

A BRIEF EXPOSITION OF MAHAMUDRA

BY

MAITRIPA

THE TEXT

Making salutation in the state of infinite satisfaction, I will tell you about the great openness (Phyag-rGya Chen-Po).

Everything that is at all possible is just one's own mind – looking for truth in externals is the working of the confused intellect. All appearances are essentially empty as in a dream. And mind also is just the movement of memory and ideas. Without inherent self-existence it is like the energy of the wind and being empty in essence it is like the sky. Everything that is possible abides in evenness like the sky – thus do I express the great openness.

One's own essence cannot be demonstrated and so the simple truth of the mind does not move from or modify the actuality of great openness. If one can truly awaken to this then all phenomenal appearances are revealed as mahamudra. This is the great all-pervading intrinsic mode.

Remain relaxed in uncontrived presence. This is the intrinsic mode free of thought. This meditation abides in itself without seeking anything else. The kind of meditation that goes searching is merely the working of the confused intellect. Just as with the sky or a magical illusion, how could we talk of separation or non-separation in the absence of both meditation and non-meditation?

For the yogi who has this clarity all virtuous and harmful actions are liberated by directly knowing this actuality. All mental afflictions become the great original knowing and act as the yogi's friend, just like a fire rushing through the forest. Then there is no basis for talking in terms of going or staying.

No matter how much you stabilise your mind in a quiet place, if you have not realised this truth you will not be freed from states that are merely circumstantial. But if you experience this truth then what could possibly bind you?

When you abide unwaveringly in this openness there is no need of constructed meditations for your body and voice. Whether or not you are in what is called profound balance (mNyam-bZhag), there is no need for contrived meditation involving antidotes. Without attempting to accomplish anything at all, whatever arises will be seen to be devoid of inherent self-existence.

All appearances are self-liberating in this infinite hospitality (Chos-dByings) and all thoughts are self-liberated in and as the great original knowing. This is the non-dual perfect evenness of the intrinsic mode. Like the flow of a great river, true illumination will be with you wherever you stay. This is the presence of uninterrupted buddhahood, the great happiness free of all samsaric objects.

All phenomena are themselves intrinsically empty and the intellect that holds to that emptiness is purified in its own place. Free of all intellectualisation, there is no involvement with mentation. This is the path of all the buddhas.

For the one who is truly fortunate I have composed this epitome of my true teachings. By means of this may all sentient beings abide in the great openness.

This concludes Maitripa's presentation of the great openness.

This teaching was received directly from that sage and translated into Tibetan by the Tibetan translator Marpa Chokyi Lodro.

This is the first of two texts of mahamudra (Phyag-rGya Chen-Po), the great openness¹. It was composed by the famous Indian yogi Maitripa and transmitted directly to Marpa who gave it to his disciple Milarepa. The mahamudra teachings are particularly associated with the Kargyudpa school, though in fact they are studied and practised by followers of all the four schools of Tibetan buddhism. The term 'mahamudra' is used in various contexts, for example as one of the four mudras, as a description of the result in anuyoga, and so on. Here however it refers to the great openness that includes all of samsara and nirvana within intrinsic uncontrived presence.

This is a revised translated by James Low from the text included in his book
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¹ Mahamudra is translated here as the 'great openness'. However this, or any other term, is inadequate to convey the range of meanings associated with the term mahamudra. Yet, hopefully, it gives some sense of the open potential alluded to: the unformed, unconditioned awareness that is primordially free and therefore requires no effort.