

**The Five-fold Path of Mahamudra:
a teaching given by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama
at the Tibetan Meditation Center in 1987**

Introduction by Merrill Whitman:

Your Holiness, I wish to express the appreciation and joy of all of the members and friends of the Tibetan Meditation Center that you have been able and willing to take the time from your very busy schedule on your short visit to the United States, to again bless us with your presence.

We understand that Mahamudra teaching is the essence of the Buddha's wisdom. We are very appreciative and know that we will all benefit greatly from your talk and teaching here today. We love you and thank you.

As usual, before we start giving teachings, we must develop a sort of proper motivation. For this, one needs refuge and altruistic mind generation. Please recite with me:

SANG GYE CHÖ DANG TSOG KYI CHOG NAM LA
JANG CHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHI
DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PA'I SÖ NAM KYI
DRO LA PHEN CHIR SANG GYE DRUB PAR SHOG

In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha most excellent,
I take refuge until enlightenment is reached.
By the merit of generosity and other good deeds,
may I attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.

Teachings by His Holiness:

Today, I will speak on the five-fold practice of the Great Seal as is communicated in the Drigung Kagyu tradition. With respect to the transmission that I have received—I have received a transmission of a short teaching found in the hundred or so instructions of Jonang from my senior tutor, Ling Rinpoche. My own experience about Mahamudra is nothing, zero. As my excuse I will not say that I was lazy, but I will say that I did not have enough time to focus.

GREAT VEHICLE AND LESSER VEHICLES

In Buddhism, there are the two vehicles, the Great Vehicle and the Lesser Vehicle. In order to practice the teachings of the Great Vehicle, it is necessary to have taken the teachings and practices of the Lesser Vehicle as one's basis. They are one's foundation. What are the practices of the Lesser Vehicle that are to serve as the basis of your practice? In the scriptures of the Lesser Vehicle the suffering of cyclic existence is identified, is set forth. On the basis of identifying the suffering of cyclic existence, one is to develop a wish for liberation from cyclic existence; one is to develop a wish for liberation from cyclic existence, identifying that there is a

state of cyclic existence. Thus, the basic practice that one is gain from the scriptures of the Lesser Vehicle is to develop a strong wish to get out of cyclic existence.

In order to understand the nature of cyclic existence as being that of suffering, you must understand this in terms of yourself in all of its details. Then you can take what you have understood about your own suffering nature and cyclic existence and extend this to other sentient beings, thereby generating altruism, love, and compassion.

This compassionate thought is the root of the Great Vehicle practice. Since the root of the Buddha's teaching is compassion, Hearers and Solitary Realizers, the practitioners of the Lesser Vehicle, also have compassion. They have the compassion that is the mere wish that beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. However, it is in the Great Vehicle that there is tremendous emphasis on compassion such that one takes upon oneself the burden of freeing all sentient beings without exception from suffering and the causes of suffering. Thus, what one has is a wish to bring about the welfare of other sentient beings. This wish induces a wish for oneself to achieve enlightenment. Thus, the altruistic mind of enlightenment is something that is endowed with these two aspirations: one is the aspiration for others' welfare and the other is the aspiration for one's own enlightenment as a means to bring about other's welfare. Motivated by this altruistic intention to become enlightened, one engages in the practice of the path.

PATH OF ALTRUISTIC METHOD AND WISDOM IN THE SUTRA AND TANTRA SYSTEMS

The path itself is a union of the practice of altruistic method and of wisdom. Within the Great Vehicle, the sutra path is to practice method conjoined with the force of wisdom, and wisdom conjoined with the force of method. All of this is within the practice of the six perfections.

In this way, method and wisdom are different consciousnesses that are different entities. In the sutra system, the consciousness of method affects the consciousness of wisdom in the sense that method and wisdom are contained within one consciousness.

For instance, in the sutra system (you probably already know this, but let me use an example) – when paying homage, if one does this within an understanding of the absence of inherent existence of the person who is paying homage, the activity of paying homage, and the object to which one is paying homage, if one ascertains this beforehand and then within the continuation of the force of that understanding bows down and engages in homage, that is a case of an activity of method that is conjoined with the force of wisdom.

Similarly, other examples would be that if you first cultivated the wisdom that realizes the emptiness of inherent existence of sentient beings and then, from within the force of that understanding, you cultivated compassion – this would again be a case of altruistic method conjoined with the force of wisdom. Does that compassionate consciousness itself realize emptiness? No, it does not.

Another example would be cultivating faith in the Buddha, the conqueror Buddha, within an

understanding of the absence of inherent existence conjoined with the force of that understanding. The mind of faith itself is not actually understanding the absence of inherent existence.

Similarly also, the objects of intent for which one is engaging in practice are all sentient beings. Thus, one is aiming one's practice at the welfare of others. Thus, if one strongly cultivates such compassion, such altruism, at the beginning of one's meditation practice, and within that motivation enters into a meditation on emptiness, that is a case of wisdom being affected by altruistic method. But that consciousness realizing emptiness is not itself a consciousness of altruistic method. The compassionate mind, or mind of altruism, has ceased at that time even though its force is still affecting the consciousness realizing emptiness, such that it is a wisdom consciousness affected by the force of altruistic method.

From this point of view, you can clearly understand that, in the sutra system, the consciousness of method – that is to say, of compassion and altruism – is a different entity from the consciousness of wisdom. With the one assisting the other, the force of the one remaining when the other is present, but the two are not actually present at the same time in one consciousness.

Then in the mantra or tantra system, it is said that such a practice of method and wisdom in which there are different entities each affecting the other is not sufficient to being about buddhahood. The reason for this being that buddhahood is an undifferentiated entity of exalted body and exalted mind. Mind and body are one entity. Thus, since the effect, the fruit that one is seeking in buddhahood, has a "oneness" of entity of mind and body, it is necessary at the time of the path to engage in a practice in which exalted mind and exalted body are of one entity. So the, how can we posit a practice in which method and wisdom are of one entity?

PRACTICE OF DEITY YOGA

Thus, in mantra there is the practice of deity yoga, in which one observes a deity body, a divine body, as one's own body and, within that, ascertains with that very consciousness its absence of inherent existence. The meaning of this is that the mind that realizes emptiness itself shines forth and appears as a divine body.

There are many other purposes for engaging in deity yoga, but the main purpose is to engage in this practice of unification within one entity of altruistic method and the wisdom realizing emptiness. However, the practice of deity yoga is for the sake of establishing a basis from which one can make further progress. I don't think that it can be said that it is the final practice.

So this meditation of a divine body, which is central to the generation stage, is compared to a boat that one needs in order to cross some water. But when reaching a certain stage, one no longer needs it. Similarly, the practice of deity yoga is for the sake of establishing a certain framework in which higher practices can be conducted.

The term Great Seal (*Mahamudra*) is designated to this special practice of undifferentiated mind

and body, or method and wisdom. When the practice of mahamudra is explained in terms of mantra, it is explained this way. When explained in terms of the sutra system, it seems that it can refer just to a consciousness realizing emptiness.

FIVE-FOLD PRACTICE OF THE GREAT SEAL

Then there is the five-fold practice of the Great Seal:

- First, there is a preparatory practice, which is the altruistic mind of enlightenment
- Second, is the actual meditation where one meditates on one's body as the divine body
- Third is the practice of faith, of developing faith within viewing one's own body as a divine body. We visualize the guru or lama in front of oneself and cultivate faith. This is because faith is the root of all great achievements of all the siddhis.

Because the experience of the Great Seal itself cannot be entirely explained within words, it is inconceivable, beyond thought, beyond expression, and so forth. It would be difficult to achieve it just through an explanation. Rather, it is said in order to experience the Great Seal just as it is, one needs to have the empowering and transformative blessings of one's lama.

Then with respect to cultivating the actual mahamudra itself, if done through the sutra system one engages in analytical meditation, analyzing and discovering the absence of inherent existence and remaining one-pointedly with this emptiness of inherent existence which has been understood through analysis. These analyses are like those that Nagarjuna set forth in his *Treatise on the Middle Way*.

- The fourth step is called the cultivation of non-conceptuality, thus named because when one cultivates the Great Seal in the mantra system, especially in the Highest Yoga Tantra system, due to the force of engaging in special yogic techniques it is possible not to put great emphasis on analytic meditation. Rather, through these special yogic techniques it is possible to achieve an ascertainment of emptiness that is the same as that achieved through analysis.

Therefore, it says in the root texts on the mahamudra that one is to put great emphasis on non-conceptual meditation. This term "non-conceptuality" is such that it appears in many different systems within Buddhism. In sutra itself, it has many different connotations. When one cultivates calm abiding (one-pointedness of mind) there is one type of non-conceptuality. Another meaning is when one cultivates special insight. There are many meanings when cultivating the three lower tantras. In highest yoga tantra, when cultivating the stage of generation, there is one meaning and when cultivating the stage of completion there is another meaning of non-conceptuality. It is very important to ascertain these various meanings of non-conceptuality and keep them separate. Apply the one that is appropriate to the context that you are considering. Instead, if you bring only the understanding of non-conceptuality that you know

best into every situation, it will really be a mess.

Let me tell a story of something that happened in the past about a fellow who was not particularly smart, but wanted to come on as if he was very smart. He learned the name “oak,” which we know is the name for a particular type of wood. He thought that if he indicated to people that he knew the name “oak” they would think he was very smart. So, he went around the room identifying every type of wood as oak, saying, “This is oak, that is oak.” Instead of getting a better reputation, he made the situation worse for himself. Similarly, when we use the word non-conceptuality and just know one meaning for it, it makes a lot of trouble for ourselves.

Thus, it is within the context of a very high stage of yoga that the undifferentiability of method and wisdom arises. It is within this type of non-conceptual meditation that one has no need for homage or other types of conventional practices. This is because, on that very high level of the yoga of undifferentiability of wisdom and method, all of the factors of method and wisdom are contained within that practice. In the context of such a high level of non-conceptuality, practices like homage are not needed.

Nowadays, when we get tired and so forth and need rest, we sit in meditation, not thinking about anything. That is a low level of non-conceptuality, is it not? That alone wouldn't be sufficient, would it?

So then, what is the mode of cultivating a full-fledged non-conceptuality in meditation? First, one needs to have formed a good understanding of emptiness as it is set forth in the Middle Way system in the sutra schools. Not necessary to say, one needs to have experience with respect to the altruistic mind of enlightenment. Of course one does.

Then, once one has some understanding of emptiness, then in the actual session one should withdraw one's mind inside – examining, watching, fixing on the nature of the mind itself. As it is said in the Middle Way School, all phenomena are made up by the mind. It is within such a context that one contemplates that all phenomena are the mind. Then one examines the mind itself and it is seen to be like an illusion. This is called “viewing appearances as the mind, then viewing the mind as empty.”

When you are able to place your mind within the luminous and knowing nature of the mind itself, then it is not necessary to intentionally stop conceptual thoughts. The reason for this is that you have identified the basic nature of all types of consciousness, the place out of which all consciousness and conceptions come. Thus, by paying attention to the luminous and knowing nature of any consciousness, no matter what is appearing, conceptual consciousness gradually lessens and lessens, and the luminous and knowing nature of the mind manifests more and more.

It is like an ocean, in that one is recognizing that all of the waves are just ocean water. You have understood the water that composes the waves. This is like the luminous and knowing nature of the mind.

When you are able to focus within the luminous and knowing nature of the mind, it seems that one's conceptual consciousness, one's thoughts of this and that, gradually diminish in force and diminish in length of occurrence. The luminous and knowing nature of mind becomes more obvious and more manifest. Than as these conceptual consciousnesses lessen and diminish of their own accord, and eventually disappear, then deeper, nondual levels of consciousness manifest, and superior non-conceptual wisdom manifests. This kind of meditation practice was designated by the great Kagyu masters of the past as the "simultaneous mode of practice." When one engages in many techniques in order to bring about this non-conceptual level of consciousness, such as many techniques involved with channels, winds, and drops, this type of practice is called the "gradual path."

What one needs to do is to receive instruction from a lama experienced in this type of realization. Compare one's realization to the lama, and thereby clear up various problems and so forth. Do this within the context of few activities, being able to do retreat and not engage in a lot of commotion and busyness. Along with verbal teachings, the transmission of blessings is very important in these practices.

- The fifth and last step is dedication. As the root text says, "Be earnest in your dedication." Dedication is very helpful in the sense that it maintains the continuum of the virtuous practice that you have done so that it won't diminish or become lost. It keeps the continuity going so that you can reach the final goal toward which you are aiming.

That is the five-fold path in brief. Knowing the transmission of mahamudra within the Drigung Kagyu tradition, we can see that Tibetan Buddhism is truly Indian Buddhism, not "Lamaism."

As a follower of the Buddhadharma, practice very sincerely. Then you will get real value and real benefit.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

Q: Please explain the sunset and sunrise path, the path of the fear of death and living without the fear of death, as stated in the Sacred Path of the Warrior.

A: I am not familiar with your particular reference, but it might be referring to the fact that the best of practitioners have nothing to fear about death, the middling practitioners have no anxiety about death, and the low level practitioner has no regrets.

Since fear is produced by the conception of inherent existence, for those persons who have the yoga of the union, or deity yoga of manifestation and emptiness, also called the union of appearance and emptiness, for persons who are able to remain in this yoga continuously, because there is a realization of emptiness there will not be any fear induced by the misconception of

phenomena as inherently existing.

With regard to fear or concern, if there is really something to be afraid about or concerned about, then it is good to have fear, to have the concern, and to do something about it. If it is something that you need not be afraid of, need not be concerned about, then it is, of course, a different situation. For instance, when a child goes about in the dark and bumps into things, he thinks this or that is there and gets afraid. This is a senseless type of fear, is it not? For a person who thinks about it, examines the situation, it is very helpful, is it not?

Basically we are in samsara, which means that we are slaves of negative mind. That is something worthwhile to fear and try to overcome. So long as that situation remains, trouble is bound to come. Instead of fear, try to realize the nature of the existence and then act accordingly.

Q: Please explain about divine pride.

A: In the practice of divine pride, the main thing is the pride itself. The secondary factor is the clear visualization of yourself in a divine body.

Because we usually have a common sense of self-hood that depends on the appearance of our common body composed of flesh, blood, bone, and so forth. Because it is in dependence on such an appearance that we have a common sense of self-hood, the basic or initial practice is to replace that with a clear appearance of yourself as a deity. Then in dependence on that clear appearance, you will have a sense of divine or ideal self-hood.

This is done in terms of a divine body appearing to the mental consciousness. It is not a matter of cultivating in meditation with the sense consciousnesses that can only see an ordinary body. When looking with the mental consciousness and seeing a pure body, pure mind will develop a sense of pure self-hood in dependence on that pure form. This is called "divine pride." For some people, there is the case of not having a clear sense of oneself as the deity, but nevertheless still having a sense of divine self-hood.

For some, it appears to be better to keep your eyes open in such a meditation. For other people, it is better to keep the eyes closed. You need to examine this for yourself. In my own experience, it is better to keep the eyes open. That way, external things will not disturb you. If at the beginning you keep your eyes closed, then when you open your eyes things will disturb you. So then, keep your eyes open and then fully concentrate on mental consciousness, completely ignore the sense organs; then they have no effect. When meditating on pure nature of the mind, it is also better to open your eyes in some colorless place. Then no attraction will appear. Then put your mindfulness on consciousness itself, and simply watch within.