



## Instructions on the Fivefold Mahamudra

*by the Omniscient Situ Panchen Chökyi Jungné*

*Namah shri Gurave.*

*The ever-present Immutable Being, Vajrasattva,  
Remains unchanged amidst the endless display of samsara and nirvana—  
I bow to this original, innate, and uncontrived guru,  
As I write these pith instructions on Mahamudra.*

For the preliminaries, 1) train in *bodhicitta*  
2) Meditate on the *yidam deity* and 3) on the *guru*.  
For the main part, 4) settle within Mahamudra.  
And 5) seal with *dedications* at the end.  
Practicing all these within a single session  
Is renowned as the Fivefold Mahamudra.

1) First, train in *bodhicitta*—the heart of awakening.  
When it comes to the cultivation of relative *bodhicitta*,  
There is aspirational *bodhicitta*, which is like wishing to go somewhere,  
And applied *bodhicitta*, which is like actually going there.

Of these two, aspirational *bodhicitta* is seeing  
That not a single sentient being has not been your parent.  
Despite wanting happiness, they don't know how to be happy.  
They only act in ways that are negative, and so wander in *samsara*.  
Therefore always cultivate a love and compassion  
That includes everyone, praying from the bottom of your heart,  
“I myself will accomplish awakening for their benefit!”

Applied *bodhicitta* is the cause of buddhahood.  
It refers to the six or the ten perfections,  
which can be subsumed within the two accumulations:  
Discipline is the accumulation of merit, and insight is the accumulation of  
wisdom;  
Both are included in calm abiding meditation.  
Thinking, “I will practice these two without laziness,”  
Promise to practice them one-pointedly.

2) Second, meditate upon your body as the yidam deity.  
It's fine whether or not you have a special yidam;  
You can meditate upon yourself as Four-Armed Avalokiteshvara.  
Seeing appearances, sounds and thought as deity, mantra, and samadhi,  
Take them onto the path, casting off attachment to them as ordinary.

3) Third, visualize your root guru seated upon a lotus and moon  
atop your crown as you visualize yourself as the deity.  
He<sup>1</sup> is Great Vajradhara, embodiment of all Three Jewels,  
Surrounded by the gurus of the Oral Lineage, the Kagyü.

Despite the compassionate power of the Victors of the three times,  
Without a guru, disciples' minds will not ripen.  
This is especially true for the unruly folks of these destitute times,  
When the force of the Victors has declined.

Beginning with this one wholesome thought,  
Consider how they help us in uncountable ways through their skillful methods.  
Therefore, with the sublime perspective that sees the guru  
As equal or superior to all buddhas, single-pointedly pray to him.

After this, once you have taken the empowerments three times,  
The guru melts into light and dissolves into you.  
At that moment, consider his three vajras and your three doors  
To be indivisible, and relax into uncontrived naturalness.

4) Fourth is the main part: training in Mahamudra.  
*First* there's what's to be understood; and second what is to be practiced.  
*First* the nature of all that appears and exists within samsara and nirvana  
Has from the beginning been the utterly pure dharmadhatu.

Profoundly clear, non-dual, beyond extremes, and uncompounded,  
This is what we call "Original Buddha,"  
The causal continuum, the natural state of Mahamudra,  
And the tathagatagarbha—buddha nature.

This utterly pure nature, which is like space,  
Is perceived as "I" and "mine"  
Through the fleeting movement of discursive thought.  
And so, beginning with ignorance, the process  
Of interdependence unfolds as the wheel of samsara.  
The guru introduces you to its true character,  
And when you understand that the root of samsara  
Is grasping to the self, and the root of that is thinking,

Then just as when a fire is extinguished and its smoke naturally ceases,  
All discursive thoughts are relinquished in the emptiness in which one trains.

This supreme path to liberation holds methods for realizing just that.  
In tantra it's taught in many ways—the development stage, training the *prana*  
energies,  
Blazing and dripping, and so on—while the sutras teach calm abiding  
With various supports and gaining certainty through insight, and so on.  
Why so? Because without realizing emptiness  
It will be impossible to transcend samsara and so emerge awakened.  
Therefore, it is said, “Whatever Dharma the Victor taught  
flows into and comes down to emptiness.”  
The Noble Ones shall be liberated by meditating upon emptiness,  
And the other meditations are taught for this purpose, it is said.

Abandoning thoughts in their meditation,  
Some non-Buddhists cultivate the mistaken idea,  
“I am the nonconceptual Supreme Self”;  
Others refute the “samadhi of non-thought from Hashang’s tradition,”  
When it’s just the calm abiding of beginners;  
While long chains of intellectual thoughts  
Are hailed as meditation by those pining after future fame—  
All such impure meditations should be totally abandoned.

You should gain experiential instruction, rather than settling for words—  
Pith advice that adorns the lineage of the Buddha’s teachings.  
Those with the good fortune to gain experience through such instruction  
Should unify their samadhi with discerning wisdom.

This is known as taking buddha nature as the path,  
The continuum of skillful methods, the truth of the path,  
And the accumulation of wisdom.  
Furthermore, *samadhi* refers to calm abiding meditation  
That remains one-pointed and without conceptual thought.  
The luminous essence of mind, undeluded and beyond thought,  
Is the way all things truly are.  
To gain certainty, from the depths of your very being,  
In the realization that all that could possibly exist is unborn simplicity  
Is the insight referred to here as *discerning wisdom*.  
When you settle evenly in both calm abiding and insight,  
They have but a single essence—a “unity.”  
For as long as meditation and post-meditation have yet to mix,  
Analytical wisdom during post-meditation is most important.

In the sutras, special insight is likened to eyes,  
And calm abiding compared to legs.

Without the eyes seeing, the legs will not know  
Or understand the path to be taken on their own;  
And yet without legs, how could one walk this path?  
Possess both eyes and legs, therefore, the teachings say.

Such a meditator discovers that within the sky-like space of reality,  
It is impossible, naturally, for there to be any stains,  
And yet the temporary emotional and cognitive stains  
Will gradually clear away like clouds.  
The various divisions of the ten grounds,  
The five paths, or Shantipa's system of One-Pointedness, Simplicity,  
One-Taste and Non-Meditation, and so forth,  
Are presented on this basis.  
As it is said, "When the stains and their imprints  
Are utterly exhausted, that is complete awakening."

When one has realized the all-pervasive dharmakaya,  
There is the second fruit, rupakaya, which comes from merit.  
These two arise as effortlessly as light from the sun.  
This is called the fruitional continuum, fruitional buddhahood,  
And sugatagarbha endowed with twofold purity.  
The Buddha's teachings on this topic are widely renowned!

*Second* when it comes to that which is to be practiced,  
There are the two means of resting.  
Place the body at rest in the sevenfold posture of Vairocana,  
And rest the mind easily, without changing anything.  
In the naked recognition of this present awareness,  
Don't follow after thoughts of the past  
Or entertain thoughts of the future.  
When thoughts abound, recognize that which proliferates them.  
Let it be as it is—without any judgement, acceptance, or rejection.

If you haven't attained the level of One-Pointedness,  
Then focus on whichever support you like  
For taking hold of the mind, such as a stick, a pebble,  
A deity's image, a syllable, or anything else.  
When your mind gradually becomes somewhat stable through such meditation,  
Practice in short sessions, many times.

First, combine your entire sixfold sensory experience  
Into a single point of mindfulness,  
Then, in an instant, completely relax and let go,  
Like slicing through a knot with a sharp blade.  
Apart from simply not being distracted from this state,

Give up all points of focus—thoughts about “meditating on this,”  
A meditation or a meditator, presence or absence, “this is it” or “this isn’t it,”  
Bliss, clarity, non-thought, emptiness, or any of the like.

As long as you simply do not stray from this mindful state,  
Your awareness, never grasping at a self, may go wherever it likes,  
Like a crow soaring above a ship at sea.  
Based on this training, the apparent objects of the six senses,  
Pain, emotions, and thoughts may all be taken as supports  
And blended with your meditation.  
They will not cloud your samadhi but increase it.

In brief, when training to stabilize your calm abiding,  
Too much relaxation will lead to drowsiness,  
While too much tightness will lead to agitation and difficulty sitting still.  
The quality of tightness only torments the mind,  
And overcome by doubts, you will not gain One-Pointedness.  
So, neither too tight nor too loose, meditate with joy and certainty.  
Attachment to any experience of bliss, clarity, or emptiness  
Will make you stray into samsara.  
So without grasping, just recognize your natural face  
And remain there without any judgement whatsoever.

When you are given the introduction to special insight,  
It is as the protector Maitreya says in *The Ornament of the Sutras* :

Once you discern that there is naught apart from mind,  
Then you will realize that even mind is emptiness.  
The clever understand that neither truly exist,  
And so know the state of dharmadhatu besides.

Through valid citation, reasoning, and experience,  
We may gain conviction that this is so.  
Firstly, this entire miasma of thought we experience  
Has no basis apart from just this very mind,  
So know it to be like things in a dream.

But how is it, you may wonder,  
That substantial things like firmness, wetness, warmth, and such,  
Could be produced by an insubstantial mind?  
It is like the legend of the cowherd who willed  
Visible horns from his head through meditation  
Or the mantrin who undertook naga practice  
And so transformed into Apalala the Naga King.  
Or when one beholds the yidam deity  
Through stability in the development stage.

If such things can manifest in a single life,  
Then what is there to stop all these experiences from manifesting  
Out of the bad habits formed over beginningless time?

Gods will see a cup of water as ambrosia  
While hungry ghosts see it as pus and blood.  
Land spirits will see a mountain  
As their own lovely mansion,  
While humans see it as ordinary stone.  
All this goes to show that such things  
Hold no truth apart from their mere appearance to the mind.

Once you gain certainty that apparent objects are mind,  
Then come to know that mind as well is emptiness.  
Mind has no concrete existence, not so much as an atom's worth.  
Why? When the condition of an object appears,  
We have a distinct experience of knowing it  
That arises and ceases with each moment.  
This is what we categorize in terms of the eight collections of consciousness,  
But if you dissect any of these, any basis for them disappears,  
For that which we call the *basis-of-all* is nothing but a name.  
Just as a thirsty animal will chase after the water  
Seen in a mirage, where none exists,  
This utterly mistaken mind grasps at a self,  
And grows more and more confused as it gathers bad karma.

This is why in the Sutra Collection the Victor clearly states:  
"There is no mind within the mind."  
While mind isn't there, it's taught that  
"Its nature is luminous cognizance."  
Why? Because what we call the "mind"  
Is just the eight collections of consciousness,  
And these are but thoughts, by nature confused.  
But the "nature of mind, luminous cognizance,"  
Is thought-free, unconfused, self-knowing gnosis.  
This is not gained anew through meditation,  
Nor bestowed by the compassion of the Victors.  
It is the beginningless causal continuum, our natural birthright.

Through the power of gathering the accumulations,  
Purifying obscurations, training, and through the blessings  
Of your guru's pointing out, you come to see for yourself  
That you already possess this. As it is said:  
>It is therefore unspeakable by others, but always with you,  
>Yet cannot be found anywhere at all.

>It must be known through the timely methods of the glorious guru,  
>And through one's own merit.

As such, it is ever-present,  
Free from both perceived objects  
And the perceiving mind.  
Pure like the sky, with no restrictions or bias.  
If you are able to rest in composure in this unity  
Of calm abiding and special insight, free from complexity, for even for a moment,  
Then "the darkness of many aeons is thereby defeated."

This Mahamudra free from complexity  
Is the essential view of both Sutra and Tantra.  
This is explained to be the single meaning of the view  
Espoused unanimously by the great Indian commentators,  
Such as when masters like Nagarjuna state,  
"There is no view superior to the Middle Way,"  
Or as in the passage from *The Torch of the Three Methods*  
That begins, "The meaning is the same..."<sup>2</sup>  
What then is the point of receiving  
Hundreds of empowerments and bestowing them on others  
If you don't practice the meaning of the fourth empowerment, Mahamudra,  
But cover your ears when you even hear its name?  
How is that different from the karma of a lord of the Desire Realm?

So when you practice this yoga of unity,  
If you grasp to the meditation moods of bliss, clarity, or non-thought,  
These will lead you astray into the Desire, Form, and Formless Realms.  
So do not grasp or block them, but just allow for the continued presence of the  
natural state.

Moreover, whether it's presuming intellectual understanding to be enough,  
Or destroying appearances and imagining them to be empty,  
Or blocking of any kind of thought, however minute—  
These should be treated as frightful abysses.  
Give up the intellectual posturing of dry scholars,  
Such as clinging to the faults of whatever thought may arise,  
And simply allow for the unaltered, natural flow of whatever arises.

When diligently practicing according to this tradition,  
Which is adorned with such experiential oral instructions  
As "relax and let be within undistracted non-meditation,"  
Gnosis will shine from within your heart, misconceptions will fall away,  
And the signs and qualities of the path will increase, even if you wish otherwise.  
Like mercury that has fallen on the ground,  
You will remain unsullied by the dust of the eight worldly concerns,  
And all the grandeur of samsara will seem as revulsive as poison.

By understanding this key point of emptiness and dependent origination's unity,  
The benefit for oneself and others, wisdom and method united, will  
spontaneously arise.  
When this happens, your "practice has arrived at the key point."

The threefold preliminaries above gather merit,  
While the main practice gathers wisdom.  
Therefore, through these two accumulations  
You will attain the resultant two or threefold kayas.  
Then, when ground and path luminous cognizance mix  
Like the meeting of mother and child,  
This is called *perfect buddhahood*.  
At this point, its empty essence is the dharmakaya,  
Its cognizant nature is the sambhogakaya,  
Its unobstructed expression is the all-encompassing nirmanakaya,  
And this total perfection is the kaya of great bliss.  
This is the supreme result of recognizing your own face,  
The original natural state whose nature is these four kayas—  
Thus, it is taught to be "the fruition, beyond hope and fear."

Fifth: Conclude by sealing the practice with dedications.  
Imagine that all the virtue there could be  
In the past, present, or future is all condensed  
Into the virtue amassed by your gathering the two accumulations  
Within the mandala of self-knowing buddha nature.  
Dedicate this one-pointedly to all beings, yourself and others,  
Being quickly freed from the snare of samsara  
And attaining the state of Mahamudra, unified connate gnosis.  
Make this dedication from within the state that  
Embraces the view of emptiness, with no reference to the three spheres  
Of action, actor, and object of dedication.

Whatever great virtue you may accomplish,  
If it's not embraced by the view purified of the three spheres,  
It will become as the Victors described  
In the *Perfection of Wisdom* sutras and elsewhere  
As like a blind man or food mixed with poison—  
It won't serve as the flawless cause of freedom.  
Therefore, take care at all times  
To plant the seed of awakening  
Every time you practice the development and completion stages  
Or whichever virtuous practice you exert yourself in.

In this way a beginner may practice  
All these five elements in a single session.



Once you practice and gain familiarity  
With the different stages of the main part,  
Such as focusing your attention in calm abiding,  
You will not need any elaborate practice besides  
This yoga of unity.

Then, there are supplementary practices related to the different times of day.  
First, at dawn comes the *yoga of clarifying gnosis*  
Wherein immediately upon waking from sleep  
You recognize awareness, the unity of empty cognizance  
Uninterrupted by thoughts, and rest there evenly,  
Then develop fierce compassion for all beings  
Who do not realize this nature,  
And thereafter begin your daily practice.  
This is the instruction for making a habit of your practice;  
It's excellent to begin your practice joyfully in this way.

During the daytime, the *yoga of sealing the experiences*  
Is to seal and meditate upon all experiences  
As being the confused mind, dreamlike,  
And by nature deluded.  
By viewing them as emptiness, just like dreams that can't be held as real,  
You will not be overpowered by delusion  
And will refine the expression of awareness;  
This is the instruction for preparing for the bardo.

During the morning and evening, the *yoga of befriending luxuries*  
Is to have little attachment to food and drink,  
Clothing, place, bedding, and so on,  
But to train in their use as reality dissolving into itself  
From within the state that knows their emptiness.  
If you are unable to train like this,  
Then make use of things as though you were offering them  
To the deities and your guru.  
These are the instructions for perfecting the accumulations  
And not being bound by luxuries.

At nighttime, the *yoga of withdrawing the senses into the basis-of-all*  
Is to not follow after the proliferation  
Of whatever deluded memories of the day may arise,  
But to look nakedly at their very essence.  
This is the instruction for making a habit of practice at nighttime.

Late at night, the *yoga of consciousness entering the vase*  
Is to pray to your guru, visualized in your heart center,  
And then to completely cut through thoughts

And fall asleep while resting evenly in the simplicity of reality.  
This is the instruction for blending mother and child luminosity  
In sleep and at the time of death.

At the moment of death, the *yoga of wide open gnosis*  
Is to sever your attachment to anything at all,  
Confess all the faults of this and past lives,  
Then bring to mind all your own and others' virtue,  
Rejoice in it, and dedicate it to great awakening.  
If you're especially capable, offer and give away your own aggregates,  
Remain decisively confident that your own mindfulness  
Is not born and does not die,  
And then let the stages of dissolution transpire as they like  
While resting evenly in the natural flow of Mahamudra,  
Free from any meditation or non-meditation,  
And uncomplicated by many complex visualizations.  
This is the transference of consciousness  
Within the wide open expanse of dharmakaya.  
This will close the doors to the lower realms,  
And halt the perpetuation of samsara in general,  
And the confusion of the bardo in particular.  
This is the instruction for realizing death as dharmakaya.

*This briefest of brief instructions  
On the Fivefold Mahamudra  
Was written freely without care for poetics  
At the behest of the minister of the great king of Dergé,  
The seasoned practitioner Lodrö,  
By the one called Tsuglak Chökyi Nangwa.*



### **Translation Origin**

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### **Bibliography**

#### *Tibetan Source*

si tu pan chen chos kyi 'byung gnas. "phyag chen lnga ldan gyi khrid yig kun mkhyen chos kyi 'byung gnas kyis mdzad pa," In *gdams ngag mdzod* (ed. 'jam mgon kong sprul blo gros mtha' yas). 18 Vols. Delhi: Shechen Publications, 1999. W23605. Vol. 9: 443–454.

1 The Tibetan here is gender neutral. Although we have used the masculine pronoun, this is simply to avoid the awkwardness of repeating "he or she" and "him or her" or resorting to the confusing singular they/them, and should not be construed as prejudicial, exclusivist or misogynist. The majority of gurus in Situ Panchen's day would have been male, certainly, but there were also some female lamas, as there are today, even if—alas—all too few.

2 *The Torch of the Three Methods (Nayatrāyapradīpa)* by Tripitakamala states: "The meaning is the same but it is free from all confusion. It is rich in methods and without difficulties. It is for those with sharp faculties, therefore the mantra vehicle is especially sublime."