

Notes on Mahamudra

By Padma Karpo

I prostrate to the precious White Lineage.¹

Mahamudra as presented here introduces the mind stream of ordinary consciousness as (actually being) pure and authentic original knowing.

This explanation of the instructions on Co-Emergent Yoga has three parts:

- X The preliminaries
- Y The main part
- Z The conclusion

X THE PRELIMINARIES

There are the ordinary and the extraordinary preliminaries. The ordinary preliminaries are explained elsewhere. Regarding the extraordinary preliminaries, for all the preparatory practices, from taking refuge and developing bodhicitta up until the guru yoga, the *Vairocana Sambhodi* says: “*The body is to be straight and in vajra posture, the mind is one-pointed in Mahamudra.*”

In accordance with this your legs should be crossed in the vajra posture; your hands should be below your navel in the equipoise mudra; your spine should be straight; your shoulders should be open; your neck should be drawn in like a hook touching the bulge of your larynx; the tip of your tongue should touch your upper palette. In general awareness is directed by the sense organs and in particular it is directed by the eyes therefore keep your eyes open and unmoving, focused straight ahead at a distance of an ox yoke.² These points together constitute the Seven Dharmas of Vairocana. This posture is called the Five Dharmas of Absorption and it effects the insertion of the winds into the central channel. Thus this posture inserts the downward clearing wind; the equipoise mudra inserts the fire-equalising wind; the straight spine and the held-in abdomen inserts the pervading wind; the tucked-in chin inserts the upward-moving wind; the tongue touching the upper palate along with the gaze insert the life-holding wind. By inserting these five winds into the central channel all the many karmic winds are inserted into the central channel. Due to this the original knowing of no thought dawns as the *‘isolated body’* or the *‘unmoving body’* or the *‘body as it*

¹ The term ‘White Lineage’ refers to the purity of this Drugpa Kargyu [Tib. *‘Brug-Pa bKa’-brGyud*] lineage. Some teachers in this White Lineage say that ‘White Lineage’ refers to those of white or pure mind.

² This is about two and a half arm’s length

effortlessly abides'.³ Regarding speech, the residual winds are expelled⁴ and speech ceases. This state is called '*Isolation of speech*', or '*Speech not moving*', or '*Speech as it effortlessly abides*'.

Do not reflect on what is past. Do not think about the future. Do not meditate using concepts organised by intentional thought nor view emptiness as if it were nothing at all. Whatever arises in the present as an object of the five doors,⁵ do not examine or analyse it in terms of 'it is this' or 'it isn't this'.⁶ Rather turn your attention inwards and rest at ease like a small child. Let your mind flow as it will yet without even a moment of distraction.⁷

*"Completely discarding all thinking and objects of thought
Abide at ease like a small child.
If you attend to the words of your guru and strive with devotion
Without doubt co-emergence will occur."*

Tillipa⁸ said:

*"Not considering, not thinking, not analysing,
Not meditating, not minding, rest with how it is."*

The Dharma King Youthful Moonlight said: "*Non-distraction*⁹ is the path of all the Buddhas." This is known as '*Mind isolated*', '*Mind not moving*', and '*Mind at rest whatever occurs*'.

Nagarjuna quotes: "*Powerful One, mindfulness, including of the body, is carefully taught as the one path travelled by all the sugatas. Keep to it and carefully protect it for if mindfulness declines then all Dharma will be ruined.*"

³ When the mind does not move the body does not move and simply abides as it is.

⁴ Because our breath is often shallow, the breath that is in the channels can be uninfluenced by breath in the lungs. This means that there is some residual or remaining or stale air in the channels and this is dulling.

⁵ The five doors are the five sense organs.

⁶ Mahamudra is focused on direct experience of occurrence and so does not rely on the examination and analysis that is employed in the sutra path.

⁷ Distraction by merging into or shying away from the flow of occurrence is avoided by remaining relaxed and open.

⁸ Tillipa is another name by which Tilopa is known.

⁹ Non-distraction means not to identify with or become the dualistic mind of involvement. If we are distracted out of relaxed openness we will find that we are caught up in reactivity and will wander here and there chasing thoughts that are already vanishing.

Thus mindfulness is non-distraction. As it says in the *Abhidharma*, “Mindfulness is not forgetting the thing you are becoming familiar with.”¹⁰

Y THE MAIN PART

This has two aspects: the ordinary practice and the extraordinary practice.

The Ordinary Practice has two aspects. Firstly, one seeks to practise the root of meditation, which is tranquillity,¹¹ and then meditates in the Yoga of One-Pointedness. Secondly, having examined the root of abiding and moving and gained true seeing or insight,¹² one meditates in the Yoga of Freedom from Interpretation or Conceptual Elaboration.

Firstly, one seeks to practise the root of meditation, which is tranquillity, and then meditates in the Yoga of One-Pointedness.

The development of tranquillity, the basis of meditation, from first taste to the full experience of one-pointedness, can be practised [1] with or [2] without reliance of supports.

[1] **The use of supports** may be (A) without breath control or (B) with breath control. Practices without breath control may involve the use of common objects such as small stones or wooden objects or reliance upon holy images, books or stupas representing the body, speech and mind of the Tathagata.

1.¹³ (A) Using an impure (i.e. not holy) support, such as a small wooden object, place this small object in front of you as a support for your focused attention. Do not let your attention stray from this object, either spreading outside or by merging inside with a mental occurrence. Look one-pointedly at only the chosen item. Imagine that your guru is above the crown of your head. Believe that he or she is the actual Buddha. Pray to him with the verse, “*All my mothers equalling space...*”¹⁴ Pray for his blessing that you will gain the supreme accomplishment of Mahamudra. Requesting this accomplishment imagine that he or she dissolves in you and that your mind is merged with his. Rest for as long as you can in as much equipoise as you can. For whatever occurrence that arises that could separate you from this state of mind, pray to your guru and then meditate.

¹⁰ Mindfulness indicates attending to something without being distracted. The subject as simple attention maintains its focus on the chosen object. In Mahamudra non-distraction or non-wavering highlights that the focus is now on the mind itself — not straying from resting in the mind free of reliance on objects.

¹¹ Skt. *śamatha*, Tib. *Zhi-gNas*

¹² Skt. *vipaśyanā*, Tib. *Lhag-mThong*

¹³ The numbers 1- 32 on the left hand side of the page are taken from the Tibetan original.

¹⁴ Or use any verses you know that increase your devotion.

If your mind is sinking, lift up your gaze and imagine you are in a bright open space. For dullness, revert to your prior different state and stay mindful of that. If you are agitated you have gone astray so lower your gaze and make the aspect of relaxation your priority.

2. Then set up the pure support of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha with an image for the body, a letter for the speech, and a sphere for the mind.¹⁵

Using an image of the Buddha's body is to use a small statue or drawing. Or to imagine the Buddha's form in front of you, golden like refined gold, ornamented with marks and signs, radiating light and dressed with the three dharma robes. Observe this in front of you and keep your attention always focused on it.

3. Regarding having a letter as the support for speech, imagine in front of you a moon disc the size of a fingernail on top of which is a letter Hung ཧུང drawn with a single hair.

4. Regarding having a sphere as the support for the mind, this sphere is similar in shape to a bird's egg, with the size of a pea and surrounded by light rays. As before, keep your mind focused on these specific signs.

5. **(B)** With regard to the breath there are two forms: having the support of the vajra recitation and having the support of the vase or pot.

As for the **first**, using the support of vajra recitation is like this. Keep body and mind at ease and direct attention towards inhalation and exhalation. Without focusing on anything else simply count the breaths: one, two and so on up to 21,600. With this you will become expert in counting the movement of the breath in and out.

6. Then as the breath rises and enters, consider whether it moves throughout your body or in just one part of it and in this way follow how the breath enters and leaves. By doing this you will become an expert on the characteristics of your breath.

7. Then merge your mind with your breath and see how it goes down from the tip of your nose to your navel, stays there and then comes back up. In this way you can see the colour and duration of each individual wind.

8. Then by paying attention to each of the five great elements,¹⁶ without mixing them together you will understand the expansion and contraction of the breath as it moves in and out.

9. Then change the out breath to a white letter Om ཨ྘, the in breath to a blue letter Hung ཧུང and the resting breath to a red letter Aa ཨཱ. With this the ending or exhaustion of the movement of inhaling and exhaling will be manifest for you.

¹⁵ This sphere or *tigle* [Tib. *Thig-Le*] is a drop or ball of light which you imagine or have drawn.

¹⁶ Earth, water, fire, wind, space.

10. As for the **second**, using the support of the vase is like this. Expel stale residual breath three times, then slowly inhale the upper wind from the tip of your nose, draw up the lower wind from below then hold the (merged) winds for as long as you can. In this way, due to not being experienced as separate from the winds what is called *'The mind which is difficult to control'* will finish conceptual wandering after objects as the winds cease going somewhere.
11. **[2]** There are three parts to **without support**: cut involvement with sudden arisings; not interfering with whatever occurs; the essentials of how to abide.
- Firstly**, regarding cutting involvement with sudden arisings, when mindfully meditating thoughts may arise when the mind goes after an object. If this happens do not continue involvement. Remember the necessity of not allowing even a single thought to occur and then focus on completely cutting off all suddenly presenting thoughts before they proliferate.¹⁷
12. By extending the period during which you meditate in this way the quantity of discursive thoughts will increase until finally they are coming one immediately after the other, arising like an uninterrupted stream. This is called *'Knowing how thoughts are'*, as if you were recognising an enemy, and is also referred to as *'The first stage of abiding like a stream falling down a steep mountain'*.
- By abiding for just one instant moment the arising and ending of discursive thoughts is revealed¹⁸. Due to this it seems as if there are more discursive thoughts. However, thoughts arise in an unbroken flow and so there is neither increase nor decrease. Discursive thoughts arise in an instant and cease in the next instant — this is how they are.
13. **Secondly**, regarding not interfering with whatever appears, having practised as just described, now remain uninfluenced as thoughts do whatever they do. Don't fall under the power of the thoughts nor try to stop them — meditate with your mind settled as an observer. With this, discursive thoughts will not be able to proliferate and you will be able to rest one-pointedly in calm abiding (shamatha).¹⁹

¹⁷ Thoughts arise suddenly and they tend to call forth chains thoughts about thoughts. So as soon as a sudden arising is noticed, strongly cut all interest in involvement with that thought.

¹⁸ Although the flow of thoughts seems to be continuous there is a tiny moment of uninvolved abiding between each of the transient thoughts. This is the first direct glimpse of the unchangingness of the mind.

¹⁹ This simple observing of all that is occurring keeps the mind free of involvement in specific aspects of what is occurring. The observing and the observed are neutral as an unbroken state of

14. Then, again discursive thoughts occur in a flash yet by meditating on them as before, continuous abiding will increase in duration. This is called *'The intermediate abiding like the gentle flow of a large river'*. By means of this essential point of resting at ease you can distinguish the mind when pure and the mind when stained.²⁰

The Lord of Dharma²¹ said:

*"Mind free of contrivance is happy.
Water free of filth is clean."*

The great powerful Yogi²² said:

*"If you abide in uncontrived freshness,
The actual will arise.
If you maintain it like a flowing river,
It will manifest fully."²³
Discard fully all objects of focus and interpretations.
Yogis, remain always in equipoise."*

Regarding both these styles of practice, Saraha has said:

*"If you bind it, it sets off in any of the ten directions.
If you release it, it always stays where it is without moving.
I have seen that it is contrarian, like a camel."*

15. **Thirdly**, there are four aspects to the key point of how to abide.

1) Resting as if spinning a brahmin's thread.

abiding. They are free of the habit formations which inform personal subjectivity and its selective objects. Since thoughts cannot catch or distract the observer, the observer remains relaxed. This is one-pointed calm abiding or shamatha [Skt. śamatha].

²⁰ When the mind is at rest it is free of content and is bright and clear. When the mind is involved with occurrences it is as if it gets mixed up with thoughts and is stained by the traces they leave.

²¹ Tsangpa Gyare

²² Milarepa

²³ Since this flow is how it is, we do not have to make it happen. Rather by resting with how it is, artifice will fall away and the flow will be unbroken as with a great river.

Just as the thread requires a balance between tightness and looseness, in meditation if your mind is tightened strongly then you will pursue thoughts, and if too loose you will remain in vague indifference.²⁴ Therefore tightness and looseness must be balanced.

Moreover, at first beginners should tighten up by (focusing on) completely cutting off all suddenly presenting thoughts, then when tired from doing that they should loosen by not interfering with whatever arises. Reflecting that by alternating tightening and loosening in this way tightness and looseness will find their own equilibrium, the wise have taught us to tighten the mind when this is required and loosen it when that is required. This is called '*Resting like spinning a Brahmin's thread*'.²⁵

16

2) Resting as when the rope tying the straw is cut.

All the antidotes previously mentioned arise from the necessity not to wander when thoughts occur. These antidotes only occur after the thought has ceased,²⁶ and so they are the stain²⁷ of meditation called '*In pursuit after the recollection*.' Therefore we abandoned that kind of conscious recollection and with the continuity of shamata calm abiding we let occurrences come as they come. Letting the mind rest free of all effort is called '*Resting as when the rope tying the straw is cut*'.²⁸

17.

3) Resting like a child gazing at a temple.

²⁴ Effortful striving brings tightening and anxiety and then, getting wired up, you are over-impacted by whatever arises. Loose and disconnected brings a chilled-out mood in which you are under-impacted. So we keep to the middle way.

²⁵ The spinner has a sense of the required tension in the thread and so feeling the thread through their fingertips they effortlessly adjust the tension to keep the right balance.

²⁶ A thought arises and is taken to be troublesome. But by the time an antidote is applied the seemingly troublesome thought has already vanished.

²⁷ The antidotes are like a stain introduced by intentional meditation. The thought has vanished leaving no trace — but the antidote seems to confirm the real existence of the vanished thought. This is the stain. What is being attended to and chased after is a recollection or memory of the imagined trace of the actually vanished thought.

²⁸ The farmer ties up a bundle of straw in order to keep it together and make it easy to control. When the rope is cut the straw falls where it falls. Similarly, by cutting the string of our effortful control of our thoughts they go wherever they go — yet we remain calm since we have also cut the thread of our need for control.

By securely tying the elephant of the mind to the pillar of mindfulness the winds are bound in their own place.²⁹ Due to the power of this, empty forms — such as smoke; fainting away with pleasure; non-thought free of sensations of body and mind, like being in the empty sky — will occur as experience.³⁰ Whatever appearances arise, whether they seem enjoyable or faulty, do not grasp at them as meaningful nor in anyway stop their appearance. This is called *'Neither stopping appearances nor grasping at them — resting like a child gazing at a temple'*.

18.

4) Resting like an elephant pricked by a thorn.

When abiding, thoughts that arise on it and the recollection that recognises them occur simultaneously. That which is to be abandoned and its antidote meet front to front³¹ and so one thought cannot link onto a second thought. The antidote does not need to be produced by effort. This is called *'Self-occurring mindfulness which binds on the front'*. This resting or abiding free of stopping or developing on the basis of sensing the arising of a thought is the meaning of *'Resting like an elephant pricked by a thorn'*.³²

This is taught as the final stage of abiding and is *like an ocean free of waves*. With this, movement is recognised upon abiding, abiding is apprehended where it is upon movement — this is called *'Collapsing the distinction between abiding and movement'*.³³ Thus we are introduced

²⁹ When the winds are not agitated by thought they rest in the central channel.

³⁰ These are experiences arising from the practice. They should be allowed to come and go without identifying with them or disidentifying from them.

³¹ Now the thought and its antidote arise simultaneously rather than sequentially. It is as if they are facing each other, face to face, front to front. Since there is no active intention the antidote of mindful presence does not have to be prepared or produced. The arising thought gains no support from mindfulness and so vanishes without trace.

³² Although the thorn is sharp, the elephant's skin is thick and so the thorn brings no disturbance. Because mindful attention is present in the moment of the arising of the thought, the potential provocation of the thought causes no disturbance.

³³ By abiding exactly on that abiding, the nature of movement is recognised as something that is self-vanishing. By seeing movement as it is, exactly on that movement abiding is revealed as unchanging and always just here. 'On' or 'on top of' refers to instant clarity. How movement is, and how abiding is, are immediately apparent and need no conceptual explanation. With this we see that movement and abiding are not two things and not two separate things. They are like the mirror and the reflections in the mirror.

to how one-pointedness is in itself. When this occurs the one who recognises abiding and movement is called '*The manner of operation of meditation*' or '*The discerning wisdom of cognizing each individual occurrence*' or '*Intrinsic awareness*'.

Furthermore from *The Ornament of the Sutras*:

*"Therefore due to this one attains
Great full purification of body and mind
As meditation and analytic knowledge."³⁴*

19. Secondly, this analysis of the root of abiding and movement identifies true seeing vipassana, with which we meditate on the Yoga Free of Elaboration.

There are three aspects to this: 1) analysing the root of abiding and movement; 2) identifying true seeing; and 3) meditating on the Yoga of Freedom from Elaboration.

1) Analysing the root of abiding and movement.

By raising calm abiding (shamatha) free of discursive thought and discerning wisdom of cognizing each individual occurrence, analyse as follows: If abiding, what is the essence of this abiding like? What is the manner of abiding like? How does movement from that occur? When movement occurs, is this movement the result of the loss of abiding or is there abiding along with movement? Is this movement other than abiding or not? What is the essence of movement like? When movement ends what is the manner of its ending?

20. With this analysis you will see that neither movement from abiding to something other nor abiding as something other than movement is established, and due to this no essence or thingness of abiding- movement can be found. When this is clear, is the awareness which looks other than the abiding-movement which is looked at? Or is it the abiding movement itself? Analysing with the eye of intrinsic awareness there is nothing whatsoever to be found and so we awaken to the inseparability of looked at and looker. No essence of existent entity of this can be established in any way and so it is called '*The view beyond dualistic intelligence*' or '*The view free of assumption and its assertion*'.

Gyalwai Wangpo said:

*"Even good views made by dualistic intellect disintegrate.
The view beyond dualistic intellect is without even a name.
Certainty of the inseparability of the looked at and the looker
Is found through the guru's kindness."*

³⁴ The non-difference of abiding and movement purifies and de-reifies all aspects of body and mind. With this, mental activity and analytic knowledge are illuminating and unmarked by the duality of subject and object.

Regarding this method of analysis, Acharya Santideva said:

*“Whoever strives at whatever mode of absorption,
In order not to stray for even an instant
Will examine ‘How is my mind?’
In this way they will inspect each aspect of their mind.”*

Moreover there is the example of firewood and fire from ***The Sutras Requested by Kashyapa***:

*“Two sticks rubbed together will produce fire
Which having arisen will burn up both of them.
In similar fashion when the faculty of best knowing³⁵ manifests
This manifesting will burn up both aspects.”³⁶*

Because this way of analysing is analysis done by inherent awareness³⁷ looking inwardly it is known as ‘*Kusali analytic meditation*’. It is not the analytic meditation of the pandit scholar because that is analysis done by a consciousness looking outwards.

21. **2)** Identifying vipassana or true seeing³⁸.

Whatever thoughts or afflictions arise they are not to be discarded nor are you to put yourself under their power. Whatever occurs is to be left as it is without doing anything with it. By recognising it in the instant of its occurrence it is purified in its own place without being discarded — and thus it arises as emptiness.³⁹ By means of this way one is able to take all adverse circumstances as the path and so this is called ‘*Taking circumstances as the path*’. By discursive

³⁵ ‘Best knowing’, prajna [Skt. prajñā], indicates the wisdom of emptiness, the wisdom or knowing which sees the emptiness of whatever is encountered or known.

³⁶ Best knowing manifests when belief in the inherent existence of phenomena dissolves. When the empty object of knowing and the empty knower meet face to face all traces of reified entities are burned up.

³⁷ Inherent awareness is the intrinsic non-conceptual quality of the mind itself. It is not compromised by dualistic consciousness and is not dependent in any way on any occurrence. It is self-aware, although there is no self that is aware.

³⁸ Vipassana [Skt. vipaśyanā], best seeing or true seeing, is the way of seeing that reveals the transitory ungraspable nature of what is seen. It directly and non-dually sees the instant presence of experience.

³⁹ If we react to whatever is occurring then our adopting or discarding acts as a validation of the false sense of its existence. By non-interference, the occurrence vanishes where it is showing its purity or absence of inherent existence or non-duality with emptiness.

thought itself recognising itself, it is liberated just by this,⁴⁰ and with this we awaken to the inseparability of what might be abandoned and its kinsman.⁴¹ This is the heart of the vajrayana practice. It is called *'The meditation of reversal'*.⁴²

Towards all sentient beings who are not awake to the nature of their mind as it is, the best kindness⁴³ is then born. With this, by employing the activities of method, one traverses the stages of developing body, speech and mind for the sake of all sentient beings. By employing that way of true knowing, any grasping at truth⁴⁴ is completely purified and so no affliction⁴⁵ will occur due to the poisonous terminating activity of power mantras.⁴⁵ Practising in this manner is taught as *'The path that neither adopts nor rejects anything that occurs.'*

22. **3)** The meditation of the Yoga Free of Elaboration.⁴⁶

This has three parts: a) analysis in terms of the three times; b) analysis in terms of things and non-things; c) analysis in terms of sameness and difference.

a) Analysis in terms of the three times. The mind of the past has stopped and is no more. The mind of the future has not been created and has not appeared. The mind of the present cannot be identified in any way. When examined in this way the manner of all phenomena is clearly like that. All of them lack any truth and are nothing more than

⁴⁰ The discursive thought that would usually be part of a chain, if seen as it is by itself, that is not as a dualistic object for a subject, is transparent or without self-substance. The thought is just as it is, inseparable from emptiness, and this is direct insight or self-illumination of the occurrence. It is like awakening within a dream and seeing that it has no substance to be adopted or rejected — and so offers no basis for hopes or fears.

⁴¹ Thus the thought and its kinsman, emptiness, are always together. This is the middle way between eternalism and nihilism. This is a direct revelation of what is described in the *Heart Sutra*.

⁴² The habitual dualistic attention to a reified object is reversed as the gaze is turned inwards. Now arising and the experience of the arising are inseparable as the lucidity of the unreified. The mind at ease is the liberation of all occurrence.

⁴³ The best kindness is born from the union of kindness and emptiness when we see that this inseparability is unknown by those wandering in samsara.

⁴⁴ Grasping at truth indicates believing in the inherent existence of phenomena.

⁴⁵ Power mantras act on the environment and if they are used for an egoic reason in the manner of Milarepa before he met his teacher Marpa then the mental afflictions of opacity, desire, aversion, pride and jealousy will intensify. But with clarity regarding emptiness the risk of this is purified.

⁴⁶ Here elaboration means adding thoughts to a thought that self-arises and self-vanishes. By pursuing the thought as if it were an existent entity and adorning it with commentary and comparisons the mind is lost in its own fabrication.

imputations of one's own intellect. By considering this you will know that they have no existence through birth, cessation or abiding.⁴⁷

In accordance with this analysis, Saraha has said:

*“The birth of things is completely pacified like space.
Things have been abandoned⁴⁸ — consequently what could be born?
From the very beginning all is naturally unborn.
Having been shown this by my Guardian Guru I have awakened to it today.”*

23. **b)** Analysis in terms of things and non-things is as follows. Thus, is your own mind existing as an existent thing? Or existing as a non-thing? If it exists as a thing, does it exist as the grasped or as the grasper? If it exists as the grasped,⁴⁹ how is its shape or colour? The grasper is exhausted in just that appearance itself.⁵⁰ If it is taken to be a non-thing then what has made the diversity of appearances? If your examination affirms that it exists as a real entity then it is fitting to keep it as a thing. Yet when examined with awareness⁵¹, nothing can be found that exists in any true way and so no phenomena can be found that could be taken to be existent things.

Yet there is the sphere of activity⁵² of the original knowing of intrinsic awareness, and so (occurrence) is not non-existent and has not gone in the direction of non-thing. This being

⁴⁷ When reliance on conceptual interpretation is let go of it is directly clear that thoughts are not born — i.e. they do not suddenly come into true existence. Nor do they cease for they have no true existence to come to an end. Nor do they abide some-where as some-thing. All seemingly real existence is the erroneous elaboration of reification.

⁴⁸ There have never existed any real things, so it is not actual things that are abandoned but the erroneous belief that real things exist. With this we see that there is no substantial basis for the birth or appearance of ‘things’.

⁴⁹ If it exists, does it exist as a subject that knows objects or as an object that is known? Since the duality of subject and object is fundamental to samsaric existence it is vital to analyse whether the mind exists as either or as both of these polarities.

⁵⁰ When the grasped at cannot be found what is the status of the grasper? As the grasped at object is a mere appearance without any substance, like a mirage or a dream, the grasper has nothing to grasp at and so is exhausted or finished in its role as grasper. Grasped at and grasping is a *folie à deux* for those two aspects of dualised experience.

⁵¹ Awareness does not rely on the attribution of conceptual identity. It reveals how the mind is free of assumptions and beliefs.

⁵² The intrinsic brightness of the mind, our revelatory clarity, is the sphere or space or arena within which experience occurs. Given the actuality of this revelation the mind is not a blankness of non-existence.

the case, there is freedom from both thingness and non-thingness and so having not fallen into the paths of permanence or annihilation this is called *'The middle way'*. Furthermore it is not established by following logical signs or by reversing through them. Rather, through the guru's pith instructions, it is like seeing a treasure resting in the palm of your hand, and so it is called *'Great'*.

*"Keeping in your heart whatever your guru told you
Is like seeing a treasure resting in the palm of your hand."*

24. c) Analysis in terms of sameness and difference is as follows. Is this mind singular or multiple? If it is singular, the so-called 'mind' is designated as 'appearing as diversity' and so in what way is it singular? If it is multiple, then how could all diversity be equal in their individual essences being emptiness?⁵³ Being beyond having diversity and being free of limits, this is called the *'Mahamudra that is completely non-abiding'*.⁵⁴ For the yogi and yogini who is awake to this, their equipoise in each and every moment is simply the original knowing of intrinsic awareness. There is not the least appearance of anything other than this and so it is called *'Without appearances'*.⁵⁵ Because with this path all clinging to true existence in all phenomena is purified, in post-meditative experience appearance is like an illusion. Moreover, it is said:

*"At the front and at the back and in all ten directions
Towards the presence of whatever is seen
Today the protector has cut all present confusion.
Now there is no one I need to question about this."*

25. **Second, the extraordinary practice** has two aspects: A) the Yoga of One Taste, the equal taste of all phenomena as the inseparability of appearance and mind; and B) the Yoga of Non-Meditation, the certainty that all phenomena are the intrinsic⁵⁶ co-emergent dharmakaya.

⁵³ When we see a tree or a stone there seems to be a tree-ness to the tree and a stone-ness to the stone. If each appearance is essentially itself, irreducible as itself, then how could all that appears be equal in emptiness? These exposed contradictions help us to put our assumptions into question.

⁵⁴ We know where something is by using tools to establish location e.g. 'near...' or 'south of...' but here we are shown how the definitions required to establish location do not apply. The mind itself cannot be caught by our usual conceptual frames. It is elusive and yet always present.

⁵⁵ This does not mean that the mind is blank. Rather it indicates that all that occurs is nondual experience free of reified separate substance.

⁵⁶ This co-emergence is not the product of any activity. It is the original intrinsic how-it-is-ness. To awaken to it is to awaken to the dharmakaya.

A) The Yoga of One Taste, the equal taste of all phenomena as the inseparability of appearance and mind. This has three parts: 1) appearance is introduced as mind by means of the examples of sleep and dream; 2) appearance and emptiness is introduced as unified by means of the example of water and ice; 3) the certitude that all phenomena are equal in taste by means of the example of water and waves.

1) Regarding appearances introduced as mind by means of the example of sleep and dream: during sleep there are many appearances yet they do not move away from mind. Similarly all the appearances occurring in the present are erroneous dreams arising within the sleep of mental dullness.⁵⁷ Yet there is nothing other than one's own mind. Therefore whatever appearing object appears, relax and rest exactly on that occurrence. Due to this the next object that appears and one's own mind merge as one taste without any separation into two.⁵⁸

The powerful yogi Milarepa said:

*"The complexion⁵⁹ experienced as the quality of a dream
Is the Master who introduces appearance
As mind. Do you understand?"*

And it is said by Saraha

*"All the three realms without exception
Are colourings done by a single great desire."⁶⁰*

⁵⁷ Dreams cannot be separated from sleep. The reified images of daily experience are dreams that falsely hide their dreamlike nature. Without practice we cannot awaken to how this misleading presentation is because we are asleep within the opacity of mental dullness arising from unawareness of the clarity aspect of the ground.

⁵⁸ By resting in a relaxed manner free of any judgement or agenda right on the arising of an appearance, subsequent appearances will each arise with your mind precisely on them. Not looking back, not looking forward, the mind is fully present with whatever is occurring, and being free of adopting or discarding there is no interference no matter what occurs.

⁵⁹ Just as the complexion of our face varies our dreams also have many ways of appearing. These perceived differences are just the qualities of dream and do not become something other than this. This variety of appearance arising for mind is itself the Master who introduces these appearances as not other than mind. The face itself is emptiness — it is revealed by its complexion. The empty mind is not other than its appearance. There is no duality.

⁶⁰ When desire pervades the mind it colours appearance according to its varying wishes. Under the power of unaware dualising, the mind invents all the things it likes and does not like — colouring them with the value it attributes to them.

26. 2) Appearance and emptiness are introduced as unified by means of the example of water and ice. How all phenomena appear is that at precisely the time of their appearance they are not in any way established as existent entities, and so are said to be 'empty'. While not existing as entities anywhere, appearances are everywhere and therefore this is called 'The unity of appearance and emptiness' or 'One taste'. Thus they are like the example of water and ice. In this fashion we can also see the unity of bliss-emptiness, luminosity-emptiness and awareness-emptiness and this is called 'Awakening to the one taste of many'. Thus:

*"If this is awakened to, everything is this;
No one will find anything other than this.
Reading is this, as are learning and meditation."*

27. 3) Determining that all phenomena are equal in taste by means of the example of water and waves. Just as waves arise from water itself, awaken to the way that all phenomena are one's own mind nature — emptiness arising as all possibilities.⁶¹

Saraha said:

*"For as long as patterns emanate from the mind,
For that long they have the Guardian's nature."⁶²*

Thus one actuality (dharmata)⁶³ goes throughout all the space of phenomena (dharmadhatu). This is called 'The manifold arising with one taste'. For the yogi who awakens to this, emptiness pervades all that occurs as post-meditative experience.

⁶¹ The waves are not other than water; water's nature encompasses them. All phenomena, all that is experienced, are encompassed within mind's nature [Skt. Chittata, Tib. *Sems-Nyid*]. This nature of the mind is emptiness intrinsic illumination of and as all possible forms of experience. Thus to say, "Everything is the mind" is not a reductive statement, for the mind is not a limited entity standing in relation to other limited entities. The open empty mind displays unborn appearances freely, easily, without interference, so that they come as they come.

⁶² The patterns of experience that we take to be our thoughts, our feelings etc. are neither the same as the mind nor different from the mind. Although when under the power of the delusion of duality they are taken to be objects that the subject experiences, they are actually not separate entities but have the nature of the Guardian. The Guardian is the Buddha with the three modes: dharmakaya/awareness and emptiness; sambhogakaya/luminosity and emptiness; and nirmanakaya/appearance and emptiness. This nature encompasses everything and so the door to awakening is always present and open.

⁶³ The actuality is the empty nature of all phenomena. Thus, whatever occurs anywhere is within the empty space of empty phenomena. All that occurs any-where at any-time has the one taste of emptiness however it appears.

28. **B)** Having determined⁶⁴ that all phenomena are the dharmakaya intrinsic co-emergence, there is **the practice of non-meditation**. That which is to be discarded, the afflictions, is exhausted.⁶⁵ The antidotes that would get rid of them are also exhausted. This is the end of the path.⁶⁶ From this there is nowhere else to be gone to and nothing to be entered. There is no struggle to ascend to another place. Non-abiding⁶⁷ nirvana, the supreme attainment of Mahamudra, has been achieved. Moreover, the meaning is as in these texts on mixing:⁶⁸

*“Kye Ho! This intrinsic awareness of original knowing
Is beyond the possibilities of speech, and is not within the domain of mentation.
I, Tili, have nothing at all to show;
By yourself you must show it to yourself, then you will know.”*

and,

*“Without thinking about, without considering, without examining,
Without meditating, without minding, leave it as it is”.*

29. **Z THE CONCLUSION**

⁶⁴ In Tibetan this is *gTan-La-Phab* which indicates arriving at something conclusive. It is not that we determine it by our effort, for it is not our construction. Rather, we arrive at the clarity that this is the case, that this is how it is and always has been, and therefore we should not try or interfere, and so we enter the Yoga of Non-Meditation.

⁶⁵ The afflictions are exhausted, finished — their life blood has been our unawareness, our belief in duality and our investment in our selection of the available phenomena. Resting in openness and seeing that subject and object share the one taste of emptiness, there is no basis for feeding the five afflicting poisons. Thus they vanish leaving nothing to be discarded.

⁶⁶ If there is no sickness, there is no need for medicine. Since the troublesome objects are, in their manifest emptiness, no longer troublesome, there is no need to apply antidotes. In fact to maintain the antidotes would itself create problems. Thus the path to freedom from the snares of samsara has come to an end for us.

⁶⁷ True liberation, the actual nirvana or release, is not somewhere else, nor is it here rather than there. Liberation does not abide anywhere nor does it rest on anything. This is the supreme siddhi, the accomplishment which is the culmination of the path. Without traversing the stages and levels of the path that this text outlines, it would not be attained — yet it is not the product of the path. It is intrinsic, unmade, simply how it is.

⁶⁸ The path is our effort to mix or blend our familiar mind with the true nature of our mind. This is not like mixing dirty water with pure water — for then we would just have diluted dirty water. Rather, we blend as pure water to pure water by leaving potential defilements where they are. Here the specific reference is to Tilopa who emphasised this aspect and who gave the statement that follows.

This has three parts: 1) the identification of and introduction to Mahamudra; 2) analysis of obstructions, deviation and straying; 3) differentiation of experience, awakening⁶⁹ and understanding.

1) The identification of and introduction to Mahamudra. This consists of four sets of yogas: determination of the ground; practise of the path, precisely distinguishing the qualities of experiences; distinguishing the signs of progress on the levels and paths; the result becoming manifest.⁷⁰

30. 2) Analysis of obstructions, deviation and straying. The obstructions of appearances arising as enemies are removed by knowing that appearances are mind; discursive thoughts arising as enemies are removed by knowing discursive thoughts as the dharmakaya; emptiness arising as the enemy is removed by knowing the unity of appearance and emptiness.

The three sites of deviation are: attachment to the experiences⁷¹ of calm abiding which is removed by advancing to vipassana true seeing.

The four sites of straying into lostness are: loss of the true nature of emptiness is stopped by emptiness arising as compassion; loss of sealing⁷² is stopped by awakening to the way things are as they are; going astray with the antidote is stopped by the inseparability of the thing to be discarded and the antidote; and going astray with regard to the path is prevented by awakening to the simultaneity of arising and liberating.

31. 3) Differentiation of experience, awakening and understanding. Awakening through hearing and reflection on the way the mind abides is called 'understanding'; one-pointed awakening to the general way of how it is, is called 'experience'; direct awakening progressing up from freedom from elaboration is called 'awakening'. Simply in terms of terminology, without error they can all be called 'awakening'.

32. *Zhanphen Zangpo the king of the Muslim country of Zanskar, offered me a bushel of best quality saffron pistils and requested me saying, "We have need of notes on Mahamudra and the Six Dharmas." Not being able to see anything reliable in any written texts available, for the benefit of future*

⁶⁹ Awakening to how it is, is to see it as it is and to simultaneously free oneself from erroneous beliefs about what one has been considering. The term 'awakening' is used to translate the Tibetan term *rTogs-Pa*. This term *rTogs-Pa* is often translated as 'to realise', yet the purpose of our study and practice is to de-realise our experience since there are no real substantial inherently existing entities to be found. We awaken to how something actually is by seeing its unreality as appearance inseparable from emptiness.

⁷⁰ Thus there are four aspects of yoga, along with the result as an un-numbered fifth.

⁷¹ These are the experiences of bliss, clarity-luminosity, and no thought.

⁷² When we are not clear that appearances are as they are with no essence or existence elsewhere, they are not sealed in the fact that 'this is it'. To stay with the immediate revelation of how this appearance is, is to avoid imagining other possibilities.

generations, I, Padma Karpo, composed this while staying in the southern lands at Kharchu, the heart of enlightenment.

May virtue and goodness arise from this!

Translation of the *Phyag-Chen Zin-Bris*

James Low, February 2024.