamita views of the presentation of emptiness.

As the author further explains in the auto-commentary:

Also there is no distinction made for the Vajrayana in having another or more supreme view, for as the Lord Sakya Pandita has said:

Between perfection of wisdom and secret mantra,  
No distinction has been proclaimed,  
If there were a more supreme view,  
Than the non-fabricated view of the perfections,  
That view would have to be a fabricated view;  
If claimed to be non-fabricated, then there no  
distinction.

The auto-commentary then continues:

The one who elucidates this definitive meaning is Chandrakirti the disciple of Nagarjuna who is the trailblazer as predicted by Lord Buddha. For as Atisha said:

If one were to ask, by what means emptiness is realised?  
That is to be relied upon the instructions from Chandrakirti,  
The disciple of Nagarjuna who was predicted by the Tathagata,  
And who has seen the truth of suchness;  
For anyone who follows the instructions from this lineage,  
Buddhahood is possible, otherwise it is not.

What is being presented here is the wisdom realising emptiness, including the presentation of emptiness itself. This was presented by Nagarjuna using many analogies to show how even an atom lacks inherent existence, with reasoning such as because it being inter-dependent origination, and so forth. This presentation of emptiness is the explicit meaning of the prajnaparamita sutras that Nagarjuna clearly elucidated. Another reason why we can rely upon Nagarjuna's work is because the Buddha himself predicted that Nagarjuna would be a trailblazer for the teachings.

So what the author is attesting is, Nagarjuna's intent is elucidated by Chandrakirti, who in turn passed the precious instructions of mahamudra, the means of recognising the nature of mind, to many great scholars and practitioners. This unbroken lineage of instructions and blessings have come down to my own glorious lama, and it is the guru's personal instructions that I rely upon for my explanations here.

In quoting from Atisha the auto-commentary is specifically presenting the lineage of the view on emptiness that we receive. Those who are familiar with the lam rim teachings will recall that in the lineage presentation found in those teachings there is a distant lineage and a close lineage.

The **distant lineage** shows how the teachings came from the Buddha to Manjushri, and then from Manjushri to Nagarjuna and down to Chandrakirti. It then passed through the Indian masters to the Tibetan masters, and down to Lama Tsong Khapa. From Lama Tsong Khapa the teachings passed to our lineage teachers and then to ourselves.

The **close lineage** comes from Vajradhara, who is the holder of the secret tantra lineage. From Vajradhara the lineage goes directly to Manjushri and from Manjushri directly to Lama Tsong Khapa. Then it is passed down to his main disciples, including Togden Jampa Gyatso all the way down through the lineage masters up to one's own guru. The authentic source of the ultimate view of the wisdom realising emptiness is shown by the presentation of this unbroken lineage.

The author says in the auto-commentary that just as Atisha's presentation of Nagarjuna's and Chandrakirti's presentations of the view is the unmistakable presentation, *in accordance with that, I will explain the mahamudra*. Thus he mentions that the presentation of the awareness of the mind is in accordance to the great masters of the lineage of Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti.

There are actually some commentaries that give specific instructions on the meditation on emptiness in relation to realising the nature of the mind. These were given to a Tibetan master called Gorim Gyatso Zangpo, who was a direct disciple of Lama Tsong Khapa. As one commentary explains, this is also one of the specific lineages. Lama Tsong Khapa gave specific instructions on how to realise the ultimate nature of the mind by first referring to the conventional nature of the mind, and then the ultimate nature of the mind, and gave specific instructions on how to meditate upon that. However the treatises by Gorim Gyatso Zangpo have somehow been lost in recent years—basically we cannot find them.

The main point to be taken here is that insofar as the actual presentation of emptiness itself is concerned, that view of emptiness definitely relies upon the authentic sources that have come through the lineages of the masters such as Nagarjuna. For the specific instructions on how to meditate upon the nature of the mind, which are explained in this commentary, the author relies upon his own master. As he explains, those specific instructions that are presented here explain how to develop calm abiding by using the mind itself as the object. Then based on that, one develops special insight, which is to realise the ultimate nature of the mind. The explanations given here are also in accordance with the lam rim teachings, specifically in the abbreviated lam rim teaching of Lama Tsong Khapa, where this presentation is quite clear.

The auto-commentary further explains:

If then asked what is the mahamudra presented here? To quote from the *King of Concentration Sutra*:

The nature of all phenomena is the seal.

Thus as proclaimed, the nature or emptiness of all phenomena is the seal, which when realised, frees you from all troubles, thus it is called great or supreme; for as mentioned again: 'it is great, supreme and immeasurable'.

The next part of the auto-commentary refers to Verse 11 and onwards, which describe the different oral traditions of the teachings and so forth. We will present them in later sessions.

Next Tuesday is the discussion session, which is good for you to attend. It is an opportunity for the senior students to share whatever they have understood to help the newer students to gain a better understanding. In that way it will be really useful and meaningful for both the newer students and the senior students. Then, as normal, the test follows the discussion. It will also be good for you to come to the test and to do it as best as you can.

So now for a quiz: According to the tantra, what is the mahamudra?

*Students: Clear light mind.*

Just saying 'clear light mind' doesn't really reflect upon what mahamudra really is. So what is it? Is it the clear light mind or is it the clear light mind realising emptiness?

*Students: The clear light wisdom realising emptiness.*

The immediate response was that mahamudra was clear light. So does everyone agree with that? Is it just the clear light?

*Students: The realisation of clear light.*

Well that, of course, is the case. However just being able to cite, 'it is the clear light realising emptiness' of course is not sufficient, it is important to understand a bit more detail about what type of mind that is.

### **Clear light and the path**

'Clear light' is a vague answer because, as explained earlier, there is the basis clear light, the path clear light, and the resultant clear light. The basis clear light is the subtle mind at the time of death, which we explained earlier. Whereas within the path clear light, there is the example clear light and the actual clear light. The clear light that is the realisation of emptiness relates to the clear light of the path. The resultant clear light is what we call the dharmakaya. So this is a more specific explanation.

So in relation to the earlier question, the answer so far has been that mahamudra is the clear light mind realising emptiness. How is that mind generated within oneself?

*Student: By going through the vajra body.*

There are actually two ways of how the mind is generated. Just referring to the vajra body, which is in accordance to the explanation given, and relating to the vital points of the vajra body isn't, in itself, a full explanation.

*Student: The substantial cause of the wind entering the central channel and the co-operative condition of the mind realising emptiness conceptually is example clear light. Meaning clear light is the co-operative condition of the mind realising emptiness, and the substantial cause is the wind entering the central channel.*

A definition was given earlier, and it is best to rely on that definition to confirm how that mind is generated. The best way to assert something is to rely on the definition.

*Student: Is it the union of bliss and void?*

There is a difference between *spontaneously arising non-dual bliss and emptiness* and *inseparable non-dual bliss and emptiness*. The *spontaneously arising non-dual bliss and emptiness* is at the stage of example clear light; whereas the *inseparable non-dual bliss and emptiness*, meaning that emptiness and the bliss are inseparable just like water being poured into water, is the meaning clear light stage of realising emptiness.

I assume that you will find the definitions in the text, which I believe actually has an explanation of both the root text and the auto-commentary. So, you should find that this text clearly explains the tantric explanation of mahamudra.

In relation to bumbling around with the commentaries, there is a story in my home-town in Tibet of someone who was known to be a very courageous person. In fact he walked around with six different knives strapped to his belt. But the time came when he was attacked by a vicious dog and in his panic, he couldn't use any of his knives, so he had to resolve on picking up some dirt and throwing it in the dog's eyes. That's like having three commentaries with clear explanations of what type of clear light it would be, yet just saying 'it is clear light, clear light!!'.

It is good to refer to the specific explanations in the text and of course if you do refer to it, you would find out that it isn't too complicated for you to understand. So it is good to rely on the teaching in the text.

In the monasteries, when we received teachings from a teacher, it was customary for the teacher to ask 'have you memorised the root text of the teaching?' If some students were able to immediately respond 'yes, we have memorised the root text' then an explanation of the text would be given. It was considered that if one hadn't memorised the text and not able quote it, then there was not much point in giving an explanation of the text because nothing will really be grasped. Thus it was difficult to receive a commentary on a particular subject if one had not memorised the root text. So a monk who had memorised the root text would be given the job of requesting the teaching.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett  
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Edited Version*

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**Week 1 (30 September 2008)**

1. What is it that one needs an understanding of in order to develop further and why? [2]
  
2. Name the meditation practices that are most powerful in making our mind suitable for engaging in further meditation practices. [4]
  
3. What are the four opponent powers? [4]

**Week 2 (7 October 2008)**

4. Explain:
  - a) Conventional Genuine Guru [2]
  
  - b) Ultimate Genuine Guru [2]
  
5. The teachings say that one should see the conventional genuine guru as being inseparable from the Buddhas of the three times. Explain this with reference to the Vinaya, Prajnaparamita and Tantrayana points of view. Which of these do we rely on? [4]
  
6. Give a summary of the 'Brief form of the guru yoga practice'[6]

**Week 3 (14 October 2008)**

7. Give the points of the supplication to obtain:
  - a) The Common Siddhis [3]
  
  - b) The Uncommon Siddhis [1]
  
8. Why is maintaining mindfulness of the guru at one's heart of great benefit in our daily life? [3]
  
9. Mahamudra is classified into sutra and tantra. Tantra is explained first to indicate that it takes up fewer words. Within Tantric Mahamudra explain *example clear light* and *actual clear light*. [2]

**Week 4 (21 October 2008)**

10. What serves as the cause for:
  - a) The Impure Illusory Body? [2]
  
  - b) The Pure Illusory Body? [2]

**Tara Institute Study Group 2008 - 'Mahamudra**

**EXAM**

NAME:

BLOCK: **6**

WEEK: **6**

**3 NOVEMBER 2008**

MARK:

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## ***Tara Institute Study Group 2008 - 'Mahamudra***

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## **Tara Institute Study Group 2008 - 'Mahamudra**

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