

Notes on *Essential, Synthesized Practical Instructions on Coemergent Union:
The Mahāmudrā Granted by the Noble Lord to Gönpawa*
B. Alan Wallace

- On the nature of spiritual intelligence:
 - Spiritual intelligence corresponds to the tenth transcendence in Mahāyāna Buddhism, namely, transcendent primordial consciousness (Tib. *ye shes*, Skt. *jnāna*). By thoroughly fathoming the actual nature of phenomena as emptiness, as well as the full range of phenomena, perceiving the equality between them, and by revealing the Dharma, one is able to fully ripen sentient beings.
 - *Doṇasutta (Aṅguttara Nikāya 4.36)*: The brahmin Doṇa saw the thousand-spoked wheels of the Blessed One’s footprints, with their rims and hubs, complete in all respects, and thought: “It is astounding and amazing! These surely could not be the footprints of a human being!” He then tracked the Buddha and saw him sitting at the foot of the tree—graceful, inspiring confidence, with peaceful faculties and peaceful mind, one who had attained to the highest taming and serenity. He approached him in awe and asked him whether he was a god, an angelic being, or an earth spirit, and each time the Buddha replied that he was not. Finally, he asked him whether he was a human being, and again the Buddha replied he was not. Doṇa then asked, “In that case, what are you?” to which the Buddha replied, “I am Awake.” He concluded in verse, “As a lovely white lotus is not soiled by the water, I am not soiled by the world: therefore, O brahmin, I am a Buddha.”
 - One of the easiest situations in which to become lucid in a dream is in a nightmare, for one may think, “I *must* be dreaming!” And one has a strong incentive to recognize it as such. This may be why it is said that Dzogchen is most powerful during very degenerate times.
- Atiśa received Mahāmudrā instructions originating from King Indrabodhi on through the lineage of Tilopa, Nāropa, and Dombi Heruka, and further Mahāmudrā teachings from Avadhūtipa and Kamalarakṣita. In addition, he received practical instructions for attaining the achievement of Mahāmudrā through relying on the *Guhyasamājatantra*.
- “On another occasion, Indian disciples came to Nyethang to visit Atiśa. They brought gifts and told him about a yogi who, after twelve years, obtained the ‘great seal’ of Mahāmudrā. Atiśa said that when he left for Tibet, a ‘perfected adept’ appeared daily in East India.” [Excerpt From: James B. Apple, *Atiśa Dīpaṅkara: Illuminator of the Awakened Mind*]
- Atiśa granted to Gönpawa Wangchuk Gyaltsen (1016–1082) his Mahāmudrā text *Essential Condensed Summary on the Practical Instructions of Coemergent Union (lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi gdam ngag mdor bsdus snying po)*
- The great nonsectarian master Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye (1813–1899), in his *Encompassment of All Knowledge (shes bya kun khyab)*: “It is said that Tagpo Rinpoche [i.e., Gampopa] gave rise to the realization of Mahāmudrā even in beginners who did not receive empowerment, which is the system of the pāramitās. It primarily consists of the instructions that come from the Kadampas—the pith instructions of *The Second Armor of Mahāmudrā of the Coemergent Union (phyag chen lhan cig skyes sbyor)* composed by Lord [Atiśa] and this present system are alike in all aspects and even the progression of

the four yogas [of Mahāmudrā] is clearly taught there. Thus, he guided most [of his students in a given] group through the stages of the path that come from the Kadam [tradition], where he guided the extraordinary ones through the path of means that comes from Lama Milarepa. What is meant [here] is the former [approach].”

Comments on the Text

- “The Master” refers to Lama Drakgyal.
- “The coemergent, actual nature of the mind is the dharmakāya, and coemergent appearances are the light of the dharmakāya.”
 - Atiśa asserts that the primordial consciousness that is realized is self-emergent primordial consciousness according to the oral tradition of his gurus, Guru Avadhūtipa and Guru Tāmradvīpa.
- “Then, all phenomena of the appearing worlds of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are your own mind. Cut off all false assumptions regarding the mind being devoid of origination, cessation, and location.”
 - This is the classic Mahāmudrā/Dzogchen approach of transitioning through Cittamātra to Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka.
 - Metaphysical realism is the view that (1) the world consists of mind-independent objects; (2) there is exactly one true and complete description of the way the world is; and (3) truth involves some sort of correspondence between an independently existent world and a description of it.
 - The two realities in physicalism: mass-energy, space-time, and their emergent properties are ultimately real, while everything else exists only by convention.
 - Democritus (460—370 BCE):
 - “Sweet is by convention, and bitter by convention, hot by convention, cold by convention, color by convention; in truth there are but atoms and the void.”
 - “The Senses: ‘Wretched mind, from us you are taking the evidence by which you would overthrow us? Your victory is your own fall.’”
 - Physicist Werner Heisenberg (*Physics and Philosophy*): “With regard to this question, modern physics takes a definite stand against the materialism of Democritus and for Plato and the Pythagoreans.”
 - Physicist Christopher Fuchs: “Schrödinger thought that the Greeks had a kind of hold over us—they saw that the only way to make progress in thinking about the world was to talk about it without the ‘knowing subject’ in it. QBism goes against that strain by saying that quantum mechanics is not about how the world is without us; instead it’s precisely about us in the world. The subject matter of the theory is not the world or us but us-within-the-world, the interface between the two.”
 - Psychologist William James (*Pragmatism*): “The essence of scientific materialism is that matter ends in tragedy.”
 - Two realities in Vaibhāṣika
 - Ultimate realities are things of which we can still cognize their conventional identities, even while we are dissecting or analyzing them.

- Obscurative realities are those things of which we can no longer cognize their conventional identities once we have dissected them by physical means or analyzed them by mental scrutiny.
 - Two realities in Sautāntrika
 - Ultimate realities are composite, have causal efficacy, are impermanent, inherently exist from their own side, and can be directly perceived with any one of the six senses.
 - Obscurative realities are not composite, have no causal efficacy, are permanent, do not inherently exist from their own side, and cannot be directly perceived with any one of the six senses because they depend for their existence on being conceptually designated. So they are known only by valid conceptual minds.
 - The contents of the “black box” of the external world, independent of appearances, in which even space and time are not inherently, objectively real, cannot be known by way of inference based on the effects we perceive that emerge from that black box.
 - The same is true of the “black boxes” of others’ minds.
 - Two realities in Cittamātra
 - Ultimate reality includes both dependent phenomena (such as the stream of conditioned consciousness, including the substrate consciousness, and the karmic energies that bring about the appearances of subject states of mind and their perceived objects), as well as emptiness, or “totality” (*pariniṣpanna-svabhāva*), which, in this school, is explained as the truth that dependent phenomena (*paratantra-svabhāva*) are free of two varieties of false constructs (*parikalpita-svabhāva*) that we habitually apply to them, namely (1) the constructs that hold subject and object to be of a separate substance and (2) those constructs that assume these two did not come from the same karmic cause, whereas in fact they did.
 - Obscurative reality consists of the dualistic appearances of outer, apprehended objects and the inner, apprehending subject, or the perceiving mind, which appear as though they are of separate substances and come from different causes, whereas, according to this school, both subject and object are arising from the ripening karmic energies of the same habitual propensity, moment by moment. So the appearance of these as two separate entities, the apprehender and apprehended, constitutes an obscurative reality.
 - The “black box” of the subjective mind that observes all objective appearances and engages in all mental activities is also unknowable by way of inference based on the perceivable effects of the subjective mind.
- “As a result of resting in that way, if random and unruly thoughts occur, whenever such a sudden thought first emerges, it is from the coemergent, actual nature of the mind itself.”
 - First identify the essential nature of the mind, and then recognize all thoughts as creative displays of pristine awareness.
- “Even if it lingers for a while, it remains right in the coemergent, actual nature of the mind; and even when it finally dissolves, it fades right back into the coemergent, and it is released, clearly and vividly, into the domain of the dharmakāya.”

- According to Yangthang Rinpoche, the three ways thoughts release themselves are (1) simply by recognizing them (*gcer grol*), (2) by the power of familiarization, thoughts release themselves like a snake unraveling itself (*shar grol*), and (3) in the culminating phase (*rang grol*), there is no way thoughts can help or harm you, like a thief who comes to an empty house, where there's nothing he can do. In this final phase, thoughts empower your realization of pristine awareness, serving as aids to your practice. Pristine awareness constitutes "primordial release" (*ye grol*), for it has never been bound by thoughts.
- "He said that when that arises in your mindstream, since your own mind is realized to be the dharmakāya, the flames of mental afflictions are cleared away, and all virtuous qualities arise by the force of that."
 - The small stage of the yoga of single-pointedness corresponds to the Mahāyāna path of accumulation; the medium stage of single-pointedness corresponds to the warmth and the pinnacle stages of the path of preparation, and the great stage corresponds to the patience and supreme Dharma stages of the path of preparation.
 - The first stage of the yoga free of elaboration corresponds to reaching the path of seeing and therefore the first ārya-bodhisattva ground.
 - The yoga of one taste corresponds to the path of meditation from the second up to the eighth ārya-bodhisattva ground.
 - The culmination of the stages of the yoga of non-meditation corresponds to perfect Buddhahood.
- "As analogies, when the king of beasts is in its mother's womb, even though its three strengths are complete, they are enclosed within its mother's body..."
 - *Ajātaśatrukaukṛtyavinodā Sūtra*: Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī presented the following simile: Soon after a lion cub is born—even though its powers are not complete—wherever its scent is carried by the wind, animals (even a mature elephant of sixty years) will not be able to bear that smell and will flee. Just so with the new bodhisattva: even though upon his first generation of bodhicitta he does not yet possess the full powers of discerning wisdom and primordial consciousness, he nevertheless outshines or overawes the śrāvakas and pratyekas.
 - The three strengths are a lion's ability to frighten other animals with his (1) scent and his (2) roar, along with (3) his own fearlessness.
 - Karma Chakmé (*Naked Awareness*):
 - "You may wonder, if there have been many who have reached the grounds and paths, why is it that they evidently lack the characteristics and qualities [of those states]?" Even though realization has arisen, those qualities may be absent. As an analogy, inside its egg a *garuḍa* has grown its wings, but due to the shell it cannot fly. Likewise, although those qualities do not appear to others, during the transitional process, the dharmakāya manifests as one's self-interest; and then it is certain that the two rūpakāyas will appear to others. For the contemplative, the body is the container; for the lion, the womb is the container; and for the *garuḍa*, the eggshell is the container. Although enlightened knowledge has grown from within, like an oil-lamp in a pot, extrasensory perception and so forth are veiled by the corruption originating from the body, which is like a

- rotten stalk. The slight confusion that is present now will vanish in the transitional process. That is the consensus among the Kagyü patriarchs.”
- Lord Jigten Sumgön: “There is a school that asserts that the path of seeing has been attained if its signs and qualities are present in the midst of a massive gathering of people, but otherwise it has not been attained. If you find that assertion in the teachings of the Buddha and their authoritative commentaries, I will dress my horse in satin and give him to you.”
 - *The White Lotus Sūtra*: “Ānanda, this one is on the tenth ground, but thinks he has not achieved anything. The bodhisattva does not know, for he has been blessed by the great mystery.”
 - “By practicing in that way, at the time of death, earth dissolves into water, water dissolves into fire, fire dissolves into air, and air dissolves into consciousness.”
 - The consciousness into which one dissolves is the substrate consciousness, and if one has already accessed that through the achievement of śamatha, then one may pass through all these dissolutions lucidly. If in addition to śamatha, one has gained experience of the emptiness of the mind through the practice of vipaśyanā and has identified path pristine awareness, then following the “dark near-attainment” (after the white appearance and red emergence) one may readily realize the “mother clear light” with the “child clear light.”
 - The meeting of the natural clear light (*rang bzhin gyis ’od gsal ba*) and the clear light of meditation (*bsgoms pa’i ’od gsal*) is stated to be the attainment of Mahāmudrā. Then, based on this realization, one engaged in this practice is able take on the identity of a deity composed of empty clear light in the form of an illusory mental body (*manomayakāya*) who performs uncontaminated actions.
 - *The Vajra Essence* on the stages of dissolution during the dying process
 - “It is a supreme crucial point to be cherished that you recognize the stages of dissolution at these times, like a lovely young woman gazing at herself in a mirror. Those of superior faculties follow the instructions on entering the sphere of the clear light. Those of middling faculties reverse the impure appearances and mindsets of saṃsāra back into displays of the clear light, the actual nature of reality. Those of lesser faculties recognize the stages of dissolution and then establish confidence in the clear light that emerges at that point. Each of these is a sublime, crucial point.
 - “Depending on their faculties, some remain unconscious in that state for six hours, twelve hours, one full day, or two or three days. However long you stay there, that is the phase at which you dissolve into the actual substrate to which you descend.
 - “Following that is the *dissolution of the [dark] near-attainment into the clear light*. As an analogy, just as the space inside a jar is united with the space outside, without even a speck of any appearance of a self, a radiant, clear expanse arises like all-pervasive space, free of contamination—like dawn breaking in the sky. At this time, people who are already very familiar with ground pristine awareness by means of cutting through and who have acquired confidence in this will recognize the pristine awareness in which they have previously trained when they later encounter the clear light to which they descend—which is like meeting a person with whom

one is already familiar. There they must hold their own ground, like a sovereign sitting upon a royal throne.

- “Those who have achieved stability of practice lasting throughout a day and night may achieve stability lasting seven human days at death. But for those who have not entered the path, the clear light will not appear for longer than the time it takes to eat a bowl of food.”

Meditation 1: Atiśa’s Practical Instructions on Mahāmudrā Meditation (from the *Essential, Synthesized Practical Instructions on Coemergent Union*)¹

At the time of practice, sit on a comfortable cushion in the posture of Vairocana with its seven qualities, including the vajra-āsana, and cultivate the four immeasurables for the sake of all sentient beings. Then, all phenomena of the appearing worlds of saṃsāra and nirvāṇa are your own mind. Cut off all false assumptions regarding the mind being devoid of origination, cessation, and location. Do not modify, do not block, do not think, and do not accomplish. Do not reflect on previous thoughts, anticipate later ones, or focus on anything in the present. Simply rest in a clear, nonconceptual state, pristinely pure and relaxed. Be at ease. In that way rest, utterly relaxed in the luminous, empty, essential nature of consciousness. As a result of resting in that way, if random and unruly thoughts occur, whenever such a sudden thought first emerges, it is from the coemergent, actual nature of the mind itself. Even if it lingers for a while, it remains right in the coemergent, actual nature of the mind, and even when it finally dissolves, it fades right back into the coemergent, and it is released, clearly and vividly, into the domain of the dharmakāya. This is like clouds that suddenly emerge in the clear sky: when they first emerge, it is from the sky itself. For as long as they linger, they remain right in the sky, and when they finally dissolve, they fade back into the sky. In that way, know that there is nothing apart from the coemergent.

Meditation 2: Vipāśyanā on the Nature of Feelings

- Vipāśyanā on the phenomenal nature of feelings
 - Observe feelings in the body and mind, generating them if necessary.
 - Recognize when pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings occur and know them for what they are. Similarly apply discerning mindfulness to worldly and unworldly pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral feelings
 - Examine their origins, their relation to grasping and identification and to the stimuli that arouse them.
 - Are they mental objects or subjective ways of experiencing mental objects?
 - Examine the three signs: impermanence, suffering, and no-self.
 - Use mindfulness of breathing as the basis for mindfulness of bodily feelings, and settle the mind in its natural state as the basis for observing mental feelings.
- Vipāśyanā on the actual nature of feelings
 - Examine their emptiness of origin, location, and destination

¹ The full text appears in B. Alan Wallace, *The Art of Transforming the Mind: A Meditator’s Guide to the Tibetan Practice of Lojong* (Boulder: Shambhala, 2022), Appendix 3, 255–59.

- Examine the emptiness of yourself as the one who experiences feelings
- Examine the emptiness of existence and non-existence of the apprehended feelings and the apprehender of them.

Meditation 3:

Teaching on Tong-Len given by His Eminence Garchen Triptrül Rinpoche

The main practice I did in prison was tong-len (giving and taking). Khenpo Münsel gave me many special oral instructions on tong-len that were not in the text. In tong-len, we generally say that we are sending happiness out to others and taking others' suffering in. But for the actual meaning of tong-len, you have to understand the inseparability of self and other.

The ground of our minds is the same. We understand this from the View. In this context, even if there are many different types of suffering, there is really only one thing called "suffering." There is only one suffering, he taught. If there is only one suffering, then at this time when you, yourself, have great suffering, you should think, "The minds of the sentient beings of the three realms and my mind have the same ground." The essence of the suffering of the sentient beings of the three realms and your own suffering is the same. If you see them as the same, if you see them as being non-dual, and then meditate on that suffering in the mind's natural state, that suffering goes away. At that moment, you have been able to lessen the suffering of all sentient beings of the three realms, all at once.

The "len" of tong-len means "taking." First, take in this way. "Tong" means "giving." If you understand mind's nature, then you recognize the essence of whatever suffering and mental afflictions there may be to be emptiness. When suffering does not harm you anymore, the mind has great bliss. If at that time you meditate, making self and others inseparable, then that bliss can diminish the self-grasping of all sentient beings. It can lessen the self-grasping. The happiness that is being given is the bliss that comes from the practice of giving and taking. This is how you should practice.