

Believers, Contemplatives, and the Future of Human Civilization, Part 7
The Cultivation of Spiritual Intelligence
B. Alan Wallace, November 25, 2024

*Essential, Synthesized Practical Instructions on Coemergent Union:
The Mahāmudrā Granted by the Noble Lord to Gönpawa¹*
By Atiśa

Namo Deva Guru

[876] The Master commented that the practical instructions on coemergent union Lord [Atiśa] gave to Gönpawa are very profound. The coemergent, actual nature of the mind is the dharmakāya, and coemergent appearances are the light of the dharmakāya. He said that those two are like the sun and its rays or like sandalwood and its fragrance.

When it is time to practice, the guru's practical instructions are on the mind's essential nature, manifest nature, and defining characteristics. The essential nature of the mind is its lack of origination, cessation, and location. As an analogy, over the course of the seasons—during the summer, when clouds and mist disappear, in the winter, when storms do not arise, and in the autumn, when the sky is pristine—if you look [at the sky], a clear, luminous, indescribable vividness arises. He said, likewise, regarding the thoughts of your mind, when the previous ones have ceased, later ones have not yet arisen, and in the interim they are not located anywhere, there is a vivid clarity that is luminous, while being devoid of any inherent nature. The manifest nature of the mind appears in various ways, yet this nature is devoid of origination, cessation, and location. The defining characteristics of the mind appear and are conceptualized as various joys and sorrows, white and red, likes and dislikes. Those three—the essential nature, manifest nature, and defining characteristics—do not exist as three different things, for the coemergent mind itself, free of conceptual elaborations, manifests in such modes of appearance. The ground is unmodified, the path is undistracted and unimpeded, and the fruition is free of hope and fear, so these are to be practiced.

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

¹ Tibetan: *Jo bo rjes dgon pa ba la gnang ba'i phyag chen*. These teachings were granted by Atiśa (982–1054) to Gönpawa Wangchuk Gyaltzen (1016–1082). *Jo bo rje dpal ldan a ti sha'i gsung 'bum* (dpal brtsegs bod yig dpe rnying zhib 'jug khang nas bsgrigs, krun go'i bod rig pa dpe skrun khang), pp. 876–78. TBRC W1GS66286.

that way, if random and unruly thoughts occur, whenever such a [877] 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.

As a result of meditating, the four kinds of yoga will gradually arise. Vividly remaining without dispersion in the luminous, essential nature of the mind, which has no inherent nature, is called the *yoga of single-pointedness*. When that arises in your mindstream, there is a sense that reification of mundane appearances is diminishing, and you think that at times your meditation is going well, but sometimes you think your consciousness is separated from the moisture of the actual nature of reality. In this way there are many ups and downs. Sustaining yourself with the practical instructions, repeatedly rest unwaveringly in meditative equipoise and gain familiarity with it.

When you realize the luminous, nonconceptual, essential nature of consciousness as the dharmakāya, free of all extremes of conceptual elaboration, including existence and nonexistence, permanence and annihilation, going and coming, and so on, that is called the *yoga free of elaboration*. When that arises in your mindstream, all previous phenomena are peeled away and conventional elaborations are cut off, which is like an impoverished person finding a treasure.

Through familiarization with this, you recognize that everything that appears as the inanimate environment and its sentient inhabitants is your own mind and that the nature of your mind is unoriginated. That is called the *yoga of the one taste of the manifold*. When that arises in your mindstream, although thoughts of dualistic grasping appear in various ways, by realizing the coemergent, actual nature of your mind to be the dharmakāya, they are naturally purified and disperse right where they are.

By gaining familiarity in that way, your consciousness is freed from being either the object of meditation or that which is meditating, and without any division between meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state, you realize subject and object as nondual. That is called the *yoga of nonmeditation*. 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 essential nature of the mind is luminous and nonconceptual; its manifest nature is free of origination, cessation, and location; its defining characteristics consist of saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, and so on appearing as concepts; and during the period of single-pointedness, just its essential nature is realized.

As a result of gradually cultivating the four yogas, even though your own mind is realized to be the unoriginated dharmakāya, when such things as illness and suffering come along, this is due to its being enclosed within the casing of the ordinary body. 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. Or even though the wings of a garuḍa inside its shell are fully developed, they are enclosed by the casing of the shell. Although you inwardly realize your mind to be the dharmakāya, you are not free of the casing of the body created by past karma, so there is no contradiction in joys, sorrows, and so on continuing to arise.

As a result of practicing in that way, [878] at the time of death, earth dissolves into water, water dissolves into fire, fire dissolves into air, and air dissolves into consciousness. When the vital energy and mind enter the *avadhūti*, they come to ride upon the naturally present, coemergent primordial consciousness—the actual nature of reality. Because you have meditated that way in the past, you will recognize it as if you were meeting an old acquaintance, and the natural clear light and the clear light cultivated in meditation will meet, so that you achieve the siddhi of Mahāmudrā. Then from the sphere of clear light and emptiness you arise as a divine embodiment of the union of the two,² which manifests as enlightened embodiments in order to serve every sentient being according to the way each one must be trained. By taking on illusion-like bodies whose nature is the mind, and which come from undefiled karma, you serve the needs of others.

If you have not meditated in that way, you will not recognize the natural clear light [of death], and even if you do, by the force of the nature of reifying it and of grasping to signs, you will be frightened and terrified of it. By crossing the border of life and death with the causes of craving and appropriation, you will take birth. By continuously spinning around in the cycle of saṃsāra in this way due to karma and so forth, you must take on immeasurable suffering.

Therefore, this practical instruction on coemergent union, which is the remedy for that, was received from the speech of the sublime guru. Meditate on it without distraction. To augment your realizations, between sessions devote yourself with boundless enthusiasm to offering the maṇḍala and so on, making prayers of supplication to your guru and the Three Jewels, creating *tsatsa* images, performing circumambulations, offering prostrations to the divine, reciting liturgies and mantras, engaging in acts of generosity, and so forth. By practicing in that way, over the course of days, months, and years, progress will come. He said that with your post-meditative consciousness, in all circumstances, you should recognize everything as being like an illusion.

These *Essential, Synthesized Practical Instructions on the Coemergent Union* were written down by the Śākya Bhikṣu Kumara. The lineage proceeds from Vajradhara to Tilopa (988–1069), Nāropa (1016–1100), Dombhi Heruka, Lord Atiśa (982–1054), Gönpawa Wangchuk Gyaltzen (1016–1082), Dromtönpa (1005–1064), Potowa (1027–1105), Sharwana, and Tabkhawa to Khenchen Jamnyak, Lama Drakgyal, and he taught it to me.

Translated by B. Alan Wallace

² *zung 'jug lha'i skur langs*. This “union of the two” refers to the indivisible union of the mind of clear light and the form of a divine embodiment.