

Teachings on Mahamudra – by Lama Thubten Yeshe, from, ‘Becoming the Compassion Buddha; Tantric Mahamudra in Everyday Life’

Mahamudra: Absolute Reality

The Absolute Seal

There are many different ways of analyzing and explaining Lord Buddha's marvelous teachings on the absolute reality of emptiness, mahamudra. Here, however, we will not be trying to understand the various philosophical points of view or to develop a merely intellectual understanding of mahamudra. We will try to achieve a direct experience of it.

Buddha explained mahamudra from two different perspectives: one according to the Paramitayana, his general Mahayana teachings, the other according to the Vajrayana, his esoteric teachings. Maha means great; mudra means seal; mahamudra means absolute seal, totality, unchangeability. Sealing something implies that you cannot destroy it. Mahamudra was not created or invented by anybody; therefore, it cannot be destroyed. It is absolute reality.

I see Western scholars talking in extensive philosophical terms about mahamudra and the rest, but I have a question for them: ‘You talk about these things, but do you meditate?’ Sometimes, our mind is interested only in fantasy, which is like going to the supermarket with empty pockets, saying, ‘This is fantastic. That is good. This is healthy. That is tasty.’ In the end, you have nothing.

The intellectual world and the practical, experiential learning process are as different as a supermarket and Mount Everest. If you leave mahamudra at the intellectual level, it will never touch you; it will have nothing to do with you. Even if you write an entire book about mahamudra, nothing can stop your problems; nothing can move your wrong conceptions. But don't worry, I'm not going to talk about mahamudra too intellectually. I'm going to keep it simple.

MAHAMUDRA EMBRACES ALL PHENOMENA

Lord Buddha explained that mahamudra refers to the unborn, unchangeable nature that exists within all phenomena. It is not as if mahamudra is something special that exists only in some holy place and not in your breakfast muesli. Mahamudra exists within all phenomena without discrimination. Its nature is reality-nature. That's why Lord Buddha says, *chonam kungyi rangzhin chaggya chen*: the absolute nature of all phenomena is the great seal. This mahamudra character embraces all phenomena in samsara and nirvana.

Absolute nature is not some philosophy made up by Lord Buddha or by Nagarjuna, the great Indian master who clarified emptiness. Nobody can invent the absolute nature of reality. But even though mahamudra is the nature of all universal phenomena, our hallucinating, conceptual mind prevents us from seeing it. Instead of seeing totality, we get caught up in relative notions of reality. We have a fanatical, dualistic view of how things are.

That is why the conception, the concrete projection, of the self, 'I', appears to our mind; and it appears as totally independent, as a self-entity. Therefore, even if we know about mahamudra, we don't really know at all; we don't realize the interdependent nature of phenomena.

Check up on the ego's view of the I when you're feeling hungry. In reality, your hunger depends on many interdependent phenomena: there is the kitchen ... the food ... your body and mind ... all these things are dependent on each other. If you realize that your hungry I is totally dependent, you'll be able to control your hunger, and after eating, you will have a deeper understanding as well.

When one part of an interdependent combination disappears, the combination itself disappears as well. For example, in our group of seventy people here, when one person disappears, the group of seventy has also gone; the group of seventy no longer exists. Do you agree or not? It's so simple, so logical. If you remove one of a hundred butter lamps, the group of a hundred has gone as well, because the group of a hundred is the combination of each one.

Looking at it another way, even as you are eating your muesli, as your stomach gets full, you're thinking, 'Oh, the hungry I feels better now.' But even that is a misconception. You are still holding onto the previous hungry I, even though it has disappeared. Maybe this is difficult for you to understand. It's not surprising that many Buddhist professors misinterpret Nagarjuna's view and think that he is nihilistic, that he destroys everything.

Check up. The 'you' of this morning has disappeared, but you still think it exists this evening. Similarly, you think that the baby 'you' still exists today. But even after one second, the 'you' of that previous second has already disappeared. Everything yourself, your sense perceptions, all the objects of your senses, everything is in the nature of change; we can say, in fact, that everything disappears.

The idealistic ego thinks, 'I built this meditation hall,' for example. But the you who built the gompa (meditation hall) has already disappeared. The gompa, the making of the gompa, and the person who made it this relationship have all disappeared.

Here's another example. When it is getting dark, you see a hose rolled up and think it is a snake. Suddenly, you're afraid, 'Oh!' That's a good example. Because of the conditions darkness and the rolled-up hose you get the idea that there's a snake there. The combination of factors brings about the wrong conception, and you feel afraid, perhaps even more afraid than if you'd seen a real snake in the distance. This time, because it is so close, you have this hallucination.

This is a good example of how we hallucinate. This snake does not even exist, but your mind paints a picture, creates a fantasy, makes it up. Nevertheless, there is an interdependent relationship of environment, object, and many other things.

It's the same with the hungry I, the concrete I: it's also an ego-projection, just as the snake is. Although the I does not exist within your five aggregates, your body and mind, it looks like it does; it appears to be concretely existent. The I seems to exist somewhere within your sense organs, but it appears to your sense perception and your conceptual mind in

exactly the same way as the hallucination, or projection, of the snake appears.

Using penetrative wisdom to look mindfully into the situation, you will never find anything that you can point to and say, 'This is the snake.' You will never find it. You can't. It's the same with the I, the hallucinated concrete idea of a self-existent I. When penetrative wisdom checks up, it cannot find the I anywhere within your body - not in your heart, your brain, your leg, your hand, or anywhere else.

Outside this gompa, there are some logs of wood. If we look with penetrative wisdom, we cannot find 'Tom' within the energy of that wood. It's exactly the same if we look within the energy of Tom's five aggregates: his body and mind. No matter how much we search, from head to foot or from foot to head, we can never say, 'This is Tom; here he is.' You can never find any 'Tom.'

You always think you are something; you are not satisfied with just your name. You seek some reality, some identity, beyond the name. However, the fact is that besides the name 'Tom,' nothing else exists.

There is not much difference between the logs of wood and Tom's aggregates. Of course, the aggregates have some kind of interdependent relationship with Tom that they do not have with the wood outside, but in the end, 'Tom' and 'wood' are merely names.

Here's another example: Before the name 'Peter,' for example, is given to a child, one would not say, 'There's Peter' when looking at that child's body.

Yet, once you have named your baby 'Peter,' automatically, when you look at his body, you think, 'Peter.' You don't remember that you gave the name 'Peter.' Instead, you think that 'Peter' comes from the side of the person, from out there. Such concrete attachment to such a concrete object!

It's the same when some situation bothers you. You think, "This is bad." Actually, you have made that situation bad; you have created it by labeling it

'bad.' No such concretely 'bad' situation exists. You have named the situation 'bad' in the same way that you have named the baby 'Peter.'

All our judgments are very gross. We see things as having a very gross nature; we never see them in their nature of totality. Therefore, we need to meditate in order to investigate the totality nature of all phenomena.

There is Only Name

Other religions, Hinduism and Christianity, for example, assert a soul, some kind of permanent entity, which possesses all the goodness of the human being. But Buddhism would say that from a philosophical point of view it is actually impossible that such a solid, concrete entity exists. There is no such concrete soul, spirit, or whatever you want to call it; there is no such permanent, independent entity existing within the human being, not even relatively.

At some point in history on this earth, people thought that there had to be some concrete, solid entity, something self-existent, in order for there to be such a thing as a human being. Such a philosophy was created in order to be able to say, 'This is a human being.' So when Nagarjuna came along and vanquished such conceptions, people thought that he was nihilistic: 'Oh, don't go near him; he'll turn you into a nihilist!' Even many Buddhist traditions still have difficulty accepting Nagarjuna's view.

But you can see: there are many interdependent parts, you give a name to that combination, and then those parts become that object. Nagarjuna would say that it's the same with every existent thing: there is just the name. There is no happiness, no unhappiness. He says that if you really check, if you penetratively investigate the situation, the object, it is impossible to find anything.

Take the pain in your body, for example. When you search for the pain with penetrative wisdom in the area where the energy of the pain is, sometimes the pain disappears. I'm sure that you have had this experience. Even if you just make up the idea, 'Oh, my knee is blissful,' sometimes you will feel bliss. You check up. Good and bad come from the idea, the concept. No such thing actually exists.

All these examples show how ridiculous we are. Everything is just a name.

The more superstition there is, the more names we produce. And because there is more superstition in the West, there are more names, more things, more goodness in the supermarket!

A mirage is a good example. I have had the experience sometimes that when I am thirsty and I see a mirage, there appears in my mind a very

concrete image of cold, calm water. We all know that a mirage is a totally interdependent phenomenon: a combination of the vibrations of the sun and the sand creates this type of energy; a mirage. But when you look at it, because it appears as if water were really there, suddenly clean, clear water appears to your mind.

This is a good example of how things don't have solid existence. A mirage appears to have a very solid existence, doesn't it? But if you check up, it is merely the coming together of various conditions: an interdependent phenomenon, changing, changing all the time. It is actually the same with everything in the world.

Phenomena Do Exist Interdependently

Nevertheless, the various phenomena do exist. When we describe how things are mere names, this does not mean that we are being nihilistic and are destroying phenomena; we are not saying that phenomena do not exist. When you contemplate the right view, the hallucination, the fantasy of the self-existent object that your conceptual mind believes in, automatically disappears. When this happens, your wisdom experiences what we call right view: emptiness, voidness, or in Sanskrit, shunyata.

At the beginning of your contemplation of right view, use your intellect to examine the ways in which phenomena are interdependent, how they come together in dependence upon various things. Then, when you gain an experience of this, do not intellectualize. Just leave it there; let go. When this wisdom is there, it is a very powerful experience.

Normally, we see the world as concrete. When you go to Sydney, for example, and see the fantastic buildings, it all seems so concrete, so solid. But when you experience emptiness, right view, the whole world becomes like nothingness, so small. Of course, it is not small, but because you are

controlling the heavy vibrations that produce all the fantasies, it appears like nothingness.

Nagarjuna explained this reality in his philosophical writings, strongly emphasizing how phenomena do exist, that we are not destroying reality, nor are we saying that there is nothing.

Everything does exist as an interdependent phenomenon, even if only in name. If you understand this properly, you will understand that Nagarjuna's view is not at all nihilistic.

The Tibetan term for interdependence is *tendrel*. Each time a thing appears to us or a situation arises, we say, 'This is this, this is that.' But the moment we have said it, it has already changed.

So Much Fear

Thus, we can see that delusions arise when our sense perceptions make contact with an object. Interdependent phenomena come together, and suddenly delusion arises, such as when we mistake the rope for a snake and feel very afraid and emotional. In fact, this is a fantasy, a projection of our mind. In the same way, all universal phenomena are actually projections of the mind, fantasies projected by the mind.

However, the conceptualizing ego always feels that there is something more than what is made up by the mind. But when you check up, intensively investigate the object, the snake, for example, the hallucination disappears. When you realize that it is only your mental projection, your fear is automatically released.

It's interesting that the phenomena that look so real to us are merely interdependent combinations of things; they're all made up. When one of the

factors disappears, the whole thing disappears. But until we discover mahamudra all-embracing unity, reality everything we experience with our sense perceptions, or even in our dreams, will be a hallucination. We always feel that objects are self-entities that don't depend on mental projection, but everything in the sense world is a hallucinated bubble it

comes from nothingness, formlessness, and its nature is such that it will disappear into nothingness, emptiness, formlessness. Nevertheless, we sentient beings believe in a concrete world filled with concrete self-entities.

We feel insecure; we have so much fear. This comes from our lack of understanding, our ignorance, which means not understanding right view, reality. People often say, 'I don't believe in anything,' thinking that only religious people are 'believers'. This is common in the West. In fact, when

you have the hallucinated vision of the snake and feel afraid, it shows with perfect logic that you do believe in something. Intellectually, you might say, 'I don't believe in anything,' but in fact, you believed the hose was a snake. If you didn't, why were you afraid? If you're a true nonbeliever, why did fear arise when you saw the fantasy of the snake?

This shows that you have tremendous belief. As long as you hallucinate, there is always belief. Belief is not just an intellectual thing. Simultaneously, each misconception in our mind is accompanied by various states of mind: feeling, discrimination, cognition, and so forth. These mental factors are automatically there, watching. Therefore, as long you have wrong conceptions, hallucinations, there is always feeling.

People ask, 'What's the best solution for fear?' Here are two methods that are among the most powerful ways to overcome fear. The first is to cultivate

more concern for other sentient beings' pleasure than for your own. This attitude lessens fear. The second solution is right view, wisdom, which completely cuts all fear. Fear comes from the unclear fantasy mind, which produces speculation and superstition. Actually, this is the nature of fear.

It's the same when you worry, when you are thinking about something that you don't have. This, too, comes from not having right view. Instead of worrying, try to understand and simultaneously just to act; then you will get what you want. Right now, we don't put our actions in the right direction; we worry instead. We speculate so much, it's as if we're in a dream state.

The right view of wisdom is blissful. This is easy to understand: the nature of wisdom is bliss because it automatically releases agitation, fear, and worry. If you are free of those emotions, you feel naturally joyful, don't you? In actual fact, emptiness is always there - you just need to recognize it.

You always feel you want a happy life. Well, the happy life is always there - you just need to recognize it. Sentient beings are too much. They're always wanting something, but looking nowhere. Eventually, when you really see this, you'll laugh instead of worry. Up in the mountains, Tibet's great yogi Milarepa was laughing at the world. He couldn't control it because he saw reality. When you see reality, you, too, will always be laughing. Whenever you see everything in a concrete way, it's too heavy; you can't laugh. With wisdom, you can control the whole world.

When you perceive the reflection of yourself in a mirror, you feel light. In the same moment that you see your image, you instinctively know that it is not the real you. This is a good example. All existent phenomena, the objects

of the sense world, are like a reflection in a mirror. When you understand right view, reality, all relative phenomena somehow become lighter for you. Maybe you see it, but maybe you don't see it. Let's say there is some desirable chocolate, and someone says, 'Do you see the chocolate?' The person who understands right view, the reality of this chocolate, could say both yes and no. Why would you say yes? Because relatively, the chocolate is there. Why would you say no? Because it has no concrete self-entity.

When there is that heavy feeling, chocolate seems huge, but when you see reality, it's as if you're seeing through the energy of the chocolate, as if you're seeing it through a veil. It's not too heavy; there is no concrete vision of it. If you look at an iron door with right view, instead of seeing heavy iron, you see it as very light and feel as if you could walk straight through it. You can have that kind of experience, and it's scientific. In reality, when you check up, an iron door is simply a combination of atoms, electrons, and other particles. Even without the experience of emptiness, without mahamudra, if you check up on the nature of such phenomena scientifically, your concrete conceptions will become lighter.

When you understand the Paramitayana explanation of right view, you can easily understand the tantric view of mahamudra. 'But mahamudra is universal; reality is the same,' you might say. That's true, but the Paramitayana view is much easier to experience than that of the Vajrayana.

Here, for example, when we practice the tantric mahamudra of Vajrayana, we visualize ourselves in the clear-light nature of the divine deity Avalokiteshvara's body. Our energy becomes Avalokiteshvara, and simultaneously we experience bliss and understand emptiness. This combination is difficult. Why? Generally, when we are blissful, we lose our mindfulness, our penetrative wisdom; we become as if unconscious. Check for yourself.

When you are happy, you are intoxicated by sentimental feelings; even if somebody wants to talk to you, you don't even notice them. You are completely full of yourself. Through practicing yoga methods such as this, you learn to have a clean- clear vision of yourself as the deity and simultaneously to experience bliss and intensive, mindful right view. This is the mahamudra of tantric yoga.

THE ABSOLUTE NATURE OF THE DHARMAKAYA

Why does the dharmakaya have the nature of existing spontaneously, without effort, with neither beginning nor end? One explanation is that the dharmakaya is not subject to causes. This is made; that comes; this ends - it is not like that. The dharmakaya is fundamentally existent within all living beings. Fish and chickens have the absolute nature of dharmakaya as well. There is no difference between the absolute nature of a chicken's mind and the absolute nature of Avalokiteshvara. Only our dualistic minds see a difference: 'Oh, dharmakaya is special; something absolute. My mind doesn't have that absolute nature'. This is a misconception. The absolute nature of our own consciousness is already completely unified with that of the dharmakaya. We simply need to recognize it, that's all.

The quality of the dharmakaya absolute nature, Buddha, supreme consciousness, God, whatever, is exactly the same as the quality that exists in your own consciousness. At the moment, everything appears to us as dualistic, separate; but when our understanding deepens, the dharmakaya will appear in the mirror of our consciousness. It's a bit like television: the images are always there, but they appear to our consciousness only when we turn on the TV. The dharmakaya is like that: it is always there. You don't make the dharmakaya, but when you understand it, it appears. That's why we call it *lhundrub*: effortless, spontaneous. Actually, it is a very simple thing.

Let's say the sky is dark and cloudy, and your grasping mind thinks, 'Oh, today is too bad. I want the sun to shine.' If you have proper understanding, you realize that the fundamental nature of the sky never changes. Sunny or cloudy, the nature of the sky is there. The clouds are all so temporary; they don't change the fundamental nature of the sky.

Our delusions are like the clouds; they cannot alter the reality of our consciousness. It is always there. The delusions cover it temporarily, that's all. When you wear different clothes, your body does not change, does it? The reality of your body does not change when you change your clothes. The reality of your beauty does not change when you put on makeup, either.

Your reality is always there whether you wear makeup or not, isn't it? Creation, everything you are, is already within you. Nobody comes along and forcefully creates something on top of what you already are. Nor does

your mind make up this reality. The absolute reality of your consciousness cannot change. Even though relatively you change, like clouds blown by the wind this way and that, the absolute quality of your mind, like space, is always there.

You can see that we need much purification in order to receive the vision of the clear-light dharmakaya. You have to make your consciousness as clear as possible; then the dharmakaya will appear. You don't need to grasp at it: 'The dharmakaya is somewhere; I want to find it.' No. It is there, always with you. You just need to see it, that's all.

Tantra gives the good example that the dharmakaya is like the sky and the divine form of Avalokiteshvara is like a rainbow. The space-like dharmakaya, which is formless and in the nature of bliss, transforms into the blissful, white, radiant light body of Avalokiteshvara, a rainbow body.

Westerners like rainbows - I've checked on this. When you see a rainbow, you are joyful. 'Oh, there's a rainbow! Isn't it beautiful!' It has nothing to do with being religious, either. All universal sentient beings feel great enjoyment when their sense perception contacts a rainbow. This proves the power of visualization, doesn't it?

Whenever you visualize the blissful dharmakaya, your mind is incredibly energized, you experience deep satisfaction, and a powerful imprint is left on your consciousness. Each time you experience this satisfaction, the dissatisfaction that causes your misery vanishes. This is the method for cutting, or purifying, dissatisfaction.

When you make this method your own, you realize that satisfaction comes from the energy of your own mind. Because of this, it can go on forever, because it's not dependent on anything outside.

Most of the time, our pleasure and happiness are dependent upon transitory conditions such as the beach or chocolate. But the real chocolate, your blissful dharmakaya, is always there. It doesn't matter where you are - in the sky, on the earth, in the bathroom - it is always with you. Your mind is in the nature of the dharmakaya; the trouble is that it is covered, obscured. You

look here, you look there, but you cannot find it. And when you are sad because you cannot find it, you think, 'Maybe the lama will give me

dharmakaya.' But no one can give you dharmakaya. It is always with you; it is always with everyone. We just need to recognize it, that's all.

Therefore, we should prostrate to all universal living beings, because the absolute dharmakaya exists within them all.

Our concrete conceptualizations about who and what we are prevent us from actualizing the deity. Our ego's projections are too strong. We have tremendous, concrete emotions - how can we release them? We cannot just say, 'I am nothing, nothing, nothing.' I could tell you all day long that you are nothing, nothing, but this doesn't make your ego-projections disappear. Do you understand what I mean? But with these techniques of mind training you can easily experience emptiness and thereby release your ego's fantasy, 'I am this, that.' Right at the beginning, we say, *tongpanyi gyi lha*, which means 'emptiness deity.' This is extremely important for actualizing Avalokiteshvara.

This sense of who we are is a complete hallucination. It has nothing whatsoever to do with reality, but it is so strong. When you had breakfast this morning, for example, there was such a concrete I enjoying it; a concrete I somewhere within your five aggregates; a hungry I in your stomach, perhaps. This is not an intellectual thing; it's completely instinctive.

Ego is very tricky. When you check intellectually, when you look for your ego, it disappears, but when you have strong contact with a sense object such as attraction to or hate for somebody, or wanting your breakfast, your ego arises incredibly strongly. The rest of the time it remains obscured, in hiding.

Once you are able to actualize the emptiness deity, when you find yourself in such situations of strong contact with sense objects, you will be able to see clearly your concrete projection of 'I', which is, in fact, completely nonexistent, opposite to the vision of emptiness. With intensive awareness, you will see the strongly hallucinated projection, which then disappears into nothingness. It is nothing, so it disappears. At that moment, you experience emptiness.

EMPTINESS DOESN'T DESTROY REALITY

The wisdom of emptiness does not destroy the reality of the external world. It destroys the mental fantasy hallucinated by ego and brings you an entirely different experience of reality.

When you realize the non-self-existence of the concrete projection of the idealistic fantasy that you have believed in for countless lives, it completely disappears into nothingness. Everything becomes empty. This experience is the wisdom of emptiness. What appears to you at that time is nothingness, not even the relative things you ordinarily see. When you re-emerge from your meditation and see forms, colors, and so forth, they appear to you as reflections in a mirror, but when you experience emptiness in meditation, there is no appearance at all.

When you first experience emptiness, it can scare you; you can feel as if you have completely disappeared. You can be sitting in meditation, experience emptiness, and suddenly feel, 'Oh! I have gone completely!' Once Lama Tsongkhapa was teaching on emptiness when one of his students suddenly grabbed hold of himself; he thought he had disappeared. Lama Tsongkhapa was so happy. He saw that his student had just had an experience of emptiness. Such a precious student; his mind was ready. The moment Lama Tsongkhapa said the words, the student had a direct experience.

Thus, it is possible. This is a good example; it should energize you and give you confidence and encouragement. But don't be afraid if you experience fear in this way; don't pay attention to it. Just let go, but at the same time, be aware. Be conscious.

EMPTINESS IS NOT RELIGIOUS

Both the Paramitayana and Vajrayana emphasize emptiness. In fact, we say that emptiness is the heart of the Dharma. Emptiness is a blissful experience, like nectar. It is not a religious trip or just mythology; it is not merely something made up. Emptiness is scientific reality, not something simply to believe in. Emptiness is incredible; it is the heart of universal phenomena. When you realize emptiness, all concrete concepts of ego vanish. Automatically, you are liberated and experience everlasting bliss. Emptiness is the real Dharma; it is what elevates you to tathagatahood.

Emptiness is symbolized by a sword, whereas loving kindness is soft, like cotton; no matter how much you touch it, it never harms. The wisdom

sword of emptiness, however, penetrates all obstacles and cuts through all delusion.

You can see how we hallucinate. This morning, your hungry I went to breakfast, and even though, as you were eating, the hungry I was disappearing, there was still the feeling of 'I am a hungry person'. You were still holding on: 'Hungry me is eating.' We have such permanent conceptions of ourselves.

We also think that yesterday's I is eating today's breakfast. That is also a wrong conception. Yesterday's you does not exist today. But this is how we think; we bring past experiences into the present all the time: 'I am this, now

doing that', but it's impossible. The past is past. Even though the past has disappeared, you still keep bringing it with you. You don't want it to disappear, but it is nothingness.

Sentient beings are too much. We like to intellectualize about impermanence- 'Everything is changing minute by minute' - but actually, we don't want to let go: 'yesterday's me is here today'. However, whatever you have experienced in your life right up until this minute is not you. It has all gone.

No matter how much you idealize, 'I am this, I am that,' it is all just conceptualization. The moment you identify yourself as something, you are already something else. Check up on this. It is scientific, not just something psychological.

A momentary experience of emptiness alone is not enough to cut through our concrete hallucinations, our fantasies of who we think we are. But an understanding of emptiness together with that experience - recognizing how we conceptualize our ego, how its nature is this and that, how we create the entire fantasy - really knocks the ego; something revolutionary happens.

Some people think that emptiness is a very difficult subject and that you have to study it for years and years before you can understand it. Of course, you can study it, and you must, but unless you really look at your hallucinated fantasy ego, the concrete conception created by your own mind, you won't get anywhere. It is not enough to have a merely intellectual understanding of emptiness. You'll still be hungry - like the tourist who

hears all about Mount Everest but never gets to experience it. It is good to learn the philosophy, but you will really begin to experience emptiness only when you look, simply and practically, at your own ego's view.

When you are meditating on emptiness, for example, first there is a concrete sense of 'I am this.' Then, when you check up, when you analyze, suddenly this I disappears. When that experience comes, don't intellectualize; just let go without expectation. Again the fantasy comes, again skillfully check up, and when you apply intensive awareness, again the ego disappears. Concentrate on that emptiness, the lack of the I. Meditate on the object, emptiness.

Some Zen philosophers, for example, say that there is no object. But there is an object. It is not possible to have the subject, mind, without an object. Mind without an object is like an old man without a stick: it cannot stand.

Mind and object of mind are completely interdependent. You cannot say there is just nothingness. Mind cannot exist without an object; there is no such consciousness.

However, there are many different levels of objects, gross and subtle. At the subtlest level, you can almost say that there is no object, but there is an object. Emptiness, which is so subtle, is an object not in the way we normally think of concrete objects, but in the sense of being something that the mind holds, or knows, that the mind meditates on. The mind cannot stand without an object.

Some people think that in dealing with emptiness it is good to block yourself off as much as possible from the objects that cause you to cling to self-existence, but that is not right. It's a bit like sleeping. We have been asleep for countless lives. Our eyes have been closed, and superstition just keeps going, constantly, like a clock; it is always there. Anyway, it is not our sense perceptions that cause us to grasp, it's our mental consciousness: the

conceptualizations of our ego. Our senses are like the consul, but the ego is president. The consul passes on information 'I am this; I am that' but it's the conceptions that are all-powerful.

When distraction comes, recognize that it is superstitious mental energy. Instead of rejecting it, watch it, intensively, consciously - the bubble, the superstitious distraction, will disappear of its own accord.

THE REALITY OF OUR FANTASIES

Actually, you could say that when the distraction disappears into empty space, this is, in fact, the reality of the superstitious view. Let's say that someone tells you a big story that in Brisbane a spaceship has landed from the moon, and in that spaceship are moon people. They are as tall as the hill down there, their mouths are the size of Chenrezig gumpa, and they have two conches in their hair. Well! You'd be very excited, hearing this, and would want to check it out for yourself. You'd rush down to Brisbane, asking for information about where to find the spaceship, searching here and there but you wouldn't find anything. After that big story, all that excitement, all that seeking, you find nothing. At that moment there would be a feeling of space, wouldn't there? As if you'd lost your fantasy object. 'I came all this way, and there's nothing.' There'd be some sense of emptiness.

Of course, in that situation, you'd feel dissatisfied to find nothing, but actually, that finding of nothing is the reality of the fantasy, isn't it? After all that emotion and idealism, you end up finding nothing. That nothingness is the reality of the fantasy. Does this make sense? I am talking psychologically.

Our ordinary experiences produce great dissatisfaction, but it's ridiculous. It's because we do not face reality. Our fantasies are not reality; therefore, when they arise and we check them out, we find nothing. But that is the reality of our fantasies.

When superstition arises during your samadhi meditation on the divine deity, don't reject it. Just look at it and it will disappear naturally; automatically, you will return to the meditation object. Sometimes, instead of looking at the superstition itself, you can look at the object of the superstitious thought. Check, watch - it, too, will naturally disappear.

Closing the Door to Negativity

Losing Your Made-up Self

Whatever you think of as your 'I' 'I am this, I am that', your mind makes it up and gives it a name. When you check with intensive wisdom, nothing whatsoever can be found. It's just like an actor: One minute

he pretends to be one person, then the next minute he changes his clothes and becomes somebody else.

Since the moment Tom got his name, every day, every month, every year, he has thought: 'I am Tom.' He thinks that Tom is something to be found within his body. His wrong conception believes that his self-entity exists within his five aggregates. Over and over again, he has continuously thought

this. But it's impossible to find such a Tom; what he thinks he is has nothing whatsoever to do with reality.

The name Tom is given to a combination of shapes and colors, then the superstition arises. The idea was made up: 'This is Tom,' and then the wrong conception developed: 'I am Tom.' But actually, the moment the name was given, that Tom was already finished; the interdependent combination of various factors that was the basis of the name Tom had already disappeared. New aggregates, new colors, and new shapes arise, but constantly the idea 'I am Tom' remains: 'This is me; this is me; this is me.' But it's just the mind making it up. Absolutely! Nothing can exist that is not made up by the mind; nothing has self-entity. The phenomenon of Tom is nonexistent. It is made up by the mind. This is reality. This is reality.

Whatever we are: student, farmer, anything, whatever name we give, it is always, 'I am this; I am that.' But it's completely made up by the mind. There is no self-existing entity there. All sentient beings are the same: 'I am ant; I am cow; I am monkey.'

We can all see scientifically that we are changing all the time, but we always point to our body and feel instinctively, 'This is me.' If you really look at

this, you will understand intellectually how your conceptual thoughts make up such a self-entity.

The real experience of non-self-entity is when you come out of your samadhi and feel as if your made-up self has been lost. However, even without such a direct experience, you can understand reality simply through clean-clear, analytical wisdom.

Thus, you can understand that the divine pride of being the deity-'I am this; I am that'-is not totally made up; nor is it new. That reality is and has always been there; it's simply a matter of recognizing it. When the heavy, thick vibration of your usual projection of who you are has dissolved, you feel more sensitive; you have a subtler view. And when you have a more subtle view of phenomena, you have wisdom, you're more liberated; you have a view of totality. The fanatical view has vanished, the neurotic view has vanished, your miserable energy has vanished.

Such liberated wisdom energy transforms into the beam of light, and that in turn transforms into the rainbow body of the mahamudra deity - even more beautiful than a rainbow. Imagine that your body is that of a sixteen-year-old; just looking at this transcendent rainbow body stimulates bliss.

The divine pride of identifying yourself in this way automatically releases the hallucinated ordinary conception of who you think you are and of seeing yourself as having self-existence. Even though it is not actually nirvana, liberation, you can say that this blissful experience, especially when deep concentration develops, is like that - an eternal, blissful experience. And this

mental energy is without limits, embracing all universal energy rather than being limited to this samsaric body and all samsaric objects. Whereas normal, superstitious experiences are shakable, this experience is unshakable. You reach beyond superstition. And you reach beyond mundane expectations, which bring conflict, indecision, and doubt.

Actually, you have the ability to stay in this experience forever, without coming down, but if you intellectualize too much about 'How?' your experience is likely to disappear.

Delusions Can Show Us Reality

Dealing with Distractions

When distractions, mundane thoughts, come into our contemplation, we should not get angry or try to reject them. When superstition arises, we should take advantage of it. 'You're welcome! Would you like to come in?' Mundane thoughts are your teacher; they give you realizations, show you reality. Let's say the thought of chocolate cake comes into your mind - it is easy to use distractions like this on the path to enlightenment.

First of all, why does this thought of chocolate cake come? Because your previous experience of enjoying chocolate cake has left an imprint in your consciousness. The experience itself has disappeared completely, but the imprint remains, as if you'd sealed it, stamped it, in your mind. As long as that stamp is there, the indestructible identification will also be there. It's the same whenever you psychologically experience anything - happiness, misery, anger, bliss it is never lost. It is imprinted on your mind, programmed into your mental computer. It is always there. This is memory.

There is a continuity between the past experience and the present recollection of it. It's like electricity: the source is somewhere else, but the energy comes through the various wires to where we are now, without a break. So, although the experience of desire has passed, who is acting now? The Tom who experienced desire in the past is completely nonexistent; the present Tom is completely nonexistent; but there is the recollection of the experience. The previous experience, the thought, the person, the object everything is gone, but still the memory of craving-desire comes, superstition comes, because it is imprinted on the mind.

When you understand that the experience of the chocolate cake arises interdependently, you can see that it has no self-entity, that it doesn't come from the object; it comes instead from your mental energy. You don't need too much explanation to see this it's simple, isn't it? The imprint of the

previous experience of chocolate cake is always there, whether you are awake, asleep, or meditating. Of course, there are cooperative causes, too: the feeling of hunger, the arising of desire, and the object, the chocolate cake. All these come together.

We have to realize that the desirable chocolate cake is a complete hallucination. Objectively, it's not there; it's as if the imprint in your mind manifests into chocolate cake. You can check up scientifically. Where is that

chocolate cake? It is a projection of your superstitious mind. Without the previous experience of chocolate cake, the thought of chocolate cake could not arise now. Your experience has nothing to do with external chocolate cake; your chocolate cake is an internal object. Your object of craving-desire is a fantasy, a hallucination.

It happens like this: Every time you recall the chocolate cake and craving arises, you're simply adding more petrol to the fire of your craving. And you keep believing in it as real. Most of the time we see things as real and believe them to be real, when in fact, they are like dreams.

So, whenever the thought of chocolate cake arises in your meditation, recognize with intensive wisdom that it is a hallucination, a mental picture, and that nothing exists out there. This will leave a strong impression on your mind. Then, whatever situation arises in your life, you will see it like that.

Remember, we discussed seeing a rope as a snake? Believing it's a snake brings fear, doesn't it? If you didn't have this belief, there would be no fear. It's just the same here. When you believe in the self-existent chocolate cake, superstition arises. But if, when seeing the chocolate cake, you recognize it as nondual, non-self-existent, this will bring some kind of dharmakaya experience. This is liberated wisdom because it doesn't bring the reaction of craving.

I repeat: When the mundane thought of chocolate cake arises in your meditation session, if you use intensive wisdom to analyze the object, you will see that it is just a manifestation of mental energy. It is only mind; no object exists. Because of your previous experiences of chocolate cake, you

have the recollection of it now. The past has gone, the future has not yet arrived, so it must be a complete hallucination.

The key is skillful, indestructible wisdom. Instead of being caught up in hallucinated objects, you will have blissful experiences instead. Seeing chocolate cake as a hallucination automatically shakes desire, dissolving it, whereas believing in real, concrete chocolate cake increases the vibration of

fantasy and, by reacting again and again and again, you accumulate deluded karma.

Your Delusions Are Your Teacher

In this way you can use the arising of superstition as your teacher. In Buddhist terms, a teacher is someone who shows you reality. If we have both wisdom and method, all our experiences become our teacher; they show us reality. Learning does not come only from books. The wind, the water, the growing flowers, the growing beard! everything can be our teacher; everything can talk to us. Our limited minds think knowledge is in the library. But for the person who really understands the graduated path to enlightenment, even the energy of a supermarket can be a teacher. Wherever you go, everything you see shows you reality.

You can see: During our meditation, and during our daily life, too, instead of being obstacles to liberation, distractions and superstitions can be helpful.

They can help us realize the dharmakaya, emptiness. Our superstitions are kind: they show us the reality of emptiness. If there were no misconceptions,

how could there be right conceptions?

By using our introspective wisdom, we can see that these hallucinations come from the mind. Mental energy is transformed into chocolate cake; it has nothing whatsoever to do with external chocolate cake; no such entity exists. Seeing this, we can automatically experience emptiness.

But don't rush; you can't rush mental energy. It takes time. Be patient; accept. It's not good to push yourself. In the beginning, perhaps, having the

distraction of chocolate cake will get you down, but gradually, you will be able to put your mind back onto the object of contemplation.

Of course, it is better to have the thought of blissful samadhi rather than the thought of chocolate cake! As we talked yesterday: If we were to realize the transcendental experiences of bliss that we could experience from samadhi, we would definitely wake up from sluggishness in our meditation. It would give us much energy.

With intensive knowledge-wisdom, our penetrative introspection can become right view. After the superstition is gone, there is an experience of unity, of nonduality, and your mind can let go; you want to let go. Then, without pushing, automatically, you can easily return to the object of your contemplation.

Afterward, when you wake up out of meditation and resume your everyday life, before you do an action, you will be able to recognize the hallucinated, concrete picture and thus deal with things more easily.

Your Wisdom Is Your Guru

We have such fixed ideas about ourselves: 'I did this and that, therefore, I am guilty.' These fantasies are released by the powerful, divine, radiating essence of the guru transformed into light coming into us. All our philosophizing and conceptualizing, the hallucinations of who we think we are, are instantly annihilated. When iron and fire mix, they become completely unified: iron becomes fire and fire becomes iron. You cannot separate them. It's the same when the powerful divine wisdom light comes: it burns all your projections of yourself.

You paint a picture of who you think you are, but it's a complete hallucination, having nothing whatsoever to do with reality. Your minds are so limited; you think 'I am this or that,' based only on your past experiences.

You're not aware of the present at all, even when your eyes are wide open. Also, we either overestimate or underestimate everything; we don't perceive reality. It's incredible. When we make things more important, more handsome, more beautiful than they really are, they appear more important or more beautiful, but it's just the projection of your hallucinating mind.

Let's say you're involved in some fantastic project and someone tells you that you are wrong. Because of your fixed view, you will freak out. But whatever you do, if you understand that everything is a hallucination-object, subject, environment, your future plans - you will be free. Someone can tell you that you are wrong, but because you are flexible and have no fixed view,

you will accept. 'Yes, I am wrong.'

But this ego of ours always thinks, 'I am right.' You build up such a mandala, brick by superstitious brick, and finally, 'This is my fantasy! It is perfect!' But you've built up something completely idealistic that has nothing whatsoever to do with reality. And when there are fixed ideas like this, there is fear, paranoia. You worry so much about what other people think. 'Maybe he thinks it's nice; maybe she thinks it's not nice.' Whenever there is superstition, it's always, 'Maybe this, maybe that ... ,' Even if somebody isn't thinking about you at all, you still worry about what he thinks.

Or, if you think something is fantastic but someone else thinks it's nothing: 'He thinks I'm nobody!' You're hurt when they don't care. Ridiculous!

If you know you are nobody, then you are nobody, so there's no need to worry! Enjoy what you are doing; accept what you are!

All this is because of our superstitions, our fixed ideas. We hallucinate this incredible dream world. I mean, it's more than a dream world! This is not something that you need to believe in; it's reality, isn't it? This is how we are. You can explain this to anyone, believer or nonbeliever.

Once you recognize this polluted way of seeing things, you can liberate yourself. Then you will have no fear about what people think of you. Lord Buddha's psychology is the most profound treatment. When you become yourself, you become familiar with your entire energy. Whatever you think you are melts into light when it's touched by the powerful supreme energy of the guru absorbing into you; you experience total unity.

In your meditation, stay with the experience of unity as long as you like; it's an incredibly powerful antidote to the fixed idea of who we think we are, of the wrong conceptions. Perhaps one day you stay in that experience, and the next day you become Avalokiteshvara!

Most of the time your problems come because you create fantasies. You think they are reality, and then, when things go wrong, you blame the situation. But you are not flexible. This practice, however, frees you: you can freely communicate, freely go, freely come, freely sleep, freely eat, freely drink. It is revolutionary, truly revolutionary. And it never harms; it is blissful in nature, so soft, peaceful, and liberating.

Sometimes you don't know who to believe. Someone says, 'This is right,' and another says, 'No, that is right.' Every time you practice guru yoga, however, you should think that your own wisdom is your guide. 'Wisdom is my guru,' you should explain to yourself. If we always rely on someone else when we have psychological problems, we will remain weak. 'Guru' does not have to refer to something physical. There is the relative guru, and

there is the absolute guru. The relative guru refers to the outside person, but the actual guru is your own wisdom. 'The guru is Buddha, the guru is Dharma, the guru is Sangha,' does not necessarily refer to the external.

It doesn't matter how much the guru talks; unless your wisdom is functioning, the teachings will go nowhere. But when your wisdom is functioning, you are liberated. 'Who is your guru?' someone will ask. 'My own small wisdom is my guru,' you will say. 'It guides me in a simple way.' You take refuge in your baby guru. Every time you do guru yoga, you are taking refuge in the guru. My wisdom guides me, explaining to me my entire nature. That is my guru.

So, this practice of absorbing the guru into ourselves is incredible. Maybe it takes time for it to come together, but it is worthwhile. The powerful universal light embracing all the universal energy comes through your central channel. Because the energies of your body and mind are connected, everything will be purified and there will be an experience of totality: the darkness, bad memory, everything is purified. The light energy coming to your throat will purify impure speech and bring indestructible control, power. When it comes to your heart, you will experience unity of mind, totality like the infinite blue sky.

The radiating light is supreme wisdom and, therefore, has the power to burn all impure energy. All your conceptions, your interpretations, are consumed by the wisdom fire. Psychologically, you will feel pure.

Slowly, slowly, practice becoming Avalokiteshvara. Remember, don't feel, 'How do I become Avalokiteshvara? Does my nose become Avalokiteshvara? My ear?' I've explained this many times as it is such a difficult point for the Western mind. So check up, study. When you totally absorb the guru into yourself, you experience your own wisdom energy, your own totality.

Making Every Moment Meditation

During Everyday Life, Don't Believe In What You See

In Tibetan, we talk about *jeto chawo*: the action after samadhi. During retreat, this refers to the times between sessions, but it can also refer to our everyday life, when we're not meditating. When you have finished your session, which we call *nyamshag*, or contemplation, and have dissolved into emptiness - you, the mahamudra deity Avalokiteshvara, dissolve into the heart, into the moon, and into the beam of light, and then become smaller and smaller and eventually disappear into emptiness - you reappear out of this emptiness as Avalokiteshvara, and then, as Avalokiteshvara, go to work, eat your lunch, or do whatever you have to do.

It is important to practice like this. During your meditation session you feel good, transcendent, but after your session or when you've left here and gone back home you feel that you've gone from heaven to hell. That's wrong. In Tibetan, we describe this as *kangje lhagsub*, which means leaving footprints, trying to cover them up using your hands, but leaving more as you go. In other words, it's an endless task. Instead, you should take your good experiences with you.

It's important to have balance and continuity and not to feel that when you leave here, you've entered another world. If you feel like this, your practice is wrong; it's not integrated.

When you have finished your retreat, you should maintain the clarity of yourself as Avalokiteshvara, the mahamudra deity, and see all forms and colors as Avalokiteshvara, all sounds as the transcendent mantra, and all superstitious thoughts as transcendent consciousness. If you can't do this, then at least see everything as an illusion: see the various objects that appear to you as bubbles, as empty: 'What I am seeing is not real; not true.'

Why do you need to think this? Since we were born up until now we have been cheated by our concrete conceptions, our belief that everything is real. We always say, 'This is real.' Why? 'Because I feel it is so,' 'Because I see it like that.' Our logic is always 'I feel,' 'I see.'

We need to realize that what appears to us is like a bubble, that it isn't real.

We need to develop the intensive wisdom that sees through the bubble and not get caught up in it. As long as you have the hallucinating mind, you will see as real whatever sense objects you perceive. This is not some kind of religious trip. We're actually describing reality, scientific reality. It is not philosophy, not doctrine. It is an experience that is beyond doctrine, beyond ideas.

You can see from experience that as soon as you give a name to something and believe in it, it appears to you. The saying, 'You hear what you want to hear,' is a good example. If you don't want to hear something, even though someone says it a hundred times, you will not hear it. This shows the relative nature of our mind.

Cultivate the understanding that bad is not bad and good is not good. Recognize that you are hallucinating a bubble. Then you will experience neither fear nor excitement; you will have control. You will reach beyond the extreme view and have a greater sense of unity. You will experience mahamudra.

Your mind is powerful. If you can have this right view for just two or three minutes, you can stay there indefinitely. Of course, it's difficult to do this at the beginning - we're like the new driver who can't put everything together and, therefore, can't let the driving just happen. But when you find the skill to put things together, to have the right view, and then, when you have developed the habit, your progress on the path will go so fast you won't believe it. Such is the power of the mind.

Another way to practice in our everyday lives is to perceive the various sense objects that arise in the same way that a magician perceives the illusions he creates as interdependent phenomena. When a magician creates an illusion, due to the arising of various phenomena - the onlookers' hallucinated mental condition, a piece of wood, the magician's spell - a horse appears. The horse does not exist in the wood, nor in the magician's mantra, nor does it come from the hallucinations of the people.

This is important to understand. The magician sees the horse but knows it is not real; he doesn't believe in the bubble of the horse. His mind doesn't

move; he doesn't get caught up. We call this *nyitsog*, which means to experience the unity of emptiness and the relative bubble; to see them

simultaneously. Therefore, don't be like the ordinary people who see the horse: 'Oh, fantastic! A horse! Look!' They see it as totally real; they become completely caught up in the hallucinated vision. Instead, we should be like the magician, who sees the hallucination but doesn't believe in it. This will bring an entirely different feeling than the feeling that arises when you see everything as having a self-entity.

But Don't Reject Reality

However, although the horse is not real, the magician doesn't reject it, does he? He enjoys it; he plays with the energy. People come to watch; he makes money from it; he has a good time. It's the same with us. We don't need to reject our muesli, our chocolate; we should simply see these things as a bubble.

When you are in samadhi, contemplating your mahamudra divine body, you don't have any mundane thoughts. There is no bubble vibration, is there?

But when you come back down from your samadhi, your old, dangerous habits are still there, especially when you go back into your usual environment. At that time, you need the intensive wisdom that sees through the bubble reality of your chocolate.

At the moment we are ordinary people. We see desirable chocolate and believe it has its own self-entity. But when we develop an understanding of non-self-entity, we see the chocolate but at the same time see it as empty. Eventually, when we become buddha, we won't have any dualistic view at all; we'll have reached beyond the dualistic view.

It is very important, then, to see your break times, and your everyday life, as sessions as well. After our meditation session ends, our practice should be

to see things as illusory, as not concrete.

If your mind is divided and you feel that when you're out of meditation, you are so deluded 'I'm guilty! I have so much desire!' you will not be

happy. You think that meditation is good, is nirvana, but going to the supermarket, drinking, and eating are samsara. This attitude doesn't help. You're rejecting life. It's not necessary to think like this.

If this is your attitude, then perhaps only one minute out of twenty-four hours will be meditation; the rest will be samsara. This will mean that samsara is completely powerful whereas meditation is only an atom.

All you people who go to work might think, 'I don't really like my job; I don't like my boss. I just go because I need the money.' If you really understood that everything is a hallucination with no self-existent reality, your job, your experiences, would be fantastic. Every day, your activities would be the teachings, the lamrim. When you finished your job for the day, you would think, 'Today, my graduated path to liberation session has finished. Now I'll go home.' It's possible! I'm not joking.

We all have a life: a house, a wife, some children, a dog. And we have all these fixed ideas about what they are - but it's all hallucinated. We build up everything, piece by piece; it all becomes a total statement: 'This is who I am.' But it's all a complete hallucination and has nothing whatsoever to do with reality. If this were reality, then when you were happy, the picture of 'This is who I am' would be real. But when you're miserable, that picture becomes 'This is who I am.'

If you really check up intelligently, you can see this is what we do. Buddhism emphasizes using our intelligence. We need to see how we hallucinate, how we don't see totality, how we're caught up in fanatical views and end up miserable.

It's not only in our mundane activities that we have these fixed ideas. If you were to come to a place like this with the attitude that it, too, is a mental projection, a hallucinated bubble, then you'd have no problems. Instead, you come with a concrete idea: 'Oh, there's a lama teaching meditation at Chenrezig Institute. He had better give me realizations, otherwise, I might as well go to the beach!' You have a fantasy about the place even before you come here - that's why all you get is trouble, and you miss out on the chocolate.

The lamrim is not just the texts we study. All your energy, everything, can be the lamrim. Then you become a professional, a *lamrimpa*.

Mahamudra is Always Here

Enjoy your life! Tantric yoga has powerful methods; it doesn't matter whether you are meditating, not meditating, or even sleeping. There are methods for putting yourself onto the right path at all times. When you wake up in the morning and you experience the sense world again, try to understand how everything is a hallucination. Then, because you are seeing that everything has non-self-entity nature, you will not react to the various problems that come.

During the day, continuously see yourself as Avalokiteshvara. When you eat your dinner, for example, imagine each mouthful as blissful, radiant light energy going into your heart.

The Paramitayana view greatly emphasizes understanding the problems of desire and renouncing this or that: 'I can't have chocolate any more. I can't even have a drop of water.' If, however, you have skillful method and wisdom, whatever you do, all your actions, even those you call mundane, can become the transcendent path to liberation.

Mahamudra, emptiness, is always here. It is unchanging, permanent. It is not something special in some special place. If you think that samsara is your ordinary life and emptiness is up there somewhere - no! You will never find reality if you think idealistically and look for it in books or lamas. You will never find reality that way.

Spirituality is always here, too. We say, 'Oh, I am looking for spirituality. I need to find lamas, priests, texts, bibles' but spirituality is always here. It is reality, and reality is not dependent upon whether you believe in it or not. If you look into the mundane, hallucinated bubble of everyday life, you will see reality.

Of course, the ability to remain in your contemplative state and simultaneously to do activities is the most difficult thing; only a buddha is able to accomplish this. But try to experience this. Then your life will be worthwhile.