

Supplication to the Takpo Kagyu

Great Vajradhara, Tilo, Naro,
Marpa, Mila, Lord of Dharma Gampopa,
Knower of the Three Times, omniscient Karmapa,
Holders of the four great and eight lesser lineages—
Drikung, Tag-lung, Tsalpa, these three, glorious Drukpa and so on—
Masters of the profound path of mahamudra,
Incomparable protectors of beings, the Takpo Kagyu,
I supplicate you, the Kagyü gurus.
I hold your lineage; grant your blessings so that I will follow your example.

Revulsion is the foot of meditation, as is taught.
To this meditator who is not attached to food and wealth,
Who cuts the ties to this life,
Grant your blessings so that I have no desire for honor and gain.

Devotion is the head of meditation, as is taught.
The guru opens the gate to the treasury of oral instructions.
To this meditator who continually supplicates him
Grant your blessings so that genuine devotion is born in me.

Awareness is the body of meditation, as it taught.
Whatever arises is fresh—the essence of realization.
To this meditator who rests simply without altering it
Grant your blessings so that my meditation is free from conception.

The essence of thoughts is dharmakaya, as is taught.
Nothing whatever but everything arises from it.
To this meditator who arises in unceasing play
Grant your blessings so that I realize the inseparability of samsara and nirvana.

Through all my births may I not be separated from the perfect guru
And so enjoy the splendor of dharma.
Perfecting the virtues of the paths and bhūmis,
May I speedily attain the state of Vajradhara.

This supplication was written by Pengar Jampal Zangpo. The last stanza is a traditional verse of aspiration.

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**SONG FROM THE HEART:
THE LINEAGE SUPPLICATION TO THE KAGYU GURUS**

The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche

The supplication to the Dakpo Kagyu lineage was written by a very diligent and great practitioner named Pengar Jampal Zangpo. He wrote it when he was practicing on a small island in a lake called Nam-tso, or “Sky Lake,” in northern Tibet. That winter there was a very heavy snowfall and he got stuck on the island. During those days of intense practice and deep solitude, he sang this supplication that emerged from his heart.

What Is the Lineage Principle?

The Lineage Supplication to the Dakpo Kagyu begins with a verse expressing the qualities of the lineage. The lineage principle is very important in Vajrayana. It has to do with keeping the instructions and the practice as authentic and genuine as possible. When such a lineage has been transmitted over many centuries, there is an element of preserving or passing down the enlightened wisdom itself. The lineage holders are the ones who hold the realization of the heart of enlightenment and transmit it to their disciples so that it continues throughout the centuries.

That is why the Kagyu lineage is especially known as “the lineage of true meaning.” The “true” meaning referred to in that phrase is the ultimate or true nature of mind. When we realize the true nature of mind, we become capable of transferring that experience to the mindstreams of others. When that happens in an unbroken way, from one person to the next, it is what we call “lineage.” It is just like lighting a candle flame—you have to hold some source of fire in your hand first before you can cause a candle to ignite and produce a flame. No matter how many beautiful *mudras* you perform in front of the candle, you will not be able to light it unless you first have some fire. Once one candle is lit, it can light many others.

That continuity is what we call “lineage.” Therefore before the lineage can be passed down, the lineage holder must have this fire, this realization of the nature of

mind, born in his or her own experience. After that the light of wisdom and enlightenment can be made available to other sentient beings so that they may illuminate their own hearts. We cannot supplicate properly unless we understand the lineage principle, the guru principle, and ourselves as students. This is very important.

The Guru Principle and Devotion

Those masters who have held such a lineage, then, become the object of our supplication. The guru, however, is not so easily defined. He or she is a big question mark, especially for our Vajrayana path. There are a lot of complicated concepts going around about “guru.” The best way to explain the guru principle, I think, is through an analogy: The guru is like a mirror, nothing more, nothing less. He or she is a mirror in which you see the reflection of your own face. A mirror has no fear of reflecting who you are. When you get up in the morning, the mirror shows you how you look at that moment. It doesn’t shy away from reflecting you. It shows you what you need to fix. At the same time, the mirror does not stretch out a hand and offer to fix you. It does not tell you how to fix your hair or what clothes to wear. A mirror does not project anything. It simply reflects who you are. Ultimately what the guru is doing is reflecting your nature of mind. The enlightened mind that you see before you is a reflection of your own true nature of mind.

Furthermore, it is you who brings the mirror into your home; it does not walk into your house on its own. It’s your choice what shape mirror you want—round, square, big enough to fill the whole wall, or something small—it’s totally up to you. You can buy a mirror that’s too big for your room, but you will not be able to use it. At the same time, you do not want something too small. You need something that fits your own situation. Where you hang the mirror is up to you as well.

Therefore it is important to seek out a teacher who fits your own disposition, someone with whom you have a karmic connection. Making this connection is the same thing as bringing that mirror home. But then, even if you have the mirror, if there is no light, you can stand there in front of your mirror for ages and still not see anything. We

cannot see without light. In the Vajrayana the light that helps us to see is the principle of devotion. If we turn on a light that is dim, we can only see some things dimly. So the brighter you shine your light, the clearer you can see the guru and the clearer you can see your nature of mind.

We must understand that the guru is not a savior. He or she is not someone you call to troubleshoot for you, someone who comes and fixes things and then goes away. It is not like that. The guru is simply like a mirror, and our devotion is like a light. With such a mirror and with such light we make this supplication that we may come to see the nature of our own mind.

The Three Kinds of Guru

Before we supplicate the guru, however, we should understand that there is more than one meaning of the term *guru*. There are three different kinds of guru that we can rely on—the outer, the inner and the ultimate.

The *outer* guru is an individual who holds an authentic lineage. This is the human master from whom we receive instructions and who guides us on our path of study, contemplation and meditation. He or she is the “mirror” with whom we are working.

The *inner* guru is the words of the Buddha, as recorded in the scriptures. While the outer guru is initially important, the inner guru eventually becomes very important as well. First, we meet the outer guru, who gives us the instructions that come from the lineage that arises from the wisdom of the Buddha. Next, however, we need to work with those instructions directly. It is this inner guru that leads us to an understanding of the outer guru’s instructions and of how to work with them in our lives. If we did not pay attention to this inner guru, then our connection with our outer guru would just be like hanging out—like being a Dead-head who follows the Grateful Dead everywhere, partying and drinking and smoking. We cannot spend all our time at dharma parties, you know, following the guru everywhere as if we were fans. That is not the Buddhist way, the Vajrayana way. Of course it is important to have a personal connection with the

guru, but once that is established, the most important thing is to put the instructions into practice. That is what we call “the inner guru.”

Finally, the *ultimate* guru is related to the experience and realization of the true nature of mind. When you look at it, all the concepts we have of teacher, teachings and path, all the instructions, practices and ritual forms we learn, are still quite relative, still dualistic. Ultimately, what is most important is just to realize the truth, the true nature of mind, the dharmakaya mind. Therefore the true guru, from the Vajrayana point of view, is your own nature of mind—and that is what we call “the ultimate guru.” This is the guru we really rely on. Everything else is the relative guru. Therefore, ultimately speaking, this lineage supplication is invoking our own nature of mind.

The Kagyu Lineage

The Direct Lineage

The lineage supplication begins by invoking “Great Vajradhara.” Who or what is Vajradhara? Vajradhara is the primordial or dharmakaya buddha, the source of all manifestations of enlightenment, and the essence of the very nature of our mind.

Vajradhara is central to the Kagyu lineage. The great Indian mahasiddha Tilopa, whom we supplicate next, demonstrated Vajradhara’s unique significance to the lineage when he declared, “I, Tilo, have no human guru—my guru is the Dharmakaya Vajradhara.” Although Tilopa studied with many great masters, when he makes this statement, he is showing that, from an ultimate perspective, the real source of his transmission is the Dharmakaya Vajradhara, the absolute manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha, and also the “ultimate guru.” This transmission is what is called the “direct” lineage, or the “short” or “close” lineage.

The Indirect Lineage

There is an “indirect” or “long” lineage as well, which is traced back to Shakyamuni Buddha. It includes all of the students of the Buddha and all of their students, until you

reach the time of Tilopa. It is composed of many individuals, among whom are the holders of the four special lineage transmissions.¹

Tilopa transmitted his lineage to the great Indian mahasiddha, Naropa. This begins the first great human transmission, from living master to student. Their relationship is quite famous and there are many stories about their years together. Naropa transmitted the lineage to his main student, who became known as Marpa, the Great Translator. Marpa, a Tibetan, crossed the Himalayan Mountains three times on foot in order to study with his master, Naropa, in India. Traveling back and forth in this manner for over forty years, he finally brought the complete transmission of the lineage back with him to Tibet. Eventually he passed it to his student, Milarepa, the great tantric yogi of Tibet, who in turn passed it to his student, Gampopa.

Gampopa was the first Tibetan lineage holder who was a fully ordained monastic. He is called “the lord of dharma” because he unified the Mahamudra tradition of Milarepa’s lineage with the stages-of-the-path tradition of the Kadampa lineage, thus establishing a unique stream of transmission known as the Dakpo Kagyu. When we say that we belong to the Dakpo Kagyu, that is a reference to the lineage of Gampopa, who is called “Dakpo Rinpoche” after his birthplace in the Dakpo region in southern Tibet.

From Gampopa the lineage was passed to the first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa, who is referred to in the supplication as the “knower of the Three Times, omniscient Karmapa.” He became the founder of the Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, one of the main lineages in Tibet.

¹ The four special lineage transmissions” refers to the special instructions and meditations, originating with various Indian masters, that were inherited and condensed into one by Tilopa. These were passed to his student, Naropa, and they later became systematized as “the six yogas of Naropa.” These transmissions are regarded as central teachings of the Kagyu school.

THE FOUR GREAT AND EIGHT LESSER LINEAGES

From Gampopa's Dakpo Kagyu, four main lineages developed:

- I. Barom Kagyu
- II. Tshalpa Kagyu
- III. Kamsang or Karma Kagyu
- IV. Pakdru Kagyü

From the Pakdru Kagyu, developed eight additional Kagyu schools:

1. Drikung Kagyu
2. Taklung Kagyu
3. Drukpa Kagyu
4. Yasang Kagyu
5. Trophu Kagyu
6. Shuksep Kagyu
7. Yelpa Kagyu
8. Martsang Kagyu

Source: The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche. "Introduction to Mahamudra" in The Ninth Gyalwang Karmapa, Wangchuk Dorje. Mahamudra: The Ocean of Definitive Meaning. Elizabeth Callahan, trans. Seattle: Nitartha international, 2001.

The Four Great and Eight Lesser Lineages

Within the Kagyu lineage there are four great lineages and eight branch lineages.

The four major Kagyu lineages are the Karma Kagyu, established by Dusum Khyenpa, the first Karmapa; the Tshalpa Kagyu; the Barom Kagyu; and the Pakdru Kagyu.

The additional eight "lesser" lineages (meaning subdivisions of its parent line) developed from one of the four major schools, the Pakdru² Kagyu. This lineage was founded by the great master, Pakmo Drupa. Since he wrote many instructions and texts and taught extensively, he had more disciples than any of the other main lineage holders. Eventually other teachers developed within this main lineage, each with a different emphasis. Thus the Pakdru tradition branched off into eight subtraditions, or sublineages. Those eight became known as the eight lesser lineages: Drikung Kagyu; Taklung Kagyu; Drukpa Kagyu; Yasang Kagyu; Trophu Kagyu; Shuksep Kagyu; Yelpa Kagyu; and Martsang Kagyu

² "Pakdru" is the shortened form of the name of the founder of this line, Pakmo Drupa.

It may therefore be confusing that the text of the supplication says, “Holders of the four great and eight lesser lineages —Drikung, Tag-lung, Tsalpa,³ these three, glorious Drukpa and so on.” Of these four, only one, the Tshalpa, is included in the four great lineages. The three others are included in the eight sublineages of the Pakdru. They are mentioned here because they were among the most famous of the lineages.

Among all these lineages, the most widely known is the Karma Kagyu lineage, which has been continued over the centuries through the impeccable activity of the Gyalwang Karmapas.

The Mahamudra Lineage

These lineages are the source of the “masters of the profound path of mahī mudrī” to whom we supplicate. They are what we call the lineage of Mahamudra. So when we talk about the Mahamudra lineage, we are referring not just to one but to a great variety of Mahamudra teachings and lineages, all equally profound, all with great methods for realizing the nature of mind.

We supplicate to all these masters of the Mahamudra lineage because they are the “incomparable protectors” of all sentient beings. As practitioners of Mahayana Buddhism, we too aspire to help and protect sentient beings from suffering. How is such a thing accomplished? We can benefit sentient beings by creating an environment in which they can realize their nature of mind and develop compassion, loving-kindness and bodhichitta. What is so evident about these masters is that they have the profound skill of creating an environment in which disciples feel very easy, comfortable and inspired to give rise to all this.

I supplicate you, the Kagyü gurus.

I hold your lineage; grant your blessings so that I will follow your example.

³ Also spelled: Taklung and Tshalpa.

As I have explained, when we supplicate, we must understand that we are not saying, “Please help me by taking me away from samsara, by taking away all my sorrows and causes of suffering.” We are also not saying, “You are far above me, so you can save me. I am low and that is why I supplicate you to save me.” That is not what we are doing here. What we are actually saying is, “I am supplicating you for inspiration. I aspire to hold your lineage and follow your example. I want to become like you—a realized, enlightened master—in order to realize the nature of mind and benefit sentient beings. Please grant your blessings by giving me the power and the positive environment in which to accomplish this.”

The Practice of Mahamudra

The next few verses refer to the actual practice of meditation. First the common preliminaries are taught, then the uncommon preliminaries. The following two verses teach Mahamudra shamatha and Mahamudra vipashyana. The final verse comments on the topic of conduct, or discipline, and on the path to be traveled, which consists of the five paths and the ten *bhumis*.

Verse on the Common Preliminaries

If we want to cause Mahamudra meditation to arise in our mindstream, then we have to bring together the elements that will generate the most conducive and profound environment for it. If we want to grow something, we have to find fertile ground. The common preliminaries are the practice that plows that ground and prepares it for planting. Everybody likes to pick the fruit, but nobody wants to plow the field. The process of plowing the field is the toughest part of farming, and it is the toughest part of this journey as well. The common preliminary at the beginning of the Mahamudra path is renunciation, which is spoken of here as revulsion.

Revulsion is the foot of meditation, as is taught.

Revulsion is like the foot of meditation because without feet we cannot go anywhere. Similarly, if we do not have revulsion for samsara, then we're lacking the means of support that will carry us forward and lead us to meditation and to any possible progress on the path. Therefore this master, Pengar Jampal Zangpo, is teaching us that the first preliminary practice on the path to Mahamudra is to generate the heart of renunciation. This is very important. Once we generate that heart of renunciation, we will naturally be freed from our attachment to this life's enjoyments. This is what we need to relinquish—our attachments to this life.

*To this meditator who is not attached to food and
wealth,
Who cuts the ties to this life,*

This line could equally be translated, “who cuts the rope of attachment to this life.” It is not saying that we need to throw everything related to this life away. Rather, it is saying that we need to relinquish our *attachment* to the *appearances* of this life. It is important to make this distinction. It does not mean that we have to renounce the world and everything in it and go somewhere else. Where would we go? Instead it is referring to cutting our fixation, attachment and clinging to the enjoyments of this worldly life. It is our neurotic clinging that is actually causing our suffering and confusion.

As Tilopa said to Naropa, “Son, you are not bound by appearances, you are bound by clinging. Cut through clinging, Naropa.” This is a very pithy and powerful statement. In a similar vein, Shantideva, in the chapter on wisdom in the *Bodhicharyavatara*, or *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, said, “We do not wish to refute appearances; what is to be reversed is thinking of them as being real.” He also said, “Nor do we wish to block off what we see and hear. What we wish to stop is the cause of suffering: thinking of these as being real.”

You can understand this quite well from the example of a dream. When you are dreaming and do not recognize that you are dreaming, that dream can produce a lot of

suffering. Why? If in your dream you see tigers, rattlesnakes or even more ferocious beings, such as humans, and you take them to be real creatures that truly exist outside of you, then you will experience great fear. When you run from them, they will chase you. If you think that they truly exist “out there” and you truly exist “here,” then the very strength of your dualistic fixation and clinging will cause your suffering to increase.

But in the very moment that you recognize you are dreaming, your dream becomes a lucid dream. You realize, “Oh, I am actually just dreaming,” and you see that there is no real tiger out there and no real “me” here, and therefore all your fear and sufferings dissolve. There is no more samsaric pain and no chasing game. If, at that moment, you do not wake up but continue to have a lucid dream, then you can continue to engage with those dream appearances, which are simply appearance-emptiness. In that way you can accomplish whatever you wish, without any fear, pain or suffering.

Therefore, when we generate revulsion and cut through the ties of desire to this life, what we are actually doing is cutting through our clinging to the appearances of this life as being real. We are not trying to forsake the appearances but to recognize that that is really all they are—mere appearances. So we make the following supplication:

Grant your blessings so that I have no desire for honor and gain.

In other words, grant your blessings so that I do not take honor and gain to be truly existent and therefore can let go of attachment to them. Grant your blessings so that I do not further my pride and mental afflictions by taking them to be real. Grant your blessings so that I may reverse my clinging in relation to them, so that I may feel revulsion toward them. This is a very profound supplication.

This verse is a reference to one of the common preliminaries, which also includes the Four Reminders, the reflections on precious human birth; on impermanence and death; on karma, cause and effect; and on the shortcomings of samsara. All of these help us to develop renunciation, or revulsion.

Verse on the Uncommon Preliminaries

The third verse is a reference to the uncommon preliminaries.

Devotion is the head of meditation, as is taught.

Devotion—to the guru, the lineage and the teachings—is like the head of meditation in Mahamudra. In fact it is said that Mahamudra is actually the path of devotion. This devotion is based on confidence. It is the confidence that comes from understanding the lineage, understanding the teachers and the lineage gurus, and understanding the importance of realizing these teachings. From this we develop faith and devotion.

When we work with devotion, we are really working with our emotions. On the basis of this heart of devotion, many difficult emotions arise—passion, jealousy, aggression and so on. These emotions may arise quite vividly due to our hope and fear in relation to our teacher, or because we are comparing our own style of devotion or accomplishments in practice to the styles and accomplishments of our fellow dharma practitioners. When we work with these mental afflictions in relation to devotion, it becomes a very powerful way of transcending them.

The guru opens the gate to the treasury of oral instructions.

There are many profound Vajrayana, Mahamudra and Dzogchen teachings, and when you read them or even practice them, it is possible to understand many of them to a certain degree. However, without a guru's oral instructions, true understanding and practice become very difficult. The guru's instructions are like the key or the password that opens the gate to this vast body of infinitely profound teachings, instructions and experiences. Therefore without the guru and his or her oral instructions, the scriptures of Vajrayana, Mahamudra and Dzogchen are not very effective.

Furthermore, many of these key instructions on the essential points of practice of Mahamudra, Dzogchen and Vajrayana have never been written down. Some masters with whom I have studied will not allow you to write them down. You are expected to just listen directly to their instructions and then practice them. After that you go back and engage in many question-and-answer sessions—only you don't get to ask the questions. They ask you the questions!

With this understanding and sense of appreciation, we continually supplicate the guru that genuine, uncontrived devotion may be born in our minds. Devotion is a very powerful element of our path. I have experienced its power myself in relation to working with my own devotion toward my gurus, His Holiness the Sixteenth Karmapa, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. It is a very powerful experience—very colorful and painful. Yet, at the same time, it is full of joy.

Verse on Mahamudra Shamatha

In the next verse, we look at the actual practice of Mahamudra.

Awareness is the body of meditation, as is taught.

Whatever arises is fresh—the essence of realization.

To this meditator who rests simply without altering

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The key point in Mahamudra shamatha meditation is simply not to be distracted. If we were to translate the Tibetan literally, we would say, “Nondistracted is the body of meditation, as is taught.” Therefore nondistracted—simply not being distracted by any outer or inner conditions—is what shamatha meditation is all about. Thus, if you are not distracted in the moment-to-moment experience of your daily life, then Mahamudra shamatha is there. If you are on the cushion in the shrine room and are not distracted, then Mahamudra shamatha is there as well. This mere nondistractedness is what is being put forth as meditation.

If you would like to take up the practice meditation, then it is not all that important to exert yourself in anything else. In that case, the most important thing is simply not to be distracted. Whatever thoughts arise, whatever emotions or mental afflictions arise, their fresh essence, their fresh nature, is what we rest upon here. We are not looking for another place to rest. Where we are trying to rest our mind is in the nature of this fresh, presently arising moment of mind, whatever it is. If our present mind is a thought, then we rest in the fresh essence of that thought. If our present mind is an emotion, such as anger, then we rest our mind in the fresh essence of that anger.

From the Mahamudra point of view, one of our greatest obstacles is doubt. Sometimes we think, “Mahamudra is not really working for me. I will look for something else. Maybe Dzogchen.” But after we have practiced Dzogchen for a while, we encounter the same thing: “Oh, Dzogchen is not really working. I will look for something else. Oh, yes! Mahamudra.” We go around and around, and this is what we call samsara—constantly cycling around and around.

Therefore, not looking anywhere else, or for something else, outside of our present mind, we just rest in this present nature of mind. This is Mahamudra shamatha. Without changing this present experience, we just rest in its essence, its nature. We do not have to make this thought better; we do not have to make it worse. We do not have to invite more thoughts; we do not have to reject the thought we have now. We simply rest in its freshness.

We can understand this a little better if we look at the line “Whatever arises is fresh—the essence of realization.” Here the word *realization* is *tok-pa* (rtogs pa) in Tibetan. Now, depending on how you spell it, it can mean two different things, yet both words sound exactly the same. One of them means “thought” (rtog pa), while the other means “realization” (rtogs pa). The translation of *tok-pa* here refers to *realization*, but in most cases, the word is understood to mean *thought*. If it were the latter, the line would mean, “In the fresh essence of whatever thoughts arise . . .” That, then, is what we would rest in. So we could say, “To this meditator who rests simply in the fresh essence of whatever thoughts arise.” In the end, however, the meanings are actually the

same. Whatever thoughts arise, their freshness is the essence of realization. When you look at that essence, it is realization. There is no realization outside that thought.

The Mahamudra teachings say that what obstructs us most from seeing the nature of our mind is simply that we keep looking for it outside our mind, outside our experiences. For that, Mahamudra uses the following example: It is like searching for one's buffalo. Let us say you are a farmer who owns a buffalo. Not knowing that your buffalo is in its stable—having missed that fact—you suddenly freak out, thinking, “I've lost my buffalo. It's not in my stable. Where is it?” So you start frantically looking for your buffalo. Of course, when you first start looking, you see buffalo tracks everywhere. When you go beyond your own property, you might see some tracks that lead you to a nice cave in the Himalayan Mountains. You are certain to find a nice buffalo up there! The problem is, however, that when you do find that buffalo, you realize it is not your buffalo. It does not recognize you and you do not recognize it. It is Milarepa's buffalo that you find in the Himalayas. Likewise, you can follow another set of tracks to the riverbanks of the Ganges, and you will surely find a buffalo there—a nice, relaxed buffalo resting on the banks of the Ganges River—but again, the problem is that it is not your buffalo. That buffalo belongs to Tilopa. And since it belongs to Tilopa, it may kick you quite hard!

So you keep searching and searching, and eventually you give up your hope of finding your buffalo, and you give up your fear of losing your buffalo. Then you say to yourself, “What the heck, I'm going home.” And once you come home, you find your buffalo. It had never wandered off. It was there all along, sitting relaxed and happy inside your stable. When you first find your buffalo, when you first see it again, that meeting is so powerful, so romantic. You look at your buffalo, and your buffalo looks at you, and you recognize each other. You both feel the bond. Finding your own buffalo is different from finding someone else's buffalo. Finding your own enlightenment is different from finding someone else's enlightenment.

Therefore the Mahamudra teachings are telling us not to look outside, because the buffalo is always at home. The nature of mind is always at home, in this present mind. What is this present mind? Present mind is all of our thoughts, all of our

emotions, all of our feelings that we are experiencing right now. If you keep looking outside this present mind, you will never find the nature of mind.

When we say, “Do not look outside,” this does not mean, “Do not look outside your body.” Rather, it means, “Do not look outside the experience of this present mind.” So this verse on Mahamudra shamatha is saying, “Rest in this present mind as freshly as possible, as directly and nakedly as possible, and as free of contrivance as possible.”

*Grant your blessings so that my meditation is free from
conception.*

Here we are supplicating that our meditation will not be altered or obscured by our thoughts or conceptions and that, as a result, we will be able to directly realize the true nature of mind. The word *conception* here means the dualistic conception of believing there is a meditator, on the one hand, and something to meditate on, on the other. It also refers to the mind of dullness and torpor. So here we are aspiring to be free from all such forms of dualistic fixation and dullness. If we are free from these two, then we will experience genuine Mahamudra shamatha.

Verse on Mahamudra Vipashyana

Next is the verse that explains Mahamudra vipashyana:

*The essence of thoughts is dharmakīya, as is taught.
Nothing whatever but everything arises from it.
To this meditator who arises in unceasing play*

All our thoughts and emotions are like the waves on the ocean. The ocean itself is dharmakaya mind, the wisdom of buddha. Just as waves arise from the ocean and dissolve back into the ocean, all of our thoughts and emotions arise from the expanse of wisdom and dissolve back into it.

As it says here, the essence or true nature of thoughts is dharmakaya mind. There is no wisdom outside the true nature of our thoughts, the true nature of our emotions. Where it says, “Nothing whatever . . .” we could instead say, “it is nothing whatsoever . . .” because, when we look at the essence of our thoughts, we cannot identify what we are seeing as being one thing or another since it does not truly exist. When you penetrate the essence of thought, when you look nakedly at its essence, then it is spacious and expansive. It has no solid or truly existing characteristics. It is free from all our concepts of what thought is.

And yet thoughts appear in a variety of forms. They can appear as anything. Even though their essence, when examined, is found to be empty, it arises with great luminosity, great clarity, in every possible form. That it arises “as anything” shows us the very strong clarity or luminous aspect of the essence of thought. That is why it says here, “everything arises from it.”

This stream of luminosity that is the essence of thoughts is unceasing. It is the unceasing play of the luminous nature of mind. Therefore the more strongly we experience a thought, the more vividly we are experiencing this luminous nature of mind. It is the same with the emotions. When you feel an emotion such as intense anger, if you can really look at its essence, it is beautiful. It gives you great strength, great power to realize this luminous nature of mind.

This verse teaches that when we look at the essence of thought, the fact that it does not exist in any form shows its *dharmakaya*, or emptiness, nature. Nonetheless it arises and manifests as luminous forms with tremendous energy, and this reveals its *sambhogakaya* nature. Furthermore, this luminous manifestation is unceasing. Whether we are walking or resting, whether we are attending to or oblivious of our thoughts, they continue in an unceasing play. That is their *nirmanakaya* nature. Therefore thoughts are taught to be in the nature of the three kayas, which are the three inseparable aspects of the enlightened nature of mind.

*Grant your blessings so that I realize the inseparability of saÜsĪra
and nirvĪÚa.*

As the text says, if we realize the essence of thoughts, we will have realized the inseparability of samsara and nirvana. That is so because samsara and nirvana are only thoughts. The distinction between samsara and nirvana is created by thoughts and nothing else. Confused thoughts are what are called “samsara,” and the mere end of that confusion is what is called “nirvana.” Therefore samsara and nirvana are only established on the basis of thoughts. If we realize the dharmakaya that is the essence of thoughts, we will realize that neither samsara nor nirvana truly exists. And that is what we call “the inseparability of samsara and nirvana.”

This verse echoes what Milarepa constantly taught. He said that the three essential points, or three stages, of practicing Mahamudra vipashyana are to “look nakedly, rest directly and relax at ease.” This means that whatever thoughts or mental afflictions we might be experiencing, we should look at their essence nakedly, directly, without trying to change them or fix them in any way. And right within that looking, we should rest. When we are resting, we must not fixate on that resting but rather relax at ease.

In fact relaxation is taught to be an extremely important element of practice. It is said in the Kagyu lineage that from excellent relaxation comes excellent meditation, from middling relaxation comes middling meditation and from lesser relaxation comes lesser meditation. Thus relaxation is the key to Mahamudra, as well as Dzogchen, meditation.

*Through all my births may I not be separated from the
perfect guru*

And so enjoy the splendor of dharma.

Perfecting the virtues of the paths and bhâmis,

May I speedily attain the state of Vajradhara.

It would be great if we could attain buddhahood in this lifetime, but just in case we do not, the verse begins with the phrase “Through all my births”. We might say that this is our plan B. As Vajrayanists, our plan A is “in this lifetime.”

In the line “May I not be separated from the perfect guru,” the term “perfect guru” refers to a “fully qualified guru.” What makes a fully qualified guru? Milarepa taught this in brief when he said, “What defines a lama is that he or she holds a lineage.” Therefore a fully qualified lama or guru is one who holds the lineage.

The next line says, “And so enjoy the splendor of Dharma.” This lets us know that it would not be sufficient for us just to be connected to the guru. We also need to receive dharma teachings from him or her. This is a very good line because it shows very clearly what the path is. It is not enough just to become a good fan of a good guru. We must study and practice too. “Perfecting the virtues of the paths and bhâmis” refers to the five paths and the ten bhumis, or bodhisattva grounds. Finally, the line, “May I speedily attain the state of Vajradhara” refers to the state of buddhahood, or complete awakening, and to the swift accomplishment of that goal.

When we connect with our heart of devotion in this way, then, in that moment, we are connecting very powerfully, immediately and directly with the awakened heart of the guru and the lineage, as well as our own inherently awakened state. We are not just relying on our own efforts. We are opening ourselves to a source of blessings that is an embodiment and a reflection of our own fundamental nature. When we genuinely supplicate the guru and the lineage, we feel the presence of the sacred world; the qualities of clarity, gentleness, peace, joy and equanimity are naturally with us.

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