

*An Aspirational Prayer  
for Mahamudra*

of

**Rangjung Dorje**  
*The Third Karmapa*

A Commentary by

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## An Aspirational Prayer for Mahamudra

*The Aspirational Prayer for Mahamudra* was composed by the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. There have been seventeen *Karmapas* up to the present time. These seventeen incarnations have cultivated different activities due to the different times in which they lived. For example, the first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa opened the gate of dharma by building new monasteries such as Tsurphu, Karma Gon, and the like. The second Karmapa, Karma Pakshi, was a very great *siddha* and did many miracles. By means of these miracles, which were wrathful he tamed other beings.

The third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, was both a great scholar and a great meditator. He composed many important treatises, such as *The Profound Inner Meaning*, *The Treatise Differentiating Consciousness and Wisdom*, and *Showing the Essence*. In particular, Rangjung Dorje was very compassionate. Thus, at the time of his death, he entered into *nirvana* on the fourteenth day of the month. On the fifteenth day everyone was able to clearly see his face in the center of the moon. Because of this miraculous event, there arose an artistic tradition called “Karku Dashalma” in which the upper part of the Karmapa’s body was painted within the moon.

Rangjung Dorje also composed this aspirational prayer. There are aspirations that can be accomplished and aspirations that cannot be accomplished. For example, we may think, “May a flower grow on top of this table,” but no matter how many times we make this aspiration, nothing will happen because none of the necessary causal conditions are present. However, if put a flower pot on the table, put in a seed in the pot, water the seed, and so forth, then later a flower will grow. Because the causal conditions have been met, the aspiration will be accomplished. When we make the aspiration, “May the realization of *mahamudra* arise in my mind,” we may wonder whether this aspiration can be achieved or not. If we make this aspiration, and

then we meditate, gather the accumulations, study, develop good qualities, and so forth, then gradually this aspiration will be accomplished. So first, we make an aspiration, then by the power of this aspiration, we practice diligently, and then due to our diligent practice, we are able to attain the fruition.

Generally, we make aspirations according to our own individual realization. As an ordinary (unenlightened) being, we might aspire to be very important, to have other people to fear us. This aspiration is perverted in that it aspires to harm others. On the other hand, we may aspire to be very rich or to have lots of children. This kind of aspiration does not harm others; however, it is very limited. Great teachers of the past have composed aspirations that were very vast and that were of benefit to both self and others. To show us how to make a vast aspiration, Rangjung Dorje composed this particular aspirational prayer that the realization of mahamudra may arise in us.

To just aspire for the realization of mahamudra to arise in the mind is a very condensed aspiration. Therefore, in this text, we make this aspiration first, then it shows us how to achieve this aspiration step-by-step according to the stages of the path.

#### SUPPLICATION TO THE GURU

##### *Namo Guru*

Rangjung Dorje begins his aspiration with the Sanskrit phrase *Namo Guru* which means “I prostrate to the teacher.” To begin this way is a Tibetan tradition. First of all, when the dharma first spread to Tibet, it came from India, the place where the Buddha first turned the wheel of dharma. Therefore, when we put a Sanskrit phrase at the beginning of a text, it is a reminder that we Tibetans did not newly create this teaching, but that it originated in India. It is not like the Bon tradition that has its origins in Tibet. Secondly, the dharma spread in India in Sanskrit. If it stayed in Sanskrit, then those born in Tibet would not have been able to practice it. However, translators out of great kindness translated the texts into Tibetan, so that now we are able to understand the texts in Tibetan. To remember the great kindness of the translators, the Tibetans place a Sanskrit phrase at the beginning of these texts.

I. PREPARATION FOR MAKING ASPIRATION

1. *Gurus, yidam deities of the mandala,  
Victorious ones of the three times and ten directions, together  
with your sons,  
Please consider us with compassion.  
Grant your blessings so that these aspirations may be  
accomplished just as we intend.*

The first verse concerns the preparation for make aspiration. In the *vajrayana* tradition, we meditate visualizing all the gurus, yidams, buddhas, and bodhisattvas in the space in front of us. First, there is one's own root guru. This root guru needs an uncorrupted lineage that begins with the Buddha. Therefore, we also visualize the lineage gurus. The yidam deities refers to the unique *yidam meditation* of the vajrayana with the *mandala* referring to the fact that one meditates on the principal deity and its retinue by means of the symbols, objects, and signs that they manifest. The "ten directions" are east, south, west, north, northeast, northwest, southeast, southwest above, below, or essentially all directions. The "three times" are the all the buddhas who manifested in the past, the buddhas in the present, and the buddhas who will manifest in the future. Generally, there are three kinds of "sons"—sons of body, sons of speech, and sons of mind. For example, the son of body is Rahula, who was actually born from the body of the Buddha. The sons of speech are the *shravaka arhats*, such as Shariputra, Maugalyayana, and the rest who heard the dharma spoken by the Buddha. The sons of mind are the *bodhisattvas*, because in the future they will become buddhas and are like the regents of the Buddha.

In this way, we meditate on all of these beings in the space in front of us. Even if we do not meditate on them in the space in front, we should think that they are actually looking at us with the eye of wisdom. So we request, "Please consider us with compassion." that we are able to achieve our aspiration as we intended. To accomplish our aspiration, we aspire to be able to realize mahamudra, the true nature of mind. We request for their

*blessings* so that the conditions favorable to accomplishing this will arise.

#### THE FOUNDATION OF ASPIRATION

2. *May all rivers, the accumulation of virtue  
unpolluted by the three concepts,  
Flowing from the snow mountains of pure intention and action  
Of myself and all the infinite sentient beings  
Merge into the ocean, the four kayas of the victorious ones.*

After the preparation for the aspiration comes the actual making of the aspiration. We make both a general aspiration and the specific aspiration for mahamudra. The general aspiration involves accumulating virtue. The roots of virtue that we have accumulated are likened to a snow mountain because a snow mountain is very white. We need to accumulate two kinds of completely white or pure intention and action which are the roots of virtue. Pure intention lacks the *disturbing emotions* (Skt. *klesha*) that bring harm to others, such as passion, aggression, and delusion. Rather, it is the completely pure intention that benefits everyone, such as love, compassion, faith, devotion, and the like. Even if our intention is good, but our actions are bad, this will bring about harm. Therefore, pure action is action that does not harm us or others. So completely pure intention and action as like a snow mountain from which a pure river flows. From our completely pure intentions and actions comes a pure or unpolluted river, which is our roots of virtue. It is “unpolluted by the three concepts,” of “I did this to them.” If there is great attachment to the object, self, and action, the pride and negative thoughts will arise. However, the pure river of virtue is free of this.

When a river flows, it grows larger and larger and finally flows into the ocean. In the same way, our virtue increases further and further. If we aspire to become more powerful and more wealthy, then this will not be of benefit to everyone. What is of benefit to everyone is to attain the state of enlightenment. This is what we should aspire to.

There are many names for enlightenment. One can say “buddha.” Right now, our minds have the faults of the disturbing

emotions and the like, and do not have good qualities and wisdom. However, in the future, with practicing the *dharma*, we can abandon the faults and the good qualities blossom. In this text, the name “victorious one” is used. Presently, we are defeated by disturbing emotions which bring us pain and suffering and sometimes birth in the *lower realms*. However, if we increase our wisdom (Skt. *prajna*), we will in the future be victorious over these disturbing emotions. What qualities does this “victorious one” have? The text says, “May it be a cause for attaining the four kayas—the dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya, and svabhavikakaya.”

#### A. COMMON FOUNDATION FOR THE PATH

3. *Until we attain this fruition,  
Through all our lives,  
May evil and suffering be unknown,  
And may we enjoy the glorious ocean of happiness and goodness.*

Having made a general aspiration, we now make a specific aspiration, specifically, the aspiration for mahamudra. With respect to this, overall there are five sections to making this aspiration. The first section is “the foundation of the path.” We aspire for this since we presently need an excellent foundation of the path. We need to attain the state of enlightenment, which is the fruition of practicing the dharma, the roots of virtue, meditating and so forth. However, Rangjung Dorje teaches us what we need until we attain the state of enlightenment.

To enjoy what the verse calls the “glorious ocean of happiness,” a state that is free from suffering, we must do more by saying, “May I be free from suffering.” To destroy the cause of the suffering, we must destroy unvirtuous deeds, negative intentions and negative actions. To do this we need to have completely pure intentions and completely pure actions, which are the roots of virtue. In terms of these actual oral instructions, we need to be able to develop this virtue and diminish our negative deeds. So we aspire, “May this occur for both myself and others, all sentient beings.” Thus, the common basis of the path is to be free from negative deeds and suffering and to strive for virtue and happiness.

B. UNCOMMON FOUNDATION OF THE PATH

4. *Possessing the supreme freedoms and resources,  
endowed with faith, exertion, and prajna,  
Attending an excellent spiritual friend,  
and receiving the pith instructions,  
May we have no obstacles to practicing these properly  
And enjoy the holy dharma throughout all our lives.*

We need to gather the conducive conditions for the general practice of meditation (Skt. *samadhi*) and in particular for the practice of mahamudra. If we do not gather these conducive conditions, we cannot practice these oral instructions. Therefore, we need the foundation for practicing this path. This foundation is possessing the supreme freedoms and resources. There is a physical and a mental basis or foundation to the path. The precious human body that possesses the freedoms and the precious human body that possesses the resources refers to a physical foundation. If we do not have this physical body, we can not practice the holy dharma. Therefore, we are very fortunate to possess the freedoms and resources.

For the mental foundation, we need faith. When we have faith, we practice the dharma and meditation particularly mahamudra. Thus, we need faith that truly knows that this will benefit us and others. One realizes that this is actually something especially amazing we will not have the good fortune to practice it ourself. If we know that it is sublime, we will have the good fortune to practice it. Therefore, one needs to have faith. With faith, exertion will naturally arise. With exertion, we will develop wisdom. If one has no exertion, then no matter how clever we might be, we will not be able to develop perfect prajna. Thus, in dependence upon faith, exertion arises; in dependence upon exertion, prajna arises.

Next, we need an excellent spiritual friend, one who is endowed with excellent prajna. We need a spiritual friend who brings us to practice a virtuous path and protects us from a negative path. We need an excellent spiritual friend. In ordinary life we can find our way, but in meditation our mind looks outward, rarely inward. When we turn and look inward, this is



wisdom. Therefore, we need a spiritual friend who is experienced in meditation.

How do we attend to a spiritual friend? Do we just live with an excellent spiritual friend, eat with him, work with him, and the like? No, what we really need are to obtain the oral instructions. The spiritual friend will tell us that we need to practice meditation that we need to do this and that and we need to give this up. Generally, there are many kinds of oral instructions: oral instructions that are of temporary benefit and oral instructions of ultimate benefit. Among these, we need to receive the *pith instructions*, such as the transmission or *pointing out instructions* of mahamudra. These oral instructions show us how to actually rest the mind. After receiving the pith of these oral instructions, we need to meditate on them. Then, at times, obstacles will arise. Thus, we aspire to be free from obstacles and to enjoy the dharma.

## II. ASPIRING FOR PRAJNA THAT REALIZES THE PATH

5. *Learning scripture and reasoning frees from  
the obscuration of ignorance.  
Contemplating the oral instructions destroys  
the darkness of doubt.  
The light of meditation illuminates reality just as it is.  
May the brilliance of the three prajnas increase.*

After discussing the foundation of the path, we need to enter this path. The foundation was divided into two kinds—the common and uncommon. For the uncommon foundation we needed prajna that realizes the path. Do we have prajna in us from the very beginning? No, we need to gradually develop this prajna. First, we need to learn the scriptures, which are the words spoken by the Buddha who taught 84,000 collections of dharma. However, we can not practice all 84,000 collections of dharma. We need the pith; however, we can not say that there is anything that is truly without significance among the 84,000 collections of dharma. We cannot throw out even one syllable. All of it is full of meaning. No matter how much we study, it will be of benefit. Therefore, first one learns scripture.

The Buddha taught the complete path, so there is no other path. He also taught not to blindly to accept his word for it, but to

examine the teachings with reason. He taught that if you act in this way, then this will happen; if you act in that way, then that harm will occur; and if you act in this way, then there will be this benefit. This is the transmission of the way things truly are. Because it is an introduction or pointing out, one can recognize the reasoning of it by means of one's own examination. By studying both the scripture and reasoning, one can find the path that initially one did not know how to find. For example, when we walk in the night, with a new moon, the rain is falling, and there is a thick fog. It is completely black, and we don't know where to walk. Then if the fog cleared a bit and it stopped raining, the path would be a little bit clearer. In the same way, if we study scripture and reasoning, then we will be freed from our ignorance or lack of knowledge.

In the same way, if we contemplate the oral instructions of the guru and think about these special oral instructions, then by practicing just one of these instructions, the path will be clearer.

With the oral instructions we understand that the path and that we must meditate on this. If we meditate, then the prajna will arise. Because prajna is able to clarify all of the actual truth, then the light born from meditation will arise, just like the sun shining. It illuminates the way things are. There is the way things are for us in *samsara* and there is the true nature of mind. For example, if we clearly and directly see where our difficulties and troubles come from and where there is happiness and joy, then this is illuminating perfectly the way things are through meditation. Therefore, one must give rise to the prajna of learning, the prajna of contemplating, and the prajna of meditating. These are the three prajnas.

### III. ASPIRING FOR THE PATH ITSELF TO BE FREE OF CONFUSION

6. *The ground is the two truths, free from the extremes  
of eternalism and nihilism.  
The supreme path is the two accumulations, free from  
the extremes of exaggeration and denial.  
May we attain the fruition of the two benefits,  
free from the extremes of samsara and nirvana.  
May we thus meet with the unerring dharma.*

Of the five sections of the text, the first was the ground of the path; the second was the prajnas of learning, contemplating, and meditating that realize the path. The third part is that the one who possesses these prajnas must enter into the genuine path. The path is made up of the ground, path, and fruition. First, what is this “ground”? If we are going to meditate, we need to have this teaching. We have to realize the teaching of the real true nature. What is this real true nature? According to the *hinayana*, it is the four truths. According to the *mahayana*, it is *emptiness*. According to the *Shentong* Madhyamaka, it is *sugatagarbha*. All of these different paths agree at the same basic point. Mahamudra teaches the true nature of mind. What is this true nature of mind? It is free of the extremes of *eternalism* and *nihilism*. When we really look at the nature of mind, it does not exist as a thing, a permanent ego. Because it is free of the extreme of eternalism, it is very peaceful.

However, if we say that mind is nothing, that there is no evil, no virtue, then we fall into a kind of nihilism. However, this nihilistic view is false, since both samsara and nirvana can arise in our mind. Even though the mind is not a thing we can point to, anything can arise in it. Thus, it is free from the extremes of eternalism and nihilism.

The text also says that we need to be “free from the extremes of exaggeration and denial.” Exaggeration in this case is to say that something that does not exist, does exist. Denial in this case is to say that something exists when it actually does not exist. To realize the true nature of mind, we need the two accumulations of merit and wisdom. To develop our meditation, we will accumulate merit by making offerings, practicing generosity, maintaining our discipline, developing patience, and the like. Then, by resting in the state of deep meditation or samadhi, we will accumulate wisdom. Thus, the two accumulations allow us to practice the path.

By realizing the ground, the way things are, we will attain the fruition of being free from the extreme of samsaric existence and free from the extreme of peace. Dwelling in samsara leads to suffering, obstacles, conflicting emotions, and so on. If we are liberated from the three realms of samsaric existence, we will attain peace for ourself alone. Therefore, we must also be free from the extreme of simply resting in this peace. By being free

from samsaric existence, we will attain the perfection of our own benefit, and by being free from the extreme of peace, we will attain the perfection of others' benefit. Therefore, we will attain the fruition of the two benefits.

Thus, we make the aspiration to meet with this unerring and error free dharma of the *ground, path, and fruition*.

IV. ASPIRING TO PRACTICE  
THE PATH WITHOUT CONFUSION

7. *The basis of purification is the unity of luminosity-emptiness,  
the true nature of mind.  
The means of purification is the great vajra yoga of mahamudra.  
What is purified is the stains of adventitious confusion.  
May we realize the fruition of purification,  
the stainless dharmakaya.*

The fourth section concerns how we need to practice the path. When we practice the path, we need to be free from confusion. There are two aspects to being free from confusion: the truth of intellectual understanding and the truth of meditation. The truth of intellectual understanding has the foundation of purification, the means of purification, and what is to be purified. The foundation of purification is that what is in our mind. It is obscured by temporary, adventitious defilements. For example, our mind is like the moon. When the moon is obscured by clouds, its moonlight can not radiate forth. Similarly, our mind is obscured by the adventitious defilements (adventitious means the defilements are not an inherent part of the mind, just as clouds are not an inherent part of the moon). We must clear the defilements from the mind and the true nature of the mind is the unity of luminosity and emptiness. Generally, the essence of mind, such as is pointed out to us in the pointing out transmission, is luminous. *Luminosity* means that anything can arise in it. For example, Where does our mind first arise from? Where does it dwell in between? Where does it finally go? If we look into this, there is nothing. It is empty. If we say it is emptiness, it is not empty because the mind is thinking. We call this emptiness luminosity. This continuity of mind is not a total blank. Just as everything vividly luminous continually arises, so

it is said to be luminous. Is this luminosity truly existent, something solid? If it were something solid, then suffering would arise. However, it is empty, in that it has no essential reality. Thus, it is the unity of luminosity and emptiness or we can say both luminosity and emptiness exist together.

It is said that the true nature of mind and the true nature of phenomena are inexpressible meaning that one cannot say that it is really like this or like that. So we must understand the nature of mind through the experience of our own mind. However, up to the present moment, we have not realized this. Since beginningless time up to now, we have not realized the true nature of mind, yet this true nature of mind exists within us. The true nature of our mind does not newly arise through meditation. This true nature of mind, which is the unity of luminosity and emptiness, free from extremes, is the essential characteristic of the mind. However, we have not understood the means to clear away the defilements. We have been obscured by temporary confusion. We must clear away this defilement of confusion by means of the vajra yoga of mahamudra, the meditation on the samadhi of mahamudra, such as *shamatha*, *vipashyana*, the *pointing out* or transmission of the way things are.

What is purified by this meditation is the defilements, the adventitious confusion of discursiveness and confusion. This confusion has continually obscured us previously. However, this confusion does not exist in the true nature of the mind. When we realize the true nature of mind, then a thought will naturally disappear. It disappears because it is only adventitious and does not exist in the true nature of mind. It is confusion, since it does not exist in the true nature of mind. When we understand this confusion, it will vanish like a bubble. Will these defilements of confusion completely vanish once and for all? No, they can not disappear once and for all because there are previous negative habitual patterns, and we must meditate on these. Therefore, the fruition of having cleared away these defilements is that the true nature of mind is freed of these defilements and fully manifests, and the dharmakaya is perfected. This is the way that one practices the path.

## **THE BRIEF OVERVIEW**

### **ASPIRING TO PRACTICE MEDITATION**

8. *Resolving all doubt as to the ground is the confidence of the view.  
Maintaining this without distraction is the main point of meditation.  
Applying the meditation completely is the supreme action.  
May we have confidence in the view, meditation, and action.*

The form of this text is to present a brief overview and then give a detailed explanation. Generally, intellectual understanding is taught by means of the three aspects of the foundation of purification, the means of purification, and the fruition of purification. One purifies the foundation by means of view, meditation, and action. The true nature of mind, which is to be purified of temporary defilements is the unity of luminosity and emptiness. One must resolve doubts about the unity of luminosity and emptiness. One must resolve these doubts by truly arousing confidence in the view. This conviction is arrived at through either the sutra tradition or the mantra tradition. In the sutra tradition, one examines through reasoning the view of the way things are. One gains understanding through contemplating that all phenomena are really and truly emptiness. This is called the view of the sutra tradition, but it is only a conviction that is an intellectual understanding of the mind and it is not a conviction that is realization. In the vajrayana tradition, one does not examine by means of reasoning or inference. Rather, one looks at the true nature of the mind and realizes, “Oh! The true nature of all phenomena is exactly like this. Of course!” This is the view of direct perception based on experience. Conviction in the view arises, and this is said to be the confidence in the view.

Therefore, one first discovers this view and the ground. To keep the mind undistracted on this view is the main point of meditation. Then, the text says, “Applying the meditation to everything...” When we are sitting in meditation, our meditation is very good. However, when we walk, stand, eat, and work, then for beginners the meditation on the mind is somewhat lost. Nevertheless, one must apply it so that it is not lost. When one applies meditation to “action,” then whether one is eating,

working, or whatever, one strengthens one's mindfulness and awareness of the meditation. Thus, when one is working, it is supreme action and we have true conviction in the view, meditation, and action. One must arouse conviction in the view, thinking, "This is truly the way it is," arouse conviction in the meditation, and arouse conviction in the action. Thus, we aspire, "May we have confidence..."

## **THE EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION**

### **CUTTING DOUBTS CONCERNING THE GROUND BY THE VIEW**

9. *All phenomena are the illusory display of mind.  
Mind is no mind, empty of any entity that is mind.  
Though empty, everything appears unceasingly.  
May we fully examine this and resolve any doubt  
as to the ground.*

Previously, the view, meditation, and action were taught in a general way. Now, we will explain the view, meditation, and action in detail.

The text teaches the view step by step. First we establish that appearances are created by mind. What is taught is that all the sensations of mind—passion, aggression, delusion, pleasure and pain, and so forth—exist presently in our mind. Appearances arise like they do in a dream. Then, if we ask from where all phenomena such as our happiness, suffering arise, the answer is they do not exist externally, but are a mistaken conception of the mind. For this reason, when we are practicing mahamudra, external objects are not important, but rather we meditate principally on the inner mind.

There are two traditions—one that believes that only appearances are mind. One establishes that only the appearances that arise in the mind are mind and the other tradition says that objects are also created by mind, that all phenomena are mind. Why is this? For example, they are like the appearances in a dream. All appearances right now—mountains, walls, houses,

and the like—are like the appearances in a dream. So there are two traditions. Whichever of these two traditions you use is fine.

According to the *Mind-only* or Cittamatra proponents, one meditates to realize that the essence of mind is emptiness, and that all phenomena are illusory manifestations of mind. According to the proponents of Madhyamaka, the mind is empty. There is no essence of the mind. Why? Because mental appearances arise in our mind, but the mind itself does not exist. Wherever the mind is, many thoughts and kleshas arise, however, if one looks at the essence of mind, it is empty of any entity that is mind. We can not find it, thinking, “Here is the actual mind right here.” The fact that we can not find it is due to the fact that the mind is empty of any essence.

Well then, is it emptiness? We think that there is nothing. however, it is “empty and unceasing.” Both the mind that previously we thought existed and the mind that we now think does not exist are not different. They are as if one. Previously when we thought that the mind existed, there was no real solid thing that continuously existed. Now when we think that the mind does not exist, there is no discontinuity in mind. The true nature of mind is the same. At first they think that the mind exists, yet there is not any real solid thing existing. Now when we look at the essence of mind and think that it does not exist, there is not anything nonexistent. How it was before remains just the same. The true nature of mind is just like that—“Unceasingly, everything appears.” The essence of mind does not exist, but all appearances do arise. Saying that “everything appears” is free from the two extremes of saying that this exists or this does not exist. When one thinks that the mind does not exist, the continuity of mind would be cut off and it would cease. Yet, mind does not cease.

Therefore, when the text says, “May we fully examine this and resolve any doubt as to the ground,” we need to be able to know how things really are. All the texts teach that the true nature of mind is very profound and deep because it is very difficult to realize. For example, it can not be expressed with speech. Even if we were to say that the true nature of mind exists, it does not exist, and even if we were to say that it does not exist, it does not exist. Well then, what is it? It can never be expressed with words. We cannot say that the true nature of



mind is like this. It is beyond the realm of thought. If we think that it exists or think that it does not exist, it is beyond the realm of thought.

We experience mind directly when we look, based on the transmission of our guru. Thinking, “It is like this, of course!” we will experience its flavor. It is like a mute person tasting molasses who experiences the sweet flavor. If you ask him how it is, he cannot say anything. Like this example, we think that the true nature of our mind is very profound, but we cannot really say how it is.

#### RESOLVING ALL APPEARANCES ARE MIND

10. *Projections that never existed are mistakenly taken as objects.  
Through ignorance, self-existing awareness is mistakenly  
taken as an ego.  
Clinging to duality, we have wandered in samsaric existence.  
May we discover the root of ignorance and confusion.*

There are three aspects to the view—all phenomena are mind; mind is empty of any entity that is mind; and even though it is empty, everything appears. These will be explained extensively one by one. First is resolving that all appearances are mind. The text says, “Projections that never existed are mistakenly taken as objects.” Now, if the true nature of mind is empty, then how will we see it? Even though the essence of mind is empty, its nature is clarity. Since its nature is clarity, this clarity is turned outward and becomes manifest as an object. However, there is no object—it has never existed. This self-luminosity manifests and we become confused and think that it is an object. Thus, “projections are mistakenly taken as objects.”

In this way, all the confused experiences of samsara, such as fear, suffering, and difficulties arise. The cause of this confusion is primarily ignorance and confusion. If we discover what the root of this is, then we will naturally be free from ignorance.

ABANDONING THE EXTREMES OF  
EXISTENCE/NONEXISTENCE

11. *It is not existent—even the victorious ones have not seen it.  
It is not nonexistent—it is the basis of all samsara and nirvana.  
This is not a contradiction, but is the middle path of unity.  
May we realize the true nature of mind, which is free  
from extremes.*

To realize that the mind is empty, it is first taught that the mind is beyond both existence and nonexistence. When we really look at the mind, it does not exist. If it existed, then we should see it. But, when we look at it, we do not see where it arises, where it dwells, or where it finally ceases. Even if we look at the very essence of mind, we do not see something existent. Do we not see anything because we are deluded? No, that is not why, since even the buddhas (“the victorious ones”) do not see it. Since the buddhas have not seen it, why have they not seen it? They have not seen the mind, because it is not something existent. Then, one might think, “Well, if that is so, then it is nonexistent.” However, it is not nonexistent, since all of samsara has arisen from it and since all the virtues of nirvana have also arisen from it. Thus, the mind is the ground of everything.

Isn't the mind being both existent and nonexistent a contradiction? No, it is not contradictory. It cannot be both existent and nonexistent. How is this? They are not contradictory. The middle path of unity is the middle path of the unity of existence and nonexistence. “The true nature of mind is free from the extremes” of existence and nonexistence. We need to realize this, and so we make the aspiration, “May we realize this.”

ABANDONING THE EXTREMES OF BEING/NONBEING

12. *It can not be shown by saying, “This is it.”  
It can not be refuted by saying, “This is not it.”  
The true nature of phenomena is beyond concept, unconditioned.  
May we definitely know the perfect ultimate truth.*

Having abandoned the extremes of existence and nonexistence, we now abandon the extremes of being and nonbeing. The text

says, "It can not be shown by saying, 'This is it.' One cannot teach, saying, 'This is the mind.' It can not say, 'This is not it.'" Everything arises as an appearance of the mind. Therefore, this "mind" is beyond the realm of thought. The mind is that unconditioned dharmata that is not fabricated by anyone. It is simply the natural state of reality. If it were conditioned, it would be impermanent. Whereas the true nature of the mind is not fabricated by anyone; there is no entity that exists. We must ascertain in our mind that the way things really are, peace, freedom from mental fabrications, is the perfect ultimate truth. This is what is meant by "May we definitely know the perfect ultimate truth."

#### THE UNITY OF EMPTINESS AND DEPENDENT ARISING

13. *Not realizing this, one circles in the ocean of samsara.  
Realizing this is no other than enlightenment.  
Nothing is affirmed or negated at all.  
May we realize the essential point of the dharmata,  
the ground of everything.*

The third stage shows that the mind is empty: it is not nonexistent; it is not affirmed nor is it negated. It is empty; however, this emptiness does not contradict the appearances of dependent arising. All phenomena are dependent arising, and emptiness and the appearances of dependent arising are a unity. In terms of this teaching, it is said, "Not realizing this, one circles in the ocean of samsara." If one does not realize the true nature of mind, one will wander in samsara. The conflicting emotions will arise and various obstacles, negative conditions, and suffering will occur. However, if we realize the true nature of mind, then all the conflicting emotions, suffering, and obstacles will naturally cease within this "enlightenment." Therefore, if one realizes this, enlightenment does not at all exist elsewhere. It is the mind itself that is enlightened. It is the mind itself that wanders in samsara. Enlightenment does not exist elsewhere.

There is no affirming that the true nature of mind is it, nor any negating that this is not it. Since it is the dharmata, the ground of all phenomena, "may we realize this essential point."

This is the main point. When we talk about realizing the true nature of “mind,” we do not realize some thing brilliant or magnificent. On the other hand, it is not complete voidness. This is really the true nature of mind. Therefore, when one fully sees this main point, then one should realize the true nature of mind.

CUTTING DOUBTS CONCERNING THE GROUND

14. *Both appearance is mind and emptiness is mind.  
Both realization is mind and confusion is mind.  
Both birth is mind and cessation is mind.  
May all doubts about mind be resolved.*

Fourthly, we investigate and search for the mind to resolve the ground. When appearances arise their root is the mind. When we realize that this mind is empty, then that emptiness is also just mind. When we think that we have realized the true nature of dharmata that realization is also mind. Not realizing this, we wander in samsara and are confused and the thought that we are confused is also our mind.

In the sutra tradition, we gather the accumulations for many aeons, practices, meditates, and then attain realization. With little effort we will understand something intellectually, but with great effort we will definitely understand it. We can in the sutra tradition realize the fruition by means of constant meditation and gathering the accumulations for many aeons. Otherwise, we will not reach realization..

On the path of the secret mantra or vajrayana, we find an authentic guru and accordingly, meditates and undergoes hardship, then we will realize the fruition. Otherwise, one can not realize this. When we use the very profound methods of mahamudra, when the guru points directly to the mind, then by meditating one or two days, perhaps one of us will realize the fruition. This is exceedingly fortunate. This is very important and is a very profound method. When we realize this quickly, we think, “I have realized just this one thing; the experience of mind.” Some may scorn this, but we should never scorn this. It is truly the profound means to enlightenment. This is very important.

Likewise, the text, says this is very profound, inexpressible, beyond the range of the intellect. Generally, we have realized this just a little bit. When we realize this, then suddenly we do not have to try for many aeons, but rather suddenly we realize it by means of this profound method. In that one instant of realization, it will seem to be stable, but a little later we will think, “Yesterday, I had a good meditation experience, but today it’s gone. What happened? It is not very stable. Why?” We are not very familiar with it. We have not gathered the accumulations for many aeons. We have not worked hard for many years. Right now, it has been pointed out to us instantly by a profound method. One instant, it seems that we understand, and the next instant, we think, “I can’t understand now!” When this happens, we shouldn’t abandon this, thinking that it is unimportant. We must definitely meditate with exertion. If we meditate, it will become stable.

### **THE BRIEF OVERVIEW**

#### **HOW TO DETERMINE BY MEDITATING ON IT**

15. *Not corrupted by the effort of mind-made meditation  
And not blown by the winds of everyday busyness,  
May we know how to rest in unfabricated, innate spontaneity  
And skillfully maintain the practice of the truth of mind.*

In meditation we rest in the true nature of mind loosely. If we think, “Using my mind, I will make it clear. I will make it peaceful. I will make it blissful,” we are creating something made by the mind. When the text says, “Not corrupted by the effort of mind-made meditation,” what is it to be uncorrupted by what is created by mind and what is this good quality? The answer is: “not blown by the winds of everyday busyness” which are the discursive thoughts such as the disturbing emotions of passion, aggression, delusion, pride when we are not meditating. They are the everyday busyness and the wind of these stir things up. For example, if there is an ocean, the wind stirs it up the water so it cannot remain stable. We should not be stained by these two faults.

What is present when one is not stained by these two faults? In the tradition of *dzogchen*, one has to reach a new clarity by distinguishing mind and awareness. This is one oral instruction. In our own oral instructions of the Kagyu, one arrives at “unfabricated” mind. To be “unfabricated” means that with respect to the true nature of mind, which is empty and luminous, we do not try to change it into something empty, and then try to change it into something luminous. Rather we rest in what is the very nature of the mind itself, and therefore this is called “unfabricated” or “innate.” “Innate” is not a fabricated true nature. Whatever the condition of the mind is, it is said to be unfabricated and innate. We should meditate with “spontaneity (naturally flowing).” Whatever exists in this true nature, we should just rest in that way. Otherwise, we will just create something anew.

### **THE EXTENSIVE EXPLANATION**

#### TEACHING THE UNION OF SHAMATHA-VIPASHYANA

##### SHAMATHA

16. *The waves of subtle and gross thoughts subside by themselves.  
The waters of unmoving mind rest naturally.  
May the ocean of shamatha  
Be undisturbed, free of the dregs of drowsiness.*

The extensive explanation first explains how should we practice the meditation of shamatha and vipashyana. Next, it explains the way in which experiences and realization arise and the way in which compassion arises. First is taught the way in which the experiences of shamatha and vipashyana arise. Then is taught the methods of practicing shamatha, the methods of practicing vipashyana, and the methods of practicing the unity of these two.

When we say “shamatha,” what do we mean? If we take the example of the ocean, it is never stable or calm because it has waves. When the waves are stirred up, then the waters are not clear. How can we make the water clear? If the waves are pacified, then it will become calm. The waves of our mind are discursive thoughts. There are subtle and gross discursive

thoughts. If these discursive thoughts are just left alone, then they will subside by themselves and there will be no movement of thought. Similarly, if there are no waves, then the water of the ocean will naturally come to rest.

So first, the waves of an ocean need to calm down for the pollution of the ocean to settle out of the water. It will rest unmoving, calm, and clean. Similarly what makes our mind dirty is drowsiness and dullness. Since this drowsiness and dullness is like dirt, if our mind is free of dirt, then actual shamatha will become unmoving and calm. Thus, we first make an aspiration that this will occur with regard to shamatha meditation.

#### VIPASHYANA: THE MAIN EXPOSITION

17. *Looking again and again at the mind that can not be looked at,  
One sees clearly just as it is the truth of not seeing.  
Resolving any doubt as to how it is or is not,  
May we recognize our unconfused nature by ourselves.*

The main exposition of vipashyana is as the text says, “Looking again and again at the mind that can not be looked at...” When we truly look at the true nature of mind, we can not say, “I am looking at this; I am seeing this.” There is nothing to look at. Why can the mind not be looked at? When we look at it, we see the true nature of it. When we see this, what do we see? For example, we can not see anything that is like an object, with a color or shape or unity. As for “the truth of not seeing”, when one sees the true nature of mind, there is not any thing to see. The mind does not have any object that can be looked at. So, when one looks at the mind, there is nothing to see. Why is there nothing to see? This is the true nature of mind. “One sees this clearly just as it is.” One sees this very vividly.

When we look and see mind clearly and think, “Oh! the mind is like this! The true nature of mind is like this” we experience how it is and is not. We never have any doubt of thinking that perhaps it is this or is not this. Thus we resolve doubts. What is the true nature of mind? Previously, we thought at times that the mind existed, that our thoughts were very solid and could not really be changed. Now, when we look at the true nature of mind, we think that the mind is empty of nature, that it

has no essence, and that it is free of confusion. This emptiness is free of confusion. Thus, we say, “May we recognize our unconfused nature, our true nature, by ourselves.” Up to the present time, we have not looked at our mind. First, we have not looked. When we do look, we do not recognize it, but when we meet with the actual oral instructions of mahamudra and are taught to look at our own nature, we recognize the true nature of our mind by ourselves.

#### PENETRATING TO THE ROOT

18. *Looking at objects, one sees no objects, but just mind.  
Looking at mind, there is no mind—it is empty of nature.  
Looking at both of these, clinging to duality is self-liberated.  
May we realize the true nature of luminous mind.*

We penetrate to the root by means of vipashyana meditation. The text says, “Looking at objects, one sees no objects, but just mind.” When we look at external objects, we have feelings of pleasure and pain in our mind. In the same way, when we look at an object, such as an appearance, the aspect of an object, that arises in the mind, and the like, then there is no object. One sees no objects, but just mind.

“Looking at mind, there is no mind—it is empty of nature.” If one looks at an external object, that object is mind. With respect to the oral instructions of our Kagyu lineage, it is said, “Appearance is mind.” Secondly, the text says, “Looking at mind, there is no mind—it is empty of nature.”

When we look at the mind, we realize that the true nature of mind is nothing like what we thought it was before, but that the mind is empty of that.

When we look at external objects and inner mind, there is clinging to duality, such that we think that there are objects out there and me is here. However, so the text says, “...cling to duality is self-liberated.” In the hinayana, this true nature, this nothingness, is said to be the “egolessness of self.” The mind does not exist by its very essence within the mind. Within the mind there is no ego. Thus, it is said that there is no ego of self. When we realize this, then step by step we can use this realization as the means to abandon the disturbing emotions. In



the mahayana, what is taught is that outer objects do not exist and the inner mind does not also exist? It is said that this is the realization of emptiness which is the true nature of phenomena. In the Heart sutra, for example, it is said, “No eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue,” and so forth and “Form is emptiness” and so forth. Likewise, within the sixteen emptinesses, outer emptiness, inner emptiness, and outer and inner emptiness are taught. In terms of the vajrayana tradition, when mahamudra is pointed out, clinging to duality is self-liberated. When we realize this by looking at the nature of mind, then both outer objects and the inner mind do not exist.

When we look at the true nature of mind, it is emptiness from the point of view that we do not see anything. However, this emptiness is not voidness. In Tibetan, we say that space is a “dead emptiness,” like a corpse. However, the emptiness of the true nature of mind is not like a corpse but it is luminous like a living person. We could call it “living emptiness.” Therefore, we aspire, “May we realize the true nature of luminous mind.”

When Kagyupas give instructions, they teach four levels. First, they say that appearance is mind. This establishes that all phenomena are mind. Second, they say that mind is empty. Third, they say that this emptiness is spontaneous presence. This emptiness is not voidness, like something dead, but is spontaneously present. Everything is able to arise, to occur, to appear, and to be known in this emptiness. Finally, they say that spontaneous presence is pointed out as self-liberated. Not only are things liberated by nature, but they do not bind or restrict each other. When we realize the true nature of mind, it is said to be peace and self-liberation. It remains free by its nature and remains free from suffering. Thus, it is said that spontaneous presence is pointed out as self-liberated.

The text says, “May we realize the true nature of luminous mind.” Looking at objects, one sees no objects, but just mind points out that appearance is mind. “Looking at mind, there is no mind—it is empty of nature.” points out that mind is empty. “Looking at both of these, clinging to duality is self-liberated.” “May we realize the true nature of luminous mind.” points out that emptiness is spontaneous presence and that spontaneous presence is self-liberated. To be free of effort is called

spontaneous presence. It is whatever is able to arise without very much difficulty at all.

**THE MAIN EXPOSITION**  
**HOW TO PRACTICE THE UNITY OF SHAMATHA AND**  
**VIPASHYANA**

19. *Free from mental fabrication, it is Mahamudra.*  
*Free from extremes, it is Great Madhyamaka.*  
*This is also called the Great Perfection,*  
*the consummation of all.*  
*May we have confidence that understanding one realizes all.*

First, there was the aspiration to practice shamatha and next the aspiration to practice vipashyana. Now, we will discuss the practice the unity of shamatha and vipashyana. The unity of shamatha and vipashyana is taught with a list of names. The text says, “Free from mental fabrication, it is mahamudra.” When we meditate, we rest in meditation on the natural state of mind. Moreover, we realize this and then meditate upon it. We do not think, “I am doing this. I am not doing that.” Therefore, it is free from mental fabrication. To rest evenly in the unfabricated nature is said to be mahamudra. The oral instructions of the Kagyupas is called mahamudra. Everyone starting from Saraha, Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, and so forth have called it mahamudra. If one gives other names to this resting evenly in the natural state, then it is also called Great Madhyamaka (Skt. middle way).” Because it is free from the extreme of existence, eternalism, and the extreme of nonexistence, nihilism. When we understand the natural state of mind, we realize it is not existent and it is not nonexistent. Since we realize that it is free from extremes, we do not fall into the extreme of eternalism or nihilism. Therefore, it is called by the name “Great Middle Way.”

The text says, “This is also called the Great Perfection” “Great Perfection” means everything is perfected, everything is complete. We try to find the nature of realize by looking at our one small mind. Since it contains everything, it is called the Great Perfection. In short, if one knows one thing, the true nature of mind, then one will understand everything. Not only

will one understand everything, but one will have confidence that the conflicting emotions and discursive thoughts will not arise, and so forth. Thus, we aspire, “May we have confidence” like that.

#### HOW EXPERIENCE ARISES

20. *Great bliss free from attachment is unceasing.  
Luminosity free from clinging to concept is unobscured.  
Nonthought beyond conceptual mind is spontaneity.  
May meditative experience free from striving be continuous.*

How does this experience and realization arise? After the practice of meditation this text teaches that two aspects arise—experience and realization.

First, there will occur three experiences—bliss, clarity, and nonthought. Generally, great bliss is the unceasing great bliss that is free of the obstacle of suffering. When one practices meditation, the experience of mind is peaceful. This peace is the essence of bliss. Generally, the gross kind of bliss that we experience is one that changes. When this bliss changes, it turns into suffering. Therefore, the Buddha has taught that this bliss or pleasure is the suffering of change. However, the bliss that arises due to samadhi or meditation is peace, and therefore, it is called great bliss. It is unceasing bliss, yet it is free from attachment.

Generally, the experience of meditation is very luminous, free of any obscuration or impediment. If one talks about the true nature of mind as being free from any obscuration, then one sees it directly and nakedly. However, when one sees the natural state of mind, there is no clinging to any concepts, such as thinking, “I saw this.” It is empty of any essence or nature. It is luminous, but it is empty of nature. Therefore, there is no clinging to concepts.

The third experience is that of nonthought beyond conceptual mind. It is difficult for the conceptual mind of ordinary people like ourselves to realize the natural state. Therefore, this nonthought is spontaneity. We aspire: may meditative experiences of bliss, luminosity, and nonthought free from striving be continuous. Through the experiences of being

free of attachment, free of concept, and transcending conceptual mind, may there arise bliss, luminosity, and nonthought.

#### HOW REALIZATION ARISES

21. *Attachment to good meditative experience is self-liberated.  
The confusion of negative thoughts is pure by nature  
within the dharmadhatu.  
Ordinary mind is beyond accepting and rejecting, loss and gain.  
May we realize the truth of simplicity, the dharmata.*

The way realization arises is, “Attachment to good meditative experience is self-liberated.” This is the attachment of thinking that when we are practicing meditation, it is something good. If meditative experience arises, whether it be the meditative experience of bliss, luminosity, or nonthought, if we become attached to it, it is no good at all. Thus, in the spiritual songs of the Kagyus, it is said that even though one has the good meditative experiences of bliss, luminosity, or nonthought, if there is grasping, then they are the cause of samsara. If there is attachment, they will not act as the cause for liberating us from samsara. Therefore, being attached to good meditative experience is self-liberated. When one realizes the true nature of the mind itself, this true nature of mind is unborn. Therefore, even if something good arises, when realization truly arises, then there is nothing that can make us be attached to this good experience. Therefore, the grasping is self-liberated.

Likewise, the verse says, “The confusion of negative thoughts is pure by nature within the *dharmadhatu*.” So there is no attachment to what is good. In terms of negative thoughts, these are the subconscious thoughts of samsara, the kleshas and discursive thoughts. When one realizes the true nature of the mind itself and looks at experience or at the essence of thought, they naturally vanish into the space of *dharmadhatu*. This is due to the fact that they are confusion and have no substance. Being empty which is the nature of confusion, they vanish into the space of *dharmadhatu*. The true nature of the mind itself, which is devoid of any self-nature, is the *dharmadhatu*. The negative thoughts are of the same essence and so they are completely

pure within the dharmadhatu. Thus, attachment to good experiences is liberated and negative thoughts are purified.

PRACTICE OF THE UNION OF EMPTINESS AND COMPASSION

22. *All beings are always enlightened by nature,  
But not realizing this, they wander endlessly in samsara.  
May unbearable compassion for sentient beings  
Who experience boundless suffering arise in our being.*

Discussed next is the way in which compassion and emptiness are unified. The truth of emptiness, pervades all sentient beings. Whether born as humans, as animals, as a small insect; all sentient beings have a mind. If they have a mind, then they have the true nature of mind which is mahamudra. They then have the ability to realize the true nature of mind or the state of enlightenment. Nevertheless, they have not realized it. Animals have not realized it, the bugs have not realized it; nor have most human beings realized it. Among human beings, even those who are charismatic or smart or wealthy have not been able to realize this true nature of mind. Thus, the text says, “But not realizing this, they wander endlessly in samsara.” They dwell in samsara, which is of the nature of suffering. No matter what our condition, the nature of samsara is suffering. We might think that some external problem brings about our suffering. However, even if we get rid of this problem, there is still suffering. The ultimate root of our suffering is that we have not realized the true nature of mind.

When we wander in samsara and experience suffering, the suffering has no end. One may ask, “Does suffering never come to an end?” It occurs again and again. For example, we may think that you will suffer from not having money, so we work hard and accumulate a lot of wealth. However, the nature of suffering remains just the same. If you think that you are suffering because you do not have enough power, then when you have amassed power and influence, this also is the nature of suffering. In this way, there is no limit to suffering. For example, once I went with His Holiness Karmapa to Bhutan. At that time, the king of Bhutan was very powerful and very wealthy. He had hundreds of military bodyguards and attendants around him.

However, he had an interview with His Holiness in which he talked about how fortunate it was that His Holiness had been able to come and he talked about his worries and sufferings. He explained the many different aspects of his sufferings. So even though he was rich, he was suffering. Even though he was powerful, he was suffering. This suffering is endless. Until one realizes the true nature of mind, there is suffering.

We need to arouse great compassion because others do not need to experience suffering. If they meditate on the true nature of mind and mahamudra, they can be free of their suffering. The essence of mind is enlightenment. Sentient beings do not need to suffer, but they have not realized this essence of mind. They have not been able to enter the path. Therefore, “may unbearable compassion arise in our being” means any sentient being, even if they are powerful and rich, is an object of compassion. Even if they are very poor, they are an object of compassion. In the same, even if it is an animal who is suffering, they are an object of compassion. Since compassion can arise for any sentient being, “May compassion arise.”

#### HOW TO UNIFY THIS WITH EMPTINESS

*23. The energy of unbearable compassion is unceasing,  
Yet when one feels compassion, it is nakedly clear  
that it is free of any nature.  
May we meditate day and night  
Inseparable from this unity, the supreme unerring path.*

Generally, compassion arises based on realizing the true nature. When compassion arises, we look at things outside. At that point, how do we practice the meditation on emptiness? It arises as the unity of emptiness and compassion. “The energy of unbearable compassion is unceasing”—the power of compassion does not cease, yet when compassion arises, the true nature of our mind does not change. The empty nature of our mind can manifest clearly. Nevertheless, very powerful compassion naturally arises for all the sentient beings who do not realize this. This compassion is based on the realization of the true nature of our mind and the true nature of phenomena. Therefore, the unity of compassion and emptiness is free from any error.

## *An Aspirational Prayer for Mahamudra*

From compassion comes the perfection of others' benefit. From realizing the true nature arises the perfection of one's own benefit. This is the cause of perfecting the two benefits, We must meditate again and again.

### ASPIRING TO THE FRUITION THAT PERFECTS THIS PATH

24. *Through meditation, one attains the eyes  
and higher perceptions,  
Ripens sentient beings, purifies a buddha field,  
And fulfills the aspiration to attain the qualities of a buddha.  
May we attain Buddhahood, the perfection  
of fulfilling, ripening, and purifying.*

Fifth is the fruition of perfecting the path. When one attains the fruition by meditating on the path in this way, how does one attain it? It arises through the power of meditation. Through the power of meditation, one attains the five eyes, the higher perceptions, ripens sentient beings, and fulfills the aspiration to purify a buddha field in the future and attain all the qualities of a buddha. May we attain Buddhahood, by perfecting on the path fulfilling, ripening, and purifying step-by-step.

### THE CONCLUSION OF THE ASPIRATIONS

25. *Through the kindness of the victorious ones of  
the ten directions and their sons  
And by the power of all the pure virtue that exists,  
May the pure aspirations of myself and all sentient beings  
Be accomplished just as we intend.*

The conclusion of the aspiration asks that the kindness of the victorious ones of the ten directions and their sons and our aspirations be accomplished. the kindness of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas who dwell in the ten directions and the pure virtue, the roots of virtue that we have accumulated, is a kind of cause. Based on this cause, the fruition can arise. In this way, when we make aspirations for ourselves and all sentient beings, may however aspirations we make be accomplished through the power of these roots of virtue. What aspirations do we make? We make aspiration, saying, "May I attain the state of a buddha,

*An Aspirational Prayer for Mahamudra*

the ultimate perfection of the two benefits,” and “May not just myself, but all sentient beings as well, attain the state of a buddha, the perfection of the two benefits. May they be free from all suffering.” Moreover, we make the aspiration, “May these aspirations be accomplished in the future in just this way.”

This brings us to the end of this text.



## The Glossary

- bodhisattva** (Tib. *chang chup sem pa*) Literally, one who exhibits the mind of enlightenment. Also an individual who has committed him or herself to the mahayana path of compassion and the practice of the six paramitas to achieve Buddhahood to free all beings from samsara.
- bodhisattva** (Tib. *chang chup sem pa*) An individual who is committed to the mahayana path of practicing compassion and the six paramitas in order to achieve Buddhahood and free all beings from samsara. More specifically, those with a motivation to achieve liberation from samsara and are on one of the ten bodhisattva levels that culminates in Buddhahood.
- Cittamatra school** (Tib. *sem tsampa*) A school founded by Asanga in the fourth century and is usually translated as the Mind-only School. It is one of the four major schools in the mahayana tradition and its main tenet (to greatly simplify) is that all phenomena are mental events.
- clear light** (Skt. *prabhasvara*, Tib. *ösel*) A subtle state of mind and according to tantric teachings is the state of mind wherein highest realization is attained.
- dharmadhatu** (Tib. *chö ying*) The all-encompassing space, unoriginated and without beginning, out of which all phenomena arises. The Sanskrit means “the essence of phenomena” and the Tibetan means “the expanse of phenomena” but usually it refers to the emptiness, which is the essence of phenomena.
- disturbing emotion** ( Skt. *klesha*, Tib. *nyön mong*) The emotional obscurations (in contrast to intellectual obscurations) which are also translated as “afflictions” or “poisons.” The three main kleshas are (passion or attachment), (aggression or anger); and (ignorance or delusion). The five kleshas are the three above plus pride and (envy or jealousy).
- Dusum Khyenpa** (1110-1193 C.E.) The First Karmapa who was a student of Gampopa and founded the Karma Kagyu lineage. He is also known for founding the tulku system in Tibet.
- dzogchen** (Skt. *mahasandhi*) This is known also as the “great perfection” or atiyoga. It is the highest of the nine yantras according to the Nyingma tradition.
- emptiness** (Skt. *shunyata*, Tib. *tong pa nyi*) Also translated as voidness. The Buddha taught in the second turning of the wheel of dharma that external phenomena and the internal phenomena or concept of self or “I” have no real existence and therefore are “empty.”

**eternalism** (Tib. *tak ta*) A belief that one's self has concrete existence and is eternal.

**Great Madhyamaka** This is another term for mahamudra.

**Great Perfection** This is another term of dzogchen.

**ground, path, and fruition** This is a logical method for describing something used in many Buddhist works. First one describes the beginning causal conditions (ground), then the coming together of these causes towards some goal (path), and finally the result (fruition).

**hinayana** (Tib. *tek pa chung wa*) Literally, the “lesser vehicle.” The term refers to the first teachings of the Buddha which emphasized the careful examination of mind and its confusion. Also known as the Theravada path.

**Kagyu** (Tib.) One of the four major schools of Buddhism in Tibet. It was founded by Marpa. The other three are the Nyingma, the Sakya, and the Gelupa schools.

**Kagyupa** Belonging to the Kagyu lineage.

**Karmapa** The title of seventeen successive incarnations of Dusum Khyenpa who has headed the Karma Kagyu school of Tibetan Buddhism.

**kleshas** See disturbing emotions.

**lower realms** There are six realms of samsara (Tib. *rikdruk*). These are the possible types of rebirths for beings in samsara and are: the god realm in which gods have great pride, the asura realm in which the jealous gods try to maintain what they have, the human realm which is the best realm because one has the possibility of achieving enlightenment, the animal realm characterized by stupidity, the hungry ghost realm characterized by great craving, and the hell realm characterized by aggression. The three lower realms are animal, hungry ghost, and hell realms.

**luminosity** (Tib. *selwa*) In the third turning everything is void, but this voidness is not completely empty because it has luminosity. Luminosity or clarity allows all phenomena to appear and is a characteristic of emptiness (Skt. *shunyata*).

**Madhyamaka** (Tib. *u ma*) The most influential of the four schools of Indian Buddhism founded by Nagarjuna in the second century C.E. The name comes from the Sanskrit word meaning “the Middle-way” meaning it is the middle way between eternalism and nihilism. The main postulate of this school is that all phenomena—both internal mental events and external physical objects—is empty of any true nature. The school uses extensive rational reasoning to establish the emptiness of phenomena. This school does, however, hold that phenomena do exist on the conventional level of reality.

**mahamudra** (Tib. *cha ja chen po*) Literally, “great seal” meaning that all phenomena are sealed by the primordially perfect true nature. This form of meditation is traced back to Saraha (10th century) and was passed down in the Kagyu school through Marpa. This meditative transmission emphasizes perceiving mind directly rather than through rational analysis.

**mahayana** (Tib. *tek pa chen po*) Literally, the “great vehicle.” These are the teachings of the second turning of the wheel of dharma, which emphasize shunyata, compassion, and universal Buddha-nature.

**mandala** (Tib. *chin kor*) A diagram used in various vajrayana practices, which usually has a central deity and four directions. It also denotes a sacred location such as the mandala of the dharmakaya and this is how it is used in this text.

**mantra tradition** Another name for the vajrayana tradition.

**Mind-Only school.** Also called Cittamatra school. This is one of the major schools in the mahayana tradition founded in the fourth century by Asanga that emphasized everything is mental events.

**nihilism** (Tib. *ché ta*) The extreme view of nothingness, the nonexistence of a mind after death.

**pointing-out instruction** (Tib. *ngo troe chi dama pa*) A direction instruction on the nature of the mind which a guru gives the student when the student is ready for the instructions. It takes many forms—slapping the student with a shoe, shouting at him or her—and is individual to each teacher and each student.

**prajna** (Tib. *she rab*) In Sanskrit it means “perfect knowledge” and can mean wisdom, understanding, or discrimination. Usually it means the wisdom of seeing things from a high (e.g. non-dualistic) point of view.

**Rangjung Dorje** (1284-1339 C.E.) The Third Karmapa known for writing a series of texts widely used in the Kagyu school.

**samadhi** (Tib. *tin ne zin*) Also called meditative absorption or one-pointed meditation, this is the highest form of meditation.

**shamatha** or tranquility meditation (Tib. *shinay*) This is basic sitting meditation in which one usually follows the breath while observing the workings of the mind while sitting in the cross-legged posture. The main purpose of shamatha meditation is to settle or tame the mind so that it will stay where one places it.

**Shentong school** (Tib.) The Madhyamaka or Middle-way school divided into two major schools: the Rangtong which maintains emptiness is devoid of inherent existence and Shentong which maintains emptiness is indivisible from luminosity.

**shravaka arhat** (Tib. *dra chom pa*) Accomplished hinayana practitioners who have eliminated the klesha obscurations. They are the fully realized shravakas and pratyekabuddhas.

**siddha** (Tib. *drup top*) An accomplished Buddhist practitioner.

**sugatagarbha** (Tib. *der sheg nying po*) Buddha nature or that enlightened essence present in all beings that allows them to have the capacity to achieve enlightenment. It is closely related to tathagatagarbha.

**sutra tradition** (Tib. *do*) These are the hinayana and mahayana texts which are the words of the Buddha. These are often contrasted with the tantras which are the Buddha's vajrayana teachings. The sutra tradition emphasizes analyzing the Middle-way texts using analytical meditation, in contrast to the mantra tradition which emphasizes looking directly at mind in meditation.

**vipashyana meditation** (Tib. *lha tong*) Sanskrit for "insight meditation" This meditation develops insight into the nature of reality (Skt. *dharmata*). The other main meditation is shamatha meditation.

**yidam meditation** (Tib.) A tantric deity that embodies qualities of Buddhahood and is practiced in the vajrayana. Yidam meditation is the vajrayana practices that use the visualization of a yidam.

