

A Root Text for the Precious Gelug Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra: The Main Path of the Conquerors

by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen¹

NAMO MAHAMUDRAYA

Homage to Mahamudra!

1.

I bow respectfully at the feet of my incomparable guru, accomplished master of adepts, who plainly reveals Mahamudra, the all-pervading nature of everything, the indivisible, indescribable, and indestructible sphere of the mind.

2.

I will write an instruction on Mahamudra from the oral tradition of the supremely accomplished Dharmavajra and his spiritual children, a teaching of the Gelug Kagyu tradition that brings together and excellently gathers the vital essence of the ocean-like pith instructions of sutras and tantras.

3.

Regarding this, there are three outlines: (1) the preliminaries, (2) the actual practice, and (3) the conclusion. As for the first, sincerely—without it being just words coming out of your mouth—take refuge, because it is the gateway to entering the Dharma, and generate bodhicitta, for it is the central pillar of the Mahayana.

4.

Also, since insight into the suchness of your mind depends on the accumulation of merit and the purification of obstructions, recite the mantra of Vajrasattva at least a hundred thousand times and make as many hundreds of prostrations as possible with the practice of the 35 Buddhas.

5.

Then entreat your root guru, who is inseparable from the Buddhas of the three times, again and again from the depth of your heart.

6.

As for the actual practice, although there are many ways to conceive of Mahamudra, these can be classified into two: (1) sutric [Mahamudra] and (2) tantric [Mahamudra].

7.

Regarding the latter, it refers to the clear light [mind], which is the great bliss that arises through the skillful methods of penetrating the vital points of the vajra body and so on.

8.

It is the Mahamudra asserted by Saraha, Nagarjuna, Naropa, and Maitripa. Taught in the *[Seven Treatises of] Accomplishment²* and the *Three Sets [of the Essence]³*, it is the innermost essence of highest yoga tantra.

9.

With regard to the sutric Mahamudra, it is the way to meditate that is explicitly taught in the extensive, middling and condensed *[Perfection of Wisdom Sutras]*. The supreme Arya Nagarjuna said: “There is no other path to liberation than this.”

10.

Here I shall give instructions on Mahamudra from his perspective and describe the ways to introduce the mind according to the teachings of the lineage masters.

11.

There are many [practice traditions], each with a different name, such as the Simultaneously Born Union, the Amulet Box, the Five Aspects, the Six Sets of Equal Taste, the Four Syllables, the Pacifier, Cutting [Self-Grasping], Dzogchen, the Instructions on the View of Madhyamika, and so on.

12.

However, when examined by a yogi who is well versed in the scriptures of the definitive meaning and logic and has experience [in meditation], [it becomes clear that] they all amount to the same intended meaning.

13.

This being the case, of the two approaches—
(1) seeking to meditate on the basis of the right view and
(2) seeking the correct view on the basis of meditation—
here I will present the latter.

14.

On a seat that is conducive to meditative concentration, assume the sevenfold posture, clear impure winds with the nine rounds [breathing practice], thoroughly refine your awareness, and with a pure virtuous mind first take refuge and generate bodhicitta.

15.

Meditate on the profound path of guru yoga and having fervently requested the guru hundreds of time, and so on, let him dissolve into you.

16.

[Then] for a short time, remain unwaveringly absorbed in the state of vague and indistinct appearances without mentally fabricating anything through discursive thoughts of expectation and worry.

17.

This is not like fainting or sleeping, when mental engagement is stopped. Put your mindfulness on guard to avoid distraction. Set up introspection to be aware of any mental movement and fully concentrate on the nature of awareness and clarity [of the mind], observing them directly.

18.

Whatever thoughts arise, recognize each one of them. Or, like a swordsman, completely cut off any thoughts as they arise. Once you have cut them off and [your mind] is at rest, loosely relax it without letting your mindfulness slip away.

19.

[Machig Labdron said:] “Fully concentrate and loosely relax. That is where the mind settles.” Furthermore, it was said [by Saraha]: “If you relax the mind that is tied up in a knot, it will undoubtedly become free.”

20.

As it has been said, relax without being distracted. When you view the nature of any thought that arises, [the thought] will naturally disappear and vacuity will dawn. Similarly, if you examine [the mind] when it is at rest, you become vividly aware of its unobstructed vacuity and clarity.

21.

Seeing [that these minds don't differ] they are known as ‘the fusion of stillness and movement’. Whatever thoughts arise, do not stop them but recognize their mental movement and settle into their nature, which is analogous to the example of a bird that has been confined to a boat.

22.

[The *Doha* says:] “It is like the way in which a crow, released from a ship, circles in all directions and then lands again [on the ship].”

23.

By maintaining [these methods], it becomes vivid that the nature

of the meditative equipoise is unobstructed, lucid and clear; it is in no way established as anything physical, and it consists of a space-like vacuity that allows anything to dawn.

24.

In this way, although the suchness of the mind comes into full view and can be seen directly, it cannot be grasped or shown by saying, “[It is] this”. Without grasping, rest loosely on whatever dawns.

25.

At present, most of the great meditators of Tibet are of the same opinion, proclaiming that these are oral instructions that give you the Buddha in the palm of your hand.

26.

Despite this, I, Choekyi Gyaltsen, say that this approach is an outstandingly skillful method for beginners to achieve mental stillness, and a way to introduce the conventional [nature] of the mind.

27.

As for how to introduce the suchness of the mind, I will now reveal the oral instructions of my root guru (Sangye Yeshe) —[an embodiment of] the primordial wisdom of all the Buddhas — who took on the aspect of a saffron-colored monk and removed the mental darkness confusing my mind.

28.

Without wavering from the earlier state of the (single-pointed) meditative equipoise, use this subtle awareness —like a tiny fish moving swiftly in a limpid pond— to wisely examine the nature of [yourself] the person, who is the meditator.

29.

As Arya Nagarjuna, the protector said:
“A person is not earth, not water,
not fire, not wind, not space,
not consciousness, and if it is not all of them,
what person is there other than these?”

30.

“Because the person is a composite of the six constituents, it is not real.

Likewise, since each of the constituents is also a composite, they are not real.”

31.

According to what has been said, when you search for the meditative equipoise, the one who is settled in the equipoise, and so on, and you cannot find even a subtle particle, at that time, single-pointedly maintain the space-like meditative equipoise without distraction.

32.

Or, while in the state of the meditative equipoise, [examine] the mind, which is a complete vacuity, not established as a physical entity, unobstructed, with all kinds of thoughts arising and scattering; it is unceasing and functions as an uninterrupted continuum of clarity and awareness.

33.

It appears to be independent, and as a conceived object it is apprehended [to exist as it appears]. Our guardian Shantideva says: “That which is called ‘continuum’ or ‘gathering’ is as unreal as a garland or an army”.

34.

By relying on such scriptures and reasoning rest in the single-pointed equipoise, which ascertains that [the mind] does not exist in the way it appears.

35.

In short, my spiritual teacher Sangye Yeshe, who is actually all-knowing, has personally said:

36.

“When you are aware that whatever appears is apprehended by the conceptual mind, the ultimate sphere of reality will dawn without depending on anything else. Place your awareness in the state that is dawning and rest on it with the single-pointed equipoise. How marvelous!”

37.

Similarly, Phadampa Sangye said: “People of Dingri—the spear of awareness should spin within the state of emptiness, so the view is unobstructed.” These [quotes] have the same intended meaning.

38.

As for the conclusion, dedicate all your positive potential generated by meditating on Mahamudra, together with your ocean-like accumulation of past, present and future virtues, to the unsurpassable great enlightenment.

39.

In this way, after you become familiar with [the meditative equipoise], you realize in detail how all the appearances that arise as objects of the six collections [of consciousness] appear. [This results] in the naked and vibrant appearance of their mode of existence. [According to Je Mitra] the important point is to recognize whatever appears.

40.

In short, do not grasp at any of the objects that appear to you, such as your mind, and so on. Always maintain [your practice of] ascertaining their mode of existence, and having understood this, connect all phenomena of samsara and nirvana to the same [ultimate] nature.

41.

As Aryadeva said:
“Whoever sees one thing
is said to see all.
That which is the emptiness of one
is the emptiness of all.”

42.

In this way, from the vantage point of a correct meditative equipoise [realizing] suchness there are no elaborations of samsara and nirvana with regard to existence, nonexistence and so on.

43.

However, having risen from this [equipoise], when one investigates, it is undeniable that there are dependently arisen actions and agents which are only nominal and merely designated, and which appear naturally —like dreams, mirages, reflections of the moon in water, or illusions.

44.

When [the perception of] emptiness is not obscured by appearances and [the perception of] appearances are not hindered by emptiness, at that time the excellent path of the equivalence of being empty and having arisen dependently becomes manifest.

45.

Through the virtue of me—Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen, a renunciate who has listened [to many teachings]—having taught these [verses], may all living beings by means of this path, apart from which there is no other gateway to peace, conquer [the two obscurations].

(Colophon:)

This way of introducing Mahamudra has long been requested, again and again, by Gendun Gyaltzen of Nachu, who holds the degree of *Nae Chu Rabjampa* (Expert in the

Ten Subjects), and Sherab Sengye of Hatong, who holds the degree of *Kachuba* (Master in the Ten Difficult Texts). Having seen that the eight worldly dharmas of this life are a drama of madness, they both live as hermits in the solitude of the mountains. Many of my disciples who wish to practice the definitive meaning of Mahamudra have also made such a request.

[I have composed this text now] especially because in one of his songs of experience, which he wrote to instruct himself and others, the all-knowing Gyalwa Ensapa⁴, lord of the accomplished masters, first taught the topics from 'relying on a spiritual teacher' to 'calm abiding and special insight' according to the Kadam Lam Rim tradition, and then said:

"I am unable to write about
the ultimate oral instruction on Mahamudra now;
it is not [the same as] the paths explained above
and is not well known in Tibet at present."

What he did not put in writing because of his objection to the time was [therefore] intended for a later [period]. For example, it is said in the *White Lotus Sutra of the Sacred Dharma*:

"The self-arisen one presents this method
for the sake of fully realizing the primordial wisdom of a Buddha.
But he never says to them,
'You will become Buddhas'.
Why is that? The Protector is waiting for the [right] time."

Having become the kind of person who does not transgress the binding precepts and upholds the pith instructions of the sacred sutras and tantras, I, the renunciate Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen, who holds an unbroken lineage of blessings from those who directly practiced this path starting from the unequalled teacher, the King of the Shakyas, down to my root guru, the all-knowing and all-seeing Sangye Yeshe, have composed this, in order to live up to [Gyalwa Ensapa's] intention [to wait for the right time], which is similar to what is taught [in this sutra].

[English translation by Geshema Kelsang Wangmo for the occasion of Kyabje Jhado Rinpoche's teachings on Mahamudra in Israel, March 15-19, 2023, organized by Dharma Friends of Israel.]

Endnotes:

¹ Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen (1570-1662) was an important Tibetan master of the Gelug tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. He was the first to receive the title of Panchen Lama from the Fifth Dalai Lama Lobsang Gyatso, and is often referred to as the First Panchen Lama.

The title was also used for Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen's successors. It was given posthumously to three masters, identified as his previous incarnations, Khedrub Je Gelek Pelsang (1385-1438), Sonam Choekyi Langpo (1439-1505), and Gyalwa Ensapa Lobsang Dondrup (1505-1568). This is why Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen is also known as the Fourth Panchen Lama.

As a teenager Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen studied with Sangye Yeshe, then the abbot of Tashi Lhunpo Monastery (founded by the First Dalai Lama Gendun Drup), from whom he received many teachings, empowerments, and so on. In 1601 he became the abbot of Tashi Lhunpo and in 1604 he gave many special instructions in both sutra and tantra to the Fourth Dalai Lama, Yonten Gyatso, and gave him full ordination.

When the Fourth Dalai Lama passed away in 1616, it was Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen who identified his reincarnation and named him Lobsang Gyatso. He also gave the Fifth Dalai Lama novice ordination in 1625, full ordination in 1638, and taught him extensively from the sutras and tantras.

The Fifth Dalai Lama declared him to be an incarnation of Amitabha Buddha and gave him Tashi Lhunpo Monastery as his main seat. Since then, Tashi Lhunpo has been the traditional seat of the Panchen Lamas.

Throughout his life Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen also served as the abbot of other monasteries such as as Drepung Monastery, the Jangtsey College of Ganden Monastery, and so forth. Furthermore, he was a gifted political mediator. He was particularly adept at resolving conflicts, and his work was crucial in negotiating peace treaties between Bhutan and Tibet, and in keeping the peace when Mongolian troops invaded Lhasa.

Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen was a prolific writer, composing more than three hundred works. Especially well known are his Lam Rim text *Stages of the Easy Path*, the *Guru Puja* or *Lama Choepa*, the *Root Text for the Precious Gelug Kagyu Tradition of Mahamudra* and its autocommentary, *Lamp Illuminating Mahamudra*.

² According to Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen's autocommentary on the *Root text for the Precious Gelug Kagyu Mahamudra* (called the *Lamp Illuminating Mahamudra*), the *Seven Treatises of Accomplishment* are seven texts that were composed by Indian *mahasiddhas*. The seven texts are: (1) *Accomplishment of the Secret* written by Mahasukha Natha, (2) *Accomplishment of Method and Wisdom* written by Mahasuka Natha's disciple Anangavajra, (3) *Accomplishment of Primordial Wisdom* written by Anangavajra's disciple Indrabhuti, (4) *Accomplishment of Non-Duality* written by Indrabhuti's consort Lashmikara, (5) *Accomplishment of the Simultaneously Arisen* written by Dombi Heruka, (6) *Accomplishment of Thatness of the Great Secret* written by Darika, and (7) *Accomplishment of Thatness After the Clarification of Reality* written by the Yogini Chito.

³ According to Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen's autocommentary *Lamp Illuminating Mahamudra*, the *Three Sets of the Essence* refer to the *Three Dohas* written by the Indian *mahasiddha* Saraha who was one of the teachers of Nagarjuna. A *doha* is a song of realization and the *Three Dohas* comprise (1) the *Dohas of the King*, (2) the *Dohas of the Queen*, and (3) the *Dohas of the People*.

⁴ As mentioned in the first endnote, Gyalwa Ensapa Lobsang Dondrup (1505-1568) was the previous incarnation of Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltsen and is also referred to as the third Panchen Lama.