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Mahamudra class 1  
Feb 18, 2005

Tonight—the meditation for mahamudra; what it means. Tomorrow—the physical practice of mahamudra; the theoretical practice of that. Next Monday—physical exercises demonstrated. It's not an absolute posture, it's a relative posture. It's OK for nerds and couch potatoes too.

Mahamudra meditation came from *Samadhiraja sutra*, through Nagarjuna, through Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, etc. There are several mahamudra lineages in Tibet, and this might be different. This lineage came through Geluk: Dalai Lamas, Panchen Lamas. This is more detailed and explicit.

Tomorrow will be from Hatha Yoga Pradipika, translated in three year retreat, and they got the transmission in India.

If they told you in church as a kid that the first half would be a prayer service and the second half we will do pushups—it's totally foreign to us to do inner practice and follow with pushups to get to heaven faster. We're getting into inner and outer methods and open and secret teachings. Normally it's kept secret until you finish Geshe studies. One is open and the other is secret, even so that in our tradition it was said that Geluks didn't have a mahamudra tradition.

He has been teaching the open mahamudra teachings, and now the secret teachings. He asked his lamas about people in this country who are interested in yoga—it's very much the same as the Tibetan tradition, even though it was cut off for 1,000 years. So the lamas told them to teach it openly.

The point of the teaching tonight is to give us something to practice at home. 28:20 meditation on the mind itself—here our mental feelings. Feelings are easy to meditate on because they're the border between physical and mental. Feelings are also the things we most often base our feelings on, and our actions are based on those feelings; our whole lives based on something amorphous and unreliable. So this meditation really makes a big difference if you do it for a while.

The reason to meditate on the mind itself is 1) it's easy to find the object and to stay on it; 2) it helps to control subtle dullness because it's an interesting object, 3) you don't also get agitated and fly off to other things; and 4) it's a seed to prepare you for secret teachings.

So how does exercise relate to the teachings? Here you work on the body and mind at the same time. When you finish Geshe studies, you can go to tantric college; you get initiation into a divine world where you could live if you do these practices. Then you come out and get trained to be able to stay there. You have to make commitments, and if you keep them, you have a chance to enter the divine world and stay there. It's something you have to do for yourself—your teacher can't do it for you.

You have to promise to follow the outer and inner methods. The inner methods are listed here in the reading, but you need a teacher. The outer methods are what we call yoga and pranayama. So what is the connection between teachings and exercises? You have a body and a mind, and in Tibet they are very different from here. They think of the mind as being in the heart area. Your mind stretches to your entire body, and to things that you can sense, and as well to things that you hear about. So where the mind is is impossible to say—the mind can't be split or destroyed. The mind and body are connected, and you can prove it, because you can get intoxicated by drinking beer.

Mahamudra meditations always take as an object your own thoughts, and try to find their true nature. If you are focusing on your thoughts, your own feelings, it's lively, and it keeps you fresh. The mahamudra yoga practices focus on your inner winds. Inside your channels, your thoughts and feelings are interconnected. This is the next frontier where we have to do our work. Mahamudra and meditation are focused there, and that's what yoga was meant to do. It makes you slimmer and younger, etc, but it also affects the winds in your body. How do you open a stuck sink? You can use drano or get a hammer and bang on the pipes. Sometimes the hammer works better and sometimes the drano works better, but together it's much more elegant and there's measurable progress. Meditation is hard to measure, but asanas are measurable.

Meditation: 49:50

There are six stages of mahamudra meditation:

- 1) Feelings change constantly.
- 2) If those feelings are going from moment to moment, there must be a fixed "me" that they are happening to. But you can't control them in the moment, or we'd be totally happy all the time.

What does the word mahamudra actually mean?

महा comes from the word great—> magnificent, maximum, mega... etc.

मुद्र comes from a root “mugh” which means to seal—>mum, mystic, mute.

In Tibetan it's *pyag rgya chen po*. It means “sealed”—so no one can open these books. A ring might also be used as a seal, or the seal that HHDL uses. So what does mahamudra have to do with that? Thoughts: the seal is a concept that seals the world, a principle that underlies everything in the world. Nothing in the world can happen without its seal—the idea is emptiness. You don't just watch your mind, you're looking for something there—emptiness. That's the principle that underlies everything. Mudra means emptiness. Maha means that if you know this, you can do anything; you get big results.

In the asanas there are 10 mudras, which are locks to change the prana. With certain physical exercises, you can force prana to trigger the direct perception of emptiness. There's a higher mudra, which is a word for your spiritual partner. If you can stay together and work together, etc. to balance the two energies so you can see emptiness, that's also called your mudra. There's a deep desire in the human spirit to balance the two energies, and then you can see emptiness directly. When you see emptiness, prana moves into part of your body and then you look better. If you can do these practices properly, you can get a body of light. As it changes, there's a millisecond delay—the energies balance, and a second later, you're standing on countless worlds helping countless people. That's what you were meant to be, not just to sleep and work and eat, and then die. We're supposed to be more than that—when you balance those energies you become an angel. Within the context of a normal life, you can become an angel.

Meditation 1:20

How do they teach mahamudra in Sivananda's lineage? He asked Swami Swaroopananda, and he kept canceling on them. Then just before they left he sent word that he could see them, and so they went. He went on for two or three hours and never got to mahamudra, but only about preparation. Tibetan lamas will do the same thing. To succeed at mahamudra you have to do the preparation.

The first preparation is shenyen tentsul—if you want to learn something you need a teacher. They travel all over and meet people who want to practice these things, but they don't know a teacher. In mahamudra before you do anything, the first step is to find a teacher.

Then you have to honor the teacher—don't feel the teacher owes you because you paid for it. In the monastery that wouldn't go. You don't refuse your teacher. So you have to do this meditation—it's not easy, etc. but it will help you to take care of others. You have to find proper training and respect the teacher. The results are unbelievable.

Mahamudra class 2  
Feb. 20,2005

Real yoga—you can be a couch potato. Anyone can open their channels.

Meditation review: 7:00 feelings and looking for the gakja—something we believe that doesn't really exist. Six flavors to emptiness, and so there are six different gakjas and six wisdoms to counteract.

- 1) For the first one it is that feelings change constantly.
- 2) For the second, we believe there's some kind of controller to our feelings, and since we don't feel happy all the time, there can't be such a thing. Really just the moment to moment feelings that come up are us—there's no more to it than that.

Mahamudra is unique because we do meditations on the outside and exercises on the outside. Like any other practice it won't work unless there are other things to go with it, the right context. You need to plant seeds that will grow while you are doing the yoga. All meditation and yoga has the same seeds—  
a) The first is to find a master of that practice and serve them. In Tibet if you heard that there was a teacher, you were supposed to check them out before going to study with them. This process took nine years. You have to make this your goal, to check them out carefully. Then you learn from them, and then you have to show respect. That bond with your teacher is the source of all attainments. Don't be like a hungry goat eating whatever you find. You have to find the right master and make a bond with them.

b) Contemplate how lucky you are. You are in a place where you have everything you need, you live in comfort, peace, and stability. Internally, you are healthy—that won't last. It's a unique time in your life. From a point of view of tantra, you have channels, sexual power, chakras, winds, etc. There is no government or religious agency that is preventing you from practicing. On the other hand, you will have to lose all of it. It takes energy to breathe; your life is not infinite. It's not a luxury—it's something you have to do now. Who knows where you'll be in a year.

c) Because you have all these resources, etc. you can get enlightened in this life. They went to Mahavir temple—only one person in a billion years can become enlightened. But everyone can become enlightened, and it's something you're supposed to do. You're not meant to eat and sleep and get old and die, you're here because you are being prepared for something. Everything you ever experienced was a preparation. At some point you need to understand that you

could be a being who could help everyone in the universe at once. We already have that capacity—we just need to bring it out.

Meditation== 38:56

3) The third gakja is to think that someone else is responsible for our thoughts or feelings.

You have to do these meditations continually, especially with other people. If you do something with a group, it becomes much stronger. When you're not feeling like meditating, close your eyes and think about how lucky you are. Since you were a kid, someone has always been taking care of you. You're being handed from person to person taking care of you. The more you do this meditation, the more you start to feel that everyone is trying to help you.

d) Sak ja—the first part is collecting new good karma. (worldview #7): look around and try to spot someone who is an angel. There's always one—it's a plan to take care of you. This is an intense method to collect good karma. Just thinking that way is the fastest karma you can collect. The second part is to get rid of your old bad karma—start with the worst one first, the most serious bad thing you've done in your life. When you think real hard, you'll come up with the second worst thing you're doing, because nobody wants to think about the worst thing. Be honest and admit it to yourself. Then purify it—the best way to counteract it is to do the opposite for a short time—just for example don't get angry for a period of time at that person. You can lock yourself in your room for an hour and not get angry for example. Everybody has something they screwed up—pick the worst one and search and destroy. You can negate the bad karma by simply avoiding it now. By for example working in a hospital, you can purify abortion. You start to get signs that it's over now.

Meditation #4—1:08 mistaken thought is that there's a fixed quality to your experience. Wrong: there is no inherent quality to a feeling.

Yoga (wind) practice, p. 15

1

The Lord of Serpents  
Is the foundation  
Which supports  
All the lands of earth,

With their mountains  
And their forests;  
And just so  
Is the coiled inner fire  
The foundation which supports  
All the secret practices  
Of yoga.

This refers to kundalini, tummo, tsandali: inner fire or inner goddess. You can visualize in many ways. One useful way is—take your left hand ring finger—up of top of head and to tailbone and up the front to the sexual organ. Inside this channel are all of your good thoughts. Side channel: left side of nose, twines around at the forehead, at the top of the head, etc. There's a branching channel on the other side as well. Inside those two channels are your negative thoughts—anger and wanting things. When you're getting angry, a lot of prana flows through the side channel. It gets fatter, and chokes off the central channel. When you furrow your brow, it makes it worse. When you take a hot shower, it loosens them and the nada comes out and people want to sing in the shower. It's like a serpent twining around the central channel. The practice of mahamudra is all about straightening out that serpent. If you got good at this, there would be no wrinkles at your forehead. When the knot at your heart opens, you see all the beings at once and know you will serve them.

Anger is a feeling in your body, like a power or energy. You label it as anger and act accordingly and put the object of anger as outside of yourself. The feelings you have in your mind are the closest thing to a physical realm. When you enumerate the skandas, form and feeling are right next to each other.

Meditation #5 1: 25:45 How do feelings change when you label them differently. This is the basis of turning problems into opportunities.

Meditations so far:

Preliminary—just try to watch the fact that you are having a feeling. You can't examine the feeling until you try to watch the feeling. At the beginning you have to watch yourself having a feeling. So "I" must be separate from the feeling. That's not meditation yet. The advantage is that will keep you awake, and it's a good place to start.

1) Then how do you feel? Know that it will change in about ten minutes. It's naïve to think that it will last. Your feelings change constantly, and so don't get attached to them. It's the emptiness of an unchanging thing.



- 2) You can't control your life. Watch your feelings. Are they in your mind? Do you control them, and can you predict how they will be in five minutes? You can't. You can't control anything; you don't own anything, so just relax/
- 3) There are people who are bad from their own side: Somebody hassles you at work—you have created that from your karma. You hassled someone before, it created a seed, and boom, you met this person. You can't be angry at them—you created them.
- 4) Find a person who is truly evil: somebody probably loves them. That's another proof that it's coming from you. Who's right? There's no such thing as a person that nobody likes. It's coming from you.
- 5) Half of them is coming from them and half is coming from you. There is physical data: red colors, decibels, etc. You can call it whatever you want—you can even turn death into the path. Story about yellow diamonds. There's no such thing as a problem that's 100% from its own side—look for the silver lining.
- 6) If you think about the first five, they are all about how to deal with the crap in the world. Stop the crap from happening in the first place. Don't think your life has to be managing bad things that happen to you. It is bad; can't I just live in a world where these things don't happen? We call it gardening—set up your reality in advance and then you don't have to manage the crap; it just won't happen. That's the ultimate worldview. You can't stop what's happening now—the only thing you can do is not create the seed. The way to do that is to take care of others—don't think of yourself. At all times watch what people need and make sure they get it. Watch their eyes; see what they need and give it to them. That's the highest mahamudra.

Meditation #6: 1:58:01

# THE MAHAMUDRA ASANAS

## A. General Notes

- **Never attempt these poses without a teacher. If teacher only knows general yoga, stick with that and build up the foundation.**
- Different claims; need for more research, textual & personal.
- Success in bandhas comes primarily from a continuous daily “foundation practice” conducted over a prolonged length of time. This lays the foundation for the David Life Hla “targeted sessions” approach. Foundation practice + targeted sessions.
- The idea of spontaneously “setting off” or triggering a bandha by targeted work in the area. All related to the idea of moving from sahita kumbhaka to kevala kumbhaka (HYP II.72-73): spontaneous stopping of the breath in preparation of seeing emptiness directly.
- Idea of avoiding pushing or tension. Triggering lung imbalances with incorrect bandhas and pranayama. Triggering muscle tension by pushing past the “opening boundary.”
- The need to do reflex breathing throughout the practice, as well as breath linking (linking the movement with the inhalation or exhalation so that the farthest extension of the motion of the body, and the completion of the inhalation or exhalation, occur simultaneously—with steady slow movement up to that point.
- At this point, don’t hold breath. Don’t apply these bandhas to other poses without teacher.

- Remember that continually studying and meditating upon the mahamudra meditations will set off the proper bandhas and channel opening.
- Temporal goals of the practice: Tremendous abdominal fire; ability to eat anything, healthy or not. A preparation for the ekarasa of an enlightened being. The ability to turn poison into the nectar of the gods. Stops tuberculosis, leprosy, obstructions of the lower intestines, and failure of the liver or related organs, as well as the imbalances of the humors which precede these conditions. Said by Gita Iyengar to help with leucorrhoea and dysmenorrhoea (menstrual problems); pre-menstrual tension; tendency to miscarriages due to glandular trouble, muscular weakness, or weak constitution; after delivery (after six weeks); following a Caesarean (after wound has healed, which might take two months); corrects displacement of uterus; tones abdominal organs; relieves headaches, heaviness, burning in the chest, dizziness, blackout.
- Ultimate goals of the practice: Ordinary people become persons of high attainments. The ability to turn the suffering world into heaven.

## **B. Rebuilding Sun and Moon**

*Preparations for the janu shirsasana component—goal of lengthening and tonifying the entire tripartite channel structure from tip of head to heels of legs. Equivalent of the urinary bladder meridian in TCM.*

1) Surya namaskara—general warmup, foundation

uttanasana—easier to use gravity to lengthen the head-to-heel muscles

pashchimotta—straight legs and straight back, no emphasis on reaching knee at all

Gita Iyengar Hla: be sure to lift the spine during this component; use finger on feet to pull spine up; may want to go into janu shirshasana from here; bent leg at right angle to extended; grab big toe of extended foot with thumbs, index, and middle fingers of both hands; straighten both arms at elbows; keep raising trunk by maintaining the grip, pressing thighs to floor; lower head from nape of neck

until chin rests in hollow of collar bone; relax head and forehead; do not constrict throat; close the eyes; she advises rechaka; no tilt to the extended leg side;

Picture of Krishnamacharya Hla in Deshikacharya Hla's book has right leg extended, left heel below testicles in perineum, right hand across balls of foot horizontally, left hand over toes and this hand.

Yoga Journal book: hook big toe with thumbs and forefingers. Says here also tones adrenal glands.

Note on switching sides: Adyar translation of HYP says that Brahmananda Hla says that practice is on left side when left leg is bent; that mahamudra is so called because it seals off all pains; and then He lists the five kleshas from YS where it says that (III.14) kleshas & death are stopped by mm.

Master Iyengar Hla: big toe of left foot touches inside of right thigh; he only says that the heel is "close" to the perineum. Use thumb & forefinger. Chin rests in hollow between collar bones. Tones abdominal organs, kidneys, & adrenal glands. Spleen, indigestion, enlarged prostate.

BSY: pose involves four elements, so powerful: asana, bandha, kumbhaka, mudra; a powerful pranic lock which spontaneously arouses meditation; posture as you start (one leg out, sitting up straight; in picture the knees seem to be touching, sitting on the ankle of the one) is called utthana padasana; they say to add khechari mudra too; as well as shambhavi mudra (gaze between eyes); tilt head backwards first; rotate awareness eyebrow, throat, perineum saying mentally "ajna, vishuddhi, muladhara" or "shambhavi, khechari, mula"; mm should be done after asana & pranayama but before meditation; they distinguish between a hatha yoga version and a kriya yoga version which it leads to; latter never to be done w/o guru; kriya yoga version said to include ujjayi pranayama, khechari mudra, awareness of arohan/awarohan passages and chakras, and unmani mudra.

everyone notes must exhale slowly; sw: also inhale slightly just before exhale to prevent a tightening

### **C. The Unexpected Core**

*Opening of groin and hip area, which has been called the “surprise center” of all success in the yoga asanas. Triggering mula bandha.*

Natural acupressure on perineal area, closing the circuit.

trikonasana, concentrate on inner thigh tendons of back foot as go down, opens hips laterally

baddha konasana to open hips laterally further

the pashchimotta done properly opens the hips vertically

Gita Iyengar Hla describes the mula bandha here as “the lower abdomen between the navel and the anus is contracted and pulled towards the diaphragm so that the region between the vagina and the anal mouth is locked upwards”

#### **D. Gentle Taut**

*Developing the uddiyana bandha naturally through a light sucking in of the diaphragm and upper abdomen. Compare to the light tension of sucking in the cheeks by using a light vacuum.*

- As a preliminary: kapalabhati breathing. Strengthening the diaphragm. Role of diaphragm rather than abdominal muscles in this pose, although navasana would also help strengthen entire area.
- Deshikacharya Hla’s two preps for uddiyana bandha. Tad%a#ka (pool, small lake = MTSO’U) asana with back on floor and arms out straight over head, gently suck in tummy. (Idea tummy forming like a pool.) Also in adhomukha shvanasana.
- The idea (p. 85, Theos Hatha Yoga) that the two side channels are choked off by the chin lock.
- Can think about this vacuum concavity during shirshasana.

- Obviously better to do this on an empty stomach, and in general without any innertube. Need to work towards that.
- Probably not good to do the traditional rechaka and hard retention. Get it to come naturally.
- No clenching muscles.

### **E. Teeter-Totter on the C7 Yang**

*Finding a very natural line of balance on the jalandhara bandha.*

- 1) Sarvangasana focusing on C7.
- 2) Definitely need a compensation pose after this, such as a setu bandhasana.
- 3) Halasana.
- 4) In down dog, looking to navel.
- 5) Theos, Hatha Yoga, p 86: "I was taught to simulate the act of swallowing a couple of times before using this bandha."

### **F. Scriptural Sources**

- 1) Georg F Hla says this and kechari mudra described in Dhyana Bindu Upanishad, which has 106 verses.
- 2) He has a text pp. 406-408 (@ which one? HYP?) which is good on mahamudra; he interprets sun & moon sides as breathing through those sides.
- 3) He says Yoga Shastra of Datta#treya has eight driya of hatha yoga as cultivated by Kapila and his disciples, incl. mahamudra, khechari, & others.
- 4) Sources acc to Yoga Kosha:  
G 32-3

GS III.6

HP III.12-17

YCU 69,70

YTU calls it mahabandha

Brahmananda: sends kundalini upwards along sushumna

“This pose a one-footed pashchimataana”

“GS adds should fix gaze between eyebrows”