

In: *Sahaja, The Role of Dohā & Caryāgīti in the Cultural Indo-Tibetan Interface*.
B.R. Publishing 2015, India, ed. by Loseries, Andrea.

The Indian Mahāsiddha Tīlopa’s Upadeśa on Sahaja-Mahāmudrā in the Eyes of Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje

Martina Draszcyk

The *Upadeśa on Sahaja-Mahāmudrā* which is attributed to the Mahāsiddha Tīlopa (988–1069) is considered to be an important guideline for the practice of *mahāmudrā*, the so-called ‘Great Seal’. The importance of *sahaja mahāmudrā* for the *bKa’brgyud* tradition in turn is for example reflected in a remark which one finds in an instruction text written by the 3rd Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje (1284-1339) on the practice of *sahaja mahāmudrā*. In the colophon of this text he refers to it as “knowing one, i.e. the way of practicing *sahaja mahāmudrā*, makes for liberation in every regard” (*gcig shes kun grol*).¹

Tīlopa’s *Mahāmudropadeśa* belongs to the genre of *Dohā* songs used by *Siddhas* in India from approx. the seventh century through the thirteenth century AD. Unfortunately, the original text of this *Mahāmudropadeśa* is lost, but, as with so many Buddhist scriptures, thanks to the translation work carried out by Indian and Tibetan scholars it is still extant in Tibetan translation.²

The historical data of the Mahāsiddha Tīlopa seem to be relatively clear when compared for example with those of the Mahāsiddha Saraha which are very elusive. Tīlopa is reported to have lived in the eleventh century from

-
1. *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid yig*, 72:2-3: ‘dir ni lhan cig skyes sbyor don || gcig shes kun grol mkhyen pa yis || sgra don rtogs pas phye pa yin || dge bas sems can thams cad kyis || lhan cig skyes pa rtogs pa shog ||
 2. See also R.JACKSON 2004:9.

988-1069, in the area of today's Bangladesh. Legend tells us that he was born into a royal Brahmin family and that he was first given the name Prabhāsvara.³ Later on, he was also named Prajñābhadrā. Commonly, however, he is referred to as Tīlopa, Tillipa, Telopa, or Tailopa,⁴ the 'sesame-pounder'. He was one of those extraordinary masters who carried on the lively tradition of *Dohā* songs in India and he is counted as one of the eighty-four famous *Mahāsiddhas*.

It is said that Tīlopa united four Tantrik teaching traditions, among others those of Saraha but, according to tradition, also of visionary female figures. Various hagiographies, the one written by the Tibetan translator Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros (1012-1097),⁵ for example, inform us that, after having received and practiced based on instructions on mind's luminosity ('*od gsal*, prabhāsvara) given to him by the Mahāsiddha Lavapa,⁶ he sat in the Aśoka temple in East India on the bank of the Khasu River close to a place called Nadukata, to read the *Śatasāhasrikā-Prajñāpāramitāsūtra* in 8000 verses.⁷ There, a woman is said to have approached him, exhorting him to meditate on its meaning. She advised him to leave the temple, assist a prostitute in Bengal and to carry out the work of thrashing sesame during the day. Legend tells us that one day while carrying out this work, he attained the realisation of *mahāmudrā*. Later in his life, upon the question who his teachers were, Tīlopa is reported to have said: "I have no human Guru. My Guru is the all-knowing One".⁸ The Buddhist traditions in Tibet maintain him in very high esteem, regarding him as an authentic enlightened individual.

At least three important works on *sahaja mahāmudrā* are attributed to Tīlopa: The *Mahāmudropadeśa* (also known as '*Ganges Mahāmudrā*'), the *Treasury of Songs* and the *Acintyamahāmudrā*.⁹

3. BRUNNHÖLZL 2007:93.

4. See (tr.) ZANGPO 2010, 343. Abayadatta gives two separate entries and distinguishes into Tīlopa and Telopa, however, they seem to be one and the same person. See also (tr.) ROBINSON 1979:271 and 62.

5. See CAYLEY (ed.) 1995.

6. Lavapa, one the 84 Mahāsiddhas

7. See CAYLEY (ed.) 1995: 31 and 56 and note 21.

8. Ibid., 46-47: *nga la mi'i bla ma med || bla ma thams cad mkhyen pa yin ||*

9. *Dohākośa* D2281, *Mahāmudropadeśa* D2303, *Acintyamahāmudrā-nāma* D2305 (Tib. *phyag rgya chen po bsam gyis mi khyab pa*).

According to Tibetan sources, Tīlopa is said to have transmitted these spiritual teachings to his disciple Nāropa (956–1041) who is also said to have come from a royal family in Bengal. Being an Indian Buddhist *Paṇḍit*, he was first of all an erudite monk and leading scholar in Nālandā University. Yet, Nāropa decided to seek for further guidance, living the life of a yogin and mystic. According to tradition, Tīlopa first put Nāropa through a series of twelve hardships before giving him the instructions regarding the direct experience of mind's true nature. The *Mahāmudropadeśa* instructions, as they came to be known, are said to have been the final trigger that enabled Nāropa to manifest his awakening. No indications however are given regarding the time and place when and where Nāropa received these instructions, the *Mahāmudropadeśa*, exactly.¹⁰

Nāropa in turn transmitted them to the Tibetan translator Mar pa who after his return to Tibet gave them to his disciple Mi la ras pa (1040-1123), the most famous among all the *yogins* and Buddhist poets of Tibet.¹¹ Mi la ras pa in turn was the teacher of sGam po pa (1079-1153) who is considered the forefather of nearly all *bKa' brgyud pa* Schools as they spread in Tibet. Therefore all of the *bKa' brgyud pa* traditions appreciate Tīlopa as a main source for the meditative approach of *mahāmudrā* (*phyag rgya chen po*).¹²

Through this line of transmission, Tīlopa's brief and succinct pointing-out instructions on *sahaja mahāmudrā* continued to be transmitted in Tibet, in particular in the *bKa' brgyud pa* traditions. Expressing meditative experiences and realizations, as well as giving instructions for the path leading to realization, through the media of songs (*nyams mgur*) is ever since an integral part of this lineage of Tibetan Buddhism; in an institutionalized manner this also became part of the liturgy of meditation texts in monastic institutions.

10. Shenpen Ösel 1999-2000, 3.

11. BROWN: 2006, 18ff. While according to the *Blue Annals* quite a number of parallel transmission lineages of *Dohā Songs* did not survive as distinct lineages in Tibet, a subsidiary lineage which traces back to Tīlopa was kept alive mainly owing to the mystic Tibetan Yogin Mi la ras pa (1052-1135).

12. JACKSON 2004:8.

The 3rd Karma pa, Rang byung rdo rje, lineage holder of the Karma *bKa'brgyud* School, and one of the most influential writers of this tradition did not just compose a number of such *vajra*-songs himself, he also commented on this famous *Mahāmudropadeśa*. In his “Commentary on *mahāmudrā* [-instructions taught at] the [River] Ganges”¹³, Rang byung rdo rje points out in which way Tīlopa in this series of approximately 108 lines instructed his exceptional student Nāropa (1016-1100) at the banks of the river Ganges in the heart essence of *sahaja mahāmudrā*. His commentary is a valuable example for the Tibetan reception of and response to the genuine Indian *upadeśa* tradition.

One Tibetan translation of Tīlopa’s *Mahāmudropadeśa* or *The Gangāma Pith Instructions on Mahāmudrā* as it is often referred to, was done by Mar pa himself. In the colophon Mar pa informs us that he translated and edited the text in Northern India, in Pullahari, after having received the instruction directly from Nāropa. This Tibetan version of the *Mahāmudropadeśa* consists of 108 lines or the so-called “Twenty *Vajra* Verses”.

Another Tibetan version of *Mahāmudropadeśa*, which differs both in terms of the sequence of the verses and in some of the wordings, is contained in various Tanjur collections, for example in the Derge- and the Peking-Tanjur.¹⁴ No translator is mentioned, yet, considering the differences to Mar pa’s translation, the translation was most probably done by someone else. Still, the examples used and the topics presented are the same. This version seems to be the one used most frequently today, probably simply for the fact that it is contained in these Tanjur and therefore easy to access.

Throughout his commentary, Rang byung rdo rje quotes only the respective beginning and end of the verses. The quoted lines and their sequence, however, are identical with Mar pa’s translation as for example found in the commentary on the *Mahāmudropadeśa* composed by the 5th Zhva dmar pa dKon mchog yan lag (1526-1583).¹⁵ Therefore it is obvious

13. *Phyag rgya chen po gangā ma'i 'grel pa*.

14. D2303:484/7-487/5 and Q3132.

15. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*. Transl. by BRUNNHÖLZL 2007: 93-117.

that Rang byung rdo rje used Mar pa’s translation of the *Mahāmudropadeśa* even though he himself doesn’t specify this in his commentary.¹⁶

The following selection of verses from *Mahāmudropadeśa* and of Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje’s associated commentary sheds some light on the way how such *Dohās* were used as a basis for guiding students on the Buddhist path.

Generally speaking, Rang byung rdo rje’s commentary neither aims at providing historical data regarding Tīlopa nor philosophical or linguistic explanations as to *mahāmudrā*. His approach is rather to use the verses straightforwardly as an authentic basis to support his students or future readers in their capacity to integrate *mahāmudrā* into their spiritual path; thus it is a text that is entirely practice oriented. Rang byung rdo rje¹⁷ starts out with a classical structure, saying that he is about to present the text by means of three perspectives: the introduction, the treatise itself, and the final part.¹⁸

In the introduction, Rang byung rdo rje, going along with the verses merely paraphrases the verse and presents the main protagonist, Nāropa, who is characterized as a wise and genuine disciple, able to rely on his spiritual teacher in the required way. In the respective verse of the *Mahāmudropadeśa*, Tīlopa addresses his student Nāropa in the beginning with the following words:

-
16. Dkon mchog yan lag offers some more information in the colophon of his commentary; there we learn the following about the *Mahāmudropadeśa*: “This completes the twenty vajra-verses on *mahāmudrā* spoken by the glorious Tīlopa who had accomplished *mahāmudrā* to the Kashmiri paṇḍita Nāropa on the banks of the river Gaṅgā after having put him through twelve kinds of hardship. Mar pa Chos kyi blo gros from Tibet who received [these teachings] from the paṇḍita [Nāropa] himself translated and finalized the editing of [these verses] in Pullahari in the north [of India].”
17. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma’i ’grel pa* in *Gsung ’bum* of Rang byung rdo rje, vol 11, 161-175.
18. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma’i ’grel pa*, 162,2: *klad kyi don dang | gzhung gi don dang | mjug gi don no |*

*You who went through hardships, are devoted to the Guru,
and endured suffering, wise Nāropa,
fortunate one, take this to heart!*¹⁹

The text or treatise as such is presented from the perspective of the view, the conduct, and the meditation.

As to the view; the first verses present a series of analogies in order to provide lively illustrations for communicating the view. Rang byung rdo rje's explanation of these examples can be summed up as follows:

Just like clouds arise and vanish from the earth's vapor, concepts vanish when mind's nature is seen. Sentient beings wander in cyclic existence because they do not realize their mind to be *mahāmudrā*. The one who sees mind's true nature realizes mind as such to be primordial knowing which is aware of its own nature.

Just like the sky is untainted by color and shape, mind's true nature is unobscured by virtue and vice. Thus, Buddha, the enlightened state is nowhere else but mind as such which does not undergo any change neither due to virtue nor due to negativity as neither of them is inherently existent.

Just like the sun as such can never be dimmed, mind's true nature can never be obscured. Regardless how dense darkness might be, it can never damage the sun's brightness. One moment of sunlight illuminates the densest of darkness. Likewise, one moment of realizing the luminosity of mind's true nature clears away all obscurations and negativities that have been accumulated since eons.

Just like space may be labeled empty, but cannot be described, the same holds true for mind's true nature. The sky cannot be described as having a certain shape or colour because it doesn't have any character of this kind. Likewise mind's true nature is ineffable and will only be realized if someone

19. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma 'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 93.5-6: *dka' ba spyod cing bla ma la gus pa || sdug bsngal bzod ldan blo ldan na ro pa || skal ldan khyod kyi snyen la 'di ltar byos ||*

finds the right access to meditation without being entangled in discursive thought patterns.²⁰

As to the meditation: Based on the view, the *yogin* is instructed to familiarize himself with the understanding, commonly referred to as the process of meditation. Tilopa's words in the *Mahāmudropadeśa* in this regard are for example:

20. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma 'i 'grel pa*, 164.3-167.3: *dper na sa rlangs sprin ni nam mkha 'i dbyings su dengs zhes pa nas | rang sems mthong bas rtog pa 'i rba rlabs dwangs zhes pa 'i bar gyis ni | rnam par rtog pa gang nas kyang ma 'ongs pa | gang du yang mi 'gro ba snga phyi med pa | de lta bu 'i rig pa des rlangs kyi sprin dang de sa rlangs kyi sprin dang 'dra ba 'byung ba yin | de yang sa rlangs kyi sprin de yang | dang po char pa baba pa las byung yang | sa rlangs med pa 'i sngon du char pa ma grub cing gcig dang gcig dus mnyam yin pa 'i phyir na | de bzhin du rang gi sems las byung ba 'i rtogs pa 'i tshogs kyang | phyag rgya chen po dang dus mnyam su byung ba yin par shes par gyis | de yang phyag rgya chen po de sems can rnams kyis ngo ma shes pas 'khor bar 'khyams pa yin no || rang gi sems nyid de nyid mthong na ni | rtog pa 'i rba rlabs thams cad dwangs nas gnyis med bde ba chen po 'i gnas su rang rig pa 'i ye shes sems nyid phyag rgya chen po rtogs pa 'o || dper na nam mkha 'i rang bzhin kha dog dbying las 'das zhes pa nas | dge sdig dkar nag chos kyis gos mi 'gyur || zhes pa 'i bar gyi ni | nam mkha 'i rang bzhin zhes ming du btags pa dkar ba dang | nag pa dang | ser ba dang | ljang ba dang | gang du yang ma grub pa yin | de bzhin rang gi sems kyi snying po de nyid kyang sems zhes brjod kyang | dngos po zlum po dang | 'jong mo dang | gru bzhi dang sog ka la sogs pa rnams kyi rnam pa ma grub cing | kha dog kyang gong dang mtshung pa dang | thams cad ma grub pa yin zhing | nam mkha 'i la dbyings dang dkar nag ma grub zhe pa ni gong du bstan | de bzhin du rang gi sems nyid de mthong na dge ba dang sdig pa gang gis kyang gnod pa ma bskyal | phan ma btags mi 'dogs | 'dogs par mi 'gyur ba yin | de yang rang gi sems ma gtogs pa | sangs rgyas gzhan na yod pa ma gsungs | de yang mdo las | sems rtogs na sang rgyas yin pas sangs rgyas gzhan du mi bstal ba 'i 'du shes rab tu bsgom par bya 'o || zes gsungs so || dper na gsal dwangs nyi ma 'i snyin po de zhes pa nas || bskal pa 'i 'khor bas sgrib par mi nus so zhes pa 'i bar gyis ni | dper na nyi ma de nyid gdo ma nas gsal ba 'i rang bzhin can yin pas | mun pa shin tu gnag pa 'i rang bzhin can de nyid bskal pa 'i bar du bsags par gyur kyang | nyi ma 'i 'od gsal pa skad cig ma nyid kyis mun pa 'i tshog bcom zhing gsal bar gyur pa de bzhin du rang gi sems kyi ngo bo 'od gsal ba de nyid skad cig ma nyid la rtogs na | bskal par bsags pa 'i sdig pa dang sgrib pa ma lus pa thams cad skad cig nyid la sel bar 'gyur zhing | byang ste dag par 'gyur ba 'i phyir na | 'khor bas bsgrub par mi nus zhes bya ba 'i don no || dper na nam mkha 'i stong par tha snyad rab brtags kyang | zhes pa nas | brjod pas 'di 'drar grub ces tha snyad 'gags gzhi med ces pa 'i bar gyis ni | nam mkha 'i stong pa zhes brjod kyang | nam mkha 'i la dbyings gru bzhi dang | zlum po dang 'jong mo la sogs pa gang du 'ang ma grub cing | brjod du med pa dang btshung par | sems kyi ngo bo la yang | ming tsam du sems zhes brjod kyang | dbyings dang ngo bo 'di lta bu zhes brjod du med pa 'i phyir ro || de lta sems kyi rang bzhin gdod nas nam mkha 'i dra zhes pa nas | de*

If mind has no aim, it is mahāmudrā.

*If you become familiar and acquainted with this,
unsurpassable awakening is attained.²¹*

Rang byung rdo rje explains that the true nature of mind (*sems nyid*) is beyond all extremes of elaborations. As long as one is attached to conditioned phenomena and to the various philosophical systems, *mahāmudrā* as such will not be realized. This kind of knowledge rather serves as yet another cause for delusion.

When one is able to cultivate a state of mind without attachment to whichever conditioned and unconditioned phenomena, non-virtuous or virtuous, and attains full mastery in it, this is called *mahāmudrā*.

Finalizing this cultivation and familiarization, this is the meaning of what is called the state of awakening.²²

Regarding the contradiction which from the perspective of the general *Sūtra* approach of Mahāyāna practice seems to go along with the way how one deals with virtuous, yet conditioned phenomena, such as the need to accumulate merit in order to progress on the spiritual path, Rang jung rdo rje explains:

yi ngang la btang bzhag med par glog la zhog ches pa 'i bar gyis ni | rang gi sems nyid gong du jo ltar brjod pa dang 'dra bar | dbyibs dang ngo bo gang yang ma grub pa de nyid | chos thams cad kyi ngo bo yin pa ste | de rtogs par byed pa 'i thabs la ri khrod dgon pa la sogs par gcig pur smra brjod med pa 'i ngang las | sgra thams cad chos kyi dbyings brag cha lta bu 'i ngang la mnyam par bzhag cing | yid la ci yang mi bsam pa de nyid don gyi ngo bo nyid yin te | bsam pa 'i yul las 'das pa 'i chos thams cad kyi ngo bo gong du brjod pa lta bu 'i don de nyid ma rtogs na | smyug ma 'i dong bu lta bu snying po med pas te | ye yang snying po med ces brjod kyang don gyi ngo bo la yod pa dang med pa 'i tha snyad ma grub pa yin pa 'i phyir na spros pa 'i mtha dang bral ba 'i ngang la 'jog pa 'o ||

21. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma 'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 101.6: *sems la gtad so med na phag rgya chen po yin || de la goms shing 'dris na bla med byang chub thob ||*
22. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma 'i 'grel pa*, 167.4-167.5: *sems nyid spros pa 'i mtha' thams cad dang bral ba de nyid | 'dus byas kyi chos gang la chags kyang | phyag rgya chen po de nyid mi rtogs shing | 'khrul pa 'i rgyu yin | 'dus byas dang 'dus ma byas kyi chos gang la yang ma chags shing | don de nyid klong du gyur na | phyag rgya chen po zhes bya ba yin zhing | de nyid goms shing 'dris na byang chub thobs ces bya ba 'i don yin no |*

For the appearance of the world, amassing the support of the accumulations of merit alone is practiced and it is said that this brings about awakening.²³

Yet:

Whatever concept arises in one's own mind, it is similar to the example of the arising and vanishing of patterns appearing on [the surface] of the ocean being moved by the wind. Just like that, mental concepts follow each other, one after the next and as the later one arises, the former ceases. [As concepts] are fundamentally nothing but one's own mind and thus in no way different from it, one [places one's] meditative equipoise in a nonreferential [state] without moving away from the essence of [mind] as such.

If you do not leave this actuality, absolute reality, i.e. the lamp for all phenomena, is fully comprehended. It is like for example, lifting a lamp in the darkness.²⁴

Regarding the topic of view, meditation, conduct, and fruition, Tilopa's *Mahāmudropadeśa* states for example:

*Alas! The phenomena of cyclic existence
are meaningless and the causes of suffering.*

Conditioned phenomena lack any nature.

Look at actuality, the [true] nature.²⁵

23. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa*, 168.5: 'jig rten pa'i snang ngo la bsod nams kyi tshogs gsog pa'i rten 'ba' zhig bsgrub cig 'di yis sangs rgya bar byed zer ||

24. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa*, 169.1-4: de yang rang gi sems la rnam par rtog pa gang byung yang | dper na mtsho chen po rlung gis bskyod na pa tra dag 'byung zhing yal ba'i dpe dang mtshungs pa bzhin du | sems kyi rnam par rtog pa yang gcig gi rting la gcig 'byung zhing | phyi ma skye zhing snga ma 'gag kyang | rtsa ba rang gi sems ma gtogs pa | gzhan gang yang ma yin pa'i phyir na | de nyid kyi ngang las ma g.yos pa mi dmigs par mnyam par bzhag cing | don de nyid las ma 'das na | chos thams cad kyi sgron me don dam pa nyid khon du chud par 'gyur zhing | dper na mun pa la sgron me btegs pa bzhin du 'gyur ro ||

25. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 104.6-105.1: kye ho | 'khor ba'i chos ni don med sdug bsngal rgyu || byas pa'i chos la snying po med pas don la snying po ltos ||

The instructions were given to the gifted disciple Nāropa. For ordinary practitioners, despite the explanation given above, there might arise some tension. In this regard, Rang byung rdo rje provides a bridge, linking this view and approach in practice with the steps required for beginners. We find this in Rang byung rdo rje's *Guiding Instructions for Sahaja Mahāmudrā*. In these explanations Rang byung rdo rje emphasizes that a *yogin* should certainly focus on direct experience, yet in order to develop this ability, he suggests a gradual process of training in *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. Tīlopa himself merely hints at these steps in another of his verses in the *Mahāmudropadeśa* where he instructs: "Those with inferior minds who cannot dwell in the natural state should seize the essential points and strip knowledge bare."²⁶ The essential points pertain to both, body and mind.

In his *Guiding Instructions for Sahaja Mahāmudrā*,²⁷ Rang byung rdo rje provides a short, yet systematic guideline for this practice which is *sahaja mahāmudrā* attained through the unity of *śamatha* and *vipaśyanā*. The instructions he gives in this text, can be summed up as follows:

As for *śamatha* related practice, the *yogin* is advised, based on the proper physical position, to maintain a one-pointed focus. Moment by moment he settles the mind in mind's luminosity, in a state of clarity, without entertaining thoughts, thinking about anything regarding the past and without hurrying conceptually ahead in the future. In case the mind does not abide one-pointedly, the *yogin* is advised to train by taking the following six supports:²⁸

The *yogin* is told to settle on the direct experiences of (1) visual objects; when the mind can abide by these, the training is directed towards (2) sounds from the animate and the inanimate world, be they pleasant or unpleasant.

26. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 104.5: *blo dman skye bu ngang la mi gnas na || rlung gi gnad bzung rig pa gcud ma bor ||*

27. *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skye sbyor gyi khrid yig*

28. *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skye sbyor gyi khrid yig*, 56.6-57.1: *lus kyi gnad sngar ltar byas la | mig gi blta stangs sna rtse sor bzhi'i thad du bltas la | 'das pa'i rjes mi bdad | ma 'ongs pa'i sngon mi bsu | da ltar gyi rtogs pa gsal la mi rtog pa'i ngang du mnyam par bzhags go | de la gsal stong dbyer med u rtse gcig tu mi gnas na ... |*

When the mind can abide in a focused way, the training is next (3) directed towards the direct experience of smells, whether they are pleasant and unpleasant. Then, the focus is directed to (4) taste, be it delicious or not delicious, then to (5) tactile sensations, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and finally (6) to phenomena as they are apprehended in the mind. The *yogin* is advised to settle his focus one-pointedly first on conditioned notions such as desire, hatred, pride, views, doubts and their various mixtures, and, later on to unconditioned phenomena. In case of distraction, the *yogin* shifts his focus on the respective antidote and focuses one-pointedly on this. The essence of this training is to hold the mind, aware of itself, with mindfulness and attention, so that neither agitation nor dullness can affect the awareness which is aware of itself.

Without being mentally engaged (*yid la mi byed*), mind is focused on whatever object is known, being aware of the simultaneity of knowing, appearances and their emptiness, without engaging in the concepts of abandoning and of adopting. This training leads to a state of mind where mind is both, at ease, knowing and focused which is the appropriate working ground for the training in *vipāśyanā*, in that based in good conduct it is a stable state of mind devoid of afflictions and concepts, thereby pacifying coarse afflictions and suffering.²⁹

29. *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig sgye sbyor gyi khrid yig*, 57.2-60.2.: *yul drug la brten nas bsgom pa ni | dang po mig gi yul du rnam pa gang gsal ba cig la lta stang gtad la sems bzung | skabs su sku gzugs lta bu'am | shing bu'am rde'u lta bu la gtad cing rig pa bzung la rtogs pa gzhan gyis bar mchod par bzhag | de la brtan na | gnyis pa sgra la brten nas bsgom pa ni | chu sgra 'am | rlung gi sgra'am | sems can sgra skad la sogs pa gang gsal ba la sems gtad la bzung | de brtan pa dang | yang gsum pa sna'i yul du snang ba'i dri bzang ba dang ngan pa gang byung ba la yang sems bzung la bsgom mo | de bzhin du bzhi pa lce la snang ba'i ro zhim pa dang mi zhim pa la yang sems gtad la bsgom | de ltar du lta ba lus kyi reg ba bde ba dang mi bde ba gang gsal ba la sems bzung | de rnams la cung zad pa dang | drug pa yig kyi sul du snang bai chos la brten [text: brte] nas bsgom pa yang | 'dus byas kyi chos dang | 'dus ma byas kyi chos gnyis las | dang po ni 'khor ba'i chos spang bya'i rtog pa | 'dod chags dang khong khro dang | nga rgyal dang | lta ba rnam pa lnga dang | the tshom la sogs pa | nyon mongs pa rnams dang | nye ba'i nyon mongs pa rnams kyi rtog pas sems g.yengs na yang yang | rtog pa'i yul du rnam pa gang gsal ba cig la shes pa rtse gcig tu gtad la bsgom yang gnyen po'i rtogs pa dge ba'i sems la yang gang sykes pa de la gtad*

The *yogin* who thus settles in a stable state of mind which is clear yet not conceptualizing (*gsal la mi rtog par 'jog pa*) continues with *vipāśyanā* meditation. First, he explores the manifestations of the six senses as they occur. He inquires whether concepts triggered by form, sound, smell, etc. appear from outer objects of perception or whether they arise from the sense faculties such as the eyes, the ears, the nose etc. Doing so he ascertains that they in fact do not arise from any of these. He explores the consciousnesses associated with the five physical senses as they appear moment by moment in dependence upon the respective sense faculty and object to be naturally clear and non-conceptual. He explores the sixth sense, mind-consciousness, when directed towards phenomena such as the consciousnesses of the five senses, and comes to see that it is naturally clear and non-conceptual in every moment. He realizes that as the preceding moment has ceased, the present moment appears clearly and the subsequent moment will come to appear; thus, conventional truth is not rejected. He realizes that the present moment, even though it is clear, doesn't truly exist, being empty of a real nature; thus absolute truth is not rejected. The *yogin* abides in a state of mind actualizing awareness aware of itself, the inseparability of appearances and emptiness. It is through familiarizing with this process that wisdom dawns, insight in

la rtog pa gzhan gyis bar ma chod par rtse cgig tu sems bzung bas gnas pa'i nyams skye'o | de ltar rtog pa gang skyes pa la dran pa dang ldan pas sems 'dzin pa 'di lyi gnad shes na byin rgog kyis mi gnod par gnas cha skye la | yang kha cig gis spang bya'i rtog pa de nan gyis bkag dgos byas pas | sems mi gnas pa'i steng du slar gegs su 'gro zhing ting nge 'dzin skye dka' ba yin ... thabs mkhas pa yang de nyid yin la | dmigs pa la brten nas su || mi dmigs pa la rab su skye || mi dmigs pa la brten nas su || mi dmigs pa ni rab su skye || de yi phyir na dmigs pa ni || mi dmigs ngo bo nyid du grub || de lta bas na dmigs pa dang || mi dmigs mnyam par shes par ba || zhes dbus dang mtha' rnam par 'byed pa las gsungs pas || dang po sems 'dzin pa la | yul gzugs lta bu gcig la bsdus pas | tshogs drug gcig tu bsdud bar byed pas yul gzhan la dmigs pa'i sems nye bar zhi bar skye'o || de brten na chos 'dus ma byes pa dang 'brel ba | yul drug dmigs pa'i rten de yang yid la mi byed par rang lugs su snang ba dang stong pa dang | spang bya dang | gnyen po'i mtshan ma med par rnam par rtog par ci yang yid la mi bya bar ba'i mdun gyi nam mkha' la mig gnyis gtad de | lus ma 'gul ba | rlung 'gro ba dang 'ong ba | rang sor dal bar bzhag nas | ngag mi smra bar bzhag ste ...zhi gnas kyi rgyu ni tshul khirms la brten te | ngo bo nyon mongs rtog pas dben pa yin || rkyen ni sems gnas khyad par la skye ste || phan yon nyon mongs sdug bsgnal rags pa gnon || zhes bya ba ni sems mi gnas pa gnas pa'i rim pa'o ||

the true nature, the non-duality of emptiness and appearance, of emptiness and compassion.³⁰

These are the steps Rang byung rdo rje leads a student through. The corresponding verses in Tilopa's *Mahāmudropadeśa* express the idea as follows:

*Being beyond all that apprehends and is apprehended
is the king of views.
If there is no distraction, this is the king of meditation.
If there is no activity and effort, this is the king of conduct.
If there is no hope and fear, the fruition will manifest.*³¹

30. *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig sgye sbyor gyi khrid yig*, 60.3-61.6: *don sngar sems bzung nas gsal la mi rtog par gnas pa de'i ngang nas | tshogs drug gi shes pa 'phro pa la brtag par bya ste | stog de phyir rol gyi yul du snang pa'i gzugs dang | sgra dang | dri dang | ro dang | reg dang | chos rnam las skye pa yin nam | mig dang | rna ba | sna | lce | lus rnam las byung ba yin nam | shes brtags nam | zhes brtags na de thams cad las ni rtog pa byung ba ma yin te | yul drug dang dbang po lngar rang gi ngo bos gsal kyang ma rtog par thag chod | 'od na sgo lnga po'i shes pa gzugs 'dzin pa'i mig gi rnam par shes pa dang | sgra 'dzin pa'i rna ba'i rnam par shes pa dang dri 'dzin pa'i sna'i rnam par shes pa dang | ro 'dzin pa lce'i rnam par shes pa dang | reg bya 'dzin pa'i lus kyi rnam par shes pa ste lnga po 'di yang | yul dang dbang po la brten nas skad cig tu snang ste ngo bos gsal la mi rtog par 'dug pas | tshogs drug gi shes pa yid gcig bu 'di'i rtsa bar bcad par bya ste | 'di la ni yid chos la gtad pa de ni sgo lnga'i shes pa dang 'dra bar rang gi ngo bos skad cig ma gcig tu gsal la mi rtog par 'dug pas | tshogs drug gi shes pa'i rang gi ngo lo ni 'khrul pa mi 'dug ste | snga ma'i shes pa ni 'gags pyhi ma ni ma skyes | da ltar gyi skad cig gang skyes pa de yang snang zhing gsal bas kun rdzob kyi bden pa mi 'dor bar | gsal kyang dbyibs su ma grub | kha dog tu ma grub | byed pa po bdag gam phyu'am dbang phyug gam tshangs pa'am | rdul phran nam phag na mo'am gang zag la sogs pas byas pas mi 'dug pas | rang bzhin gyis stong pas na don dam pa'i den pa mi 'dor ba snang stong gnyis kyang dbye ba med gang du yang snang zhin gang du yang brjod du btub pas de nyid dang gzhan las rnam par grol ba'o || zhes rtogs par bya'o || 'di ni rang rig ste gang rang rig 'khrul par rtogs pa nyid ye shes zhes bya ste | ye nas gnas pa'i gnas lugs shes pa'i phyir ro || de lta bu'i mngon sum de ni byis pa so so'i skye bo rnam kyis ngag gis mrjod par mir shes la | yid nyon mongs can gyi rtog pa'i spyod yul ma yin no || des na rang gis nyams su ma myong gi bar la bstan du med do ||*

31. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 105.3-4: *gzung 'dzin kun 'das lta ba'i rgyal po yin || yengs pa med na sgom pa'i rgyal po yin || bya rtsol med na sgom pa'i rgyal po yin || re dogs med na 'bras bu mngon du gyur ||*

*Likewise, if mind's root is severed,
The foliage of cyclic existence will dry up.
Take, for example, the darkness that has accumulated over thousands
of eons:
A single lamp dispels the density of this darkness.
Likewise, one moment of one's own mind's luminosity
dispels the not-knowing, wrongdoing, and obscurations that have
amassed for eons.³²*

The commentary by Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje provides the following explanation of this metaphors:

The example is darkness with the feature of being extremely black. Even if this has accumulated through the course of ten-thousand eons, one single lamp dispels the density of darkness.

Likewise, even though an inconceivable [amount of] wrongdoing was accumulated through the course of beginningless cyclic existences up until the present, one moment of *mahāmudrā*, i.e. the luminosity shining in one's own mind, dispels the entire multitude of wrongdoing and of obscurations that have amassed for eons.³³

As to the stages a *yogin* goes through in his development, Tīlopa says in his *Mahāmudropadeśa*:

*In beginners, it is similar to water [gushing down] a gorge.
In between, it is like the gentle flow of the river Ganges.*

32. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 106.3-4: *dper na ljon shing sdong po yal ga lo 'dab rgyas || rtsa ba gcig bcad yal ga khri 'bum bskams || dper na bskal pa stong du bsags pa'i mun pa yang || sgron me gcig gis mun pa'i tshogs rnams sel ||*

33. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa*, 172.6-173.1: *dpe ni mun pa shin tu gnag pa'i mtshan nyid can de nyid | bskal pa stong du bsags par gyur na 'ang sgron me gcig gis mun pa'i tshogs thams cad bsal ba bzhin du | tshe 'khor ba thog ma med pa nas tha ma da lta la thug gi bar du | sdig pa bsam gyis mi khyab pa byas kyang | rang gi sems la shar ba'i 'od gsal phyag rgya chen po skad cig gis | bskal par bsags pa'i sdig pa dang sgrub pa'i tshogs thams cad sel ba'o ||*

*Finally, all waters meet like a mother and her child.*³⁴

*If someone with an inferior mind cannot dwell in the natural state,
the essential points should be seized and knowledge stripped bare.*

Through the various branches of gazing techniques,

*and holding the mind, one should exert oneself until knowledge dwells
in its natural state.*³⁵

Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje's comment where he emphasizes the gradual process a practitioner has to go through, reads:

A beginner must enter gradually, starting from the lower *yāna*. Furthermore, in a beginner, [the state of mind] resembles water [gushing down] a gorge. [He should abide by] the view that amassing the accumulations [brings about], virtue and the view that when harm is [done] and mistaken conceptions arise, negativity [is produced].

[Then having become able to] free himself from the clinging towards these [attitudes], when he enters the path of the Vajrayāna, is it like the example of great streams such as the river Ganges, which flow gently with little force. Nothing, whether it might be virtue or negativity brings benefit or causes harm.

When in this way everything is realized to be non-referential, it is like the ocean in which all rivers meet. Some whose intellect is inferior might not understand this meaning. Yet, they should seize the essential points of *prāṇa* (*rlung*) and, by means of various techniques of

34. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma 'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 108.6-109.1: *las ni dang po cong rong chug dang 'dra || bar du chu bo gang ga dal gyi 'bab || tha mar chu rnams ma bu phrad pa bzhin || blo dman skye bu ngang la mi gnas na || rlung gi gnad bzung rig pa gcud ma bor || lta stangs sems 'dzin yan lag du ma yis || rig pa ngang la mi gnas bar du gcun ||*

35. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma 'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 110.5-110.6: *blo dman skye bu ngang la mi gnas na || rlung gi gnad bzung rig pa gcud ma bor || lta stangs sems 'dzin yan lag du ma yis || rig pa ngang la mi gnas bar du gcun ||*

meditation, they should exert themselves in the points of knowledge until they realize the meaning of *mahāmudrā*.³⁶

The final part consists of an aspiration. Pithy as it is Karma pa Rang byung rdo rje does not give any further comment on this last line, other than just mentioning that this is the wishing prayer by means of which Tīlopa ends his *Upadeśa*.

*May this pith instruction on the essential points of mahāmudrā
dwell in the hearts of fortunate beings!*³⁷

Bibliography

- BROWN, DANIEL P. *Pointing out the Great Way: The Stages of Meditation in Mahamudra Tradition*. Boston: Wisdom. 2006.
- BRUNNHÖLZL, KARL *Straight from the Heart. Buddhist Pith Instructions*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications. 2007.
- CAYLEY, VYVYAN (ed.) *The Life of the Mahāsiddha Tilopa by Mar-pa Chos-kyo bLo-gros*. Transl. by Fabrizio Torricelli and Sangye T. Naga. Dharamsala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. 1995.
- DKON MCHOG YAN LAG
(5th ZHWA DMAR PA) *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*. In *sGung thor bu /*

36. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa*, 174.1-5: *las dang po pa ni | theg pa chung ngu nas gim gyis dzigs dgos shing | las dang po gcong rong gi chu dang 'dra zhing tshogs bsags pas dge bar lta zhing | gnod pa dang log pa 'i sems skyes na sdig par lta ba ste | de rnams kyi 'dzin pa grol nas gsang sngags kyi lam la zhugs pa 'i dus su | dper na chu bo chn po gangā la sogs pa dang | chu bo chen po rnams dal zhing g.yo ba bzhin du tshegs chung ngus dge ba dang sdig pa gang gis kyang phan ma btags gnod pa mi bskyel ba'o | de nas de lta bu kun mi dmigs pa 'i klong du gyur ba ni | chu thams cad 'dres pa 'i rgya mtsho dang 'dra ba'o | blo dman pa 'i skye bu 'ga' zhig gis de lta bu 'i don ma rtogs kyang | rlung gi gnad bzung zhing bskom pa 'i thabs du ma yis | phyag rgya chen po 'i don ma rtogs kyi bar du rig pa gnad du gcun zhing rtogs pa 'i dus su phyag rgya bzhi la gnas shing nyams su len dgos pa'o |*

37. *Phyag rgya chen po gang gā ma'i 'grel pa dngos grub kyi nying khu*, 112.1-2: *'gro ba skal ldan snying la gnas par shog ||*

- dkon mchog yan lag*, vol. 1, pp. 91-113, reproduced from rare texts from the library of zwa-dmar rin-po-che, Gangtok. Dzongsar Chhentse Labrang. 1974.
- GUENTER, HERBERT V. *The Royal Song of Saraha: A Study in the History of Buddhist Thought*. Seattle/London: University of Washington Press. 1969.
- JACKSON, ROGER *Tantric Treasures: Three Collections of Mystical Verse from Buddhist India*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2004.
- JACKSON, ROGER; KAPTSEIN, MATTHEW (ed.) *Mahāmudrā and the Bka' brgyud Tradition*. IATS 2006: *Tibetan Studies: Proceedings of the Eleventh Seminar of the International Association for Tibetan Studies*, Königswinter 2006. IITBS, 2011.
- KOLLMAR-PAULENZ, KARÉ. *Kleine Geschichte Tibets*, München, Verlag C.H. Beck, 2006.
- LAMA TASHI NAMGYAL (ed.) *Shenpen Osel, The Clear Light of the Buddha's Teachings Which Benefits All Being*, Volume 3, Number 3. December 1999–January 2000. Seattle, Washington: Kagyu Shenpen Ösel Chöling (KSOC).
<http://www.shenpen-osel.org/issue8.pdf>; last internet access: Sept. 21st 2012.
- NĀLANDĀ, TRUNGPA NĀLANDĀ TRANSLATION COMMITTEE, CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA (tr.). *The Rain of Wisdom*. Boulder & London: Shambhala Publications, 1980.
- RANG BYUNG RDO RJE (3RD KARMA PA) *Phyag rgya chen po 'i gang gā ma 'i 'grel pa*, vol. a, pp 161-175 in *Karma pa rang byung rdo rje 'i gsung 'bum*. mTshur phu mKhan po Lo yag bkra shis, 16 vol.: Zi ling, 2006.

- RANG BYUNG RDO RJE *Phyag rgya chen po lhan cig skyes sbyor gyi khrid yig bzhugs so*, vol a, pp. 53-72 in *Karma pa rang byung rdo rje'i gsung 'bum*. mTshur phu mKhan po Lo yag bkra shis, 16 vol.: Zi ling, 2006.
- ROBERTS, PETER ALLAN (tr.) *Mahamudra and related Instructions, Core teachings of the Kagyü Schools*. The Library of Tibetan Classics, Boston: Wisdom Publications. 2011.
- ROBINSON, JAMES B. (tr.) *The Lives of the Eighty-four Siddhas* (by Abhayadatta): Berkeley: Dharma Publishing. 1979.
- ZANGPO, NGAWANG *The Treasury of Knowledge, Jamgön Kongtrul Lodrö Tayé, Buddhism's Journey to Tibet*. Ithaca N.Y.: Snow Lion Publications. 2010.