Empowerment and the Path of Liberation
Tsele Natsok Rangdröl
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Empowerment

Wishfulfilling Nectar to Delight The Worthy Offered in Reply to Questions on the Key Points of the Ripening Empowerments and the Mahamudra Path of Liberation

Tsele Natsok Rangdröl

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FOR£WORD

BUDDHAS HAVE APPEARED IN THE PAST and will do so in the future. We are now in the era of the Buddha Shakyamuni, the Fourth Guide of this present aeon. The Buddha, our Teacher, had tremendous ingenuity and immense compassion. He taught in countless profound ways, all adapted to the individual capacities of the beings who had the great fortune to be within his sphere of influence. During this era of Buddha Shakyamuni, we can receive the teachings of Sutra and Mantra. Tibetan Buddhism is the combination of Sutra and Mantra, which are in fact an indivisible unity. I am happy to introduce this translation of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl's teaching on the ripening empowerments and liberating instructions. Tsele Natsok Rangdröl was a most illustrious master, excelling in both scholarship and accomplishment. His character resembled that of Dza Paltrül in Tibet and of Shantideva in India. His mind was gentle and disciplined and he displayed a profound sense of humility. At the same time he was also adept at exposing the faults hidden deep in others, and skilled in giving advice to remedy these faults. It is a fact that without removing our faults we cannot develop true spiritual qualities. Our secret faults and shortcomings must be exposed and skillfully altered by oral instructions. Tibetan Buddhism has three levels of precepts: the vows of individual liberation, the practices of bodhisattvas, and the samaya commitments of Vajrayana. These samaya commitments depend completely upon having received the ripening empowerments, upon being genuinely introduced to and recognizing the original wakefulness that is the nature of empowerment. To train in remaining evenly in that basic state of original wakefulness is itself
the direct path to awakening to buddhahood within this very body and life.

We hear that Vajrayana is superior to other vehicles, but for what reason? Its superiority lies entirely in receiving the ripening empowerments and liberating instructions in an authentic way, and in applying them correctly. By doing so we can reach enlightenment, ideally in this very life, or next best at the moment of death. At the very least, as long as we haven’t created severe negative karma through acts such as turning against the Three Jewels, breaking our samayas, or abandoning our bodhisattva vows by forsaking other sentient beings, our mothers from past lives, there is still the opportunity to realize the innate nature of dharmata in the after-death state of the bardo, and thus to reach liberation. The key instructions that enable us to accomplish this depend upon empowerment, meaning upon our experience of original wakefulness that is the nature of empowerment.

There are different ways of conferring empowerment within the systems of Father Tantra, Mother Tantra, Nondual Tantra, Quintessence Tantra, and so forth. Some of these ways emphasize skillful means, others discriminating knowledge. Some place equal emphasis on means and knowledge, and some on the essential nature itself. The differences in emphasis apply to both the ceremony of conferring empowerment, when teachings are given, as well as the actual application of the meaning in practice.

*Empowerment* was written by Tsele Natsok Rangdröl, a 17th century scholar, poet and Buddhist master, who had reached a very high level of wisdom and accomplishment in practice. In it he describes the precise nature of the ripening empowerments, the purpose and benefits of receiving them, what constitutes the authentic transmission of empowerment, how to attain liberation after empowerment, and what it truly means to be liberated.

In this book he also describes the true meaning of Mahamudra. He imparts the subtle and very profound key points needed to guide one through the critical stages encountered during the training of Mahamudra. In order to clear away our lack of understanding, misunderstanding, and doubt, Tsele Natsok Rangdröl presents his teachings in a question-and-answer format, with the replies spoken from his personal experience.
It is my opinion that this English translation of *Empowerment* will bring immense benefit. We find ourselves at a point of time in which the general teachings of the Buddha, and especially Vajrayana, are spreading all over the planet.

The true intent of Vajrayana is exceedingly subtle, and some people find it hard to correctly comprehend its nature. They may misconstrue the meaning of tantric teachings, or feel suspicious about them. I sense that this is the reason for some questionable translations that have recently been published. Some of these are produced by people without proper Buddhist education, while others are merely opinions formed from incorrect personal assumptions. Unfortunately, such books are in disharmony with the intent of the tantras. I harbor great misgivings about unrealized people who give talks and publish books on ‘Vajrayana’ while acting and thinking in ways that contradict the meaning of the tantras.

There seems only one way to remedy this fault, and that is to present the topic of the four empowerments in a way that accords with the meaning of the tantras. I find it most beneficial to publish a correct translation of the instructions of an authentic master who was both erudite and personally accomplished. I have great trust in the teachings of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl, and it is exactly for that reason that I encouraged Erik Perna Kunsang to translate this work. By doing so, I believe we are not creating the demerit of divulging secret matters; rather, a book like this is comparable to a medicinal remedy, dispelling the illness of lack of understanding, misunderstanding and doubt. I feel confident that my yidam and gurus consent to this, and that this translation will bring great benefit.

Our great master, His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche, on several occasions told me that people who harbor no ambition to become a great scholar, but who want to focus on truly realizing the view in this life and sincerely wish to reach the ultimate point of training should study just a few of the writings of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl, including his teachings on the bardo, Mahamudra, and the Great Perfection. If they study and reflect correctly on his teachings, they will find the pith instructions that are the very heart of the 84,000 sections of the Dharma are all complete within these.

Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche
During the last two decades students from many countries have connected with a steady stream of masters from the Tibetan tradition of Buddhism who have conferred numerous empowerments. To elevate the profound ritual of empowerment above a mere empty form and to cast light upon the many layers of Vajrayana theory and practice, Venerable Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche has requested us to translate another text of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl. This prolific 17th-century philosopher, meditation master, poet, and practitioner also wrote Lamp of Mahamudra (Shambhala Publications), Mirror of Mindfulness, and Circle of the Sun (Rangjung Yeshe Publications).

The empowerment ritual is sometimes called the indispensable entrance door to Vajrayana. Through the blessings of the lineage masters, our devotion, and the insight introduced during the empowerment, we obtain the right to practice Vajrayana. However, it is only through our personal commitment to continue the training that this entitlement is retained and fully realized.

Empowerment — sometimes called initiation or abhisheka — gains its name from the analogy of a prince who is enthroned and invested with his natural right to rule. Similarly, the empowerment ceremony, when conferred by a qualified Vajrayana master upon a receptive student, is the authorization for the student to realize the full potential of his or her being, the sacred nature of our body, speech, mind and original wakefulness. The empowerment ritual activates our natural right to an enlightened rule over our life and practice.

This Empowerment text contains a detailed explanation of the manifold aspects of the ritual, and a wealth of instructions on innu-
merable key points of practice, especially those relating to the path of liberation of Mahamudra and the Great Perfection, the training in simplicity and directness.

The text itself was written by Tsele Natso Rangdröl as replies to a series of questions presented by Mipham Gonpo, one of his disciples. The questions were not included in the original in the interests of conciseness.

In translating this book, we deliberately decided to leave some aspects undefined. The interested reader can seek further clarification from a qualified master. In other cases we added words enclosed within parentheses to enhance the precision of the translation, as well as footnotes to ensure comprehension. For the explanation of more common terms, not detailed in our other works, we added a modified glossary. It is our translation style to adhere as closely as possible to the original manuscript, i.e. not adding or deleting anything.

As with all our books, this one would not have been possible without the generous help and guidance of our teachers and Dharma friends. We would like to offer special thanks to His Eminence Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche for sharing his extraordinary understanding; to Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche for unravelling difficult points as well as encouraging the completion of the project; and to Graham Sunstein, Edna Lama, Bill Karelis, S. Lhamo, Deborah and Bizhan for their many suggestions. In particular we appreciate the precise copy editing of Kerry Moran, whose work is indispensable to us. We would like to dedicate some of the merit of this book to her small son Nicholas Gamm, whose tragic death moved us all.

By the virtue of translating, publishing, studying and practicing this precious teaching, may the reincarnation of His Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche appear soon. May the lives of His Eminence Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche and all other upholders of the Buddha's teachings be long. May all sincere practitioners, the buddhas of the future, overcome all obstacles in their practice and lead all beings to happiness. These wishes were made at the completion of the translation on the day of Lhabab Düchen, the Buddha's Descent From Tushita.

Erik Pema Kunsang and Marcia B. Schmidt
Nagi Gompa, 1993
PROLOGUE

NAMOGURU SAMADANA ADVAYABHYA!
Homage to the master who is indivisible from the deity!

The nature of beings is the continuity of buddha nature, spontaneously present since primordial time, Yet they are blinded by an inborn cataract. At the wheel of great bliss, I venerate my master¹ Who readily reveals this self-cognizant wakefulness.

The doors to the Dharma leading beings to liberation Exist in a number that lies beyond count. Yet only the Supreme Secret Vajra Vehicle provides the swift, definitive path. So I shall here explain the essential meaning of its teachings.

I am an old simpleton, with no power of learning, reflection and meditation, I lack the basis for expounding the profound meaning as it is. Yet since you, a supreme guide with the pure motivation of benefitting others, have asked me, I shall hereby offer these replies.
Life after life, through sublime and wonderous deeds, you have been a wishfulfilling jewel for the Buddhadharma and all beings. Bearing the name Mipham Gonpo, Lord of Dharma, your flawless expansive vision that perceives all knowable things possesses not the faintest blemish of doubt.

Nevertheless, considering the welfare of future generations who will practice the sacred Dharma, you have altruistically thrown wide the gate of your skillful activity by pretending to ask me several key points of Secret Mantra concerning ripening and liberation. For this reason, this ignoramus herein presents a few words of crude discernment. If they are contradictory and confused, ignorant and mistaken, please forgive me with your profound and expansive realization of the inconceivable dharmadhatu.

Were I to mention at this point your questions in full, it would provide a sense of continuity and be easier for readers, but this old man, intimidated by the cumbersome load of words, offers you only the key points condensed to their essence.
THE RIPENING EMPowerMENTS

Regarding your questions about the meaning and definition of obtaining empowerment — my reply will be accompanied by quotations from the tantras and arranged under two headings: general and specific.

Entering the door to the teachings of Secret Mantra Vajrayana depends upon two things: ripening and liberation. Unless you first obtain the ripening empowerments, you are not authorized to hear even a single verse of the tantras, statements and instructions. (Unauthorized) people who engage in expounding on and listening to the tantras will not only fail to receive blessings; they will create immense demerit from divulging the secrecy of these teachings. A person who has not obtained empowerment may pretend to practice the liberating instructions, but, instead of bringing accomplishment, the practice will create obstacles and countless other defects. This is mentioned in the Buddha Skull Tantra:

As a lute cannot be played without strings,
Though all other parts may be present,
The person who lacks empowerment
Will not be successful in the practice of mantra and meditation.
The *Tantra of the Heart Mirror of Vajrasattva* further states:

Just as a boatman without oars
Cannot cross to the opposite bank of a river,
There will be no accomplishment without the support of empowerment.

The shortcomings of failing to obtain empowerment have been mentioned in countless such ways. Regarding the advantages of receiving empowerment, the *Tantra of the Heart Mirror of Vajrasattva* says:

Having fully obtained all the empowerments,
The entire Secret Mantra is accomplished without hardship.

The *Tantra of the Brilliant Expanse* further says:

The noble child who has obtained empowerment,
Accomplishes all wishes in this life,
And attains true enlightenment in the next.

Innumerable other similar quotations exist.

The basic materials or seeds for the empowerments in question are already spontaneously present within one’s own nature. The master’s blessings and the symbolic indications (of the words, gestures and implements used during the ritual) provide the circumstances for their growth. As an analogy, consider the enthronement ceremony of a universal monarch. The person enthroned must unmistakably be of royal birth, and yet until he is established on the throne he is only called ‘prince,’ never ‘king.’ Once he has been enthroned and has been conferred with rulership of the kingdom, he becomes king in actuality.

Similarly, while the seeds of the four empowerments are primordially present in the disciple’s nature, the original wisdom will not be actualized until these seeds have been ripened through empowerment. Once the disciple embarks upon the path of ripening and liberation, the wisdom of his own nature will be actualized. This is described in the *Subsequent Tantra of the Bathing Elephant:*
The mind essence of sentient beings is the luminous nature of self-awareness,
The unfabricated awakened state, a continuity that is spontaneously present.
Once you embark on the path of ripening and liberating this luminous nature,
You clearly perceive the fruition within your own being.

I shall now explain empowerment in terms of its essential identity, etymological definition, categories, and purpose.

The *Tantra that Embodies the Four Rivers of Empowerment* describes the essential identity of empowerment:

It purifies, ripens, and refines your being,
Infuses you with innate wakefulness,
And implants in your mind-stream (the seed of) the fruition
Of attaining the indestructible thirteenth bhumi.

Thus, empowerment is the king of all methods that cause the original wisdom inherent in yourself to naturally manifest.

The etymological definition of empowerment is like this: Formerly your body, speech and mind followed deluded habitual tendencies and possessed no independent power. The method that now provides you with natural authority over the indivisible state of the four kayas is called 'empowerment.'

The Sanskrit word for empowerment, *abhishencha*, literally means 'to cleanse defilements,' in the sense that the power of the four empowerments removes the obscurations of body, speech, mind and cognition. The Sanskrit word *abhisheka* is also used, meaning 'to instill with an entitlement.' What kind of entitlement is one instilled with? The vase empowerment entitles or authorizes you to visualize your body as a deity, the secret empowerment to practice the channels and energies, the wisdom-knowledge empowerment to practice coemergent bliss and emptiness, and the precious word empowerment to practice the unity beyond concepts.

The Sanskrit word *abhisiddhi* is also used, meaning 'to be accomplished' or 'to be ripened.' How is one ripened? The vase empowerment ripens the physical aggregates, elements, and sense-factors into
a deity; the secret empowerment ripens the voice and the inhalation, exhalation and abiding of the breath into the nature of mantra; the wisdom-knowledge empowerment ripens the bindu essences into great bliss and all sensation into coemergent wisdom; and the word empowerment ripens all that appears and exists into all-encompassing purity, the all-pervasive continuity of dharmakaya.

The categories of empowerment differ according to the various sections of tantras. To quote the Wisdom Bindu:

Empowerment with water and empowerment with crown
Are described in the Kriya tantras.
The vajra, bell, and also name (empowerments)
Are clearly explained in the Charya tantras.
The empowerment of no return
Is elucidated in the Yoga tantras.

According to the Kriya tantras, the disciple is rendered a suitable vessel by the water empowerment, the crown empowerment, and also by means of the knowledge entrustment, etc. In the Charya tantras, the additional empowerments of vajra, bell and name, which together (with the two above) are called the five knowledge empowerments, are conferred on the disciple. The Yoga tantras include an additional empowerment called the irreversible master empowerment or the empowerment for accomplishing vajra conduct. A general method for bestowing these empowerments is used by the Sarma and Nyingma schools of Secret Mantra.

Inner Secret Mantra's special Anuttara Tantra tradition for conferring the complete four empowerments also does not fundamentally differ from the teachings of the Sarma and Nyingma schools (regarding the outer tantras), although there are numerous minor variations within the four. According to the Sarma schools, the empowerments of Chakrasamvara, Hevajra and Guhyasamaja are for the most part alike.

The Kalachakra system teaches that the water of the initial vase empowerment is for purifying the defilements of the five elements, accomplishing the siddhis of the five consorts, and attaining the first bhumi. The crown empowerment is for purifying the defilement of the five aggregates, accomplishing the siddhis of the five buddhas,
and attaining the second bhumi. These two empowerments purify the obscurations of the body and implant the seed for attaining the vajra body.

Similarly, the tiara-streamer empowerment is for purifying the defilements of the ten winds, accomplishing the siddhis of the ten consorts, and attaining the third bhumi. The vajra and bell empowerments are for purifying the defilements of the right and left channels, accomplishing the siddhi of the male and female chief figures, and attaining the fourth bhumi. These two empowerments purify the obscurations of speech and implant the seed of vajra speech in your being.

The empowerment of yogic discipline is for purifying the defilements of the eight consciousnesses, the sense faculties and sense objects, accomplishing the siddhis of the male and female bodhisattvas, and attaining the fifth bhumi. The name empowerment is for purifying the defilements of ‘doer and deed’ (subject and object), accomplishing the siddhis of the male and female wrathful ones, and attaining the sixth bhumi. These two empowerments purify the obscurations of mind and implant the capacity to attain the state of the vajra mind.

The permission-blessing and supportive ritual are for purifying the defilements that obscure the nature of original wakefulness, accomplishing the siddhi of Vajrasattva and consort, the lord of the family, attaining the seventh bhumi, and connecting with the fruitional state of vajra wisdom. These seven empowerments are called the ‘seven empowerments to initiate immature beings,’ and it is taught that the person who has obtained them becomes a lay practitioner (upasika) of Secret Mantra.

Following that, the vase empowerment implants the capacity to attain the eighth bhumi and validates one as a novice (shramanera) of Secret Mantra. Through the secret empowerment one attains the ninth bhumi and becomes a fully ordained practitioner (bhikshu) of Secret Mantra. By means of the wisdom-knowledge empowerment one attains the tenth and eleventh bhumis. Through the fourth empowerment one attains the twelfth bhumi and becomes a great lord of beings. Thus, as the Kalachakra system teaches, the empowerments guide you through progressive stages.
All the other tantras divide the vase empowerment into the five knowledge empowerments followed by the empowerment of the conduct of a vajra master. Then follow, one after the other, the secret empowerment, the wisdom-knowledge empowerment, and the word empowerment. There are numerous systems of classifying empowerments.

According to the Nyingma school of Secret Mantra, there are two ways of dividing empowerments: either into the 'four rivers of empowerment,' corresponding to their origin, or into the 'four steps of empowerment,' corresponding to their method of bestowal. The four rivers of empowerment are:

- the empowerment of the scripture of teachings
- the empowerment of the yidam deity
- the empowerment of the learned pandita, and
- the empowerment of the expression of awareness.

The four steps of empowerment are the vase, secret, wisdom-knowledge, and word empowerments.

The subdivisions of each of these are described in the scriptural system of the Magical Display of the Peaceful and Wrathful Ones:

Perform the empowerments of the crown and tiara,
The rosary, armor, and the banner,
The mudra, the parasol and the vase,
The food and drink and the five essential components.

These are the ten outer benefitting empowerments. They are followed by the empowerments for the abilities of expounding, learning, sadhana practice, engaging in various activities, and acting as a vajra master. These are called the five inner enabling empowerments. All 15 are subdivisions of the vase empowerment.

Following these, the secret empowerment, the wisdom-knowledge empowerment, and the empowerment of the indivisible great bliss are bestowed. These three are known as the three profound empowerments. Thus, there is a total of 18 different empowerments.

The scripture called the Eight Sadhana Teachings of the Assemblage of Sugatas divides empowerments into two categories: the special wisdom empowerment and the general compassion empowerment.
The special wisdom empowerment includes 26 empowerments:

- the eight empowerments based on the outer indicating mandala of material substance, which upwardly embodies Kriya and Charya
- the nine empowerments, based on the inner 725 deities, which bestow the complete blessings of Mahayoga and Anu Yoga
- the three empowerments of complete bodhicitta, based on the secret union of the father and mother aspects, for quickly traversing the paths and bhumis
- the six empowerments of the entire Ati of royal anointment, based on the innermost thatness mandala of self-aware wisdom.

The thirteen general compassion empowerments include the eight enabling empowerments of the all-encompassing teachings, and the five benefitting empowerments.

All these add up to 39 empowerments, while the detailed subdivisions amount to 237 different empowerments.

According to the root text of the teaching cycle of Lama Gongpa Düpa, the great ripening empowerment scripture entitled the Heart Mirror, the empowerment categories include:

- the outer vase empowerment in ten parts: the five knowledge empowerments and the five supportive empowerments
- the inner empowerment of the all-encompassing teachings of the vajra king, in 117 parts
- the secret empowerment of the vajra master, in 34 parts
- the quality empowerment of the offering articles of precious accomplishment, in 25 parts
- the activity empowerment of the attendants acting to tame beings, in 21 parts; and
- the seven empowerments of permission-blessing for the complete entrustment of the teachings.
Thus, there is a total of 213 parts.

According to the system of the grand empowerment of the Scripture of the Great Assemblage (Düpadö), the chief of all the empowerments of the Nyingma school and the general empowerment of the nine gradual vehicles, there are:

- the preliminary 16 major supreme empowerments by means of the chief deity Vajrapani, indivisible from Vajrasattva, with twelve other retinue deities in the mandala. These purify misdeeds and obscurations and lead one away from the abodes of the lower realms.

- The vehicle of gods and humans of the higher realms discloses eleven mandalas and 123 empowerments.

- The vehicle of the shravakas has five mandalas and 39 empowerments.

- The vehicle of the pratyekabuddhas has four mandalas and 45 empowerments.

- The bodhisattva vehicle of aspiration and application has ten mandalas and 53 empowerments.

- The vehicle of Kriya has six mandalas and 62 empowerments.

- The vehicle of Ubhaya has one mandala and 28 empowerments.

- The vehicle of Yoga has the twofold mandala of Vajradhatu and 99 empowerments.

- The vehicle of Mahayoga, of the unexcelled Secret Mantra, has the two aspects of peaceful and wrathful: the peaceful has six mandalas and 362 empowerments, while the wrathful has six mandalas and 640 empowerments.

- The vehicle of scripture Anu Yoga has eleven mandalas and 855 empowerments.

- The vehicle of Ati Yoga of the Great Perfection has one mandala and 18 empowerments of the expression of awareness.
Serving as the support for all of the above is the longevity empowerment of accomplishment, with one mandala and 58 empowerments. In short, without counting the different entrances to the mandala of the Great Assemblage (Düpado) tradition establishes that there are, in all, 54 mandalas of colored powder and 55 mandalas of three components, in which dwell 1,980 deities. The total number of empowerments amounts to 2,440.

The different categories of empowerment belonging to either the Old or New Schools of Secret Mantra are merely subdivisions of the four empowerments. They are not individual components of a complete structure consisting of the preliminary steps of preparation, the accomplishing and offerings of the main part, and the concluding ritual actions. The precise number of these categories differs greatly among the various empowerment texts of the Sarma and Nyingma schools. How can one possibly establish a fixed number of categories when each system of teachings has an inconceivable number of major and minor empowerment texts? Briefly, all the methods of ripening in the unexcelled Secret Mantra are without a single exception included within the four categories of vase, secret, wisdom-knowledge, and word empowerments.

In addition, many scholars of the Sarma schools have raised numerous objections against certain empowerments found among the different vehicles, such as the empowerments of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas found in the empowerment manuals of the Early Translation School of Secret Mantra. Generally speaking, aside from the Secret Mantra, empowerments are not found in the sutras or in the Vinaya. Nevertheless, the context (of the Great Assemblage) demonstrates that all teachings are complete and included within the path of Mantrayana. Practice of the short path of Mantrayana suffices for the sharpest type of person possessing the capacity for instantaneous realization, but people with gradual capacity are to be guided by means of the gradually ascending vehicles. The Two Segments describes this principle:

At first, give the mending-purification,
And then teach the Vaibhashika.
Likewise, with the Sautrantika.
This describes the shravaka teachings. Next:

After that, teach the Yogacharya.

This describes the Middle Way and so forth of the Mahayana vehicle.

And next, teach the Hevajra.

This refers to the actual part of Vajrayana and corresponds to the prescribed gradual way of teaching.

Furthermore, regarding the context of taking precepts, most of the empowerment manuals state:

The trainings of discipline—
The precepts of individual liberation, of bodhichitta,
And the vidyadhara precepts of Mantrayana—
I will always abide by and observe.

Even though empowerment manuals appear in various lengths, all agree on one single point: although the person who receives these precepts is indeed not eligible for the proper Vinaya title of shramanera or bhikshu, he still possesses the three complete sets of vows of Mantrayana. This can be understood simply by examining the previously mentioned steps of the Kalachakra empowerment. Again, one may think that the mandalas and empowerments of the different tantric vehicles should only be performed in accordance with their individual systems, and that it would be unreasonable to perform them exclusively in accordance with the Anuttara system. In fact, the lower vehicles and tantras are always included within the higher ones, but it is impossible for a higher vehicle or level of tantra to be included within the levels below. For example, the king is never controlled by the ministers — the ministers are always under the power of the king. Similarly, it is the nature of things that all the lower vehicles are completely contained within the Unexcelled Higher Vehicle. Nevertheless, the Sarma school empowerment text, Vajra Garland, teaches that the key point involving the different systems of bestowing empowerment is 'knowing one that frees all,' and does not divide them into different sections of tantra. It also explains the method
used to divide the various sections of tantra, and how empowerment is conferred in accordance with each individual system.

The empowerments for the nine vehicles of the Nyingma school include two traditions:

— the method of conferring empowerment for all other mandalas in their totality within the Single Great Mandala of the Unexcelled, and
— the method of disclosing the mandalas of the individual sections of tantra, and then bestowing empowerment in accordance with each of their different systems.

In either case these empowerments are without exception part of the flawless tradition of Padmakara and the other sublime vidya-dharas, panditas and siddhas, and are exactly in accordance with the intent of the numerous tantras of the Three Yogas. They are not fake teachings fabricated by dirty old family men of the Nyingma school dressed up as tantrikas. I merely mention this as an additional point.

Regarding why the empowerments are always divided into four types, you might ask, “What are the purpose and function of these four?” I will reply in terms of their basis of purification, the objects to be purified, the means of purifying, and the results of the purification.

All the aggregates and elements of beings — the ‘vessel and its contents’ — are the basis of purification of the vase empowerment. The speech and pranas present (within oneself) as syllables are the basis of purification of the secret empowerment. The essential elements and bindus present (within oneself) as great bliss are the basis of purification of the wisdom-knowledge empowerment. The mind essence that primordially is dharmakaya is the basis of purification of the word empowerment. Why is this? Because the basic materials are spontaneously present within oneself as these four aspects.

Then you may wonder, “Well, if they have been spontaneously present in myself since the beginning, what is the need for conferring the four empowerments?” The empowerments are necessary because
of the existence of the following four deluded habitual tendencies which obscure the ground, seeds or basic materials:

- the delusion of fixating on the world and beings as ordinary and solid
- the delusion of fixating on the speech as ordinary
- the delusion of fixating on the mind as ordinary, and
- the habitual tendencies of fixating on the three doors as being separate.

The means of purifying these four (fixations) is the four empowerments.

Moreover, the purposes of the four empowerments are:
- to abandon the four types of desire that should be discarded: watching, laughing, touching, and embracing
- to realize the four mudras that should be accomplished: the samaya mudra, the dharma mudra, the karma mudra, and the mahamudra
- to savor the experiences of the four joys: the wisdom of joy, the wisdom of supreme joy, the wisdom of transcendent joy, and the wisdom of coemergent joy
- to receive the four mandalas: the mandala of colored powder, the body mandala of the father and mother aspects, the mandala of the secret lotus, and the mandala of self-cognizant wakefulness
- to authorize and make one suitable to perform the four practices: the development stage of the deity, the nadi-prana and the recitation, the swift path of the bindus, and the path of liberation of Mahamudra and the Great Perfection
- to comprehend the four views that should be realized: the view of Mind Only, the Middle Way, Secret Mantra, and Mahamudra and the Great Perfection
- to accomplish the fruition of the four kayas: nirmanakaya, sambhogakaya, dharmakaya, and svabhavikakaya;
- to gain mastery over the four activities for the welfare of others: pacifying, increasing, magnetizing and subjugating.

The purposes of and necessity for the four empowerments are included within these points. Their benefits are beyond the grasp of thought, as the Secret Treasury of the Dakinis mentions:
When the unripened person has fully received the ripening empowerments and abides by the samayas,

He will provisionally attain all siddhis and ultimately achieve the fruition of the three kayas.

This is mentioned innumerable times in the various sections of the tantras.
THE LIFE-FORCE OF EMPOWERMENT is embodied in the samayas. Therefore, in the context of the previously mentioned empowerments of the complete nine gradual vehicles, the detailed aspects of the samayas are the entire categories of precepts and trainings of both Sutra and Tantra. Within the system of Mantrayana itself, the Sarma and Nyingma schools delineate the samayas individually.\textsuperscript{11}

In the Sarma system, as explained in the Kalachakra and other tantras, there is a fixed number of root downfalls for each of the Four Sections of Tantra.\textsuperscript{12} Furthermore, the general system of Anuttara Tantra describes the 21 yogic disciplines, the samayas of the five families, the four root downfalls, the eight subsidiary downfalls and so forth.

The Nyingma system has 27 root samayas, achieved by dividing each of the outer, inner and secret samayas for Body, Speech and Mind into three. In addition, there are 25 subsidiary samayas, the 21 subtle samayas for the benefit of oneself, the 44 samayas for the benefit of others, and so forth. In addition there are the four great natural samayas of the view — the samaya of nonexistence, the samaya of pervasiveness, the samaya of oneness, and the samaya of spontaneous presence — also called the special samayas of the innermost Great Perfection.

In short, we should observe correctly and without violation all the samayas mentioned in all the commentaries on the tantras of the Nyingma and Sarma schools.

In particular, I shall now explicitly describe the samayas of meditation and post-meditation, eating, carrying, and observing for each of the four empowerments. Once you have received the vase
empowerment, you should train in the development stage as the samaya of meditation. Do not let the three doors stray into delusion, and never separate from the notion of the deity in order to maintain the samaya of the post-meditation. Partake of the five meats and five nectars as the samaya of eating, and keep a qualified vajra and bell as the samaya of carrying. Finally, regard the world and beings as the mandala of deities and avoid wrong views as the samaya of observing. Be sure not to violate any of these.

Similarly, having received the secret empowerment, you should train in tummo as the samaya of meditation, and never forget the fire of the atung as the samaya of post-meditation. Partake of food and drink after consecrating them as wisdom nectar as the samaya of eating. Practice without fail prana-union 21 times daily as the samaya of carrying, and avoid degenerating the element of bodhichitta as the samaya of observing.

Having obtained the empowerment of wisdom-knowledge, you should utilize an actual or mental consort as the samaya of meditation. Never separate from the experience of great bliss as the samaya of post-meditation. Enjoy in the manner of union as the samaya of eating, and treasure the kunda bodhichitta as the samaya of carrying. Give up wrong views about females, who have the nature of knowledge, as the samaya of observing.

The samaya of the meditation for the precious word empowerment of indivisible great bliss is to train in the nature of unity beyond concepts. The samaya of the post-meditation is to avoid straying into complete delusion, and instead be inseparable from the experience of union. The samaya of eating is to let dharmata enjoy dharmata. The samaya of carrying is never to depart from the key points of the view, meditation and action. The samaya of observing is to remain unspoiled by accepting or rejecting, clinging or fixating, on anything that takes place.

If you keep these samayas for practicing the four empowerments, not violating them for a single moment, all the qualities of Secret Mantra in their entirety will manifest within your being like an overflowing heap. You will quickly realize the fruition of the four kayas. All the temporary and ultimate qualities will appear effortlessly as the spontaneous Great Perfection. So it is said.
To present these merely indicative general explanations of the four empowerments to the venerable ears of someone like yourself, who has gained mastery over the treasury of the Dharma, is the same as trying to teach the Six Syllables to Avalokiteshvara. Moreover, learned and accomplished masters of other Dharma traditions would certainly ignore these silly, pointless scribblings written by my ignorant self. Indeed, I'm only putting my pen to hard work. Nevertheless, when I wrote this down I thought, "Wouldn't it be nice if my efforts would create the right circumstance for awakening all the supposed Dharma practitioners from their ignorant slumber? Especially those so-called monks and followers who, although they pretend to have entered the path of Secret Mantra, haven't taken to heart even a single verse relating how to practice Vajrayana."
Now, returning to your question about the dividing line between truly obtaining or not obtaining empowerment, and to your additional detailed inquiry about people who practice the third empowerment in name only while merely becoming an embarrassment to the Buddhadharma: I shall present my understanding in the following concise points.

Someone who wishes to enter the gate of the precious Buddhadharma in general, and the vajra vehicle of Secret Mantra in particular, and who possesses the attitude of renunciation and the sincere desire to attain enlightenment, should connect with a qualified spiritual master. The master should not be a charlatan guru or a demonic imposter. The student should have devotion free from hypocrisy, and faith that resolves the master to be a buddha in person. With a noble heart free from desiring material gain or veneration, the master himself should accept the disciple and guide him on the path in accordance with his degree of mental capacity. When the disciple has become a suitable recipient and at the appropriate time, the master should confer the vase empowerment within a mandala through either the extensive or concise ritual procedures.

Here, the main point is to confer the vase empowerment and give its pointing-out instruction while focusing on a method that successfully reduces the disciple’s habitual tendencies and deluded clinging to an outer and inner, gross and subtle, solid and ordinary world with beings. Free from platitudes and mere lip-service and exactly in accordance with the master’s words, the disciple should understand how the world and beings, everything animate or inanimate and comprised of the aggregates, elements and sense factors,
has, since the very outset, never been anything but the mandala of the deity. Right then, through the master's kindness and instructions, the disciple's obscuration of momentary delusion is cleared away. He is able to understand how the external world is in fact a celestial palace and its inhabitants are indeed a mandala of deities.

In particular, through the conferring of the five knowledge empowerments, the disciple understands and realizes exactly how it really is. He realizes that our inherent possession, the five aggregates, are primordially the five male buddhas, the five elements are primordially the five female buddhas, the five poisons are primordially the five wisdoms, and so forth. This signifies having obtained the vase empowerment and having embodied its objective.

In fact, it is necessary to purify our karmic perception of everything outer and inner, the world and beings, as being ordinary and solid. Consider the methods and auspicious coincidences necessary for this to occur. During any empowerment ritual, at the time of the descent of the wisdom beings, a blindfold is tied on the recipient in order to interrupt the thoughts that cling to visible forms as ordinary. Music is played to stop the thoughts that cling to sound as ordinary. Smoke prepared from substances such as incense and resin causing the wisdom to descend is spread to halt the thoughts of smell as ordinary. Consecrated nectar is given to interrupt thoughts that fixate on taste as ordinary. The physical position of the sevenfold posture of Vairochana or the vajra posture is taken to stop thoughts that cling to touch as ordinary. Finally, the steps of visualization, emanating and absorbing are taken to interrupt the deluded clinging to our mind as ordinary.

Moreover, the master, by the power of making the blessings descend through his own steadfast samadhi, interrupts for a short while the disciple's deluded perception of ordinary body, speech and mind. The foremost disciple experiences the unobscured dawning of self-existing, coemergent wakefulness. The next best experiences pure perception with overwhelming and intense devotion while the manifestation of experience blazes forth, while the disciple of lesser caliber should at least feel slightly exhilarated.

The combination of these different meditative visualizations and skillful means evokes the wisdom that is the nature of empowerment within the disciple's mind. The seal of the empowerment is given to
point out what has been brought forth, to stabilize it, and to assure it will never depart from this nature.

If the nature of the empowerment has arisen in the disciple’s mind then he has received the real empowerment, regardless of whether the superficial articles of empowerment are placed on his head. Moreover, should he realize the nature of the vase empowerment with regards to the path of liberation, during the development stage practices he need not depend upon a mind-made practice of imaginary imputations, for he is liberated from the ‘good clinging’ of fixating on shapes and colors as the deity. For such a person all that appears and exists dawns as all-encompassing purity, and therefore all attachment and aggression towards self and other, enemy and friend, good and evil and so forth are naturally liberated.

As long as the nature of the empowerment is not understood, even if a mandala were arranged to fill the entire country, and hundreds of thousands of vases and so forth were placed upon the disciple’s head, and he were given as much water from the vases as he could carry off, his mind will remain unmoved from its former ordinary state, without any impairment whatsoever to its mundane deluded clinging.

When the nature of even the vase empowerment has not arisen within the disciple’s mind, he is not eligible to receive the higher empowerments, and will in any case not comprehend them. When the seeds of the ripening empowerments have not been sown, how can the leaves and fruit of the liberating path grow forth? Further empowerments will therefore be nothing more than futile effort on the part of both master and disciple, and, in the worst case, will form the circumstances for the downfall and violation of divulging the secrecy of Mantrayana.

On the contrary, when the auspicious coincidence of master and disciple, nectar and suitable vessel, come together, the vase empowerment does ripen the body of the disciple so that his aggregates, nadis and elements are purified and the five poisons dawn as wisdom. Through the power of that, he then becomes a suitable recipient for the secret empowerment.

Such a disciple can, by means of the physical mandala of master and consort, be given the secret substance on his tongue and have the nature of the empowerment pointed out. Thereby his deluded
clinging to ordinary speech is purified and he realizes that the vajra speech has been spontaneously present since the beginning. At this point, he recognizes whatever is heard as the continuity of mantra and gains mastery over recitation and utterance, emanating and absorbing, and over any type of vajra recitation, silent recitation and so forth. By training in the blazing and dripping of tummo, melting and refining the bindu, as well as the descent, retention, reversal and spreading (of bodhichitta), accomplishment is attained and the disciple becomes a suitable recipient for the wisdom-knowledge empowerment.

Such a person can, by means of an actual or mental mudra, be led into a direct manifestation and experience of the four joys whereby the coemergent wisdom of bliss and emptiness is pointed out. As indicated thereby, the disciple realizes all other mental thought formations, such as joy or sorrow, hot or cold, roughness or smoothness, pleasure or displeasure, desire or anger, and so forth, to be coemergent wisdom.

When the nature of the third empowerment has genuinely arisen in the disciple's mind, and he perceives how his mind in actuality is the essence of the vajra mind, he has become a suitable recipient for the word empowerment. This king of all empowerments, the empowerment of great bliss or the precious word empowerment, is in all the Great Perfection teachings called the empowerment of the expression of awareness. When this is correctly pointed out, the disciple can recognize, decide and finally resolve that all phenomena of samsara and nirvana are the vajra wisdom of the indivisible four kayas, the great all-pervasive innate self-awareness that is unfabricated and spontaneously present. Thus, he directly and easily realizes the meaning of how the ground, path and fruition, and how the view, meditation and action — in short, how the naked vital point of all the 84,000 doors to the Dharma — are totally embodied within present ordinary wakefulness. Having realized this, the disciple transcends the domain of hope and fear, dualistic fixation, accepting and rejecting, and captures the stronghold in which whatever occurs is the play of original wakefulness.

This correct procedure for bestowing and receiving the four empowerments is indispensable, since all the Great Perfection teachings of the Nyingma school outline a definite system for conferring and
practicing the essential meaning of these four empowerments (in sequential order), with an interval of months or years between each. The disciple becomes a siddha upon completion of the four empowerments.

However, nowadays many followers of the Sarma and Nyingma schools trade the teachings of Secret Mantra for food and material gain. Although the important key points of development and completion, ripening and liberation, did indeed fall upon their ears, they lack personal experience. They consider it sufficient merely to have learned the terminology of the tantric root texts and the elaborate details of the ritual procedures. At the same time, they compete in superficial matters such as the melodiousness of voice and ritual instruments, and go to the houses of benefactors offering the promise of highest gain. There they pass the time pursuing offerings and consuming food and drink, primarily wine and meat slaughtered for their sake.

Even people like myself, so-called 'lamas' who have not even taken to heart the correct meaning of taking refuge, sneak about like mice, feigning the virtuous appearance and conduct respected by common people. While in our hearts we aim at nothing other than material goods and income, we expound the Dharma, confer empowerments, give instructions, ordain monks and nuns, perform consecrations and undertake rituals for the sake of the dead. Motivated by presumption, we shy away from nothing, though we lack the power to act in the capacity of a vajra master. The insignificant amount of food and material wealth gained as a result of this activity leaves a trail of nonvirtue. Spending our lives in this way, we wreak disaster upon ourselves, our followers, and whoever is linked with us. Many so-called lamas, lacking even the virtue and power of having chanted as much as one rosary of the Six Syllables, find it enough to know merely how to hold a vajra and bell, because they are an incarnation of such-and-such sublime personage or belong to a special bloodline. They proclaim that whoever connects with them will be benefited, yet their behavior is akin to the example of showing a deer's tail in order to pass off donkey meat as venison, or tying a bell on the neck of a cow that doesn't give milk in order to sell it.

On the other hand, the arhants, panditas and siddhas of India gladdened householders and common people by teaching the law of
karma, the bases of purity — love, compassion, joy, and impartiality — the progressive and reverse order of dependent origination, and the merit of generosity. Moreover, not a single source mentions the bestowal of empowerments in the way that we Tibetans perform them.

Nowadays in (17th-century) Tibet, Kham, Kongpo and other districts, certain lamas make concerted efforts to collect offerings and hoard food and wealth by trading empowerments and teachings as commodities, under the pretense of inspiring people to virtue and benefiting sentient beings. Crowds of people, many of whom do not even know the alphabet and just happen to be around, are gathered for the empowerments by deceitful means such as beating drums, blowing conches, performing dances and plays, arranging group practices for young maidens, and giving communal meals.

Many of these people, never questioning whether or not they are a suitable recipient nor thinking about the wisdom that is the nature of the empowerment, participate in empowerments half-heartedly, aiming merely to entertain themselves and enjoy some companionship. Others who feign faith or understanding of the Dharma may participate in empowerments for the sake of dispelling sickness or evil influences, reducing the effect of their inauspicious year, or to remedy an ominous divination or astrological horoscope.

In such cases, regardless of whether or not the lama explains the empowerment, the participants are completely obscured by the ‘three defects of the vessel’ and the ‘six impurities,’ and will not understand the meaning. Believing that ‘empowerment’ is a mere touch on the head with ritual articles, they walk away from the ceremony with vacant gazes, lacking the faintest idea about what the master pointed out. This type of empowerment ceremony is indeed quite common.

Some people claim that empowerments given to a crowd of laypeople are not the complete four empowerments of Secret Mantra, and that no fault exists since these are just permission-blessings or entrustments. But actually even an entrustment involves the samaya commitment to keep the deity in mind and to do the practices of ‘approach and accomplishment’ and so forth. During such a ceremony one has to repeat the taking of the precepts of refuge, bodhichitta and the samayas of the five families, and since most ordinary people cannot possibly know the principles of what should
be adopted and avoided, both myself and others are therefore indeed at fault for being involved in such affairs. Incidentally, as it has been taught in the sutras that people who live off selling the sacred Dharma are reborn in a hell where they eat flaming iron balls and drink molten lead, it seems as though the Dharma practitioners of the present age have incredibly great courage.

Another aspect: the followers of the New Schools hold that the above-mentioned link between master and disciple depends upon ritualistic procedure. When they confer an empowerment they maintain that all the ritualistic procedures, such as the liturgical arrangement (for the empowerment) and so forth, must follow the explanations of the authoritative scriptures, and therefore, they place exclusive emphasis on these procedures such as the self-initiation, etc. The adherents of the Nyingma School advocate that blessings depend on the mantra, and therefore place great emphasis on the recitation.

In my own ignorant opinion, all of these must come together as a foundation. In particular, it is my understanding that the vital point is to receive the blessings and realize the nature of the empowerment that is pointed out, which is based on the strength of the meeting between the master's blessings and the disciple's devotion. It appears to me that once you receive such a blessing, (realization of the nature of the empowerment) does not depend solely upon a material empowerment being or not being conferred.

For instance, due to the power of Tilopa displaying a cotton rag scorched by sparks and twelve other symbols, Naropa realized the nature of the four empowerments. The dakini Secret Wisdom (Guhya Jnana, Sangwa Yeshe) was also known as Sun and Moon Attainment (Nyida Ngödrub), as Sukhasiddhi when she transmitted the Cutting Practice, and as the dakini Leykyi Wangmo in the Nyingma School. When she conferred empowerment upon Guru Padmasambhava, she transformed him to the letter HUNG. Swallowing the HUNG, she sent it through her body and emitted it through her secret lotus, whereby Padmasambhava received the complete four empowerments and attained the supreme accomplishment of Mahamudra.

When Padmasambhava was about to leave Tibet for the southwestern Continent, he bestowed the profound teaching of Padma Nyingtig upon King Lhasay and four other disciples on Mount Hepori at Samye. In a single moment, he transformed that very place
into the realm of Sukhavati and brought them to maturity by emanating and absorbing rays of light.

Moreover, when Lord Maitripa finally met the great master, Shavaripa, after seeking him with disregard to his own body and life, his being was ripened and liberated simply by Shavaripa placing a hand upon his head.

The siddha Khyungpo Naljor realized the nature of empowerment when the dakini Niguma poured a skull cup full of secret water for him and pointed a finger at his heart.\(^\text{21}\)

The siddha Orgyenpa realized the nature of empowerment when a yogini in the form of a courtesan gave him a bowl of soup.

There is also the story that the terton Guru Chöwang placed a piece of excrement on the top of the head of the Nepalese man, Bharo Vihardhara, and poured urine into his mouth. Through this, Bharo remained in undefiled coemergent wisdom for seven days and was liberated.\(^\text{22}\)

The learned and accomplished Kyoshey Tönpa expelled Machik Labdrön from the empowerment assembly, beat her and threw her into the river, through which she realized the wisdom of the empowerment and could traverse freely through walls.

Dampa Gom-mön, who transmitted the Pacifying Practice, gave Chupa Dartsön a cup of tea and a large bag of tsampa, saying "This is a substitute for the empowerment ritual," whereby Chupa Dartsön received the blessings and attained realization equal to that of his master.

Countless such stories abound. Obviously, the vital point of empowerment is to receive the blessings so that original wakefulness dawns in our being. Therefore, there is no point in listing the details of whether or not the qualifications of the place, master, and disciple are complete as taught in the tantras, or whether there must be a fixed number of disciples and so forth. In these times when questions regarding the nature of the empowerment, the way to implement it in practical experience, and the points of the samaya commitments, etc., are left behind on the pages of books, and masters as well as disciples do as they please and what feels most enjoyable, these discussions between the two of us will cause nothing more than annoyance in the hearts of others.
In any case, regarding the purpose: once you receive the vase empowerment, your aggregates and elements are ripened into deities; and when you correctly understand the symbols and meaning of the development stage and put them into practice, the seed of nirmanakaya is sown.

When you obtain the secret empowerment, understand that the inhalation, abidance and exhalation of the breath is mantra and implement this in practice, and you are implanted with the seed of sambhogakaya.

Having received the knowledge empowerment, when mental occurrences and thought formations arise as dharmata and you sustain coemergent wisdom, you have sown the seed of dharmaekaya.

By obtaining the word empowerment and resolving that samsara and nirvana are equal, and by sustaining the practice like the flow of a river without straying from the state of unity beyond concepts, you accomplish the undivided state of the essence body, svabhavikakaya, at best within this lifetime, next best in the bardo. After this, by emanations generated by aspirations and compassion, you perfect the welfare of beings as a great, effortless and spontaneous accomplishment.

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Specific Points

I shall now offer a more precise clarification of the third empowerment. In this particular context, I will reply to your questions on quotations about the (unity of) means and knowledge, appearance and emptiness, etc. I will also establish whether the primordially and spontaneously present mind essence free from constructs and manifesting as Vajra Varahi or Prajnaparamita depends upon the temporary bliss of union between two factors.

Earlier I explained how the basic materials or seeds of the four empowerments dwell within our being as the essences of the four kayas. This is indeed the meaning of the sequence of empowerments within the threefold Path and Result of the Sakya School. Although these basic materials or grounds are present in ourselves, they are veiled by the coemergent obscurations and are not visible to ourselves or others. But when the master points them out by means of the ripening (empowerments) and liberating (instructions), self-existing wakefulness naturally manifests. Concerning the giving and receiving of the third empowerment, the empowerment texts of Secret Mantra generally teach that desire is primary among all the disturbing emotions for beings in the Desire Realm, and therefore remains the root of samsara unless it is utilized through the path of means. Consequently, the vehicles of the shravakas and so forth are taught primarily to make us take abandonment as path. For people of sharper faculties who embark on the path of Secret Mantra, it is said,

Just as a burn caused by fire
Should be eased by fire itself;
Just as water stuck in the ear
Should be extracted by means of more water; ...
Using this example, it is said "Desire itself purifies desire." In accordance with this, a vast number of profound teachings on the path of passion are found in the tantras and in the oral instructions of the New and Old Schools, meant for people who are suitable and destined for these practices. Also, the way in which the third empowerment is to be conferred is discussed at great length. The extraordinary type of person who wishes to embark on such a path should at first follow a master who has definite realization in that path or practices. Having purified his body completely by means of the vase empowerment, the disciple should correctly gain definite achievement in the application of the secret empowerment. Once the disciple has attained the signs of control over the channels, winds and essences and perfected the qualities of his own body, he can request the knowledge empowerment, have pointed out the four ascending and descending joys, and gain mastery over the coemergent wisdom. It will then also be easy for such a person to be given the precious word empowerment.

In this context, Naropa and Maitripa differ in opinion as to the way in which the wisdom of example and the wisdom of meaning is recognized. The Sakya and Kagyü Schools in Tibet also differ regarding the identity of these wisdoms, and what they affirm or deny. The way I personally understand this topic is as follows.

In this context, as indicated by the wisdom of the bliss of union, I think one must equalize the 'taste' of all sensations into coemergent wisdom. Unless one realizes that, bliss may dawn as coemergent while pain and sickness do not. Unless they dawn (as coemergent wisdom) there is no way to recognize all forms of conceptual thinking to be the innate nature (dharmata), and thus one misses the point of the third empowerment. Without experiencing the nature of the third empowerment, one does not obtain the true fourth empowerment. Consequently, whatever appears and whatever is experienced must be ripened into coemergent wisdom. When this happens one needn't depend exclusively upon the practice of the bliss of union, as illustrated by the phrase "Appearance is the male and emptiness is the female." We can understand this through the example of Shang Rinpoche: when he had reached perfection in experience and realization of the path of means, all experiences — a thorn piercing his foot
or his head bumping against the roof of his cave — dawning as co-emergent bliss and emptiness. Therefore, among the twelve trials Naropa underwent, this is also the reason why Tilopa beat Naropa's secret vajra with a stone.

If one is a true practitioner of the path of passion, one should definitely have gained mastery over the retaining, retracting and distribution of the bodhichitta, which is easier the more power one has over the pranas. More difficult than that is the ability to realize that desire is discriminating wisdom. Unless exactly that happens, one does not become a practitioner of the path of passion but instead creates the root downfalls of both Sutra and Mantra. These days, just as you have mentioned, the behavior of many people conflicts with both Sutra and Mantra as well as worldly conventions, and surely harms the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni.

In particular, I have heard that some people, after having acquired some slight power over their pranas, display openly to crowds as a spectacle the 'front pipe,' 'back pipe,' the 'water-drinking vajra,' and so forth.24 Such people not only forsake themselves, their master and the teachings, but also reduce to dust the term Secret Mantra.

Moreover, if one takes to heart the practice of the third empowerment exactly as it should be, one will accomplish the 32 major marks of a buddha by purifying the 32 nadis through which the bodhichitta flows, the 80 minor marks by purifying the 80 innate thought states, the ushnika25 by retracting the secret vajra into its sheath, the rainbow body by purifying the material form, and so forth. The tantras and instructions of the Old and New Schools detail how to reach accomplishment in the seven aspects of union.26 Most of the siddhas, including Tilopa, Naropa and Virupa, were originally great panditas who upheld the vinaya rules; later they attained accomplishment through this path. The great brahmin Saraha was the preceptor of five hundred panditas. After he took the daughter of an arrowsmith as his consort, he proclaimed, "Yesterday I was not a monk; from today I truly am." Among the Nyingma masters there have been innumerable accomplished vidyadharas, headed by Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava), who attained the indestructible rainbow body.

In this later part of the dark age, however, the people who pretend to uphold the vinaya act in complete contradiction to the vital
root of the precepts, even though they appear to be striving diligently in the finer points of the training. Self-professed followers of the path of Mantrayana as well seem to spend all their time on actions that are a hundred times more vile than those of ordinary worldly people. Everywhere I look it seems like authentic followers of Sutra and Mantra, separately or combined, are rarer than the udumvarā flower,27 while charlatans in religious guise, revelling in the five kinds of wrong livelihood, proliferate like ants whose hill has broken open. On seeing this, the small child of my mind finds no other resort than to lie down on a bed of sadness.
Well, you ask, “Isn’t it impossible to confer the third empowerment of Secret Mantra in any other way than by means of the coemergent melting bliss?” The answer is no. Since the system of Secret Mantra is one of many profound, quick and vast methods, there are many symbolic methods for the third empowerment. In many empowerment rituals of the New Schools the mandala of the sindhura mirror is used, and the Nyingma system also has many different methods. The symbolic method that is based upon the coemergent melting bliss can be conferred by means of a picture of the consort, a bell, or a ‘source-of-dharmas’ design. Alternately, the pointing-out instruction can be given by means of the mandala of ultimate bodhichitta, using empowerment articles such as a crystal or a mirror, and without making use of the relative bodhichitta involving bliss and emptiness. There are numerous methods of pointing out, directly and in actuality, the wisdom that is the union of emptiness and cognizance or emptiness and awareness.

As an additional aspect, one may be shown a pair of forms — one beautiful, one ugly — and have pointed out their nonduality. Likewise, the pointing-out instruction may be given by sounding a pleasant and a harsh sound, by experiencing the smell of incense and rotten meat, the taste of molasses and vinegar, and by rubbing the different textures of silk and woven hemp on one’s body. There are indeed a vast number of such methods.
The majority of empowerment texts don’t require any elaborate articles for the higher empowerments. There is the way of conferring the complete four empowerments simply by means of a torma, as well as manifold other ways. Ultimately, as I have repeatedly mentioned, the vital point is to be able to experience the original wakefulness through receiving the blessings. The purpose of the third empowerment, no matter how it is given, is therefore simply to purify the obscurations of mind and to let thoughts dawn as dharmata, planting the seed of dharmakaya. The *Tantra of Pacifying* describes it thus:

The indescribable coemergent wisdom
Depends only upon the practices of gathering the accumulations and purifying the obscurations
And upon the blessings of a realized master.
To follow other methods should be known as delusion.

Therefore, the lifestyle of the present-day teachers of the paths of ripening and liberation is for the most part what the eighth Karmapa said:

While totally mistaking the frame of mind of secluded mountain retreat,
And not understanding the correct application of *surupa*,
It is truly insane to pretend to be a vajra holder
By merely giving a torma to Mahakala.29
The chanting of just the *MANI*
Does not accord with any of the rituals of the Four Sections of Tantra
And brings little benefit.

He continued,

There are many who pretend that it is empowerment
Just to place a lump of dough on another’s head
And exclaim “May you be blessed by the enlightened Body, Speech and Mind!”
Moreover, to call behaving as one pleases 'yogic activity,' to call the pursuit of material things 'acting for the welfare of others,' to call eating feast offering, ganachakra, and so forth, is like the siddha Orgyenpa said:

The people who in groups enjoy meat and wine
While lacking the vital points of development and completion—
Aren't they just sowing the seeds for rebirth as hungry ghosts?

Such practitioners actualize all the predictions given by the Precious Master of Uddiyana (Padmasambhava) in the Prophecies of the Oral Lineage:

As the direct sign that the teachings of the Vinaya are degenerating,
Monks with perverted morality disguise themselves as practitioners of Mantrayana.
The proportions of the three Dharma robes are mistaken, and new fashions spread.
Meat and liquor is permitted and food is taken outside the time of meals.
The order of training is misconstrued and fondness is given to dyes and embellishments.30
Vowless sangha members adorn themselves with knives and weapons.
Elder preceptors act as leaders in war
And the teachings of Shakyamuni disappear like a pool being drained.

He also said:

The followers of Secret Mantra in the attire of the Vinaya vows
Believe they combine the two as outer and inner, while in fact they lack both.
Perverting the Vinaya discipline and abandoning the samayas,
They neglect meditation within and outwardly act crudely.

While maintaining the double-sided behavior of white face and black mind,
They deceive beings with insincere and hypocritical teachings.
With the income of perverted livelihood they wreak disaster upon themselves and others,
They allow the Secret Mantra to become shamanistic incantations, and perform sadhanas in the marketplace.

Without having received empowerment, they expound the tantras
And perform empowerments indiscriminately to any gathering.
While surely not ripening others, they endanger their own lives.
How rare will people be who attain accomplishment in that age!

Guru Rinpoche continued:

Without having mastered the channels, winds and bodhichitta essences,
They feign conferment of the four empowerments, but instead upset the dakinis and Dharma protectors.
Evil omens and myriad obstacles will result.
Claiming their teaching is like precious gold, they sell the priceless Dharma,
Perverting it and breaking the Buddha’s word and their samayas,
They will meet with immediate punishment.

These and other such numberless prophecies have indeed come true. If I were to straightforwardly describe the behavior of such people who fill the country, professing to act for the welfare of the teachings and beings while pointlessly wreaking disaster on themsel-
nes and others, it would only be a cause for creating negative actions of speech and increasing wrong views. To a large extent there is no doubt the fault lies in the failure of my own pure perception to be all-encompassing.
HAVING EXPRESSED SOME SKETCHY POINTS regarding the four empowerments in general and the third empowerment in particular, I shall now offer you the heart of the liberating instructions in the form of replies to your questions about the profound nature of emptiness.

First of all, you inquired about establishing with certainty that the outer vessel of the world, including Mount Sumeru, palaces, and so forth; the inner contents of sentient beings with their individual forms, the various types of creation and destruction, and the changes of our own material body; and all the mental activity of our thoughts, such as the five or three poisons — the entirety of all these — are nothing other than the magical display of the mind.

In response to that: in general, there are innumerable individual ways of perception for different beings. This is best illustrated by the example of water as being seen as nectar by gods, as a weapon by the demigods, as water by humans, as food and drink by some animals and as a dwelling place by others, as pus and blood by hungry ghosts, and as molten metal by hell beings. All these perceptions are the personal experiences of individual beings.

In particular, the way in which individuals perceive the appearance of external objects differs in accordance with their respective degree of mental capacity. Ordinary worldly people regard appearances as a solid reality. Non-Buddhist extremist philosophers, the tirthikas, maintain that everything is created by the godhead or the Almighty. The Buddhist shravakas and pratyekabuddhas hold that
appearances are made of material particles. The Mahayana Mind Only School maintains that all appearances are mind and that this mind is a truly existing self-cognizance. The Middle Way School asserts that all objects are a superficial mistaken perception. The followers of Secret Mantra regard all that appears as being the mandala of the deity. Thus, each of the individual vehicles indeed have their own different types of position. And although these positions are real within their own experience, in fact, they do not have even an atom of existence separate from the mind. The Tantra of the Immaculate Essence declares:

All the outer and inner elements
Are the coemergent mind itself.
Within, the three realms, the six classes of beings, and so forth—
The inhabitants, sentient beings,
The five senses and the five sense objects,
The sense cognitions, the five disturbing emotions and so forth,
Are all the personal perception of mind.
Besides the mind, not even an atom
Has an instant of existence.

It continues:

Ignorance and samsara are your own mind
And the eternalism and nihilism of the tirthikas are also mind.
Shravakas and pratyekabuddhas abandon samsara
While the path of the bodhisattvas purifies it,
Within Mantrayana it is transmuted or recognized.
These different vehicles are your own mind.
There is no Dharma that is not this mind.

When you take a single ladle of water from the ocean
You can still make use of it.
Likewise, it is mind that individually experiences
The truth corresponding to each of the levels of teachings
of the vehicles.\textsuperscript{31}

In this way, whatever appears is nothing but mental occurrence.
SAMSARA AND NIRVANA: THOUGHT AND NONTHOUGHT

You also inquired whether samsara can be explained as arising from mental occurrence or conceptual thinking, and whether nirvana arises from nonthought. My reply is that the general authoritative scriptures explain it in the following way. In his praise to Vajra Manjugosha (Manjushri), Dignaga said:

Conceptual thinking, the great ignorance,
Makes you fall into the ocean of samsara.
Once free from this conceptual thinking
You are forever beyond sorrow.  

In the context of the profound paths of Mahamudra and the Great Perfection, if you possess the key point of the oral instructions on taking conceptual thinking as the path, the dharmakaya or the self-existing wisdom itself is nothing other than the nature of recognizing the natural face within conceptual thinking. So there is no need to deliberately try to cast away thinking, nor should you deliberately try to attain a state of nonthought. A scripture says:
Cultivate nonthought as the antidote to thought.
But to desire nonthought is a huge concept.
Dharmadhatu is beyond both thought and nonthought.
Thought and nonthought are both in the domain of words.

The *Sambhuti Tantra* says:

Emptiness is not to be cultivated
Nor should one meditate upon the not-empty.
The yogi who doesn’t abandon emptiness
Definitely doesn’t abandon the not-empty.
Holding on to the empty and not-empty
Will give rise to huge concepts.

We often see such statements as, “He who suppresses thoughts is not a meditator.” We should bring all conceptual and nonconceptual states onto the path, neither affirming nor denying them but embracing them with the vital point.

You also mentioned some doubt about whether black and white thought activity are both causes for samsara. My reply is that in general, white thoughts or mental occurrences such as pure perception, devotion and compassion are virtuous types of mental states, and therefore are causes conducive to merit or emancipation. Black thought occurrences, such as the five or three poisons, are unvirtuous states of mind and thus the causes of the lower realms of samsara. This is exactly the principle of cause and effect taught in the general Dharma teachings. Nagarjuna said:

Desire, anger and delusion
And what they produce are unvirtuous.
Non-desire, non-anger and non-delusion
And what they produce are virtuous.

It is not required in this context to state many details, but if a seemingly virtuous deed is performed with unvirtuous motivation, it doesn’t qualify as virtuous; while, if the action superficially appears to be unvirtuous but the motivation is completely virtuous, then there will not be a negative consequence. In the past, some masters of
the Sakya and Drigung schools differed in opinion about the classifications, what should be accepted or rejected, and so forth. But these days, people who correctly know what should be adopted or avoided seem to be rare. There are also cases where both the action and the motivation are labeled virtuous, yet still become evil deeds: for instance, to kill animals and throw a feast for monks and laypeople in order to make offerings for the sake of a deceased person, or to have ceremonies or chanting performed after a slaughtering. Such customs proliferate everywhere nowadays. While definitely not helping the deceased, these deeds are disastrous for both the donor and the recipient, and yet no one seems to worry. It is therefore indeed hard to express the points of cause and effect.

Although a sublime yogi may realize that cause and effect is mind and that the mind is empty, since it is emptiness that manifests as cause and effect, he doesn’t denigrate (the law of karma), but acts in an illusory way without being bound by clinging to things as being real. For those who understand this, the gathering of the accumulation of merit also becomes the great accumulation of wisdom. The Manarasowar Sutra says:

Although you understand that dharmata is beyond cause and effect
The karmic deeds of good and evil are never lost.

The point here is that it is not permissible to disregard cause and effect by professing to emptiness. Also, virtuous deeds should not be performed with hopes for their karmic ripening, such as rebirth among gods and humans, or with ambitions for fame and gain. Rather, practitioners should carry out these deeds in a state that is like an illusion. The Sutra Foretelling Goodness says:

By gathering the illusory accumulations
You become illusorily enlightened
And carry out as an illusion
The illusory welfare of beings.

In short, it is said that unless you embrace the deed with the accumulation of wisdom or the knowledge of emptiness as the most important, even virtuous actions, not to mention evil deeds, will
become causes for rebirth in only the higher realms or for being a shravaka or pratyekabuddha rather than for the definite goodness of enlightenment. So, you must unify means and knowledge.
SHAMATHA AND VIPASHYANA

REGARDING THE NONTHOUGHT OF STILLNESS, you asked whether shamatha and vipashyana are both causes for nirvana.

My reply is this: although stillness of mind or the state of nonthought generally is shamatha, vipashyana does not depend exclusively upon this state of stillness. However, your specific inquiry is not about the shamatha and vipashyana of the general vehicles, but is primarily meant in the context of the Mahamudra system of definitive meaning. On this occasion, though merely acting like someone who has received teachings on the Middle Way view of the general vehicles, I will also offer you a reply in accordance with the extraordinary system of Mahamudra, both the general and specific aspects of these topics.

The terms shamatha and vipashyana appear in most of the higher and lower vehicles. In some contexts shamatha demonstrates the word meditation (dhyana, samten) while vipashyana points to discriminating knowledge (prajna, sherab). Their respective characteristics are mentioned in the Cloud of Jewels Sutra:

Shamatha is one-pointed attention. Vipashyana is the individual discrimination of phenomena, correctly and exactly as they are.

In terms of their function, the sutra continues:
Shamatha suppresses disturbing emotions. Vipashyana utterly purifies disturbing emotions.

In this way, both are causes for nirvana. As to their divisions, there are two, as described in the *Sutra of Unraveling the Intent*:

Shamatha and vipashyana are of two kinds: resulting from knowledge and resulting from oral instructions. As for resulting from knowledge, shamatha is to keep in mind the twelve sections of Sutra. To understand their meaning is vipashyana.

These days these two types are well-known under the terms ‘analytical meditation’ and ‘resting meditation.’ Ordinary shamatha meditation is certainly applied by the tirthikas, but it doesn’t become a cause for emancipation. For instance, the non-Buddhist teacher Lhagchö practiced shamatha for twelve years and attained undefiled qualities such as the superknowledges and so forth. But, because of feeling hatred for a mouse he was reborn as a cat and in the hell realms. This is also described in the *Sutra of the King of Samadhi*:

Even though mundane people meditate on emptiness
They are unable to avoid fixating upon it as concrete.
From that, disturbing emotions again fully evolve
Just like practicing the samadhi of Lhagchö.

The Buddha therefore taught that we need the supramundane or supreme shamatha. 34

Moreover, the nine types of equanimity — the four meditation states of the gods of the realm of form, the four meditation states of the formless realm, and the shravaka’s samadhi of cessation — are all aspects of shamatha. Although these states include innumerable temporary qualities such as superknowledges and miraculous powers, they are useless in terms of reaching ultimate enlightenment unless they are embraced by vipashyana. The master Aryadeva describes how vipashyana is of the most vital importance:

Though the wildfire of meditation again and again
Consumes the thicket of disturbing emotions
It doesn’t destroy the sturdy root of egotism.
So, arouse an interest that saturates it like the moisture of the monsoon.

Moreover, many learned masters of the New Schools have criticized the Great Perfection of the Nyingma School, calling it similar to the Hashang view. However, the historical narratives of the Great Perfection tell of how Nyangben Tingdzin Zangpo, the aide to King Trisong Deutsen, received instruction in meditation from a Chinese Hashang teacher. Practicing assiduously, he achieved superknowledges and could remain immersed in shamatha for many days without food or drink. Thus impressed with his own excellent meditation, he met the great pandita Vimalamitra and asked him about this meditation practice. Vimalamitra responded, “Through this type of meditation you will take rebirth as a class of naga that doesn’t awake from sleep for an aeon; it isn’t a cause for enlightenment.” Hereby Nyangben’s attachment was cut, he requested the Great Perfection from the great pandita and, by practicing it, attained the rainbow body. There are many other such stories indicating that shamatha is merely a supporting basis for vipashyana. The meditation of stillness alone doesn’t qualify as the authentic meditation practice of Mahamudra. In particular, all the authoritative guidance texts of the Old and New Schools unanimously agree that people who fixate with attachment on the experience of stillness will go astray in their meditation practice.

In terms of the primeval natural state, the innate condition, the real mode of things, both shamatha and vipashyana are in essence a nondual unity. People of higher capacity recognize the original innate state as it is and practice it just like that, rather than dividing shamatha and vipashyana into different aspects. Not only shamatha and vipashyana, but all that appears and exists, all of samsara and nirvana, is experienced as the display of nothing other than the Mahamudra of awareness and emptiness. Thus they realize the nature of all phenomena as it is.

As means to guide people of medium and lesser capacity, shamatha is divided into different types, beginning with shamatha with attributes, which includes methods for maintaining mental stillness using impure objects such as a stick or a stone, or pure objects such as a wisdom deity, a seed syllable, bindu, or prana training. As for sha-
matha without attributes, the traditional ways of guidance use various means such as concentration, relaxation, or alternating between the two. These methods are similar to the way in which, when learning the alphabet, one trains gradually, beginning with ka, kha ... (in English, A-B-C...) and so on.

In order to give rise to an authentic meditation state here on the path of Secret Mantra, it is taught to be of chief importance to receive the blessings of your master. A tantra mentions:

The coemergent that others cannot express
Is not found anywhere else.
You understand it by following the master’s timely instruction
And from your own merit.

Kyobpa Rinpoche explained:

Secret Mantra is the path of blessings.
Without receiving the blessings of the master
No matter what you do, it is all intellectual fabrication.

In particular, when about to train in the actual shamatha without attributes according to Mahamudra, some present-day practitioners of Mahamudra persevere in blocking out thought activity and rigidly concentrating. All the authoritative scriptures and instructions of the former siddhas, however, only teach how to leave the mind in naturalness. Tilopa said:

Don’t follow what is past and don’t invite the future.
Don’t speculate about the present and don’t meditate with the intellect.
Don’t analyze with discursive thought; utterly relax your mind.

Shavaripa also said,

Without controlling the breath or tying down your attention.
Rest in unfabricated wakefulness like a small child.
The Incomparable Dakpo (Gampopa) said:

Don’t correct or improve; rest freely.  
Don’t check too much; rest in the natural state.  
Don’t keep something in mind; rest free from focus.

In his Sevenfold Pointing-out Instruction, Yang Gönpa said:

Don’t regard your thinking as a fault  
And don’t deliberately strive for nonthought.  
Leave your mind in its natural state and keep on guard.  
Then your meditation practice will arrive at the core of shamatha.

It is my understanding that the vital point is to be able to meditate exactly in accordance with the statements of all the Kagyü forefathers.

All the Mahamudra teachings of the Nyingma School teach exactly in the same way, as the Mahamudra of Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance mentions:

With your body assume the sevenfold posture of Vairochana.  
Leave your mind without fabrication and activity,  
Vividly clear in a state free from mental constructs.  
Leave this mind undistracted from the unfabricated state  
In a continuity that is unfixed and devoid of concepts.

When a thought of a perceiver and something perceived stirs,  
Look into the essence of just this thinker,  
And not finding, relax as before and rest.

The gross train of thoughts, each one,  
Naturally subsides and you remain in quietude.  
You abide free and easy  
In the state of bliss, clarity and nonthought.

This is just the resolving of shatnatha  
And the sign that vipashyana is about to arise.
This subject has been taught in great detail, here and in other places.

By diligently practicing this type of stillness meditation, you will gradually have the experiences of movement, habituation, stability and perfection. Some of the guidance manuals describe these experiences with the analogy, "The first state of stillness is like a waterfall; the second is like a gently flowing river; and the third is like an unmoving ocean." But there is the danger of becoming bloated with self-infatuation and conceit because of the conditioned superknowledges and miraculous powers that arise as signs of achieving stability in these experiences, and of thus going astray on an errant path. It is therefore taught that it is essential to follow an experienced master in order to avoid slipping into deviations.

As I have mentioned previously, the mundane shamatha of mental fabrication, the blind meditation state of suppressing sensations and the like are not the paths to nirvana. Therefore, the shamatha that serves as a supporting basis for Mahamudra meditation is accepted to be only the above-mentioned unfabricated natural resting.

Some people achieve a certain measure of stillness but fail to bring forth the clarity of awareness, and become absorbed in the dull torpor of oblivious indifference. This brings no progress and leads one astray, as the Master of Uddiyana said:

Without bringing forth the natural strength of awareness,
A numb and inert state of stillness
Will never yield any progress whatsoever.
So it is crucial to bring forth the steady clarity of awareness.
There are many meditators, but few who know how to meditate.

It is truly important to utilize the vital points.
Defining Mahamudra

Following this explanation that is meant to serve as a mere hint of shamatha, I will now address the actual meaning of vipashyana, the wisdom of emptiness. As you mentioned, statements such as "Prajnaparamita is beyond thought, word and description" describe the nature of mind from the aspect of its essence, while statements like 'supreme seed of all expression' describe the mind's characteristic of being cognizant and unobstructed. These two aspects are not contradictory, but are primordially and spontaneously present as the great union of cognizance and emptiness.

Furthermore, the phrase 'Mahamudra meditation,' which is renowned like the sun and the moon, is defined in many ways. In India, Tilopa and his disciple Naropa, emphasizing means over knowledge, defined Mahamudra as the coemergent wisdom of bliss and emptiness. This focus on the practice of the path of means was upheld by Marpa, Milarepa, Rechungpa and so forth. On the other hand, Maitripa, his guru Richö Wangchuk, and his guru Saraha, emphasized the knowledge aspect of emptiness and defined Mahamudra as amana sikara, mental nondoing, or the Mahamudra of awareness and emptiness, the ultimate wakefulness of simply unfabricated, natural resting. Transmitted through Marpa and Milarepa, this tradition was spread widely as coemergent union by the Incomparable Dakpo (Gampopa). Later on, Garwang Chökyi Drakpa and other masters wrote manuals for the Mahamudra of bliss and...
emptiness and for the Mahamudra of awareness and emptiness, the natural state.

Moreover, here in Tibet, Lord Sakyapa and his followers maintained that Mahamudra is itself the original wakefulness that is the nature of empowerment, and that empowerment therefore is of great importance. On a practical level, they placed great emphasis on the empowerments of ground, path and fruition.

The glorious Drukpas, father and sons, and other masters, especially Gyalwa Götsangpa, defined Mahamudra as 'unimpaired, spontaneous wakefulness.'

The learned and accomplished Kodragpa defined it as the natural face — the state of 'not finding' when seeking the arising, dwelling and ceasing of the mind.

The omniscient Butön and others defined Mahamudra as the sugata-essence, and focused on the explanation of the ground. Jonangpa (and his followers) held the view that the qualities of fruition such as the major and minor marks are fully present within the mind-stream of sentient beings, and emphasized the explanation of the fruition.

Bodongpa (and later followers) defined it as simply nonconceptual wakefulness, and, as in the case of the Middle Way, emphasized the empty aspect. The Gedenpa (Gelug) followers also held the view of the Middle Way.

The followers of Zhang Tshalpa defined Mahamudra as great luminosity, while the Drigung followers defined it as the totality of self-awareness. In the ultimate realization itself there is surely no difference, but there are indeed infinite aspects to emphasize and ways to explain it.

The Practice Lineage of Kamtsang (Karma Kagyü) maintains that Mahamudra or the essence of vipashyana is the ultimate realization of all the sections of tantra, the nondual wisdom of means and knowledge, a fresh and naked awareness that naturally manifests within coemergent, innate space. In his Pointing-out Instruction of Mahamudra, Pal Kachöpa says,

What manifests as cognizant awareness does not consist of any entity whatsoever, and is primordially not made out of anything at all. At the same time as not being an existent
thing, it appears in myriad different ways, so that these three — appearance, awareness and emptiness — are an indivisible unity and of same taste. This itself is Mahamudra, the natural face of the buddha of your own mind that manifests within your direct experience.

You will find innumerable similar statements in the teachings of the forefathers of the Practice Lineage. The Mahamudra teachings of the Nyingma School are also similar. As Guru Rinpoche mentions in his *Oral Advice on Mahamudra*:

The phrase 'Mahamudra of the mind itself' means a wakefulness that is nondual cognizance and emptiness. All the phenomena included within samsara and nirvana at first appear from this mind, and at present they remain in the continuity of this mind. When, at the end, all phenomena are freed, they also dissolve into the expanse of this mind. Therefore, all phenomena are nothing but mind itself. Once you recognize the self-cognizant natural face of this mind by embracing it with the blessings and oral instructions of your master, it becomes the foundation for developing all the qualities of nirvana. Why is that? The nature of mind that is primordially unborn is dharmakaya; its natural manifestation that is unceasing cognizance is sambhogakaya; its expression that is all-pervasive functioning is nirmanakaya; and the fact that these three are primordially indivisible and spontaneously present is svabhavikakaya. All the qualities of the buddhas spontaneously arise from realizing this.

He also said:

Although the myriad magical displays of samsara and nirvana arise unceasingly from the primordially nonarising mind itself, they are nothing other than a nonarising display. All appearances are therefore empty while the natural manifestation of emptiness appears, and thus appearance and emptiness are nondual.
Guru Rinpoche continued:

This is also called the indivisibility of means and knowledge, since the wakefulness, an unceasing presence of mind, is the means, while its nonarising nature is the knowledge aspect. This great wisdom of nondual means and knowledge is the basic state of all phenomena.

Thus he has taught in great detail. Furthermore, the Mahamudra of Unconfined Vastness declares:

Concerning shamatha and vipashyana,
Shamatha is the state of mental nonfabrication
After thought and disturbing emotions have naturally subsided.
Vipashyana is to realize that what appears and exists is mind.

In the meditation state, do not put the mind to work
But rest freely in naturalness.
The ensuing state of mind is the gross and subtle thoughts.35

The same text continues:

The expression of mind manifests unceasingly
But this natural wakefulness is empty.

The view is free from focus.
To sustain that without fixation is the meditation.
No suppressing or striving is the conduct.
The fruition is to transcend hope and fear.

Cast mundane clinging totally away.
Utterly destroy deluded experience.
Completely abandon attachment to habitual tendencies.
Release your attention freely in itself.

Rest gently in the innate state.
This mind is the forefather of all the buddhas.
The crucial point is to realize the nature of this mind.
The 37 factors of enlightenment,
The ten bhumis, five paths and six paramitas,
The three and five kayas and the five wisdoms—
These and all other attributes
Are embodied within the single sphere of mind itself
Once you resolve its basis and root.

All the vidyadhara siddhas agree unanimously that the root of the entire Buddhadharma is to gain mastery over our own mind. And yet, there are many people who immerse themselves in a view and meditation made up solely of dry words, or who cling to a blind meditation state that is an exercise in mental fabrication. It is therefore of chief importance to guide qualified disciples in accordance with their different capacities and faculties, such as the gradual, instantaneous or skipping-the-grades types. First of all, they should persist in the general and special preliminary practices until the signs appear.

For the main part of the practice there are also different ways of teaching, such as establishing the view from within the meditation state, or establishing the meditation from within the view. Whichever is the case, the most vital point is to resolve the ground and root of mind. Disciples should therefore decisively seek out their mind within their own experience and gain some definitive understanding which is not merely vague assumption, intellectual comprehension, received information, or scholarly expertise. Only when the right situation arrives should the crucial pointing-out instruction be given. If the profound words of the oral instructions are explained indiscriminately, at the wrong time or out of context, the disciple will remain inexperienced and full of platitudes. So it is vital to know the various crucial dividing points (in the disciple's level of progress).
You presented a detailed question regarding the elimination of faults, using example, reasoning and this quotation from the Jewel Ornament of Liberation:

If the view of emptiness is faulty
People of lesser intelligence will be ruined.

My reply is this: This treatise, The Wishfulfilling Jewel Ornament of Liberation,\textsuperscript{36} establishes an understanding which unifies the two streams of Kadampa and Mahamudra. Among the general systems of Sutra and Mantra it emphasizes the Sutra system, and was written to show the stages of the Mahayana path. The explanation of emptiness in the chapter on discriminating knowledge adheres mainly to the Middle Way view, while the methodical aspects of the path are primarily taught according to the six paramitas. Since the scriptural quotations are predominantly taken from the authoritative texts on the Middle Way, the teachings of Maitreya\textsuperscript{37} and so forth, this book does conform with the general vehicles. The actual view of Mahamudra, however, is clarified in Lord Gampopa's Revealing the Hidden Points of Oral Instruction, and other of his works, including treatises and his replies to questions.

It is generally held that the difference between Sutra and Mantra lies not in the view but in the methods. But as it is the meaning of the view itself that is implemented in practice, 'method' implies how to realize or make oneself familiar with this meaning. It is precisely
because the methods differ that there is a slight difference in the view. That is to say, the Middle Way is the best view among the causal philosophical vehicles, and although it has numerous subdivisions, generally speaking it is said that one should practice the meditation state like space and maintain the post-meditation state like an illusion.

That the emptiness of the meditation state is like space is (in this vehicle) examined only by using scriptural quotations, reasoning and analysis to intellectually affirm and establish that the mind does not consist of any entity whatsoever. When meditating, one rests evenly in a thought-free, space-like state in which all thinking has been deliberately abandoned. The 'ensuing consciousness' or 'ensuing perception' (of appearances) is regarded or intellectually generalized as being like an illusion.

On the other hand, Mahamudra is free from accepting or rejecting. It brings the nature or manifestation of the mind itself, no matter how it is, onto the path as self-cognizant wakefulness, unfabricated and liberated.

When seeking out the mind, the philosophical vehicles use intellectual analysis and conceptual speculation. They regard the innate essence as the emptiness of nonexistence, as demonstrated by the fact of not finding anything through searching, like a thief entering an empty house. But the Mahamudra system looks directly into one's natural face within the meditation state, thus gaining a decisive understanding of whether or not it consists of characteristics such as color and shape, or possesses a place of arising, dwelling and ceasing, and so forth. Through this process one resolves that there is nothing other than the seeking awareness itself. One sees a wakefulness in which seeker and what is sought are nondual – the natural face of wisdom, the union of emptiness and cognizance. The difference between these two methods is substantial. The Mahamudra system doesn’t accept that emptiness as it is, is a product of conceptual examination or statements of reasoning and analysis. Jampal Drakpa said:

The analysis of the aggregates being empty
Is hollow like a plantain tree.
But the emptiness endowed with the supreme of all aspects
Is never like that.

Relating to this and other such statements, Tilopa described how the meaning beyond concepts is not realized exclusively through intellectual fabrication or analysis:

Through concepts you don't realize the nature beyond concepts.
Through constructed practices you don't reach the unconstructed enlightenment.
If you want to realize the unconstructed nature beyond concepts,
Resolve your own mind and rest in naked awareness.

As Tilopa said, all the types of view and meditation belonging to the philosophical vehicles differ slightly from the view of Mahamudra in this context.

I shall now explain how people can be ruined if their view of emptiness is faulty. The Victorious One did indeed skillfully begin by teaching emptiness to ordinary people, as well as shravakas and pratyekabuddhas, in order to reverse their clinging to things as being real. But to fixate on emptiness as paramount is a greater fault than fixating on a concrete reality. Lord Gampopa illustrated this by means of analogy, reasoning and quotations, and the Ratnakuta Sutra declares:

Kashyapa, a belief in a self as huge as Mount Sumeru is easy to (destroy), but the belief in emptiness with true conceit is not (destroyed) so (easily).

The Great Brahmin (Saraha) also said,

To cling to a concrete reality is to be as foolish as cattle
But clinging to emptiness is even more foolish.

There are many other such statements. Why does this clinging to emptiness bring ruin? True emptiness is beyond concepts, while the clinging is conceptually constructed and therefore doesn’t serve as
the path of enlightenment. In addition, clinging to emptiness alone turns into the view of nihilism, which is a direct cause for the lower realms. The *Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha* says:

To deny cause and effect and the ripening of karmic deeds
Is the belief maintained by nihilistic *Tirthikas.*
Reborn in the hell of incessant torment as soon as they die,
They ruin themselves and also destroy others.

Here in Tibet, some people, under the pretense of scholarship, treat the view and meditation of Mahamudra and the Great Perfection, and especially Dharma terminology such as 'conduct free from accepting and rejecting,' as equivalents to the general Hashang School. But Hashang seems to mean the nonacceptance of methods, cause and effect: the phrase "No recollection and nothing held in mind" refers to the belief that meditation is a nonconceptual state of dullness similar to deep sleep, in which all cognizance has been blocked out. There is never any occasion in which this equals the wisdom of unified cognizance and emptiness of Mahamudra and the Great Perfection.

The phrase 'beyond thought and recollection' used in some Great Perfection teachings, and the term 'mental nondoing' used in Mahamudra, refers to (the absence of) ordinary deluded thinking such as intellectually constructed fabrication.

The 'conduct free from accepting and rejecting' refers to the unconditioned innate nature within the natural face of the meditation state that is untainted by fixation on attributes such as virtue and sin, good and evil. It never implies a denigration of cause and effect or the claim that there are no good or evil deeds.

To focus one's practice on the vital point of not separating means and knowledge is the crucial view of both Mahamudra and the Great Perfection. This also corresponds to the teachings of Jowo Jey (Atisha), who said that the ground is the unity of the two truths, the path is the unity of means and knowledge or the two accumulations, and the fruition is the unity of the kayas.

Moreover, the Incomparable Gampopa said,
The followers of the Paramita vehicle (Mahayana) meditate after establishing by means of quotations and reasoning that dependent origination and so forth appear while being devoid of self-nature. This creation of emptiness out of mere belief is the Middle Way of meditation. It possesses the dualistic concepts of a meditator and an object of meditation. One doesn’t realize the view through that. Because it counteracts the fixation of a concrete reality it can exhaust an immense amount of obscurations, but it cannot bring enlightenment.

Others regard meditation as being nothing but a nonconceptual state, and train in post-meditation as being like a dream or illusion. The system of the master Milarepa is, as he said, to “take the five poisons and all thoughts as the path and, when accustomed to that, to practice without division between meditation and post-meditation, sessions and breaks.” This is the extraordinary Mahamudra position stated directly.
Conceptual Meditation

You also mention that you feel hesitant about practicing conceptual meditation because meditating on a conceptual form of emptiness could lead to the lower realms.

In general, a correct realization of the nature of emptiness is the source of all Dharma teachings. It is therefore called 'mother of the victorious ones,' space of phenomena (dharmadhatu), and discriminating knowledge. It is also called the 'womb of the queen consort,' space, source-of-dharmas, ṚWAM, and so forth. All these and other such types of symbol, meaning and sign belonging to Secret Mantra are taught using symbolic terminology in order to illustrate this nature of emptiness.

(This correct realization of the nature of emptiness) is the source of the categories of eighteen types of emptiness taught in the sutras of the definitive meaning, as well as of all different aspects of development and completion of Mantrayana. For example, just as external space is the basis for or source of all worlds and beings, all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana at first manifest from the expanse of emptiness and ultimately dissolve back into the space of emptiness. The Tantra of Immaculate Fruition mentions:

The ground that produces all of samsara and nirvana, without exception,
Is the utterly unformed dharmadhatu.
Pervading everywhere, a vast expanse
Of space-like wakefulness,
Arising from the state of nonarising.
Myriad magical displays appear in all possible ways.
All that appears and exists, samsara and nirvana, take
form from the unformed
And manifest in actuality.
Everything is one in the nature of the basic state,
The dharmata that transcends mental constructs.

Not realizing this nature as it is creates the basis for confusion to
arise. Ignorant of the inherent quality of the unity of emptiness and
cognizance, such people uphold wrong beliefs such as nihilistic void-
ness or limited emptiness. These wrong views will only lead to the
lower realms. On the other hand, within the correct realization of
emptiness there does not exist someone to go to the lower realms, the
act of going, or a place to go.

In particular, in the context of Mahamudra, Ground Mahamudra
is the original basic state or sugata-essence that is primordially and
spontaneously present as your innate nature (dharmata) free from
change and alteration, increase and decrease — an empty cognizance
endowed with a core of awareness. Path Mahamudra is the purifica-
tion of the defilement of temporary delusion by means of the
numerous profound and swift procedures, such as shamatha and
vipashyana, development and completion, means and knowledge,
the two accumulations, and so forth. Fruition Mahamudra is the
attainment of mastery over the Dharma kingdom, the identity of the
three kayas of buddhahood, that need not be sought elsewhere but is
self-existing within yourself as a great spontaneous presence. These
are the qualities of realizing emptiness as it is.

Whether or not the conceptual practice of emptiness creates the
circumstances for rebirth in the lower realms depends upon the in-
dividual person. Moreover, there are different types of conceptual
practices. In the general vehicles there are Dharma teachings using
conceptual love and compassion, bodhichitta and the six paramitas.
The special Secret Mantra has conceptually based teachings, such as
the extensive and condensed development stages or the meditation
practices of the channels, winds and essences. But when you embrace
these practices with the sublime key point, then conceptual and non-
conceptual are simply indivisible. So what is this sublime key point?
It is simply threefold purity. Taking the example of bodhichitta, this is to realize that the object for generating the resolve, the one who generates it, and the mental state of the resolve itself are all of one taste within the space of natural emptiness. The same goes for the paramitas and so forth. Once you understand this, then all the practices that are conceptual or with a reference point become causes for unexcelled complete enlightenment. The *Sutra Foretelling Goodness* says:

> All phenomena are devoid of a self-nature
> And are free from of the attributes of sentient beings or buddhas.
> The belief that the attributeless has attributes
> Takes you far away from buddhahood.
> Thus dharmic people are tainted by concepts.

> When fully understanding that things have no substance—
> That any deed is beyond a doer—
> It is fully revealed that clinging to names is empty.

> The one who understands that causes and conditions have no self-nature
> Is free from attachment and therefore also knows the Dharma.
> The one who understands that Dharma of non-attachment
> Will see buddhahood with the eyes of purity.

Similarly, it is essential to understand correctly that all the conceptual visualizations such as the development stages of Mantrayana are also to be practiced in this very same way. That is to say, in whatever development stage you practice, exactly in accordance with what has been pointed out by your master during the vase empowerment, everything that appears, the world and its contents of beings, the aggregates, elements, and sense bases, are to be visualized with the certainty of being what they are: the nature of the deity since the beginning. This way of visualization does not mean to mentally construct something to be which it is not. Such an imputation would
be an incorrect relative truth, like the example of a piece of charcoal which never becomes a conch however much you imagine it to be so.

Similarly, the practices and visualizations of the nadis, pranas and elements are profound key points, methods that form the coincidences for realizing the primordially present nature, the basic state of things. They are not imagining something to be what it is not.

Anything you visualize turns into 'conceptual straying' if visualized as a permanent reality with fixation on it as being solid. You should resolve that the visualization is a display of the Mahamudra of your mind — visible while being devoid of self-nature, just like a magical illusion or the moon in water. In its ultimate nature it is beyond constructed concepts. In this way, there is definitely no basis whatsoever for any obstacle, flaw or going astray. The *Essence Tantra* describes this fact:

In the coemergent mind essence
There is neither a meditation nor a meditator.
There is no deity and also no mantra.
In the nature free from constructs,
Both deity and mantra are perfectly present.

As the method for realizing this,
Just like refining and crafting gold and silver,
Since you cannot shape and craft silver ore
Before it has been melted,
You must establish the fruition
By means of the ripening empowerment and the development stage.

The scripture continues:

The five aggregates are the five families of buddhas,
And these five families are the five wisdoms.
The five elements are the five consorts.
All the outer and inner vajra sense bases
Are the supreme mandala of male and female bodhisattvas.

From the continuity of the single dharma-kaya,
In order to benefit all sentient beings,
The emanated buddhafields fill space
And infinite bodily forms are displayed.

Ultimately there is no development stage
Since the wakefulness of your own perception is complete
as the deity.
The deity is your mind and your mind the deity,
Just like a crystal and colored light are indivisible.
This nonduality of deity and mind
Is the nondual realization of the victorious ones.

Moreover:

Just as milk from a milking cow
Permeates its entire body but does not appear when you
pull its horns,
While milk appears when you tug the udders,
Likewise, with the dharmakaya of self-awareness,
If you know the key points of the methods and oral
instructions
Concerning the innate state of the three vajras,
All the attributes of Body, Speech, Mind, Qualities and
Activities
Will appear as direct perception and not as inference,
And you attain complete buddhahood in a single lifetime.

In accordance with this statement, when you apply the key points
upon the ground in which the body, speech and mind since the be­
ginning are the three vajras, through the profound methods of the
path of ripening and liberation, you realize the fruition, the qualities
of the Body, Speech and Mind of the victorious ones. This is the
special feature of the Vajra Vehicle of Secret Mantra, the profound
key point of taking the fruition as path. If you receive the master’s
oral instructions and blessings for the stages of development and
completion with and without concepts, this is not difficult.
Next, people begin the Development Stage with purifying into emptiness by means of the svabhava mantra. This mantra is meant to remind oneself of the essence of emptiness, the original natural state of all phenomena, the nature that primordially pervades all of samsara and nirvana. Yet nowadays many people believe that the purpose of the svabhava mantra is the temporary emptiness of rendering inconcrete the appearances of the world and its beings.

What is the real reason for remembering the great emptiness of the primordial natural state at the beginning of the development stage? The reason is to acknowledge Prajnaparamita — the mother of all phenomena — out of whose space all the phenomena of (samsara and) nirvana must necessarily originate. It is precisely the natural expression of this emptiness, the magical display of its unceasing cognizant quality, that emanates and manifests in the form of a celestial palace and various types of deities. No matter how this magical display appears, recognize that it is not made of material substance, but is the unity of appearance and emptiness. This great unity has never separated from the space of the immense emptiness of your mind essence. This is what is given the name 'development stage.'

As for the particular group of deities you visualize: through vivid presence you avoid falling into the extreme of nihilism, through recollection of the pure symbolism you avoid falling into the extreme of eternalism, and through stable pride you avoid sporadic or fragmented visualization. The purpose of these methods is to prevent
your three doors from departing from the three vajras, and they are found in most of the tantras and sadhanas of both the New and Old Schools. However, only a very few people practice in this way.

Some people explain that visualizing the development stage in the beginning and dissolving into the completion stage at the end is intended to bring birth and death onto the path and is the system of Nagarjuna and his followers and others. Others hold that practicing development and completion as a unity is the system of Naropa and his chief disciples. Although there are many different types of systems, there is undoubtedly no real difference between the basic intent of these sublime masters. The different systems are suited to different occasions and to the diverse inclinations and capacities of those to be tamed.

Some masters have said that these variations stem from the different systems found in the many sections of tantra, while the ultimate meaning is that development and completion are nothing other than a unity. Why is that? It is because initially the ground is the unity of the two truths, while the fruition that is ultimately realized is the unity of the two kayas. Therefore everything at first manifests out of the expanse of emptiness, and at the end again dissolves into the primordial continuity of the natural state. Thus it is taught that both manifesting and dissolving are in fact no other than a unity, the cognizance and emptiness of your mind essence. Yet nowadays people practice development and completion separately, alternating one with the other.

Furthermore, any practice of development and completion should be performed exclusively as the cause for the unexcelled enlightenment of oneself and all beings pervading space. However, it seems that present-day practitioners of development stage and sadhana recitation struggle blindly with deities and mantras for the temporary selfish gains of increasing their lifespan and wealth, or in order to alleviate a particular disease or evil influence, or with the intention to attain minor accomplishment in yogic activities to bring benefit or avoid harm. Such people will hardly arrive at the perfect development stage. Clinging to deity and mantra as ordinary reality without correctly understanding the threefold symbol, meaning and sign embodies great danger, as illustrated by the story of how one can be reborn as a hungry ghost with the form of Yamantaka. There-
fore, no matter what type of teaching you practice, understand the importance of taking to heart the authoritative scripture and the perfect oral instructions of your master.
THE HEART CENTER

Next, you questioned the seeming contradiction between the facts that the guidance texts and other scriptures teach that the mind possesses no place of origin, dwelling or disappearance, yet the Nyingma School, the Old System of Secret Mantra, teaches that the mind dwells in the heart center, supported by the heart's 'sphere comprised of the five pure essences.'

In general, all the teachings given by the victorious ones are contained within the two truths. In this context, from the aspect of the essence of the mind itself, it is totally devoid of all constructed attributes such as arising and ceasing, originating and remaining, coming and going, and also does not possess any concrete attribute such as shape or color. Consequently, it is beyond the confines of a place of abiding and something which abides. The Mother Scripture (Prajnaparamita Sutra) states:

The past mind is not seen.
The future mind has not arisen.
The present mind does not dwell.

Moreover:

Unborn and unceasing - the essence of space itself.

Thus the mind is simply the ultimate truth, the innate nature (dharmata) that transcends being and not being, permanence and annihilation, coming and going. It is not a void and nihilistic 'nothing
whatsoever,' since the manifestation of this innate essence of emptiness arises in all possible ways as unobstructed expression. This unobstructed manifestation appearing in all possible ways is called 'relative truth,' and seemingly it also has an origin, dwelling and disappearance. But mind has a nature that is the indivisibility of the three kayas.

As to the mind's initial place of origin, its unobstructed expression arose out of the expanse of the true all-ground of the natural state. Not knowing its own nature and moved by the power of the karmic wind of deluded dualistic fixation, it arises as a magical apparition, appearing while being nonexistent. As to its place of abiding, it dwells in and pervades this material body. Finally, as to its place of disappearance, at the time of death the movement of prana and breath, which serves as the cord tying body and mind together, is cut, and the consciousness emerges through one of the sense openings corresponding to one's individual karma. It then forms a link with the following rebirth, wherever that may be. This is definitely the way of origin, dwelling and disappearance according to the provisional relative truth. The *Tantra of the Brilliant Expanse* states:

Ema! All the beings of the three realms
Spin around through origin, dwelling and disappearance,
As if on the rim of a water wheel.
The mind's place of origin is the primordial ground.
The mind's dwelling place is the bodily support.
The mind's place of disappearance is the object to be analyzed.

The origin, dwelling and disappearance, according to the relative expedient meaning, is taught here and in other scriptures in great detail.

The three realms of samsara are characterized by this kind of nonexistent yet appearing magical display, an unending magical fabric of birth and death, arising and dissolving. In the ultimate essence, this magical display doesn't arise from anywhere, doesn't dwell anywhere, and doesn't go anywhere. Thus all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are just names, mere words, only imputations. Nothing whatsoever possesses any real or solid existence. All
being and not being, truths and falsehoods, are nothing but objects appearing in a dream. The person who believes them to be either true or false also does not exist. The *Heart of Transcendent Knowledge* states:

All phenomena are emptiness, devoid of characteristics, unborn, and unceasing.

The Storehouse Tantra also says:

The way it seems is that anything possible arises.
The way it is is that nothing is real.

The statement that the mind dwells in the heart center as mentioned in the *Profound Inner Topics* is the special perspective of Secret Mantra. It is said that when auspicious circumstances are arranged within the body, realization arises in the mind. This is the context of explaining the nature of the nadi structures, the moving pranas, and the placement of the bodhichitta essences within the vajra body, including the 72,000 nadi branching out from the three channels and five wheels and so forth, as well as the pranas and bindus supported by them. Since the *Profound Inner Topics* and its commentaries explain in great detail all the points of the various sections of tantra combined into one, there is no need to mention more here.

The heart's 'sphere comprised of the five pure essences' is taught in all the commentaries on concealed topics covering the vajra body found in both the New and Old Schools. Within the 32-spoked wheel of nadi of the heart center, called the 'array of recall' or 'jewel crown,' arrayed in the four cardinal directions around the knot formed by the juncture of the three nadi, is (the form of) a HUNG surrounded by the four hidden nadi-knots BHRUNG, ANG, VAJRA, and KHAM. In their centers are the eight pure essences of the nadi. The three middle ones are unconditioned (dharmata) nadi and therefore serve as the supports for the unchanging three kayas. In front is the nadi of mirror-like wisdom, which serves as the support for the other four wisdoms. To the right is the nadi of qualities which therefore serves as the support for manifestation of pure realms, celestial palaces and so forth. To the left are the three nadi for the three ordinary
poisons, which support the manifestations of all samsaric deluded thinking, karma and disturbing emotions.

In particular, within the nadi of dharmata is yellow light that serves as the support upon which the all-ground consciousness dwells. This light is formed out of the pure essence of flesh. Similarly, within the nadi of wisdom the blue light that is the pure essence of breath forms the support for the ‘mind consciousness.’ Within the nadi of qualities, the red light that is the pure essence of blood forms the support for the ‘defiled mind consciousness.’ Within the ordinary nadi, the dark red light that is the pure essence of heat forms the support upon which dwells the consciousnesses of the five senses.

Furthermore, within the middle nadi are the syllables SU and TRI, formed out of the impure part of the nadis. They serve as the seeds and causes for the habitual tendencies of taking rebirth as a demigod and animal, and dwell with that which purifies them, the syllable OM, the essence of Body. Within the front nadi are the two syllables A and NRI, formed out of the impure part of breath. (They manifest as) the seeds for taking rebirth as a god and human, and reside together with that which purifies them, the syllable HUNG, the essence of Mind. Within the nadi to the right are the two syllables PRE and DU, formed out of the impure part of blood. (They abide as) the seeds for taking rebirth as a hungry ghost and hell being, and dwell within that which purifies them, the syllable AH, the essence of Speech.

The thought forms of the disturbing emotions such as the five poisons and avarice arising from these causes, and the seeds of the impure six classes of beings in the form of syllables are the basis for purification as well as the objects to be purified. All the wisdom manifestations of Body, Speech and Mind, such as the deities to be visualized, the mantras to be recited, the samadhis to be trained in and so forth, arise from the three essence syllables of the Body, Speech and Mind of the victorious ones, and are the means that purify. When the body, speech and mind are purified and perfected as the capacities of the three vajras, the fruition is the realization of the three kayas of the victorious ones. This is exactly what is taught to be the crucial point.

In particular, in the center of all these channels, formed from the pure essence of the central channel, is the nadi known as the ‘knot-free nadi’ or the ‘kati crystal tube,’ also called the ‘rabbit-eye king of
nadis' or bhasantu. It is subtle and flexible, clear and bright, like a thread of white silk, and the shape of its end is like an open bell. In ordinary people it faces downward and is closed. In experienced and realized people, great beings and bodhisattvas, it is slightly opened and faces forward. For those who have arrived at perfect accomplishment or buddhahood it is fully opened and faces upward. By the power of this, such beings are said to have fully expanded the wisdom of knowledge and compassion.

Within this supreme nadi the essence of wakefulness abiding as the ground is present as the indestructible bindu in the form of the syllable HUNG. It is the size of a mustard seed, with a color like stainless crystal or mercury, and is surrounded by the sphere of the light of the five pure essences. It embodies the dharmakaya of awareness wisdom, the original natural state, the ultimate truth, the great unity of cognizance and emptiness.

Some people denounce this, saying, "The eternalistic non-Buddhists claim that the substance of mind abides in the center of the heart as an egg-like sphere that is solid and indestructible and has a size that corresponds to the individual person. This is the same as this sphere comprised of the five pure essences." But actually, since the essence is fully endowed with the five wisdoms and manifests while being devoid of self-nature, there is no basis for comparison between the two. About this the Glorious Tantra of Everlasting Union says:

The lotus flower in the middle of the heart
Has eight petals and a center.
The nadi that lies at its midpoint
Has a form like the flame of a butter lamp,
A shape like the flower of the plantain tree,
And its opening hangs facing downward.

In its center abides the daka,
The size of a mustard grain.
This indestructible seed of HUNG,
Permanently present like fallen snow
Is known as the bhasantu
That gladdens the heart of all living creatures.
The Secret Tantra of the Blazing Sun Expanse of Luminosity says:

The all-illuminating kati crystal tube,
The body of great wakefulness abiding as the ground,
Is manifest from within the lotus blossom,
And dawns as the space of the perfect mandala.

The Tantra of the Flawless Essence continues:

On the dhuti, growing forth from the body's life-pillar,
Are the five wheels, like umbrella spokes of hollow copper tubes.
The nadi that is their pure essence
Is the ultimate central channel of dharmata.

All other nadis branch out
From this great nonarising pathway,
Like the spreading foliage of the great wishfulfilling tree.
Since its core is connected to the heart center,
The 'heart' is the support for consciousness and the life-force.

The pure essence of flesh is the central channel.
The pure essence of heat is the 'short A flame.'
The pure essence of bindu is the HANG of great bliss.
The pure essence of breath is the prana of life.
The pure essence of mind is the all-ground.

Within this enclosure of the five pure essences
Dwells the ultimate deity, essential wakefulness,
The primordial forefather of the awakened state.

The same text continues:

The king of nadis in the center of the heart
Is the one called 'rabbit eye.'
Like the bell-shaped flower it closes and opens.
In sentient beings it faces downward,
Obscuring perception with delusion.
Through the qualities of meditation it opens facing ahead,
And the dualistic experience of samsara and nirvana
dawns as illusion.
In the buddhas it faces upward,
With the fully manifested light of wakefulness.

Thus it has been taught in great detail, not only the system of the
Old School, but also in many of the tantras of the New Schools. The
above-mentioned *Tantra of Union* continues:

The beauty of this nadi
Is renowned as free from dust.
Pure, like the light of a crystal,
Bodhichitta is luminous wakefulness.
This substance of the five wisdoms
Is the thickness of a mustard seed.

The *Five Stages* also states:

Wisdom will definitely dawn
In the person who meditates upon
This single unchanging sphere
That forever abides within the heart.

The *Two Segments* furthermore mentions:

The great wisdom dwells within the body.

Moreover, Saraha said:

Although the learned ones can expound the shastras,
They do not realize that the great wisdom is present in the
body.

This is also explained in numerous scriptures, commentaries, and
instructions composed by the siddhas. In short, this sphere, comprised
of the five pure essences in the heart, is the crucial support for
ultimate bodhichitta (the awakened state of mind). Due to the interre-

tionship between body, mind, nadi and pranas, all methods and
key points for meditating on luminosity depend upon the heart
center. This is also the vital reason why all the deity practices of the
development stage without exception must take as support the seed syllable in the heart center, and why the threefold sattvas, the revolving of the mantra garland, and all the visualizations of emanating and reabsorbing spring from the heart center.

At the time of death, due to the fact of the prana-mind converging with the bindus in the heart center, the luminosity abiding as the ground appears. This is true even for the tiniest insect, and is the reason why people possessing the power of practice are liberated in the first bardo. Furthermore, all the qualities of the prana-mind entering the central channel manifest as the virtues of applying this key point.

According to the Nyingma system's instructions on the practice cycles of the Great Perfection, there are six lamps: the chitta flesh lamp, the white and smooth nadi lamp, the far-reaching water lamp, the lamp of pure space, the empty bindu lamp, and the lamp of self-existing knowledge. In addition there are the lamps of the innate ground, of the bardo state, and of the final fruition; thus there are nine altogether. These lamps are nothing other than the crucial point taught in this chapter.

As indicated in the opening chapter of the tantras, the mandala of the victorious ones is spontaneously present within the practitioner's body. This means that the five buddha families and the other 42 peaceful deities within the indestructible sphere comprised of the five pure essences in the heart center, as well as the manifestation of their radiance, the 58 wrathful deities within the bone mansion of the brain, are all present in essence as dharmakaya, in nature as colored light, and in form as spheres of pure essences. During the bardo of dharmata, this is experienced as filling the entire universe of one's individual perception. When you embrace the deities with the key points of the oral instructions at this time, you are liberated. When you fail to recognize that they are your personal perception and mistake them as something other, you feel terror and fright and are unable to attain liberation. The way this takes place is taught in great detail in countless numbers of pointing-out instructions (for the bardo states).

Unfortunately, many people of other Dharma traditions regard the Nyingma teachings in general and the Great Perfection in particu-
lar as being a non-Buddhist system and reject these teachings, not even including them within the sections of the Buddhadharma.

Most of the people who profess to be Nyingmapas fool themselves with rituals of protection and exorcism, annihilation and suppression of obstacles, as well as with the rituals of 'safeguard-ransom,' thread-crosses, and astrology. They use the petty gain of food and wealth from these rituals to feed their wives and children. Spending their lives in this way, they obviously don't practice the profound teachings of the Great Perfection: even their volumes of scriptures are abandoned as nests for insects. Seeing this, I cannot help but feel deeply saddened.

Disregarding the Nyingma scriptures, if people like yourself whose eyes of wisdom are wide open would just look within the boundless ocean of collected writings of the great siddha Karma Pakshi, this type of view and meditation practice will be evident. Moreover, the meaning of the entire Heart Essence of the Great Perfection can be explained from within the profound teachings of Karma Nyingtig that was written down when the omniscient (Karmapa) Rangjung Dorje had a vision of Vimalamitra. This was mentioned as an additional note.

In the context of explaining that the heart center is the support for and dwelling place of the mind, ordinary people also regard the heart as the most vital part of the body. Moreover, a scripture on medicine mentions:

The channel that clarifies the faculty of thinking
Resides in the heart and is surrounded by 500 minor channels.

Since the support for the powers of life-span, vitality, and life-force abides in the heart center, it is also said that practitioners of deliverance\textsuperscript{43} take the heart center as their focus.

Furthermore, since this is consistent with the meaning of the lower sections of Secret Mantra, as mentioned in the Abhisambodhi of Vairochana and elsewhere, you find in many empowerment rituals this visualization: "Within the heart center, imagine upon the disc of the full moon that is the essence of relative bodhichitta the five-pronged white vajra that is the essence of ultimate bodhichitta." Such
statements seem to symbolize the indestructible sphere in the heart center.

Again, the systems of Chakrasamvara, Hevajra, and Guhyasamaja, as well as the Kalachakra, teach that when you have perfected the practice of Secret Mantra, you attain enlightenment as a sambhogakaya within the true Akanishtha of individual perception. The Great Perfection system mentions how the mandala of sambhogakaya resides in the heart center, as well as how the bardo of dharmata manifests and how to attain liberation. None of these teachings differ in terms of the realization of the true meaning.

Moreover, by the power of the identical basis of the outer, inner, and other, the place in which the thousand buddhas of the Good Aeon in this Saha world awaken to true and complete enlightenment is exclusively the Vajra Seat (Bodhgaya), the heart of the Jambu Continent. This is said to prove the identical basis for outer and inner interrelationship.
HAVING REPLIED TO MOST OF YOUR QUESTIONS and hinted at others, I shall now address the topic of the main part of Mahamudra training. You mentioned that during the meditation state the attention remains wherever you direct your gaze, such as into the sky or towards the ground. Although individual colors are cognized, there seems to be no fixation on them.

In response to this, it is generally taught that the sevenfold posture of Vairochana, the eye gazes and so forth are very important techniques for a beginner to train in a meditation state which he or she has not yet grown accustomed to. In particular, when cultivating stillness using a support such as a stick, pebble or the like, you should one-pointedly focus the eyes and the mind. At the same time, the particular object on which you focus is perceived yet not fixated upon. However, there are two different possibilities for this.

A state of vacant indifference in which the object is visible but the details of perception are indistinct is not to be identified as meditation, but is called blank-mindedness. Meditation should be an uncorrupted and wide-awake knowing of the natural face of your mind essence. At the same time, the entire appearance of the object is flawlessly cognized and all the input of the six senses are registered.
exactly as they are, as vividly and distinctly as mercury spilt out on the ground.

Consequently, if you are untainted by clinging and fixation, there is no need to reject or block out the perceived object. This is because sense perception is the natural radiance of the coemergent mind essence. As Tilopa said:

You are not fettered by perceiving, but by clinging;
So cut your clinging, Naropa!

Marpa also said:

In general, perceptions, no matter how they appear,
Are deluded perception when you do not realize them;
Clinging to outer objects will tie you down.
But for those who realize, perceptions appear as a magical illusion
And perceived objects arise as helpers to your mind.
In the ultimate sense, they have never appeared
But are utterly pure as the nonarising dharmakaya.

It is indeed as he said. Furthermore, in the context of shamatha practice, as I mentioned above, the method of gazing and so forth are key points of utmost importance. The Great Perfection teachings therefore also mention many types of gazes, such as the peaceful gaze of a shravaka to quiet the disquiet mind, the bodhisattva gaze to steady the stillness, and the wrathful gaze to liberate the steadiness.

When practicing the main part of Mahamudra meditation in which shamatha and vipashyana are indivisible, it is essential not to depend upon the deliberate effort of gazes and so forth. Lord Kdragpa said:

I, a yogi of Mahamudra,
Have no posture, gaze, or fixed attention.
I simply practice in whatever thought arises.
As he said, you must mingle every moment of walking, sitting, eating and lying down with meditation. It is therefore not necessary to always keep a posture or gaze.
You also mentioned that there is stillness one moment and thought occurrence the next. As I already stated, the traditional instructions generally teach that at first one trains in different methods of establishing stillness of mind. Unless you succeed in letting the waves of thought subside in themselves, you will not recognize naked self-existing wakefulness. Therefore, a higher, middling or lesser degree of stillness must arise in your being. This creates the foundation for meditation practice. As the lord (Karmapa) Düsum Khyenpa said:

This unbridled stallion of mind
Galloped formerly on errant paths.
Steer him now onto the correct track!

Just as he said, it is taught that it is difficult to remain steady no matter how much you meditate unless you have achieved some stillness. The great siddha Orgyenpa described this:

Your deluded mind uncontrolled by mindfulness,
Your awareness fluttering about,
Your attention like a feather blown around by the wind,
Will hardly seize the natural steadiness of the innate.
Consequently, you must master the state of stillness. However, to believe that stillness alone is meditation and that thought occurrence and other states are not is the fault of not having recognized the state of vipashyana, and will result in a state termed the 'famine of meditation practice.' So in stillness, practice within that stillness, and when thinking, recognize your natural face within that thinking. Götsangpa said:

Look directly into your mind!
When looking it is not seen, an absence of material substance.
Rest loosely within this absence.
Rest free and easy without fixation.

When a thought begins to occur
Recognize it directly
And then rest loosely within that.
It is naturally liberated without a doubt.

Look directly at outer objects!
They are the magical illusion of your own perception.
Without fixating, rest in whatever appears.
In between, let awareness remain freely.

Your thinking is inconcrete like a moving mist.
Do not fixate, let the thinking move on.
Be free from accepting and rejecting by recognizing your natural face—
That is called 'thought arising as meditation.'

As it is uncertain that the stillness will last for a long time, it is essential to be able to treat both stillness and thought occurrence as meditation practice. As Götsangpa says, when thought occurrences are embraced by mindful awareness they are no other than the meditation practice itself.

Furthermore, you said that thought occurrence followed by stillness is like vanishing mist, and stillness followed by thought occurrence is like the appearance of a new cloud.
My response is this: this same mind sometimes appears to be still and sometimes appears as thought occurrence, rather than there being two minds. This being so, there is no thinker during stillness and no abider in stillness during thought occurrence. In actuality, everything, stillness or thinking, no matter how it appears or is experienced, is an expression of the same mind — a magical display that appears while having no existence. A doha declares:45

This same mind is the seed of everything
From it both existence and nirvana appear.

In his Aspiration of Mahamudra, the lord (Karmapa) Rangjung Dorje says:

Perceiving is mind, being empty is also mind.
Realizing is mind, being mistaken is also mind.
Having arisen is mind, having ceased is also mind.
May we cut through all our doubts concerning mind.

Yang Gonpa said:

Your mind moving as a thought is the door to the natural state.
Recognizing your natural face is the key point of practice.

Similarly, it is taught that we should simply recognize with self-cognizant mindfulness without falling prey to the fixation of ordinary deluded thinking, and should not make the slightest attempt to accept stillness as good or reject thought occurrence as bad. Just as Barawa said:

That which is called Mahamudra
Is not some other special thing.
Mahamudra is to sustain your natural face
Within these different present perceptions.
Mahamudra is to maintain the innate state
Within whatever is experienced, free from fixation.

Amazing, this Mahamudra!
Without trying to introduce a remedy,
Maintain openness; and it is so wide!
Without placing **conceptual mind** on guard,
Rest naturally; and it is so relaxed!
Simply allow everything to happen
Without blocking or trying; and it is so free!

Therefore, leave your mind loosely in the stillness when still,
freely in the thought when thinking, and vividly in perception when perceiving. No matter how it is, do not put your mind to work by correcting or projecting. While simply letting it recognize itself, place it in a way that is cognizant, naked, wide awake, free and open. Here, 'to place' doesn't mean that there exists something to place separate from someone who places it. As the Dharma king Songtsen Gampo said:

All your thinking is conceptual mind.
Give up the doings of this mind and rest.
'Rest' is also just a word.
Give up holding on to words and let be.

Since all verbal expressions are surely superficial, you must personally experience the ultimate wakefulness of the natural state. Therefore, it is essential not to cling to the limitations of names and words.
YOU INQUIRED ABOUT HOW GOOD OR BAD sense impressions are perceived as abruptly as a flash of lightning. My reply is this.

In general, as I have explained above, all sense impressions occurring within awake mindfulness, no matter how they are felt, all turn into meditation training without exception. However, while submerged in the smooth, soft experience of stillness in which natural awareness has not been stripped bare, if a sudden sense impression occurs or you hear a human voice or the barking of a dog, it feels as if you have been awakened from the quiet feeling. If that is the case, you were clinging to a temporary experience rather than training in naked ordinary mind.

The person practicing in that way will meditate comfortably in a remote place free from disturbance, but will lose the meditation as soon as a voice or sound is heard or one of the other six sense impressions occurs. Concerning this, it is taught as you just said. The sign of superficial shamatha is that a disturbing sense impression during stillness is felt like a thunderbolt; the stillness is destroyed by the sense impression. In that case it is necessary to emphasize the practice of vipashyana. This is the reason behind the story of how Lord Phagmo Drubpa helped certain disciples progress by arranging their meditation seats near a slamming door. Similarly, Geshe Chayulwa, when his disciples were sitting in meditation, would clash his cymbals together.
As these examples indicate, it is essential to bring forth the brightness of awareness rather than to simply rest in the experience of inert stillness. It is also essential to be able to take any disturbing sense impression that occurs as meditation training. Therefore, it is taught that at any given time the essential point is the vivid and wide-awake quality of this present naked ordinary mind itself rather than falling prey to a blurry, indistinct experience of stillness. Just as Lorepa said:

You may train for a long time in dull shamatha without clarity
And still not realize your nature.
So actualize the gaze of sharp awareness,
And meditate by repeating short sessions.

Bringing forth the brightness of awareness, you recognize naked mind without straying into the serenity of the stillness experience. That which recognizes in this way is vipashyana (clear seeing), and all the vital points of meditation practice rest upon this vipashyana.

Moreover, during various states such as suffering, strong anger, the other disturbing emotions, or sickness, you should simply take the awareness that notices as the core of your practice. The instruction in equal taste is also no more complex than this.

When in this way your awake mindfulness recognizes your natural face in whatever is experienced, since there is no pursuance of deluded thinking, it is impossible to avoid thoughts turning into dharmakaya or whatever is perceived turning into meditation training. Although there are many types of meditation and post-meditation, they are nothing other than the presence or absence of self-cognizant mindfulness.

The great Kagyü masters hold various opinions about how to define the meditation and post-meditation states. Lord Rangjung and others have divided them into the meditation and post-meditation of experience, the meditation and post-meditation of realization, and so forth. Kyobpa Rinpoche and other masters apparently taught that up to the stage of medium nonmeditation there is a seeming meditation and post-meditation for each respective level, but no real meditation and post-meditation.
Other teaching traditions explain that until reaching the stage of greater simplicity one is to meditate by making separate sessions of meditation and post-meditation. After one has realized simplicity, one transcends into the unity of meditation and post-meditation. All these different ways of teaching are intended to suit the diverse capacities of individual people.

In most of the Mahamudra teachings given by the great master Padmasambhava, he appears to condense the meditation and post-meditation into simply the presence or absence of awake mindfulness. That is because the dividing point between samsara and nirvana cannot be any other than being deluded or not deluded, aware or unaware. He also declared, "There is no meditation or post-meditation superior to refraining from corrupting your naked ordinary mind by correcting or fabricating! Continue as much as you are able by sustaining it without following after delusion! Train as much as you can in mingling that with all the daily activities!" In the Self-liberated Direct Seeing that Points Out the Awareness he said:

This awareness, free from the eight confines of eternalism and nihilism, is called the Middle Way, since it doesn’t fall into any extreme.
It is called awareness, because awake mindfulness is unceasing.
Since its emptiness is endowed with an essence of awareness,
It is also given the name sugata-essence.

If you know this nature, it is the supreme among all knowledge,
Therefore it is called Transcendent Knowledge.
Since it is primordially beyond concepts and free from extremes,
It is given the title Mahamudra.

Due to realizing or not realizing,
It is also known by the name ‘all-ground.’
This cognizant and wide-awake state of mind Remaining unfabricated, ordinary and natural,
Is exactly what is named ordinary mind.

No matter which of the many sweet-sounding names it is given,
It is in fact simply the present wakefulness.
The one who desires something superior to this,
Is searching for the footprints after having found the elephant.
He will not possibly find it even if he scans the billionfold universe;
The awakened state is not found outside the mind.

In the same text Padmasambhava continues:

Samsara and nirvana have no other difference
Than that between the moment of being unaware and aware.
We are deluded by perceiving our mind as something other.
Delusion and nondelusion are in essence the same in being mind.
Since beings do not have two mind-streams,
It is liberated by leaving this mind uncorrected in its natural state.

While knowing that all perception is mind,
Though visual perception takes place, it is unfixated wakefulness.
Since we are not deluded by perception but by fixation,
We are naturally liberated when we understand that fixated thoughts are mind.

Padmasambhava continues:

Everyone who practices in this way is liberated.
They are liberated with no difference as to sharp or dull faculties.
Although a sesame seed or milk is the base of oil and butter,
The oil or butter does not appear before the pressing or churning.

Similarly, although all beings have the essence of buddhahood,
Without practicing, sentient beings do not awaken.
Therefore, grow accustomed to this natural awareness.

As Padmasambhava said, there is no meditation training higher than to take as the core of practice the recognition of the natural face of spontaneous awareness, without falling under the power of deluded distraction.
You mention that it is difficult to meditate without giving rise to the notion of meditation, yet that there is doubt when having the notion of meditation. My reply is this.

In general, the initial notion of wanting to request instructions for guidance in meditation, and the following notion of wanting to practice one-pointedly because the aim will not be accomplished without exerting oneself in the training, and so forth is the diligence of devoted and constant application. Such types of notions are therefore by all means necessary and bring great benefit, as the Sutra of the Arrayed Tree says:

In order to eliminate doubt from your mind
Follow your master’s advice without being lazy.
That is the guard against Mara which vanquishes disturbing emotions.
Through it you dispel flawed beliefs and craving.
Strive thereby to liberate all beings.

Thus, you should never separate from promoting undistracted mindfulness.

During the main part of the meditation training, various thoughts such as the thought of meditating, the hope that meditation will be successful, the fear that it will not, and other such notions, including the notion of trying to achieve bliss, clarity and nonthought — in short, all types of ambition and mental fabrication are nothing other than deviations from the training. You should therefore sustain the nonconceptual innate state of naked naturalness.
If you are unsatisfied with simply recognizing your natural face however the attention dwells or manifests, and if your training is a conceptual attempt to create some type of “excellent” meditation state, you will be bound by the meditation practice or tainted by contamination. About this the matchless Gampopa said:

When the meditator is not bound by his meditation
He will not be bound by anything else.
So cast away the view of intellectual understanding
And destroy meditation experiences from their base.

Lingje Repa also said:

As long as you retain conceptual clinging
You are never free from the river of samsara.
To give up fixating is the key point of liberation.
When free from ambition you accomplish buddhahood.

Tsangpa Gyarey declared:

When training in mental nonfabrication
Do not maintain something by creating it conceptually.
Practice your fixed attention as much as you want;
I, the simple beggar, maintain ordinary mind.

Orgyenpa said:

While thoughts are the display of dharmakaya,
The mere stillness of mind is not dharmakaya.
Let it go freely and then watch the show!
Recognize your natural face; that’s enough!

While the kleshas are the great wisdoms,
They are not abandoned by training in their antidotes.
Look into your natural face and keep training!
Recognize this natural face and they become helpers.

While the six sense impressions are the modes in which your mind appears,
Perceived objects cannot be blocked out.
Make supplications and keep training!
The perceived objects appear as a magical display.

Zhang Rinpoche also said:

If you wish to remain in bliss, clarity and nonthought without clinging,
Do not meditate on a meditation, but cast away the act of meditating.
When free from the ambitious deeds of meditating and not meditating,
This meditation of nonaction is the ultimate meditation.

Barawa declared:

Without letting the mind project or concentrate,
Place it in ordinary naturalness.
Since there is neither the act of placing nor something to be placed,
Recognize the natural face of this placer.

That which recognizes is itself also just a concept,
So be free from fixating on that concept.
To meditate without being free from concept,
Is the great darkness that obscures the state beyond concept.

By training again and again in a meditation free from concept,
There is the danger of conceptlessness turning into a concept.
So without cultivating even a nonconceptual state,
Be free from fabricating concepts.

The same master continued:

Although you may be free from conceptual meditation,
You still need to grow accustomed to the nature of nonmeditation.
So it is essential to keep training
Constantly and at all times,
Without abandoning true undistracted mindfulness.

When distracted you don't realize the natural state.
When meditating you stray into the concept or the particular meditation.
So train yourself in the true path,
The undistracted and unmeditated continuity of freshness.

In this way there are countless profound and extensive counsels given by all the masters of the Practice Lineage. The core of these key points is included within simply sustaining, with self-cognizant mindfulness, the very way your mind is, no matter how it may appear. Stated in brief, always devotedly supplicate the authentic master, having positively decided that he is the dharmakaya buddha.

Since all the sentient beings of the three realms, without exception, are your own parents, make pure aspirations of immense reach with love, compassion and bodhichitta.

No matter what spiritual practice you do, do it for the welfare of all beings as infinite in number as the sky is vast, and never create even an atom of the darkness of selfishness.

No matter what you may undergo in terms of sickness, mishap, enmity, demonic attacks, and misery, including death, do not place your trust in anything other than your master and the Three Jewels. Always generate the confidence of having resolved that whatever is experienced is your own mind, that your mind is dharmakaya, and that dharmakaya transcends the realm of conceptuality.

Curtail your many plans, because in this life that lasts no longer than a dream, there is no time for pointless schemes and preparations.

As long as your ego-clinging has not been brought to an end, the black and white manifestations of cause and effect are unfailing, so exert yourself in correctly adopting what is virtuous and avoiding what is evil.

Although you may have realized the unconditioned nature, do not belittle conditioned virtuous deeds, but put your strongest possible effort into gathering (the accumulations) and purifying (the obscurations).
Cast away the inner fault of ego-clinging that expects experience and realization, signs of accomplishment and the ability to benefit others to manifest, while leaving no time for practice. Instead, until you attain enlightenment, endeavor in never separating your mind and dharmakaya.

These days exceedingly many people become exhilarated and filled with conceit when, based on a small degree of practice, they have signs or superknowledges, miraculous abilities or visions, power of speech or benevolent influence over others, disciples, fame, followers and so forth. Through this they bring disaster upon themselves and other people, both in this life and the following ones. There exists no more severe way of mistaking obstacles for accomplishment, yet few people recognize this.

The most eminent signs of accomplishment are devotion to the master, pure perception of Dharma brothers and sisters, compassion for sentient beings, conscientiousness in regard to cause and effect, disenchantment with samsara, detachment from material things, a peaceful and gentle personality, and one-pointed focus on practice. When all these grow and increase more and more in one’s being, this alone will suffice as signs of accomplishment. It seems in this dark age that the Dharma lineage masters and ordinary practitioners should be competing and struggling for excellence, yet in their deeds they only compete in being in conflict with the Dharma. This makes true Gyalwa Yang Gönpa’s saying: “Neighing like costly horses when speaking of the Dharma, but barking like cheap dogs when applying it in practice.”

Gyalsey Togmey moreover said:

Although I have no assurance that I shall not die today,
I stubbornly make preparations to stay forever
At the moment of death I shall surely be beating my chest
in despair!

He continued:

Although I cannot bear even the tiniest present suffering,
I seem to be brave enough to discount cause and effect.
I shall surely be plunged into the dreadful abyss of the
lower realms!
He also said:

Having pledged myself to train in the four points of spiritual practice,\(^{47}\)
I have the arrogance to desire prestige and power
I shall surely not be able to keep my promise!

He continued:

When my belly is full and the sun is warm, I wear the facade of a practitioner,
But faced with misfortune and suffering I am just an ordinary person
My mind is surely not mingled with the Dharma!

It is definitely as he thus taught. That is why the illustrious Tsuglag Trengwa said:

Don't judge between the Dharma lineages of yourself and others.
If you act in a non-dharmic way you will always wreak disaster.
If you find these faults in yourself, try hard to discard them!

Mahamudra, the Great Perfection and the Middle Way,
Pacifying and Cutting,
Six Unions, Five Stages and Six Doctrines,
Mingling and Transference, the Path and Result, and so forth
Although there are many such different categories,
They are only different approaches, different doors.
As soon as you realize the meaning of each,
They are all indivisible and equal.

Just as he said, there are no teachings that are ineffectual or shallow; it is because the individual person is inadequate that his being fails to be ripened and liberated. Consequently, please exert yourself in being able to mingle the teachings with your own mind,
no matter what Dharma system you follow. This is my sincere prayer to all people of future generations.
Epilogue

Replies to your questions are included within these rough summaries. The finer points that I did not address will be covered in general when you read the commentaries of former masters, in particular in the Mahamudra teachings written by the ninth Karmapa. Furthermore, details on the gradual stages of the four yogas, the way in which the paths and bhumis are traversed, and methods for clearing the hindrances of deviations and the ways of going astray are found in the collected writings of all the precious Kagyu masters. As I have also described my humble understanding of these points in other writings, I didn't cover them here as it would take too many words. In any case, the essential meaning is this: Do not maintain separate notions of meditation and the mind that meditates; rather, maintain the indivisible exhaustion of concepts and phenomena. Please understand that there is no need to hope for or aspire to the various stages of experiences, paths and bhumis.

Ema!
The victorious ones, their sons and emanations, without exception,
Have never had any activity other than guiding beings.
Therefore they teach countless doors to the Dharma
Corresponding to people's individual destinies.

Although the single voice that is the inexpressible supreme seed of all expression
Has 84,000 aspects in accordance with people's different destinies,
These are one as the ultimate essence of absolute truth.
This oneness is the enlightened essence of the sugatas, Primordially present as the nature of sentient beings. Obscured by ignorance, like a treasure in a pauper's house, Sentient beings forever suffer in the illusory prison of deluded thinking, Like seeing a mottled rope as a snake or a conch as being yellow. 50

These bewildered sentient beings on errant paths, Tormented by hundreds of different sufferings, are saved from their misery, By the vajra holder, the guide to liberation.

The essential extract of the ocean of his teachings, The swift path that gives happiness to worthy ones in a single lifetime, Simultaneously completes the 84,000 sections of the Dharma Within the most profound aspects of ripening and liberation.

If you do not realize the essential meaning, You may unfold the vast foliage of expressed words, But not attain the fruits of unexcelled enlightenment; So pay heed to this fact, Mipham Gönpo.

Although the white brilliance of your former training Leaves no room for even an atom of doubt or competitiveness, You spread this light of questioning as a statement of a noble being, In order that the lotuses of worthy ones seeking liberation may fully blossom.

In order to give dharmic answers to dharmic questions One must have attained the four types of right discrimination. 51
As I do not possess the wealth of the threefold knowledge
These frivolous answers will seem ridiculous to learned people.

I have not undergone the training of studies,
But have aspired single-mindedly towards the definitive meaning.
Yet, I am totally obscured by the beginningless darkness of evil tendencies
And am covered by the veils of black and white distractions.

At the age of eight I embarked upon this path of the true secrets,
And have been nurtured by the compassion of many qualified masters.
Still, the web of day and night has not been cut,52
And now I am nothing but an old man.

I am not able to perform mundane tasks,
Neither wanting to nor doing so.
Although I have remained in seclusion for twenty-seven years,
I have not attained the yogas and am still an ordinary person.

Therefore I have no basis to express correctly the secret key points of instruction
And even if I did, they would hardly be meaningful.
However, as I am unable to turn my back on your request, May there be no fault in writing down these silly words.

When seeing the people of the dark age practicing pervertedly
The ripening and liberating aspects of Secret Mantra, the summit of the vehicles,
May these honest words I couldn’t withhold, like the bawling of an ox,
Not bring pain to the people’s ears.
May my words turn into a diamond that crushes the wheels
Of the endless machinery of karma and kleshas, cause and effect,
For all my old mothers, reaching to the limits of infinite space,
And cause them to journey to the continent of supreme liberation.

May all beings without exception quickly attain
The great indestructible wisdom of the indivisible four kayas,
May the perilous ocean of existence be overturned from its depths,
And may the goodness of realizing the original wakefulness be present!

This way of expressing the profound key points of the swift path was inspired by the power of the command of the great guide Karma Mipham Gönpo. I, Natsok Rangdröl, also known as Karma Rigdzin Namgyal, an old man who practices the discipline of renunciation as mere wishful thinking, wrote this down during the breaks between my spiritual practice under the waxing moon of the Ninth Month of Sixfold Ripening (Mindrug) of the All-Inclusive (Kunden) Year of the Male Iron Mouse (1660 A.D.). May the virtue of this be a cause for all beings to turn away from the path of chasing deluded sophistries, and instead enter and perfect the excellent and sublime path of ripening and liberation of the supreme vehicle. Mangalam. May it be virtuous.

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Victorious ones of the three times, with your sons and disciples, Divinities of the Three Roots, hosts of accomplished knowledge holders, Ocean of Dharma protectors, guardians of what is virtuous, Grant your blessings that this pure aspiration may be fulfilled.

The single cause of the benefit and welfare of countless beings, The basis from which all qualities of virtuous goodness originate, Is the flawless, precious teaching of the Victorious One. May it spread and flourish throughout all times and directions.

May the Buddha's teachings spread completely In accordance with all possible inclinations of sentient beings. May they enjoy the profound and extensive teachings Exactly befitting their individual intelligence and inclinations.

May the ultimate vehicle, the true and unexcelled meaning, May the highest view, the wondrous Great Perfection, May the essence of the teachings, the vajra vehicle of luminosity, Spread and flourish and remain forever.

May the ones who uphold the treasury of the qualities of the pure three trainings, The doctrine holders and masters, fill all lands. May a hundred thousand suns and moons of learning, reflection and meditation rise To let the light of the teachings illuminate all directions.
Sights and sounds are deity and mantra, and the world with its beings is the realm of the victorious ones.
All this is of one taste within the sphere of awareness,
The expanse of the mind of Samantabhadra, indivisible emptiness and cognizance.
May all beings quickly be liberated in this primordially pure space.

By the power of the wondrous blessings of the truth of the Triple Gem,
And the truth of my own pure and noble intentions,
May all these aspirations be fulfilled without obstruction,
Manifesting the auspicious circumstances for the Buddha’s teachings to remain!

This aspiration was taken from a collection of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl’s poetry.
Aryadeva ('phags pa'i lha). One of the important Buddhist philosophers of India and a disciple of Nagarjuna whose writings he explained extensively.

Barawa (chos rje 'ba' ra ba rgyal mtshan bzang po) (1310-1391). Disciple of Zurphugpa, Shuksebpa and Kodragpa Sönam Gyaltse.

Bodongpa (bo dong pa). Recognized as a separate school after the great pandita Chokley Namgyal (1375-1451) who authored one hundred volumes and is known as the most prolific writer in Tibetan history.

Butön (bu ston) (1290-1364). Fourteenth century Tibetan scholar and historian; early compiler of the Kangyur, the Buddhist Canon.

Charya (spyod pa). The second of the four sections of tantras according to the Sárma schools.

Dhuti (Skt.). The central channel.

Dignaga (Skt., phyogs glang). Fifth century author of Abhidharma Kosha. Disciple of Vasubandhu, famed for his contributions to pra­rama, logic and epistemology. Counted among the Six Ornaments which Beautify Jambudvipa, he is the holder of the transmission of valid cognition, which brings an end to confusion about meaning.

Düpa (dus pa'i mdo). The main scripture of Anu Yoga. Consists of 75 chapters and is also known as Do Gongpa Düpa (mdo dgongs pa 'dus pa) or Kündü Rigpve Do (kun 'dus rig pa'i mdo).

Entrustments (bka' gtd). Short empowerment ritual, usually for receiving the blessings of the body, speech and mind of the deity.

Ewam (Skt.) These two syllables represent the union of emptiness and compassion, emptiness and bliss, or means and knowledge.

Five kinds of wrong livelihood (log 'tsho lnga). Hypocrisy, flattery, soliciting, expropriating, and calculated generosity.
Five Stages (rim inga). The system of practical application of the Father Tantras especially taught by Nagarjuna and his two spiritual sons, Aryadeva and Chandrakirti. They consist of the three solitudes of body, speech and mind; illusory body, and unity.

Four types of right discrimination (so so yang dag rig pa bzhi). The right discrimination of definitive words, meaning, phenomena, and courageous eloquence.

Ganachakra, feast offering (tshogs kyi 'khor lo). A feast assembly performed by Vajrayana practitioners to accumulate merit and purify the sacred commitments (samayas).

Garwang Chökyi Drakpa (gar dbangchos kyi grags pa). Probably identical with Chen-ngawa Chökyi Trakpa (spyan snga chos kyi grags pa), the fourth Shamarp Rinpoche (1453-1524), a disciple of the Seventh Karmapa, Chödrak Gyamts.

Geshe (dge bshes). 1) A spiritual teacher according to the Mahayana teachings. 2) A learned teacher according to the Kadam and Gelug traditions.

Geshe Cha-yulwa (dge bshes bya yul ba). (1075-1138). Also known as Shönnu Ö (gzhon nu 'od), this early master in the Kadam lineage was one of the teachers of Gampopa, the great Kagyü master.

Guru Chöwang (gu ru chos dbang). One of the Five Terton Kings. (1212-1270). For details, see the H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche's The Nyingma School, Wisdom Publications.

Gyalwa Gotsangpa (rgyal ba rgod tshang pa). (1189-1258). Literally, 'Vulture Nest Dweller.' A great master in the early Drukpa Kagyü lineage; also known as Gönpo Dorje (mgon po rdo rje). A rebirth of Jetsun Milarepa. Among his many disciples were Orgyenpa and Gyalwa Yang Gönpa.


Jonangpa (jo nang). The lineage of masters of the Shentong School who were known by their monastery at Jomo Nang. They include Yumo Mikyö Dorje, the founder of the school, Tukje Tsöndrü, Dölpowa Sherab Gyaltse and Taranatha.
Karma Mipham Gönpo (karma mi pham mgon po). See Mipham Gönpo.

Khyungpo Naljor (khyung po rnal 'byor). (1002-1064). A Tibetan master who brought teachings back from India that were later known as the Shangpa Kagyu. Disciple of the female siddha Niguma.

King Lhasey (rgyal po lha sras) (9th Century). The second son of King Trisong Detsen.

Klesha (Skt., nyan mong). Disturbing emotions that agitate one’s mind and obscure the buddha nature.

Kodragpa (ko brag pa) (1181-1261). Also known as Sönam Gyaltsen, founder of the Kodrag Monastery in the Upper Nyang area of the Tsang province in Central Tibet. He was a great nonsectarian master and is counted among the teachers of Yang Gonpa.


Lingje Repa (gling rje ras pa). (1128-1188). A great master in the early lineage of the Drukpa Kagyu School; also known as Lingchen Repa Pema Dorje (gling chen ras pa pad ma rdo rje). He was a disciple of Phagmo Drupa and the teacher of Tsangpa Gyare.

Lorepa (lo re pa). (1187-1250). A great master of the Drukpa Kagyu school. He is also known as Wangchuk Tsöndrü (dbang phyug brtson 'grus).

Lower sections of Secret Mantra. The Three Outer Tantras: Kriya, Charya/Upa, and Yoga Tantra.

Mending-purification (gso sbyong). A ritual for mending vows and purifying breaches.

Mipham Gönpo (mi pham mgon po). Identical to Bomting Chöje Miphampa, the incarnate lama who requested the teachings presented in this book. A great master of the Drukpa Kagyu lineage.

Nyangben Tingdzin Zangpo (nyang dben ting 'dzin bzang po). A close disciple of Vimalamitra and Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava).

Varahi who transmitted to him the Urgyen Nyendrub. Teacher of Gyalwa Yang Gönpa as well as the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje. Pal Kachöpa (dpal mkha’ spyod pa). Probably identical with Kachö Wangpo, the second Shamar Rinpoche (1350-1405).

Practice Lineage (sgrub brgyud). The lineage of teachings and masters where emphasis is placed on one’s personal experience of the teachings as opposed to the scholastic lineage of expounding the scriptures (bshad brgyud). This phrase also refers to the Eight Great Chariots of the Practice Lineage (sgrub brgyud shing rta brgyad), the eight schools of Buddhism that flourished in Tibet: Nyingma, Kadam, Marpa Kagyü, Shangpa Kagyü, Sakya, Jordruk, Nyendrub, Shije and Chö. Today only the first five survive as independent lineages.

Safeguard-ransoms. A ceremony in which evil spirits are given an effigy of the afflicted person.

Saha world (mi mjen kyi 'jig rten gyi kham). The name of our present world system. Saha means ‘enduring’ because the sentient beings here endure unbearable suffering. Saha can also mean ‘undivided’ because the karmas and kleshas, causes and effects, are not separately divided or differentiated.

Sautrantika (mdo sde pa). A hinayana school of philosophy and the second of the four major Buddhist Schools known for its reliance on the suttas rather than Abhidharma.

Sevenfold posture of Vairochana (rnam snang chos bdun). This position is described as the legs in full lotus, the spine straight, the shoulders broadened, the neck slightly bent, the hands in the gesture of equanimity, the tip of tongue touching the palate, and the gaze placed in the direction of the nose.

Six Unions (sbyor drug). One of the Eight Great Chariots of the Practice Lineage embodying the pith instruction for the practice of Kalachakra.

Superknowledges (mngon shes). Divine sight, divine hearing, recollection of former lives, cognition of the minds of others, capacity for performing miracles, and, in the case of accomplished practitioners, the ‘cognition of the exhaustion of defilements.’

Thread-crosses (mdos). A tantric ritual involving structures of sticks with colored yarn used to appease mundane spirits.
Tsangpa Gyarey (gtsang pa rgya ras) (1161-1211). Early master in the Drukpa Kagyü lineage, also known as Yeshe Dorje (ye shes rdo rje). Chief disciple of Lingje Šepa and founder of Druk Gönpa after which Drukpa Kagyü got its name. It was during his time that a saying appeared, "Half the people are Drukpas, half the Drukpas are mendicant beggars, and half the mendicants are siddhas."

Tsuglag Trengwa (gtsug la 'phreng ba) (1504-1566). The Second Pawo Rinpoche. Disciple of the Mikyo Dorje, the eighth Karmapa, known for his writings on astrology and religious history.

Twelve sections of Sutra. These are also known as the twelve aspects of excellent speech (gsung rab yan lag bcu gnyis) and are the twelve main divisions of the Buddhist Canon: General Discourses (mdo sde); Proclamations in Song (dbyangs su bsnyad pa); Prophecies (lung du bstan pa); Poetic Pronouncements (tshigs su bcad pa); Special Aphorisms (mched du brjod pa); Declarations (gleng gzhi); Narratives (rtogs pa brjod pa); Parables (de lta bu byung ba); Succession of Former Lives (skyes pa ’i rabs); Extensive Sayings (shin tu rgyas pa ’i sde); Marvels (rmad du byung ba); Established Doctrines (gtan la dbab pa).

Two Segments (brtag gnyis). The condensed version of the Hevajra Tantra.

Vaibhashika (bye brag smra ba). One of the two main Hinayana schools of philosophy. It is based on the Abhidharma teachings compiled in the Mahavidhasa, the treatise known as the Great Treasury of Detailed Exposition (bye brag bshad mdzod chen mo).

Vimalamitra (dri med bshes gnyen). A Great Perfection master who was invited to Tibet by King Trisong Deutsen. One of the three main forefathers of the Great Perfection teachings, especially Nyingtig, in Tibet.

Virupa (Skt.) Indian Siddha; founder of the lineage brought to Tibet by Drogmi Lotsawa (’brog mi lo tsa ba) in the eleventh century, now renowned as the Sakya (sa skya) School. He is also counted among the teachers of Atisha and Dombi Heruka.

Yamantaka (Skt.). Tantric deity; the heruka of the vajra family and wrathful form of Manjushri.

Yang Gönpa. See Gyalwa Yang Gönpa.

Zhang Rinpoche (zhang rin po che). See Zhang Tshalpa.
Zhang Tshalpa (zhang tshal pa) (1123-1193). Also known as Tsöndrü Drakpa (brtson ’grus grags pa), he was a disciple of Đakpo Gomtsül and founder of the Tsalpa branch of the Kagyü School.
1. The wheel of great bliss is the center at the crown of the head.
2. To reiterate, these seven empowerments are for the vase and crown, tiara-streamer, vajra and bell, yogic discipline, name, and the permission-blessing.
4. The term 'upwardly embodies' means that the intent and meaning of the vehicle below is essentially contained in the one above.
5. The teaching cycle of Lama Gongpa Düpa, the Embodiment of the Guru's Realization, was revealed by Sangye Lingpa (1340-1396) and is still renowned as Lama Gongdü (bla ma dgongs 'dus) in 18 volumes of approximately 700 pages each.
6. The nine vehicles (theg pa dgu): Shravaka, Pratyekabuddha, Bodhisattva, Kriya, Upa, Yoga, Maha, Anu, and Ati.
7. Ubhaya, meaning both, combines the conduct of Kriya with the view of Yoga Tantra. The vehicle is otherwise called Upa or Charya.
8. This refers to the initiation into the mandalas of the nine gradual vehicles according to the system of Anu Yoga.
9. A fully enlightened buddha teaches beings in accordance with their individual capabilities and inclinations. Each of these levels of vehicles are, nevertheless, ways to full awakening through the ultimate vehicle. In the tradition of Düpadö, the disciple is initiated into nine mandalas representing the nine gradual vehicles.
10. The Three Yogas refer to Maha, Anu and Ati.
11. The terms precepts, trainings and samayas refer to the commitments respectively of Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana.
12. The Four Sections of Tantra are Kriya, Charya, Yoga and Anuttara.
13. The Six Syllables obviously are OM MANI PEMA HUNG.
14. Tsele Natsok Rangdröl is speaking about the state of affairs in the 17th century.
15. The progressive and reverse order of dependent origination means that samsara unfolds when ignorance leads to dualistic consciousness and so forth while liberation is attained through contemplation on the twelve links of dependent origination in reverse order.

16. A belief connected to the Chinese-Tibetan astrological cycle of 12 years named after 12 different animals. The reappearance of the animal associated with the year of one’s birth is considered inauspicious: thus, every 12th year is an "obstacle year."

17. When receiving teachings, one should be free from the three defects of the vessel, the six stains, and the five ways of misapprehending. For details see The Introductory Teachings in The Union of Mahamudra and Dzogchen, Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche, Rangjung Yeshe Publications. The three defects are: not paying attention, failing to remember, and listening with a poisoned attitude. The six stains or impurities are: conceit, disinterest, lack of endeavor, distraction, being withdrawn, and weariness. The five ways of misapprehending are: getting the words but not the meaning, getting the meaning but not the words, getting the meaning wrong, getting the order wrong, and misinterpreting the examples.

18. The permission-blessing or entrustment is a very short version of empowerment.

19. The fault lies in giving empowerments recipients cannot honor.

20. The word ‘self-initiation’ in the case of a master is the preparation for empowerment prior to conferring it upon the disciple. In other cases, it means conferring empowerment upon oneself so as to rejuvenate the blessings; this is also called ‘path empowerment.’

21. Probably she poured urine in the skull cup for him to drink.

22. The details of this story are found in Dudjom Rinpoche’s The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism, pgs. 766-8.

23. To take abandonment as path means to emphasize renunciation, contentment, and detachment by reflection on impermanence, the defects of samsaric existence and so forth, so as to abandon the causes for further rebirth in samsara.

24. This refers to public display of secret yogic exercises.

25. The ushnika is the protuberance at the top of the head of a buddha, and requires the most merit to manifest among all the major and minor marks. The special quality of the inner path of Vajrayana is to purify the obscurations and manifest enlightened qualities by perfecting the mandala of the vajra body.

26. The seven aspects of union (kha sbyor yan lag bdun). The seven qualities of a sambhogakaya buddha: complete enjoyment, union, great bliss, absence of a self-nature, presence of compassion, being uninterrupted, and being unceasing.
27. The *udumvara* flower only appears and blossoms when a universal monarch or a buddha is born into the world.

28. *Sindhura* is the crimson powder often seen on the heads of married Indian and Nepalese women.

29. In other words, mere knowledge of rituals does not make one a genuine practitioner of Vajrayana.

30. The 'order of training' refers to the order in which monks are seated in the assembly, according to the number of years since taking ordination.

31. About this, Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche said, "Just like a scoop of water from the ocean is always water, the Buddha's teachings from the level of the shravakas up to the Great Perfection are always true. This truth is always experienced by the individual mind."

32. The phrase 'beyond sorrow' is also a term for nirvana.

33. ‘Conducive to merit or emancipation’ means virtuous deeds, the result of which ensures a rebirth in the higher realms within samsara or, if combined with renunciation and understanding of egolessness, in liberation from all of samsaric existence.

34. The supramundane or supreme shamatha means nondistraction embraced by vipashyana, sometimes called ‘shamatha that delights the tathagatas’ (de bzhin gshegs dgyes zhi gnas), the shamatha state at the first bhumi which is embraced with insight into emptiness. For the key points related to practice, see the author's *Lamp of Mahamudra*, Shambhala Publications.

35. Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche said, "The ensuing state of mind, as opposed to the post-meditation state, means that the arising of thought can be continuously dissolved."

36. This is the title as it occurs in Tibetan: yid bzhin gyi nor bu thar pa rin po che'i rgyan.

37. About the Five teachings of Maitreya, Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche says in his book *Buddha Nature*, "The Ornament of Realization (Abhisamaya Lamkara), clarifies the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. The next three teachings are general works given to clarify all of Buddha Shakyamuni’s teachings. These are called the Ornament of the Sutras (Sutra Lamkara), Discerning the Middle and the Extremes, and Discerning Dharmas and Dharmata. The fifth work taught by Lord Maitreya truly establishes the Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. It is called the Uttara Tantra Shastra."

38. This is the sutra popularly known as the Heart Sutra.

39. The *Profound Inner Topics* written by the third Karmapa, Rangjung Dorje, is the most important book on Vajrayana in the Karma Kagyu tradition.
40. Although the Great Pointing-Out Commentary says that calling this nadi-spoke ‘jewel crown’ is mistaken, and it should be called ‘great jewel,’ the king of tantras (Guhyagarbha) states in harmony with all the tantras of the New and Old Schools: ‘... Of the jewel crown known as ratna mukuta ....’ —Tsele Natsok Rangdröl

41. Such as the Bindu Scripture of Nagpopa. —Tsele Natsok Rangdröl

42. Samayasattva, jnanasattva, and samadhisattva. —Tsele Natsok Rangdröl

For instance, the samayasattva is the deity that appears through visualizing oneself in the form of Buddha Amitabha. The jnanasattva or wisdom being, is the real Buddha Amitabha, invited from the pure buddhafield of Sukhavati to dissolve indivisibly into oneself. The samadhisattva is the tiny form of Buddha Amitabha dwelling in the center of one’s heart during the practice of emanating and absorbing rays of light.

43. Using a wrathful practice such as Vajra Kilaya to “deliver” or purify ignorance.

44. The ‘outer, inner, and other’ are key terms in the Kalachakra system.

45. This seems to be a quote from one of the vajra songs of the great Indian master Saraha.

46. The eight constructs are mental formulations of mind or phenomena having such attributes as arising and ceasing, being singular or multiple, coming and going, and being the same or being different.

47. To not respond angrily when met with anger; to not respond with abuse when abused; to not respond with hitting back when hit; and to not respond with reproach when reproached. —Tsele Natsok Rangdröl

48. The collected works of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl has been published in New Delhi in eight volumes. Among his writings translated into English are Lamp of Mahamudra, Shambhala Publications, and Mirror of Mindfulness and Circle of the Sun, Rangjung Yeshe Publications.

49. The ‘exhaustion of concepts and phenomena’ is a key phrase describing the final state of realization on the path of Dzogchen.

50. A person suffering from a strong attack of jaundice is said to see a white conch as being yellow.

51. The right discrimination of dharmas, the right discrimination of meanings, the right discrimination of definitive words, and the right discrimination of courageous eloquence. —Tsele Natsok Rangdröl

52. In other words, undistracted awareness is still not unceasing throughout day and night.

53. Referring to Buddha Shakyamuni.
Abhisambodhi of Vairochana (*rnam snang mngon byang*).
Aspiration of Mahamudra (*phyag chen smon lam*).
Brilliant Expanse (*klong gsal gyi rgyud*).
Buddha Skull Tantra (*sangs rgyas thod pa'i rgyud*).
Cloud of Jewels Sutra (*dkon mchog sprin gyi mdo, Ratnamegha Sutra*).
Eight Sadhana Teachings of Sugatagarbha (*bde gshegs snying po sgrub pa bka' brgyad*).
Essence Tantra (*snying po'i rgyud*).
Five Stages (*rim lnga*).
Glorious Tantra of Everlasting Union (*dpal kun tu kha sbyor gyi rgyud*).
Heart Essence of the Great Perfection (*rdzogs chen snying tig*).
Heart Mirror (*snying gi me long*).
Heart of Transcendent Knowledge (*snying gi me long*).
Inner Topics (*nang don*).
Jewel Ornament of Liberation (*dvags po thar rgyan*).
Karma Nyingtig (*karma snying thig*).
Lama Gongpa Düpa (*bla ma dgongs pa 'dus pa*).
Magical Display of the Peaceful and Wrathful Ones (*zhi khro sgyu 'phrul*).
Mahamudra of Dispelling the Darkness of Ignorance (*phyag chen ma rig mun sel*).
Mahamudra of Unconfined Vastness (*phyag chen klong yangs mtha' bral*).
Manarasowar Sutra (*ma dros pa'i mdo*).
Oral Advice on Mahamudra (*phyag chen zhal gdam*).
Padma Nyingtig (*padma snying thig*).
Pointing-out Instruction of Mahamudra (*phyag chen ngo sprod*).
Profound Inner Topics (*zab mo nang don*).
Prophecies of the Oral Lineage (*lung bstan bka' ma*).
Ratnakuta Sutra (*mdo dkon mchog brisugs pa*).
Revealing the Hidden Points of Oral Instruction (*zhal gdams gab pa mgon phyungs*).
Sambhuti Tantra (Skt.).
Scripture of the Great Assemblage (*'dus pa mdo*).
Secret Tantra of the Blazing Sun Expanse of Luminosity (*klong gsal 'bar ba nyi ma'i gsang rgyud*).
Secret Treasury of the Dakinis (*mkha' 'gro gsang mdzod*).
Self-liberated Direct Seeing that Points Out the Awareness (*rig pa ngo sprod cer mthong rang grol*).
Sevenfold Pointing-out Instruction (*ngo sprod bdun pa*).
Storehouse Tantra (*bang mdzod kyi rgyud*).
Subsequent Tantra of the Bathing Elephant (*glang po chur 'jug gi rgyud phyi ma*).
Sutra Foretelling Goodness (*bzang po lung bstan pa'i mdo*).
Sutra of Unraveling the Intent (*dgongs pa nges 'grel*).
Sutra of the Arrayed Tree (*sdong po bkod pa'i mdo, Gandhavyuha*).
Sutra of the King of Samadhi (*ting 'dzin rgyal po'i mdo*).
Sutra of the Ten Wheels of Ksitigarbha (*sa'i snying po 'khor lo bcu pa'i mdo*).
Tantra of Immaculate Fruition (*'bras bu dri ma med pa'i rgyud*).
Tantra of Pacifying (*zhi byed kyi rgyud*).
Tantra of the Brilliant Expanse (*klong gsal*).
Tantra of the Flawless Essence (*dri ma med pa snying po'i rgyud*).
Tantra of the Heart of Vajrasattva (*rdo sems snying gi rgyud*).
Tantra of the Immaculate Essence (*dri ma med snying po'i rgyud*).
Tantra of the Mirror of the Heart (*snying gi me long*).
Tantra of Union (*kha sbyor gyi rgyud*).
Tantra that Embodies the Four Rivers of Empowerment (*dbang gi chu bo bzhi 'dus kyi rgyud*).
Teachings of Maitreya (*byams chos*).
Uttara Tantra (*rgyud bla ma*).
Vajra Garland (*rdo rje phreng ba*).
Wisdom Bindu (*ye shes thig le*).
In Buddhism there are no teachings that are ineffectual or shallow; it is because the individual person is inadequate that his being fails to be ripened and liberated. Consequently, please exert yourself in being able to mingle the teachings with your own mind, no matter what Dharma system you follow. This is my sincere prayer to all people of future generations.

TSELE NATSOK RANGDRÖL

The empowerment ritual is sometimes called the indispensable entrance door to Vajrayana Buddhism. It activates our natural right to an enlightened rule over our life and spiritual practice. The clearly, comprehensible Empowerment contains a wealth of instructions on all the key points of Buddhist training, particularly the path of liberation of Mahamudra and Dzogchen.

"People who harbor no ambition to become a great scholar, but who want to focus on truly realizing the ultimate point of Vajrayana should study just a few of the writings of Tsele Natsok Rangdröl. In these, they will find the pith instructions that are the very heart of the Dharma."

Chökyi Nyima Rinpoche

The 17th century master Tsele Natsok Rangdröl is also the author of Mirror of Mindfulness and Lamp of Mahamudra.