

VAJRA RECITATION

This instruction on the vajra recitation of the syllables ॐ ां हूं was given by Drigung Kyabjé Garchen Rinpoché in commentary on Mahāsiddha Tilopa’s The Ganges: An Experiential Pith Instruction on Mahāmudrā (Skt. mahāmudropadeśam). Specifically, it is in reference to the line, “When persons of lesser intelligence cannot abide within the meaning, they should ascertain awareness through holding the key point of breath.”

Now the text refers to people of inferior intelligence. That means all of us. [*laughter*]

It continues, “. . . cannot abide within the meaning . . .” What is this inability to abide within the meaning? When the mind follows after thoughts and the winds follow after karmic energies, mind and winds separate. The text refers to the “vital point of wind energies.” This vital point is the juncture at which mind and wind energies are brought together.

Among the myriad wind energies of the body, there are five principal winds. The navel, where the fire-equalizing wind abides, is like the royal seat of all the winds. The practice of vase breathing is to hold awareness there. In its pure aspect, the fire-equalizing wind [at the navel] abides as Vajravārāhī. This is the perspective of the Six Yogas of Nāropa.

In general, there are three principal channels: the left and right channel and, between them, the central channel. The central channel, or wisdom channel, is the principal among all the [body’s] channels. When we draw the wind and mind energies into the central channel at the navel, we practice the methods for merging mind and wind into one point.

There are two modes of practice for focusing the energies at the navel—with visualization and without visualization. The latter involves the *vajra* recitation of the syllables ॐ ां हूं. This recitation is combined with focus on the subtle wind energies.

At the level of the navel is a ball of flame the size of a lentil. As we breathe in through the nostrils, we should mentally recite the syllable ॐ. [With this recitation,] the wind energies descend the right and left channels and then enter the central channel below the

navel *cakra*. At this time we should hold the breath for a short period of time, mentally reciting the syllable $\bar{A}\bar{H}$. As we do so, we should imagine that those winds slightly fan the ball of flame that is abiding at the navel, causing it to burn brighter. We then breathe out, mentally reciting the syllable $H\bar{U}\bar{M}$.

Within this exercise, look at the empty nature of mind itself. This will be of great benefit to stabilizing the practice of *mahāmudrā*. There are many among you senior students who are familiar with this practice. Yet for all of you I would request that right now you practice it briefly in the manner I just described.

In order to do this practice, we should maintain an erect bodily posture. We can leave the rest of the body however it is at the time, as long as the spine is straight. In the beginning, the visualization can only partially be maintained. Breathe in, mentally reciting the syllable $O\bar{M}$. Then, while holding the breath mixed with the wind energies in the central channel at the navel, briefly meditate and mentally recite the syllable $\bar{A}\bar{H}$. Then, breathe out with the syllable $H\bar{U}\bar{M}$.

[*Note: In early 2011, Lama Garchen Rinpoché began to modify his instructions on vajra recitation as follows: When mentally reciting the syllable $H\bar{U}\bar{M}$, one exhales with the gross physical body. However, one should imagine that the wind energies that have gathered at the navel merge forcefully into the ball of flame and are bound there with the recitation of $H\bar{U}\bar{M}$.*]

The breath should be held gently. When pressing the breath downward, do not expand the belly [outward]. Rather, bind the lower wind upward and press the upper wind downward. This is called “the union of the winds.” When the upper winds are pressed down and the lower winds are pulled up, that is [also] referred to as “the vase breath.”

This breathing instruction is a very abbreviated mode of practicing the yoga of *tummo*, or inner fire, as it was taught by Lord Jigten Sumgön. Having practiced this myself, I have personally experienced its benefit. You will not hear this instruction from others who teach many elaborate key points of channels and winds. I am offering it based on my own experience.

When the wind energies are abiding at the navel and we leave the mind in its unfabricated, natural state, sometimes warmth will instantaneously arise in the navel. If we meditate in this way for a while—say one week—warmth will arise. Then, without

needing to hold the breath again and again, awareness will naturally abide at the navel because of the warmth. That is to say, on the basis of warmth, mind abides in stillness. This method of causing the mind to abide on the basis of warmth and bliss is extremely beneficial. As for the time, one should train in this each morning at daybreak.

If, in this way, the winds abide through mindful awareness, later there will be no need to hold the breath. Through mindfulness, the winds will remain at the navel. Then, even though we breathe in and out, the place where the wind energies will stay is the navel. There we will accumulate the vital essences of wind, or *prāna*, which will abide together with the wind energies.

When we conjoin the in- and out-breath with the ॐ ां हूं *vajra* recitation, wind energies and mind will always be mingled. Thus, we will be free of obstacles—that is, obstacles arisen from distraction.

At present, the winds and mind are separate. The winds naturally go where they will. The consciousness wanders elsewhere. But, through training in this way, we bring mind and wind energies together as one.

Regarding that which is to be meditated on, it is all right to meditate on the form of the guru. But, for the most part, we should meditate on Vajravārāhī. Her form is like a lamp flame and her nature is that of fire. Otherwise, it is suitable to meditate on a seed syllable or whatever form is convenient for one.

In this practice, there is no need to think about the gross physical body at all. The three channels—left, right, and central—are visualized. Each breath descends through the left and right channels. Then, without expanding the belly, the wind energies enter and naturally abide at the navel with the mental recitation of ां. At that juncture we should remain in equipoise for a few moments. Afterwards, we breathe out with the mental recitation of हूं. Then in the future, when this practice has become habituated, there is no need even to hold on to the visualization. Simply through the power of mindfulness, the winds will gather and abide at the navel *cakra*.

When I explain this, I utilize very few words to do so. But when it comes to actually doing the practice, we need to engage the pith instructions on the Fivefold *Mahāmudrā* combined with the pith instructions on the Six Yogas of Nāropa. The experiences that arise from that must be undergone and habituated over a long period of time.

When we speak of the blessings of the Dharma, people give rise to faith and belief from the bottom of their hearts. Thus, they may think that, if one practices, results will be quickly and easily realized. However, there is a bit of a contradiction in that. For example, when we plant a seed, we only see the fruit after five or six months of watering and cultivating it. Similarly, if we do not practice, the blessings of Dharma cannot enter our mind-streams. Thus, it is necessary to make a bit of effort.

So now for anywhere between one and three minutes we should meditate together, holding the breath as described and see what happens. *[silence]*

It is an [occurrence of] auspicious interdependence for us to do this practice together.

Interpreter:

What follows are questions regarding the vajra recitation of the syllables OM ĀḤ HŪṂ, which we also referred to as a brief instruction for how to practice tummo at the navel.

The first of the questions is:

When engaging in the *vajra* recitation for a period of time, first warmth, then the sensation of bliss arises. What is the proper way to work with the sensation of bliss?

Rinpoché's response is:

Within the experience of bliss, we need to look directly at its nature. It is a mental arising. When we look at the nature of bliss, we will recognize its emptiness. Thus, it isn't necessary to "meditate on" emptiness. Rather, if we just leave the mind in the nature of bliss itself, that nature is empty. The experience of bliss becomes empty; thus, there is no fixation on it.

Interpreter: By the way, if at any juncture the question perhaps was not understood or the answer was not understood or was incomplete, please shout out that you need clarification and we will go from there.

Question:

As I follow the breath in and out with the recitation of OM ĀḤ HŪṂ, various sensations arise in the body and central channel. How should I integrate these into the practice?

Answer:

Interpreter: There are two points here.

First, although we are aware of the natural flow of the breath in and out, we are not following it with the mind. In this practice, we maintain the focus of concentration at all times on the ball of flame at the navel. Only a small fraction of our awareness is diverted to the breath, the left and right channels, and so forth.

Second, although diverse experiences, thoughts and sensations can arise in the practice, we should not be distracted by them. Again and again we should return to the flame of awareness at the navel, thus liberating mental and physical arisings through awareness.

Question:

During the *tummo* practice you gave, what is visualized during the exhalation when one mentally recites the HŪM?

Answer:

When we are engaged in the trainings based on *mahāmudrā* practice, there is no visualization at all. The winds are all that is meditated on. It is sufficient to recall with the mind the sound of HŪM as we exhale.

Question:

Is the wind expelled through the left and right channels or through the central channel?

Answer:

It is expelled through the left and right channels.

Question:

One instruction was to bring the energies from the two side channels into the central channel, but another instruction was about bringing down-energies up and other energies down. How do these two directions fit together?

Answer:

Interpreter: So let's do this in two parts.

When we are engaged in *mahāmudrā* meditation and the various trainings that stabilize it, we really are not focusing on objects of visualization—objects endowed with color,

shape and so forth. When doing practices such as *tonglen* or *rasayāna*, for example, there will be various visualizations. But in the context of *mahāmudrā*, there is no visualization at all. Rather, the focus is abiding of the mind.

The whole point of this *vajra* recitation is that it is a method to unite mind and wind energies.

Interpreter:

In addition to that, I had asked Rinpoché if it is the case that there is no visualized object does that mean that we are not visualizing the left, right, and central channels?

And he said: No, you are visualizing those. Actually, this will depend on your own experience. If you choose to visualize them as the pathways through which the energies travel, then that's fine. If choose not to visualize them, that's also fine. So you can do whichever is more suitable for you. The important point is to merge mind and winds as you mentally recall the OM, ĀḤ and HŪḤ.

Then with regard to the subtle form of the vase breath, in this practice, we are binding the two lower orifices to draw the lower winds up and also pressing the upper wind energies down. Thus, we merge the winds together at the navel, forming a sealed, spherical reliquary. We are thus refining the focus of our awareness on a tiny ball of flame abiding at the navel, at the meeting place of these two compressed winds. *I hope that addresses the question.*

This *vajra* recitation is in the context of *mahāmudrā* practice. When we continuously maintain the recitation, it preserves the secret mantra *samayas*. Although there are various visualizations that can be done with the wind energies, in the context of *mahāmudrā*, there is no visualization at all. It is only a method to merge wind energies with mind as we recall the syllables OM ĀḤ HŪḤ and to cause the mind to abide at the navel. When we hold the breath, we should do so gently, not engaging in forceful training. Allow the breath to easily and comfortably abide for as long as it will.

When first we begin the meditation, we should focus on the three channels: the left, right and central. But once we have become habituated to this, and in particular, habituated to the central channel, we should understand that this is the single root of all of the other channels—this is the basis from which all of the other channels arise. So to focus our attention completely on the central channel will suffice, as it encompasses all the other channels. It is like the [single] trunk of a great tree.

Now, in the same way that a tree has many branches that spread out, so too the central channel has limbs that branch out at the level of the five channel wheels. These then further branch out into subsidiary and further subsidiary channels, which extend to all of the pores of the skin. They are innumerable. Now we should not be visualizing all of this. It is just important to understand it. So as we focus on the central channel, we should also have just a general, approximate sense that from this central channel branch off countless others that pervade the entire body.

Then when we engage in the practice of *tummo* through the *vajra* recitation, the warmth that is generated at the navel will spontaneously arise and pervade the body. We don't need to cause it to pervade the body; rather we should understand that it naturally does so—just as, if you water a tree, all of the tiny roots, branches, twigs, leaves, and so forth are naturally pervaded by the water. By meditating in this way on the warmth at the navel, the seed essence is replenished.

When someone is new to the training, then the results that will be attained, and the length of time that it takes for them to be attained, will correspond to the degree of effort that one puts into the practice. The student of highest capacity will give rise to the experience of warmth within a week. Others will give rise to signs of accomplishment within one month, six months, and so forth.

In any case, once the warmth has been generated, eventually one will reach the point where it is not necessary to engage in visualization to give rise to the experience. The warmth will naturally abide as the mind abides. Then, during daily activities, as we naturally breathe in and out, awareness of the continual cycle of OM̐ ĀḤ HŪM̐ will pervade our minds. We will be aware of the natural “OM̐” sound of the inhalation. The sound of “ĀḤ” will immediately be recalled at the navel. The “HŪM̐” sound will accompany exhalation. Each time we breathe in, the flame will be renewed, as when one blows on live coals.

Later, when this has been habituated, the mind will abide without effort. Then, warmth will be achieved in the body; the mind will abide in stillness; awareness will be clear; cold-based illnesses will be cleared away. Thus, there are many great benefits from this practice.

Various concepts, negative emotions such as attachment and aversion, and emotional experiences like suffering are all thoughts. Thoughts themselves are obstacles. The Tibetan term for obstacle is “*barché*”. What this really means is “interruptions” in

practice. For example, if we are trying to cultivate love and compassion, anger is an obstacle—an interruption in the continuity of love.

When we are engaging this practice of *tummo* and we focus on the $\bar{A}\bar{H}$ syllable, all thoughts and negative emotions of attachment and aversion and so forth are transformed into the fire. They are burnt by the fire. Likewise, all of our illness, pain, and suffering are burnt away. This is of great benefit. It is suitable to consume all diverse thoughts and bad dreams with the flame of awareness.

Question:

You mentioned that the *vajra* recitation of $\text{O}\bar{M} \bar{A}\bar{H} \text{H}\bar{U}\bar{M}$ corresponded with the stage of Fivefold *Mahāmudrā* practice associated with the Six Yogas of Nāropa. By that I assume you are referring to the deity practice of Cakrasamvara and the visualization associated with that. Is the purpose of that visualization also the stabilization of one's meditation and awareness of the natural state? What is the difference between working with visualizing oneself as the deity, and working with the channels in that visualization, and visualizing and working with one's own channels?

Interpreter:

So for those who didn't clearly hear the question, Rinpoché had mentioned that vajra recitation of the syllables $\text{O}\bar{M} \bar{A}\bar{H} \text{H}\bar{U}\bar{M}$ has some connection with the Six Yogas, which are practiced in the context of the Fivefold Mahāmudrā, and the question was about what that connection is.

Answer:

In general, the Six Yogas of Nāropa deal only with the subtle channels and wind energies. Although the teachings of the Six Yogas are numerous and diverse, they all deal with channels and winds. When we engage the *vajra* recitation of the syllables $\text{O}\bar{M} \bar{A}\bar{H} \text{H}\bar{U}\bar{M}$, in a similar way we are working with the subtle channels and even more so with the subtle wind energies. So that, in a very simplified way, is the connection between the two.

Question:

When one is engaged in deity yoga and visualizing one's own form as the deity and meditating on the channels in the body of the deity, and when one is meditating on the

channels in the *vajra* recitation of OM ĀḤ HŪM, is this basically the same thing—for the same purpose?

Answer:

Yes, it is. To engage meditation on the channels and winds, one must generate *bodhicitta* in one's mind-stream. Having done so, the body is the nature of the deity. It is pure from the very basis.

Question:

Earlier you said that it could take between one week and a few months to experience warmth in the practice. But as soon as I hold the vase breath, I immediately experience heat in the body.

Answer:

Each individual's channels and physical constitution is unique. In general, though, heat that is experienced immediately is unstable, changeable and not particularly blissful. In this practice we are cultivating a stable, consistent experience of bliss-warmth that gradually develops together with clear awareness of mind's nature.

Question:

Although you have mentioned visualizing the central channel and the ball of flame at the navel, I am not quite certain where the central channel and the exact point of the navel are located.

Answer:

It is not necessary to be concerned with the exact locations of the channels and the channel wheels since they are immaterial and cannot be found in the gross physical body. The channels and *cakras* are created through the power of meditation; thus, they abide wherever you imagine them.

This transcript was excerpted from teachings given by Kyabjé Garchen Triptrül Rinpoché at Drikung Namgyal Ling in Tucson, Arizona in 2005 and supplemented with later pith instructions on the vajra recitation by Garchen Rinpoché. The teachings were interpreted

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