



**Acharya Lama Sönam Rabgye**

***“Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive  
in the Light of Mahamudra,”***  
**composed by Jetsün Milarepa**

Presented at Karma Theksum Tashi Chöling in Hamburg, February 2009

This article is humbly dedicated to  
His Holiness the XVIIth Gyalwa Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje,  
His Eminence the IVth Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche, Lodrö Chökyi Nyima,  
to all our exalted spiritual masters, and  
to the preservation & propagation of the Buddhadharma,  
especially of the Karma Kagyü Lineage.

## Introduction

I am very happy to be here and wish to greet and welcome you kindly. Let us sing the prayer to the Lineage Masters of Mahamudra, *The Dorje-‘Chang Thung-ma*, and meditate for a short while before looking at the song of realization that the great master of melodies, Jetsün Milarepa composed, entitled *Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive in the Light of Mahamudra*. Then I will briefly explain why Milarepa wrote about the provisional and definitive meanings of reality according to the Mahamudra tradition so that students understand them and are able to distinguish the relative and absolute truths.

Jetsün Milarepa spent the greater part of his life meditating in utter solitude in various caves. While meditating intensively in the cave that has come to be known as Chubar Dzong, which is situated between Tibet and Nepal, a group of non-humans appeared to him, among them the very powerful *tshe-ring-mched-nga*, the ‘Five Sisters of Long Life.’ Seeing them, Milarepa recounted, “When I meditated in other caves, I made offerings and praised the local deities and spirits, like the Lords of Mountains. I didn’t make a *torma* (‘a ritual cake’) or offer tea, barley, or other nice things to the local deities here because I owned nothing. Perhaps this is why these mighty spirits are coming to me here.”

After he realized this, they didn’t leave but became fiercer and more threatening. Milarepa prayed to the Three Jewels, but it didn’t stop them from approaching. He prayed to the yidam deities and protectors, which didn’t change things either. He fervently repeated mantras, but things didn’t get better. He couldn’t even pacify the demons and terrifying ghosts with his melodious voice. On the contrary, they came nearer to him, grew bigger and bigger, and became very wrathful. One demon shouted: “You yogi. Your voice may be melodious, but I want to eat your flesh.”

Another demon bellowed: “I want to drink your blood. I will squish and kill you. You will see.”

They came nearer and nearer, looked him straight in the eyes, and became more vicious and threatening than imaginable. In response to their rage, clouds darkened the sky, the earth quaked strongly, and the thick walls of Milarepa’s cave rattled and shook – he was afraid.

Realizing that all his attempts to appease the foul spirits were in vain, Milarepa turned his attention inwards, reflected, and thought, “Aren’t all outer and inner appearances of conditionality manifestations of our own mind? Isn’t it so that there are no appearances outside our own mind? Isn’t everything an illusory appearance of our own mind and in truth doesn’t exist?”

He continued contemplating and thought, “Who said this? Lord Buddha said this in many Sutras and Tantras and it is stated in commentaries on his words, too.”

Then Milarepa remembered his exalted Root Lama, Marpa Lotsawa, and recalled that he had given him the same instructions and again and again taught: “All things without exception are the appearance of our own mind. All outer phenomena that we perceive, like forms, sounds, scents, etc., are nothing but manifestations of our own mind. Mind’s essence, *ngo-bo*, is empty of inherent existence and its nature, *rang-bzhin*, is clear light. Not knowing that the true nature of our mind is free of mental constructs, that it is emptiness, and that it is brilliant clear light means being deluded.”

Milarepa also remembered that Marpa Lotsawa had said:

“The fundamental nature of our mind as it is, *gnäs-lugs*, is *phyag-rgya-chen-po*, Mahamudra.”

Having brought the Mahamudra teachings he had received from Marpa Lotsawa to mind, Milarepa recognized and thought, “Clinging to the assumption that the fierce demons and threatening ghosts that are appearing to me are outer appearances is an illusion. They are nothing but a manifestation of my own mind. I am only afraid of them because I am deluded, *‘khrul-pa*.”

After Milarepa had settled his mind on the practice of Mahamudra, he was able to experience perfect fearlessness and could abide in steadfast valour. He looked into the faces of the malevolent beings and told them: “There’s no reason for me to be afraid of your vicious and threatening outbursts. If you want to eat my flesh and drink my blood, I offer my body to you and I hope it tastes good. Everyone born inevitably dies. No matter what, I will die one day, so it makes no difference to me what you do.”

He added: “Actually, it would be an exceptional opportunity for me to accumulate merit by being generous towards you. So, I feel very fortunate and am not at all scared of you.”

This is what Milarepa told the demons and ghosts while abiding in direct realization of Mahamudra. It was due to encountering and facing these vicious beings so wisely and courageously that he achieved utmost fearlessness. As a result, he sang the following song:

“E-ma!

While all phenomena of the three realms of conditioned existence appear -

At the same time, they don’t truly exist. How wonderful!”

Jetsün Milarepa sang many vajra songs to the demons and ghosts, who were so deeply moved by his words that they experienced an inner transformation. They developed profound respect and devotion for Milarepa and said to him: “You yogi. You are truly wise and free. From now on we will never harm a living being again. We will protect them as best as we possibly can.”

They made this promise to him and became his disciples. He had many human and non-human disciples. The Five Sisters of Long Life, too, were so touched by the Jetsün that they had immense faith and deep devotion for him. Tseringma, their chief due to possessing stronger supernatural powers than the other four, requested him to accept her and her escorts as his disciples in return for their assistance, which he did. Having diligently practiced the instructions that he gave them, they became Dharma protectors, specifically of the Karma Kagyü tradition. There are many stories about how the Tseringmas, until the present day, again and again appear to many practitioners of the Kagyü Lineage and help and advise them.

And so, after having attained perfect fearlessness and unfaltering experiences and realizations, Jetsün Milarepa composed *Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive in the Light of Mahamudra*. I received the oral reading transmission and instructions of this profound song of realization from Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche while in Nepal and am very happy to pass them on to you.



**The Title,**  
***Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive in the Light of Mahamudra***

Generally, all appearances can be seen from a relative point of view or from an ultimate point of view. In the context of Mahamudra, all things are taught to have a relative meaning, *kun-rdzob*, and an ultimate meaning, *dön-dam*.

On specific occasions, Buddha Shakyamuni taught that things don't really exist, at other places and times he said that they do. Lord Buddha presented various teachings in connection with each of the two truths, *bden-gnyis* in Tibetan. Sometimes he spoke about emptiness, the ultimate truth, so that disciples would not cling to existents as permanent and real, thus helping them become free of anxiety. At other times he spoke about existents, the relative truth, so that disciples would not assume that things that exist don't, thus preventing them from falling into a state of denial. And that is why the Buddha taught the provisional and definitive meanings of reality.

Most people believe that things truly exist and are permanent and therefore they are strongly attached and cling to things. To help them relinquish this fault, the Buddha taught that all things are empty of inherent existence, i.e., are empty of an own nature. The Buddha never said that objects perceived with one's sensory faculties do not exist, rather he said that they exist as mere appearances and that thinking they exist inherently is being deluded about their true nature. He taught that one must overcome this error. For example, all phenomena are like appearances in dreams and like magical illusions. And so, in truth, phenomena don't really exist but are like dream-appearances or magical illusions.

## **The Homage**

*“Right here in this world Jambudvipa, the Victor’s realm,  
There is One renowned as being a Second Buddha.  
On the victory banner of teachings that do not set  
He is like the crowning jewel at the very top.  
Respected by all and worthy of offerings,  
The melodious sound of this rippling flag of fame  
Reverberates in every direction around.  
Is this the lord and accomplished master Maitripa?*

*“There is One who served at his lotus feet with respect  
And drank in full draughts the quintessential elixir,  
The Mahamudra, the crowning point of view.  
This put him in touch with reality plain and simple.  
He perfectly brought all excellent qualities forth  
And was an emanation of the Tathagatas in human form.  
That greatest of beings, Lord Marpa, taught like this:”*

## **The Teachings**

Having offered homage to his spiritual masters in the foregoing verses, the teachings that Jetsün Milarepa presented in this exceptional song of realization are divided into four verses that make four sections. In the first verse, he described the relative and ultimate truths of outer apprehended objects. In the second verse, Milarepa explained the relative and ultimate truths of an apprehending subject, i.e., the inner consciousnesses. In the third verse, he described the two truths of the skandha of form, which precedes and leads to the other four. In the fourth verse, he explained the two truths regarding male and female demons and terrifying ghosts.

### **1) Apprehended objects**

*“However appearances might appear outside,  
Not realized are delusory reflections.  
Clinging to objects, that is what ties you down.  
For those who know, they're illusory appearance,  
For them what appear to be objects are mind’s resource.  
In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as appearance,  
And, being unborn, dharmakaya is utterly pure.  
He taught of its sacredness in the unborn dharmakaya.”*

#### **- Summarized instructions**

There are three stages that can occur while apprehending a sensory object: the stage of not recognizing and not knowing the true nature of an object that one perceived with one’s respective sensory organ, the stage of knowing the true nature of objects that one perceived, and the stage of realizing its ultimate nature.

Not knowing how objects are, one thinks that they truly exist, interprets them, and makes decisions based upon one's judgments. One discriminates any sensory object, i.e., sight, sound, taste, scent, and tactile object that one perceived with one's respective sensory faculty and judges it as pleasant, or unpleasant, or it leaves one indifferent. The third stage is realizing that any perceived object has no essence, is like a dream-appearance, and is not permanent and real. By realizing that any object one apperceived or apperceives is impermanent and not real, in the end one sees how objects really are and realizes that nothing truly exists.

During the second stage, when one is aware of a sensory object that one perceived with one of one's sensory faculties, one's discursive mind consciousness interprets and judges it as beautiful, ugly, or neutral. As a result, one develops desire and attachment for things that one considers pleasant and thus clings to them. Or one develops aversion and a dislike for things that one considers unpleasant and thus rejects them. Or one feels indifferent about things that one thinks are neutral. So, our lives are very busy.

Our ear consciousness perceives sounds that we then think are good, bad, or neutral. Our nose consciousness smells scents that we then think are good, bad, or neutral. If we smelled something that we think is pleasant, we feel happy and are attached to it. If we smelled something that we consider awful, we feel unhappy and reject it, and so on. We spend lots of time, make great efforts, take on a 10-hour-a-day job in order to earn the money we need so that we can reward ourselves for having worked all day. We buy expensive perfume or extravagant clothes, use the perfume and wear the clothes, want perfume or clothes that we think are better two or three days later, and buy those things. It's difficult to be content, so we cannot keep limits - that's the problem. Therefore Milarepa said about apprehended objects: "Not realized are delusory reflections. Clinging to objects, that is what ties you down."

While lacking realization of the true nature of phenomena, one thinks that things are real, clings to them, and does what one can to get them. For those who aspire to know how things really are, Milarepa taught that they're illusory and are mind's resource. Furthermore, he tells us that when a practitioner realizes the ultimate truth of all phenomena that can be apperceived, then "In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as appearance, and, being unborn, dharmakaya is utterly pure. He taught of its sacredness in the unborn dharmakaya."

### **- Detailed instructions**

There can be three phases one goes through while dreaming: the phase in which one doesn't know that one is dreaming, the phase in which one knows that the visions in one's dreams are dream-appearances, and the phase in which one realizes the true nature of one's dreams while dreaming.

When one doesn't know that one is dreaming about being beaten up by someone who is very big and strong, for instance, one will be extremely frightened and will think, "He is beating me up and it hurts so much." As long as one doesn't know that one is dreaming while dreaming, one will be confused and think that the images appearing to one are real and will react accordingly. But, one realizes that the visions one had in one's dream were dream-appearances when one wakes up. By knowing that the images one experienced in one's dream were mere appearances that do not really affect one, one becomes free of the chains that cause one to cling to them as real and then isn't scared anymore, which happens in the second phase. At that time one realizes that dreams are dreams while dreaming or after having woken

up. The ultimate phase is realizing, while one is actually dreaming, that both dream-appearances as well as one's mind that apprehends the images are devoid of true existence.

The great saint Shantideva wrote: "All things resemble dream-appearances, are impermanent, and are like a banana tree."

This example is used because the trunk of a banana tree only consists of layer after layer that can be peeled off until one reaches its hollow core. It illustrates quite well what the Buddha meant when he said that it is necessary to realize and distinguish the relative and ultimate truths.

As to the relative truth, the Buddha said that it's a mistake not to appreciate and acknowledge that apprehended appearances and apprehending beings are present, i.e., it's a big mistake and very dangerous to deny and refute their existence, in which case one will have fallen into having the extreme view of nihilism. Lord Buddha stressed that there is karma and the results of all actions on the relative level of existence, i.e., one will experience the results of one's beneficial and virtuous actions and be happy and prosperous, and one will experience the results of one's non-virtuous actions and suffer. One should not mix the two truths.

The ultimate truth is that everything that appears has no true existence. When one understands the ultimate truth and knows that there is no appearance that has substantial existence, then one will no longer succumb to erroneous notions and will not believe that phenomena truly exist. One will become free of the chains that keep one bound to one's craving for and attachment to things. Ultimately, all things that appear and that can be known cannot be grasped and are like the hollow trunk of a banana tree. Taking dreams to exemplify the ultimate nature of things, images appear in dreams, but they have no true existence.

Jetsün Milarepa tells us in the last two lines of the above verse that ultimately all phenomena are the unborn *dharmakaya*, 'the truth body.' As the uncreated dharmakaya is the ultimate state of all things, there isn't anything that is different than other things. The dharmakaya is the true nature of all phenomena and is equality, *mnyam-pa-nyid*.

It's very important to precisely and concisely differentiate the two truths that pertain to the relative level of reality and the ultimate level of reality or the provisional meaning, *drang-dön*, and the definitive meaning, *nges-dön*, of all that is and not to mix them up or confuse them.

It's quite evident that the two truths pertain to two levels of being when considering the example of dreams. One experiences a great number of things while dreaming and many images terrify and make one suffer. When one wakes up from a dream, one remembers the visions and experiences one had, knows that they were only dream-appearances, and realizes that in truth they were not real, thereby breaking the chains that kept one bound while one wasn't aware that one was only dreaming. It's the same while awake. One has an immense number of experiences in daily life, too, and many times one has great difficulties dealing with them, e.g., one fears specific things, or one is overwhelmed by one's emotions, or one has a headache, or one is angry, or one is greedy, etc. These feelings make it hard to deal with situations fairly. By clearly knowing and realizing how all appearances really are, one won't be tied down due to clinging to them as real. Then one won't be all too hard on oneself and others but, instead, one can deal with situations properly, relaxed and with ease.

As long as one hasn't realized how one's mind really is, *gnäs-lug* - that one's mind is Mahamudra, *phyag-rgya-chen-po* -, one will be confused, apperceive a great variety of

appearances delusively, and will focus one's attention on them in that manner. The various philosophical schools interpret appearances differently. For example, the Chittamatra (the 'Mind-Only School') teaches that all objects that can be apperceived arise and appear due to one's karmic imprints, *bag-chags*; karmic imprints are habitual patterns stored in one's mind that arise to one's mind as appearances.

Buddha Shakyamuni turned the Wheel of Dharma three times. When he turned the Dharmachakra a second time, he taught that all outer objects that can be apprehended arise due to *rten-'brel*, 'interdependent origination.' He presented examples and said that all appearances are like dream-appearances or like reflections in a mirror. *rTen-'brel* is the primary causal condition that makes it possible to apperceive appearances; when it isn't established, apperception doesn't take place. The essence of an object is lack of own existence, emptiness. Due to emptiness, an object can appear when causes and conditions come together. Knowing this is having the superior view.

In the light of Mahamudra, all objects that can be apprehended are said to be the clear and innate radiance of one's own mind. The true nature of one's mind is clear light, *'öd-gsäl*, i.e., one's mind has the quality of continuously displaying its innate clarity. And so, appearances are the natural, luminous, and playful manifestation of one's own mind.

It's important to understand the different views on how things are. So that one's meditation goes well, it's especially important to realize that all apperceived appearances have no true existence. Ultimately, all phenomena without exception are equality, *mnyam-pa-nyid*. If one investigates the two truths well, then one will experience deeply within oneself the equality of all things. Just hearing the teachings that Lord Buddha and Jetsün Milarepa presented on the relative and ultimate truths will not suffice as long as one doesn't experience them. Let's take the example of a telephone to understand the purpose of being able to distinguish the two truths.

In the past, nobody imagined that it would ever be possible to communicate with people living far apart in Jambuling, our world. Nowadays, we experience what Lord Buddha and Milarepa taught and see that concepts like "near" and "distant" that our ancestors were used to aren't valid anymore when we phone with friends living in other parts of the world. We can even see each other face-to-face if we have special cameras on our phones. The concepts "fast" and "slow" also pertain to the relative level of existence. For example, it would have been very hard for me to come to Germany from Nepal in the past, but now it's even possible to fly around the world in a week or two. In the same way, hearing and intellectually understanding the instructions is not experiencing the ultimate truth that phenomena are emptiness-appearance inseparable or emptiness-bliss inseparable. When one realizes the sacred teachings, then one actually experiences the equality of samsara and nirvana inseparable.

*Question:* "When I wake up and realize that I had a dream, I think that I am the person who recognizes that I dreamed. Who and what is it that realizes the ultimate truth?"

*Lama Sönam:* The mind, but it just doesn't happen. By meditating, one will gradually attain special insight, which isn't attained intellectually. One wins realization when one has special insight and then there is no separation between what is realized and the person who realizes, because the mind realizes itself. So, we have to train a little bit by meditating. For example, you hear about a place you have never visited and have no idea how to get there when you want to go. You inquire, receive information, and know when to turn right, when to turn left, and so forth, and you know that you are there when you have arrived. Like that.



## 2) The apprehending subject

*“The workings of mind consciousness inside,  
Not realized are ignorance itself.  
This is the root of all karma and all afflictions.  
If realized is self-awareness wisdom.  
Here is where white qualities spring full-blown.  
In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as wisdom.  
Let phenomena go as far as they go and no more,  
This is as far as they go and no more, he said.”*

*Lama Sönam:* Who said this?

*Translator:* “Marpa.”

*Lama Sönam:* Yes, Marpa Lotsawa said this.

### - Summarized instructions

Jetsün Milarepa explained the provisional and definitive meaning of one’s consciousnesses in the second verse of the teachings of the song, entitled *Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive in the Light of Mahamudra*.

*Translator:* “I want to ask about the term ‘go’ in the last two lines of the English translation. The Tibetan term is *gsäd* and is often translated as ‘exhausted,’ which means ‘is no longer there.’”

*Lama Sönam:* No longer there, okay. For example, it is possible to make a fire by rubbing two sticks of wood against each other. When the fire burns, then both sticks burn and are eventually consumed. In the same way, when the deluded thoughts of one’s discursive mind consciousness are burned up, then all illusory objects are also burned up and consumed.

The first two lines describe the first phase in which one doesn’t realize the true nature of one’s mind, the true nature of one’s mind being the Buddha nature, which everyone is endowed with. One is ignorant of one’s mind’s true nature as long as one’s discursive mind, *sems*, hasn’t realized one’s Buddha nature, *de-bzhin-snying-po*. One’s true mind has always been perfectly pure and has never been stained by impurities. But, while ignorant of how one’s mind is, defilements obscure it. The defilements are delusions that arise as fleeting, adventitious mental defilements or afflictions, *blo-bur*. They can be removed. The defilements do not pollute the purity of mind’s true nature, but they make it impossible to realize it. This is why the defilements should be removed. When all obscuring, adventitious defilements have been removed, then one will have realized *ye-shes*, ‘pristine, timeless, primordial wisdom,’ which is one’s mind’s abiding nature. By having attained realization, which occurs in the second phase, positive white qualities manifest fully.

Jetsün Milarepa described the third phase, i.e., the definitive meaning of perfect realization, and wrote: “In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as wisdom.”

The Madhyamika philosophy explains that primordial wisdom, *ye-shes*, is beyond the four extremes, *mtha’-bzhi*, of being established from self, from other, from both self and other, or from neither self and other. Decisively, primordial wisdom is free of the extremes of existing and not existing. It is freedom from thought-ridden constructs, *spro-bräl*. Realization of primordial wisdom is often translated as ‘simplicity’ and is auspicious freedom from mental contrivances, *bkra-shis-spro-bräl*. And so, there’s no such thing as primordial wisdom as opposed to lack thereof.

*Student:* “But it is there the moment I designate it.”

*Translator:* “It is stated in *The Prajnaparamitasutra* that the five objects that can be apperceived and the apprehending subject are empty of own existence.”

*Lama Sönam:* We are very attached to our mind, so it’s very difficult to let it free. Therefore, how to let it free? Recalling the three phases, everything is perceived delusively as long as one hasn’t realized the true nature of one’s mind. When the obscuring, adventitious defilements have been removed, then one’s mind manifests as primordial wisdom. Ultimately, all phenomena, including one’s mind, are not bound by connotations. Designating primordial wisdom is an affirmation that one clings to. Milarepa’s instructions make it very easy to understand, otherwise it isn’t easy. For instance, it was once very hard for me to open the safety-lid of a bottle that contained cleaning fluid that I wanted to use to scrub away the stains of the water bowls at Kamalashila Institute. I didn’t know how, tried for half-an-hour, and even hit at the bottle. Someone explained that I only had to push the lid down a little bit and turn it. I did this and it opened. It was very easy. Like that. It’s hard if we don’t know and easy if we do.

## **- Detailed instructions**

Summarizing the instructions above, Milarepa explained the three phases of an apprehending subject. The first phase is being ignorant of the way one’s sixth discursive mind consciousness, *yid-kyi-rnam-shes*, is and appears. Based upon this ignorance, *ma-rig-pa*, one accumulates karma, which is held in one’s seventh afflicted consciousness, *nyön-mongs-rnam-shes*, and is stored in one’s eighth all-ground consciousness, *kun-gzhi-rnam-shes*. When one has realized that all phenomena never existed and don’t really exist, then ignorance will have been transformed into primordial wisdom, which manifests as positive qualities. In the third phase, primordial wisdom, *ye-shes*, which always has been and already is free of mental elaborations, *spro-bräl*, proves to be non-existent.

One’s discursive mind, *sems*, is in truth inseparable with a buddha. As stated: “All living beings are buddhas, but their minds are obscured by adventitious defilements. When the adventitious defilements that cause delusions have been dispelled, they are buddhas.”

This means to say that as long as one hasn’t realized that one’s mind’s true nature is buddha, one is bewildered and deluded. One will directly realize that one’s nature is buddha when the adventitious defilements that obscure it have been removed. One sees that Buddha nature is not far away and is not out of reach. It’s very close, in fact, it’s too close to see. But, one looks for it outside oneself and falters.

The Mahamudra instructions tell us that the true nature of one’s mind, the Buddha nature, is always present within every living being without exception and that it is ever immaculate and pure. One doesn’t recognize it - and that’s the problem. Due to not recognizing it, one tries to find it and pursues other ways. While doing so, one’s situation becomes more and more complicating and one becomes more and more confused. As a result, one creates more obscurations by thinking, “It’s like this and isn’t like that. No, it isn’t like this and is like that,” and so forth. Milarepa said that it is very close, for example, as closely conjoined as fire and heat. The characteristic of fire is always heat, right? The true nature of one’s mind is inseparable with one’s mind. It is within - it is one’s mind. If one knows this, then one isn’t ignorant anymore and is clear. When one is clear, then one doesn’t create negative actions. If one doesn’t create negative actions, then there’s no karma. When there’s no karma, then there are no negative results. So, that is what primordial wisdom is like.

Acharya Nagarjuna described the difference between someone who has realized primordial wisdom and someone who hasn't and wrote: "When one has afflictions, one is a sentient being. When one is free of afflictions, one is a buddha."

The main afflictions are: dull-wittedness, hatred, miserliness, greed, jealousy, pride, and wrong views. They are like a net that keep one entangled. When one has fully freed oneself of one's entanglement in the net of one's delusions and afflictions, one will be a buddha.

Since beginningless time, the true nature of one's mind has always been pure and was never obscured or stained by one's afflictions. It can be compared to pure gold or a flawless diamond. Taking the example of gold, it was already pure before it was extracted from a goldmine, but its radiance will remain concealed as long as it is encrusted in ore or when it is tarnished a bit while being scrubbed and polished. The nature of one's mind can be compared to pure gold. The mind of ordinary beings is darkened by ignorance and obscured by the afflictions, which can all be purified and dispelled. But where do the afflictions come from? Not from outside oneself. They come from one's own mind. So it's necessary to purify one's mind and remove the afflictions that cover and conceal its true nature. How does one do this?

Lord Buddha presented a great variety of methods to remove one's ignorance and afflictions. For example, there are various methods to cleanse tarnished gold. If the stains are very dark, one scrubs the gold with a rough cotton cloth. When the darkest layer of tarnish has been removed, one polishes it with a soft cotton cloth and rubs and rubs the gold until it glows. In the same way, there are various methods to purify the afflictions that obscure one's mind and that impede realization of self-awareness wisdom, *rang-rig-ye-shes*.

In the Kagyü tradition, one follows the gradual path of Lhaje Gampopa to purify one's coarse and subtle obscurations. One begins purifying one's mind of very coarse obscurations by engaging in the four preliminary practices, which are contemplating one's precious human existence, impermanence and death, karma, and samsara. Having reflected the instructions on the four contemplations well, one engages in the four special practices. First one makes prostrations while reciting *The Refuge Prayer* so that one becomes a fitting vessel to practice the path. Then one meditates Dorje Sempa to purify the negative karma that one has accumulated. Having completed this practice, one makes mandala offerings to accumulate merit and wisdom. To receive one's Lama's oral instructions and his blessings, one engages in the fourth special practice of Guru Yoga. A Sutrayana practitioner then engages in calm abiding and special insight meditation practices. A Vajrayana disciple practices the creation and completion stages of meditation, *bskyed-rim* and *rdzogs-rim*.

Jetsün Milarepa went through unbelievable hardships to purify his karma and to mature spiritually. Marpa Lotsawa, his *rtsa-ba'i-bla-ma*, had him build one tower after another and when they were completed, told him to tear them down again. Marpa Lotsawa, who didn't give the profoundest teachings to every student, was very happy that Milarepa had endured the hardships and then gave him all oral transmissions and instructions that he himself had received from his Root Lama. Milarepa went into retreat and practiced meditation intensively, with great determination, and without taking a break. Once he meditated with a butter-lamp placed on his head and stayed in the same meditation posture for eleven whole months. But this was in olden times, during Milarepa's times, and he was very, very special. Why did he do this? Because in the earlier part of his life he had done many very negative things that his mother asked him to do. He learned black magic and killed many people. Then he thought, "Whenever I think about my karma, I will only go to lower realms of existence."

He turned his mind after he regretted having committed so many bad deeds. He resembled someone who had unknowingly swallowed poison and did all he could to rid himself of it. In the same way, having full trust that the law of karma is really true, he was very determined to purify his karma. He practiced the instructions that Marpa Lotsawa had given him with great diligence and determination, realized the true nature of his mind, and experienced that it isn't far away, that it's just a matter of enabling it to emerge.

This was a brief account of the methods that one can practice, but methods alone do not suffice to realize self-awareness wisdom. One also needs discriminating awareness, *shes-rab*. It's necessary to practice the methods, *thabs*, in conjunction with developing *shes-rab*. If one practices the methods while developing discriminating awareness, then one's mind's true nature will directly manifest as self-awareness wisdom. All paths that the Buddha taught are contained in the teachings on method and discriminating awareness. By practicing both aspects of the path conjoined with joyful endeavour, one will attain self-awareness wisdom, *rang-rig-ye-shes*. That's how to understand what the Buddha taught.

The term *rang-rig-ye-shes* is merely a connotation. It is the same as the true nature of the mind, *sems-kyi-gnäs-lug*, that always and already abides within every living being. No ordinary living being is or ever can be separated from the true nature of their mind. Yet, one needs one's Lama's instructions and blessings for it to directly manifest and one can then and only then realize it. No one can attain realization for anyone else, but it will not be possible to realize one's true nature without an authentic and qualified Lama's instructions and blessings. One's Lama is the source of realization that occurs in a manner in which the realizing subject realizes his or her own true mind. This is why it is called self-awareness wisdom in that it then enables all one's virtuous qualities to manifest openly and freely.

It is paramount for students of Mahamudra to have wise understanding of the teachings on *lhag-mthong* ('special insight'), because the essence of *zhi-gnäs* ('calm abiding') is linked to the view of special insight. Before one's mind is able to rest in calm abiding meditation one-pointedly, one needs to really know the view of Mahamudra. If one has realized the view, which means knowing well how phenomena are and how they appear, then one can easily rest in the calm of one's mind. Of course, disturbing thoughts will arise, but one won't be distracted as easily if one knows the view. That is why great Mahamudra masters explained and continue teaching special insight before they instruct their students in the practice of calm abiding meditation. Having realized *rang-rig-yes-shes*, Milarepa sang:

"E-ma!

All phenomena of the three realms of conditioned existence appear -  
At the same time, they don't truly exist. How wonderful!"

As mentioned, it's very important to understand the view of Mahamudra. Traditionally, there are two approaches to attain realization. One tradition instructs disciples to develop the view based on meditation practice, and the other tradition instructs to meditate based on one's understanding of the view. The Mahamudra tradition teaches that it's important to gain certainty of the view and then to practice one-pointed calm abiding meditation.

Many thoughts arise while one is meditating and it's important to know that they arise from and are not other than one's own mind. The great Mahamudra master Gyalwa Lorigpa said: "What does one do with the consciousnesses? Do not cling to the objects that appear to the five sensory consciousnesses with the discursive mind consciousness. If one doesn't cling to them, then they are realized as a self-display and are self-liberated."

He added: “All meditators. Realize only this: the inseparability of apprehended objects and the apprehending mind consciousness.”

He clearly spoke of the fact that subject and objects are inseparable.

Generally, six consciousnesses are distinguished, the five sensory consciousnesses and the discursive mind consciousness. The eye consciousness naturally and directly sees visual forms with the eye sensory faculty; the ear consciousness naturally and directly hears sounds with the ear sensory faculty; the nose consciousness directly smells scents with the nose sensory faculty; the tongue consciousness directly perceives tastes with the tongue sensory faculty; and the body consciousness directly feels objects that are touched with the body sensory faculty. Directly means without discursive interpretations. The sixth discursive mind consciousness, *yid-kyi-rnam-shes*, causes the problems by becoming involved with a sensory perception. It is referred to as the gate to the sensory consciousnesses because it interprets and clings to things due to creating thoughts about a perceived sensory object, such as, “Oh, that form is so nice. I want it. The other form is so ugly. I don’t want it.”

Attachment and aversion are the starting-point of emotions and make lots of problems. The discursive mind consciousness continuously grasps and clings to things it interprets and judges, which is what having a big ego means. Disturbing emotional afflictions are developed due to ego and they impede clear insight.

Actually, we are all very good and nice people. We all have a good and warm heart. It doesn’t matter whether people say we are good or not, our mind’s essence is really good. One can feel that one loves one’s friends, or one’s child, or one’s parents. The mind consciousness is so strong. One clings to one’s ego so strongly and then one creates emotions, *nyön-mongs-pa*. In that moment, one forfeits one’s innate goodness and acts differently than one really is. Do you know how many disturbing emotions we have?

*Student:* “Endless.”

*Lama Sönam:* One can say that we are very emotional. Hatred together with anger is one disturbing emotion. Attachment together with grasping and greed is one emotion. Sometimes one doubts and has fear; one isn’t clear in one’s mind, but always doubts, which is one emotion.

*Translator:* “Do fear and doubt go together?”

*Lama Sönam:* I think so, or we can count them separately. We have many, right?

*Student:* “Jealousy.”

*Lama Sönam:* Yes, jealousy, and pride, and sadness. Sadness is also one disturbing emotion.

*Translator:* “Avarice and miserliness.”

*Lama Sönam:* Aggression and so forth. Disturbing thoughts sometimes really disrupt one from seeing the truth, right? Then it’s not easy. One is very unhappy when one is submerged in feelings of what one wants and what one doesn’t want. One mixes those feelings with anger, fear, doubt, etc. We all have enough experiences with this. For instance, if I have no idea about Mahamudra and emotions arise in my mind, I react and look very aggressive. Who makes this? One’s sixth discursive mind consciousness.

When speaking of eight consciousnesses, there is the seventh consciousness, *nyön-mongs-rnam-shes*, the ‘afflicted consciousness.’ It makes emotional reactions come out. For example, when showing one’s anger and aggression, one’s face becomes red, one’s body trembles, and one does bad things. It happens like this. One becomes used to acting like this and therefore has habitual patterns, *bag-chags*. These habitual patterns subside into one’s eighth ground consciousness and are kept there like pictures in an album. That’s why one has no control over karmic consequences. Anything positive or negative one does subsides and is stored as a habitual imprint in one’s ground consciousness. When one does something bad, it’s due to the

activation of the immediate consciousness. This aspect of one's seventh afflicted consciousness is connected to one's ground consciousness. The instantaneous aspect of one's seventh consciousness, which is connected to one's sixth mind consciousness, gives rise to one's impulsive reactions and behaviour. Milarepa therefore sang: "The workings of the mind consciousness inside, not realized are ignorance itself. This is the root of all karma and all afflictions."

Then Milarepa taught: "If realized is self-awareness wisdom."

We can understand this line by recalling Gyalwa Lorigpa's statement above: "What does one do with the consciousnesses? Do not cling to the objects that appear to the five sensory consciousnesses with the discursive mind consciousness. If one doesn't cling to them, then they are realized as a self-display and are self-liberated."

When disturbing emotions or thoughts arise, one looks at them directly while practicing calm abiding meditation. Trying to get rid of them only makes one perpetuate more thoughts. It's important to recognize that a thought or emotion has arisen and to know that it is created by oneself and not by any one else. One looks directly at a thought the moment it arises, knows that one created it, and lets it free. One is confident that thoughts and emotions change because one knows that they are impermanent. If one looks at a thought or emotion the moment it arises and lets it free, then it has become a support for one's meditation. This is the quintessence of calm abiding meditation in the Mahamudra tradition. For example, different kinds of waves arise and subside into the ocean again. The ocean is never against the waves and the waves never stand in opposition to the ocean. If raindrops and snowflakes fall on the ocean, they do not harm each other. In the same way, during calm abiding meditation, one looks at any thought or emotion that arises directly and watches it go. But, one has to look inside oneself to see that everything arises from one's mind. If one can look at one's mind in this way, then every thought and emotion will be a support for one's practice. One's discursive mind slowly settles down when one becomes more and more proficient in practice and one can rest in calm and ease. This is how one deals with one's thoughts and emotions and can accomplish the Mahamudra view, just as Milarepa taught: "If realized is self-awareness wisdom. Here is where white qualities spring full-blown."

What does full-blown mean?

*Translator:* "It means fully exposed."

*Lama Sönam:* That is what Milarepa said.

Sometimes it is difficult and not easy. Often one ignores disturbing emotions in one's conduct. So, one can behave like a small child. If a mother shouts or spansks her small child for having misbehaved, it cries a little bit but doesn't cling to the thought that it was spanked. The Mahamudra teachings stress Milarepa's five ways to meditate, the first one being: "Rest in the nature of your mind like a child."

*Translator:* "What kind of behaviour is ignoring things?"

*Lama Sönam:* One can let free and not grasp. One can try to be like a child that is sad after its mother was angry, forgets, and is again very friendly and open a half-an-hour later. That's what one needs in meditation: opening the mind, being more expansive, and dealing with emotions easily. Meditation doesn't mean closing one's eyes, one's ears, etc. One looks at emotions when they arise. Sometimes it's difficult, but one can try.

Ultimately, there is no wisdom. In Milarepa's words in the verse we are looking at: "In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as wisdom. Let phenomena go as far as they go and no more, this is as far as they go and no more, he said."

Taking the example of two sticks made of wood rubbed together to light a fire, in the end both sticks are burned up. They stand for the two truths, the relative and absolute truths that in the end are burned up. At this point, all disturbing imputations and thoughts like “This is good and that is bad,” will have been consumed, even the term “primordial wisdom.” This means to say that all distinctions arising from thoughts and emotions will have been dispelled.

Let us rest our mind for a short while now and think about this topic. You are welcome to ask questions afterwards.

*Question:* “Do we take the all-ground consciousness that is like the hard disc of a computer with us after the afflicted consciousness has been eliminated and after death? Would the discursive mind consciousness emerge purely then?”

*Lama Sönam:* I think so. Actually, there are two traditions. One tradition only speaks about six kinds of consciousness, another tradition speaks about eight. I think it is the way I explained.

*Translator:* “So, in a way, the seventh and eighth are explained as part of the discursive mind consciousness when only six kinds are taught?”

*Lama Sönam:* Yes.

*Next question:* “I fear that the sixth mind consciousness is the evildoer, because it continuously grasps, clings, and creates karma due to not knowing how things are and due to becoming involved with the sensory consciousnesses, thus activating the seventh by creating afflictions. So I think one has to work on the discursive mind consciousness.”

*Lama Sönam:* Yes, clinging activates the seventh consciousness.

*Same student:* “What should I practice so that I don’t grasp and cling with my sixth consciousness? Or do I work on the seventh by meditating love and compassion when I am angry?”

*Lama Sönam:* Yes, you can do that. It’s very good. Developing love and compassion is a remedy against hatred and anger. So, try to apply them.

*Translator:* “It depends. When an emotion is pretty strong and we find that we can’t just look at it so that it dissolves, maybe it’s better to use an antidote?”

*Lama Sönam:* Yes, an antidote. Love and compassion are antidotes against hatred and anger.

*Translator:* “My understanding is that the purpose of this kind of meditation is to develop and maintain clear mindfulness and awareness and to recognize whatever arises as what it is and then to let it be. My question is whether it is always possible or are feelings so strong that one cannot let them go? Isn’t it better to apply antidotes than to drift along? It depends upon one’s abilities to deal with situations.”

*Same student:* “The second possibility is to imagine being a child. At first a child feels the situation and then quiets down. Is it better to allow oneself to just feel the situation and then to let it free?”

*Translator:* “Lama taught that being like a child has to do with one’s conduct.”

*Lama Sönam:* Yes, just let it free. You can do that.

*Same student:* “Because that is my experience. I can let a feeling go much more easily if I feel it.”

*Lama Sönam:* Let it go easily, without trying.

*Translator:* “You mean that one should feel and then express an emotion?”

*Same student:* “Yes.”

*Lama Sönam:* Yes, it is a good way to let it out.

*Translator:* “I think what she means is bringing out one’s anger, for instance.”

*Lama Sönam:* You mean that you should be angry with people?

*Translator:* “Yes.”

*Lama Sönam:* No, I don't mean that. Look directly at your anger and know that your anger is in your mind. Another way to look at it is that a small child messes things up, but the mother never complains. Knowing that it is natural for a child to be messy, she lets her child be free and never gets angry. She plays with the child and lets it throw its toys around. Like that. When an emotion arises, one looks at it, thinks, "Okay," and from the meditative point of view knows that it's nothing else but one's own mind. One recognizes an emotion by looking inside, lets it free, and relaxes and rests in one's mind. Don't struggle with an emotion inside, but try to let it free.

*Same student:* "I have found that being angry with people verbally when they don't do nice things helps fast."

*Lama Sönam:* You can clarify a situation, but try to do it positively. You know that showing your anger only brings on more problems. Find out why someone is making you angry. Talk with that person to find a solution. You are free of that problem when you have found a solution. Sometimes you are free when you accept a situation and are deluded when you don't. Is that okay?

*Same student:* "Yes, thank you."

### 3) The skandha of form

*"This skandha of form compulsively taken on,  
Not realized is four elements making a body.  
Sickness and suffering, this is what comes of that.  
If realized, it's a deity's union body.  
In the end, in fact, there is no such thing as a body.  
It's as rarefied as a cloud-free sky is what he taught,  
Is pure as a cloud-free sky is what he taught."*

As in the above verses, Milarepa described three phases in this verse. In the first three lines, he described what it means to be ignorant of the true nature of the skandha of form. There are five *skandhas*, 'aggregates of being,' which are the five principal mental and physical constituents of being. They are: form, which leads to the skandhas of sensations, recognition, mental events, and consciousnesses. The skandha of form is one's body that consists of the four elements. As long as one hasn't realized the definitive truth of one's body, it will inevitably be subject to sicknesses and one will suffer. In the fourth and fifth lines, Milarepa described how to see one's body during the second phase, which is when one has realized how it really is. In the last three lines, Milarepa described the third phase, which is the ultimate state and means that ultimately one's body doesn't truly exist but arises in dependence upon causes and conditions. Let me explain this in detail.

One will notice that the skandha of form is one's body that consists of the four elements (earth, water, fire, and wind, i.e., air). One knows that one's body inevitably causes one to experience sicknesses and pain. One has physical and mental happiness and suffering and only wants to experience both physical and mental well-being and happiness, but there are many impediments. What are the *bar-chäd*, 'impediments'? The main impediment to feeling physical well-being is any kind of sickness, *näd-pa*. The main impediments to experiencing mental happiness are the afflictions, *nyön-mongs*.

How can one attain physical well-being? In order to answer this question adequately, one needs to ask, what is the basis for sicknesses and suffering, *sdug-bsngäl*? The bases for sicknesses and suffering are the skandhas that are mixed with *gsag-tshäd*, 'accumulated



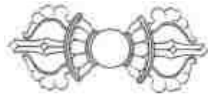
contaminations' (also translated as 'outflows'). The medical treatises list 425 different kinds of sicknesses.

The source of all sicknesses and diseases is a disorder of one of the three types of energy-forces (also referred to as "humours"). The three types of humour that are connected with the skandha of form are *rlung* ('wind' in the body that is responsible for growth, movement, and the respiratory system), *mkhris-pa* ('bile' that is associated with heat in one's body), and *bād-kān* ('phlegm' that is associated with one's bodily fluids). One is healthy as long as the three humours are pure, and one is sick when they are impure. One's body consists of three main channels through which the energy-forces flow. The central channel stretches through one's body and ends beneath the tip of one's skull. One side channel reaches into one's heart, and a second side channel reaches into one's secret center. Impure phlegm gives rise to sicknesses in one's central channel. Impure bile gives rise to sicknesses in one's first side channel. Impure wind gives rise to sicknesses in one's second side channel. All 425 kinds of sicknesses are caused by the three impure humours, i.e., energy-forces. What contaminates the humours and makes them impure? The three main mental afflictions, which are ignorance, desire and aversion. Desire and greed bring on wind sicknesses. Hatred and anger bring on bile sicknesses. Mental dullness, i.e., ignorance, brings on phlegm sicknesses. Therefore the source of every sickness is a wind, bile, or phlegm disorder, and the source of the three disorders are the three main afflictions. So, the main impediments for physical well-being are wind, bile, and phlegm disorders. The main impediments for mental happiness are desire, hatred, and ignorance.

How can one become well again when one is sick? One must look up a doctor and receive his help. How can one's mental impediments for happiness be overcome? One needs an authentic Lama who has all characteristics of a qualified Mahamudra master. One needs to rely on him, receive the oral transmission of the instructions from him, engage in the practices that he imparted, and realize the true nature of one's mind and all things by practicing. When one has directly realized the true nature of one's mind, *sems-kyi-gnäs-lug*, one will have overcome all one's physical sicknesses and mental anguish. Having eliminated them, one will have attained both physical and mental well-being and happiness. As long as one hasn't realized the true nature of one's mind by practicing the Mahamudra instructions that one received from one's qualified Lama, one will experience physical sicknesses and mental suffering. As said, in order to overcome physical sicknesses, one must rely on a doctor's help. In order to eliminate the source of all physical sicknesses and mental suffering, one has to rely on a qualified Lama, practice the instructions that he imparts, and realize the true nature of one's mind, Mahamudra.

Why does one experience suffering and pain? One experiences suffering and pain because one clings to oneself and to one's belief that one actually is one's body. Basically, one discriminates between the self of an apprehending subject and the self of apprehended objects and clings to them as real. One identifies with oneself by pointing at one's body and calling it "me, I," and clings to it as real. This is the error and reason why one cultivates extreme attachment to it, which is the source of suffering. And there is so much suffering, right? Sometimes people suffer because they have no food and are hungry; sometimes they suffer because they have too much food and eat too much. Of course, one has to eat when one is hungry and suffers if one doesn't, but one also suffers if one eats too much and gets stomach problems. One also suffers if one has no clothes, freezes during the winter months, and catches a cold. But one also suffers if one has too many clothes and wears two jackets and two trousers on a hot summer day, in which case one can't even walk normally, and so on.

We cannot do as Jetsün Milarepa did, who realized the true nature of the body, *lüs-kyi-gnäs-lug-rtogs-pa*, and therefore was free of all sicknesses. As beginners on the path, we aren't free and will continue having different kinds of sicknesses because we haven't realized the true nature of our body, the skandha of form. When we have realized that the true nature of our body is beyond all imputations and impositions, *spro-bräl*, we will have realized that it's like a dream-appearance or magical illusion, free of substantiality. Then our body will not become sick any more and we will have overcome physical suffering and pain – like Milarepa.



Jetsün Milarepa had a younger sister whose name was Petama. There was also a girl in the early part of his life who his parents had wished he would marry when he came of age. Her name was Zesay. After things turned out differently and many years had passed, Petama learned that Milarepa was meditating in caves nearby their home. People told Petama that he was very poor and didn't look like a human being. They said that he had no clothes, had nothing to eat, and was living in utter poverty. They also told Petama that he looked like a madman. Petama was very sad and wondered what was going on with her brother. She and Zesay went to Milarepa together and were very sad when they saw him. Petama thought, "My brother does not look like a human being."

The two young women cried and cried bitterly.

Petama said to Milarepa, "Oh, my brother, dear brother of mine, please do not do like this. I see many high Lamas and Rinpoches in our village. They have wonderful monasteries and sit on luxurious thrones. They are in charge of a large community of monks and nuns, have attendants, give teachings, and recite prayers every day. You can be like those Lamas. I don't understand what you are doing here. What is your Dharma?"

Petama and Zesay gave Milarepa a few clothes, food, and beer and begged him, "Please do not live like this. You have to change."

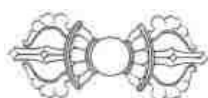
That was their advice to Milarepa.

He replied, "Yes, you are right. I am aware of everything you said and have the ability to live like that, but I don't like that. Whatever comfortable things I see when I look around make people get caught in the eight worldly dharmas. I don't want this. I want to be beyond the eight worldly dharmas and be free."

The eight worldly dharmas that seduce the mind are pursuit of gain, praise, eulogy, and joy, as well as fear of loss, defamation, ridicule, and sorrow.

Milarepa continued and told them, "I don't need normal clothes - I have the natural clothes of inner mystic heat. I don't need a comfortable dwelling place or a monastery - I have a wonderful castle. My cave is my castle. I don't need food - I am nourished by meditation. That's enough."

He then sang a wonderful song to Petama and Zesay, who were moved deeply and said, "Now we understand the meaning."



One will experience one's body like a dream-appearance or magical illusion when one has realized its true nature. As long as one hasn't, one's body is in need of much attention, care, and safeguarding. Slightest discomfort causes one great problems. Either one is cold because one isn't wearing enough or one suffers from heat because one is wearing too much. One's

body is very sensitive. Milarepa was free of these difficulties and therefore wrote of the second phase of realization of the skandha of form: “If realized, it's a deity's union body.”

When one has realized the true nature of one's body, one will be free of attachment and will have realized one's body as a dream-appearance inseparable, which is the same as appearance-emptiness inseparable. It will be like an illusory body, which is the same as the true body of a meditation deity. But one needs to change and transform one's ordinary mode of seeing and experiencing one's body in order to realize that it is a deity's body. This is the reason Vajrayana practitioners engage in the creation and completion stages of meditation. Immersed in meditation on emptiness, the image of the insubstantial deity appears to a meditator in all details just as clearly, vividly, and splendidly as a rainbow. By meditating the methods of Vajrayana, practitioners come to directly realize that the true nature of their ordinary body is the manifestation of appearance-emptiness inseparable and then the image of a meditation deity appears clearly.

As it is, due to thinking it really exists, one believes in and is therefore extremely attached to one's ordinary body that consists of flesh and blood. One overcomes one's attachment to one's ordinary body by engaging in the practices of the creation and completion stages. These practices deal with realization of absolute reality. Milarepa tells us that ultimately, “in fact, there is no such thing as a body. It's as rarefied as a cloud-free sky is what he taught, is pure as a cloud-free sky is what he taught.”

Who taught this? Marpa Lotsawa.

Please recite the verse on the relative and ultimate meaning of the skandha of form and meditate the meaning for a short while. If you have any questions afterwards, please ask. If you have no questions, I have a question: What is the basis for experiencing physical suffering and pain?

*Student:* “The real cause is our hatred, desire, and ignorance. From them, the aspects of bile, phlegm, and wind cause physical sicknesses. In that way, the three main afflictions bring on every kind of mental suffering.”

*Lama Sönam:* We looked at the source of mental and physical suffering and how to eliminate it. We will find the middle way and then not cling to ourselves as strongly. We are beginners and suffer because many different kinds of obstacles arise. When they arise, we have to think about what Milarepa said, that as long as we have not realized ultimate reality, we cannot do anything about things that happen. But we needn't fall down and become depressed. When we realize that we have a body that is subject to suffering and pain, we can transform it into a deity's body that can do many good things. Ultimately, the body is beyond existing the way it appears.

#### 4) Male and female ghosts and demons

*“Apparitions of male and female ghosts and demons,  
For as long as your guise has not been seen through are maras,  
Obstacle-makers who nothing but trouble spell.  
If the guise is seen, thought’s obstructers are Dharmapalas,  
A hotbed of siddhis of such a variety.  
In the end, in fact, there are neither gods nor demons.  
Let concepts go as far as they go and no more.  
That is as far as they go and no more, he said.*

In the fourth verse of *Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive in the Light of Mahamudra*, Milarepa described what realizing the true nature of demons and ghosts means. He first spoke of the state in which their true nature hasn’t been realized, how they are when their true nature has been realized, and how they are ultimately.

While ignorant of the true nature of what one thinks are ghosts and demons, ‘dre and glegs, one sees and experiences them as male or female ghosts and demons because one thinks that they really exist. In that case, they are *maras*, the Sanskrit term for ‘obstacle makers,’ *bdüd* in Tibetan. They create immense impediments, *bar-chäd*. When one is darkened by ignorance and obscured by afflictions, one is beset by one’s thoughts that they are real, which is why they can hurt and harm one. When one realizes that they are appearances of one’s own mind and don’t truly exist, one’s mistaken concepts about them will have been pacified and dissevered. At that time, they aren’t apperceived as outer appearances that are separate from one’s own discursive notions and concepts. One realizes that ghosts and demons merely appear due to being designated as terrifying and malevolent and are nothing but one’s own suppositions. And so they are vanquished when one has stopped designating mere appearances of one’s own mind as evil and vicious and then cannot harm one anymore.

In contrast, one’s uncertainty as to whether ghosts and demons don’t exist is justified. Relatively, they exist and appear. As long as one subtly clings to an apprehending subject and apprehended objects on account of not having transcended duality, male and female ghosts and demons appear on the relative level of being. Many fierce and very powerful malicious spirits appeared to Milarepa. Due to having realized the ultimate nature of all things and due to his spiritual valour, he saw them, spoke with them, and was able to subjugate them. He also moved them to promise never to harm others again. Many ghosts appeared to Milarepa because in the past he had clung to their true existence so strongly. It is said that a large number of demons also appeared to Machik Labdrön, the great female saint and yogini of the 11<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century Tibet.

There are a great number and an immense variety of non-human spirits. The ones that help and protect one are called *lha*, ‘gods,’ and the ones that hurt and harm one are called ‘dre, ‘terrifying ghosts.’ Everybody experiences them due to their personal positive or negative mind states. For example, if someone is always friendly and helpful, one even tells them, “You are an angel.”

If someone is unfriendly, aggressive, and hurts and harms, one tells them, “You are a demon. Get out of my sight!”

And so, while ignorant of the true nature of appearances and things, one is embedded in concepts and inevitably experiences the consequences. It’s natural for people to be very friendly and helpful if they feel flattered and for people to be very unfriendly and resentful if

they feel they have been demeaned. It's not easy to pacify and thus to subdue one's concepts of demons and malicious spirits. It's true, right?

Where I come from in the region of Nepal, which is mostly inhabited by Tibetans, I experienced that people strongly believe in the existence of demons and ghosts. They insist that there are demons living in the forests, in mountains, in boulders, in rivers and streams, actually almost everywhere. They also believe that gods live in similar places and things. I experienced that villagers thought and insisted that a truly existing god lived in one tree and a truly existing ghost or demon lived in another tree. There are no doctors and hospitals in my village. When people are very sick, they call on a shaman who summons the oracle for advice. Having heard the oracle speak, the shaman then tells his patients that they will be healed and will recover if they offer food or drink to a god or to gods living in a specific tree or rock. People believe this, give the shaman presents for his help, and do as he says. It's really strange. I've seen very sick people recover and find better sleep after they made offerings to spirits that they think live in trees or rocks. There are many stories about this happening to people living in countries of the Himalaya Mountains and it is a mighty *sems-kyi-s nang-ba*, 'appearance of the mind.' Therefore Milarepa said:

"E-ma!

All phenomena of the three realms of conditioned existence appear -  
At the same time, they don't truly exist. How wonderful!"

*Translator:* "One can translate the last statement as 'How amazing!'"

*Lama Sönam:* Many indigenous people live in the area I come from, so there are many shamans of the ancient tradition who are referred to as black Bönpo. There is a big juniper tree in my village and every year the shamans and villagers perform specific liturgical ceremonies in front of this tree. We weren't even allowed to touch it, that's how special they think this tree is. One day, the house of a villager burned down. The owner asked an old woman who is a shaman to summon the oracle. After she asked, it answered for the owner, "You haven't made offerings to the tree up to this day, so the tree-ghost made your house burn down."

The home-owner was a hot-tempered man and became very angry with the tree for having burned down his house and for having caused him and his family so much suffering and pain. He took an axe, stuck it in the pouch of his jacket, and marched to the tree. When he got there, he tried to chop it down with his axe, but only managed to strike into half of the trunk after he hacked at it for an hour. He gave up. As though talking to someone face-to-face, he triumphantly told the tree, "Okay, if you're really powerful, then talk now. Otherwise, if you ever dare harm my family again, I will hack at your other half."

The people were really shocked at his behaviour and wondered how he could act like that. Some villagers were really scared of the tree-ghost and thought that something terrible would happen that night or that the man would be dead before sunrise. But nothing happened and the next day he was still alive. The tree couldn't do anything. The villagers were really surprised that nothing had happened that night. They were puzzled and wondered what was going on.

The native Indians of America believe that a special bird is a god that really helps, another bird is a demon that really harms, and they make offerings to these animals.

*Translator:* "The people in India believe in the holy cow."

*Lama Sönam:* Yes, those are very strong mental constructs.

*Translator:* "My grandmother also believed that a child can be harmed by spirits."

*Lama Sönam:* Thoughts like that are very powerful *sems-kyi-s nang-ba*, 'appearances of the mind.' Thoughts have an extremely strong influence on people and lead to crucial

consequences. In that sense, the Chittamatra, *sems-tsam* (the 'Mind-Only School'), which teaches that every appearance is a reflection of one's own mind, has a very deep view. They explain that the source of delusions is one's own confused mind.

In the next lines, Milarepa wrote about the phase of realizing the true nature of '*dre* and *gegs*, 'ghosts' and 'demons.' When their true nature has been realized, they are transformed into *chös-skyong*, 'Dharma protectors.' The Dharmapalas are the source of supreme accomplishments, *siddhis* in Sanskrit, *dnös-grub* in Tibetan. How can this be? Because they vowed to protect and guard the Buddha's teachings and to be helpers of yogis and yoginis. There are many stories about how the Dharmapalas helped many diligent practitioners attain a great variety of siddhis. For example, the extremely powerful Five Sisters of Long Life were in the group of demons who appeared to Milarepa while he was meditating in the cave called Chubar Dzong. After he offered songs of realization to them, they recognized his amazing abilities and turned their minds away from evil. They promised never to hurt a living being again but to help them as best as possible. They vowed that they would support all his activities, that they would fulfil his wishes, and that they would always be his disciples. After all five sisters, who had supernatural powers, had bestowed their abilities upon him, they became his foremost disciples from among his many non-human followers. Therefore Milarepa was mainly referring to the Five Sisters of Long Life, the Tseringmas, in the lines of this verse: "If the guise is seen, thought's obstructers are Dharmapalas, a hotbed of siddhis of such a variety."

In short, as long as one hasn't realized the true nature of ghosts and demons and clings to them as real, they cause harm. If one realizes their true nature, then they are helpers.

Having achieved the ultimate stage, a realized yogi will no longer believe in and be attached to an apprehending subject and apprehended objects and thus will have cut away the last diversion. Aware that they don't really exist, gods or demons will not appear in the mind of such a One. On a relative level, non-existent ghosts and demons seem to be real for someone who hasn't realized their true nature. When one has realized that they don't truly exist, one will have overcome clinging to thoughts that they do.

In the last lines of this verse, Milarepa explained the benefit of realizing that gods and demons don't really exist and wrote: "Let concepts go as far as they go and no more. That is as far as they go and no more, he said."

In other words, ultimate realization, *mthar-thug*, is realization that every appearance is empty of being existent and non-existent. It is realizing emptiness of the extremes, *mtha'-stong-pa-nyid*.

*Question:* "Is it all right to think that the tormas one is offering to demons during Milarepa Guru Yoga have to do with offerings made to one's own negativities so that they leave and one's meditation is better? Or what is the purpose of that section of Puja practice?"

*Lama Sönam:* I think what you said is right and concerns the inner aspect of practice. Outer demons do not belong to Vajrayana practices, which are very, very profound. Some demons have a very small heart and cannot take the path. Therefore one is generous towards them, offers tormas and presents to them, and asks them to take what they want. This is the relative level. One asks them to leave when one does this and tells them that they should never harm living beings, that they do not belong to the practice, and therefore may not stay.

*Next question:* "Not having the concept that someone is evil doesn't change that person's behaviour."

*Translator:* "Have you tried it? What is your question?"

*Same student:* “Not designating something doesn’t necessarily change that person on the relative level, or?”

*Lama Sönam:* Just leave it like that. There’s no need to change things, but try to have love and compassion. Actually, the nature of the person who is engaging in misdeeds is not bad. This person is confused and therefore overwhelmed by disturbing emotions. You should understand this. Stay calm and give that person some love and energy. It may help.

*Translator:* “Also, if I don’t react, then maybe I won’t feel harmed as much.”

*Lama Sönam:* Right.



One time Milarepa was meditating love and compassion in a cave situated in Nyeshang, Nepal. Nearby, a strong hunter and his hound were chasing a deer. The deer knew that Milarepa was very good, came to him for protection, and laid down at his right side. The hound was a very powerful dog. It could catch birds that were flying in the sky and could bite into hard stone and break out pieces of rock with its teeth - that’s how powerful the dog was. Chasing the deer, the dog arrived, cooled down completely in Milarepa’s presence, laid down at his left side, and licked his thigh. Shortly afterwards, the hunter managed to climb up the mountain path to the cave. When he saw the deer and his vicious dog lying at Milarepa’s left and right sides, he was shocked and became furious. He pointed his bow and arrow at Milarepa and shouted, “What have you done to my dog? It was supposed to kill that deer for me and now the animals are together like a family.”

The enraged hunter shot an arrow at Milarepa, but it fell to the ground.

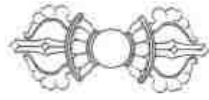
Milarepa thought, “The dog and deer listened to the teachings I gave them. This man is a human being, after all, so maybe it will help if I give him teachings.”

Milarepa said to the frenzied man, “Please listen to me. You have enough time to shoot at me, so maybe you have a little bit of time to listen to my teachings.”

The hunter was stunned that Milarepa was not afraid of him, so they talked. Milarepa told him, “I’m never afraid. You have so many weapons that you can use to shoot me. I don’t have

things like that. I only have natural weapons. My natural weapons are my loving kindness and compassion, so I'm not afraid. Listen to my teachings."

Having received teachings from Milarepa, the man cooled down completely, gave up hunting, and became one of Milarepa's foremost disciples. His name was Chira Gonpo Dorje, *chira* meaning 'hunter,' and he is known to this day as Chira Repa.



*"In the ultimate yana, to put it in general terms,  
Through the Anuttarayoga of Secret Mantra,  
When a dhatu condensation with nadi aligns,  
The forms of spirits are seen outside, he taught."*

In general, there are three vehicles of Buddhism: the Shravakayana, *nyan-thös-kyi-theg-pa* ('vehicle of the pious hearers'), the Bodhisattvayana, *byang-sems-theg-pa*, and the Secret Mantrayana, *gsang-sngags-theg-pa*, the latter being supreme. There are four sections of Secret Mantrayana, which is another name for Tantrayana, *rgyüd-kyi-theg-pa*. They are: Kriya Tantra, Charya Tantra, Yoga Tantra, and Anuttarayoga Tantra.

The last two lines of the above verse are instructions from Maha-Anuttarayoga Tantra, which teaches that the body consists of three interrelated elements: *nadis* (the Sanskrit term for Tibetan *rtsa*, 'the channels in the body'), *prana* (*rlung*, 'the energy winds'), and *bindu* (*thig-le*, 'the essences,' i.e., the mind). When *rlung* and *thig-le* are connected within the tip of a channel, then one can see ghosts or demons outside oneself or one can have a vision of gods. When the three elements are not contaminated but are pure, then one sees the pure mandala of a deity, and so forth. Since these kinds of visions arise in dependence on the conjunction of the three elements, they are not realization of the ultimate truth. For example, one sees two moons if one presses one's eyes while looking at the moon in the sky. One will again only see one moon when one stops pressing one's eyes. In the same way, the visions described here are not real. Milarepa therefore wrote:

*"Not knowing these self-expressions are not what they seem,  
But thinking they are real will get you nowhere."*

In these lines, Milarepa summarized the teachings that nothing exists outside one's own mind, rather that appearances are manifestations of one's own deluded mind that one clings to.

One can imagine that the next line is an answer to somebody questioning Milarepa and asking, "What about you?" His answer in the next line of the song is:

*"There was a time confusion made my head spin."*

Should someone have asked him, "What did you do in your confusion and where did it get you?" His answer:

*"Knowing no better I built a nest of delusion,  
Taking gods that help and spirits that harm as true."*



Having answered that he “built a nest of delusion,” Milarepa tells us that he too had strong concepts that there are truly existing gods who help and truly existing spirits who harm. “But,” someone might have asked, “how are things for you now?” His invaluable answer:

*“But now through the Jetsün-siddha’s guidance so kind,  
I see stopping samsara and winning nirvana won’t do.  
I’ve caught on that whatever appears is Mahamudra.”*

In these lines, Milarepa addresses the fact that Marpa Lotsawa had generously given him all profound instructions needed to realize Mahamudra and the complete cycle of instructions on *The Ten Dharmas of Naropa*. He tells us that he practiced the sacred instructions and, having realized the inseparability of samsara and nirvana, saw that samsara is not a state to be rejected and nirvana is not a state to be achieved. Not being confused anymore, he wrote that he saw how things really are and realized that samsara and nirvana do not stand in opposition but are equality. He had realized samsara-nirvana inseparable and experienced that all appearances are a manifestation of Mahamudra. This means to say that seeing that every appearance and experience arises from one’s innate creativity is seeing that every appearance is a playful manifestation of one’s own mind.

Generally speaking, great siddhas and yogis experience many impediments while practicing the path. Such a One never shuns obstacles or thinks they need to be eliminated, rather a yogi and yogini see that all impediments and obstacles are opportunities to increase and enhance their spiritual practice. Therefore Milarepa was able to inspire his students by speaking to them about fruition in the next lines:

*“Through realizing delusions have no ground,  
The water-moon of awareness shines unblurred.”*

The Tibetan term for awareness in this line is *rig-pa*, a connotation specific to the Nyingma tradition. It denotes unmistakable knowledge or knowing that is free of mind-made, fabricated mental constructs and thoughts. Realization of *rig-pa*, ‘awareness,’ is the same as realization of mind’s luminous radiance and clarity, *‘öd-gsäl*, as taught in the Kagyü tradition. Milarepa continued:

*“The sun of luminosity, free of clouds,  
Lights up the darkness of ignorance out to its brink.”*

In these lines, Milarepa likens mind’s true nature, *‘öd-gsäl*, with the sun and likens delusive mental constructs with clouds. This means to say that when the mind is free of ignorance, *ma-rig-pa*, which brings on delusive concepts and thoughts, then the darkness of coarse and subtlest delusions will have been dispelled and then the radiant clarity of *rig-pa* will manifest openly. He then tells us:

*“My spinning head of confusion spins no more,  
A glimmer of basic being glows within.”*

When delusive illusions, *‘khrul-pa*, have been dispelled, mind’s true nature will be realized and experienced, which is not non-existent like horns of a rabbit. On the contrary, mind’s true nature, which is basic goodness, freely shines from within when illusions have been dispelled. Again, realization of mind’s true nature isn’t a mental state of dull nothingness, rather it is an experience that cannot be compared to other experiences. Therefore Milarepa concluded the

spiritual song, *Distinguishing the Provisional from the Definitive in the Light of Mahamudra*, with two lines, the first being:

*“How precious now the idea of seeing a ghost.”*

Milarepa is telling us that it was very important for him to think that the appearance of a terrifying ghost was real because it moved him to remember the Mahamudra view that Marpa Lotsawa had taught him and to maintain it while practicing the path. He wrote that thinking that the appearance of an evil spirit was real was indeed a precious thought, *rnam-rtog-rin-po-che*.

Everybody encounters a great variety of difficulties in daily life that they think aren't easy to deal with and feel badly about. One shouldn't think negatively. Thinking negatively and being pessimistic is separating oneself from the view. It's very beneficial to have Milarepa's teachings in mind uninterruptedly, *rgyüd-mi-chäd*, and not to be separated from the view, *lta-ba-bräl*. One should remember the view when one wakes up from a nightmare, or when one thinks that there is an evil ghost nearby while out in the dark, or when one is being attacked, or when someone is angry and screaming at one. Then one can abide in the true nature of one's mind.

*Question:* “There are many dangerous dogs in India. I can deal with situations in which people shout at me, but don't know what to do when those dogs attack me.”

*Lama Sönam:* Just stop. You can talk to the dog peacefully and see that it eventually will wag its tail. Sometimes dogs understand. It will jump even more at you if you run away in fear. There are very crazy dogs in Nepal and India, though, and they can be dangerous. You can think about their true nature and then won't react as fearfully. If you can't protect yourself, just meditate the Mahamudra view. Use the dogs as a support for your meditation. That's why Milarepa wrote in the last line of the song:

*“It reveals the unborn source, how strange and amazing!”*

The unborn source refers to the fundamental nature of one's mind, which is free of being created and manifests clearly. Situations that cause great fear are moments in which it is important to remember the Mahamudra view of how things are. This is the tradition of Milarepa, who never felt negative about obstacles but only positive, which helps realize the profound view.

## Conclusion

Mahasiddha Göstangpa wrote a wonderful song of realization, entitled *Seven Delights*. In this song, he spoke about seven strong obstacles that he faced. He saw the positive aspect of obstacles that he experienced, used them as supports for meditation to realize the profound view, and remarked: “Any thoughts or obstacles that arise, for me sheer delight!”

This is the same as Jetsün Milarepa wrote: “How precious now the idea of seeing a ghost. It reveals the unborn source, how strange and amazing!”

### *Seven Delights,* composed by Mahasiddha Götsangpa

“Namo Ratna Guru!

When thoughts that there is something, perceived and a perceiver,  
Lure my mind away and distract,  
I don’t close my sense gateways to meditate without them,  
But plunge straight into their essential point.  
They’re like clouds in the sky, there’s this shimmer where they fly,  
Thoughts that rise, for me sheer delight!

When kleshas get me going and their heat has got me burning,  
I try no antidote to set them right.  
Like an alchemistic potion turning metal into gold,  
What lies in klesha’s power to bestow  
Is bliss without contagion, completely undefiled,  
Kleshas coming up, sheer delight!

When I’m plagued by god-like forces or demonic interference,  
I do not drive them out with rites and spells.  
The thing to chase away is the egoistic thinking,  
Built up on the idea of a self.  
This will turn the ranks of maras into your own special forces,  
When obstacles arise, sheer delight!

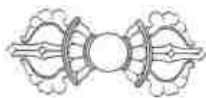
When samsara with its anguish has me writhing in its torments,  
Instead of wallowing in misery,  
I take the greater burden down the greater path to travel  
And let compassion set me up.  
To take upon myself the sufferings of others,  
When karmic consequences bloom, delight!

When my body has succumbed to the attacks of painful illness,  
I do not count on medical relief,  
But take that very illness as a path and by its power  
Remove the obscurations blocking me,  
And use it to encourage the qualities worthwhile,  
When illness rears its head, sheer delight!

When its time to leave this body, this illusionary tangle,  
Don’t cause yourself anxiety and grief.

The thing that you should train in and clear up for yourself,  
There's no such thing as dying to be done.  
It's just clear light, the mother and child clear light uniting,  
When mind forsakes the body, sheer delight!

When the whole thing's just not working, everything's lined up against you,  
Don't try to find some way to change it all.  
Here the point to make your practice is reverse the way you see it,  
Don't try to make it stop or to improve.  
Adverse conditions happen, when they do it's so delightful,  
They make a little song of sheer delight!"



It's a wonderful song, right? Please don't forget to sing "Sheer delight" when anything happens to you. And please appreciate and know that your lives are invaluable and remember what Jetsün Milarepa and Mahasiddha Götsangpa taught. Try to be easy-going, reliable, steadfast, not aggressive, not stressed.

Life is sometimes not easy, which we all know and experience. How often do we doubt, are fearful, are angry, and so forth? Almost every day. Sometimes we are very involved with these emotions, which doesn't help but only causes more problems, more blockages, and more confusion. We have experiences and should try to do as Milarepa said. Then it helps. Remember the view of Mahamudra as taught by Milarepa and try a little bit. That's the purpose, right?

It was really a good time being with you and a special occasion to speak about the teachings that I received from Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche in Bodhanath twelve years ago. I made a few notes, have a few own experiences too, and tried to share them with you. I truly hope and pray that these instructions will help you in daily life and in your future lives. Thank you very much. Let us recite the dedication prayers now.

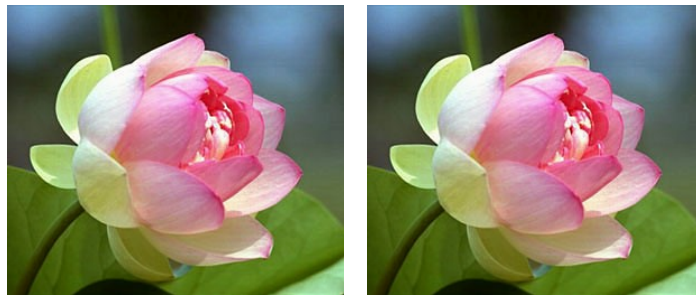
## Dedication

May all virtue that is created by accumulating merit and wisdom  
Be dedicated to attaining the two truth bodies that arise from merit and wisdom.

May bodhichitta, great and precious, arise where it has not arisen.  
Never weakening where it has arisen, may it grow ever more and more.

May the life of the Glorious Lama remain steadfast and firm.  
May peace and happiness fully arise for beings as limitless in number as space is vast in extent.  
Having accumulated merit and purified negativities,  
May I and all living beings without exception swiftly establish the levels and grounds of buddhahood.

All you sentient beings I have a good or bad connection with  
As soon as you've left this confus'd dimension,  
May you be born in the West, in Sukhavati,  
And when you're born there, complete the bhumis and the paths.



When Venerable Lama Sönam Rabgye did not teach in English, translated simultaneously from Tibetan into German by Rosemarie Fuchs, who we wish to thank very, very much for her highly-valued, exceptional contribution. Sincere gratitude to Madhavi Maren Simoneit from Hamburg for having generously made the recording of these teachings available. *Seven Delights* translated by Jim Scott, publ. by Marpa Transl. Com., Nepal, 1996, pages 96-100. Photo of prayer flags that mark the entrance to Jetsün Milarepa's cave at Nyeshang in Nepal, with the view he had when he looked outside, courtesy of Lama Sönam Rabgye. Special thanks to Josef Kerklau from Münster for the photo of Lama Sönam. Lotus graciously offered by Yeunten, Nguyenthi Mydung from Paris. Translated, edited & arranged by Gaby Hollmann from Munich during Losar of the Earth-Ox 2136, responsible for all mistakes. Copyright Acharya Lama Sönam Rabgye, Karma Theksum Tashi Chöling in Hamburg & Karma Lekshey Ling Institute in Kathmandu, 2009.

May the truth of the teachings spread throughout the world &  
bring peace and happiness to all living beings!