



PRACTICE IX

Mahamudra: The Emptiness of the Mind,
in Six Different Flavors

Answer Key, Class One

1) The word "Mahamudra" means "Great Seal." Explain the real meaning of each of these two words. (Tibetan track give the Tibetan.)

"Seal" (*mudra*) refers to emptiness, or the ultimate nature of all existing things. "Great" (*maha*) means also "highest," emptiness being the highest of all things, since a person who perceives it thereby begins to stop all suffering. The study of Mahamudra is thus the study of emptiness.

ཡུལ་གྱི་ཚེན་པོ།

chakgya chenpo

2) What are the two kinds of Mahamudra?

There is a secret practice of Mahamudra and an open practice of Mahamudra. Our course concerns the open practice.

སྔགས་ལུགས།

ngak luk

མདོ་ལུགས།

do luk

3) Mahamudra is basically a study of the emptiness of the mind itself. What are four advantages of studying the emptiness of the mind, as opposed to the emptiness of objects in general?

The four advantages are:

- a) It is relatively easy for people to bring up the object of the meditation (one's own mind) in their mind

དམིགས་རྟེན་འཆར་སྒྲ།

mikten char la

- b) Because we are focussing on our own minds, it is relatively easy to eliminate subtle dullness

བྱིང་བ་ཕྱ་མོ་གཅོད་སྒྲ།

jingwa tramo chu la

- c) Since one is also eliminating distraction, then mental agitation is automatically prevented

གོད་པ་རང་ལྷགས་ཀྱིས་འགག།

gupa rang shuk kyi gak

- d) This serves as a powerful factor which ripens the mind for the eventual practice of Mahamudra according to the secret way

སྒྲིན་བྱེད་བྱེད་པར་ཅན།

minje kyepar chen



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Answer Key, Class Two

1) It most often seems almost random when we encounter something that we either like or don't like. Describe the "flavor" of "emptiness" that denies that anything is an accident. (Tibetan track give the Tibetan also.)

The flavor referred to here is #3: the fact that a visible object and the valid perception which grasps the visible object are devoid of any separate substance. "Devoid of any separate substance" means: "It is not true that they come from a separate karmic seed; rather, they both arise from the same karmic seed." According to the Mind-Only School, this is the lack of a self to things. According to the Independent group, this is the gross lack of a self to things.

གཟུགས་དང་གཟུགས་འཛིན་གྱིས་ཚད་མ་རྗེས་གཞན་གྱིས་སྟོང་བ།

suk dang sukdzin gyi tsema dzeshen gyi tongwa

2) Much of the trouble in our lives comes from judging what we are not really capable of judging. Judgements depend on labels—on how we interpret something. Describe the "flavor" of "emptiness" that addresses how we label things. (Tibetan track give Tibetan also.)

This flavor is #4: The fact that the fact that any particular thing is called what it is is something which is devoid of existing by definition. Put simply: The fact that things are called what they are is not something which is automatic. According to the Mind-Only School, this is also the lack of a self to things.

རང་ཉིད་རང་ཉིད་ཅེས་པའི་ཐ་སྐད་འདུག་པའི་འདུག་གཞི་ཡིན་པ་རང་གི་མཚན་

ཉིད་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པས་སྟོང་བ།

rangnyi rangnyi chepay tanye jukpay jukshi yinpa ranggi tsennyi kyi druppe tongwa



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Answer Key, Class Three

1) Explain the metaphor of the magic show that the Independent group of the Middle-Way School uses to help describe their version of emptiness.

In the magic show, the audience sees a stick as an elephant. The magic can only take place if a number of conditions are present. The magician takes a small stick and throws it on the ground. He mutters some magic words, and sprinkles magic powder in the eyes of the members of the audience. Due to the stick on one side, and the magic words and powder on the other side, there can occur the perception of an elephant. Just so, in this school there must be something "out there" appearing to us, and from our side a perception of it too, cooperating, or there can be no object.

2) One of the "flavors" of "emptiness" is very useful for understanding the process of transforming problems into opportunities. Describe it. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

This refers to emptiness flavor #5: the fact that objects are void of existing from their own side through any unique identity of their own, rather than existing simply by virtue of having appeared to an unaffected state of mind. According to the Independent group, this is the subtle lack of a self to things, or real emptiness

སློབ་གཞོན་མེད་ལ་སྣང་བའི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་ཅམ་མ་ཡིན་པར་ཡུལ་རང་གི་སྐྱུན་
མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་བསྐྱོད་ལུགས་སུ་གྱུབ་པས་སྣོང་བ།

*lo nume la nangway wanggi shaktsam mayinpar yul ranggi tunmong
mayinpay duluk su druppe tongwa*



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Answer Key, Class Four

1) What is the one "flavor" of "emptiness" that allows for creating a Buddha paradise, where you live as an enlightened being made of light? (Tibetan track name in Tibetan.)

This "flavor" is emptiness #6: the fact that objects are void of existing from their own side through their own identity, rather than existing simply through names [words] and terms [thoughts]. According to the Consequence group of the Middle-Way School, this—and only this—is emptiness, and there are no separate degrees of emptiness (although emptiness can be divided according to the object that has it: the person or "things," meaning the person's parts). This interpretation is the ultimate one accepted by Lord Buddha; the realized being Nagarjuna; Je Tsongkapa; Khen Rinpoche; in all presentations of tantra; and moreover by anyone who has seen emptiness directly.

མིང་བདམས་བཞག་ཅམ་མ་ཡིན་པར། ཡུལ་རང་གི་བསྐྱོད་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ངོས་ནས་
གྲུབ་པས་སྣོད་བ།

ming de shaktsam ma-yinpar, yul ranggi duluk kyi ngune druppe tongwa

2) What is the main difference between emptiness flavor #5 and flavor #6? (Tibetan track describe in Tibetan.)

Both schools describe the existence of a pen, for example, as a combination of something appearing to us (a cylinder) and us thinking of it in a certain way (as a pen). The big difference is that, only according to flavor #6 (the Consequence group version), the *cylinder itself* is just as much a product of this process, and on down infinitely: there is no object all the way on down that comes from its own side. This does not though in any way deny the existence of these objects.



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Answer Key, Class Five

1) A person gets in a car accident; their head goes through the windshield, and they die. Explain the difference between *how* they died and *why* they died—that is, the difference between the apparent cause and the real cause.

How they died was that their head was softer than the glass, and enough of their brain was damaged that they died. Why they died was that they had done some harm to life in the past.

2) Describe the role of an act of truth (*satyachara*) in the liberation of India, and the distinction between the apparent results and the real results of our actions.

We distinguish between the apparent results of our actions and the real results of our actions: Mahatma Gandhi understood this distinction for example when he led rows of men non-violently into the face of soldiers who would beat them with sticks. The beating came from a previous negative karma of striking someone else, and had nothing to do with their present activities. Their present activities provided a direct cause for the liberation of India.

3) What percentage of what happens to us in the present moment comes from our past thoughts, words, and deeds; and what percentage happens from what we are doing now? Which is to say—what percentage of things have emptiness, and what percentage are self-existent?

100% empty; 100% are coming from our past actions, or none— it can't be something in between!

4) Describe the difference between "roboclaws" and "gardening."

The "roboclaws" state of mind is demanding results of our current actions in the present moment; it is mistaken, and it is perpetuating our pain, because it doesn't work. "Gardening" is the idea that we plant good seeds by maintaining good deeds now, no matter what the apparent short-term cost. This leads us inexorably to a Buddha paradise.

5) What is very simple and obvious indication that the "roboclaws" approach to life is wrong?

It does not give consistent results: if something really caused something else, then it should always cause it. But the "roboclaws" approach does not give consistent results, so it is not causing what we think it does.