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# Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇམ་དགེ་ལུན་ཡུལ་གྱི་ཆེན་པོ།།

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. (*pause for meditation*)

## 4. IN BRIEF, APPLYING MEDITATION TO ALL APPEARANCES (CONT.)

The auto-commentary states:

In summary, I convey the instructions of my own spiritual master who is not only 'omniscient' in name, but in accordance with the meaning of his name, is indeed all knowing.

Kyiwo Tsang explains that while 'in summary' can relate to the summary of the presentation in general, it specifically emphasises the main point, which is to gain an understanding of emptiness when reflecting upon interdependent origination, and to gain an understanding of interdependent origination when reflecting upon emptiness. We have explained this a few times previously, and it is necessary to keep note of this essential point.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary further quotes Lama Tsong Khapa's commentary on *Root Wisdom* which reads: 'The possibility of emptiness implying interdependent origination is for the Prasangika, who validly negate inherent establishment, but not for other systems'. This is how the Prasangika presentation is explained to be unique. His Holiness the Dalai Lama also regularly emphasises the uniqueness and profundity of this point in his teachings.

If reflecting on the fact that things do not exist inherently or truly enables one to immediately gain an understanding of how things arise as interdependent originations, and if reflecting on how things are interdependently arisen, one is immediately able to reflect upon how things are empty of inherent existence, then one has gained an insight into this unique presentation of the correct view. Reflecting on this point and gaining an understanding of it puts one onto the right track for understanding the correct view, as presented by the Prasangika.

It is similar to how it was explained in *Four Hundred Verses*, which says that those who have little merit will not be able generate even a doubt about the correct view, while for those with some merit, even a doubt about the correct view will shatter the very core of cyclic existence<sup>1</sup>. This explanation is in accordance with what is being presented here.

36. *Let me recall a few words from the mouth of my root Guru, Sangye Yeshe, a truly omniscient buddha, who has said succinctly,*

37. *'If you can see whatever thoughts arise in your mind as a process of mental labelling, then the sphere of all things [dharmadhatu], the true supreme voidness, is dawning on you without any reliance on other forces of logic. In this state, when voidness has appeared [to your mind's perception], fixing your consciousness single-pointedly on that voidness, is truly a wonderful feat.'*

Even though we covered the meaning of these verses briefly earlier, we can reflect upon it further. The Kyiwo Tsang commentary explains that for ordinary beings whatever appears to us appears as existing from its own side. The opposite of that is that things do not exist from their own side but are merely labelled and merely imputed by one's conception. When it dawns that each and every phenomenon is merely labelled on its basis by conception, then that is when one gains the understanding of the way things actually exist. The conceptual mind here refers to a mind that validly labels the object.

The object of negation is the appearance of inherent existence or true existence. At the point when one is actually able to negate that with a non-affirming negation, which means that nothing is superimposed, on top of that negation, one gains the understanding of dharmadhatu or the sphere of all things in the subtlest form. On gaining that understanding of emptiness, which was initially based on the reasoning of interdependent origination, one will be able to apply the same reasoning of interdependent origination to all other phenomena without having to resort to other reasonings, and thus gain the understanding of dharmadhatu, or the sphere of reality of all phenomena.

As the commentary further explains, as that dawns upon oneself, to be in a meditative state where the sphere of reality of all things (emptiness) and the wisdom realising that are as if they are one and inseparable, and to be able to single-pointedly focus on that without distraction, is a most wondrous and amazing feat indeed; this is finding the correct path that pleases all the buddhas.

What is being clearly explained here is that the main factor that pleases all the buddhas is finding the correct path that leads to buddhahood. With respect to identifying the object of meditation and how to actually engage in the meditation technique, the mind of the meditator focusing on the object and the object itself are to be regarded as one and inseparable. What is clearly indicated here is that even though the subject and object are not one, it is as if they have become one. This is also one of the main points that I emphasise regularly when presenting the technique of meditation, so you need to have clear understanding of this point.

To explain this again, being in a meditative state where the object, which is the sphere of reality of all things (dharmadhatu or emptiness), and the subject, which is the mind or the wisdom realising that, are as if they are one and inseparable, is said to be a most wondrous and amazing feat that pleases all the buddhas. And as I have indicated and emphasised regularly, regardless of whatever meditation one engages in and whatever object one may be focusing on, when one reaches the point

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<sup>1</sup> Verse 180, See the teaching of 22 May 2007.

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where the object and one's own mind focusing on it appear to be one and inseparable, then at that point one's focus becomes very firm and very stable. This will enhance one's focus and whatever meditation one may be doing becomes very effective.

In the root text the author Cho-kyi Gyaltsen says, 'Let me recall a few words from the mouth of my root Guru, Sangye Yeshe'. Kyiwo Tsang's commentary further elaborates that what is being implied in this statement is that in order to gain the profound understanding of dharmadhatu, and to be able to meditate on it, one needs to rely upon the profound instructions of one's own guru. It is further emphasised in the commentary that without relying upon the profound and unmistakable instructions of one's own root guru, one will not be able to gain the correct understanding leading on to the realisation of emptiness. The commentary explains that the lama should not be any one but a qualified lama, who has the unbroken lineage of the Buddha's own words, that which has come down to one's own root guru through an unbroken lineage of masters. In that way one will receive the unmistakable and profound instructions on how to gain the correct understanding of the view.

As the auto-commentary does not have an elaborate explanation of these verses, I have resorted to Kyiwo Tsang's explanations. Although it contains further elaboration, I have just presented the main points.

The next verse, which we have also briefly covered, basically encompasses the same points that were made earlier.

*38. Similarly, Pha-dampa Sangay has said, 'Consciousness applied in the perception of voidness, once it has understood voidness, should be turned round full circle to destroy the ignorance of grasping for its own true independent existence. Voidness itself and the perception of voidness are both void of being tangible concrete entities obstructing anything, O! people of Ding-re.' All such quotations lead to the same idea.*

The main point that is being made here, which has been explained earlier, is that when reflecting on the interdependent origination of phenomena, one needs to be able to immediately reflect upon the empty nature of that phenomena, or its lack of inherent or true existence. Likewise when reflecting upon the lack of inherent existence or true existence of any phenomena, its interdependent origination needs to dawn upon one.

The Kyiwo Tsang commentary then further explains that in brief one first meditates on the selflessness that is to be understood as imputed existence, using one's own continuum as an object. Having understood how it applies to oneself, one can then apply it to other phenomena. Using the mind itself as an object, as well as whatever appears to the mind, one sees them in the light of being established as interdependent originations thus negating the independent existence or inherent existence of all phenomena. Meditating in meditative equipoise on that point is the Gelug Mahamudra tradition of meditating upon voidness and is the actual mahamudra.

## **2.3. Conclusion**

According to the Kyiwo Tsang commentary, this has three further sub-divisions:

1. The manner of dedicating the merits
2. The manner of removing interferences by applying the benefit derived from meditation
3. The manner of actualising the correct path

### **1. THE MANNER OF DEDICATING THE MERITS**

The corresponding part in the auto-commentary reads:

The virtues of having meditated upon mahamudra are dedicated towards the peerless awakening mind of Buddhahood. In accordance to the presentation in the root text there is the preparation, the actual and the conclusion. While the earlier categories have been presented, the conclusion is not explicit in the root text. However it can be presented here in order to distinguish the separate categories:

*39 At the conclusion of your meditation session, you should dedicate whatever virtue has accrued from meditating on mahamudra, as well as your ocean-like accumulation of virtue in the past, present and future, towards your attainment of the peerless enlightenment of buddhahood (for the sake of all beings).*

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary explains that having completed the meditation session the main factor that one is dedicating is the motivation of bodhichitta with which the meditation session commenced. One also dedicates the merits that one has accumulated over the three times to all beings, so that they can generate the mind seeking enlightenment.

Here 'dedication' refers to dedicating the virtues that one has accumulated during one's meditation session on mahamudra, which was preceded by the bodhichitta motivation. At the very beginning of one's practice, one generates the motivation 'I engage in the practice of the meditation of mahamudra in order to free all beings from all suffering for the purpose of achieving enlightenment'. In accordance with that motivation, at the very end one also dedicates whatever virtues one has accumulated during one's sessions towards enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Here one also needs to bring to mind the difference between motivation and dedication. In order for a dedication to become a dedication, there has to be some substance to dedicate, which in this case is the merit that one has accumulated from one's practice. Whereas motivation is similar to an aspirational prayer - one may not have actually engaged in any practice, but one may still have an aspirational prayer to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. When one has not actually engaged in any particular practice, then the motivation is like a mere aspiration, which cannot become a dedication because there is no substance or virtues yet accumulated to dedicate. One needs to understand this difference between motivation and dedication.

While one is specifically dedicating the virtues or merit that one has accumulated from engaging in the practice of mahamudra, one also brings to mind all the merits or virtues that one may have accumulated in all three times -

all the merits that one has accumulated in the past, is accumulating now, and will accumulate in the future. This is a very profound, vast and extensive way of making a dedication, so it is good to bring this to mind in whatever practice one engages in. When one actually dedicates the specific practice one does now, one also brings to mind all virtues that one has accumulated in the past. Even though we may not recall specific instances of having accumulated virtue, particularly in relation to past lives, we can however still dedicate that. This is a very extensive way of dedicating merit to accumulate vast amounts of merit.

When the teachings indicate dedicating the virtue of the beginning, the middle and the end, one can reflect and bring to mind:

- One generates the bodhichitta motivation prior to engaging in the meditation session.
- Even though the bodhichitta motivation is not manifest during meditative equipoise on emptiness. Nevertheless, due to the motivation prior to engaging in the meditation session, the mind focusing on emptiness is said to be accompanied with a continuum of that bodhichitta motivation. Thus, while single-pointedly engaged in the focus on emptiness, one still accumulates the merit from the motivation of bodhichitta.
- At the end, being mindful of the merits and virtue that were accumulated during the meditation session, one dedicates the merits towards enlightenment.

In this way we can see how the beginning, the middle and the end of the practice have all been extensive ways of accumulating merit.

It is good to apply this to every practice. The main point is that whatever virtue one may accumulate in any practice that one does, if one dedicates that towards enlightenment then that is the most supreme form of dedication.

One can also dedicate one's merits towards having the perfect conditions to continuously meet with the sutra and tantra teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa, and to be able to uphold the Dharma.

One also does dedications for the great Mahayana teachers who are expounding the unmistakable path, to have a stable and long life, and for all of their aspirations to be fulfilled. To make dedications in this way would be very meaningful.

In summary, we are dedicating towards the fulfilment of the all hopes, wishes and happiness of all beings and for the Dharma to spread. In addition we also dedicate that we will be able to continuously meet with, and follow a Mahayana spiritual friend who has all the qualities intact, to become like them and to practise in accordance with the instructions of the spiritual teacher, and to be able to follow the spiritual master who are like Maitreya and Manjushri.

In whatever virtue or practice one engages in, one must be able to apply these forms of dedication, and in particular, to secure the three main factors, which are the beginning, the middle and the end, and to ensure that remains intact. Being intact refers to the three main

factors, which are that it is imbued with bodhichitta, complemented with the view realising emptiness, and sealed with the dedication at the end. When one's practice is suffused with these three factors, then it becomes the unmistakable path leading to enlightenment.

The particular dedication being presented here is dedicating the merits of meditating on mahamudra. Dedicating the merits of the composition actually comes in later verses.

## **2. THE MANNER OF REMOVING INTERFERENCES BY APPLYING THE BENEFIT DERIVED FROM MEDITATION**

The corresponding part in the auto-commentary continues:

After having come out of meditative equipoise, 1) the manner of practice during the post-meditative state, 2) the manner of determining the object of negation when re-entering meditative equipoise, 3) as well as clearing doubts about how to overcome the extremes during both of those two states, is presented together in the following verses:

*40. Having developed, in this manner, the habit of meditation on mahamudra, then during the post-meditation period you appear to your six types of consciousness and scrutinise how they appear to you. In this way the bare mode of existence of things will arise before you brilliantly.*

*41. In short, then, whatever appears to you, such as your mind, [you should take its ordinary appearance as a truly independently existing entity to be your object of refutation for voidness analysis]. You should not grasp at such things as existing the way they appear to be. Instead you should try to ascertain their actual mode of existence.*

*42. Then constantly nourishing your understanding [by meditating alternately on space-like voidness during formal meditation sessions and on mirage-like voidness during post-meditation periods], you should combine the essence of all things in samsara and nirvana into their single common nature as void [and meditate upon this]...*

It seems that there are still quite a few verses left, so we can have two more sessions this month. Then December 8 can be the discussion, followed by the exam on December 15.

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