

# The Gelug-Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra

*by Lozang-chokyi-gyeltsen,  
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\_\_\_\_\_, *Precious Sprout, Deciding the Difficult Points of [Chandrakirti's] "An Illuminating Lamp [for 'The Guhyasamaja Root Tantra']"* (sGron-gsal dka'-gnas-kyi mtha'-gcod rin-po-che'i myu-gu).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Pure Stages of the Yoga of Guhyasamaja* (gSang-'dus rnal-sbyor dag-rim).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Short Presentation of an Exceptionally Perceptive State of Mind* (Lhag-mthong chung-ngu).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Short Presentation of the Graded Stages of the Path* (Lam-rim chung-ngu).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Totally Clarifying the Intentions [of Chandrakirti's "Supplement to (Nagarjuna's 'Root Stanzas on) the Middle Way']"* (dGongs-pa rab-gsal).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path* (Lam-gtso rnam-gsum).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Treasury of Commentaries on the Five Stages [of the Guhyasamaja Complete Stage]* (Rim-lnga 'grel-mdzod).

*The Twenty Thousand Stanza Prajnaparamita Sutra*  
(Pancavimshatisahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra; Nyi-khri stong-pa).

Vasubandhu, *A Treasure-house of Special Topics of Knowledge*  
(Abhidharmakosha; mDzod).

Yogini Chinta, *Establishing the Very Nature of the Reality of What Follows from Becoming Clear about Functional Phenomena*  
(Vyaktabhavanugatattvasiddhi; dNgos-po gsal-ba'i rjes-su 'gro-ba'i de-kho-na-nyid grub-pa).

Yongdzin Yeshey-gyeltsen (Yongs-'dzin Ye-shes rgyal-mtshan), *Clearly Indicating the Main Points from the Oral Teachings of the Gelug Tradition of Mahamudra* (dGa'-ldan phyag-rgya chen-po'i man-ngag-gi gnad gsal-bar ston-pa).

\_\_\_\_\_, *Notes from a Discourse on the Gelug Tradition of Mahamudra* (dGa'-ldan phyag-rgya chen-po'i khrid-yig).

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\_\_\_\_\_, *The King Dohas* (rGyal-po do-ha).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Queen Dohas* (bTsun-mo do-ha).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Three Core Volumes* (sNying-po skor-gsum).

Sershul (Ser-shul dGe-bshes Blo-bzang phun-tshogs), *Notes on the Five Stages [of the Guhyasamaja Complete Stage]* (Rim-lnga zin-bris).

*The Seven Texts of the Mahasiddhas* (Grub-pa sde-bdun).

Shantideva, *Engaging in Bodhisattva Behavior* (Bodhicaryavatara; sPyod-'jug).

*A Sutra on the Essential Factors for Accordant Progress* (Tathagatagarbha Sutra; De-bshegs snying-po'i mdo).

Tagtsang Lotsawa (sTag-tshang Lo-tsa-ba Shes-rab rin-chen), *An Ocean of Teachings on the General Meaning of Kalacakra* (Dus-'khor spyi-don bstan-pa'i rgya-mtsho).

*The Three Mothers* (Yum-gsum).

Tsongkhapa (Tsong-kha-pa Blo-bzang grags-pa), *The Essence of Excellent Explanation of Interpretable and Definitive Meanings* (Drang-nges legs-bshad snying-po).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Grand Presentation of an Exceptionally Perceptive State of Mind* (Lhag-mthong chen-mo).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Grand Presentation of the Graded Stages of the Path* (Lam-rim chen-mo).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Grand Presentation of the Graded Stages of the Secret Mantra Path* (sNgags-rim chen-mo).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Lamp for Clarifying the Five Stages [of the Guhyasamaja Complete Stage]* (Rim-lnga gsal-sgron).

\_\_\_\_\_, *An Ocean of Reason [Commentary on Nagarjuna's "Root Stanzas on the Middle Way"]* (Rigs-pa'i rgya-mtsho).

**A Root Text for the Precious Gelug-Kagyü  
Tradition of Mahamudra  
(dGe-ldan bka'-brgyud rin-po-che'i phyag-chen  
rtsa-ba rgyal-ba'i gzhung-lam)**

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*Translated by Alexander Berzin July 1996*

Namo mahamudraya -- Homage to mahamudra, the great seal of reality.

I respectfully bow at the feet of my peerless guru, lord of that which pervades everywhere, master of those with actual attainment, who expounds, in a denuding manner, the diamond strong vajra sphere of mind, parted from (what can be expressed in) speech, inseparable from mahamudra, the great seal of reality, the all pervasive nature of everything.

Gathering together and thoroughly condensing the essence of the oceans of sutras, tantras, and quintessence teachings, I shall write some advice concerning mahamudra from the Gelug-Kagyü tradition of the fatherly Dharmavajra, a mahasiddha with supreme actual attainment, and his spiritual offspring.

For this, there are the preparatory practices, the actual methods, and the concluding procedures. As for the first, in order to have a gateway for entering the teachings and a central tent pole for (erecting) a mahayana mind, earnestly take the safe direction of refuge and develop a bodhichitta aim. Do not have these

merely be words from your mouth. Then, since seeing the actual nature of mind is indeed dependent upon strengthening the enlightenment-building networks and purifying yourself of the mental obscurations, direct (toward your root guru) at least a hundred thousand repetitions of the hundred-syllable mantra and as many hundreds of prostrations as possible, made while reciting *The Admission of Downfalls*. In addition, make repeated, heartfelt requests to your root guru inseparable from all Buddhas of the three times.

As for the actual basic methods, although there are many ways of asserting mahamudra, there are two when divided according to the sutras and tantras. The latter is a greatly blissful, clear light mind manifested by such skillful methods as penetrating vital points of the subtle vajra-body and so forth. The mahamudra of the traditions of Saraha, Nagarjuna, Naropa and Maitripa, it is the quintessence of the anuttarayoga class of tantra as taught in *The (Seven Texts of the) Mahasiddhas* and *The (Three) Core Volumes*. The former refers to the ways of meditating on voidness as directly indicated in the expanded, intermediate and brief (*Prajnaparamita Sutras*). The supremely realized Arya Nagarjuna has said, “Except for this, there is no other pathway of mind leading to liberation.” Here I shall give relevant instruction on mahamudra in accord with these intentions of his and discuss the methods that lead you to know the mind, face to face, in keeping with the exposition of the lineage masters.

From the point of view of individually ascribed names, there are numerous traditions, such as those of the

\_\_\_\_\_, *Root Stanzas on the Middle Way* (Mulamadhyamaka Karika; dBu-ma rtsa-shes).

\_\_\_\_\_, *[A Method to Actualize Guhyasamaja] Made in Brief* (Pindikrta, mDor-byas).

Ngari Panchen Pema-wanggyel (mNga'-ris Pan-chen Padma dbang-rgyal), *A Commentary on [Sakya Pandita's] "Differentiating the Three Levels of Vowed Restraints"* (sDom-gsum rab-dbye'i 'grel-ba).

Padampa Sanggyay (Pha-dam-pa Sangs-rgyas), *A Hundred Verses to the People of Dingri* (Ding-ri brgya-rsta-ma).

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\_\_\_\_\_, *A Ritual to Honor the Spiritual Master* (Bla-ma mchod-pa).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Root Text for the Precious Gelug/Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra: The Main Road of the Triumphant Ones* (dGe-ldan bka'-brgyud rin-po-che'i phyag-chen rtsa-ba rgyal-ba'i gzhung-lam, Phyag-chen rtsa-ba).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Six-session Guru-yoga* (Thun-drug bla-ma'i rnal-sbyor).

Third Panchen Lama, Pelden-yeshey (Pan-chen dPal-ldan ye-shes), *Answers to Questions* (Dri-len).

Pundarika, *Stainless Light [Commentary on "The Kalachakra Abbreviated Tantra"]* (Vimalaprabha; Dri-med 'od).

Sakya Pandita (Sa-chen Kun-dga' rgyal-mtshan), *Differentiating the Three Levels of Vowed Restraints* (sDom-gsum rab-dbye).

Sanggyay-yeshey (Sangs-rgyas ye-shes), *Songs of Meditational Experience* (gSung-mgur-ma).

Saraha, *The Commoner Dohas* (dMangs do-ha).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Lamp to Clarify the Meaning of the Generation Stage of Guhyasamaja* (dPal gsang-ba 'dus-pa'i bskyed-rim-gyi don gsal-bar byed-pa'i sgron-me).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Lamp for Further Clarifying the Five Stages [of Guhyasamaja]* (Rim-pa Inga'i yang-gsal sgron-me).

\_\_\_\_\_, *An Ornament for "The Stainless Light" [Commentary on "The Abbreviated Kalachakra Tantra"]* (Dri-med 'od-rgyan).

*The King of Absorbed Concentrations Sutra* (Samadhiraja Sutra; Ting-nge-'dzin rgyal-po'i mdo).

Lakshmikara, *Establishing Non-discordance* (Advayasiddhi; gNyi-med grub-pa).

Longchenpa (Klong-chen Rab-'byams-pa), *A Treasury of Deep Awareness* (Ye-shes mdzod),

*The Lotus Sutra* (Saddharmapundarika Sutra; Padma dkar-po'i mdo).

Mahasukha, *Establishing the Hidden Factors* (Guhyasiddhi; gSang-ba grub-pa).

Maitreya, *Differentiating the Middle from Extremes* (Madhyantavibhaga; dBus-mtha' rnam-'byed).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Filigree of Clear Realizations* (Abhisamayalamkara; mNgon-rtogs rgyan).

\_\_\_\_\_, *The Furthest Everlasting Continuum* (Uttaratantra; rGyud bla-ma).

Marpa (Mar-pa Lo-tsa-ba) *Songs of Meditational Experience* (Mar-pa'i gsung-mgur).

Nagarjuna, *The Five Stages [of the Guhyasama Complete Stage]* (Pancakrama; Rim-Inga).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Precious Garland* (Ratnavali; Rin-chen 'phreng-ba).

simultaneously arising as merged, the amulet box, possessing five, the six spheres of equal taste, the four syllables, the pacifier, the object to be cut off, dzogchen, the discursive madhyamaka view, and so on. Nevertheless, when scrutinized by a yogi, learned in scripture and logic and experienced (in meditation), their definitive meanings are all seen to come to the same intended point.

And so for this (sutra tradition of mahamudra), out of the two methods, namely seeking a meditative state on top of having gained a correct view (of voidness) and seeking a correct view on top of a meditative state, (I shall explain) here in accordance with the latter method. On a seat conducive for mental stability, assume the seven-fold bodily posture and clear yourself purely with a round of the nine tastes of breath. Having thoroughly separated out muddied states of awareness from lucid ones, then, with a purely constructive mind, direct (toward your root guru) your taking of safe direction and the reaffirmation of your bodhichitta aim. Meditate next on a profound path of guru-yoga and, after making hundreds of very strong, fervent requests, dissolve your (visualized) guru into yourself.

Absorb for a while unwaveringly in that state which is without the gurgle-gurgle of appearance-making and appearances (of “this” and “not that.”) Do not contrive anything with thoughts such as expectations or worries. This does not mean, however, that you cease all attention as if you had fainted or fallen asleep. Rather, you must tie (your attention) to the post of mindfulness in order not to wander, and station alertness to be aware

of any mental movement.

Firmly tighten (the hold of your mindfulness) on that which has the essential nature of clarity and awareness, and behold it starkly. Whatever thoughts might arise, recognize them as being that and that. Alternatively, like a dueler, cut the thoughts off completely, wham-wham, as soon as they occur. Once you have completely cut these off and have settled (your mind), then, without losing mindfulness, relax and loosen up. As has been said, “Relax and loosen its firm tightness and there is the set state of mind.” And elsewhere, “When mind itself, ensnared in a tangle, loosens up, there is no doubt that it frees itself.” Like these statements, loosen up, but without any wandering.

When you look at the nature of any thought that arises, it disappears by itself and an utter bareness dawns. Likewise, when you inspect when settled, you see a vivid, nonobstructive bareness and clarity. (This is) well known as “the settled and moving (minds) mixed together.”

(Thus,) no matter what thought arises, when, without blocking it, you recognize (that it is) a movement (of mind) and have settled on its essential nature, (you find) it is like the example of the flight of a bird confined on a boat. As is said, “Just as a crow having flown from a ship after circling the directions must re-align on it ...”

From cultivating such (methods as these, you realize that,) since the essential nature of the totally absorbed mind is a lucidity and clarity, unobstructed by anything,

Gyelrong Tsultrim-nyima (rGyal-rong Tshul-khrims nyi-ma), *Last Testament Letter Cast to the Wind* (Kha-chems rlung-la bskur-ba'i 'phrin-yig).

Gyeltsabje (rGyal-tshab rJe Dar-ma rin-chen), *The Heart of Excellent Explanation [Commentary on Aryadeva's "Four Hundred Stanza."]* (bZhi-brgya-pa'i rnam-bshad legs-bshad snying-po),

*The Heart Sutra* (Prajnaparamita Hrdaya; Shes-rab snying-po).

*The Hundred Thousand Stanza Prajnaparamita Sutra* (Shatasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra; 'Bum).

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Indrabhuti, *Establishing Deep Awareness* (Jnanasiddhi; Ye-shes grub-pa).

Jamyang-zheypa, Ngawang-tsondrü ('Jam-dbyangs bzhad-pa Ngag-dbang brtson-grus), *An Interlinear Commentary on "A Ritual to Honor the Spiritual Master"* (Bla-ma mchod-pa'i cho-ga'i mchan-'grel).

\_\_\_\_\_, *A Root Text on the Tenet Systems* (sGrub-mtha' rtsa-ba).

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Ninth Karmapa (Kar-ma-pa dBang-phyug rdo-rje), *Mahamudra Eliminating the Darkness of Ignorance* (Phyag-chen ma-rig mun-gsal).

Kaydrubje (mKhas-grub-rje dGe-legs dpal-bzang), *Answers to Questions* (Dri-len).

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Kaydrub Kyungpo (mKhas-grub Khyung-po rNal-sbyor), *Hundreds of Verses for Auspiciousness* (Shis-brjod bka'-brgya-ma).

Kaydrub Norzang-gyatso (mKhas-grub Nor-bzang rgya-mtsho), *A Lamp for Clarifying Mahamudra to Establish the Single Intention of the Kagyu and Gelug Traditions* (bKa'-dge dgongs-pa gcig-bsgrub-kyi phyag-rgya chen-po gsal-ba'i sgron-ma).

\_\_\_\_\_. *An Illuminating Lamp [for "The Guhyasamaja Root Tantra"]* (Pradipoddyatana; sGron-gsal).

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*The Confession Sutra Before the Thirty-five Buddhas* (lTung-bshags lha so-lnga).

Darika, *Establishing the Very Nature of the Reality of the Great Hidden Factors* (Mahaguhayatattvasiddhi; gSang-ba chen-po'i de-kho-na-nyid grub-pa).

Dharmakirti, *A Commentary on [Dignaga's "Compendium of] Validly Cognizing Minds"* (Pramanavarttika; Tshad-ma rnam-'grel).

Dharmavajra (Chos-kyi rdo-rje), *The Guru-yoga of the Foremost Three-part Composite Being* (Sems-pa-gsum rtse-mo'i bla-ma'i rnal-sbyor).

Dombi Heruka, *Establishing What Simultaneously Arises* (Sahajasiddhi; Lhan-cig skyes-grub).

*The Eight Thousand Stanza Prajnaparamita Sutra* (Ashtasahasrika Prajnaparamita Sutra; brGyad-stong-pa).

Gampopa (sGam-po-pa Zla-'od gzhun-nu), *A Jewel Ornament for the Path to Liberation* (Thar-pa'i lam-rgyan).

*The Guhyasamaja Root Tantra*; cf., *The Guhyasamaja Tantra*.

*The Guhyasamaja Tantra* (Guhyasamaja Tantra; gSang-'dus rtsa-rgyud).

Gungtangzang (Gung-thang-bzang dKon-mchog bstan-pa'i sgron-me), *Notes from a Discourse on the Gelug Tradition of Mahamudra* (dGe-ldan phyag-chen khrid-kyi zin-bris).

\_\_\_\_\_. *Thousands of Songs of Meditative Experience* (sTong-mgur).

and not established as any form of physical phenomenon, it is, like space, an utter bareness that allows anything to dawn and be vivid. Nevertheless, although the actual nature of mind may be seen straightforwardly, with exceptional perception, to be like that, it cannot be taken as a “this” and be (verbally) indicated.

The great meditators of the Snow Mountains are practically of a single opinion in proclaiming that this setting (of the mind) at ease, not cognitively taking (as a “this”) anything that arises, is a guideline instruction for putting within your grasp the forging of Buddhahood. Be that as it may, I, Chokyi-gyeltsen, say that this method is a wondrous skillful means for beginners to accomplish the settling of their mind and is a way for knowing, face to face, (merely) the superficial nature of mind that conceals something deeper.

As for the methods that can lead you to know, face to face, the actual (deepest) nature of mind, I shall now set out the guideline teachings of my root guru, Sanggyay-yeshey, who (as his name literally means) is (the embodiment of) the Buddhas’ deep awareness. Assuming the guise of a monk clad in saffron, he has eliminated the darkness enshrouding my mind.

While in a state of total absorption as before, and, with a tiny (portion of) awareness, like a tiny fish flashing about in a lucid pond and not disturbing it, intelligently inspect the self nature of the individual who is the meditator. It is just as our actual protector for refuge, the highly realized Arya Nagarjuna, has said, “An

individual is not earth, not water, nor fire, nor wind, not space, not consciousness. Nor is he or she all of them. Yet what individual is there separate from these? And just as an individual is not perfectly existent because he or she is (what can be labeled on) a conglomeration of six constituents, likewise none of the constituents are perfectly existent because each is (what can be labeled on) a conglomeration (of parts).” When you search and, like that, cannot find even a mere atom of a total absorption, someone totally absorbed, and so on, then cultivate absorbed concentration on space-like (voidness), single pointedly, without any wandering.

Furthermore, while in a state of total absorption, (scrutinize your) mind. Not established as any form of physical phenomenon, it is a nonobstructive utter bareness that gives rise to the cognitive dawning and projection of a wide variety of things – a continuum of unhindered (unceasing) clarity and awareness, engaging (with objects) without discontinuity. It appears not to depend (on anything else). But as for the conceptually implied object of the mind that grasps (for it to exist as it appears), our guardian, Shantideva, has said, “What are called a ‘continuum’ and a ‘group,’ such as a rosary, an army, and the like, are falsely (existent as findable wholes).” By means of scriptural authority and lines of reasoning (such as this), totally absorb on the lack of existence established as things appear.

In short, as has been said from the precious lips of my spiritual mentor, Sanggyay-yeshey, omniscient in the true sense, “When, no matter what has cognitively dawned, you are fully aware of it as (having its

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say to those who would (prematurely) write about this method of their own accord that you are enlightened. If you ask why, it is because those who are guardians for safe direction have regard for the times.”

Therefore, also in order for such prophesies as this to be fulfilled, I, the renunciant Lozang-chokyi-gyeltsen, who have not let degenerate the lineage of inspiration from those who have practiced straightforwardly this pathway of mind from the peerless Universal Teacher, the King of the Shakyas, down through my root guru, the omniscient Sanggyay-yeshey, and who myself have become a member of this lineage, not letting the close bond of its practice be lost, and who uphold the quintessence teachings of the sutras and tantras, have compiled this at Ganden Monastery.

existence established merely by its being) what can be cognitively held by a conceptual thought, the deepest sphere of reality is dawning without need to rely on anything else. To immerse your awareness in the state of (this) dawning and totally absorb single-pointedly, oh, my goodness!” Similarly, the hallowed (fatherly Padampa Sanggyay) has said, “Within a state of voidness, the lance of awareness is to be twirled around. A correct view (of reality) is not a tangible obstruction, O people of Dingri.” All such statements come to the same intended point.

At the conclusion (of your meditation), dedicate whatever ennobling, positive force has accrued from meditating on mahamudra, the great seal of reality, as well as your ocean like network of constructive actions of the three times, toward great peerless enlightenment.

Having accustomed yourself like this,, then no matter what has dawned as an appearance of a cognitive object to your sixfold network (of consciousness), inspect minutely its manner of appearance. Its manner of existence will dawn, denuded and distinctly. (This is) the essential point for having whatever has cognitively dawned being like what you recognize.

In short, any object whatsoever that cognitively appears, such as your own mind and so on, make yourself certain about its manner of existence – don’t grasp at it (to exist in the manner that it appears) – and always sustain (that certainty).

When you know (one thing to exist) like this, (you see

that) it applies uniformly to the self-nature of all phenomena of samsara or nirvana. Aryadeva has also given voice to that in saying, “Any seer of one phenomenon is the seer of everything. Any voidness of one thing is the voidness of everything.”

Before the face of proper, total absorption on the actual nature (of everything) like that, there is just the severance of mentally fabricated extremes regarding (everything of) samsara and nirvana, such as (inherent, findable) existence, (total) nonexistence, and so on. Yet after you have arisen, when you inspect, (you see that) the dependent arising of the functioning of what is merely imputedly existent, simply by names, undeniably and naturally still cognitively dawns, like dreams, mirages, reflections of the moon in water, and illusions.

(When you realize simultaneously that) appearances do not obscure voidness and voidness does not make appearances cease, you are manifesting, at that time, the excellent pathway mind (that cognizes from the single viewpoint) of voidness and dependent arising being synonymous.

The speaker of these words has been the renunciant called Lozang-chokyi-gyeltsen, who has listened to much (teaching). By its positive force, may all wandering beings quickly become triumphant Buddhas through this pathway of mind, apart from which there is no second gateway to a state of serenity.

(Author’s colophon:) I have compiled these methods that lead you to know, face to face, the great seal of

reality, mahamudra, at the repeated previous request of Gedun-gyeltsen, (who holds the monastic degree of) Infinitely Learned Scholar of the Ten Fields of Knowledge, and of Sherab-senggey from Hatong, (who holds the monastic degree of) Master of the Ten Difficult Texts. They have seen that the eight transitory things in this (world) are like dramas of madness and now live in remote solitude, following a sagely way of life and taking this pathway of mind as their essential practice. Further, many other disciples, who wish to practice mahamudra at its definitive level, have also requested me.

Moreover, (I have especially composed this text now since) the great triumphant Ensapa, the omniscient, majestic commander of the ennobling ones with actual attainment, has said in one of his songs of experience to instruct himself and others, “I have compiled the instructions concerning lam-rim (the graded stages of pathway minds) from the Kadam tradition, all the way from entrusting yourself to a spiritual teacher up through shamata and vipashyana. But, in the end, I have been unable to set out now, in written words, the ultimate guideline instructions for mahamudra, which are not included among these aforementioned pathways of mind and which are not well known at present to those of the Land of Snows.” Thus, what was not set down (in writing) at that time due to the power of its being restricted was intended for a later period.

Also, for example, in *The Lotus Sutra*, it was stated, “Because it is to be realized completely by the Buddhas’ deep awareness (Sanggyay-yeshey), you could never