

MOONBEAMS OF MAHĀMUDRĀ SURVEY

A SURVEY OF

DAGPO TASHI NAMGYAL'S MOONBEAMS OF MAHĀMUDRĀ

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BASED ON THE TRANSLATION BY ELISABETH M. CALLAHAN (SNOW LION, 2019)

PART ONE: COMMON SAMĀDHIS

Video One: Introduction

- Why study this book “Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā” by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal?
 - complete explanation of Kagyu Mahāmudrā
 - background of all meditation instructions like for the “Ocean of true Meaning” etc.
 - background of L. Tilmann’s lineage (Gendün Rinpoche, Gampopa, Karmapas)
 - careful English translation by Elisabeth M. Callahan
 - easier, incomplete English version by Traleg Rinpoche
 - French translation by Christian Charrier
 - German translation in preparation by Judith Debbeler and a translation team in Rangjung Yeshe Institute
 - overview of the teaching material existing so far in the various languages (audios and transcripts see Ekayana Media Library)
- Why these videos? Who is the intended audience?
 - to present an overview on Mahāmudrā practice in form of a study manual
 - *See: Translator’s introduction on Kagyu Mahāmudrā, pages 29 – 38*
 - to reduce the hesitation to study this book personally, giving guidance
 - to allow interested practitioners to get a quick orientation followed by personal reading of the book and listening to the audios of the detailed explanation
 - to catch up with the ongoing curriculum (sentence by sentence explanation in English, German and French)
 - pointing out the essentials of each chapter to not get lost in less important details
 - explaining the structure or inner logic of the presentation (abhidharma approach)
 - not intended as a manual of meditation instructions
 - not intended to replace the curriculum
- Who is the author? Short biography of Dhagpo Tashi Namgyal
 - *See: Translator’s introduction, pages 38 – 41, and abbreviated biography pages 65 – 78*
 - lived in 1513–1587, 400 years after Gampopa
 - supposed to be Gampopa’s first official reincarnation
 - 14th throne holder at Gampopa’s monastery

- trained by (the 13th abbot), his uncle Gampo Chöje Sönam Lhundrup
- Context of this book in its time, the author's intent
 - further defining the Kagyu Mahāmudrā approach
 - explaining the approach to outsiders of the Kagyu tradition
 - giving the oral transmission a common, easily understandable reference text
 - clarifying issues of debate with other traditions (Sakya, Gelug)

Video Two: Outline of the whole book

- *Moonbeams, Outline of text, pages 9 – 21; Translator's introduction, pages 42 – 57*

I. Introduction: **Why** we meditate on the nature of mind

- A. All phenomena are experienced in mind
- B. Problems of not meditating on the nature of mind
- C. Virtues of meditating on the nature of mind

II. Main Part: **How** we meditate on the nature of mind

A. **Common** Meditation Approach (Part One)

1. Śamatha and Vipāśyanā explained together
2. Śamatha
3. Vipāśyanā
4. How to meditate on the view (Removing doubts)

B. **Particular** Mahāmudrā Approach (Part Two)

5. Generating confidence
6. Preliminaries
7. Various Mahāmudrā approaches
- Gradual instructions
 8. Śamatha
 9. Vipāśyanā
10. Pointing out instructions
11. Sustaining Mahāmudrā meditation
 - The necessity to sustain
 - The methods to sustain
12. Eliminating deviations and strayings in meditation
13. Enhancing the realization
14. How realization develops
 - Differentiating four yogas (levels of practice)
 - How the realizations of the four yogas develop
15. The four yogas in detail

- One-pointedness
- Simplicity (freedom from elaborations)
- One Taste
- Nonmeditation
- How the bhūmis and paths are traversed through the four yogas

III. Colophon

Video Three: Common Exposition of Śamatha and Vipāśyanā

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 15 – 45 (chapter 1)*

1. Summary

- Tashi Namgyal will follow here the well-known presentation of the sūtra oriented treatises.
- In the same way as every part of a tree is connected to the trunk, every samādhi (meditative absorption) is connected to mental calm and intuitive insight.
- To be engaged one-pointedly (without distraction) with a wholesome focus or content of meditation corresponds to mental calm (śamatha).
- To understand the nature of the meditative experience with wholesome differentiating wisdom (prajñā) corresponds to intuitive insight (vipāśyanā).
- The union of these two allows for an awakening understanding of reality to arise.

2. Systematic Presentation

- Causes of calm and insight:* wholesome conduct, pure view, the guru's blessings, dependent origination, gathering the accumulations of positive force and awareness, purifying veils, residing in a conducive place, having few desires, being content, reducing activities, relinquishing attachment and aversion, relying upon awakened beings, listening to them, studying their teaching, and contemplating it deeply.
- Eliminating obscurations (veils)* like dullness and agitation which are the main obstacles, showing as remorse, sluggishness, drowsiness, doubts, pleasure-seeking, malice, distraction of attention, external or internal distraction, distraction related to characteristics or to negative propensities, laziness, forgetfulness, non-exertion, and excessive application. They are eliminated through skilfully directing one's attention, developing trust (faith), motivation, right effort (exertion), suppleness, mindfulness, alertness, applied intention, and the equanimity of remaining in the natural state.
- Knowing (identifying) the essences of calm and insight:* Undistracted (one-pointed) mind resting in mind and deeply understanding (differentiating) phenomena (reality). with the help of nonconceptual and conceptual supports for calm and insight one progresses from approximative calm and insight to true (pure) calm and insight.
- Knowing (presenting) the sub-categories of calm and insight:* the nine stages of mental calm and the three or four types of insight plus the six modes of inquiry.
- Explaining the order of practice:* mental calm supports insight; insight enhances calm; we need to cultivate insight right from the beginning without pursuing calm separately

- vi. *Cultivating the unity of calm and insight:* Since insight is unstable without calm, and since calm without insight does eliminate the obscurations, we need to practice both: in a clear, relaxed mind insight into suchness (nature of mind) appears effortlessly.
- vii. *Explaining the results:* Calm leads to mental stability free from afflictions and insight leads to wisdom that purifies the tendencies of lacking awareness. Furthermore, śamatha reverses attachment to sense pleasures and characteristics, gives heightened perceptions and samādhis, and ensures good rebirth, while vipaśyanā brings happiness to all beings, recognizes the nature of all phenomena, and liberates from involuntary rebirth. Together they lead into complete awakening.

Video Four

Śamatha preparation and general exposition of meditation objects

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 47 – 51 (chapter 2, first part)*

A. Preparations

- Restraining sense faculties, being attentive
- taking care of proper amounts and quality of food
- on a comfortable seat, in a posture enhancing clarity
- breathing slowly without effort, willing to tolerate difficulties
- disregarding desire for possessions and worldly endeavours
- maintaining wholesome conduct
- applying oneself with joyful perseverance

B. Objects (focus) of meditation

1. General exposition of meditation objects

- *Universal objects*
 - (1) Focussing on conceptual representations with initial analysis
 - (2) resting on nonconceptual representations without analysis
 - (3) directing one's attention on *what* arises (quantitative)
or on *how* it arises (qualitative)
 - (4) repeatedly refreshing the intention to accomplish one's purpose.
- *Objects which change our attitude and behaviour*
Meditating for example on ugliness, kindness, dependent origination, the way sense perceptions arise with their elemental qualities (dhātus), and breathing.
- *Objects which give expertise in knowing non-self*
Meditating on the aggregates (skandhas)
sense fields (dhātus), sensory processes (āyatanas)
12 links of dependent origination
and the effects of actions.
- *Objects which purify mental afflictions*

- (1) Focussing on the experience that neither coarse nor subtle (calm) saṃsāric states give lasting happiness.
- (2) Meditating all aspects of the four truths (suffering, its origin, its cessation, and the path of liberation).

Video Five: Śamatha practice

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 51 – 62 (chapter 2, second part)*

2. When to practice what?

For all afflictions exist corresponding focusses of meditation which help to purify them:

- attachment
- aggression
- bewilderment
- pride
- excessive thinking
- various types of confusion about:
 - formative forces
 - self or non-self
 - interdependence due to causes and conditions
 - impermanence
 - suffering
 - enchantment with sense pleasures etc.

3. Advice on initial objects of meditation

Start with *one* object, for example the breath.

Focus *inward* on the body as it is, as a deity, symbols, light rays, experience of joy etc.

Focus *outward* on ordinary (worldly) or special (spiritual) sensory experiences

4. How mindfulness and alertness sustain meditation

Mindfulness maintains the stream of awareness and prevents the mind from straying.

Alertness recognizes when it has strayed and brings it back.

Balance tightness and looseness, effort and relaxation, to stay in flawless absorption.

C. The way to practice śamatha

Eliminate the five faults through *eight applications* (see p. 24).

Practice the *nine stages*: settling, continuous settling, renewed settling, increased settling, taming, pacification, full pacification, one-pointedness, and equipoise. (p. 57f.)

Apply the *six strengths* – hearing, reflecting, mindfulness, alertness, joyful perseverance, and familiarization – to progress through the nine stages. (p. 59f.)

Thus, progress through the *four types of attention*: tightly focussed, intermittently engaged, uninterruptedly engaged, and spontaneous. (p.60f.)

[Supplement from the oral instructions: The supreme focus of calm abiding is bodhicitta – to rest in the heart of awakening, meditating in the bodhicitta motivation and view...]

Video Six: Different aspects of Insight practice

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 63 – 65 (chapter 3, first part)*

A) General explanation: Different types of insight meditation

1. mundane vipaśyanā (insight) develops a general understanding of the mind
 2. lesser (basic) supramundane vipaśyanā develops an understanding of the four truths and of the absence of an individual self
 3. higher supramundane vipaśyanā develops an understanding of the nature of mind and all phenomena, which includes:
 - understanding meaning
 - understanding entities
 - understanding characteristics
 - understanding qualities
 - understanding time
 - understanding reasonings
- through differentiating phenomena (quantitative aspect)
 - thoroughly differentiating phenomena (qualitative aspect)
 - differentiating phenomena as to their coarse and subtle aspects
 - discerning, analysing, and understanding the view
 - abiding, meditating in the view without discernment or analysis
 - understanding the abiding state (nature of mind)
 - realizing the view of definite meaning in relation to mind and phenomena
 - finely discerning all further aspects of dharma

Video Seven: How to give rise to Insight

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 66 – 85 (chapter 3, second part)*

B) The way to generate the view for vipaśyanā to arise

Developing the view of absence of self with the help of reasoning, logic, and deep observation, thus undermining the belief in the existence of a self in the individual (perceiving subject, mind, soul) and of a self in phenomena (perceived objects, experiences).

- refuting a self-entity of persons
- refuting a self-entity of phenomena
- exploring beliefs in existence, non-existence, both, neither
- exploring appearances, mind, empty nature, spontaneous presence, self-liberation
- contemplating pointing-out instructions on mind and reality
- remembering the view
- meditating, resting in the view
- engaging in post-absorption activity while staying in the view

Video Eight: Introduction to Analytical and Resting meditation

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 87 – 89 (chapter 4, first part)*

Using analysis and resting we will find it easy to discover the true point of meditation. Not using both, analysis remains intellectual, and resting remains dualistic. Analytical meditation uses inferential cognition based on critical investigation using scriptures and reasonings. Finally, analysis has to lead beyond terms and referents into direct cognition. Resting meditation uses direct cognition while remaining in equipoise with suchness in the natural abiding state.

Resting in mental calm (śamatha) allows for wisdom to clearly analyse the actual experience.

- (1) First, insight meditation (vipaśyanā) uses conceptual thinking and nonconceptual analysis.
- (2) Then, vipaśyanā does not rely further on conceptual thinking, but mostly uses nonconceptual analysis (examination) of the present experience, for example to notice deviations from the resting state (dullness, agitation...) and arouse alertness to correct this.
- (3) Finally, there is the vipaśyanā free of conceptuality and analysis.

Video Nine: Using Analysis and Resting to enter the View

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 89 – 95 (chapter 4, second part)*

During śamatha we need analysis (discerning wisdom) to know the presence, cause, interaction, and nature of the afflictions, and to modify our way to meditate in accordance with the actual experience. But when the aim of naturally supple resting in clear awareness is achieved, all further analytical processes need to be abandoned. This is the “pacification of discernments at the end of analysis” leading into nonconceptual, unmoving vipaśyanā.

When conceptual thinking and analysis stop after full discernment, true vipaśyanā arises, and we simply “rest in the view”. The unification of calm and insight is achieved, and we only occasionally use analysis to verify just how it goes.

Beginners who experience agitation due to an excess of analytical meditation should cultivate more śamatha, but when they experience sluggishness from too much resting meditation, they should cultivate vipaśyanā. When both are balanced, we cultivate equanimity in suchness without active application. Mind rests in mind.

Resting in the view is knowing the empty nature and sustaining the freedom from elaborations (simplicity) resulting from that understanding (seeing).

Discerning wisdom (prajñā) arising from study and contemplation cuts through misinterpretations concerning reality (wrong views); like showing a horse the racetrack.

Discerning wisdom arising from meditation leads to the direct understanding that all phenomena are ungraspable (empty), without a stable core or self-entity. Discerning wisdom in a calm mind allows for clear insight to arise, just like light coming into fine eyes allows for clear seeing.

When clinging to characteristics blocks our mind, whatever realisation we might already have had, we again need analytical meditation to see through the illusion and blockage.

Video Ten: Clarifying the actual View

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 95 – 107 (chapter 4, third part)*

The point of the whole path is to develop an unshakeable, non-fabricated certainty concerning the nature of mind and reality, knowing “suchness”, the way it is. Simply resting suspended in ordinary “stagnant” nonconceptuality does not produce that certainty.

We need to be mindful, alert and fully aware (interested), which gives rise to seeing and the resulting certainty. To enable this, we abandon even the slightest fixation on the experience of the fundamental view (true seeing) and on the absence of self-entity or lack of reality – and rest completely open without any thought like “that is it” or “this is empty”.

In the seeing that truly liberates (“right view”) śamatha and vipaśyanā are both present free from all grasping and all blockages – if not, it is not the true seeing. The result of analysis is to see and understand beyond concepts.

Initially, to investigate the view, it is impossible not to employ discerning wisdom (prajñā). But later, we learn to let the mind rest in itself, in suchness, in the empty nature of all appearances.

When seeing how it is, there is no seeing of anything, of any phenomenon. Mind, free from dullness and agitation, does not conceive of anything and does not grasp at anything. Free from mindfulness and attention involving subject and object, mind rests free from elaborations. In the nature of phenomena (dharmatā), just as it is, mind rests just as it is.

In the sphere of all phenomena (dharmadhātu), complete simplicity free from elaborations, mind rests free from elaborations. During that time, discerning wisdom (prajñā) ceases to function as a mental activity distinguishing various aspects of experience and shows as basic, empty luminosity, which clears away everything that could be a flaw.

Video Eleven: Summary of Insight meditation

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 107 – 109 (chapter 4, fourth part)*

Tashi Namgyal summarizes insight meditation in a paragraph that merits closer attention:

1. First understand all phenomena (subject and object) to be mind.
2. Then examine whether a mind exists in past, present, and future.
3. Look whether it is one mind or several minds.
4. Find out whether mind arises, stays somewhere, and ceases at times.
5. Discover mind’s all-pervading natural “luminosity” (awareness).
6. Thus, understand that mind does not exist as something.
7. See that subject and object never existed.
8. Also realize that the discerning wisdom has no existence as something like the fire produced from rubbing wood, consumes the wood, and then goes out.
9. Discover how that type of view dispels all dullness and agitation.
10. The schism between perceiver and perceived is gone together with the faults of apprehending characteristics and conceptualizing
11. Mind rests in the nonconceptual samādhi of the “absence of characteristics” without any need to create a forceful certainty.

This finishes the general outline of what we need to know in order to practice deep meditation in accordance with the buddhist sūtras, tantras, and oral instructions of the great masters.

PART TWO: THE WAY TO CULTIVATE THE “UNCOMMON MAHĀMUDRĀ”

(WAS ALSO TRANSMITTED LIVE ON ZOOM)

Video 12: Generating Confidence, Basic Explanations

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 113 – 119 (chapter 5, first part)*

A) The various meanings of the word “Mahāmudrā” – “Great Seal”

Mudra means seal, mark, sign, imprint, trait, and characteristic. Here it refers to the non-arising, empty nature of all phenomena, thusness, prajnaparamita, without definable characteristics, free of all expectations, and basically beyond conditioning.

Mahā means great, supreme. Here it signifies that there is nothing higher than this dharma.

Many synonyms are enumerated for Mahāmudrā: suchness, unsurpassable wisdom, universal excellence, dharmakaya, and equality of phenomena...

B) The essential nature and subdivisions of Mahāmudrā

Essentially that what we call Mahāmudrā is free from characteristics, abides nowhere and pervades everything, comparable to space. It is clear, unstained, inexpressible.

Ground Mahāmudrā is the very nature of all phenomena (dharmata) as well as of our mind, naturally luminous empty nature, the primordial abiding state, clear, brilliant, unidentifiable.

Path Mahāmudrā is the increasing purification of veils leading to a growing realisation of just how it is through the practices of listening, contemplating, and meditating, which include calm abiding and insight meditation. Path Mahāmudrā also includes further practices called karmamudrā, samayamudrā, jñānamudrā, and dharmamudrā.

Fruition Mahāmudrā manifests when all veils covering the ground are completely purified and suchness shows free from even the most subtle dualistic clinging. It includes the manifestation of fivefold timeless awareness, also called the “five wisdoms” although the five are inseparable.

C) The Benefits of knowing Mahāmudrā

Knowing Mahāmudrā one will attain the supreme result of liberation, buddhahood, and know the equal taste of all phenomena, also referred to as the same nature of samsara and nirvana.

Video 14: Generating Confidence, Mahāmudrā in Sūtras and Tantras

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 119 – 147 (chapter 5, second part)*

The sūtras mention Mahāmudrā as mudra of liberation, nondual and pure, as all phenomena being imprinted with the mudra of equality, stainless, internally pure, naturally luminous, primordially unborn, non-abiding, and unceasing, the mudra of emptiness – just to name a few.

In the tantras we find varying lists of three or four mudras (karmamudrā, samayamudrā, jñānamudrā, and dharmamudrā) usually culminating in Mahāmudrā, which is explained as non-elaboration, natural joy in recognition of its empty nature, and ground dharmata (the way phenomena are). Sometimes it is referred to as the Wisdom Lady or Prajnaparamita, who gives birth to all buddhas. Tashi Namgyal writes (p. 128, bottom):

“In brief, we should know that all the presentations on the ground abiding state of phenomena, natural emptiness, natural connateness, equality, unchanging bliss, great bliss, being free from arising, abiding, and ceasing, profound peace, and freedom from elaborations in the tantras and texts of the mahāsiddhas are presentations of Mahāmudrā.”

And he continues, after refuting some erroneous views of his time, with the section on “How Mahāmudrā is the profound point of all sūtras and tantras” (p. 135, bottom). Based on many quotes he describes the essential nature of the Mahāmudrā approach as:

- The path of direct cognition (of the ground)
- The vehicle of the unsurpassed essence
- The direct path into the realisation of suchness
- The uncontrived yoga

To further generate confidence in the authenticity of this approach, Dhagpo Tashi Namgyal shortly describes the origins of the Mahāmudrā lineage in India and how it was then transmitted in Tibet. You are advised to read more about these great masters like Saraha, Tilopa, Naropa, Marpa, Milarepa, Gampopa, the Karmapas and all other Dhagpo Kagyu masters to be able to appreciate their care and dedication to pass on this most precious gift into our times.

Videos 15 & 16: Specific Preliminaries for the Practice of Mahāmudrā

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 149 – 168 (chapter 6, first part)*

We need to:

- Be instructed by a qualified spiritual mentor (lama)
- Train in wholesome conduct
- Listen closely to the teaching (study)
- Reflect repeatedly on the meaning (contemplation)
- Turn away from our attachment to the alluring appearances of this life
- Turn towards what is truly reliable (refuge)
- Arouse an exceptional motivation of definite goodness for all further lives (bodhicitta)
- Practice the dharma properly as much as we can (meditation)
- Meditate again and again on the true nature of all phenomena

More specifically the preliminaries include an in depth practice of the following five:

1. Contemplating the preciousness of our human birth, impermanence, the effect of our actions (karma), how to avoid suffering, thus developing revulsion with our own saṃsāric tendencies and a continuous sense of urgency
2. Deeply going for refuge and arousing bodhicitta
3. Practising generosity by offering mandalas and in every act of our life
4. Cleansing obscurations with the Vajrasattva practice and through applying the four forces (powers)
5. Receiving the blessing of uniting with the master’s mind (guru yoga)

Videos 17 & 18: The Preliminaries for Every Mahāmudrā Meditation

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 168 (bottom) – 174 (chapter 6, second part)*

The preliminaries of a meditation session in the Mahāmudrā tradition always include:

A) What we should take care of first (preparing the ground)

- Preserving wholesome conduct with mindfulness and alertness
- Remaining free of attachment and aversion in the six sense fields
- Being fully alert and mindful in all our actions of body, speech and mind
- Enjoying moderation in eating, drinking etc.; taking food as medicine
- Practising into the night and early in the morning, sleeping less

B) How to maintain the meditation sessions

- If possible, prepare a little shrine
- Chose a comfortable seat and posture
- Let body and mind settle naturally
- Cut the flow of useless thinking
- Develop a strong resolve, being clear about how you will meditate
- Guide your mind step by step through the meditation (main practice)
- Keep to short, frequent sessions at first, not putting strain on our mind
- With increasing stability, we lengthen the sessions
- Finally, we dedicate the positive force of having practiced to all sentient beings
- In between sessions we use everything to deepen our understanding and to develop a positive attitude with a corresponding beneficial activity

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 175 – 177 (chapter 7)*

The following instructions are given for the “gradual” types of practitioners, who travel the path step by step. Most practitioners nowadays belong to that category, which needs progressive instructions, which are basically subdivided into calm abiding (śamatha), insight (vipaśyanā), and resting in the nature of mind (Mahāmudrā).

The rare “instantaneous” types, who have trained a lot in previous lives, will be able to enter Mahāmudrā directly on receiving just a few pointing out instructions.

Accordingly, for the different types of practitioners, different approaches have been proven helpful. Many Mahāmudrā masters teach a combination of instructions: giving the progressive approach together with pointing out instructions on the nature of mind.

Video 19: Śamatha – The Practice of Calm Abiding in Mahāmudrā

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 177 – 184 (chapter 8, first part)*

The practice of calm abiding within the Mahāmudrā tradition relies on a good familiarity with the general approach to calm abiding as practiced in all traditions (see chapter 2). These basic instructions must be integrated first. What is explained now is in addition (!) to those basic instructions.

- The Mahāmudrā tradition emphasizes the “Vairocana” meditation posture in seven points (see page 181).
- We then let the breath flow in and out, without a sound, gently and effortlessly, until the breath becomes so fine that it might not be felt anymore.
- We meditate with open eyes and straight back, without wilful tension.
- The cushion is one fist high, compressed like a ball below the anus, so that we can sit for a long time without getting numb legs, but rather enter a clear and lucid mind.
- The emphasis is then on joy and enthusiasm for cultivating samadhi, a strong motivation and faith, knowing that the whole point of practice is suppleness.
- With this motivation we usually do a short, intense guru yoga, then letting the guru dissolve into us.
- Whatever support for meditation we chose, it is as if the guru were meditating from within, feeling the body, hearing the sounds, seeing the visual object, noticing the mental processes etc.

Videos 20 & 21: Śamatha – Using supports and characteristics

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 184 – 194 (chapter 8, first part)*

The practice of calm abiding (mental stillness) can be enhanced by the use of various ways to stabilize one’s mindfulness. We distinguish three ways to train stability in calm abiding:

1. *Becoming mindful by focussing on characteristics with support*

- outer *ordinary* objects like a pebble, a twig, a flower, the pattern of a carpet, a letter, a sound, a landscape, whatever sensory object one finds suitable...
- outer *spiritual* (“pure”) objects like a buddha statue, painting, spiritual symbol, mandala, mantra chanting...
- inner ordinary objects like specific physical sensations, inner sounds...
- visualized *outer* spiritual objects like a buddha or a pure realm
- visualized *inner* spiritual objects like light spheres of various colours in the body, a lotus in the heart, a buddha in the heart

We direct our mind loosely to those focal supports, not letting it wander anywhere else, remaining non-conceptual, without distraction and without thinking about the object. The advantage of this approach is that we always have a clear, definite support to return to in case we get distracted. The specificity of the Mahāmudrā approach is to never inhibit nor pursue thoughts, and to always practice as much as possible free from hope and fear, trusting that it is the mind’s nature to become calm when not stirred up by clinging to self-importance.

2. *Becoming mindful by focussing on characteristics without (a stable) support*

- Using the characteristics of breathing:
 - through counting, following, settling, examining, changing, and purifying the breath (pp.189/190)
 - filling with breath and other forms of pranayama (pp. 191/192)
- Not using the breath but focussing on instructions like:
 - Leave the mind in its own free and natural state
 - Not involving with thoughts about past, present, and future
 - Be aware not to engage in analysis
 - Relax all effort to meditate
 - Leave mind like space
- Using the characteristics of mental activity:
 - Opening all six sense fields in non-grasping mindfulness
 - Leaving thoughts to themselves (non-involvement)
 - Noticing various forms of tension and relaxing all hope and fear

Video 22 (not given yet): *Śamatha without focussing on characteristics*

➤ *Moonbeams, pages 195 – 214 (chapter 8, second part)*

3. *Being mindful without focussing on characteristics*

- Tightening or uplifting the mind when it is dull, sluggish, fuzzy or lethargic and thus lacking clarity and freshness by raising the gaze, straightening the body and expanding the mind's vision, making it spacious and vibrant
- Relaxing the mind when it is agitated, clinging, emotionally pre-occupied or engaged in discursive thinking, by lowering the gaze, letting go and opening into a spacious, naturally settled and free state
- Resting calmly in the mind's lucid and non-conceptual nature; only tightening our mindfulness and alertness, if the mind is not still and clear any more.
- Taking the joy of a naturally relaxed mind as our inspiration to go into deepening experiences of equanimity

When practising like that three successive experience of mental calm will show (p. 207):

Like a waterfall, like a flowing river, and like an unmoving ocean

This is the result of a gradually deepening process of settling, taming and pacifying the mind until one reaches an effortless, completely clear and calm equipoise where mindfulness is naturally present with great suppleness or flexibility in body and mind. This process is usually described in nine steps (p. 208). For this to happen we need the six strengths of

- understanding coming from listening and study
- understanding coming from reflecting and contemplating
- mindfulness
- alertness
- diligence or joyful perseverance, and
- familiarization.

The increasingly clear, flexible, one-pointed mind is then used to develop insight (*vipaśyanā*).