



Mahamudra Practice
by
the 12th Chamgon Tai Situ Rinpoche

So far, I have been teaching about Mahamudra in a very general sort of way. You may call it an introduction or summary of Mahamudra. Now, I thought perhaps it will be beneficial for all of us to learn about Mahamudra practice, not just a general introduction but about practice. It will also be very much an introduction to, or a summary of, the practice. In principle, all the teachings of Buddha are for practice; all the teachings of Buddha only give us the final or complete result if we practice them. Without practice, of course, we get benefits. For example, knowing something is much better than not knowing, and knowing correctly is much better than knowing incorrectly. So this way, knowing dharma is very, very beneficial. Just associating with dharma is also very, very beneficial. Associating with good things is much better than associating with bad things, and associating with the right thing is much better than associating with the wrong things. So association with the dharma and understanding of the dharma is all beneficial, but we only achieve the total benefit if we practice.

The definition of practice is that our body, our speech and our mind has to be functioning according to the teaching of the dharma. We have to integrate the dharma into our physical, verbal and mental activity. So we think according to dharma, we speak according to dharma and we act according to dharma. If we manage to do that well then we are a mature practitioner. If we are not able to do that well then we are not a mature dharma practitioner, but we are trying. So in this way, at least, we have to try our best. We have to put effort into implementing the dharma that we learn, in our physical, verbal and mental activity. Then we get the benefit.

Out of this, the most important is mind, because mind is the most important essence. For example, we might physically do all the good things, never doing anything wrong, and verbally, we might say all the good things and never say anything wrong, but in our mind, we think of all the negative things. If we have a vested interest in our mind, for our positive physical and verbal activity, then it is no good. It is like eating very good food, on a very good plate, with lots of very good eating tools (eating weapons I call them), like chopsticks, spoons, knives, forks and all kind of things: no matter whether we eat with gold, silver, or diamonds, if the food is poison then we are going to die right after the meal is completed. It will be our last meal. So it will be like that if we have a negative motivation in our mind. Even if, externally, we act positively, it is like poisoned food. So in this way, the most important thing is mind.

Now, the practice of meditation is actually directly involving the mind. You can pray with mind and body together through your speech. You can pray, but still your mind can be negative. For example, we have so many kinds of wildlife here, and one of them is the parrot: the green bird that speaks human language if they are taught. You can teach this bird a very special and sacred mantra, like OM MANI PEME HUNG for example, and this bird will say OM MANI PEME HUNG. If there is a worm crawling in front of him, he may say OM MANI PEME HUNG, and then eat the worm: the worm is moving and gets chopped into pieces, and the bird enjoys it. Then the bird goes for another one. So, in that way, you can be verbally saying good things, but mentally you are totally disconnected with what you are saying. That can happen. But with mind it cannot happen, because if your mind is purely aware and purely dedicated, and engaged with the practice of dharma, for example, with a good motivation such as devotion and compassion, then that wouldn't happen. In this way the mind is the most important.

At the same time, according to the Mahamudra teaching, everything that we see, hear and interact with: nature and the universe, everything is the interdependent and interconnected manifestation of everything that has to do with our mind. So there is no difference between our mind and everything else. In essence, it is its reflection. Some reflections are very serious, so it's solid. Some reflections are not that serious, so they are not that solid. For example, some people like big hats, some people like small hats, some people like blue hats, some people like purple hats and most people like white hats. So there are different perceptions, you know? But some things are very, very, very serious, and very much in common with everybody else. In this way, the mind is the most important. It's like a king. It's like the heart or core of everything, and so practice with the mind is actually the most important.

Out of all the aspects of practice then, the most important is meditation, because without meditating one cannot attain buddhahood. It is impossible without meditating. This is because what has to be enlightened is our mind, and our mind has the perfect essence in it, as the embodiment of it, and we have to let it manifest. And how can it manifest if we don't let it manifest? So meditation is letting it manifest, and in this way, meditation is the most important aspect of practice.

In itself, Mahamudra practice has a tremendous amount of methods. At the same time, Mahamudra is about everything; so everything is Mahamudra, in principle. I can't say we have the method, but, in principle, if you are able to do anything correctly and ultimately then you will become Buddha, you will attain realisation of Mahamudra. I will give you a very, very simple example: we eat rice or bread every day, or we drink water or some form of liquid every day. So anybody who knows how to drink a glass of water 100% perfectly and ultimately, that person is Buddha. If we know or if we do anything perfectly, ultimately, then that is Mahamudra practice. However, we don't have the methods for all of those things so I

can't teach you. I can only talk about it, but I can't instruct you how to drink a glass of water properly, so that you become Buddha. We don't have that method, but it is our principle.

Our method, then, is those teachings that are transmitted by our masters, through the centuries, continued from master to disciple for over 2,500 years. These are the methods that we have. These methods were compiled by many of our great masters, and then it became a systematic, organised method that goes one after another, step by step. Out of all of them, as far as our lineage is concerned, the most complete, most sacred and most implemented text is *Mahamudra Ocean of Certainty*, by the Gyalwa Karmapa.

This text starts with the contemplation of precious human life and ends with the recognition of the nature of mind. It has teaching chapters and practice chapters: a total of ninety-eight (or you can say ninety-seven, because the last one is final, so that doesn't count). These ninety-seven chapters lead us from appreciating what we are: the precious human life, to the realisation of who we really are, what we really are, and what we have always been. They lead us to the recognition or the realisation of the nature of mind. So this is the most comprehensive text, as far as the Mahamudra practice is concerned, in our lineage.

In this teaching there are two categories: the first is known as the preliminary practice, and the second category is the main practice. Preliminary means preliminary for the main practice. For instance, if you put up a building, you have to prepare the ground, and you have to make the foundations. You can still put up a very big building if you don't do this, but it will not work, because you might not get to live in it. So the foundation is very important. The deeper or more profound the foundation then the more your practice will be effective later, and there will also be less obstacles, less confusion and so forth. So the foundation, or the preliminary practice, is first.

The preliminary practices that are taught in the *Mahamudra Ocean of Certainty* are twelve: the first four are the four contemplations, the second four are purification and accumulation practices, called the four foundations, and the last four are the four conditions; four conditions because in order for your dharma practice to go well and to progress smoothly, effectively and deeply, you have to have all the conditions for it. So those four are about the conditions. So twelve foundations: four and four and four.

After that, the actual practice involved is: first, *shinay* or *shamatha* [tranquillity meditation], and then *lhaktong* or *vipashyana* [insight meditation]. The reason for this is that first our mind has to be as pure as possible and as calm as possible. Pure and calm in a sense that it is not influenced by all the things that occur in day-to-day life: the things outside and inside ourselves. We shouldn't be affected by those things, not negatively at least. So, for that, *shinay* is the best method, because *shinay* is letting yourself be calm from inside, and not trying to make yourself calm from outside. If you have good *shinay* you can be in the middle of

a festival with singing, dancing, music, food, the smell of food, people, and all kinds of things can be happening around you, but you can still be calm. That can happen only from inside, not from outside.

To be calm from outside you have to isolate yourself. You have to go somewhere where nothing is happening, where there are no people, and there you can become externally calm. Then, inside, you can be alone on the whole planet but very much crowded inside. In that way, the means to make you externally calm does not help us in the long term; it does not help us deeply. I will give you some not very, how do you say, uplifting examples, some quite sad examples. Lots of people take alcohol, lots of people take drugs and lots and lots of people smoke to make themselves calm. However, that is external calm, and it doesn't help for that long, because you need more. First you smoke three cigarettes a day, then after that ten, then thirty and so on. Then you become a chain smoker, and you can get worse. If you take alcohol you can become an alcoholic. First you cannot go to sleep so you take a little before you go to bed. After that you have to increase it. Eventually, you have to take your drink right after you get up, and that's very bad; you are already an alcoholic. With drugs, first you take the lightest form of drugs, but then after that you need to take heavier drugs. You have to take drugs not only from smoking or eating, but you even have to inject them into your blood system, and that is bad. You are already doomed – almost. If you are very strong, physically and mentally, you can come off it, but it's very difficult. So, in this way, external means of calmness are not the solution. Internal means are the solution, and that means shamatha or shinay meditation.

So next is the lhaktong practice, then introducing the nature of mind, and then dealing with every aspect of the mental and emotional states which delude the mind. For example, when we are angry we are deluded in such a way that we see everything as ugly and everything as bad. When we are deluded by attachment we are so deluded that everything becomes totally shining and all of that sort of thing: romanticising about everything. When we are jealous, everybody's happiness becomes our suffering – what a terrible thing – and when we are proud everybody's suffering becomes our happiness – what a terrible thing. This is how the defilements delude us. They influence us and change everything.

The practice of Mahamudra, step by step, is dealing with each one of those: going to the heart of each one of those and transforming them one by one. This makes the *Mahamudra Ocean of Certainty* a complete practice instruction for Mahamudra.

The Four Contemplations

The first four preliminary practices are the four contemplations. I am not 100% sure in English language what is the difference between contemplation and meditation, but, by asking lots of

questions of English speaking individuals, I came to a conclusion for myself. Still, I am not 100% sure, because I am not a linguist, but contemplation means you have something to think about or to analyse. That is contemplation. But in meditation you are not analysing anything. You are visualising, or you are just sitting, or you are following a particular text, but you are not analysing anything or trying to confirm anything. That is meditation, and that's what I understood is the difference. So I am using this terminology as if that were true, but I am not sure. Anyway, the first four I call contemplations. In Tibetan we call them *chi gom*. It's a *gom*, or a meditation, but it's a *chi gom*: *chipa* means thinking or analysing. These first four are very important, because it is described as *lo duk*. *Lo duk* means your mind, your motivation, your perception, your wish or aspiration which is not towards worldly things but towards enlightenment. Sometimes practitioners may misunderstand this and think that it means we have to become, or we are becoming, anti-social, or that we are against samsara. We are not against samsara. We are absolutely for samsara, you know? We try to attain buddhahood for the benefit of everybody in samsara; so we are not against samsara. We are deciding to take the journey towards enlightenment, which is a journey with goal, instead of continuing to journey in samsara, which is a journey without goal. We go, again and again, in a circle.

So that is the definition of *lo duk*. We are not saying samsara is bad or terrible, and that we are against it. Definitely not. We are saying that samsara is samsara: it is going in a circle, and samsaric activity will not get anywhere. We will keep on doing the same thing, again and again, forever. Therefore we decide not to do that. Instead, we want to journey towards enlightenment, which is not going in a circle. So every single practice and every single activity will take us one step further. It can be a baby step, or it can be a magnum step; it can be an elephant step, or it can be a tortoise step, but it is a step towards enlightenment. So we decide to do that. For that reason, these first four contemplations are extremely important.

The first contemplation is "precious human life." Precious human life we all have, but if we don't know it then we can't appreciate it. If we can't appreciate it then it is as good as, or as bad as, if we didn't have it. One of the Gyalwa Karmapas says in a teaching – I think it is the first Karmapa, but I am not 100% sure – "If you want to see this side of the mountain clearly, go to the other side of the mountain." If you are here and you try to see what this really looks like, you cannot see it clearly. If you go over there and turn around this way then you will see this place very clearly. So we have the precious human life, but if we don't look at it, by putting ourself over there, we cannot see what we have, and then we cannot appreciate it. If we don't appreciate ourself then all the problems happen, you know? All of us, one way or another, have something to complain about, or maybe a couple of things to complain about. We have a couple of things to moan about and a couple of things to worry about, but if we are able to see ourself clearly, we will know how fortunate and meritorious we are. For example, I consider myself very, very, very fortunate, you know? But if I don't think about it then I have

ten thousand things to complain and worry about. Really! So, in this way, the contemplation on precious human life is extremely important. That's number one.

Once we are able to have that appreciation then death/impermanence is very important. If we don't have the understanding of death/impermanence then the understanding of precious human life doesn't really help. Death/impermanence we know very well. We don't have to use any special effort, and it doesn't take a genius to discover this. If we look around, who is one hundred years old here? Nobody. And the newborn of today will also not be here after one hundred years; that is almost guaranteed – almost. So in that way, we will not last very long. I came here for the first time twenty-five years ago, and even this project [the construction of Sherab Ling] is not finished. Three times that will be seventy-five years, and four of that will be one hundred years. It's nothing. Human life is so short; it's really nothing. So if we don't use this life meaningfully then we will lose this for sure. Therefore, after learning to appreciate our precious human life, our existence, we have to realise impermanence or death/impermanence.

After knowing death/impermanence, we have to understand karma or cause and condition. When we die it is not just like a candle ran out and the flame goes off; it's not like that. It's not like a glass dropped on the floor and broke; it's not like that either. We are here, and this is proof that we came from somewhere. Also, because we are here, this is the proof that we will go somewhere. How can we be here without coming from somewhere? Impossible. How can today exist without yesterday? How can today exist without tomorrow? So it is a very simple thing. This makes us aware that we are the result of our past, and our future will be the result of now. It will be. So karma, or cause and result, means that. If there is no karma then everybody will be equal. Everybody will look the same, sound the same and think the same. The state of education, state of power and state of economy will be precisely the same. As long as this is not so then it is the karma that makes everything so different.

I know all kinds of people: some people are very educated, and some people are uneducated; some people are rich, some are poor; some are healthy, and some are unhealthy. There are so many variations. I know people who are healthy, rich and powerful but very unhappy. I also know people who are poor, with bad health; they are sick and have no power, but they are very happy, and vice versa also. So many different things, why? Because each and every one has their own cause and condition: that's karma. Also, there's another proof for that, which is that when you become Buddha, you are above and beyond karma. Therefore all the Buddhas are equal. When you become Buddha and are beyond karma, you are liberated and purified of all karma: cause, conditions, everything. So all the Buddhas are equal. Until then nobody's going to be equal, 100%. Of course, equal opportunities and equal rights are one thing, but exercising the equal opportunity and equal rights is another thing, and achieving the equal opportunity and the equal rights is absolutely a different thing. So that is karma. We have to

know that after we die it's not just finished. It is the same thing. It continues. Therefore, when we live we have to live, but we also have to appreciate our life. We have to use each moment as positively as possible, as meaningfully as possible. So that is the third contemplation.

The last contemplation is the suffering of samsara. After knowing the first three, the suffering of samsara is a very important thing to understand. If we don't understand that then we might be a very virtuous person, a very religious person, but we still end up in samsara. How? If we don't understand the suffering of samsara then we may say "Oh, I better not lie." Why? "Because in my future life nobody is going to believe me, even if I tell the truth, or I might be born as somebody who cannot speak." So for that purpose you speak the truth. Then we want to be generous and don't want to steal anything, because of the fear that in the next life we will become poor: that we will have nothing, if we steal in this life. Of course, those kinds of attitudes are good. You don't want to be sick next life, so in this life you don't cause any injury to anybody. You don't want to be poor in the next life, so this life you don't steal anything. In the next life you want to be respected by everybody for what you say, so in this life you don't tell lies. These things are very good, but that's still samsaric dharma: not for enlightenment, not for buddhahood. Therefore, one has to understand the shortcomings of samsara.

In this way, the four contemplations: precious human life, death/impermanence, karma, or cause and result and the suffering of samsara, all of these four contemplations, have their own very, very important reason for that step. Those four stages have to be practiced as they are. Okay.

Purification & Accumulation

Now the second foundation, which is known as the four foundations, is actually a practice which includes meditation, recitation and also physical practice. This begins with the refuge and prostration practice, then Vajrasattva visualisation and recitation practice, and after that the mandala offering and guru yoga. In principle, all of the practice of dharma is, in one way or another, a form of purification and accumulation. Purification, I think, is the correct terminology, but accumulation I have some problem with, because it also really means that what is negative has to be purified, but what is positive has to be accumulated or developed. So maybe this terminology of accumulation is not 100% correct, but let's use it as a working terminology. Purification and accumulation, in essence, are actually the same thing. You cannot say that this is purification only, and that is accumulation only. For example, if you have dirty clothes, they are dirty clean clothes. It has to be, because the clothes have to be clean first, so that when you wash out the dirt, they can become clean again. They were clean, and then something happened so that they became dirty: paint or dust or whatever. When you wash the clothes to make them clean again, what you are doing is purifying or cleaning the dirt, and accumulating, developing or revealing the cleanness which is there when it is still

dirty. So that's exactly how dharma practice is: we are Buddha in our essence.

This is very interesting, because lots of people say "I want to become Buddhist," or "I am not Buddhist," or "I am Buddhist but they are not Buddhist." Well, officially and intentionally, whether you say you are Buddhist or not is one thing, but in essence everybody is Buddha. So actually, everybody is more than Buddhist: everybody is the embodiment of Buddha. Anyway, that is what is clean or what is perfect. Through our countless lifetimes of wrong doings or right doings and all of those things, we became obscured, so now we do not look like a Buddha, we do not sound like a Buddha, we do not think like a Buddha, and we definitely do not manifest like a Buddha. That is what we have to purify. When we say "purification" then as we are purifying the pureness has to be revealed. There's no such thing as just purifying without the pureness being revealed. It's not two efforts; it is one effort. We clean then cleanness appears. So purification and accumulation are the same thing, but these particular practices of the foundations are divided into two, with the first two being purification oriented practice, and the second two, accumulation oriented practice.

The descriptions of Vajrayana teaching are so many, but one of them is that there are plenty of methods; never short of methods. In this way, all of these practices, such as the four foundations, are part of this variety, and these varieties are for a specific purpose. The first two are purification, so prostration practice comes first and Vajrasattva practice comes second, and the reason is very, very clear: prostration is first as a physically oriented practice, and Vajrasattva is second as a mental and, specifically, verbally oriented practice. You have to recite the Vajrasattva mantra, and then you have to visualise the purification. Now, with prostrations, you have to recite the text, and you have to visualise, but, at the same time, the main part of the effort here is the physical prostration. So, when you are prostrating, you know you are prostrating. It's not unnoticeable, you know. When you are doing Vajrasattva it can be unnoticed by you: whether you are reciting or not, or whether you are visualising or not. But when you do the prostrations, you will never have that problem. However, for a meditator or practitioner to sit down for hours and say mantras is very difficult, definitely for beginners. Of course, even for seasoned practitioners this can be a problem, because if you are doing well then you will fall asleep, you know? If you fall asleep as soon as you do the meditation and prayer that means you are doing well. You are able to relax; your practice doesn't cause you stress, and that's a very good sign. If it happens that after you do the practice you cannot sleep, and even at night you have problems sleeping, then you have a problem with your practice, because you are not doing it right. You're not able to relax; you're not able to calm down, and the practice causes you stress. That is not right. Something is wrong. So although falling asleep is a good sign, it is also an enormous obstacle. However, Vajrayana methods are such that when you are doing prostrations it's very difficult to fall asleep [laughter]. In that way it is very good practice for the beginner; it is a very good practice for someone who starts.

Now what are we purifying? We are purifying our body, we are purifying our speech and we are purifying our mind. So, with the body, what are we purifying? This body is nothing more and nothing less than the fruit of our karma; this is what it is. All of our karma is physically manifest as however we manifest physically. Of course there is much more, but physically. Second is our speech. Our speech is expression; we communicate through our speech. Some people communicate with themselves through their speech, but most of us speak to other people. It is communication and expression of ourself, and that is actually the translation of our karmic cause and conditions, all translated and communicated through our speech. So that is karmic fruit as well. Next is our mind. Of course, when we say mind (we have so many Buddhist scholars and masters here so I have to be very careful), mind has so many levels. So here, when I say mind I mean the dualistic aspect of our mind. We call ourselves "I" and everybody else "others," so this is the kind of mind I am talking about. This mind is the fruit of our karma as well. We think in a certain way, certain things affect us in a certain way, and we react to certain things in a certain way. All of this is the result of our karma. So when we say purify then there has got to be something pure in there, otherwise you cannot purify. For example, you cannot purify a bowl of ink. It's impossible. No matter how much you wash it, it's still black. It still comes out as ink. You wash, wash, wash, and you are finished with it. There's nothing in there that you can clean, because it's all ink, but if it is a diamond that is covered with dirt then you can purify it, or you can clean it. When you clean it, the dirt is gone, and the cleanness inside is revealed. So, like the clean clothes that became dirty, if you wash them then the cleanness is revealed. In that way, when we say purification, there has got to be something pure in there, and that is our mind: the essence of our mind. So we purify all of the temporary defilements, all of the temporary outcomes of our defilements, and all of the habits that are created through the defilements. These things are what we purify. Now, the essence of our mind is incorruptible. It can never be contaminated by anything, so it is always pure. Therefore the purification terminology becomes justified.

Prostrations are physical purification. I wouldn't say it is hard practice, physically, because when you look at the workers at the construction sites or in a coal mine then that is hard work. But, with prostrations, you are in a nice room, you have a clean floor and you are appropriately dressed. You have a little pad for your knees, a little pad for your hands, and you have a beautiful Buddha image up there. You sit quietly and meditate first, and then do your prostrations and counting, one by one. That's not such hard work. Out of all the other practices that is, how do you say, the most noticeable physical activity. In this way, it is physically oriented purification practice, but it also involves visualisation, which is mind, and recitation, which is speech. So that's first. In the tradition of our lineage we do 110,000 prostrations. 10,000 is to make up for any mistakes we make in the counting. When you do something good and set a certain number, less is not good, but more is no problem. So to make sure we do 100,000 prostrations we add 10,000.

After completing the prostration practice, next we do the Dorje Sempa practice, or in Sanskrit (which I am not very good at because I did not study) it will be something like Vajrasattva. Tibetans will pronounce it *Benza Sato*, so the Dorje Sempa or *Benza Sato* recitation. This recitation involves visualisation of a particular deity, and that's a very important part of it.

Buddha is two things: there is the historical Buddha of our time, Buddha Shakyamuni, and the lineage of dharma comes from him. Another Buddha is all the Buddhas: not just Prince Siddhartha but all the Buddhas. Earlier I said that all the Buddhas are equal, because they are above and beyond anything that is dualistic, which includes karma. The Buddha that represents that, the Buddha which represents all aspects of Buddha, is Buddha Vajradhara. Then we have the five Buddha families, and the king of all five Buddha families is represented by Buddha Vajrasattva or Dorje Sempa. We recite the hundred-syllable mantra of Dorje Sempa and visualise the purification, and in this way we purify all aspects of our karmic conditions, and the causes of all the karmic conditions: the defilements themselves. The five Buddha families represent the transformed aspects of the five defilements, and Dorje Sempa represents all of it. In this way, it is the highest kind of purification deity (if you like, you can call it a deity). Then we say the purification mantra of that deity 110,000 times. As you see very clearly, prostrations are physically oriented purification, and Dorje Sempa is verbally oriented purification, and both go with the mind, because both physically and verbally oriented purification practices involve your mind. Mind is the key, of course. With these two practices the purification oriented practices are complete. Then we start the accumulation oriented practice.

When we say accumulate, as I mentioned earlier, it means when we are accumulating merit and when we are accumulating wisdom. Merit is necessary, because wisdom can only be contained if we have merit. Wisdom cannot be contained if we don't have merit. I will give you a very stupid example: not a wise one, not a divine one and not a spiritual one but a worldly one. So, everybody knows that everyone wants to be rich – not everyone but most people. Rich means you have a lot of money, but even for that one has to have merit. If a person who does not have much merit is given a big amount of money, what will that person do? That person will not be able to handle it. Instead, that person will get into so much trouble, and that money will destroy them, but if that person has merit then they are able to use it and enjoy it; they are able to do good things with it. In this way, even for worldly things we need merit, and for spiritual things, of course. So we cannot contain wisdom if we don't have merit. In order to develop wisdom we need merit, and for that we practise the accumulation of merit. Merit accumulation means doing good things: physically, mentally and verbally good things, beneficial things that are meritorious. Accumulation means you do lots of good things or lots of positive things, so that after some time it becomes natural for you to do good things. When it becomes un-natural for you to do bad things, that is a sign of merit. When it becomes easier for you to do positive, helpful and good things, rather than to be negative and harmful and all

of that, then that means you have developed some merit.

These days I have sensed (but I could be wrong) that many people think, when somebody is doing something not so good, they will say "Oh, its human nature." It is a widespread popular concept that it is easier to do bad things than good things. It is kind of a natural concept. That's what many people experience, which means a time of degeneration, or that we are not so meritorious, if that is the case.

Through doing good things we accumulate merit, so here, in the practice of mandala offering, the means of accumulating merit that we are using, or are taught, is the offering of the universe. Giving to the poor, disadvantaged or needy, offering to Buddha or bodhisattvas, or for a good cause are all giving. Here we are following the path of devotion to all the Buddhas, bodhisattvas and deities, and we are offering the universe. Of course our real offering here represents one solar system: the sun, the moon and the continent etc., but then that is followed by an aspiration of the whole universe.

The Buddha taught that our solar system is part of a "third thousand" universe system. That means 1000 x 1000 x 1000, or one billion solar systems functioning together, and we are part of it. So we are envisioning the offering of all of the universe. Of course Buddha also says that this third thousand universe system is just like one grain of sand in the river Ganges, and that there are countless third thousand universes in endless space. They cannot be counted. When we are offering this, we are offering the whole universe represented by one solar system each time. If we believe in it, and if we mean it then we are really offering the whole universe. The whole universe belongs to us, because the whole universe is the manifestation of our karma. The universe, as we perceive it, is the manifestation of our own karma, and so it belongs to us; we belong to it; we are part of it. In this way, we are truly offering one solar system representing the whole universe each time we make one mandala offering. One mandala offering, once you are really practicing it, takes maybe twenty or thirty seconds. So each twenty or thirty seconds you are offering one whole solar system representing all the universe. That can, and will, be meritorious. Giving one apple to a beggar is meritorious; donating money to a good charitable organisation is meritorious; helping somebody sick is meritorious, but offering the whole universe has to be meritorious, because it will be so much of what we consider meritorious. In this way, it is a tremendous Vajrayana sacred method, that really gives the opportunity for everybody, rich or poor, fortunate or unfortunate. Anybody can afford to do the mandala offering. Of course, if we don't believe in it then that's another thing, but if you truly, truly mean to offer the whole universe each time then it is meritorious. If you just follow the ritual and are not really feeling it or believing in it then it will be meritorious, but that's not exactly what it's meant for. So that is one thing. Another thing is that when we are doing some small things, we can be quite non-dualistic about it, but when we are doing a little bit bigger things then we are very dualistic about it, and we hold onto it. For example, when

you give five rupees to a beggar, you will not think about it, and you will be quite non-dualistic about it, but if you do a little bit more than that, it comes into your mind, and you will think of it for several days "Oh my goodness, I gave such and such to that fellow, and I'm a good person": that sort of self gratification. In the same way, if we offer something to a Buddha image or something then whenever we see the Buddha, we will also remember what we have done before. Here we are offering such an enormous amount, but it doesn't even occur to us that we have done it. Of course, for most of us, that may happen because we don't believe that we are offering a universe [laughter]. We think that we are just offering a few grains of rice on a plate, you know? So that's why. However, if we really mean it, it's a tremendous way of accumulating merit. We practice this 110,000 times, and after that we do the guru yoga.

The guru yoga is the accumulation of wisdom. Wisdom, of course, many of you know, and I think I also mentioned something about it earlier, but I will try to make it more clear. Here, wisdom actually means the awakening of primordial wisdom. It's the same thing as purification: we have wisdom; we are all Buddha in our essence right now; we all have primordial wisdom right now, but that primordial wisdom has to manifest. That primordial wisdom has to shine forth. So, for that, we do the guru yoga.

Terminology wise, guru yoga means the practice of the guru. But really, the meaning of guru yoga is that from Buddha until now, for over 2500 years of the lineage, the transmission has taken place from the guru, or master, to the disciple. In that way, the living blessing, the living presence of Buddha's primordial wisdom, has continued, so that we can receive it. Then our primordial wisdom can start to manifest. It is like if you have a seed: you put water on it, and it slowly starts to grow. So that is what blessing is; that is what guru yoga is.

As an example, you know that I am a guru, or everybody thinks that I am a guru. That's fine, but when I talked about guru yoga I used to feel a little bit paranoid. It sounded like I was telling others how important I am, and how everybody should worship me, you know? That kind of fear was there, sometime back. But that happened because I really didn't understand 100% (then I would be Buddha). I didn't understand then as much as I understand now about what guru yoga and guru devotion are, and what all of these things mean. So there's no reason for me to get paranoid, because it is the blessing of the lineage. It is not my blessing, alright? It is the blessing of the lineage. If it is my blessing that I have to give you then you would have to wait for quite some time [laughter]. If I said that I am very ambitious, maybe one hundred lifetimes, because if I improve by 1% each lifetime, I will be Buddha after one hundred lifetimes, and so then you will have a blessing: you will have my blessing, you know. But it is not like that. It is the blessing of the Buddha that you are getting through the guru. It is like this light: the bulb is not giving the light, the wire is not giving the light and the switch is not giving the light, but the powerhouse which gives the current is way over there. You don't see it, and you don't hear it, but it's over there. So it is the Buddha's enlightenment, which is

ever present, beyond time or any limitation, that continues through the gurus of the lineage, but it can only continue if the samaya is not broken. If the wire is broken the light won't come. The powerhouse can be a very big one, but the light won't be here. Also, if the bulb is burned, no light will come. Similarly, if the lineage is not broken somewhere, because of the broken samaya, then the blessing continues from Buddha to the guru, and from the guru to the disciple. So that's how it works. It's very clear, I think.

Now, the Mahamudra lineage guru yoga of the four foundations is such that you receive *abhisheka* or empowerment. You receive the body empowerment, speech empowerment and mind empowerment, in the form of absorption of the mandala of the refuge: the mandala of the guru, deity, Buddha, dharma, sangha and protector. From this mandala you are receiving the blessing, you are receiving the *abhisheka*. In this way, we do the first two practices as the purification, then we accumulate merit so that we can contain the wisdom, and then we receive the *abhisheka*. We do the guru yoga so that we receive the transmission of the blessing of the Buddha, the blessing of the lineage. So that is how the four foundation practices are taught: with that particular purpose.

Many times I have met with individuals who say that they have done this practice and that practice, but they haven't done that one or that one. Sometimes it appears that people did mandala offering but not Vajrasattva and not prostrations. Sometimes they did the Vajrasattva first and prostration second, because it was more convenient or less convenient, and so on like that. Nothing's wrong with that, of course, but that is not really how it should be done. First should be prostrations then Dorje Sempa, mandala offering and then guru yoga. Then it is in order. Otherwise, it is little bit like eating dessert first, and then you eat the main course. Nothing wrong with that – it won't explode – but that's not the purpose of each thing. For each thing the purpose has to be served.

Now one last thing: with many new practitioners there is a sense of a little bit of a complex, or a feeling, about doing foundation practice. It sounds like the person is somewhat immature and something like at kindergarten or a beginner somewhere. They think that foundation practice is almost like a punishment, or a test for the practitioner, as to whether you can really make it or not. This is really wrong, because each one of these practices, if you do it as a main practice, can lead you all the way to enlightenment. So if you just do prostrations as your main practice, it can lead you to buddhahood. If you do Dorje Sempa only, it can lead you to buddhahood. Each one is a complete practice in itself. So that is briefly about *ngondro* or preliminary practice, and with all the general things about Mahamudra, I think these are now somewhat addressed.

Meditation

Then, in Mahamudra practice, after the *ngondro*, shinay meditation is taught. Shinay is extremely important, because it is allowing us to rest, in peace, so that our true essence can manifest and function. When you practice shinay, the sign of whether your shinay is doing well or not is very simple: if your defilements become less then it is a good sign that your shinay is going well. It is due to our ignorance that we develop dualistic perception, and through that we reinforce our defilements. As long as there is "I" and "other," there will be attachment, anger, jealousy and pride: naturally. You cannot have "I" and "other," these dualistic concepts, without having attachment, jealousy, anger, ignorance, pride and all these things. It's impossible. As long as there is "I" there will be some choice: "I like this very much; I like this quite okay, but this I definitely don't like," you know? So if there is something that I don't like (this happens to me a lot) then I will be angry. If there is something that I like very much, and if somebody else has achieved that, but I don't, then I will be jealous. If I achieve what I like very quickly, but others have to work very hard, then I will be proud. I will think, "I must be good. I must be better than everybody else." So these things are a production of one another. Shinay practice is to overcome the influence of those defilements, by overcoming the hindrances of thoughts, perceptions and those things. So then we become calm, and our true clearness is somehow allowed to function. That's shinay.

Lhaktong is clarity. Calmness is one thing, but clarity is another thing. So, calm but clear. When I see some person who has drunk lots of whiskey and is just lying there looking very calm, not doing anything and not saying anything, that is not clear. Definitely not [laughter]. So shinay is the calmness, but lhaktong is clarity. The calmness that one achieves through shinay is maintained with awareness, and that is lhaktong. There are a tremendous number of methods in that.

After good shinay and good lhaktong, the union of shinay and lhaktong is addressed. If we don't have the unity of shinay and lhaktong, we might be very a good practitioner in the shrine, and a very good practitioner on the meditation cushion, but as soon as we are off the cushion and out of the shrine, we will be just like everybody else (when I say everybody else, I am presuming that everybody is not Buddha yet). So in order to have true maturity, and maintain the state of mind which we achieved through good shinay and lhaktong, then the unity of shinay and lhaktong is emphasised.

Once we are able to develop a good state of meditation there, then introduction to the nature of mind is addressed. Introduction to the nature of mind is something that happens as the result of our own inner progress, our own awakening of primordial wisdom. It cannot be done just because we want it to happen. It cannot be done by force or wanting. It can only happen when it happens. Once we have good shinay, and we are calm and stable, then we try to generate pure devotion: devotion to the Buddhas, the bodhisattvas, the lineage of the masters of Mahamudra and our guru. In this way the most sincere, pure, state of mind manifests, as

result of our pure devotion. Once that is achieved, we maintain the awareness of that pure devotion. That is one way to have a glimpse of the nature of mind.

Another way is to generate compassion for all sentient beings. All sentient beings are suffering in samsara, and all sentient beings are our mother sentient beings. They are suffering, and we have sincere and pure compassion towards them all. Once we generate that then we do the same thing: we maintain the awareness of that compassion, that pure compassionate state of mind, and that way we have the chance to have glimpses of the nature of mind.

But of course, both of these are not 100% pure and naked recognition of the nature of mind, because both of them are tainted by devotion and compassion. For us, we don't have any choice. It has to be that way, to begin with. It is like somebody who has hepatitis: they look at a conch shell which is white, and they will see it as yellow. They can't help it because they have hepatitis, but the good thing is that they see a conch shell which is whiter than everything else. Everything is yellow, but out of that, the conch shell is more white. It is not the real conch shell that they see, but still they see it. So as long as we are dualistic, we cannot force ourselves to be non-dualistic; it is impossible. Therefore, as long as we are dualistic, we have to go through such methods as devotion and compassion. Through that we recognise the nature of mind. Then, as the practice progresses, we will be able to truly realise the nature of mind, which is not influenced by any dualistic perception whatsoever. Those are the particulars of the step by step practice of Mahamudra.

As you develop, there are four stages of Mahamudra progress. The first is one-pointedness, the second is simplicity, the third is one-taste and the fourth is non-meditation. Each one of them has three steps, so altogether there are twelve stages of Mahamudra progress, or Mahamudra realisation. For example, when you reach the third step of the fourth level of maturity, that is known as one-taste. It means "mind and matter," and there is very little duality. As a result of that, a practitioner may manifest miracles.

When I go to the west, people somehow try to pretend that they are not interested in miracles. I don't believe it; it's not true. They say that because they are interested. Then of course, when I am in the east everybody is thrilled by miracles. So anyway, why do miracles happen? What is the difference between miracles and magic? Magic is a dualistic outcome, whereas miracles are the manifestation of non-dualism. Milarepa could fly in the sky, just like birds. Why? Not because he learned how to fly, but because, for him, walking on the ground or flying in the sky is the same thing. There is no difference. That's why he can fly.

One time Milarepa was with one of his disciples, and there was a big storm coming. Milarepa disappeared, and so the disciple was in big trouble. Then he heard his master sing a song; so he was looking around in the pouring rain and storm, but he couldn't find him. Finally he

listened to where the sound came from, and he saw a horn on the ground: the horn of a dead animal. So he went there, and heard his masters voice coming from the horn. He looked inside, and Milarepa was inside the horn, but Milarepa hadn't become smaller. Then the disciple looked outside, and the horn had not got bigger. So, I think he was a little bit puzzled, and then Milarepa said "If you are as good as me then come inside" [laughter]. So that is another one of his miracles, but it doesn't mean Milarepa knows only those two things.

A miracle, by definition, is not playing tricks or playing games, but it means that one has reached the state of realisation where mind and matter are non-dual. From that state, the great masters, like Milarepa, can manifest miracles. We may say perform miracles, but I think that's very misleading. Anyway, that is one example of the particular steps of Mahamudra practice. Then comes the twelfth stage, and beyond that is the realisation of Mahamudra. That's the realisation of buddhahood, which is absolute freedom and liberation, with no limitation whatsoever, for the sake of all sentient beings: for their liberation and realisation, without any limitation. So that is the final part of the Mahamudra teaching and practice. Now I am saying all of this and teaching this according to the *Mahamudra Ocean of Certainty*. That is how *Mahamudra Ocean of Certainty* is introduced by the Gyalwa Karmapa.

A final thing for our Mahamudra teaching here that I would like to share with you, is a few words which have been very, very beneficial for me. I am not a great practitioner – I think everybody knows that – and I am not a Buddha for sure, you know. Very, very far away from it, but I have received lots of blessing from many, many great masters, especially my Vajradhara, His Holiness the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa. Through their blessings I received a tremendous amount of transmission, and, as a result, I think I have some blessing in me from them, which is still alive and functioning. As a practitioner, or as a trying practitioner, of Mahamudra, the particular terminology or the particular words written by the 3rd Gyalwa Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, in his *Mahamudra Prayer*, have been a tremendous help for me, to say the least. So therefore I would like to share some of these verses with you.

The first is about shinay. There are four sentences that Gyalwa Karmapa writes about shinay. He says:

*Let the waves of subtle and coarse thoughts subside into
their own place
And the waters of mind, without movement come
spontaneously to rest,
Free from the contaminations of discursiveness and sloth,
May I establish a still ocean of shamatha*

He gives the example of mind as an ocean, and a stable calm ocean as a calm mind. So it tells us, very clearly, that the biggest obstacle to shinay is thoughts. Thoughts are caused by emotions, and they are caused by defilements, of course, and vice versa.

Now, he did not say that we should stop thinking, but he said subside: the waves subside in the ocean. That's very important. Lots of the time, people think that when you meditate, especially in shinay meditation, you should not be thinking. That is very strange actually, because everybody has thoughts, but when you say "I should stop thinking" then that thought, which you create purposely, has to be stronger than the thought that is already there naturally. So you are not overcoming thought, you are actually creating more thoughts.

How to remedy this is very simple: don't try to recollect the past; don't try to generate thoughts of the future; just let things come and let things go. Everything is perfect as it is, if we don't do anything. So if we just sit there quietly, and decide not to have anything to do with planning and all of these things for this one hour of our meditation, then, first there will be lots of thought, but if we don't do anything then it will be less and less, and we will have a quite calm state of mind. Of course, we will not have a totally thoughtless mind. A thoughtless mind is impossible. If we have a thoughtless mind we will not even notice it. So if anybody says "I have a thoughtless mind" then that is already a thought [laughter]. So noticing, itself, is a thought. Next the Gyalwa Karmapa writes about lhaktong, and here he says:

*Looking again and again at the mind which cannot be
looked at,
Seeing vividly, just as it is, the meaning which cannot be seen,
May the 'yes' and "no" of doubt be cut
And the genuine self-nature understood.*

This is about lhaktong. Once we have a good state of shinay then, not looking for anything, not looking at anything, just maintain the awareness of that state of calmness. Just maintain the awareness. Just maintain it, and maintain it with awareness. That is lhaktong; that we can comprehend. Of course lhaktong has many levels.

Now the Karmapa's words about compassion. He says:

*The nature of all beings is buddha;
Not realizing that, we wander in endless samsara.
For the boundless suffering of sentient beings
May unbearable compassion be conceived in my being.*

So the purpose and definition of compassion are very clearly stated here. True compassion is

really true respect for all sentient beings. When you see somebody doing terrible things and suffering terrible consequences, you are not feeling compassionate towards that person just out of pity, but that person is Buddha, and so they do not deserve to suffer; they do not have to do all of that, and that is not what they want to do. Even the worst person, the most evil being, definitely doesn't want to be evil. It's guaranteed. So therefore, once you know all of that clearly, then what you feel for that person is compassion. That's called compassion. Unbearable compassion does not mean you have to become desperate, and will do all sorts of things, you know? That's not correct. If you do all sorts of things because you have unbearable compassion, desperately, then you might make things worse, and that's not what it means. It means that you will do everything that you can to awaken your buddha essence, so that you will be able to awaken each one of those sentient being's buddha essence.

One of my very good friends asked me a very interesting question. I was talking about enlightenment, and this person asked me "What is the benefit of enlightenment? What is the benefit of becoming Buddha? What it will do for society?" That person is a very hard working and very good person: interested in helping people. Not only interested, but doing lots of things for people. Then I said (and I really mean this), "It will do exactly what Buddha Shakyamuni did for all of us. If I become Buddha, it will bring benefit to all sentient beings, just as Buddha Shakyamuni brings benefit to all of us. If you become Buddha, it will bring benefit to all sentient beings, just as Buddha Shakyamuni brings benefits to all of us. That's how it will benefit." So unbearable compassion means this.

Then, the unity of compassion and emptiness is extremely important. For that Gyalwa Karmapa wrote four sentences. He said:

*Although such compassion be skilful and unceasing,
In the moment of compassion, may the truth of its
essential emptiness be nakedly clear.
This unity is the supreme unerring path;
Inseparable from it, may I meditate day and night*

So the Gyalwa Karmapa describes the unity of compassion and emptiness this way. Now, what does this mean? When we practice compassion for all sentient beings, we don't get dualistic about it. We are as non-dualistic as possible. We know that all sentient beings are not suffering ultimately, and all sentient beings are not ignorant ultimately. All sentient beings are suffering relatively, and all sentient beings are ignorant relatively. So it is emptiness: it's all interdependent. All sentient beings appear to be ignorant and suffering because of all of the karma, and that is because of the ignorance, and that is because of... and so on and so forth. So everything is interdependent. Nothing is independent; nothing is ultimate. Therefore, as you generate your compassion, the non-attachment or non-grasping in your compassion is

constant. Then your compassion will never go wrong. Otherwise your compassion might turn into "idiot compassion." That means having compassion for one person, because somebody is causing that person suffering, and so you hate that other person. That is idiot compassion, you know? You help one to hurt another, or you hurt one to help another. That's back to square one. That's nothing more or nothing less than going around in samsara. There is a very old Tibetan saying: "Kill the fish and feed the dog" [laughter]. So that is idiot compassion, you know? We should be able to have impartial compassion, limitless compassion, for the benefit of all sentient beings. That will happen with the unity, or the union of, compassion and emptiness.

There is one last verse from the Gyalwa Karmapa that I would like to share with you. He says:

*Self-appearance, which never existed, has confused itself
into projections;
Spontaneous intelligence, because of ignorance, has confused
itself into a self;
By the power of dualistic fixation one wanders in the realm
of existence –
May ignorance and confusion be resolved.*

This means that all the objects, those we like and those we hate, all of them, are our own our own karmic manifestation. If we don't have this particular "eye," we will not see this particular colour and this particular shape. If we don't have this particular "body," we cannot touch and feel these particular things. If we don't have this particular "ear," we cannot hear these particular sounds. We might have the same mind, and we can be equally neurotic, but that wouldn't have anything to do with this; that's something else. In this way, everything is our own manifestation. So, constantly mistaken as an object, the seed of dualism is planted – constantly. When we call ourselves "I" – like I notice I am here; you notice you are there; you notice how you feel; you notice what you want – that is constantly recognising yourself, but that is mistaken as "I." In that way the dualism is further established, so that object and subject are maintained, and the outcome of that is samsara. Gyalwa Karmapa says "May I recognise everything as my own manifestation, and may I recognise 'I' as the non-dualistic recognition of my essence, and may that transformation take place." So these words are a tremendous blessing for me. It helped me so much, and I hope it will do the same thing for you. Okay.

Dedication

One last thing (I always like to say this, and I really mean it): in our lineage there is the saying that “Just like the Garudas, and just like the snow lion, the offspring is better than the parents.” So in that way, I sincerely pray that you, as the offspring of Mahamudra lineage, all attain buddhahood before I do, and then I will have the privilege to be your first disciple. I sincerely pray and dedicate for that, okay? Alright.

All contents © Tai Situ Rinpoche.

For further teachings by Chamgon Kenting Tai Situpa visit:

<http://www.greatliberation.org/shop>