

A Guide to the Ganges Mahamudra

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The Ganges Mahamudra is a short teaching on a meditation practice known as Mahamudra. Because it briefly describes this important practice it has become popular with people unfamiliar with the wider body of Buddhist philosophy. And for that reason, the Ganges Mahamudra may be misunderstood. Meditation has become popular in the West, but it arose in a context and needs to be understood in terms of this context. For Tilopa, the author of this text, the purpose of meditation is enlightenment. He understood enlightenment as freedom from the bondage of ignorance. This bondage manifests in the form of our defiled emotions: greed, anger, and ignorance. Under the bondage of these emotions you do what harmful to yourself and to others. The other aspect of enlightenment is the development of all the positive qualities that are inherent in our nature. A fully enlightened being is a person who has eliminated all the defiling emotions and developed all the positive qualities. While this text focuses on meditation, meditation is only part of the work that needs to be done to achieve enlightenment. The practice of Buddhism includes moral discipline meditation, and wisdom. Wisdom starts with an intellectual understanding and ends with a experiential understanding. The experiential understanding arises out of the practice of meditation, but is not the same as the practice of meditation.

It is the purpose of this essay to explain the meaning of the text and the practice of Mahamudra, in terms of an explanation of the wider practice of Buddhist meditation where necessary. The text of the Ganges Mahamudra is in **bold** and my explanation is in plain text.

In Sanskrit: Mahamudra Upadesha
In Tibetan: Chagya Chenpo Men Ngag
In English: Pith Instructions on Mahamudra

The title of the text is “Pith Instructions on Mahamudra.” It is popularly referred to as the Ganges Mahamudra because it was taught on the banks of the Ganges river. The teaching was originally given in Sanskrit and then translated into Tibetan and I have done this translation into English. It was traditional in Tibet to give both the original title and Tibetan title for texts translated from Sanskrit and I have added my own title.

Mahamudra is the name for one approach to meditation. Mahamudra is usually translated as “Great Seal.” Documents were once stamped with a seal instead of being signed. The seal indicated the authenticity of the document. The idea is not that Mahamudra is authentic, but that the practice of meditation shows us what is authentic as opposed to what is unreal and only exists in our imagination. Authentic also means what is of genuine value rather than what people think is of value. The nature of mind is authentic, even though it is covered by temporary defilements. To use an analogy, it is like jeweler who is carrying jewelry that accidentally falls into the mud. The jeweler would not think the jewelry had lost a single penny of its value. But the jeweler would not sell the jewelry until every speck of the mud was cleaned off.

The word translated as pith instructions, upadesha, refers to a particular type of teaching. Buddhist teachings often include quotations from scripture and previous commentaries in order to establish that what they say is consistent with them. An upadesha is given directly from teacher to student and this type of quotation is not needed because of the trust between teacher and student. The texts also are short and given with the immediate needs of the student in mind. It’s as if two

people were driving together and one was giving directions. The directions would be brief and suited to the immediate need, for example, “turn left at the next light.”

**Mahamudra cannot be taught, but
You, who practiced austerities for the teacher from devotion
And patiently bore sufferings, intelligent Naropa
Fortunate one, listen to this and take it to heart**

The person speaking is Tilopa, who was Naropa’s teacher. Tilopa was a wandering yogi, living on offerings that he begged. Naropa was originally a Buddhist monk, a teacher at the monastic college of Nalanda. The monastery was supported by the kings of the Pala dynasty and Naropa had a relatively comfortable life. However, he was unsatisfied with what he had been able to achieve through his meditation practice and left the monastery in search of a teacher. This meant giving up the secure life of a monk and teacher, which was a hardship, as the second stanza says. Mahamudra cannot be taught because teaching uses words and concepts, but Mahamudra is direct experience of what is authentic. While concepts can orient us in the right direction, it can’t substitute for your own experience.

**For example, what is the support of space?
Similarly, mahamudra is not dependent on any object
Rest in midst of uncontrived naturalness
And by letting it be no doubt what is bound will be released**

If you are a new student of meditation it’s best to have some object, such as the breath. That way it’s easier for you to know if you are doing the practice correctly. You simply ask, “Am I aware of the breath,” or whatever the object of meditation is. Meditation is awareness of what is happening at the present. However, the point of meditation is not awareness of some specific object, but the act of awareness itself. One can be aware of anything, or everything. And that is what the practice of Mahamudra is, being aware of whatever is happening in your present experience. It is uncontrived and natural because you are not trying to push your mind in a specific direction. And if pursued seriously and consistently the practice of Mahamudra will free you from the bondage of ignorance about what is so.

**For example, looking at the center of the sky, sights will cease
Similarly, it is taught that when the mind looks at the mind
The collection of thoughts cease
and perfect unsurpassed enlightenment is attained**

So you may wonder how if the purpose of meditation is to improve your mind, how will being aware of my ordinary thoughts and feelings have any benefit? Usually one thought leads to another, so you have long chains of thoughts. So much so that your thoughts fill your mind from the moment you wake until you fall asleep. But when you are aware of your thoughts, the chains of thought after thought don’t happen. Instead, thoughts arise and cease because each thought is only temporary. And there is a gap until another thought arises again. In between thoughts you experience the thought free mind. And while this is not enlightenment and does not directly lead to the experience of enlightenment, it is a first step towards it. Enlightenment is seeing mind and

phenomena directly as they are and initially thoughts are an obstruction to this.

**For example, clouds and mist dissolve into the sky
Without staying or going anywhere
Thoughts which arise in the mind are like that
When your mind is looked at the waves of thought dissolve**

The thoughts that arise during meditation may create strong emotions. You may be filled with feelings of worthlessness or sudden anxiety. Or you may experience feelings of elation or bliss and wonder if this is the experience of enlightenment. All thoughts and emotions are temporary. None are the experience of enlightenment. Nor do they show that you are incapable of meditation. All thoughts come and go like clouds in the sky. They are prolonged if you resist or encourage them. And they dissolve naturally in their own time when you are simply aware of them.

**For example, by nature space is beyond color or shape
Its purity cannot become colored by black and white
Similarly, the essence of your mind is beyond color or shape
And cannot be changed by black or white deeds**

Your meditation may be filled with thoughts of love and compassion. Feelings of love may fill your heart so much that you may feel it is going to burst. Or your mind may be filled with thoughts of anger and revenge. From the standpoint of Mahamudra meditation, neither is better or worse. The practice is to be aware of whatever thought arises, without either trying to prolong it or cut it short. A meditation filled with positive thought is not a good meditation and a meditation filled with negative thoughts is not a bad meditation, as long as you remain aware of your thoughts. Of course, after the meditation is finished you should not nurture negative thoughts, but during the meditation, just let them be.

**For example, the disk of the sun is radiant
And cannot be obscured by the darkness of a thousand eons
Similarly the essence of your mind is clear light
And cannot be obscured by eons in cyclic existence**

In Mahamudra a distinction is made between the essence of mind and its incidental properties. Thoughts and emotions come and go. The mind can be sharp or dull. These are the incidental properties of mind. The nature of mind is what does not change. It is described by a phrase usually translated as “clear light.” Light is a metaphor for awareness. Mind is aware of phenomena inside and outside of you. The word translated as “clear” is perhaps better translated as transparent. Although light illuminates, you do not see light, only the objects it illuminates. In the same way, we are aware of phenomena through the mind, but do not see mind in the phenomena that mind makes us aware of.

**For example, space is designated by the term empty
But space cannot be described by words like that
Similarly your mind is declared to be clear light
But it cannot be grasped through any verbal designation**

Although the term “clear light” is used as a metaphor for the essence or nature of mind, it is only a metaphor, an indication of what mind is like. The nature of mind cannot be captured in any designation. Any designation is at best a description of some thought or feeling present in the mind, it is not a description of the mind itself.

**In this way the nature of mind has always been like space
All phenomena without exception are also non-existent**

Although the mind is beyond description, you place limitations on it. You think that your mind is like this or that. These false notions are a form of ignorance and bondage. When the false notions of what the mind is are dropped, the mind is clearly apparent, but has no definite form. So it is compared to the empty sky or empty space. And all the phenomena that arise in mind are also like empty space. For example, when you are angry, there is a very strong and solid sense of “I am angry.” The “I am” is a concept about mind, but not something actually present in your experience. It is only an illusion. And when this illusion is seen through, the anger has no basis. It may arise, but it quickly disappears, like drawing in water with a stick.

**Abandon physical activities and remain natural
See your ordinary speech as unreal, like an echo
View whatever arises in the mind without deliberation
Your body has no essence, it is like a bamboo stalk
Let your mind go beyond concepts, like the clear sky
Free the mind and let it be, without holding or letting go**

Normally our activities are done with the aim of increasing our status or happiness. But since the mind is beyond description, it can neither be improved or made worse. There is no point in trying to improve your status or happiness, so all efforts you make for them should cease. You should only continue the activities needed to preserve your life and health: doing your work, eating and cleaning, and so on. You speak, but there is no sense of a speaker, because no “I” can be found. So your speech is like an echo, which also has no speaker. Thoughts arise in your mind, but there is no sense that you are producing them. Thoughts come and go freely, but the sense that there is a separation between the thinker and the thought is not there. There is also no sense that this is “my body,” so the body lacks a core or an essence. When the many activities of your mind are seen to be pointless, they diminish and your mind is often free of concepts, like the empty sky. But there is no need to chase thoughts away or deliberately produce them.

**Mahamudra is practice without goal
Well acquainted with this single meditation,
You will attain unsurpassed enlightenment**

Most people start meditation with a goal in mind. This could be a practical goal such as calming the mind or relieving stress, or it could be a spiritual goal such as enlightenment. It’s been my experience that meditation goes better if you focus on the process rather than the goal. This means to try to do the practice a little better each time you sit down to meditate. For Mahamudra that means paying close attention to whatever arises in the mind. Each time you try be more careful

and attentive. Focusing on the process automatically leads to the goal, which is unsurpassed enlightenment, the same understanding that Shakyamuni Buddha had.

**Those who practice tantra and the perfections,
The vinaya, the sutras, and the collections
Their own philosophies and commentaries
Will not see the clear light of mahamudra
The clear light is obscured by their aspirations
Conceptual thought blocks the true meaning of the commitments**

When you take up a new activity there is an unfortunate tendency to focus on the wrong thing. For example, an artist may focus on buying all sorts of art supplies instead of doing more art work. Similarly the student of Buddhism may spend too much time studying the different Buddhist scriptures and their commentaries. While some understanding of them is helpful, you should not spend all your time reading and studying them to the detriment of your meditation practice. And you should not consider yourself an advanced practitioner of meditation because you have memorized all the commentaries and can recite what the great masters have said about the subject. It's been my experience that the people who make the quickest progress in meditation are not the very smart and talented, but those with humble abilities who none the less devote themselves to the practice. I believe that this is because you first try to "figure out" how to meditate and this is always a failure. It's only when you give up trying to "figure it out" that you make progress. The smart and talented person has more faith in their own abilities and it takes them longer to give up, if they ever do so.

**Beyond all desires, all mental activity
Will subside by themselves like waves in the water
Without dwelling, or observing, or transgressing the true meaning
You are a light in the darkness, not transgressing these commitments**

Beginning meditators often complain that their minds are full of thoughts and they can't keep their minds still for even a moment. What stirs up the mind is desires. Desires, like other thoughts and emotions, are only temporary and if you meditate for long enough they will settle down. Usually what follows is a feeling of boredom. This is just another form that desires take, but the boredom allows your mental activity to subside a bit. A lot of your meditation can be occupied with the cycle of desire, boredom, daydreaming, leading to more desire. But in that cycle there are gaps of quiet mind. That gap may be experienced as a feeling of peacefulness and ease because the repetitive cycle of desire and boredom you often experience in meditation is unsatisfactory and tiring. This experience of a sense of peace with a quiet, alert mind temporarily puts aside feelings of desire because when the mind is satisfied in itself, it does not need to look outside itself. This sense of peace can carry on beyond the meditation practice, or if you are an experienced meditator, can occur spontaneously outside the meditation, and for a time will be beyond desire. Without any effort you will keep your moral commitments. But you need to be very careful at this point in your practice. It's easy to delude yourself into thinking that you've freed yourself from desire when they are only temporarily absent.

Finally free of every desire, not abiding in extremes

**The meaning of all the the collections of teachings is seen
If you apply yourself to the ultimate meaning
You will be freed from the prison of cyclic existence
And meditative equipoise will consume every defilement and obscuration**

When you are able to rest your mind in a quiet, alert state the misconceptions you have about yourself start to fall away. The mind is seen as it is, which is neither a something to be apprehended nor a complete nothingness. Understanding the mind to be neither something nor nothing is referred to as “not abiding in the extremes.” All the Buddhist scriptures were written to guide you to and through this state and as you practice you will understand them better and better. As the mind is understood it spontaneously becomes calmer and quieter. So if you keep up your practice of meditation, a virtuous cycle begins where a calm mind leads to a deeper understanding and the understanding leads to greater calm. The final result is the complete elimination of our defiled desires and our misunderstandings about what the mind is.

**Then you are a spiritual guide who can explain
The meaning to foolish persons devoid of faith
Exhausted by the stream of cyclic existence carrying them along
Foolish ones worthy of compassion because of their endless suffering
Overwhelmed by suffering, and wishing to be liberated by a wise teacher
Their minds will be liberated when the blessings enter their hearts**

The purpose of Buddhism is to lead you to enlightenment, which is the understanding of the nature of mind and phenomena. If it lost its transforming power, it would be nothing more than a museum piece. So in each generation, there must be practitioners who have gained understanding through the practice of meditation. These practitioners serve as the teachers for the next generation. So there is a chain of teachers and students going back to the Buddha and if this chain is broken it would be difficult to get genuine results from the practice of meditation. A teacher cannot liberate you directly, the teacher is more like a coach who shows you how to do the practice and corrects your mistakes. The blessings of the teacher are the encouragement and inspiration you get to do the practice. The teacher both shows how to attain the goal and is the embodiment of the goal. Being a student of a teacher creates faith and confidence that the goal is possible.

**Alas, the worldly phenomena have no meaning and result in suffering
As constructed phenomena have no essence,
See the essence in the definitive meaning**

Many of the goals we set in life have no value in themselves. They are only considered valuable because of the values of the society we are raised in or because of our personal whims. For example, you may want to always be fashionably dressed. But what is considered fashionable is only a common opinion and changes from decade to decade. The pursuit of any goal requires effort and trouble. It's better to apply this effort to what is the root cause of our unhappiness which is your defiled emotions. Your emotional state is grounded in your mind and the clearer you understand of your mind, the more your defiled emotions will diminish.

Transcending dualism is the king of views

**Non-distraction is the king of meditations
No deliberate action is the king of behavior
The result is realized when you are without hope or fear**

The mind is not an object and cannot be apprehended as an object. But it is not non-existent. Seeing that the mind neither exists or does not exist is the correct view. Mahamudra meditation is without a definite object. The practice is to remain in undistracted awareness of whatever arises in the mind. When your understanding is strong, your spontaneous actions will be more appropriate than the actions that you plan. The measure of your success in meditation is if you are able accept whatever life brings you without rejection or clinging.

**The nature of mind is clarity, beyond any frame of reference
By not traversing the path, you attain the path to Buddhahood
Through objectless meditation you attain unsurpassable enlightenment**

The ordinary approach to self-improvement is to develop good qualities and get rid of bad qualities. However helpful this may be, it does not get to the core of your problem, which is the misunderstanding of who you are and what the mind is. This cannot be put into words, terms like clarity or awareness only point to something that cannot be described. But you can experience it through the meditation practice of Mahamudra. And that experience is the basis of genuine self-improvement.

**Alas, know that the phenomena of this world
Are as lasting as dreams and illusions
And like dreams and illusions have no reality
Thus, disenchanted with worldly activities, abandon them
Cut off all connection to the likes and dislikes of this world
And meditate alone in a forest hermitage**

The practice of meditation requires detachment from your everyday concerns and problems. They must be put aside for at least the time that you are meditating. Ideally, they would be put aside entirely, so that you can devote yourself whole heartedly to meditation. Beginning meditators should not rush headlong into doing long retreats. It's best to first get comfortable with the practice of doing meditation with short daily practice and longer group practice when you are able. After a while, you can try doing short group retreats, then longer, and finally you can try solitary retreats. It's best to ask a teacher if they think you are ready before doing a retreat.

**By remaining in the meditation which is non-meditation
You will attain the non-attainment of mahamudra**

The practice of Mahamudra is to remain aware of whatever arises in you mind. It can be called "non-meditation" in that there is no deliberate attempt to focus the mind on an object. Usually this practice is done in an incomplete and inconsistent way. Thoughts that occur during the practice of Mahamudra about the practice of meditation are not scrutinized the same way that other, more random thoughts are. Thoughts that the meditation is going well or not, feelings of impatience, or thoughts that you must practice more strictly to attain your goals should be made ob-

jects of awareness the same as any other thoughts. With continued practice these thoughts diminish so there is no longer a wish to make progress or a fear of failing to make progress. In that way the practice of Mahamudra is the practice of non-attainment.

**For example, the ten thousand branches and leaves of a tree
Will wither when its single root is cut
Similarly, when the root of mind is cut,
the leaves and branches of cyclic existence dry up**

It would be extremely time consuming to try to eliminate all our bad habits just as it would time consuming to try and pluck all the leaves from a tree. All our bad habits are based on the misunderstanding that the mind is something that needs to be improved, for example, by entertaining it. But there is no need for this kind of self-improvement. Meditation practice shows that the mind is fine just as it is. When we finally see this, your desire to change or improve the mind is seen to be superfluous and the bad habits based on this desire fall away.

**For example, the darkness of a thousand eons
Is banished by a single lamp
Similarly the clear light of your own mind instantly
Clears away the ignorance of a thousand eons**

It is difficult to explain the sort of knowledge that comes from the practice of meditation. To put it in a few words, it is a positive experience with an essentially negative character. By positive experience I mean that it is something you experience directly, like seeing an object with your eyes or hearing a sound with your ears. But it is different than an experience through the senses, because there is no distinction between the subject and the object sensed. In the experience of Mahamudra meditation the mind is directly aware of the mind, so there is no sense of subject and object. The negative character of the experience is that the direct experience of mind undercuts all of your false ideas about who and what you are. You drop these false ideas, but do not replace them with better ones, because the nature of mind defies description. People sometimes use grandiose terms for this nature, but the terms are just labels. It no more describes the nature than a street name describes the character of a street. This is what gives the experience of the nature of mind its baffling, negative character.

**Alas, the meaning of what is beyond concepts
Cannot be understood by the intellect
The meaning of what is without effort
Cannot be understood by striving
If you wish to attain what is beyond concept and effort
Use naked awareness to cut off the root of your mind**

So Mahamudra meditation has a paradoxical character. The practice is just remaining as you are, but in full awareness of the experience. The result is an understanding of the mind that defies description and undercuts everything you thought you knew about yourself. Simply remaining in awareness cuts through the understanding of who you are.

**Let the muddled water of conceptual thoughts clear
Rest naturally in appearances without altering them
Mahamudra does not invite or reject phenomena
Purifying latent tendencies from beginningless time in the subconscious**

In Mahamudra meditation, you do not make things happen. You let them happen. If you are in a quiet, peaceful environment thoughts will slowly become fewer and gaps will appear between your thoughts. If you try to forcibly prevent yourself from thinking, you will not be successful, because “I must not think” is also a thought. You also do not try to prevent negative, emotion laden thoughts from arising or try to increase positive emotions when they arise. You look at thoughts dispassionately, without pushing them away or holding on to them. Each time a negative emotion arises and you look at it dispassionately, it becomes weaker, so with time negative emotions diminish.

**Put aside arrogant opinions on the unborn nature
Let the manifest appearances of phenomena exhaust themselves**

It's important to not mistake an intellectual understanding of meditation and its consequences for the results of actual practice. Even worse is when you take some understanding that arises in your meditation and misidentify it with some stage of accomplishment. This is unfortunately very common, even among experienced meditators. The best test I've found is that if an understanding makes you feel proud, you have probably misidentified it. But if it makes you feel stupid because you think that it's obvious and that you should have known that, it's likely to be valid.

**The supreme king of views is total liberation without limit
The supreme king of meditations is deep, vast, and boundless
The supreme king of actions cuts the proliferations of extreme views
Making one's home in the wishless, you obtain the supreme result**

Who we believe we are and what we think the world is, is limited by our conceptual framework. The practice of Mahamudra meditation shows you that much of this framework is arbitrary. This does not mean that you can do anything, the laws of cause and effect still apply. But when we see through the extreme views of “this is so” and “this is not so”, the world becomes much more fluid and workable. You live in the present, not the future, which is where your hopes and wishes are.

**At first, your practice is like a mountain stream rushing through a ravine
Then it is like the Ganges river, flowing slowly through the plains
Finally, it is like the waters of the son merging into the mother**

New meditators are often discouraged by the rush of thoughts they see in their minds when they sit down to meditate. This is entirely normal and expected and is not a sign that you are a person who can't meditate. Thoughts are not an obstacle to Mahamudra practice as long as you are aware of them. With time, the awareness grows stronger and as awareness grows, thoughts decrease. Eventually a meditator has a continuous awareness of the mind during the practice of Ma-

hamudra. The mind becomes as peaceful and quiet as the surface of a large river. But there is a risk here, because even though the mind is calm, the disturbing emotions are still there, just as the current of a river can be very strong even though it is calm on the surface. These emotions can suddenly erupt and lead to behavior just as bad as any untrained person, or even worse. For this reason it's very important for you to carefully observe all the rules of morality at all times and never think that you are beyond the need to do so. Out of the calm of continuous awareness insight gradually grows, until it pervades every aspect of your life. At this point there is no clear distinction between during meditation and after meditation. This mind is compared to the ocean and has no boundary. A river is calm on the surface and moving underneath, but the ocean is disturbed on the surface and calm underneath. Similarly, an advanced meditator often seems more ordinary and an intermediate meditator more impressive. For this reason, it's important not to judge people by trivial features of their behavior, it is difficult to know what lies beneath them.

**Persons of less intelligence, who cannot abide in the nature
Should take up the key point of the inner winds
And the various auxiliary practices of the gazes and concentrations
Exerting themselves while they do not abide in awareness**

Intelligence here is referring to the ability to quickly see the nature of mind, not to intellectual ability. Even when one sees the nature of mind through the practice of Mahamudra meditation, some have a profound understanding and others a more shallow understanding. Those with a more shallow understanding should take up the practice of tantra. Tantra uses the practices of yoga to deepen the understanding of the nature of mind. Usually one first seeks to understand the mind with Mahamudra and then enhances that understanding with Tantra. But the order of practice is not fixed and some will do better by first practicing Tantra and then Mahamudra.

**Rely on a consort until the wisdom of bliss and emptiness dawns
The blessing power of the unification of skill in means and wisdom
Gently draw it down, hold, and reverse it
Carry it to its abode and then extend it until it pervades the body
The wisdom of bliss and emptiness will dawn if you are without clinging**

You need to be careful when studying Tantra, because many times it uses symbolic language and will be misunderstood if taken literally. The “consort” refers to the practices of the subtle energies within the body, which in Tantric yoga are called the winds, channels and drops. Controlling these subtle energies produces a feeling of bliss. When you examine this bliss you see it is just like all thoughts and emotions and empty of any abiding nature. For this reason, you no longer seek it or try to hold onto it. Not holding on to this bliss, you no longer hold onto the pleasures of everyday life and cut through the disturbing emotion of greed, which dominates the lives of most people. “Skillful means” and “wisdom” are also symbolic terms and refer to the male and female energies within the body. In the practice of Tantric yoga you control and manipulate these energies.

**You will have long life, no gray hair, and flourish like the waxing moon
Your appearance will be bright and lustrous
and you will have the strength of a lion**

**You will quickly attain the common accomplishments
And endeavor to attain the supreme accomplishment**

The subtle energies within the body are responsible for your good health and aging is the diminishing of these energies. The practice of Tantric yoga strengthens them, so one of the signs of accomplishment is that your physical health improves and aging slows down. These are some of the common accomplishments of Tantric yoga, which if you continue to practice will lead to the supreme accomplishment: full, complete, and perfect enlightenment.

**This is the pith instruction of Mahamudra
Fortunate persons should take it to heart**

This ends the explanation of Mahamudra meditation. You should read it often for inspiration for your practice.

**This Mahamudra instruction was composed orally for
The Kashmiri pandita the intelligent Naropa
Who underwent twelve extreme trials
by the banks of the river Ganges. It was spoken by Tilopa.**

Tilopa was not very well known during his life and the biographies differ on the details of his life before he became a yogi. Afterwards he received several Tantric practices from different teachers. These practices became known as the Six Yogas of Naropa. Naropa was Tilopa's student. He became very famous and had many disciples from India and Tibet. Originally he was a scholar monk from Nalanda, the most prestigious Buddhist monastery in India. He was not satisfied with his own meditation practice, so he gave back his monastic vows and became a student of Tilopa.

**These twenty vajra verses on Mahamudra
And eight on the channels were given to the great Naropa
And was requested by the best of translators,
Marpa Lotsawa of Tibet in the pure land of Pulahari
This concludes it.**

Marpa studied Buddhism in Tibet, but made several trips to India to receive the teachings from their source. He met many teachers, but his chief teacher was Naropa. When he returned to Tibet he lived as a farmer and gathered a small group of students around himself. He translated the teachings on Tantra and Mahamudra into Tibetan and these teachings became the basis of the Kagyu tradition in Tibet. They also spread to the other Buddhist traditions in Tibet.

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