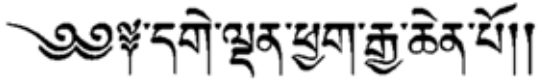


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# Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness



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## 4. The resultant appearance of the benefits

We have been covering this fourth sub-division of Kyiwu Tsang's commentary, which is divided into two:

1. Identifying calm abiding
2. Introducing the mind

### 1. Identifying calm abiding

As mentioned in the auto-commentary, no matter how firm and how stable the concentration at the ninth stage may be, if it is not combined with physical and mental pliancy then it is still a meditative state of the desire realm, and is not yet calm abiding. The actual state of calm abiding is defined as engaging in single-pointed concentration on an object for as long as one wishes, accompanied by the bliss of physical and mental pliancy.

Obtaining the state of calm abiding, as explained in the teachings, is the basis for obtaining many further qualities such as clairvoyance, and miraculous powers. It is also the point where one obtains the mind of the higher realms i.e. form and formless realms, and the mind derived from meditation, as well as the preparatory stages of the four higher concentrations. Thus achieving calm abiding serves the basis for obtaining many higher levels. As mentioned previously the sequence of obtaining the bliss of physical and mental pliancy is that mental pliancy is obtained first followed by physical pliancy, while the bliss induced by physical pliancy is experienced first, followed by the bliss of mental pliancy. That was explained in a previous session, as was the definition of calm abiding. It is good to get a sound understanding of what calm abiding actually is by referring to the definition, along with an understanding of physical and mental pliancy. As mentioned previously, more detailed explanations of the nature of calm abiding and physical and mental pliancy are in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* (the extensive lam rim) and *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.

It seems that we have adopted the practice of considering the *Lam Rim* as a preliminary topic, whereas the reverse is true for the great masters. Great masters and meditators revere the lam rim as one of the most precious and essential texts for developing the mind leading to enlightenment. In fact if one is not able to subdue one's mind by studying and practicing the *Lam Rim*, then there is no other teaching that will help to subdue the mind. If we find that our mind seems to become coarser and that we have mental blockages, then that is because we have not been able to apply the practices described in the *Lam Rim*. When we notice that we seem to have less faith in the teachers and the teaching itself, and that our mind has not transformed, then the fault lies in none other than the unsubdued mind.

One of the verses from the *Lama Chopa* or *Guru Puja* mentions 'those who have not been tamed, even after a thousand Buddhas descending'. Rather than assuming that this passage relates to other sentient beings, we must understand that it relates to ourselves. If our mind is not yet subdued then we have not yet been tamed.

The main point that I am emphasising is that you must try to put into practice whatever understanding you gain from the teachings, making sure that they serve as a means of subduing the mind. If it becomes a means to increase delusions such as pride and so forth, then practising and studying the teachings will have not served their purpose. It would be a real shame if the teachings become a cause to increase, rather than decrease the delusions.

Actually, we find that there are ways and means to help to subdue the mind in every religion. However rather than putting into practice those techniques, it seems that the delusions increase in many of the followers of the different traditions, which is how sectarian attitudes arise. Saying things like 'our religion is better than others', leads to disputes and conflicts that cause destruction to each other's religion. This is very prevalent, even to this day.

When we really investigate the cause, it is not a fault of the religions themselves. The fault lies rather with those who follow the religion not being able to put it into practice as means to bring about the intended result, which is to subdue the mind. This is a really crucial point to understand.

Also, as the teachings mention, one must not judge the person but judge what's behind the person, the teaching itself, and examine whether it is authentic or not. But often it seems that the opposite is practiced, where one follows the teacher before really checking if they are qualified with the knowledge of the teaching. If we judge merely by the appearance of the person and not the teaching itself, then that too is a fault. This is something that we need to keep in mind.

As the great master Geshe Potowa says, 'the distinction between Dharma and non-dharma is whether the practice helps to reduce the delusions in the mind or not'. Authentic Dharma practice will be an aid to overcome the delusions in the mind, while non-dharma or worldly dharma increases the delusions in the mind. This is a very clear distinction. If one's practice helps to subdue the mind, then it is a Dharma practice. Likewise if meditating on whatever understanding one has of emptiness helps to lessen grasping at the self, then the meditation on emptiness has pointed us in the right direction, and is therefore an authentic practice. But if grasping at the self increases when meditating on whatever understanding one has of emptiness, then it has led us astray. This is something that we should keep in mind.

Dharma practice is to really help subdue the mind, to lessen its faults and increase its qualities. As I mention regularly, this cannot be achieved in one or two days. Rather we must have a realistic approach, and take a broad view. If we can lessen just one negativity and increase just one quality a day, then that will eventually lead to the removal of all faults from the mind and

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increase one's potential to have all the good qualities in one's mind. Expecting that suddenly all faults will just naturally fade away and that we will be naturally and spontaneously endowed with all the good qualities is an unrealistic approach. It just doesn't happen!

In relation to the definition of calm abiding, Kyiwo Tsang's commentary further explains that obtaining calm abiding depends on whether one has obtained a complete subtle pliancy or not. When one obtains that complete form of pliancy, then one has obtained calm abiding. However if one does not apply continuous focus on the object, forming a strong familiarity with calm abiding meditation, then one will not obtain the state of signlessness, non-discursiveness and complete pacification.

The text then explains that 'sign' refers to ten different types of objects; which are the five sense objects, the three poisons and the male and female bodies. When we consider these ten signs as objects of distraction, we find that they do indeed subsume all forms of distractions. When in meditation, it is in relation to any of these ten signs that we become distracted. This explanation is also in accordance with the lam rim teachings.

The Kyiwo Tsang commentary then further explains that when one initially engages in the practice of focusing on the mind, then as soon as any of the signs appear one must immediately remember the faults of allowing one's mind to be influenced by the appearance of that sign. Remembering the faults will help to prevent one's mind from being influenced by the appearance of the signs.

Then, with further familiarity one will reach the point where the signs will not appear at all. Initially, if the signs do appear, they will naturally subside and not appear. Then as one further meditates and focuses on the mind itself, one will reach the point where none of the signs appear. At that point, the very stark bareness, or the nature of the conventional mind itself will be very apparent and clear, and along with that there will be a sense of real joy, and a feeling of natural ease. One then just remains in that state of focusing only on the mind.

When one reaches that stage of focusing entirely on the mind itself, where it appears very clearly and vividly, while also inducing a sense of real joy and ease, then because of the lack of any appearance of the signs, one has reached the state of signlessness. This explanation is in accordance with Asanga's *Hearer's Levels*.

When one reaches that point where one has the clear and vivid appearance of the mind itself, along with an experience of joy in the mind, then without allowing any other thoughts to interfere, one places one's entire focus on the mind itself. The experience at that time would be a sense of complete comfort and ease of mind. The bliss that is experienced will be like water bubbles that continuously form and then subside, before forming again. In that way the mind experiences a continuous sense of ease. At this point one has also reached the stage of being completely free from all discursive or conceptual thoughts. Thus it is called the state of non-discursiveness.

As one continues to engage in that meditative state of focusing on the mind, the experience of ease and bliss just

naturally fades away without intentionally having to discard it, just like a pine tree slowly sheds its bark. This means that the grosser level of that sense of ease or enjoyment fades away, leading to a more subtle state of bliss and enjoyment. In other words, the grosser levels of that bliss naturally fade away leading to a more subtle and refined form of bliss. Then, being completely immersed in that meditative state of focusing on the mind, one reaches the point where even one's own body will not be visible. As such there is no experience of physical discomfort or disease, and there will be no physical hindrance to one's focus on the object, which is the mind. At that level, the mind itself will appear to be like space where there is complete vacuity.

When the meditator comes out of their meditative equipoise, then as a result of having reached that state of clarity and vividness of the mind during the meditative state, a constant sort of awareness would be apparent in the post-meditative state as well. It will be similar to an upturned cup, a bowl of vacuity, at the level of one's heart. Even in the post-meditative state, that appearance remains as a result of one's intense and continuous focus during the meditative state. That post-meditative experience arises from one's meditative experience, and it is not something that is superimposed. Rather it is a result that arises from one's earlier familiarity of focusing on the mind. When one comes out of the meditative state, because one's body was not visible in the meditative state, there will be an experience of obtaining a new body again. Along with that experience there is a sense of joy with obtaining a body again.

When such a meditator goes about and interacts in the world again in the post-meditative state, the delusions such as attachment and anger will still occur, but at a very minimal level and with a much less intensity and duration than previously. That is the result of having meditated in such a way. As presented earlier, at this point one has obtained complete pacification.

The actual clarity of that meditative state is further defined as being such that when looking at a wall, for example, the meditator will see the wall clearly to the point of seeing every atom of the wall. That clarity is the result of the clarity of the object of one's meditation.

Stability refers to having applied effort in maintaining a stability of focus on the object, to the point where one is able to maintain a continuum of a meditative state, even during sleep. What is being indicated here is that the sleep state becomes similar to the state of concentration itself, and dreams become very vivid and clear as well. Kyiwo Tsang further mentions that these descriptions are in accordance with Asanga's text *Hearer's Levels*. Specifically, Kyiwo Tsang mentions that the explanations in Asanga's *Hearer's Levels* point out that all of the qualities described earlier are the attribute of focusing on a formless object such as the mind, in contrast to using an object that has form. When a formless object such as the mind is used, the qualities described earlier are evident.

## **2. Introducing the mind that is focused on**

One needs to understand that it is the chosen object for developing calm abiding, which is the mind itself, which

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makes mahamudra unique. As it is the mind focussing on itself it is as if the object and subject are actually one.

In introducing the mind as an object for developing calm abiding, there are two subdivisions:

1. That which is mistaken
2. Accepting that which is unmistaken

*1. That which is mistaken*

In order understand the points made here, one must first of all understand that there is the conventional nature of the mind as well as the ultimate nature of the mind. In achieving calm abiding, there are those who may mistake the conventional appearance of the mind as the actual ultimate nature of the mind, which is mistaken. The unmistaken, according to the explanations of the lineage lama, is being able to identify the object as the conventional mind.

The following verses from the root text state:

*25. Thus although you can see this nature of the mind most obviously, nevertheless you can never hold on to or point to any particular thing as 'my mind'.*

*26. [After you have developed through these methods mental quiescence on the conventional mind], most meditators of the land of the snows agree that then to fix gently in meditation on whatever appears [on the clear mirror-like nature of your mind], without grasping at any extraneous thoughts or preconceptions is an oral tradition method for the easy forging of buddhahood.*

The auto-commentary doesn't give an explanation of these two verses, however Kyiwo Tsang's commentary presents the following explanation: just as teeth falling out and the hair turning white are the nature of someone ageing, the conventional level of the mind is perceived as colourless and shapeless, and the mere vacuity of the mind itself. What is basically being explained here in simple terms is that as in accordance with the explanations given earlier, the attributes of the mind are that it is colourless, shapeless and unobstructed by any physical forms. Thus it has the propensity of being empty, like space.

Thus, when initially identifying the mind it will appear to the meditator as being colourless, shapeless and a mere vacuity. That vacuity is then mistaken for the actual emptiness of the mind itself. There are those who, being mistaken themselves, actually say, 'If you meditate on the nature of the mind in this way, when that becomes apparent you have reached an ultimate state, then that is what will bring you to buddhahood'. The root text refers to this when it says 'forging of buddhahood'.

As the commentary further explains, identifying the mind as being formless and shapeless and unobstructed is the identification of the conventional nature of the mind. That is basically how the mind will appear when its conventional appearance becomes apparent. As mentioned previously, there are many who mistake that for the actual ultimate nature of the mind. When the root text refers to 'the land of snows' it is referring to Tibet, and is pointing out that some earlier meditators fell into that mistaken view.

The commentary explains that this state is none other than a state of reaching calm abiding focusing on the conventional mind, which is in fact not unique to Buddhist practice, as it is held in common with even non-Buddhist meditators. So it is not such a unique and high achievement on the path to enlightenment. Rather it is merely the state of calm abiding focusing on the conventional nature of the mind.

As mentioned, there are those who mistake that for perceiving the ultimate nature of the mind and who even present it to others as the unique technique of realising the nature of the mind, saying, 'This is a unique instruction, and passing it on to you is as simple as giving you food or alcohol'. As mentioned in the root text it seems that at certain times in Tibet there were some meditators who actually mistook gaining that meditative state for the actual realisation of the emptiness of the mind. If that has occurred in the past there is no reason why it can't occur again, so that is something that we have to be wary of, as it is all too easy for us to fall into that trap.

The commentary then further explains and clarifies how that achievement in itself is not so unique, using the example of generosity. If generosity of giving even a mere morsel or piece of food to an animal is combined with either renunciation or bodhichitta, then just as that act of generosity will respectively be a practice of either the medium scope or the great scope, so too if reaching the level of calm abiding focusing on the mind is accompanied with either of these motivations, then one could say that it has some unique properties or attributes. Otherwise it is just a meditative state, and must not be mistaken to claim that meditative state as a genuine and unique state in accordance with Buddhist practice. If engaging in single-pointed meditation is preceded by a good motivation such as renunciation or bodhichitta, then in accordance with one's motivation, the practice itself becomes a virtuous practice and a unique Buddhist practice as well.

We must also relate this to our daily practices as well. As mentioned previously, a practice becomes a Buddhist practice if it is accompanied with refuge, and it is a Mahayana practice if is accompanied with the bodhichitta attitude. That is how we ensure that our practice is a genuine and unique practice. That is how we must understand and take these instructions on a personal level; we should remind ourselves to make sure that our practice is a genuine, unique Dharma practice used to subdue our own mind. We all understand that without refuge there is no way of it becoming a Buddhist practice, and the definition of 'refuge' itself, as explained in the past, involves having the fear of the lower realms and cyclic existence in general.

That fear of the lower realms and of cyclic existence does not just come about naturally, so how does one generate it? We do so by contemplating the reality of cause and effect, contemplating on how, due to positive causes, one will experience positive results, and due to negative causes one will experience negative results. When we contemplate that law of cause and effect of karma the reality becomes more and more apparent, then when one

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combines it with one's own experiences, one will come to realise that even in this life one has engaged in many more negative karmas than virtuous karmas.

If that is true for just this life, not to mention previous lives, one will naturally assume that one has created much more negative karma, which becomes the cause to be reborn in the lower realms and cyclic existence again. So when one contemplates that reality, the wish to do something about it will be generated naturally and spontaneously.

When one reaches that level of understanding, and it dawns that one has created much more negative karma, which is the cause for lower rebirths in future lifetimes, then the need to engage in practices of purification becomes extremely strong, to the point when one cannot rest idly without purifying one's negative karma. If in the evening before going to bed, one finds that one has created negative karma during the day, then because of a sound understanding of cause and effect, there will be a natural impulse of wanting to purify that negative karma, as it cannot be left without being purified. That is the level that one will reach. One will also rejoice and dedicate the virtuous karmas that one has created during the day.

There is no one here who is not familiar with the purification practice. But what is the use of knowing the technique if we don't use it? Knowing the technique is useless if we don't actually use the technique.

If someone doesn't know the techniques of how to purify negative karma, then there is not much to be done. But it is really up to those of us who have belief in the karma, and who know how to purify negative karma, to put it into practice. A simple but effective practice would be to generate a strong sense of regret for the negative karma one has created and then with that strong sense of regret, to think 'It is really disastrous that I have created this negative karma, and I cannot go without purifying it. I must purify it, because if I don't it will lead to further negative consequences for myself'.

With an understanding of effect of negative karma, one develops a strong sense of regret within oneself. Then with that sense of regret, and strong wish of not wanting to repeat the negative karma again, even at the cost of one's life, one develops the strong resolution, 'I will not create this negative karma again'. If one develops that mind for even a short time and recites, for example, one mala of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra; that then becomes the purification practice and one's negative karma is purified. As the teachings present, one of the methods for purifying negative karma is to rely on the names of the enlightened beings, and this is basically the technique.

If we find that it is hard to develop that resolve to not commit a negative act again, then that is because the regret is strong enough. The stronger the sense of regret one has, the stronger the wish not to repeat that negative action will be. For example, if someone were to find themselves engaging in an act of stealing, and comes to really see that as being a totally negative deed which shouldn't be done, then a sense of regret about having engaged in the act of stealing will arise very strongly. If it is a very strong sense of regret, then the thought of never

wanting to do it again will naturally occur, which will actually prevent the person from stealing again. This is how, on a practical level, we can understand how a strong sense of regret will help to prevent one from repeating negative actions in the future.

The following session, as you are all aware, is the discussion night. As mentioned previously, it is good for you to take part in the right state of mind, with a good motivation and so forth. It would be particularly good for the discussion to be focused on the actual definition of calm abiding, what calm abiding is, and its qualities particularly in relation to the physical and mental pliancy, specifically identifying physical and mental pliancy and the bliss that is induced by them. Those points are good to discuss in order to gain a better understanding of them.

The virtue of discussing and thus gaining a better understanding of all of these points will be that when one is ready to engage in the actual practice of developing calm abiding one will not need to be too worried about the need of finding someone for instructions, because one would have already become familiar with the technique. That is why we are becoming familiar with these topics now, so that when the appropriate time comes for us to engage in the practice, we will have all the tools at our disposal. Right now, we even have access to the textbooks and if at any time we have a doubt about a certain point, we can refer to them to make it a bit clearer. So, we are fortunate to have these resources at this time.

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Edited Version*

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