

Chapter 3

Ground Mahamudra

The *Song of Lodro Thaye* is divided into the foundation, path, and fruition mahamudra. Foundation mahamudra is divided into the way things are and the way things are confused. The way things are concerns the essential quality of emptiness, the nature of luminosity (Tib. *salwa*) and the unimaginable qualities and how these manifest. Now we will discuss the methods for realization of this true nature.

74. *It is the foundation of all confusion and liberation*

75. *With its self-luminous mind manifesting
anything able to manifest anything.*

76. *With its alaya consciousness*

The Way Things Are

From the point of view of philosophy, there are two major schools of thought or philosophies concerned here: the Mind-only (Chittamatra) school and the Middle-way (Madhyamaka) school. The Chittamatra view is that all external appearances have no real existence but are just mind. The Madhyamaka school holds that the mind is also essentially empty. For those of us, doing mahamudra practice, we must first understand that all external appearances or phenomena are actually mind and then realize the mind is empty in order to be able to establish the true view of mahamudra.

How is it that all appearances are mind? First of all through examination of solid external appearances, we find that they do not really exist. We simply use labels for external appearances that are made by the mind. For instance, we have the word “hand” which we apply to a hand. But if we examine this hand closely we find that the “hand” is actually made up of four fingers and the thumb and various joints and skin and so on. The thing we call a “hand” is actually made up of other parts and there isn’t a single thing we can say is a

hand. It is just a label for this collection of things that appear together. Even examining further, a thumb has joints and a knuckle and the fingernail and these different parts are conveniently labeled a “thumb,” but even just a thumb is not a single thing by itself.

So we see in this way that actual external objects really have no real intrinsic existence. But how is this possible? In essence they do not exist, but they appear to the mind. What is the reasoning here? In the language of the dharma, we say, “being clarity, it is awareness.” For example, I can say this table exists because it appears clearly in my mind. Other than that, I can give no other reason. Because I can see it with “my” eyes, and I can understand it with “my” mind and I can touch it with “my” hand. Therefore there seems to be a table there. If I ask someone else if it exists, they will say it does and if I ask why they will say, “I see it with ‘my’ eyes and I can touch it with my hand.” So the existence of an object depends only on the relationship to our perception and there is no other reason to say it exists. In this way all phenomena appear to one’s mind and exists relative to one’s mind and this is a sign that appearance *is* mind.

This is why we can say all appearances are mind. In general there are two kinds of phenomena: external appearances or events and internal mental events. We have seen how external phenomena are mind. Subjectively, the mental experiences such as desire, confusion, hatred, compassion, love, happiness, and sadness are also obviously mind. So both external appearances and internal experiences are mind.

So by examination we first gain the understanding that all appearances are mind. Knowing this we sit down and practice meditation and from this meditation there arises the conviction that this is so, and we can meditate with this direct feeling that all phenomena is mind. A first stage is the “introduction” of all appearance as mind and in the second is the casual experience in meditation.

What is the root of saying, “all phenomena are mind.” The text says, “and its alaya consciousness.” Mind has eight aggregates of consciousness. In nonBuddhist philosophy it was believed that these consciousnesses were a single consciousness called the self or *atman*. This theory said that it seemed in reality to be more than one consciousness which can be explained by the example of the house

with six windows and a single monkey inside. The monkey races around sometimes looking out this window and sometimes looking out that window, then the north window, then the east, and so forth. From the outside of the house it looks like there are many monkeys, because one always sees a monkey's face in the windows. But really this is just one monkey. This example indicates that there is just one "self" which sometimes perceives through the eyes, sometimes through the ears, sometimes the tongue and so on like the monkey running around.

From the Buddhist point of view, however, there are actually many consciousnesses or minds. These are usually called a set of six or eight consciousnesses which are called the *aggregates* (Skt. *skandhas*) because there are many consciousnesses within each of these six. Each consciousness has its own function, for example, the eye consciousness perceives visual form, and it doesn't hear sounds or smell smells and so on. The ear consciousness hears sounds but doesn't perceive visual forms, and so forth. Each of six consciousnesses has a particular function and a particular organ it is associated with. Thus the six groups of consciousnesses that perceive externally are associated separately with the eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, and mind.

These six groups of consciousnesses also have what is called the afflictive or klesha mind which is the confused aspect. This is the seventh consciousness, so sometimes texts will say, "seven groups of consciousnesses." The afflictive mind is extremely subtle. It maintains the sense of "I" or the obscured notion of self. It does not have much clarity. When we have an occasional strong clinging to the idea of self, that is the result of the sixth, mental consciousness. But the ever present, underlying subtle sense of self or ego is called the afflictive mind or seventh consciousness. So all these six kinds of consciousnesses plus the afflictive mind will arise. The ground upon which these consciousnesses arise, the continuity of our mind which is present whether or not other consciousnesses are functioning is actually the eighth consciousness. It is that bare continuum of clarity that is never interrupted and is called the "foundation of all consciousnesses" or the alaya consciousness.

How do these eight consciousnesses come about? In the nature of mahamudra we described the two aspects of mind as having the

essence of being empty and the nature being luminous. When the luminosity aspect becomes stronger, more apparent, it arises as something. The luminosity aspect is clearly arising but one doesn't examine the nature of that luminosity which is the foundation consciousness, but without awareness of the essential emptiness of that foundation. One errs on the side of luminosity and that is basically the beginning of ignorance.

77. As for the cognitive aspect of this neutral state

It says "with the foundation consciousness" is the "neutral" state. Although the nature of this foundation consciousness is the essential ignorance, but being neither virtuous nor unvirtuous, it is called a neutral state. Virtuous or unvirtuous thoughts may arise to it, but it itself is neutral. Although there is the essential ignorance, the essence of that is awareness due to the clarity aspect, in the sense that anything can arise in it. Since anything can arise in it, the clarity aspect is also the cause of the ignorance or confusion. For instance, if we have a television that is so vivid and so clear, we begin to think the things we see on it are really there on in the TV. A person really appears to be there because it is so clear and perfect and this clarity aspect itself lends itself to confusion.

78. Its essence is empty and its nature is luminous.

79. These two are inseparable and are the quintessence of awareness.

80. It is space, unidentifiable as an object.

Although there is this aspect of ignorance, "its essence is emptiness and its nature is luminous." This is the nature of the foundation consciousness. In fact the emptiness and clarity are inseparable, but because of the power of the clarity aspect, the emptiness aspect of phenomena is not recognized. So the essence, the clarity, the "heart of awareness," is somewhat confused. Although there is this confusion, essentially the foundation consciousness is not some physical, solid thing, but rather "it is space." The statement, "possessed of the heart of awareness" means that it is the strong aspect of the luminosity has the potential of awareness. There is both

emptiness and luminosity, but the luminosity is more manifest and this is the heart of awareness (Tib. *rig pai snying po can*). This is what is meant by “appearance is mind.” Much arises in the foundation consciousness. When the appearances arise there, it is like in dreams. When we sleep we can dream of mountains, oceans, horses, and elephants. Actually, they don’t really appear, but the thought arises. When thoughts become more and more clear, they appear as things. In that way appearances arise in the mind. So we need to know that appearances are mind’s own appearances.

First we must understand that all appearances are mind by simply contemplating it. Then we must experience directly that appearances are mind through meditation by turning inward. Most people never think of looking inward because their whole mind and consciousness is directed towards outward phenomena. Then through the lama’s instructions we learn to look inward and to investigate awareness and consciousness. On top of that we need to know that mind is empty through recognizing its nature.

81. It is a spotless precious clear crystal.

So first we must understand that appearance is mind. Then we must realize that mind is empty. If one looks at the essence of mind, we examine or look at the foundation consciousness, the mental consciousness, and the sensory consciousnesses. Wherever we look, we find that mind has no flaws or stains. It’s like the clarity of a flawless jewel or a crystal. If we look into a crystal we think we see something in the jewel, but really there is nothing there, just clarity, just a perfect clear crystal. In this way when we look at the mind there is nothing to see, just sheer clarity. This is what is meant by “empty” or “empty in essence.”

82. It is the glow of the lamp of self-luminous mind.

Mind is like a clear crystal and yet it is said to be “self-aware, self-luminous” (Tib. *rang rig rang gsal*). When one looks at mind, one can’t find anything there. But mind is not like a total void or interruption of mental continuity, rather mind is continual, it is always present. That uninterrupted presence is called luminosity.

Similarly, if we examine our eye consciousnesses, we can't find anything whatsoever to that consciousness and yet before us are all kinds continually appearing vivid images. If we examine the ear consciousness, we can't find it anywhere, but the sounds are still heard perfectly clearly. In the same way, when we examine the mental consciousness, we can't point to something and say, "Oh, *this* is mental consciousness." But mental consciousness is there continuously apprehending things and has a quality of continuous awareness and cognition. There is the "self-awareness, self-luminous" quality of mind and this allows us to know our own luminous nature. It is like the light from a butter lamp. The natural radiance from a butter lamp is the aspect of clarity or luminosity.

83. It is inexpressible, the experience of a mute.

Whether we say, "the nature of mind has no intrinsic existence," that is, it is empty or we say, "the mind's continuity is uninterrupted," these are analogies for describing mind. We cannot say, "it is like this." So it is ineffable, impossible to express in words just like the experience of a mute person who eats sugar for the first time and thinks its really delicious but when asked what it is like, the mute person can only sit there in silence. So expressing the mind's nature is like the experience of the mute.

84. It is unobscured, transparent wisdom,

According to the general view, all phenomena are emptiness. This view is usually arrived at by studying logical arguments. Through logic one examines the mind and sees that it has no identifiable essence. Then one concludes from this analysis that it is emptiness.

However, according to the secret mantra tradition (the vajrayana) this view is not reached through logic, but rather through direct examination of the mind. By looking directly at mind, the emptiness of it is seen and then is understood. When emptiness is understood, one then realizes that, "appearances are mind and mind is empty." One understand that mind is intrinsically non-existent. But this intrinsic non-existence is not simply empty. If one says, "it is not

existent” it is still there. If one says, “it is existent,” there is nothing there at all.

The line “it is unobscured, transparent wisdom” means that this wisdom cannot be obscured by anything. “Transparent wisdom” means that there is no person or thing or event that can block it. This luminosity of one’s mind couldn’t be blocked even if one tried. It is always naturally present without interruption. But the essence of this wisdom being unobscured does not mean it is really some actual thing. Its essence is also empty. It is transparency. It has this essence. The name for this is “luminous” (Tib. *od gsal*) dharmakaya or sugatagarbha. Sugatagarbha is the potential or seed of the Buddha sometimes called Buddha-nature.

85. The luminous dharmakaya, sugatagarbha,

86. Primordially pure and spontaneous.

This sugatagarbha is present and is “primordially pure” which is to say that it is flawless and unaffected by any negativity. At the same time, it is always spontaneously present, not created anew but naturally present. In the Madhyamaka Shentong view it is described as being by nature “completely pure” and “free from incidental blemish.” So this kind of nature is described as “spontaneously present.”

87. It cannot be shown through analogy by anyone,

88. And it cannot be expressed in words.

89. It is the dharmadhatu, which overwhelms mind’s inspection.

Many wise people have tried to give many examples about this state, but in fact these examples are completely inadequate. Nothing can point it out. For instance, we can use the analogy of a lump of gold buried beneath the ground for explaining the essence of sugatagarbha, but sugatagarbha is not really a big lump. One will never be capable of describing it.

There are nine examples in the *Uttara Tantra*¹ that tries to describe this Buddha-nature by trying first with one example, then with a second, and then a third and so on. However, it “cannot be expressed with words” so whatever word one uses will not be right.

One couldn't say it is this or it isn't this. One cannot use any words. The line, "cannot be inspected by ordinary, rational mind" means that aside from the direct experience in meditation, it cannot be identified through mental concepts. It is the dharmadhatu, the realm of reality.

90. Established in this to begin with,

91. One should cut all doubts.

In general, as explained above from the aspect of luminosity, it is called sugatagarba. That words cannot explain it and that examples cannot illustrate it; from this aspect of its intrinsic emptiness it is called "dharmadhatu." This is wisdom and realm (Skt. *dhatu*). Dharmadhatu is unimaginable, essentially emptiness, has been "established right from the start," meaning that this is extremely important. One needs to establish it. Then "cutting through all conceptual embellishments" means not indulging in thoughts of "mind it is this, it is not this." Cutting of all such embellishments, and recalling experiencing mind. For instance, if one really practices meditation then it is extremely clear and all doubts are vanquished.

92. When one practices meditation maintaining the view,

93. It is like a garuda fathoming space.

94. There is no fear and no doubt.

According to the sutra tradition, the establishment of the view depends on logical reasoning. In the mantra tradition, the view is based on the experience of meditation. Both of these traditions are called "view." They are understood from looking at the clarity or luminous aspect of mind. One is that after contemplating it one thinks, "Oh, it seems to be like this" and establishes the view that way. In the mantra tradition meditation leads one to the experience of the way it is and thus establishes the view that way. One needs a view or outlook on where one is going. If one has a good view, then one can maintain meditation to its end. If one has a good view, and maintains the meditative experience, it is likened to the garuda soaring in space. The garuda glides beautifully and gracefully throughout the sky. If one doesn't have the habit of this experience,

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then one is always wondering whether one's meditation is correct, if it is good or bad, and so forth. Without such thoughts, there is no anxiety, doubt, or fear. It is not like when we fly in an airplane and are afraid that it might crash!

95. The one who meditates without the view

96. Is like a blind man wandering the plains.

97. There is no reference point for where the true path is.

Having "meditation without view" means that if one doesn't develop the view and tries to meditate it won't work very well. It is like a blind man wandering on a huge plain who doesn't know whether he is on the right path or not and can't even decide which way to go. Without a view meditation practice will not go well. One will not have a frame of reference to know where one is and where one is going.

98. The one who doesn't meditate, but merely holds the view

99. Is like a rich man tethered by stinginess.

100. He is unable to achieve fruition for himself and others

101. Joining the view and meditation is the sacred tradition.

Having realized the view, unless one then meditates, the view is useless. It is like the rich man who is stingy so when he really needs money, he doesn't use it. When a natural need arises, there is nothing given and no result. Without meditation, there won't be any benefit just like the money of a rich stingy man doesn't benefit anyone. Therefore, we should fully realize the view, then meditate well with this view and "these two combined together is the sacred tradition." The experience of this is the way of great beings, and we can really achieve the path.

At the beginning of this chapter, mahamudra was divided into the way it is and the way of it is confused. The discussion of the way foundation mahamudra is or the nature of mahamudra is now is concluded.

The Way Things are Confused

102. As for the ignorant aspect of this neutral state,

103. One does not know one's nature because of the five causes.

So how is it that confusion arises? As described before, there is the neutral aspect of the foundation consciousness, the aspect of stupidity. So here “ignorant aspects of the neutral state” should be understood as the foundation consciousness. When one doesn't fully realize the nature of mahamudra, the root of confusion is present. The root of confusion has five causes which obscure one's nature. Through these five different reasons, we have the clinging to the notion of self, the aspect of excessive clarity and so on so that oneself doesn't understand one's own essence. One doesn't know that it is intrinsically empty, or what is the very nature of mind. Based on this lack of knowing there is basic ignorance which is co-emergent with the foundation consciousness. This co-emergent ignorance is like waves occurring in the ocean which is like clinging to a notion of self or the afflicted mind that arises from the foundation consciousness.

The alaya consciousness is not without confusion. It is confusion but there is not virtue or unvirtue. Virtue can arise and unvirtue can arise depending on the foundation consciousness . It is because anything can arise in that consciousness itself is called neutral. Until this arises, there is the afflictive mind which is also said to be neutral. It has the afflictive emotions and so it is called “afflictive” but in essence it is neither virtuous nor unvirtuous. In general, “neutral” refers to both neutral obscuration and neutral non-obscuration. {This means either interfering or obstructing liberation or not obstructing it.} The foundation consciousness is non-obscured neutral and the afflictive consciousness is obscured neutral.

{It is a little obscured} because all appearances arise to it. Confused appearances of samsara arise. And they are not recognized as such. First there's the mere appearance and then that clarity increases and the waves of self-clinging swell. The afflictive mind causes more and more clarity or luminosity. For the foundation consciousness there is only the mere arising without a great deal of clinging. The foundation consciousness can be known as mere

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arising (Tib. *shar tsham*). The ground or foundation for that arising is the foundation consciousness. This mere arising not being recognized is the beginning of the process of confusion.

104. In the ocean of coemergent ignorance,

105. The waves of ego-fixation's confusion roll.

The five causes are the five kinds of ego clinging. The five causes of samsara are (1) clinging to self, (2) being proud of self, (3) liking or being attached to self, (4) being confused about self, and (5) the mind being too luminous.

106. Cognition becomes a self, and projections become objects,

From the co-emergent ocean, the waves of bewildered self-clinging move. The afflicted mind confuses and the waves of confused self-clinging swell. Because of an afflicted mind becoming clearer, self-clinging occurs. Based on this clinging to a notion of self, the idea occurs that one's mind is the self and that external appearances are objects, and then basic duality sets in.

107. And so the habitual patterns of grasping and fixation solidify.

108. Thus, karma accumulates and then fully ripens.

109. The rim of the water wheel of samsara turns.

Then based on this subject-object clinging, action (karma) is accumulated. Then many opinions of good and bad arise, and one develops afflicted emotions: attachment, aversion or stupidity. Then again action based on those is done and based on those actions, their results are experienced. This causes cyclic existence to revolve just like a water wheel revolves.

Chapter 4

The Revelation of Path Mahamudra

Path mahamudra is divided into three parts. The first one is the nature of the ways things are, the second is the manner of being confused about it, and the third is the introduction or revelation. We have finished the explanations of the nature and of confusion and now is the introduction.

110. But even while it turns, its essence is unstained.

111. Even while it appears, it is empty of reality.

As explained previously there is the alaya consciousness in which the klesha consciousness causes confusion. Then on top of the klesha consciousness the six sense consciousnesses are confused. Then karma is accumulated and the wheel of cyclic existence turns. Although samsara appears to cycle in this way, the mahamudra essence of the mind's actual nature is without blemish. This essence is absolutely pure, and thus the mahamudra true nature is not covered by any faults. Since it is essentially stainless, the very appearing of appearances is relative reality and empty of any true reality, empty of any truth.

In general, it is said in the Madhyamaka tradition, that the essence of all appearing objects is empty. It is essentially empty, but this doesn't mean that these actual objects aren't there—not this kind of empty. These objects are empty of their own nature. It is said of objects, "Appearances, without losing their appearance..." Appearances do continuously appear, they don't need to be denied existence, but they are empty of intrinsic nature. In this empty essence, however, the appearing is never blocked. Therefore, "while appearing, they are empty, while empty, they appear." Appearances and emptiness are not contradictory.

112. Mere appearance is the vividness of the trikaya.

In general, the character is empty or essence is empty. In character is unborn, it is dharmakaya, “Character (Tib. *gshes*) means basic nature (Tib. *gnas lugs*). So the basic nature of the character of phenomena is essentially empty. This emptiness of essence is dharmakaya. Then the radiance (Tib. *kad ?es*) is unobstructed. This means that in the essential emptiness of this unborn nature there is nothing inhibiting or obstructing and it is therefore unobstructed. This unobstructed aspect is taught to xxx sambhogakaya. The dynamic energy (Tib. *rtsal*) that arises from this in various way is the nirmanakaya. So in this way, the “mere appearance, moreover...” is the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya, the “three kayas arising vividly.”

113. Unborn is the nature of birth;

114. That unborn is unobstructed

115. On the threshold of nonduality, there is nowhere to dwell.

First of all, appearances are essentially empty but even mere appearance is the manifestation of the three kayas. Furthermore, appearances have three characteristics which are: unborn, unceasing, and not abiding. Being unborn, there is no end, and in between these there is nowhere to abide. In the past they are unborn, in the future unceasing, and in the present not abiding so they are completely free of the three times of past, present, and future.

Unobstructed just means that if the essence is empty then there is nothing to obstruct it. If it were some solid object then you could say it is blocked or obstructed. But being empty it is unobstructed. Unobstructed mind does not have to do with whether outside objects exist or not, but the fact that the mind is empty by nature means that it can arise or manifest as anything. It is not obstructed by its own nature, whatsoever. It is empty. In regards to mind and object, for instance, it may seem from our experience that mind is due to perception of objects and therefore experiences mind by perceiving the object. But actually it is the other way around: when we have direct experience of mind, we find that really, the experience of objects arising is due to mind. First the objects are recognized as mind and then with closer examination one discovers that mind is essentially empty, which is why it is unobstructed, it is unborn, it is endless, and does not dwell anywhere. This is because there

is nothing there to be born, to abide and to die. But the whole point is it is completely impossible to describe in words what mind is.

In the saying mind is unobstructed one is talking about the essence of mind, not that the mind is a permanent thing. We are talking about the essential emptiness of mind. But from the emptiness any amount of prajna or jnana can arise.

There are two aspects to mind: emptiness and unobstructedness. The emptiness is like the way it is, its nature, but through ignorance one conceives objects and phenomena outside oneself. With this confusion karma eventually begins to be accumulated. The outside objects don't really exist, but we believe they exist and karma develops. But actually it is the essence of mind which is the root or basis or foundation of the whole thing. It is like the foundation from which it (karma) all comes. That is why it is so important to meditate on mind because that is the very root of the whole process which includes karma and everything.

It is just like on television, you can see what is happening in India or Russia or what is going on in America. This creates all these endless manifestations, but if we suddenly turn the television off, it appears to be all gone. In the same way we have to discern the basis of what is projecting all these manifestations. We need to get right to the root which is the mind and cut this off. Cutting off at the root is like pulling the cord of the television.

116. From this mind, difficult to express,

117. Various magical displays of samsara and nirvana arise.

The essential quality of mind is emptiness and this is difficult or impossible to express. It is hard to say specifically that it is this or that. Yet it is the basis for the manifestation of all samsara and all nirvana. From the basic nature of mind, in the situation of cyclic existence, the various appearances arise and when there is transcendence of the cycle, nirvana, then the various qualities arise. So it is the source of various apparitions.

118. Recognizing these as self-liberated is the supreme view.

119. When this is realized, everything is suchness.

120. When there are no obstructions or attainments, this is the innate nature.

121. When conceptual mind is transcended, his is the ultimate.

Within the context of the foundation, path, and fruition mahamudra, the foundation mahamudra concerns the way of realizing the view of this basic nature. How does one go about realizing it? As explained to realize that the mind is self-liberated that all these various apparitions of samsara and nirvana arise, but in the absolute nature, they do not bind us. As described in some commentary, it is like gathering a heap of ashes—if you strike it, it disintegrates back into its original form. Self-liberation, then, is the supreme view.

Understanding mind as self-liberated is the understanding of everything. If this is recognized as the nature of all things then outer phenomena and inner mind are realized as this very suchness. Then there is no longer anything to accept or reject. This is the innate nature of the character of mind. Being completely beyond any intellectual process, completely beyond mind, it is the absolute natural state. If in samadhi one realizes this basic nature, this is said to be the ultimate. This completes the discussion of ground mahamudra

122. As for path mahamudra:

123. Mind and the phenomenal world are mahamudra.

124. Coemergent mind is dharmakaya.

125. Coemergent appearance is the light of dharmakaya.

The text begins a discussion of the two aspects of the path mahamudra. The first aspect is the mind itself and second is all appearances. In the exceptional teachings of the Kagyu tradition, the first aspect is called “the mahamudra of coemergent mind itself” and the second aspect is called the “mahamudra of co-emergent appearance.” The first is looking inwardly at the grasping mind and placing it in a state of meditation, which leads to coemergent mind itself. Secondly, directing one’s attention outwardly to objective appearances and meditating on phenomena leads to the realization of coemergent phenomena. But these two are not essentially any different because basically this coemergent mind itself is dharmakaya and the coemergent appearance is like the radiance or the result of dharmakaya. So there is really no difference between these two.

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The Tibetan word *lhen chig* (together or coemergent) in mahamudra terms means that this basic nature and the essential essence of one's own mind arises together. The first syllable *lhen* simply means basically "two things, not one thing." The second syllable *cig* means "one" or "single" so *lhancig* means "two together as one" neither just two or just one. Coemergence is not two things because they are essentially the same and it is not a single thing because there are two aspects to it. In terms of the mind one can say "mind" and "its basic nature" are not two separate things, but they are also not a single thing. In the same way, "appearances" and the "essence of appearances" are not two separate things and not one thing.

126. When the blessings of the glorious guru

127. And one's karma come together,

128. One realizes one's nature like meeting an old friend.

We need to recognize our own nature in this way. How do we recognize it? There are two conditions that are necessary; first, the blessing of the glorious lama. Depending on one's devotion and faith in the lama, one receives the blessing of the lama. Second, one can have good fortune, karmic readiness by having previously entered the door of dharma met the lamas, listened to dharma, practiced diligently, and being interested in samadhi. This is the good fortune of being receptive. So if these two conditions exist mahamudra is revealed and one recognizes it in the way one recognizes an old acquaintance. That is, like seeing someone you've met before and recalling, "Oh yes, I know you!" Like this example, the basic nature of the mind will be recognized.

129. There is no point in much talk,

130. But the beginner needs various things.

131. One should abandon either greeting or accompanying thoughts of past and future.

132. The instantaneous mind of nowness.

There is no point in much explanation. In short, the practice arises out of confidence, faith, and diligence and other than that there is really no point in endless explanation. Therefore, it is through meditation that recognition takes place. What the beginner needs is methods to put into

practice. For instance, the practice of the four common preliminary practices and the uncommon preliminary practices (Tib. *ngöndro*) and the practice of tranquillity meditation (Skt. *shamatha*). The beginner needs various kinds of techniques. Based on various techniques in the samadhi of tranquillity meditation, first the mind must be brought to rest.

In shamatha practice, but not exclusively in shamatha practice, it is taught in all the old commentaries, “Don’t greet thoughts of the past.” This means not to dwell on all the things one has done. Those thoughts should be temporally set aside. Also what one has just recently done—all the thoughts of the past should be abandoned. Similarly, don’t think about what one is going to do in the next day, make plans, and so forth. One also shouldn’t dwell on the present or even think about what one is doing right now such as thinking that one is sitting and meditating. So not greeting memories nor accompanying future plans at all. One must give up thoughts of past and future.

So how should one meditate? If one considers the past and the future, then discursive thinking takes over. One begins to think, “this happened to me” or “I’m going to do this” and soon is lost in many discursive thoughts. So don’t think about the past or the future. Then there is the mind or awareness of the present (Tib. *danta kyi she pa*). the awareness of the present is the momentary awareness of this very present instant. If one looks at the absence of this instant right now, then discursive thought will naturally not arise. Sometimes we call this awareness “fresh” (Tib. *soma*), which basically means “new” and this refers to when discursive thoughts haven’t arrived and there is just the freshness of the present awareness. So it is called the instant of awareness of the present. An instant is of very, very brief duration. One should look at the essence of this infinitely brief instant of present awareness.

133. Is the unfabricated innate nature.

134. In meditation, there should be no trace of deliberateness.

135. One should not stray for an instant in confusion.

This kind of awareness of the present should be completely unfabricated. Nothing to make, just the state of fundamental nature. In whatever is the essence of what is, not like, “I will meditate,” “I will make it emptiness,” “I will contemplate clearly,” or “I will do like this” you must rest in the mind’s own basic nature, the natural fundamental state which is

uncontrived. Then “there is not a speck of something to meditate on” means there is actually no meditation.

Although there is nothing to meditate on, this is not distraction. If in this state one is distracted or wavers, then one goes astray. So it says, “one should not stray for an instant in distraction.” Through steady mindful awareness one simply abides in the natural fundamental state of the present moment, without falling into distraction. Not only that, but not falling off even for an instant, because even in that instant of distraction the basic nature of mind is lost.

Now ordinary mind (Tib. *thamal gyi shepa*) and freshness (Tib. *soma*) are a way of seeing the essence of mind in its uncontrived state. Seeing that essence, if you don’t rely on mindfulness and awareness, it will instantly disintegrate. Once it is lost, you are just an ordinary person. Therefore, you must always guard mindfulness and awareness. Always rest in the freshness of the present moment without contrivance or wavering—always maintain that.

Uncontrived means that the mind itself is not following after thoughts, that is, that its nature or essence is uncontrived. Within this uncontrived state, one abides always. Usually mind is producing a lot of thoughts and this is contrived. We remember things and we fabricate many things. Being uncontrived means maintaining or cultivating just the essential nature of mind.

In some commentaries, it says that mindfulness and awareness are like a spy—someone who watches carefully from afar, so they won’t get caught.

136. Nonwandering, nonmeditation, nonfabrication are the point.

137. With freshness, looseness, and clarity,

There are six ways of resting or placing the mind: without distraction, without meditation, non-fabricated, fresh, relaxed, and innately clear.

Subsequently, then as is said, “undistracted, rest in freshness.” If one wanders off, then it becomes old and stale. Therefore being undistracted, staying in the awareness of “nowness,” in the present instant without wandering off is dwelling in freshness. Secondly, when resting in this fresh, present state, as stated previously, “there is not even a speck of something to mediate on which concerns the rational mind.” This is non-meditation. Other than resting in the basic nature of awareness itself,

there is no particular object at all on which to meditate or anything to do. So it is said, “Without meditating, rest relaxed.” (Gradually these are added on). This means to relax just as you are without any contrivance. The third is non-fabrication, nothing to make. The fourth is innate clarity. This mediation is extremely clear and pure. When you are caught up in fabrication, this clarity and purity don’t occur. If you’re not making up anything, then it is naturally clear and pure. So it is said, “Without fabrication, rest in innate clarity.”

138. In the space of the three gates of liberation,

139. One is mindful, establishing proper watchfulness.

Meditating with these six methods, it says, “in the space/sky of the three gates of freedom.” The sky of the three doors to freedom refers to the first three methods of non-distraction, non-meditation, and non-fabrication. Texts usually refer to the three doors of freedom as the causes free of characteristics, the fruition free of aspiration, and the essence, emptiness. However, here it refers to non-distraction, non-meditation and non-fabrication. This is when, in one’s mind, one is beyond thoughts of past, present, and future like complete space. So in this way in the space of non-distraction, non-meditation and non-fabrication it is maintained by mindfulness and awareness. Mindfulness and awareness are extremely important in all meditation practice. For instance, in the *Bodhisattva’s Way of Life* Shantideva honors those who meditate with a guarded mind with his hands folded, praying to them, to maintain mindfulness and awareness because it is absolutely necessary. he advises them to guard their mindfulness and awareness more carefully than their very life.

Shantideva’s example was the mind is like the door with mindfulness and awareness being the guard at the door. For instance in a house everyone must come through the door whether they are an important guest or a thief. So the door is very important if thieves see that there is a very strong or powerful guard inside, they won’t attempt to break in. On the other hand, if they see that there is no guard or a very weak one, they will go ahead and attempt to steal. The kleshas and discursive thoughts are like bandits that are trying to steal from inside. Mindfulness and awareness are like the guard at the door preventing things from being stolen. Continuing we can say the mind is like a bank. Mindfulness is

like the guard at the door of the bank who needs to be very powerful and well equipped with a gun. If the guard isn't powerful, they can't protect the door. But sometimes mindfulness is lost, like in an Indian bank. In India the guard of the bank is supposed to be guarding against thieves and bandits but he is also a dangerous person because he has a gun. He might just come in and hold up the bank himself. So they have the gun tied to a pillar outside the door so he can still brandish it around, but he can't go anywhere with it himself. So this example shows that as well as the guard of mindfulness, we also need awareness to make sure that the mindfulness is taking place properly.

140. Always keeping the mind balanced between tight and relaxed.

141. One pacifies the accumulation of subtle, noticeable, and gross thoughts.

With this kind of mindfulness and awareness, the mind should be in a state of being perfectly toned, neither too loose nor too tight; being perfectly balanced between those two at all times. In this way all the different kinds of thoughts, subtle discursive thoughts more obviousness and very powerful thoughts, will all eventually be pacified.

142. Rest in the state of natural, contrived mind.

143. The four levels of experiences arise in succession,

When the thoughts are thus pacified and mind is accustomed to that, then one can abide within an uncontrived, natural state. If then one is meditating in that state, then the experience is of greater and greater clarity and gradually the four stages of experience will arise in succession. First one's meditative experience is "the waterfall from a high cliff" which is the experience of first meditating. It seems that one has many more thoughts and mental disturbances than before one began meditating. If one tries to meditate, everything seems much more turbulent than before. But in fact it is not more turbulent, it is just that one has taken a look at the mind and naturally understands what it is like. So one is more aware of all the turbulent and subtle thoughts that arise. The second stage is the stage of "the current of a river." It is like a great river that is somewhat calmer and more peaceful. The third stage is "an ocean without waves." The mind is completely still and stabilized. And

the fourth stage is “the sky without clouds” which is an absolutely transparent, clear state.

144. And the sun of luminosity continually dawns.

145. The root of mahamudra meditation is established.

146. Without it, one’s talk of higher realization

147. Is like building a house without a foundation.

After these four experiences have gradually come about in succession, then finally in the stage of clear light will take place “the sun of luminosity continuously dawns.” It will abide constantly, just like a sun that doesn’t rise and set, but is always present in a state of clarity. When that happens then one has established the foundation of the meditation of mahamudra. it is stabilized, the root has been planted.

Without having a true or abiding experience of the meditation of mahamudra arising in one’s stream of being, just imaging that “I have great experience” won’t work. It is just like building a house without a foundation. It is as a house needs a strong foundation and without it will never be solid or strong.

148. However, excessive desire for this is the work of mara.

There are these experiences of the mind abiding and of clarity. If they occur, it is very good, but one should not be attached to this stage. As soon as one thinks, “Oh, I have attained the stability” and “I am really great and special” or “I have attained clarity—this is really great” then this is called the actions of mara. Attachment is not the action of maras, maras aren’t some external influence or demon, but rather the obstacle to spiritual practice that it causes. It is an obstacle to the further development of samadhi.

Sometimes we may have very good meditation with good experiences. This happens to many people. They say their meditation goes very well, either good clarity or good abiding, then one day they can’t seem to retrieve it. One day it is good, then it won’t happen again. This can create a great deal of hope and anxiety creating a problem in our meditation. We become attached to the good experiences and worry about the bad ones. Actually, our view should be whatever experience arises in the mind doesn’t matter. If a good experience arises that’s very

good; if a bad experience arises, it doesn't make any difference. This is because the mind basically is a collection of all kinds of experiences—good and bad and mixed experiences—that constantly arise and there is really no difference of what kind of experience it is. Nagarjuna says experiences and people are like mangos. Mangos often look ripe on the outside, but when they are opened, they may not be ripe. At other times mangos look like they are not ripe on the outside, but upon opening them they are very ripe. So it is with mind—sometimes its good experiences, sometimes its bad, sometimes it only seems to be good or only seems to be bad. Essentially there really isn't any difference between these two conditions.

149. Those who persevere but have little learning

150. Are deceived by superficial virtues

151. And lead themselves and others along the way to the lower realms.

So we shouldn't have any attachment to whatever experience arises. Someone who perseveres with effort for a while and feels something has happened in their meditation experience might become very confused by the experience and start to develop pride, thinking, "Now I really have good qualities." Then that good experience itself leads to confusion and "leads oneself and other down the path to the lower realms." So it is important to not become too attached to any experience.

152. Even the good experiences of bliss, luminosity, and nonthought

153. Are the cause of samsara if one fixates on them.

Even the very excellent experiences that occur in samadhi such as bliss, clarity and non-thought can be the actual cause of samsara if there is any kind of fixation or attachment to these experiences. It is important never to get attached in this way.

So, in summary, this chapter described the possible ways to go astray in meditation and the mistakes that can happen, and how to avoid them.

Notes

Note 3: The relationship between coemergence and “ordinary mind” or *thamal gyi shepa* in Tibetan is that they are pretty much the same thing. Generally, coemergence is used to describe the true nature of things. *Thamal gyi shepa* it is a very special term used by some of the Kagyu lamas because if you have some kind of hope when you meditate that you really are going to meditate on this fantastic state, on this nature of mind, just wonderful state of mind, it could put one into a bad frame of mind. To keep people from looking forward to this great fantastic thing, certain Kagyu lamas began to use this very uncommon word so that meditators would not have so much hope because it is actually just very ordinary, normal mind. The idea of coemergence (“*lhancig*”) sounds very esoteric and difficult to understand very far away. However if we translate it as ordinary mind (“*thamal gyi shepa*”) it is easier to understand, just uncontrived mind that one already has.

Questions

Question: What about anger?

Rinpoche: Looking at the essence of anger--if you have the introduction or transmission then there is nothing there, and if you realize that, it is pretty much mahamudra. Usually all the things that occur in the mind, whatever they are, happiness, sadness, and so forth, you should regard them essentially as, “wind moving in space,” as it says in some commentaries. No matter how much wind blows in space, nothing is harmed. In that way, when kleshas or happiness or sadness arise there is no problem whatsoever. You have to realize that. You have to stabilize it--you have to meditate.

Question: Establishing the view.

Rinpoche: First there is the sutra tradition according to the view of Madhyamaka there is emptiness, emptiness is like such and such. There is the Buddha-nature which pervades all beings, and it is like such and such. Clearly contemplating these things, it is a kind of understanding that comes from mental activity. Thinking about it and figuring it out--“this must be what it is like” and so on, then a kind of experience takes place.

Secondly, based on experience, then an authentic lama gives a pointing out experience of mind’s nature. Whether or not the individual

has a good understanding of the texts or not, the lama says, “sit here, look at mind, meditate!” Then the lama asks, “What arises?” “What is mind?” “What is it like?” “Where is it?” Some lamas like Trungpa Rinpoche give an introduction to ordinary mind. This is giving the view based on our experience. Once you have this view, then you meditate on it. So it is the view based on the introduction or transmission, and is followed up by meditation.

Question: What is view and meditation inseparable?

Rinpoche: View is like the door. Then contemplating again and again, eventually, whenever you meditate it is there. When view is first introduced, it is not yet stable. You think, “Oh yes, that probably so.” or “Oh, maybe not, that not really it” and so on with many fluctuations. Then when you have meditational experience of it, whenever you meditate, you arrive exactly right on it.

Question: What is mind? What is unobstructed?

Rinpoche: Unobstructed means first of all unborn. If something is not born, there is no ceasing. then when you see that it is empty of essence, then there is no obstruction. If something were solid and corporeal, therefore be obstruction. If at first there is emptiness, then there can be not thing to obstruct.

Mind’s own very nature is empty, therefore the appearances that arrive from within that emptiness are also by nature empty, they basically have not intrinsic reality.

Question: What is mind. Is it opposed to objects?

Rinpoche: Now mind arises based on objects. To our perception it seems that way. But really objects arise based on mind. Without investigating it, mind seems to arise in response to objects. if you really examined mind when it seems to arise, you see it is empty of essence. Therefore it is called unborn and unceasing. Sometimes the terms “unobstructed” and “unmoving” are used. “Primordially permanent” and “undemonstratable” and so forth. The reason is that its essential nature is non-existent. There is no way to say, “here it is,” or “it is like this.”

Question: If mind is unobstructed, how does karma fit in?

Rinpoche: As we discussed previously, there is the way it is and the way it is confused appears). Mind being permanent, unchanging, etc. these are in relation to the way it is. Karmic cause and effect are used in terms of the confusion. From the perspective of confusion, anything can arise. When anything arises, karma takes place. As was said, “awareness is the

self and intrinsic radiance is the effect.” There is the perception of the existence of self and outer objects, and based on that actions are accumulated, and based on that their results occur, then the essential nature is completely lost. The root of all that, however, is the mind and in it there is not even a bit of existence. This is the whole point of meditating on the nature of mind-- it is the root of the whole thing.

For example, on TV we can watch the news from India or Russia or anything. But when we turn off the TV, it is basically dumb and speechless and can't show anything at all. Like this anything that arises in basic bewilderment, but if you really look at the root or source, if you meditate on the mind, you see it is empty of anything. If you just look at the turned off TV nothing is there.

Question: Does the four experiences come after mind abiding in its own place?

Rinpoche: The Tibetan word rang rig means falling on itself or by itself and means is about the essence of mind. Abiding in that means that if you can maintain it, it will gradually increase and grow until you are actually abiding in it. So the four experiences describe that process. The essence is revealed, but then practice makes it actually happen. Just by persevering in meditation, the four experiences will arise by stages.

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Books by Thrangu Rinpoche

The Three Vehicles of Buddhist Practice. This book gives an overview of the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana as it was practiced in Tibet. Boulder: Namo Buddha Publications, 1998.

The Open Door to Emptiness. This book goes through in a easy-to-understand way the arguments made to establish that all phenomena are indeed empty. Vancouver: Karme Thekchen Choling, 1997.

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ⁱ For these nine examples see Thrangu Rinpoche's *The Uttara Tantra: A Treatise on Buddha-nature*. Namo Buddha Publications.