

The Sadhana of Mahamudra:
Thoughts on the Practice at the 2016 Profound Treasury Retreat

We will be practicing *The Sadhana of Mahamudra* together twice at our retreat. Many of you have done this practice before, either at the Profound Treasury retreat, in a Shambhala center, or in another practice context. Or this practice might be completely new to you.

We can do this practice together in a very simple way, and just see what happens to us and to our environment when we do so. As much as possible, it would be good if we can do the practice without many expectations, just letting it wash over us and come out of us. Sometimes you might find the practice inspiring; sometimes it might feel hollow or empty. Sometimes it might seem electric, almost dangerous. Let's watch what happens. Let's be curious and see what comes up. You might find the sadhana outrageous, intimidating, strange, magnetizing or repelling. There's no particular right or wrong reaction and no particular goal that we have for this practice. Let it be a journey without goal.

Why are we including the practice of the sadhana in our retreat this year? We're trying to do more than just talk talk talk about vajrayana. We're trying to make a connection between ourselves and the world of tantra. By practicing the sadhana, we are sticking our toe into the vast ocean of vajrayana experience. In this way, we may provoke glimpses of vajrayana experience and mind. This practice is one way to draw closer to the mind of the teacher and to unlock the energy, devotion, and the power that are the vajrayana.

This practice was very special to Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche and a precious gift that he gave to his Western students. This was the first terma teaching that the Vidyadhara discovered or found after he left Tibet. The idea of terma is that it is not a personal composition. It is rather something that is found at the appropriate time, the time in which it can help people. Traditionally, terma is believed to be a teaching that was originally given by Guru Rinpoche and then hidden in the recesses of earth or mind, to be drawn out when the time is right and ripe by a teacher with the connection both to the original context of the teaching as well as the context of *now* in which the teaching emerges.

A sadhana is a structured practice that invokes particular energies and also embodies wisdom and compassion. All sadhanas begin with the taking of refuge and bodhisattva vows, so they rest on the foundation of hinayana and mahayana. Then, out of emptiness, the student visualizes a yidam, or a deity that represents the innate sanity and the power of the lineage as well as one's own basic being.

In *The Sadhana of Mahamudra*, the visualization of the yidam is a combination of Guru Rinpoche, who brought the Nyingma teachings to Tibet; and Karma Pakshi, who was the second Karmapa, the head of the Karma Kagyu lineage. (Guru Rinpoche is visualized in a wrathful manifestation here, as Dorje Trollo.) It's very unusual to combine two figures from different streams of teachings in this way. This was the unique vision of the Vidyadhara—seeing that the energies of these two great streams could be joined in this practice.

The Kagyu lineage here represents the power of devotion, the tremendous strength that love has to transform our world. Karma Pakshi also represents the realization and the energy of Mahamudra, the great symbol, the great embodiment of the energy and power of reality, of things as they are. The Nyingma Lineage is the lineage of vast space and realization, the lineage of profound, deep realization. Together, the combined Dorje Trollo-Karma Pakshi yidam is the embodiment of crazy wisdom, or the wisdom of compassion without boundaries.

There are several aspects of practicing the sadhana that you might find challenging or new to you. One is the practice of visualization altogether. Towards the very beginning of the sadhana, you chant: *My whole being is Dorje Trollo. And my form is Karma Pakshi.* So you are embodying, becoming, being Dorje Trollo and Karma Pakshi. Then a lengthy description follows: of the outer environment, or the charnel ground, in which the yidam arises; the pedestal or support on which he stands; the implements that he holds in his hands; and the quality of inner being—which is represented by the Karmapas in the three centers. What can we make of that? Well, for our purposes here, we don't have to make a lot. Again, the idea of a glimpse is important. You recite the liturgy aloud, and flashes or glimpses of what you're saying may arise. Sometimes you don't "see" anything, but you feel something in the atmosphere—you start to pick up on the energy in some way. Just let it be the way it is!

Another challenging aspect is working with wrathful energy: it's definitely all over the sadhana. It could be invigorating or frightening or both—what's that wrath about? Many people associate meditation and Buddhism purely with pacifying and peaceful energy. Of course, dharma is about overcoming our aggression. But as human beings, we also experience a range of intense emotions, and they are part of our being, not just neurotic expressions. How do we work with anger or wrath in a way that is not ego oriented? That could be a question or koan that we can hold in practicing *The Sadhana of Mahamudra*. We are letting ourselves be big, threatening, angry—within a protected space of practice. We aren't acting out our anger, but we are being these powerful energies. How can they work for the good? This is a question we can explore through the practice.

What about the mantra recitation? We have so many projections and mis-associations about mantra as some kind of soothing pacifier or bliss bringer. Mantra is actually about protecting the mind. What are we protecting it from? Hmmm or maybe we should say HUM HUM HUM! We can explore the experience of mantra when we practice the sadhana. Should something happen to our state of mind? Is the mantra inside or outside? What about the different parts of the recitation: aloud, subverbal and then formless meditation?

We will be doing the sadhana together, not as a solitary practice. We practice sitting meditation and tonglen together at the retreat, and now we are focusing some attention on the group practice of *The Sadhana of Mahamudra*. Although our experience, even in a group, is always individual and alone, we also are influenced by practicing together with others. In this situation, the group of practitioners works together without a discussion. How does it happen, for example, that the mantra gathers intensity, sustains itself and then subsides? There is a group leader, but we all feel when it's time for more emphasis on the mantra and when to let it fade.

In post-meditation, snippets of the liturgy may arise in one's mind. Sometimes they become things to chew on for months or years. "*I have been fool enough to think that I possess my own projections*" is one of those for me. What does that mean? I find it intriguing and I can't dismiss it. I also don't feel that I understand it, but again, I have glimpses.

Glimpse is an intriguing word, one that evokes the sudden vivid flashes we might have with this practice, both during the practice and in post-meditation. Maybe that can be the headline for our practice of the sadhana this year: Glimpses of Mahamudra.

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