



*Mahamudra has no causes—yet faith and devotion are the causes of mahamudra.
Mahamudra has no conditions—yet genuine gurus are the conditions for mahamudra.
Mahamudra has no methods—yet uncontrived mind is the method of mahamudra.
Mahamudra has no path—yet undistracted mind is the path of mahamudra.
Mahamudra has no result—yet mind liberated into dharmata is the result of mahamudra.*
~ Gampopa, The Very Essence of Mind, Mahamudra, the One Sufficient Path

In the Kagyu tradition, mahamudra is the end-result of all Dharma practice—a Buddha’s awareness, wisdom, and compassion so perfectly aligned with reality, with things as they actually are. Mahamudra is the realization of reality-as-such.

Maha means big or great; *mudra* means seal or stamp. So *mahamudra* is the Great Seal that ALL things are marked with. *Mahamudra* is the very nature of all phenomena, including our mind. *Mahamudra* is reality-as-it-is: empty, vivid, unrestricted. “[All experience and] phenomena are naturally pure and sealed as primordially liberated.” (Thrangu Rinpoche, Essentials of Mahamudra, p.76).

Ground, Path, and Fruition Mahamudra

The ground of mahamudra is buddha-nature.

The path to (sutra) mahamudra is shamatha and vipashyana.

The fruition of mahamudra is buddhahood, fully awakening to the way things are.

Three paths to mahamudra

Sutra mahamudra is the perfect and effortless union of perfect shamatha and vipashyana. *Tantra mahamudra* uses the skillful means of yidam, mantra, and subtle energy yogas. *Essence mahamudra* is the direct transmission of pointing out instructions. There is no difference in the resulting mahamudra; the differences are in the methods of practice.

Preliminaries

Mahamudra is not a fancy superior shortcut route to enlightenment; it is the end result of removing all confusion and afflictive emotions and karma. You can’t skip over meditation, ethics, effort, training and purification, the accumulation of merit, or the cultivation of wisdom and compassion. Mahamudra is said to be effortless, but it is the effortless result of genuinely taking refuge, cultivating right view, right intention, and right action, and mastering meditation practice to realize the Buddha qualities. Sutra, tantra, and essence mahamudra all require taking refuge and cultivating bodhicitta, some realization of shamatha and vipashyana, and thorough cultivation of the ordinary preliminaries (four thoughts that turns the mind), and the extraordinary preliminaries (Refuge, Vajrasattva, Mandala Offering, and Guru Yoga).

The Four Yogas of Mahamudra

One-pointed: stable clarity of knowing (shamatha).

Simplicity (non-fabrication): seeing emptiness (vipashyana).

One taste: experience is nondual; no grasping three spheres.

Nonmeditation: no effort; the natural state, on and off the cushion.

To rest in tranquillity is the stage of one-pointedness.

To terminate confused thoughts is the stage of non-conceptuality.

To transcend the duality of accepting & rejecting is the stage of one taste.

To perfect experiences is the stage of nonmeditation.

~ Je Gomchung (a direct disciple of Gampopa)

From Dako Tashi Namgyal, *Clarifying the Natural State*:

ONE-POINTEDNESS: “You have seen the essence of One-Pointedness if you have reached a naturally knowing and confident certainty in your mind’s aware emptiness. You have not seen the essence if you do not possess this confident attitude, even if you can remain in the states of bliss, clarity and nonthought. You have perfected the strength of One-Pointedness if this state of aware emptiness becomes constant throughout day and night. You have not perfected its strength if it is an occasional resting... realizing this mind to be a nonarising self-knowing that is self-liberated, you have completed the realization of One-pointedness.” (DTN, p. 78-79, 83)

SIMPLICITY (NONFABRICATION): “You have seen the essence of Simplicity if you, after investigating thoroughly the nature of the experiencer, totally arrive in a state in which all constructs have dissolved. You have not see the essence if you have not dissolved the *tarnish of conviction*, which is the experience of clinging to emptiness. You have perfected its strength if you entertain hope and fear during perceptions, even though you know their nature to be nonarising and you have not dissolved the clinging to emptiness.” (DTN, p.85)

ONE TASTE: “You have seen the essence of One Taste if, free from accepting or rejecting, confirming or denying anything perceived, you have recognized the original state of equality as on objectless natural awareness. You have not seen the essence if you still cling to the conviction that savors this equality in terms of something to be mingled and a mingling with it... You have not perfected its strength if one taste isn’t experienced as multiplicity because of retaining the bond of a remedy.” (DTN, p.90)

NONMEDITATION: “You have seen the essence of Nonmeditation if your realization of nonmeditation is free from an object of remembering or familiarization... You have not seen the essence if you retain a sense of something that needs to be remembered or grown accustomed to. You have perfected the strength of Nonmenditation of the subtlest dualistic perception has dissolved and you have brought all [“outer”] phenomena to the state of exhaustion, so you are always indivisible from original wakefulness.” (DTN, p.95-96)

Study

Please print, study, and reflect on these two short texts combine devotion and mahamudra instruction. (you'll find both on the [BPP webpage](#) in the October 16 section)

- Aspirations for Mahamudra by the Third Karmapa Rangjung Dorje
- The Vajra Song of Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye

If you want to further unpack the instructions in Kongtrul's song, here are two commentaries:

- *Cloudless Sky: The Mahamudra Path of the Tibetan Buddhist Kagyu School*, by the Third Jamgon Kongtrul.
- *King of Samadhi: Commentaries on the Samadhi Raja Sutra and The Song of Lodro Thaye*, by Thrangu Rinpoche.

One of the better overviews and introductions to mahamudra in plain English is *Mind At Ease: Self-Liberation Through Mahamudra Meditation*. By Traleg Rinpoche.

Reflect

The Tibetan word for buddha is *sangye*. *Sang* means awakening from the sleep of ignorance. *Gye* means the blossoming of wisdom, compassion, and all good qualities.

Mahamudra, the ultimate fruit of Dharma practice, is awakening to reality-just-as-it-is, free of confusion and afflictive emotions.

- ❖ *What specific sensations, feelings, thoughts, and impulses prevent you from simply resting in experience, without contrivance or fabrication?*

Aspire and practice bringing awareness and compassion to those very experiences.