

From "The Teachings of Tibetan Yoga", translated by Garma C. C. Chang

The Essentials of Mahamudra Practice
As Given by The Venerable Lama Kong Ka

Lama Kong Ka said:

"To practice this Mahamudra meditation one should first be initiated by a qualified Guru. The purpose of Mahamudra initiation is to make the disciple recognize the illuminating-void awareness of his Self-mind. Only after recognizing this intrinsic "awareness without content" can the disciple practice Mahamudra correctly. Until he has done so, he will find it difficult to escape from the subject-object entanglement and to elevate his mind to the state of non-distinction and non-attachment. To deepen this illuminating-void Awareness, he should practice often the essential instructions given below.

"He who can rest his mind in pure Self-awareness without distraction will be able to do anything. To practice Mahamudra he should stop discriminating, abandon habitual thoughts of "accept this" and "reject that", and strive to reach a state where Samadhi and activities become one. Until he has done so, he should stress quiet meditation first, and then as a subsidiary exercise apply his Mahamudra- awareness to his daily activities."

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"There are three essentials in the Mahamudra practice:
equilibrium, relaxation, and naturalness.

" 'Equilibrium' means to balance body, mouth, and mind.
The Mahamudra way of balancing the body is to loosen it,
of balancing the mouth is to slow down the breathing,
and of balancing the mind is not to cling to and rely on anything.

"This is the supreme way to tame the body, breath [prana],
and mind.

" 'Relaxation' means to loosen the mind, to let everything go, to strip off all ideas and thoughts. When one's whole body and mind become loose, one can, without effort, remain in the natural state, which is intrinsically non-discriminative and yet without distractions.

" 'Naturalness' means not 'taking' or 'leaving' anything: in other words the yogi does not make the slightest effort of any kind. He lets the senses and mind stop or flow by themselves without assisting or restricting them.

To practice naturalness is to make no effort and be spontaneous.

"The above can be summarized thus:

The essence of equilibrium is not to cling.

The essence of relaxation is not to hold.

The essence of naturalness is to make no effort."

THE FIVE SIMILIES OF MAHAMUDRA EXPERIENCE

"There are five similies which describe the correct experience of Mahamudra:

A sphere which is like infinite space.

Awareness omnipresent like the great earth.

A mind steady as a mountain.

Self-realizing Awareness clear and bright like a lamp.

Pure consciousness, crystal clear and empty of discriminating thoughts.

"Mahamudra experience can also be described thus:

Like a cloudless sky, the sphere is broad
and free from obstruction.

Like a waveless ocean, the mind is steady
without discriminating thoughts.

Like a bright lamp on a windless night, the
consciousness is clear, bright, and stable."

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"To practice Mahamudra, keep both mind and body loose and gentle without straining to do so; stop doubting and worrying, and remain balanced.

"In practicing Mahamudra, identify all that you encounter with the 'unborn Void' and remain natural and relaxed."

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"To keep the body loose and gentle does not imply completely abandoning all activities, but that these activities should be carried out in a smooth, relaxed, and spontaneous way.

"To keep the mind loose and gentle does not imply making it dumb or insensible, but that one should try to further its bright awareness.

"To identify everything with the Unborn Void means that he who has realized Self-awareness and is able to sustain it, should then try to let everything he meets and experiences liberate itself into the Voidness."

FIVE WAYS OF STRAYING FROM MAHAMUDRA

"(1) One is liable to misconstrue Voidness as an annulment of both virtues and vices if he does not know that existence and Voidness are, in essence, identical, and this includes all moral truths and laws. This misunderstanding is straying from the View of Mahamudra. On the other hand, if one only has some sort of understanding of this truth, but cannot experience it intimately, he is said to have strayed from the realization of Mahamudra.

"(2) If one does not know that Mahamudra practice [the Path] is, in essence, not different from Mahamudra accomplishment [the Fruit] and that all the wonderful merits are contained in the practice itself, he is liable to think that practice comes first and Realization follows, so that Enlightenment is a product of the practice. This is perhaps true on the everyday level, but as far as the View is concerned, he is said to have gone astray.

"(3) If one can make a genuine effort in Mahamudra practice but does not have immutable faith in the teaching itself, he is liable to cherish a 'hidden' hope that some day he may attain a teaching that is superior even to Mahamudra. This is also a sign of straying from Mahamudra.

"(4) He who knows not that the cure and the cured are, in essence, the same, is liable to cling to the idea that the Dharma-practice [the cure] and the desire-passions [the cured, or that which is to be cured] are two absolutely different things. This is also straying from the View of Mahamudra.

"(5) In Mahamudra practice, there is always a tendency on the yogi's part to make too many corrections. He who finds himself always trying to correct faults is most likely to have strayed from the Path."

THE THREE MAJOR EXPERIENCES OF MAHAMUDRA

"In the course of meditation practice, three major experiences will be encountered. They are: Blissfulness, Illumination, and Non-distinction.

"(1) In the experience of Blissfulness some people feel that a great rapture envelops the whole body and does not decrease even in adverse circumstances, such as in extremely cold or hot weather. Some may feel that both body and mind disappear, that they are extremely joyful - and they often burst into laughter. Some may feel full of inspiration and enthusiasm, or extremely peaceful, contented, and happy. The ecstasy may become so great that they become unconscious of day and night.

"(2) In the experience of Non-distinction, some may feel that all things become empty, or may see the void nature of the world; others experience all things as devoid of self-entity, or that both body and mind are non-existent; while yet others really understand the truth of Voidness [Sunyata]."

"None of the above experiences should be treated as perfect and complete, and one should never cling to any of them. Among them, that of Non-distinction is most important and unerring. Some of the Illumination and Blissfulness experienced could be very misleading and even harmful."

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"The profoundest of all the verbal instructions on Mahamudra is this:

Cast aside all clinging and the essence will at once emerge.

"The core of Mahamudra practice consists of two things, non-effort and non-correction. One should know, however, what this non-correction means. The Jetsun Milarepa explained this point very clearly: 'Concerning the practice of non-correction, one should understand three things: If wandering thoughts and desire passions are not corrected, one will fall into the lower realms. If the Blissfulness, Illumination, and Non-distinction are not corrected, one will fall into the Three Realms of Samsara. Only the immanent Self-mind needs no correction.'"

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"At all times in the day, during or after meditation, one should try not to lose the 'essence'. In other words, one should try to bring the meditation experience into his daily activities.

"It is quite understandable that one may be distracted during his daily work, thus forgetting the 'essence,' but he should try always to bring back the Awareness, and if he succeeds, the 'essence' will at once emerge again.

"One should try not to lose Self-awareness by day or night. To practice Mahamudra during sleep and in dreams is also extremely important. He who cannot do so properly should shun all activities and practice Mahamudra meditation uninterruptedly for five or six days, then he should rest for one day before continuing. One should not be discouraged if he cannot keep the Awareness alive for a whole day. To make continuous and persistent effort is essential. He who can do so will certainly broaden his Awareness and Realization."

HOW TO CULTIVATE MAHAMUDRA THROUGH ADVERSE CONDITIONS

"After one has realized the 'essence,' he should then proceed to practice the so-called 'utilizing exercises.' That is to say one should utilize some particular conditions to further Realization.

"(1) To utilize distraction and discriminating thoughts to further Realization:

"This does not mean observing the nature of discriminating thoughts, nor meditating on Voidness, nor being 'mindful' of the distraction, but implies keeping 'bright Awareness'- the essence of discriminating thoughts- vividly alive. This Awareness in its natural state is Mahamudra. If at first one has great difficulties he should try to overcome them and merge the distracting thoughts into the Path.

"(2) To utilize desire-passions to further realization:

"Sometimes you should purposely stir up desire-passions such as lust, hatred, jealousy, etc.- and then observe them in depth. You should neither follow, relinquish, or correct them but clearly and 'awaringly' remain in a loose and natural state. When in deep sleep you should try to merge Awareness with the unconscious without strain. This is the best way to transform the unconscious into 'light'.

"(3) To utilize apparitions and devils to further Realization:

"Whenever any fearful apparition appears, you should employ the Mahamudra meditation on the fears. Do not try to dispel the fear but dwell on it clearly and loosely. In doing so, if the apparition vanishes, you should try once more to conjour up even more frightful apparitions and again apply Mahamudra to them.

"(4) To utilize compassion and grief to further Realization:

"Since in the final analysis, life and Samsara imply suffering, a Buddhist should have great compassion for all sentient beings. When contemplating men's sufferings, a great compassion will arise; right at the very moment when that compassion arises, one should practice the Mahahudra meditation on it. When one does so, both Wisdom and Compassion will grow.

"(5) To utilize sickness to further Realization:

"Whenever you are ill, you should practice the Mahamudra meditation on the sickness. You should also observe penetratingly the essence of both the patient and of the sickness, thus eliminating the dualism of subject and

object.

"(6) To utilize death to further Realization:

"He who can practice Mahamudra as instructed will not be perplexed or frightened when death occurs. He will then be able to identify, without fear, all the visions and experiences that take place in the process of dying. Free from attachment and expectations he can then unify the Light of the Mother and Son into the great whole."

THE ERRORS IN MAHAMUDRA PRACTICE

"(1) If one's Mahamudra practice is confined solely to the effort of stabilizing the mind, the activities of all one's six consciousnesses will be halted, or dimmed. This is called a 'frozen ice' type of practice, and is a very harmful tendency in Mahamudra meditation which must be avoided.

"(2) He who neglects the clear 'Awareness' but abides solely in Non-distinction will see or hear nothing when confronted with sights, sounds, smells, and touches. . . This is an error due to having become sluggish.

"(3) When the last thought has gone, and the next one has not come, this immediate, present moment is a very wonderful thing if one can abide therein; but, if he does so without clear awareness, he still falls into the error of sluggishness.

"(4) He who can hold the bright Awareness but thinks there is nothing more to Mahamudra also falls into error.

"(5) If one only cultivates 'Blissfulness,' 'Illumination,' and 'Non-distinction' without practicing 'penetrating-observation-into-the-mind,' it still cannot be considered as the correct Mahamudra practice.

"(6) He who develops a dislike to manifestation is most likely to have gone astray.

"(7) He who concentrates on his Awareness and cultivates the illuminating-void Self-mind is said to practice Mahamudra correctly. However, this 'concentration-effort' has a tendency to hinder that spontaneity and freedom

of spirit, without which it is difficult to unfold the vast and liberating Mind. One should therefore never forget to practice the 'looseness,' 'vastness,' and 'spontaneity.'"

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"What, then, is the correct Mahamudra practice?"

"[Answer:] The ordinary mind [Tib.: Thal.Ma.Ces.Pa] is itself the correct practice. That is to say, to let the ordinary mind remain in its own natural state. If to this mind one adds or subtracts anything, it is then not the ordinary mind but the so-called 'mind-object' [Tib.: Yul.]. To make not the slightest intention and effort to practice, and yet to not be distracted for a single moment, is to practice the natural mind correctly. Therefore, as long as you can keep your Self-awareness, no matter what you do, you are still practicing Mahamudra.