

Notes from the Teachings on Mahamudra, by Lama Lodu,
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The lineage blessings are always there, very fresh. Through this we can get something from these teachings.

From the three poisons we have more ego, more afflictions, more mistakes, suffering, confusion.

Of the different Buddhist Traditions, the Hinayana counteracts mainly desire; the Mahayana counteracts mainly anger and ignorance. The Vajrayana is the remedy to all three at the same time. Tantra is a method to realize mahamudra.

Step by step, with humility, from the beginning

The first step is to detach from samsara – wanting only simple food and clothing, just enough to practice. Renunciation means that we are not mostly concerned with fame, name, gain and loss. Instead we are completely renounced.

The Four Thoughts that turn the mind are: the precious human existence, impermanence, cause and effect, or karma, and the suffering and confusion of all beings in the six realms. If you have an awareness of these in your heart, this will correct your attitude.

Second, turn your mind to the bodhisattva attitude. Love, compassion, perfect and pure bodhicitta – this is the heart of enlightenment. This includes, specifically, our enemies, those who obstruct us. Generate bodhicitta toward them. The enemy is very important. We should have this, love, compassion and bodhicitta, towards all equally.

Looking at the essence of anger, with spaciousness and clarity can bring great purification. It is an opportunity to awaken.

It is important also that one's loving kindness be without clinging, without grasping, from the depths of your heart, without expectation. Then you are close to mahamudra.

With expectation (wanting something in return) love is not love, it is business.

With bodhicitta, everything you do becomes the path.

Next, shinay, or calm abiding practice.

For calm abiding, we need lots of purification, and the accumulation of merit. Apply mindfulness. Make sure your mind is positive. In daily life, examine your mind – what we are doing or saying, but especially what is going on in our mind. Inside, the motivation is what counts.

From daily life practice, meditation comes more easily. It is clear and comfortable.

Then tantra, precisely, perfectly, honestly, the tantric mandala, tantric dimension. One session can purify lots of imprints, and help attain mahamudra.

For samadhi – calm abiding practice: mount the mind on the breath. Usually the mind goes from emotion to emotion, from affliction to affliction. The benefit of this kind of meditation practice is that it stops those afflictions, and reduces habits.

Increase your concentration and clarity. Be aware of what is going on in your mind.

What is called 'patch-like' concentration is like having a hole in a robe. The 'hole' is when your mind leaves its object. Bring your mind back. Cultivate the power of mindfulness.

What is called 'near placement' is when you are distracted, but you catch it and bring your mind back.

The first four Paramitas are a cause for you to improve your concentration. Calm abiding, samadhi, opens your heart to wisdom.

Settled doesn't mean we have removed ego and afflictions. It's like sediment, if you stir, it will come up again.

Milarepa said, 'Don't be attached to samadhi; Let bloom the beautiful flower of vipassana, insight-wisdom'.

Meditation should be not cloudy, but clear, but samadhi practice alone cannot liberate you from samsara.

The body gets sick because the mind gets sick. There are the illnesses of anger, jealousy, desire, pride and ignorance, and of these, the basic cause is ignorance. The body depends on the mind.

Calm abiding practice can calm these sufferings. And your clarity and calm can heal other people. Samadhi has great benefits. We haven't touched the ego yet, but without this you cannot practice mahamudra.

Next comes vipassana – insight, and there are two ways to approach this. The first is analytical – through study and learning, and the second is by directly looking at the mind.

Self is not really existent. Is this self existent or not existent in any way? Look in the five aggregates, and the six consciousnesses. No part of this body is me or I. It has no location. Search through the body for the me. What we conceive of as a self, me, I, is not really existent.

Finally, when you find no self, don't think of anything. Just relax.

Self and phenomena are empty, without self as we conceive it.

Things have a compounded nature – what is called the table, for example, is interdependent arising. It is impermanent.

KDK is not existent. Ok – you are in the house. What part of the house? Where is the house? 'House' is just an idea – it doesn't exist.

Or the USA – where is the USA? Is this the USA? No, this is San Francisco Airport. Where is San Francisco? Look and we see buildings. Look everywhere and we cannot find San Francisco. Everything disappears into emptiness.

When everything disappears, then relax into emptiness.

After short analysis, let the mind go, spacious like the sky, without the concept of emptiness.

Here, through analytical vipassana samadhi, we are on the way to mahamudra.

Then, looking directly at the nature of the mind, without any kind of past, present or future thought.

(In response to a question)

Guru yoga cultivates devotion, and confidence in your practice. You reach mahamudra when you truly see your guru as buddha.

To recap – renunciation, bodhicitta, shinay (calm) and lhaktong (insight), which has its own divisions.

In the school called ‘Rangtong’ the self is empty. In Shentong, the idea is put forth of ‘other empty’. This means that other than buddha nature, all is empty, but Buddha nature is not empty – is never empty.

This is the basis for the Uttaratantra and the Tathagatagarba Sutra.

As interdependent phenomena, objects are empty. They are based on causes and conditions – dependent origination – they don’t have inherent existence. Desire, for example, needs a subject and an object, and is empty, not inherently existent.

But the perfect true nature of Buddha is not empty, not subject to conditions, not solid, nothing tangible. It is beyond intellectual emptiness, transcendent. The enlightened quality and perfection is there. Buddha nature is clear, radiant, forever, transcending everything artificial.

The mind is like this: A conch shell is white, but someone with an eye disease, even the conch shell becomes yellow. We have confusion, so we see the true nature of buddha, awake, clear light, we see as a solid self, and are overwhelmed by afflictions.

A skilled doctor gives the proper medicine and cures the patient so he sees the conch shell as white, as it is, clear light, radiance, infinite, permanent. Removing the disease of the afflictions and ego, our true nature is always buddha, clear, radiant, permanent. A being may be an insect, or an animal, or a hungry ghost, but that never changes. Transcendent emptiness, clear light, luminosity, permanence is always there.

Other than the true nature, all is empty, but buddha nature is never empty.

This is the bridge between the Mahayana and the Vajrayana. We already have these enlightened qualities, clear, radiant, indestructible. Knowing this we call ‘Vajra dignity’, ‘Vajra pride’.

Like gold that is beneath the ground for a million years, for eons and eons, afflictions and emotions cover buddha nature. The quality of the gold, the value of the gold never lessens. In the same way, even after a million years, buddha nature is naturally pure. There is no need to remove anything – there is no impurity in it. And there is no need to add anything to it – the good quality is already there.

Perfect wisdom is seen by perfect wisdom, gained through meditation.

Meditation on emptiness is clear light without clinging. We should continue the flow of meditation without attachment, fresh, completely naked and unstained.

Words do not liberate from ego clinging. We need to give birth to the certainty of what the view is. Words alone do not help. Bring the meaning to mind. Gain certainty about what it means to meditate.

Meditation means the clear light, not clinging, without attachment to calm abiding. Calm abiding alone cannot liberate from samsara, but drowsiness, sleepiness or excitement are hindrances to wisdom, so we need mindfulness, introspective alertness to notice if sinking or excitement are there.

Sleepiness is the gross level. With sinking, there is some clarity, but extreme clarity and sharpness is not there. That is sinking, the subtle level of sinking. To notice this, you need very accurate, very sharp introspective alertness.

The same with excitement – gross excitement is losing the object. Subtle excitement too is an obstacle to wisdom. Be mindful, alert to those, so you can gain wisdom. That is meditation.

Then, conduct, continually, non-attachment, no craving, like drawing on water, that is conduct.

Conduct should be harmonious with meditation and the view. If conduct is away from the view, then something is wrong. Conduct should be unobscured by ignorance; without desire, anger, jealousy, greed. This is called ‘stainless conduct, but wearing the clothing of characteristics’.

Remove illusions and look directly at the true nature. Good can also be negative; bad, when there is not clinging, can also be good. Just let go of the mind of grasping, holding, and you can see the true nature.

Look at your mind, and relax on that. This is like working hard, then getting to the top of a mountain – there is realization, and joy.

There are two ways of being confused. One is from not practicing properly, and the other is from the lineage not coming through directly.

The meaning of mahamudra is that ‘maha’ means great, and ‘mudra’ means gesture. Another explanation is that mahamudra means the union of emptiness and compassion; maha means wisdom, emptiness, and mudra means method, or compassion – the method to realize buddha nature.

Transcending the concept of emptiness, this is ‘other emptiness’. Words cannot touch this.

Then, because of buddha nature, enlightened qualities can manifest to benefit sentient beings.

In response to the question:

‘I recall a verse from The Aspiration Prayer for the Attainment of Mahamudra that says, ‘The light rising from meditation makes clear the nature of mind, exactly as it is’, so my question is, this light rising from meditation – is that mahamudra?’

Answer: If it is without ego, that is mahamudra.

In response to a question about mahamudra and dying:

Merging your mind with the mahasiddha’s mind, and merging your mind with the dead person, or the dying person’s mind – that is best. You can also practice taking and sending.

Deity practice and mahamudra are the same. Appearance as the deity, awareness is emptiness, that is mahamudra. The union of compassion and emptiness, that is mahamudra. The creation stage leads to the completion stage. All these lead to the same point.