

# **Mahamudra: The Great Seal**

## **From *Wild Awakening: The Heart of Mahamudra & Dzogchen***

### **By Dzogchen Ponlop, Excerpted from pp. 21-38**

The essential nature of Mahamudra is like all-encompassing space; it rests nowhere and is free from all conceptions. The Mahamudra teachings come from the direct teachings of Lord Buddha Shakyamuni, the historical Buddha. The lineage of these Mahamudra teachings has continued from the time of the historical Buddha until now in an unbroken lineage. There is an oral transmission or "ear-whispered" lineage and a textual transmission lineage.

The Sanskrit term *mahamudra* is *chak gya chenpo* (*phyag rgya chen po*) in Tibetan. The meaning of *chak gya chenpo* is explained in many different ways in our tradition, one of the principal sources for these explanations being the *Mahamudratilaka Tantra*. Overall, *chak gya chenpo* traditionally comprises three aspects, found in the meaning of the syllables *chak*, *gya*, and *chenpo*.

The first syllable, *chak*, refers to emptiness or shunyata, and the experience of emptiness, which in the Mahamudra tradition must become personal and genuine. *Chak* thus stands for the innermost awareness or insight of shunyata, the realization of the inseparability of samsara and nirvana in their nature of emptiness.

The second syllable, *gya*, literally means "seal" or "symbol." In its deeper sense, *gya* refers to the unaltered, unfabricated, or unconditioned nature of wisdom: the experience of going beyond samsaric existence, of freedom from the subtle fetters of complexities. *Gya* signifies the intrinsic quality or abiding reality of all things, which transcends duality. It is the primordial purity that encompasses everything.

The third syllable, *chenpo*, means "great" or "pervading." The fundamental nature of mind is all-pervasive and the nature of everything. It is the union of emptiness and wisdom. *Chenpo* signifies this union and the realization that freedom is innate in the true nature of reality.

Therefore, literally speaking, Mahamudra means "great symbol" or "great seal." It also means "great gesture." The term *great seal* is used in the sense of an emperor's seal. When an emperor signs a constitutional decree, at the end there is a seal that carries the full weight of this authority. Until it is sealed, the law means nothing, but once it has been sealed, there is nothing that is beyond that law. In this case, the seal is the nature of all reality. In other words, there is no other nature or reality that exists beyond this

nature of luminosity and emptiness, this nature of appearance and emptiness. The nature of ego is great emptiness. The nature of self is selflessness. The nature of the phenomenal world is nonexistence. It is empty yet appearing. That is why it is said that emptiness is inseparable from appearance, from luminosity itself.

The term *great symbol* is also used, but "symbol" is not meant in the conventional sense of something that stands for or suggests something else; instead, it is the thing itself-the real thing, the actual stuff. For example, we could say that spaghetti is the symbol of Italian food. However, when we eat spaghetti we are not eating a symbol. We are eating actual Italian food. In a similar way, the "great symbol" is not like a picture that represents a real place somewhere else. The great symbol is the great nature of true reality. It is the actual taste of the true nature of inseparable emptiness-luminosity.

Maitripa, a great Indian *mahasiddha* and one of the forefathers of the Kagyu lineage, explains the definition of Mahamudra in this way:

Mahamudra is nondual awareness that transcends intellect; it is nonconceptual and lucid, like all-pervading space. Though manifesting boundless compassion, it is devoid of self-nature. It is like the reflection of the moon on the lake's surface. It is lucid and undefinable, without center or circumference, unstained, undefiled, and free from fear and desire. Like the dream of a mute, it is inexpressible.

The Mahamudra teachings are the essence teachings of the New Translation school of Tibetan Buddhism. This school refers to those traditions that developed in Tibet during the second spreading of the Buddhist doctrine, beginning in the eleventh century. In particular, the New Translation school includes the Kagyu, Sakya, and Gelugpa schools. The Old Translation school refers to the Nyingma lineage. The fundamental elements of Mahamudra are presented in the Mahayana journey in the teachings on transcendental wisdom or knowledge called *prajnaparamita*. The teachings on Mahamudra are also taught in the different tantras and *shastras*. The tantras refer to the scriptures or teachings of the Buddha that form the basis of the Mantrayana. Shastras are commentaries or philosophical treatises that elucidate the Buddha's teachings.

## **The Glacier Mountain**

### **The Sun of Devotion**

In order to follow the path of Mahamudra, we need the genuine transmission from the lineage and the lineage masters. From the Mahamudra point of view, the guru plays a very important role because no matter how well, how directly, and how perfectly Shakyamuni Buddha transmitted the Mahamudra teachings, we are not able to be in his

presence now. However, we are able to be in the presence of our gurus, and it is only through their blessings that we are able to directly receive, connect with, and realize this heart of Mahamudra. In the Mahamudra tradition it is said that the compassion of the guru and buddhas is equal—there is no difference in their compassion. However, in terms of kindness, our guru is more kind to us than all the buddhas of the three times, because he or she directly points out our true nature. Thus, the key to Mahamudra experience or realization is our devotion to the guru and the lineage. Without devotion, there is no *adhishtana*, or blessing transmission. Without adhishtana, there is no way for us to realize the true nature of mind.

In one of the songs of realization, it is said that devotion is like the sun shining on a snow mountain. This mountain is like the guru. If the sun of devotion does not shine on the glacier mountain of the four kayas of the guru, then the river flow of blessings will not descend. This metaphor shows us whether or not we will be able to receive the transmission of Mahamudra. The more intensely the sun of devotion shines, the more strongly the stream of blessings will flow. If it is too cold, or too cloudy, or if no sun is shining, then the glacier mountain remains frozen. It is always beautiful, it is always pure, but the stream does not come down from that mountain. Therefore, generating devotion is very important if we are to receive these blessings. It is important to pay close attention to our mind of devotion. Because devotion to the guru, to the lineage, and to the teachings of Mahamudra is so strongly emphasized, the path of Mahamudra is frequently known as the path of devotion.

Devotion is the path, and devotion is realization. Devotion is experience and devotion is fruition. Whenever we experience genuine devotion, we experience Mahamudra mind; and whenever we realize the depth of devotion, we realize the true state of Mahamudra mind.

Devotion is not simply blind faith; rather, the experience or taste of devotion is an experience of the naked reality of our mind, especially of our emotions. Devotion comes from trust and from surrendering ourselves. Such surrender and trust come from confidence, which comes from knowledge. Therefore, this devotion is deeply rooted in wisdom and knowledge.

### **Passionate Devotion: Working with Emotions**

The experience of devotion is extremely personal in terms of its degree and its way and power of manifestation. Devotion is something that we need to connect with naturally, without preconceptions. For example, we do not need to sit down for an hour in order to try to figure out how or what it should be, or toward which object it should arise. Devotion has to arise naturally with the help of the lineage and with the help of our

emotions. The power of a genuine experience of devotion is utterly beyond concept. When we fully experience devotion, it transcends all conceptuality. When we fully experience devotion, it helps us to transcend emotions, even though it arises from or is based on emotions.

As with every aspect of the path, devotion does not arise naturally or easily for everybody, nor is it something that is necessarily constant. It is similar to our experience of meditation practice. Every time we sit and meditate, it is different. Sometimes our practice is deep and calm. We might feel that our practice is a wonderful achievement and that we can work with all of our thoughts and emotions. At other times we might feel as though we have never sat on a cushion before. We might feel that we have lost everything, including all qualities of calmness. The same is true for devotion, except that it fluctuates even more.

Ultimately speaking, devotion is not directed outside our mind. We direct devotion toward "ordinary mind," which is the Mahamudra mind, and to the genuine heart of enlightenment that is within us and within our emotions. We direct devotion to the mind of enlightenment that is right within our fear and hope. There is no Mahamudra mind outside these experiences.

Devotion involves working with our emotions very directly. In fact, the two are closely tied together. Within devotion, we can find elements of all our emotions. There are elements of passion. There are surely elements of jealousy, and there are elements of aggression and pride as well. While there are elements of every emotion within devotion, the strongest is passion, followed closely by jealousy. It is important for us to process these emotions rather than deny them. We need to see them clearly while also trying to remember the kindness, wisdom, prajna, and skillful means that we have received from our guru and the lineage. We should continue to try to develop our devotion further, no matter how much or what kind of emotion arises.

Jealousy is frequently involved with devotion because we tend to compare ourselves with others and become competitive. For example, in a class, there are many students but only one teacher. When the teacher acknowledges another student, you might feel, "Oh, my colleague is doing better than I am." Because the teacher acknowledged that person and forgot to acknowledge you or even smile, you might suddenly think, "What's wrong? He smiled at the other guy over there. Did I do something wrong?" There is a lot of fear involved with these thoughts.

We might not be totally crazy with jealousy, but there is sometimes a sense of feeling incompetent or unworthy. This also arises from making comparisons. For example, you might compare yourself with other students and think, "Oh, I'm not worthy. They can do

things better than I can." At other times, you might say the opposite: "I can do things better than they can." Either way, it becomes problematic.

Having some sense of openness, willingness, and courage to work with such emotions when they arise becomes a powerful way to realize and experience true devotion. Sometimes it is necessary to recognize the helpful nature of our emotions and to acknowledge their power and potential to be of benefit to us. It is not fair to accuse and blame our emotions all the time.

### **Original Devotion**

Trust in our own enlightened heart can be reinforced through trusting the heart of the guru. We call this "merging our mind with the mind of the guru" or "mixing our heart with the heart of the guru." We have to do this intentionally in the beginning, with trust and with effort. Gradually, however, it does become effortless. Sometimes when we focus totally and one-pointedly on the guru's mind, we have the experience of merging—the experience of being one person. What happens in the next moment? We might feel claustrophobic and run out of the room.

Try to generate devotion—in any amount, in any style, in any way you can. You can cultivate devotion in your own way. Do not worry about how someone else does it. If you simply mimic others because you think that devotion should be uniform, then that will not be genuine. Do not be afraid to express devotion in your own way, whether it is a Tibetan way, an American way, a European way, an Asian way, a Russian way, or any other way. It does not matter. Pure devotion does not have any standardized form or mold to fill. If there were a standard form for devotion, then teachers would have handed it out a long time ago, but there is no checklist or fill-in-the-blanks for devotion. Every individual way of expressing devotion should be as authentic, original, and individual as possible. Then there will be a real sense of connecting with your heart—not in exactly the same way that someone else's heart is connecting, but in a way that you can feel your own heart connection. That is the most important part of our whole journey.

The Mahamudra path is very different from the Hinayana-Mahayana journey in this respect. In the Hinayana-Mahayana journey, there are standard forms. There are checklists. If you are taking monastic ordination or bodhisattva vows, there is a checklist for what you can and cannot do. There is a standard way to conduct yourself on that path. However, on the Mahamudra path, it is very individualized, and that is why your own personal connection with the lineage becomes so powerful and important.

It has been taught that if someone brings to the practice of Mahamudra the tendency to take great pride in not relying on the spiritual guidance of the guru or in not following the guru's meditation instructions, then such a person might fall into the animal realm. In other words, their practice might lead them into a realm of stupidity, a state of completely spaced-out consciousness. This shows us that on the path of Mahamudra, devotion is beyond any question, such as whether or not we should have it or whether we can substitute something else for it. Devotion is not optional. Mahamudra can be realized only through the path of devotion.

## **Mahamudra Lineage History**

Mahamudra emphasizes the continuity of oral instructions, which are passed on from master to student. This emphasis is reflected in the literal meaning of the name "Kagyu." The first syllable, *ka* (*bka'*), which means "speech," refers to the scriptures of the Buddha and the oral instructions of the guru. *Ka* carries the sense of the enlightened meaning conveyed by the words of the teacher, as well as the force with which such words of insight are conveyed. The second syllable, *gyu* (*brgyud*), means "lineage" or "tradition." Together, these syllables mean "the lineage of the oral instructions."

Over twenty-five hundred years ago, Prince Siddhartha attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree in Bodhgaya and then manifested as the Buddha. According to Buddhist cosmology, he was the fourth historic Buddha of this fortunate aeon. Prince Siddhartha's achievement of enlightenment—the realization itself—is called the *dharmakaya*, or the body of truth. When that realization is expressed through subtle symbols, it is called the *sambhogakaya*, or the body of enjoyment. The physical form of Shakyamuni Buddha, which is the historical manifestation of such realization in a form more accessible to sentient beings, is called the *nirmanakaya*, or the body of manifestation.

The Mahamudra lineage traces its origin back to Shakyamuni Buddha through Marpa Chökyi Lodrö, the great translator and realized yogi who brought the unbroken lineage of Buddha's Mahamudra from India to Tibet. At the age of fifteen, Marpa first trained as a translator under Drogmi Shakya Yeshe and later traveled three times to India and four times to Nepal in search of Buddhist teachings. Marpa is said to have studied with 108 masters and yogis, but his principal teachers were Naropa and Maitripa. Marpa then transmitted the lineage to his heart son, the famous yogi Milarepa.

The great master Gampopa, who is also known as Dakpo Lhaje, and Rechungpa were the principal students of Milarepa. Gampopa was prophesied in the sutras by the Buddha and established the framework of the lineage by unifying Milarepa's Mahamudra lineage with the stages-of-the-path tradition of the Kadampa lineage. The resulting

unique tradition, known as the Dakpo Kagyu, was critical to the unfolding of the Kagyu lineage.

Gampopa transmitted this lineage to his three heart sons, one of whom was the First Karmapa, Düsüm Khyenpa. In the Kagyu lineage supplication, the line "knower of the three times, omniscient Karmapa" is a reference to the First Karmapa. The transmission was passed from the First Karmapa to his disciple, Dragon Rechenpa, and then from him to the Second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi. It has passed continuously in this way to the present incarnation, who is the Seventeenth Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje, the youngest living Mahamudra lineage holder. The continuity of this lineage transmission is known as the golden rosary.

In general, there are two main lineages of Mahamudra, which are known as the direct and the indirect lineages. The original source of the transmission of the direct lineage is the Buddha Vajradhara, while the original source of the transmission of the indirect lineage is Shakyamuni Buddha.

### **The Direct Lineage**

The original source of the teachings for the special transmission of the direct lineage is Vajradhara, who is the primordial, or dharmakaya, buddha. Vajradhara expresses the quintessence of buddhahood itself, the essence of the historical Buddha's realization of enlightenment. The skylike dharmakaya nature of Vajradhara is depicted in paintings by his dark blue color. Vajradhara is central to the Kagyu lineage because Tilopa received the Vajrayana teachings directly from Vajradhara, who is synonymous with the dharmakaya, the source of all manifestations of enlightenment. Thus, the Kagyu lineage originated from the very nature of buddhahood.

Tilopa acknowledged the origin of this Mahamudra lineage in his songs. He sang, "I, the yogi Tilopa, do not have any human teacher; I do not have any human master to follow. My teacher, my guru, is the great Vajradhara, the dharmakaya nature of Vajradhara." This shows that the lineage came directly from Vajradhara to Tilopa.

### **The Indirect Lineage**

The line of transmission originating with Shakyamuni Buddha, which is known as the indirect lineage, is also referred to as the oral instruction lineage. Tilopa originally inherited four main streams of wisdom that were transmitted by Indian mahasiddhas

such as Saraha, Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Chandrakirti, and Matangi. Tilopa then condensed these four special transmission lineages into one and transmitted it to Naropa. This stream then passed from teacher to disciple: from Naropa to Marpa, Marpa to Milarepa, and then Milarepa to Gampopa.

However, Gampopa received the transmissions of two different Indian lineages. One was the tantric lineage, which came from Tilopa to Naropa to Marpa and then to Milarepa. That tradition conveys a very strong Vajrayana element. Gampopa also received the full transmission of the Indian master Atisha, which is known as the Kadampa lineage.

Atisha was trained at Nalanda University and became a great Buddhist master. He also served as the discipline master at Nalanda University. During the time of Marpa, he came to Tibet and transmitted many Sutrayana teachings. He was responsible for the transmission of both the philosophical and the practice traditions of the Prajnaparamita teachings. Thus, Atisha's lineage was based primarily on the sutras, although he also transmitted some tantric and Mahamudra practices.

Therefore, when the Mahamudra lineage came to Gampopa, it was a rich mixture of the tantra and sutra traditions. Gampopa presented the Mahamudra lineage by teaching three different methods of practicing Mahamudra.

### **Three Classifications of Mahamudra**

According to the teachings and tradition of Lord Gampopa's lineage, the three classifications of Mahamudra are Sutra Mahamudra, Mantra Mahamudra, and Essence Mahamudra. Sutra Mahamudra is Mahamudra: The Great Seal is primarily based on the sutra teachings, and Mantra Mahamudra is primarily based on the mantra teachings. Essence Mahamudra draws from both sutra and mantra, but is traditionally distinguished as the devotional path based on blessings.

### **Sutra Mahamudra: The Secret Road in the City**

The general teachings of Mahamudra were presented by Lord Buddha and his followers in such sutras as the Prajnaparamita sutras or the discourses on transcendental knowledge. These sutras teach primarily "the great emptiness." The shortest of the Prajnaparamita sutras is the *Heart Sutra*, which teaches the inseparability of form and emptiness. That sutra, along with the whole collection of Prajnaparamita teachings, is one of the bases for Sutra Mahamudra.



The teachings on buddha nature are the other basis for Sutra Mahamudra. The buddha-nature teachings point out that the nature of our mind, emotions, and thoughts is complete wakefulness. That wakefulness is what we call buddhahood, or enlightenment. Furthermore, that enlightenment is the nature of all sentient beings. This essence of enlightenment is what we call buddha nature or *tathagatagarbha* in Sanskrit.

These two streams of teachings form the basis for the sutra aspect of Mahamudra. The practice of Sutra Mahamudra essentially involves the study and contemplation of these sutras, followed by meditation. We contemplate the teachings on emptiness, or *shunyata*, as well as the teachings on buddha nature, which is our fundamental wakefulness. Through this process, we discover our own heart of enlightenment. We discover that enlightenment is nothing external to us but is found within this very mind—within our emotions, thoughts, and perceptions. It is within these experiences that we see the basic state of enlightenment.

The meditation of Sutra Mahamudra essentially consists of resting one's mind, free of mental activity, in the state of nonconceptual wisdom. This is the fundamental definition of Sutra Mahamudra: mind resting in the state in which it experiences the *dharmadhatu*, which is the expanse or nature of all things. This resting is essentially a nonconceptual wisdom beyond all elaboration, or the unity of clarity and emptiness. In this context, one meditates in the following way: The object of one's meditation is luminosity free of any projections; the perceiving subject is the lack of mental engagement; and one meditates without mental engagement. There are many extensive explanations on meditating without mental engagement, found primarily in the teachings of Maitripa and Sahajavajra.

The Sutrayana approach to Mahamudra is seen as a very profound method because it does not require any of the sophisticated and complex tantric rituals, deity yoga visualization practices, or *samayas*. It is a simple sutra approach, yet it conveys the direct transmission of the tantric essence of awakening. This particular approach is also known as a secret passage. It can be compared to a secret street within a city—a route that has not been widely discovered. Although it is right in the heart of the city, very few people know about this secret street. What is the difference between this street and the other streets in the city? This street is a shortcut, without traffic or traffic lights, and it is a direct route. This street is right within this very city, and it will take you straight to your destination without any delays. Thus, in order to find this path, you do not have to go far. The direct and profound methods of Sutrayana Mahamudra are found right within the sutra approach, right within the ordinary and simple path of spiritual practice. Through this path, we can attain complete buddhahood by traversing the five paths and ten *bhumis*.

Sutra Mahamudra is viewed as being very profound, straight to the point, yet simple. The difference between Sutra Mahamudra and other sutra approaches, such as the general Hinayana and Mahayana paths, is that Sutra Mahamudra has a tradition of skillful means that contains profound methods of directly pointing out the selfless and luminous nature of mind. There is a direct method of pointing out, which usually does not exist in other sutra approaches. The skillful methods of pointing out the nature of mind used in Sutra Mahamudra are imported, in a sense, from the Vajrayana tradition. Therefore, the essence of Sutra Mahamudra is usually described as being prajnaparamita, or the transcendental wisdom of emptiness, with a touch of the Vajrayana. Finally, it is called Mahamudra, the great seal, because by using the very words and teachings of the sutras, it brings the realization of Mahamudra.

The Sutra Mahamudra approach is seen as a specialty of the Kagyu tradition and was the central emphasis of Gampopa's teachings. Therefore, although it originated in India and was also taught by Marpa and Milarepa, Gampopa is regarded as the main figure responsible for bringing this teaching to its full development and manifestation.

### **Mantra Mahamudra: The Path of Great Upaya**

The second aspect of the Mahamudra tradition is the approach of the Mantrayana, or the Vajrayana. This approach involves quite profound and sophisticated methods, which include working with creation stage and completion stage deity practices, as well as very detailed instructions on working with *nadi*, *prana*, and *bindu*. The main presentation of Vajrayana Mahamudra is found in the *Anuttarayoga* tantras and in the instructions of those tantras. These tantras are transmitted through the four principal *abhishekas*, or empowerments. When Mahamudra is introduced as the naked, natural state through the use of Vajrayana methods, this is called Mantra Mahamudra.

A special feature of the Vajrayana path is the variety and richness of its methods, through which one can realize the nature of mind. This diversity of methods is not emphasized in the Sutra Mahamudra approach, in which there is just one simple pointing-out method for experiencing Mahamudra. In Mantra Mahamudra, there are many means of pointing out mind's nature, such as the process of the four abhishekas. When we go through the initiation process of an abhisheka, we are empowered to practice the mandala of a particular deity, which symbolizes the nature of mind. This is the traditional way in which a student is introduced to the nature of mind. The images of deities represented in paintings and sculptures are actually reflections, mirror images, of the nature of our own mind. By working with such a reflection through the process of visualization, we are working toward the recognition of our own mind. For example, in order to see your own face, you have to rely upon a mirror. When you see your

reflection, you can say, "Oh, yes, my face has such and such features," and you can recognize whether your face is clean or dirty. Similarly, the pure and impure aspects of mind are reflected in these symbolic images of a deity. Thus, through deity yoga practice, Mantra Mahamudra reflects to us the nature of mind.

The Mantra Mahamudra deity practice is very profound; at the same time, it is quite easy to misunderstand the images and to misinterpret the deity as an external entity. The practice of the Vajrayana path requires a very strong understanding, and the source of that understanding is the instructions of the lineage and the Vajrayana tantras. When we study the instructions and receive the transmission, our understanding becomes clear. Through this clear understanding, we are able to genuinely relate to Vajrayana deity practice.

### **Essence Mahamudra: Simultaneous Realization and Liberation**

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On this path, there is no need for either the elaborate methods of Mantra Mahamudra or the gradual training of Sutra Mahamudra. In Sutra Mahamudra, there are still some forms; for example, the practices of *shamatha* and *vipashyana* meditation, as well as the practices of bodhichitta, are retained. There is also a great deal of formal study. In Mantrayana Mahamudra, there is also a certain formality of method that can be seen in the reliance upon ceremony and ritual; for example, there are extensive liturgies, visualizations, and mantra recitations. Thus, in this sense, Vajrayana Mahamudra is also a very formal way of introducing the nature of mind. In contrast, the Essence Mahamudra path is totally formless. The transmission happens instantaneously. Essence Mahamudra is nothing more than one's naked, ordinary mind resting in the unfabricated state.

In the Essence Mahamudra tradition, all conceptual clinging, such as clinging to ideas of sacred and profane or of virtuous and unvirtuous, is cut through, and we work directly with the experience of mind and its nature. The lineage guru points out the nature of mind to us, directly and nakedly. This kind of pointing-out instruction is very genuine. It is not something that we can mimic or repeat. We cannot "try it out" one time and say, "That was just a rehearsal. It did not work out, so okay, let's do the same thing again." That is not how it works. In the tradition of this lineage, we get one direct and naked pointing out, which has an effect. Throughout the history of Essence Mahamudra, pointing out has always happened in a simple, ordinary way. This type of pointing out typifies the Essence Mahamudra approach, where we are working directly with our experiences of ordinary, worldly life, as well as our experience of the nature of mind.

## **Perspectives on the Mahamudra Journey**

We prepare ourselves for the Mahamudra journey first by coming to understand its place within the more general Buddhist journey and, second, by grounding ourselves in its essential meanings, characteristics, and forms. Then we will be ready to look more closely at the details of the three modes of Sutra, Mantra, and Essence Mahamudra.

### **Ground, Path, and Fruition**

The Mahamudra journey is usually viewed from the perspective of ground, path, and fruition. For example, when we begin our Sutra Mahamudra journey, we enter at the level of ground Mahamudra. At this stage, we are introduced to the fundamental nature of reality, the basic state of our mind and of the phenomenal world. We develop a clear intellectual understanding of the view of emptiness and of the nature of mind through our study, contemplation, and meditation practices. When we are ready to give rise to the actual experience of Mahamudra meditation, we enter the stage of path Mahamudra by first engaging in the preliminary practices and then receiving the pointing-out instructions from our guru, which prepare us to engage in the corresponding meditation practices. Subsequently, we develop our practice more fully through what are known as enhancement practices. The fruition stage is the completion of our journey. It is the point at which we fully discover the nature of our mind, which is the achievement of buddhahood. Thus, whether our Mahamudra journey follows the methods of Sutra, Mantra, or Essence Mahamudra, we relate to the progressive stages of ground, path, and fruition. This is true even though the Mahamudra teachings speak about "sudden awakening."

### **Sudden Awakening**

Even in Sutra Mahamudra, there is some sense of sudden awakening. These teachings are typically distinguished from the Vajrayana Buddhist teachings, yet Gampopa describes the Mahamudra of the Sutrayana tradition as being consistent with the Vajrayana teachings. Therefore, we might well ask what it means to say that Sutra Mahamudra is consistent with the techniques of Vajrayana.

It is important to see that Sutra Mahamudra does not consist only of the teachings on emptiness yoga; it is not simply a philosophical or intellectual approach to understanding emptiness. Sutra Mahamudra introduces a certain method of "clicking," which comes from the Vajrayana tradition. When the "click" occurs, there is a strong sense of force—a sense of something happening suddenly. When the extensive teachings on emptiness are connected to this Vajrayana notion of clicking, they become much more powerful and our journey progresses much more quickly. This clicking is

strongly connected to or dependent upon our devotion to the teacher, to the teachings, and to the power of the blessings of the lineage. We suddenly click into a certain state of awakening. We are talking about two states of mind here: asleep and awake. When you are sleeping, you have the potential of being awakened—of being an awake person. You always have that potential, and from the point of view of potential, there is no difference between you lying there asleep and the awake person who is watching you sleep like a log. At the same time, there is a communication taking place between the sleeping mind and the awakened mind. For example, the fully awakened mind of Vajradhara communicated with Tilopa, who was possibly half-awake at a certain point. Then the clicking happened between them, and Tilopa was fully awakened by Vajradhara's teaching.

In one sense, we could see this click as the result of something coming from the outside. Because we experience the world dualistically, we cling to the notion of receiving something from outside ourselves. However, whatever we "receive" is not something foreign to the essence of our minds. It is already there in the same way that the potential for being awake is present in our minds while we are in a state of sleep. In order to wake up, we need only this clicking; it does not matter whether we use an alarm clock to click into the awakened state or another technique, such as a bucket of water, which is much more powerful. However, since we are following a progressive path, if we attempt to use the clicking method to jump into the state of awakening at the beginning of our journey, we might experience some confusion.

In general, our guru, our spiritual friend, guides our journey on the Buddhist path. Because of this, we always have some sense of a reference point and some sense of blessing. However, we should not misconstrue this to mean that our teacher has total power over us. A teacher does not have the power to pull us out of samsara. For example, at the general or basic Sutrayana level of the path, the teacher is simply like an alarm clock. We must make the effort to approach the clock and set the alarm for the right time. Then, when it buzzes in the morning, we have a choice about whether to wake up or go back to sleep. It is our own individual responsibility—we can press the snooze button or we can get up. Thus, there needs to be a sense of balance. Although the teacher or spiritual friend is very important on our journey, he or she is not like God. We have to put in our own effort. This effort begins with ground Mahamudra, which is the fundamental teaching of the Mahamudra path.

## Shamatha

### *King Doha: Saraha's Advice to a King*

Translation and Oral Commentary by Traleg Kyabgon  
From *The Path: Shamatha and Vipashyana*, pp. 24-30

When we practice Mahamudra with the practices of shamatha and vipashyana, different kinds of attitudes are encouraged. We find repeated injunctions to develop what is called “the attitude of neither acceptance nor rejection.” When we are practicing, if negative thoughts arise, if discursive thoughts arise, if strong emotions arise, we should not immediately react to these by thinking, “Oh, this is bad, I should not have these experiences.” If we have good or comforting or inspiring experiences during meditation, then we should not get overjoyed and think, “Oh, I’m getting somewhere, my meditation experiences have been very positive lately. It’s a positive sign, I’m blessed.” If we continue to deal with our meditative experiences in that way, then, according to Mahamudra teachings, we will not progress very much because we will be driven by hope and fear. We are hoping for wonderful things to happen and we are fearful they will not, or that bad things might happen.

In Tibetan the phrase panglang redok dang dralwa is used. Pang is “to renounce,” “to give up”; lang means “to cultivate.” Re is short for rewa which is “hope” and dok is short for dokpa which means “fear.” Finally, dralwa means “to be free of.” Altogether then, this means we try to approach Path Mahamudra meditation by being free of notions of acceptance, rejection, and hope and fear.

If we get bogged down by thoughts of what to cultivate, what to renounce and give up, and we get caught up in hoping things will be working out well and fearing they will not, these become distractions and impediments to our path. Instead of producing shamatha tranquility, they disturb our mind. This is one of the main instructions given and a very important key part of the practice.

It is also suggested that if we get bogged down with thoughts of acceptance, rejection, hope and fear, we also drive a wedge between time now and time in the future. We start thinking that something good has to happen in the future, or that something bad is going to happen in the future. The main attitude one should have is the willingness to work with whatever is arising in one’s mind now, whatever one is experiencing at any given time. This is what one should be focusing on, rather than thinking about what these experiences may mean or be symbolic of or be leading one into, in relation to the future.

## Letting Go of the Running Commentary

We try to interpret our experiences all the time, and give them a lot of commentary. To a large extent, how our experiences are appropriated, made sense of, given significance and meaning, depends upon our mood, or even the time of the day. This is also something that we have to keep in mind. It is not only that we form interpretations in terms of things external to us, but we also interpret what we ourselves are going through at any given time. As soon as we start to conceptualize and attempt to understand what is really going on, we lose touch with the bare experience. In other words, the bare experience becomes shrouded by our interpretive accretions. You might say we put layers of commentary on what is experienced.

In Mahamudra we try to stay with the experience, and if we stay with the experience, then we are going to interpret our experiences less in terms of whether they are a good experiences or bad experiences. In order to follow the Path Mahamudra we need to refrain from evaluating everything we experience. Simply thinking an experience is bad because of our own confusion and habits of mind, does not mean it is bad. Conversely, just because we think certain experiences are good, does not necessarily mean they are good. We should consider these things so that we don't jump ahead and start conceptualizing about what we are experiencing.

We need to try to have some sense of openness by thinking about things like this. An experience that we may have thought was not very good could, in time, with deeper understanding, deeper appreciation of meditation, and the benefit of hindsight, be thought of in fact as beneficial. At the time, though, it may have been upsetting or uncomfortable, or even confronting. Just because something is pleasant, doesn't necessarily mean it is good for us, and just because something is a bit confronting or unpleasant, doesn't mean it is bad for us. Even in life generally that happens to be true, of course. We could keep out of a lot of trouble if we follow that rule.

It is extremely important to keep an open mind. In that way, one tries to meditate, to practice shamatha. It is said that if we approach things in this way and are open to varieties of experiences, then experiences will rise and fall, rise and fall and we will be less given to distractions and disturbances. A very common example used for how to deal with the mind is to describe it as being like an undisturbed pond. Vigorous use of mindfulness and emptiness is seen as disturbing or stirring the pond. If one stirs a pond, all the sediment at the bottom will come to the top and, in one's confused attempt to keep the pond clean, it gets murky and muddy. But if the pond is let be, left alone, then all the sediment sinks to the bottom and the pond will be clear. Doing less will bring the most benefit, and doing more results in less benefit.

## **Maintaining Awareness Whether the Mind is Stable or in Movement**

The main thing is to be able to stay with whatever is arising and if we do that, we are maintaining our awareness, which is the key to meditation. If we practice awareness in relation to a wide range of emotions, feelings, and experiences, then we will develop a certain ability to maintain awareness under many different circumstances. If we can only maintain awareness when our mind is sufficiently calm and not when the mind becomes slightly agitated, then our meditation is partial. Our ability to practice awareness is not well-established, because a slight disturbance is enough to snuff out the awareness.

Again, an example is given to describe this. Think of a strong gust of wind as disturbing discursive thoughts and a small flame as awareness. If the flame is very small, the wind will almost automatically wipe it out; the flame does not have much chance. But if the flame is sufficiently strong, the wind actually encourages the flame to blaze even more, rather than putting it out. In a similar way, it is said that if the meditator is able to harness awareness, likened to the flame, and maintain it even if there is a great deal going on in the mind, it is like the wind and the flame helping each other. Strong emotions, thoughts, and feelings are not then anathema to the flame of awareness. The flame is actually encouraged and gets stronger, just as with training in physical exercise, the more we train, the more we are able to put up with physical stress. If we use awareness under a variety of circumstances and situations, then we are able to maintain shamatha tranquility. Otherwise, when the mind is calm, awareness is present, and when it is not calm, awareness is not present.

Nowhere is it said that you cannot maintain awareness when the mind is in a state of movement, as it is called. That is the other key thing to remember, that we can maintain awareness in a state of movement and in a state of non-movement. Both are mentioned in Mahamudra literature on shamatha and they are called “the meditative state of non-movement” and “the meditative state of movement.”

Movement refers to when there are thoughts, feelings, emotions, and so forth rushing through the mind. There is a phrase in Mahamudra vocabulary: né gyu rik sum (Tib.). The terms used in the phrase are né, which means when the mind is stable, gyu, when the mind is in a state of movement, and rik means awareness, which may be more familiar in full as rikpa. This phrase refers to being able to maintain awareness whether the mind is in a stable state or in a state of movement.

This is the key to how we establish shamatha stability. We don't do so by trying to deliberately reduce the activity in the mind but by trying to maintain awareness, even in



a state of movement. This is, again, a very important notion. Otherwise our meditation becomes partial and our awareness fickle; it can't be properly established because it doesn't have sufficient strength to maintain itself when the mind is in a state of movement.

Movement means when there are thoughts and emotions and feelings arising in the mind. What this means then is we don't have to think that the mind should be empty of thoughts or feelings or emotions to be in a meditative state. It doesn't matter whether we have thoughts or no thoughts; that is not the key. Instead, the key is to maintain awareness.

### **Strengthening our awareness**

To establish this kind of awareness in Mahamudra as part of shamatha meditation an exercise is given. If our mind is a bit agitated, we try to stabilize it by watching the breath, for example, or whatever is going to help us achieve that. We try to calm the mind down and create some stability. If the mind is already somewhat stable, we deliberately think of something or even give rise to some strong emotion and then return to a stable mind. We continue to repeat the exercise, so that we are going from stability to movement and movement to stability, then stability to movement and movement to stability, again and again, always trying to keep mental awareness. That is how we try to make our awareness stronger, so that we get used to maintaining awareness even when there is movement in the mind, not just when the mind is stable. This is what né gyu rik sum refers to.

These exercises are used as a very effective method to maintain awareness, no matter what is happening. In stillness, we try to create movement, and in movement we try to create stillness, and if we do that, we may develop what is called "the balance between stability and clarity." If we are able to maintain proper awareness, then there will not be too much clarity, because if there is too much clarity, this leads to agitation.

If there is not enough clarity, then having too much stability leads to dullness of the mind. When we go back and forth from movement to stillness and stillness to movement, we learn about this balance. This is called necha and selcha (Tib.). Né means "stability" and cha means "portion," so necha means "the portion of mind which is stable" and as sel means "luminosity" or "clarity," selcha means "the clarity portion." We have to try to have balance between these two so that too much clarity does not lead to agitation, and too much stability does not lead to dullness and stupor. The portions have to be maintained in a balanced state. This is not to say that we won't have more clarity sometimes and at other times a bit more stability; they don't have to be in exact equal portions, so to speak. Nevertheless there has to be some kind of balance.

We may also develop that balance if we are meditating in the way we have been discussing, using movement and stillness together, and again not thinking that stillness is something that is really good and movement is a bad thing. If we are not thinking like that and we try to bring harmony between the two, our ability to maintain stability and clarity will increase. That is what shamatha practice of meditation involves.

While I am giving you the essentials here, to do this kind of meditation you do have to study with a qualified lama; you can't do this kind of practice just by reading a book. While I am sure you know that already, we have a duty to inform people of that again and again, as well. In our tradition we are instructed to do this, so I am passing that on. These are the essential instructions normally given to gain stability of the mind, because the main point of shamatha is to stabilize the mind.

To recapitulate, we stabilize the mind by harmonizing the movement versus stillness by trying not to get caught up in thoughts of acceptance and rejection, hope and fear and so forth, and, most importantly, by trying to maintain this balance between stability and mental clarity. When the mind becomes more stabilized that way, we gain shamatha stability

**The Three Qualities of Shamatha**  
**From *Comments on Longchenpa's Final Testament, Immaculate Light***  
**In *The Fearless Lion's Roar: Profound Instructions on Dzogchen, the Great***  
***Perfection*, by Nyoshul Khenpo Jamyang Dorje**  
**Translated by David Christensen, pp. 39**

The subsequent verses teach us how to meditate with mindfulness (dran pa), attentiveness (shayzhin; shes bzhin), and conscientiousness (bag yod).

Mindfulness, moreover, is like a virtuous hook  
That catches the crazed rampant elephant of the mind,  
Leading it away from all faults and toward what is virtuous.  
Rely on this from now on!

Attentiveness is like an undistracted watchman  
Who affords the thief of nonvirtue no opportunity,  
And protects the supreme wealth of virtue.  
Let your mind rely on it with certainty from now on!

Conscientiousness is like a well-constructed moat,  
Which prevents brigand bands of afflictive emotions from striking.  
It leads an army to victory over the foes of karma.  
Strive to guard your mind from now on!

We must keep the virtuous practices of love, compassion, rejoicing, and so forth, in our minds. Mindfulness is like a hook that can subdue the wild elephant of mind, and attentiveness is like a guard who protects the wealth of our virtuous practice. So we should never separate from them. In essence, we must always practice with mindfulness, attentiveness, and conscientiousness.

# **The Instruction on Stillness, Occurrence, And Awareness in Mahamudra**

**By Mipham Rinpoche**

**From *Perfect Clarity: A Tibetan Buddhist Anthology of Mahamudra and Dzogchen*, Translated by Erik Perna Kunsang, Pages 69-70**

If you can simply practice mahamudra and experience stillness, occurrence, and awareness according to the vital instruction of that practice, you will ultimately perceive the truth of reality. This is because the nature of your mind has the sugata essence. Apply the related key instruction. The basis of all things is mind. After understanding the mind's secret, seek the vital point of your mind and you will become skilled in all things and realize the meaning of egolessness.

Since I am teaching according to the oral instructions of the realized ones, I will leave out various logical investigations. Stillness is when you look into your mind, direct yourself inward, and remain devoid of any kind of thinking. Occurrence is when various kinds of thoughts arise. Awareness is your mind being conscious of either of these. If you maintain this continuously, you will come to understand the following vital point: Various feelings such as joy and sadness arise from your own mind and dissolve back into your mind. Understanding this, you will come to recognize that all experiences are the personal experiences of your mind.

Subsequently, by looking directly into the essence of your mind, whether it is still or thinking, you will understand that it is empty and, even though it perceives many things, it does not possess any entity whatsoever. This so-called emptiness is not a blank void like space. Rather, you will come to understand that it is an emptiness endowed with all supreme aspects. This means that it does not possess any self-nature, yet it has an unceasing clarity that is fully conscious and cognizant.

When realizing this secret point of mind, although there is no separate watcher or something watched, to experience the naturally luminous and innate mind-essence is known as recognizing awareness. This is what is pointed out in both mahamudra and dzogchen.

According to Saraha, if you can sustain it, "By looking again and again into the primordially pure nature of space, seeing will cease."

As stated in the Prajnaparamita, "Mind is devoid of mind; the nature of mind is luminous."

There is nothing easier than this, but it is essential to practice.

**Mahamudra: Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance**  
**By Wangchuk Dorje, The Ninth Karmapa**  
*In Moonbeams of Mahamudra by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal With*  
*Dispelling the Darkness Of Ignorance by Wangchuk Dorje, The Ninth*  
*Karmapa Translated, Annotated, and Introduced by Elizabeth M. Callahan*

**Mahamudra Practice Workshop One**  
**May 6, 2023**

**1) Preliminaries**

- a) Preliminaries Session Five: Contemplation of Death and Impermanence
- b) Preliminaries Session Six: Contemplation of Karma
- c) Preliminaries Session Seven: Contemplation of the Deficiencies of Samsara
- d) Preliminaries Session Eight: Contemplation of the Opportunities of Human Life

**2) Shamatha**

- a) Shamatha Session One: Essential Points for Body and Mind
- b) Shamatha Session Five: Resting Without Support
- c) Shamatha Session Six: Three Levels of Resting

**3) Vipashyana**

- a) Vipashyana Session One: Looking with Stillness
- b) Vipashyana Session Two: Looking with Movement

**4) Conclusion**

- a) Conclusion Session Three: Three Strayings and Four Deviations
  - i) The Three Strayings
- b) Conclusion Session Seven: Final Remarks
  - i) Ground, Path, and Resultant Mahamudra
  - ii) View, Meditation, Conduct, and Result
  - iii) Advice
  - iv) Experiences and Realizations

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## I. Preliminaries

### **Preliminaries Session Five: Contemplation of Death and Impermanence**

Generally speaking, all conditioned phenomena are impermanent and, in particular, since the life-force of beings is as ephemeral as water bubbles, you never know when yours will be destroyed. It is not even certain that you will not die right now. When you die, nothing other than the dharma will be of any help. If you engage in futile worldliness and activities for just this life, you will not transcend the causes of suffering. Now, promise yourself that the moment your mind wanders to concerns about food, clothing, or similar things of this present life, you will remember death.... Meditate intently on this.

### **Preliminaries Session Six: Contemplation of Karma**

You should at all times examine your three doors. Take delight in whatever virtuous actions you have done, and put an end to unvirtuous actions or [karmically] unspecified [or neutral] ones. Without mixing up what is to be abandoned with what is to be adopted, what is to be undertaken with what is to be shunned, sever the stream of unvirtue and set in motion a continuous flow of virtue with your three doors. ... Therefore, train yourself with a subtle awareness of what is to be adopted or rejected in the context of the karmic process of causes and results.

### **Preliminaries Session Seven: Contemplation of the Deficiencies of Samsara**

Following that, if you do not contemplate the deficiencies of samsara, you will not develop revulsion for it and the determination to be released from it. Without those catalysts, [meditation] experiences and realizations will not arise in your mindstream, and you will lack the circumstances for them to arise. To prevent that, you must contemplate the sufferings of samsara.

### **Preliminaries Session Eight: Contemplation of the Opportunities of Human Life**

This precious human existence, which is the support for being able to practice [the dharma] in that way, is extremely difficult to acquire. Therefore, not succumbing to the lure of idleness and laziness, you should concentrate intently on [dharma] practice. What will you do if the pleasures and opportunities [of your human life] are lost to the demon of death and impermanence, and

you are left empty-handed? Since this human existence is so hard to obtain and so easily destroyed, exert yourself at all times and in every situation to make your attainment of its pleasures and opportunities meaningful.

## **2. Samatha**

### **Shamatha Session One: Essential Points for Body and Mind**

In general, although there are many methods for developing samadhi, if you know one [set of] essential points, hindrances and obstacles will not arise, your samatha and vipasyana will be flawless, and experiences and realization of innate wisdom will arise without exertion. Since the dharma can be taught by means of Vairocana's kaya, the method for effortlessly giving rise to the samadhis of the generation and perfection processes and to experiences of bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality is, for beginners, to rely upon the essential points of the physical posture.

By holding those essential points for the body, the movements of thoughts are self-purified and many excellent qualities, such as nonconceptuality, arise. Maintaining just those essential points for the body brings physical and mental tranquility. Do not be too tightly focused or too taut.

Begin by exhaling a small amount of stale breath. Then rest without putting any effort into exhaling or inhaling. Recall the preliminaries in a generalized way. Don't bring past activities to mind. Don't speculate about the future, thinking, "I will do this." or "I should do that." Relax in the ordinary mind of the present: unfabricated freshness. Leave it just as it is without adopting or rejecting anything. Your mind will become workable and samadhi will arise.

Since those essential points for the body and mind are the foundation stone for meditation, apply yourself to them. That was the first session.

### **Shamatha Session Five: Resting Without Support**

To focus without a support, look vacantly into the space in front. Do not use any reference point, and do not mentally contemplate anything. Simply be undistracted. Do not dwell on existence or nonexistence, the past or the future. With great perseverance, place the lookout of undistracted mindfulness, and remain at ease in buoyant, uncontrived freshness. Rest without being diverted for an instant, as if you were threading a needle. Do not waver: be like an ocean without waves. Do not make any effort: be like a garuda soaring in space. Leave aside your hopes and fears.

When you aren't distracted, thoughts won't arise. But if you are distracted, a thought will appear suddenly. As soon as that happens, recognize it, look nakedly at it, and settle your mind as before. No matter what thought arises, recognize it. And, without doing anything to it—trying to stop it or encourage it, enjoy it or not enjoy it—rest right within it. Look at it with your eye of

prajna. Use the thought itself as the support for concentrating your mind, and rest. Sustain [this meditation] without slipping into being too tight or too loose. That was the fifth session.

### **Shamatha Session Six: Three Levels of Resting**

If dullness or agitation arises, apply the [appropriate] method for dispelling them. If you are not able to initiate resting using the techniques [given above], you should use other objects suitable for meditation.

Through sustaining [meditation] in that way, [three levels of resting will develop]. On the first level of resting, you will have many coarse thoughts, which are like water falling from a mountain cliff. During the second level, your coarse thoughts will subside. At times, a thought may pop up suddenly, but you will notice it and immediately it will be self-pacified. Like a large river, meditation just continues flowing. Finally, both subtle and coarse thoughts subside, and there is a steady nonconceptual state. Within a state of bliss, clarity, and nonconceptuality, there will arise stillness that is quiet, serene, vivid, vibrant, crisp. Until such stillness develops, you must arouse exertion. Once it has developed, keep practicing without interruption. That was the sixth session.

## **3. Vipasyana**

### **Vipashyana Session One: Looking with Stillness**

Hold the essential points for the body as before. Your gaze is very important in this context. Without blinking, letting your eyes wander or flutter, look vacantly with bulging eyes into the center of the empty space directly in front. Remain quietly within flawless stillness, with your mind naturally settled in its own state, without contrivance, with no sense of ownership or fuss. Intensifying that slightly, arouse a flash of undistracted mindfulness, brilliant and sharp.

When your samatha is going well, look closely at the nature of your mind. Does it have a color, form, or shape? Does it arise, cease, or abide? Is it existent? Nonexistent? Does it reside externally or internally? Or is it something to be known apart from just that stillness? It may be an emptiness that cannot be identified as anything, a nothingness. Alternatively, it may be that, within stillness, the mental state that cannot be identified is vivid, crisp, stark, something you do not know how to describe. The nature of stillness may be a stupefied dark mental state. Or it may be clear, sharp, and naked.

This [approach] contains all the critical and key points related to the abiding state. And yet those with just a theoretical understanding, who have only heard [the instructions], and who use lofty dharma jargon have a mindstream bound by the eight worldly qualities that they [try to pass off] as fabulous experiences and realizations. Pretending something has arisen in their mindstream when it has not, they pull the wool over their own eyes and deceive themselves. If they are monastics, they have impaired their vows by lying about their attainments.



Therefore, [be rigorous] in your practice, [like] pulverizing bones with a rock. It is not something "out there" to be patched together by conceptuality. It must be genuine experiences and realizations arising within you, "right here," through the force of meditation. Tighten up your awareness and look. Then take a break. Again, look. Look at the nature of the still mind. In this context, the approach to settling [your mind] is to remain clear, lucid, and radiant, like the sun free from clouds. At times, energize your awareness, and strive to look at its nature.

### **Vipashyana Session Two: Looking with Movement**

The essential points for the body, the gaze, and conduct are the same as before. Within a blissful, clear, and nonconceptual state, vivid and relaxed, a fleeting thought may suddenly appear, or you should arouse a thought about something suitable. Look at the nature of that active mind. Look at when it is active. Look at where it is active. What is its color and shape? What are its origin, resting place, and destination like? Does it reside externally? Or is it internal, within the body? If it is internal, is it in the center of the heart? Or somewhere else?

Examine this by asking yourself: Wherever it is, outside or inside the body, how does mind rest and how is it active? Is mind an entity? Is it a nonentity? Does it arise? Cease? Have a color or shape? If so, what are those like? Is it "something" about which you think, "It does not have [such attributes]"? Or, even though there is nothing thought of as, "This is it," is there still something known that does not arise, cease, and so on?

When you look at thoughts, is it that all thoughts are empty, free from conceptual elaborations, without arising or ceasing? Or is it that having looked at a thought, it vanishes without a trace? Or is that all thoughts arise without being identified? If they arise without being identified, is there the thought, "There is nothing to identify," at that time or not?

Once a thought appears or you have caused one to appear, look at its nature without blocking it or grasping at it. When you have happy ones or sad ones, look at their nature. Create many thoughts, and look. When strong ones, such as those involving the five poisonous mental afflictions, arise or you create them, also look. Is there a difference between the thought itself, the object of the thought, and the immediately preceding thought or mind? Look to be certain that you cut your misinterpretations from within.

If you see the nature of thoughts as naked clarity-awareness, look: is there a difference between the naked clarity-awareness that you saw before while resting and the naked clarity-awareness that you see now with thoughts? If you are not certain, look carefully. Drawing a thought in and placing it in clarity-awareness is not [the way] to look. To see that a suddenly arising thought is of the same nature as the original, ordinary mind—which is not adulterated in any way—is it.

## **4. Conclusion**

## **The Three Strayings**

If you fixate on bliss, clarity, or nonconceptuality, you will stray into the three realms. Therefore, regardless of whether good or bad experiences arise, do not take [any of them] to be supreme.

## **Ground, Path, and Resultant Mahamudra**

In actuality, mind-itself is innately thusness or mahamudra—the only [distinction] is whether the twofold purity, primordially present, is realized or not. This innate quality is mahamudra at the time of the ground. Mind itself, from when you start to cultivate the path up through the tenth bhumi, is mahamudra at the time of the path. When you awaken from the sleep of ignorance and actualize the true nature, that is mahamudra at the time of the result.

## **View, Meditation, Conduct, and Result**

To be free from percepts and perceivers and see the true abiding state is the view. To meditate on that nature without distraction is the meditation. To be free of doing things and things to do and to sustain that during any one of the four types of conduct is the conduct. To have no hopes or fears—no fears of falling to the lower states of samsara or wishes to attain the elevated state of a buddha—and no sense of an object of meditation and a meditator is the result. Understand the meaning of the view, meditation, conduct, and result in that way, and arouse your diligence.

## **Advice**

Have the devotion of total trust in your guru and the revulsion that is free from any attachment to samsara and this life. Rely on undistracted mindfulness at all times. Be without needs and shorten your perspective. If the eight worldly values, thoughts of this life, or pretenses arise in your mind, crush them. Decisively cut your ties to this life. Until you have no sense of ownership about [or investment in] the development of your meditation, apply yourself to sustaining it continuously.

## **Experiences and Realizations**

Although there are many differences between experiences and realizations, [simply put, their differences are as follows]. If there is a meditator, your mind, and meditation—bliss, clarity, nonconceptuality, or emptiness as objects of meditation or objects of experience—that is experience. If the meditator and the meditation not being two [separate things] is directly realized—and is not simply an assumption—that is realization. Experiences and realizations must be distinguished. It is important to nurture [experiences or realizations] with constant effort within a state that neither fixates nor regards them as sublime.