

## An Excerpt from THE UNION OF MAHAMUDRA AND DZOGCHEN

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*Namo Mahakarunikaye*

*Emaho!*

**T**he sutras, tantras, and philosophical scriptures are extensive and great in number. But life is short and intelligence small so it is hard to fully embrace them all. You may know a lot, but if you don't put it into practice, it will be like dying of thirst on the bank of a great lake. Likewise, it is possible that a common corpse will be found in the bed of the scholar.

Namo means "I pay homage". An incredible amount of Buddhist literature has been preserved, such as the sutras of mahayana, the tantras of vajrayana, the secret mantras, and the various texts of philosophy, such as the thirteen major philosophical texts, not to mention the different sciences and so forth. All are contained in a very vast number of works. There are the direct teachings of the Buddha, the Kangyur, and the treatises by the panditas and so forth, the Tangyur.

However, the human life span is brief compared to some other beings. Dangers to life and limb abound. Though with food, medicine, and various methods we try to keep ourselves healthy and try to extend our lives, sometimes things bring a quick end to our lives. Illnesses are common. In any case, life is impermanent and won't last forever.

Our intelligence is really quite limited. So because we have neither the capacity nor the time to make a thorough study of the vast amount of teachings, it is difficult to fully embrace and understand them, to get a complete grasp on all of the fine details. Even if we were to study quite a lot and become very learned, if we only know the theories but don't assimilate them through reflection and actual practice itself, it would be like dying of thirst on the shores of a great body of fresh water. Wouldn't it be a complete waste to die of thirst at the banks of a large body of drinking water?

In the next line, in this context the word "scholar" means one who is learned in the different sciences and so forth. In the Buddhist sense, it refers particularly to one learned in the inner sciences, the philosophy of Buddhism, the practices and so on. Traditionally, it is said that these studies cause the learned person to become gentle and disciplined while the sign of success in practice is to be less and less disturbed by the negative emotions. That is how it should be. But it could happen that, instead of becoming a learned scholar and assimilating the teachings, one's arrogance and pride increases steadily.

At the time of death, wonderful signs will indicate the passing away of a truly learned being, such as indestructible relics remaining in the cremation ashes. Or the body may remain in the meditation posture for a long period of time without decomposing. Rainbow lights sometimes manifest and various other signs. But, if during one's lifetime the accumulation of studies did not help one's mind or tame one's disturbing emotions, one will die just like an ordinary person. Wouldn't this be sad?

At the time of death, there are many ways of discovering whether a person was a good practitioner or not. The body left behind by an ordinary being will become, in a very short time, completely inflexible so that

the arms and legs cannot be bent. If the flesh is manipulated, it will be like chewing gum. If it is pulled out, it will stay like that, it won't smooth back into place like the skin of a person who is alive. This is the condition of an ordinary corpse. But, if a person has attained a certain level of practice, the body will remain pliant, the flesh supple, and the mouth and eyes will have a particular expression. There are only a few examples; there are many other signs.

The reason why this line is included in the text is because there is a saying in Tibet, "The hide or leather which serves to store butter is not cured by the butter." It probably sounds strange to Westerners. Usually, to cure cow hide, one has to rub it with oil, manipulate it until it becomes quite flexible. Afterwards, it will never become hard and stiff again. But, in Tibet, the particular skin which is used for the storage of butter becomes, after some time completely stiff, as though it were iron. This is the analogy for a Dharma follower who fails to take the teachings to heart. The whole point of Dharma practice is to increase one's love for others, one's compassion, and one's understanding of emptiness while decreasing one's negative emotions. If, instead, one becomes more inflexible, it is possible that a common corpse will be found in the bed of a scholar.

*The scriptures of the sutras and tantras and the words of the learned and accomplished ones of India and Tibet*

*All have great blessings; but are difficult for ordinary people to grasp.*

*Though they are indispensable for teaching in a monastic college,*

*For one-pointed practice they are of little use.*

*This "pointing-out instruction of the old lady" is more beneficial for your mind than all of the others.*

About 100 volumes of what the Buddha, himself, taught, the extensive sutras and the profound tantras, are in print. The commentaries on these, written by the panditas and great masters of the past, also have commentaries written about these commentaries. Some of the commentaries on the sutras, the tantras, and the different sciences and philosophies have innumerable commentaries. In this way, there is a tremendous amount of literature composed by the masters of India and Tibet.

It is best if one is able to study all of these and get a complete understanding through learning, personal experience, and practice. The scriptures have great beneficial effects and great blessings. If one is to become a great teacher in a monastic college, one should possess the nine attributes of a noble person or sublime being. For example, one should be skilled in composition, debate, and elaboration, in study, contemplation, and practice, in wisdom and noble character, and have a pure and excellent attitude. In order to become a great teacher able to expound all these different philosophies, or if one is studying in a Buddhist college, it is indispensable to learn all these things. But, if one is a householder with a family and no time to devote one's entire life to these studies, then a vast theoretical understanding should not be emphasized. On the contrary, the experience through practice is more beneficial. In such a case it is unimportant to go through this vastly detailed learning, but rather more important to condense all the teachings into a very short and precise one. If one stayed alone in a cave and practiced one-pointedly, then all this vast learning would be inconsequential.

Therefore, the *pointing out instruction of the old lady* means that all the teachings have been condensed into just a few essential lines of text which contain the vital point, the secret or key point, or how the mind is. If one can take such an instruction to heart, then it is more beneficial for one's mind than all the scriptures.

*All the innumerable and profound teachings, such as mahamudra and mahasandhi,*

*Which are decisive and unmistakable in each root text,*

*Are indispensable when teaching disciples who will hold the Dharma lineages.*

*But for personal practice for the sake of the future, it is more profound to condense them all into one.*

Our main teacher, Buddha Shakyamuni, expounded the different levels of teachings which are generally called the *nine vehicles or yantras*. Of these, the pinnacle of all is the mahamudra and mahasandhi which hold the highest and most profound view. Among all the birds, it is said that the *garuda* is the most supreme. Likewise, among all the viewpoints, mahamudra and mahasandhi are most supreme.

These teachings have reached us today through a direct lineage. The mahamudra teachings come through the Kagyu lineage: Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa and so on directly down to the practitioners of present day. The mahasandhi teachings were passed down through Garab Dorje, through Guru Rinpoche, and then to our own root teacher whom we study with at present. These teachings are transmitted when a qualified competent master meets with a qualified student and transmits the teachings.

There are various ways in which these teachings are transmitted, through mind to mind in a direct transmission, through indication or gesture, and through words. In the past, it was sufficient for the master and student to merely rest their minds together in composure, then the teaching would be transmitted to the disciple. Another teacher might simply say, "Look into your mind!" or point a finger at the sky. Through that, the student would recognize the ultimate nature, also known as the ordinary mind.

Through one of these instructions, the student would then recognize the nature of his own mind, but we are not at the stage right now. Now, we have to depend upon words, explanations. It is said that without the use of words and concepts, one cannot understand the ultimate truth. Without understanding the ultimate truth, one will not attain nirvana. So, at this point in time, we need to rely upon words in order to recognize that which is beyond words, the ultimate truth or natural mind whatever we call it. Other profound teachings, such as Madhyamika, can be transmitted in this way, too, not just mahamudra and mahasandhi.

*For upholding the doctrinal teachings, it is necessary to grasp precisely and unmistakably the various traditions of the Dharma.*

*But if you are concerned with the welfare of your future, it is more profound to train in being non-sectarian, seeing all of them as being pure.*

When the teachings of these various profound viewpoints are elaborated upon, the teacher must expound them in exact accordance with the traditional methods so that the understanding that the student gets is an exact replica of the teacher's realization, a complete image, like clay poured into a mold and stamped out. The image will be exactly like the mold. In order to preserve the pure, authentic teachings, it is important that what is being presented is exactly according to the system. When teaching Madhyamika, it should be taught exactly according to the Madhyamika system, when teaching mahamudra, it should be exactly according to the mahamudra system and so on. Likewise, it is the same with the four philosophical schools, like the Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Cittamatra and Madhyamika schools.

The Vaibhashika school has its own viewpoint, its own practice, mode of conduct, and result. The shravaka teaching, itself, is divided into eighteen schools and each of these should be kept precisely according to its own point of view, its own practice, and its own result. If one attempts to mix it with other viewpoints, the whole thing will become distorted and one will be unable to make the teachings continue.

Each of these views should be maintained individually: when holding one viewpoint and debating with another viewpoint because they are successively more and more profound, one should be able to win the

debate with the highest viewpoint. For instance, the Cittamantra is more profound than the Sautrantika; one can progress in his way with understanding through the nine vehicles. In this way, if one upholds the Buddha's teachings one will know precisely and separately the different views of each vehicle: the first three vehicles are the shravaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva, the three aesthetic tantric vehicles are the kriya, upa and yoga and the three vehicles of the mastery of the inner tantras, maha, anu and ati. If one knows precisely the different details of these, without confusing or mixing them together, then one will be able to uphold the Buddha's teachings and teach them.

In this context, one should, for one's own benefit, first study, contemplate, and reflect upon the teachings, and finally put them into practice through meditation. Then, for the sake of others, one should be able to expound upon, compose, and refute objections to the teachings. When expounding, one should be able to expound shravaka teaching according to the shravaka system without confusing it with the pratyekabuddha teachings without confusing them with the mahayana teachings. When teaching the mahayana even though the viewpoints of the mind only school are very subtle and almost the same as the Madhyamika system, still one should be able to discuss them without mixing things up together. In this way, one will be able to teach in the correct way and uphold the Dharma lineages properly. It's good to study them if one can, but if one is only practicing for one's own understanding, to facilitate one's own enlightenment, then one doesn't need all these things.

When the text advises us to practice for the sake of the future, it doesn't mean only for the next life, but all the time, for this present life, for the intermediate state after death, and for what ever future lives are forthcoming, all the way up until enlightenment. If one is practicing with this understanding, then it is more profound to condense all the teachings into one. This does not mean that one should mix it all together in one big melting pot so that the viewpoint from the shravaka school is mixed in with the simplicity of mahamudra, etc. It means that all the teachings are given in order to tame one's own mind, to uproot the three basic poisons. Knowing this and practicing from this angle is the meaning of condensing them all into one. The significance of condensing them all into one is that one should practice the three yanas, the hinayana, mahayana and vajrayana without any contradiction.

Regarding the shravaka yana, or hinayana, the main point is the practice of non-attachment, peace or contentment, and renunciation. The emphasis is placed on acknowledging that one experiences samsara due to ego-clinging and craving for personal gain so one tries to cut down desire, attachment, and the wish to harm other beings. Having discarded ego-clinging, a shravaka practitioner pursues the attainment of nirvana, the state of permanent peace. Their main emphasis is to abandon attachment. There is no contradiction here with regards to the higher vehicles because in both mahayana and vajrayana, one also abandons the disturbing emotion of attachment.

In mahayana, one regards the principal disturbing emotion as aversion, which manifests as anger and aggression, because this prevents one from benefiting others, the main point of practice. The thing to work on in mahayana teachings is the purification of aggression while aspiring to hold others through the cultivation of love and compassion. There is no contradiction here in regard to the other vehicles, as one also tries to resolve the disturbing emotion of anger in those vehicles.

In vajrayana, the secret vehicle, ignorance, not knowing or lack of insight, is regarded as the principal problem. Ignorance is considered the most subtle negative emotion and, like a stubborn stain embedded in the weave of a cloth, the most difficult of the disturbing emotions to clear away. Because lack of insight is the basis for all the disturbing emotions, they apply various methods in order to clear away this basic ignorance or stupidity. The basis of ignorance is dispelled through the various teachings, such as mahamudra, mahasandhi, or ati yoga. The reason why mahamudra, and mahasandhi are such renowned and impressive sounding teachings is because they can completely uproot ignorance, the basic

obscuration. Ignorance is cleared away by basic wakefulness, wisdom which is totally free from any kind of mental fabrication, thatness devoid of constructs.

If one practices in such a way that one clears away all the negative emotions resulting from passion, aggression, and ignorance, then there is no contradiction between the three vehicles. This is the meaning of condensing them all into one. This is the view of mahamudra and dzogchen.

In Tibetan medicine, when the doctor speaks of various illnesses, he will say that there are 404 sicknesses and that all these illnesses are actually a result of a disturbance in the humors of bile, wind, and phlegm and that these disturbances stem from the three poisons, themselves. Tibetan doctors also take into account certain negative influences, such as the evil forces called gyalpo, mamo, and tsen, which are also manifestations of these three poisons, they are actually the three kayas.

Because there are many negative emotions and, correspondingly, many teachings or remedies, the higher the view, the more effective it is. Just as a medicine is sought which can cure all different sicknesses simultaneously, the higher the view, the more likely that all of one's negative emotions can be cleared away by this single view, such as mahamudra and mahasandhi.

To give a basic definition of the terms "mahamudra" and "mahasandhi", in short, the word "maha" or "great" means there is nothing superior to this and, "mudra" means without being apart from the seal of the great wisdom, the indivisible emptiness and compassion.

When we say mahasandhi, dzogchen, maha ati or the great perfection, here "perfection" means that all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are perfect or complete within the space of primordially pure awareness. Here, the word "great" means that there is no greater method or means for clearing away all the disturbing emotions.

The text says such as mahamudra but that includes others, like Madhyamika and Lamdrey, the path and fruition and also the Shijey, the pacifying system. "Madhyamika" means to be free from the extremes of the concepts of "existence" and 'non-existence,' 'both' and 'neither'. Briefly, this view is the state beyond concepts, beyond mental fabrications, inexpressible, inconceivable and indescribable, totally beyond conceptual thinking.

According to the Sakya tradition, there is a teaching called Shenpa-pa Shidrel, parting from the four attachments, which is taught by Lord Manjushri. The fourth line of these is that if there's any attachment or clinging, then one doesn't have the right view. Hence, the view is without fixation.

There are many philosophical viewpoints and a lot of systems, but, actually, there is nothing which is not included within mahamudra and mahasandhi. Just as all things are contained within space, likewise, all the other viewpoints and systems are included within these two. Thus, it's more profound to condense everything into a single practice.

There are various traditions of Dharma, like Kagyu, Nyingma, Sakya and Gelug and, it is important to keep these teachings very precisely and unmistakably, without mingling them with other teachings. For example, if one were to hold the kagyu lineage, one should keep very meticulously the tradition which one has received of the kagyu teachings, how the empowerments are conferred, how the teachings are given, etc. Likewise, if one has received the Sakya teachings, they should be preserved exactly according to the Sakya tradition. If one is not going to be a lineage-holder but one is only practicing in order to attain enlightenment or to benefit one's future lives, it is more important to be non-sectarian and cling to

being strictly kagyü or Nyingma, etc. One should just practice without any partiality, seeing everything as pure.

*It is necessary to focus your mind on one single and sufficient master.*

*If you are to be his chief disciple.*

*But if you wish to have the virtues of experience and realization dawn within you.*

*It is more profound to combine all the teachers you have met into one.*

*And to visualize him the Buddha resting on our crown and to supplicate him.*

In the next verse, if one is to be the chief disciple of a particular master, then it is important to focus one's mind exclusively on him. This is alright. It is sufficient to just keep to one teacher, through one may have bad connections with other teacher in past lives. If one desires to achieve a lot of experiences and realization very quickly, it is more profound to condense all the teachers into one. If one doesn't have the right perception to supplicate one's master in an ordinary form, one can imagine him as a deity and decide that he is the embodiment of all the teachers that one has had contact with, and then supplicate him. In this way, one can generate greater faith and one will very quickly have experiences and realizations. In addition, one's obscurations and habitual patterns can swiftly be cleared away.

It seems that some practitioners have a certain problem which practitioners in the past have also experienced. A practitioner might stay in one area of the country, have contact with one teacher, receive teachings, empowerments and initiations, and have great trust in and affection for that person, have a very close relationship. Then he leaves for another part of the country, meets another teacher, and again forms a close relationship and feels great trust. He might receive new practices and progress on the path due to the blessings of this new teacher. He then might wonder, "Have I completely abandoned my previous teacher? What should I do? Should I go back, but then what about this one I'm studying with now? It would be like throwing this one away." One's mind becomes very disturbed and it is difficult to choose. It is probably for this reason that this verse is included here in the text. If one can combine all the teachers into one, there will be no conflict about choosing one master over another.

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