

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF  
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VOLUME FIVE

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*Illusion's Game: The Life and Teachings of Naropa*

*The Life of Marpa the Translator (Excerpts)*

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SHAMBHALA • Boston & London • 2004

## HUM

### AN APPROACH TO MANTRA

Homage to the guru, yidams, and dakinis!

When I hear the profound music of HUM  
It inspires the dance of direct vision of insight.  
At the same time my guru presents the weapon  
    which cuts the life of ego,  
Just like the performance of a miracle.  
I pay homage to the Incomparable One!

One must understand the basic usage of mantra in the teachings of Buddha. Whether it is in the form of mantra, dharani, or a single syllable, it is not at all a magical spell used in order to gain psychic powers for selfish purposes, such as accumulation of wealth, power over others, and destruction of enemies. According to the Buddhist tantra, all mantras and other practices, such as visualizations, hatha yoga, or any other yogic practices, must be based on the fundamental teaching of Buddha, which is the understanding of the four marks of existence: impermanence (anitya), suffering (duhkha), void (shunyata), and egolessness (anatman.)

In this connection, it should be pointed out that in contrast to Hindu tantra, Buddhist tantra is based on shunyata and anata. The concept of shunyata is quite easy to relate to the whole content of tantra, as in mahamudra experience, and that of anata is most essential. Some Western scholars mistakenly identify the preparation of mandalas and the countless divinities with the Hindu tradition, as if it were an umbrella under

which all other Indian religions might be found. Although some Vedantic mystics might claim their experiences to be the same as mahamudra, there is an essential difference, for the herukas and all the other divinities in Buddhism are not external. In other words, they are aspects of the awakened state of mind, such as Avalokiteshvara representing the compassionate aspect of buddha nature.

There are various mantras connected with these bodhisattvas and herukas which help to achieve, for example, the essence of compassion, wisdom, or energy. In this essay we are discussing the single syllable HUM. HUM is the sound connected with energy, and is most profound and penetrating. This mantra was used by Guru Padmasambhava in his wrathful aspect in order to subdue the force of the negative environment created by minds poisoned with passion, aggression, and ignorance. HUM is often the ending of certain mantras used to arouse the life energy.

Before chanting the sacred music of HUM, it is necessary to consider the relationship of teacher and pupil. There must be oral transmission. The pupil should not choose a teacher at random, for unless the teacher belongs to a spiritual lineage, he may be able to give a mantra but he will not be able to transmit its power. With a strong karmic bond between teacher and pupil, the pupil should be inspired with an unwavering conviction of trust in the teacher's spiritual quality. Whatever difficulties the pupil might continually have to undergo and whatever sacrifices he might have to make, his devotion must remain constant until he is able to surrender his ego. If he fails to do this, he will not be able to experience the sacred music of HUM, he will not be able to develop understanding of its profound meaning, and he will not be able to develop the transcendental siddhi.

When a beginner chants the sacred music of HUM, he might find some temporary benefits; for example, his mind might become quiet and irritating thoughts might be eased. This is because HUM is composed of HA, ॐ, U, ॐ, and M ॐ. HA expels the impure air from the lungs, U releases the most irritating thoughts through the mouth, and M clears the remaining thoughts through the nose.

As mentioned in yogic texts, prana (breath) is like a horse, the nadis (channels) are like roads, and the mind is the rider. In this way, using prana, tension is released and any psychological disturbance may be relieved, but only as a temporary measure.

For advanced meditators, the syllable HUM is a means of developing the five wisdoms. H ॥ is the mirrorlike wisdom, clear and continuous. A ॐ is the wisdom of equanimity, panoramic awareness. U ॐ is the wisdom of discriminating awareness, awareness of details. M ॐ is all-accomplishing wisdom, effortless accomplishment of all actions. A ॐ is the wisdom of all-encompassing space (dharmadhatu), the ground from which all things originate and to which they return.

The meditator will not find these wisdoms in an external source but, rather like the spark which bursts into flame when fanned by the wind, he discovers them within himself.

HUM is the seed syllable of all herukas in the four orders of tantra (kriya, upa, yoga, and anuttara which includes ati). The herukas originated with the subjugation and transformation of the Rudra of ego. The absence of ego is shunyata. In the vajrayana, shunyata or voidness is expressed in terms of fullness, as in the line of the *Heart Sutra* which says "form is emptiness, and the very emptiness is form." Therefore this form has tremendous energy which is simply what the five wisdoms are.

HUM is referred to in many texts as the sonorous sound of silence. HUM represents that state of meditation when awareness breaks out of the limits of ego. It was by that force of HUM that the fortress of Rudra was reduced to dust. HUM may be regarded as the fearless utterance of a warrior shooting his arrow in the battlefield. HUM is sometimes referred to as the mantra of the Vajrakilaya Mandala of the high tantra school. First, it is the dagger of beyond-thought, which stabs with deadly accuracy into the heart of dualistic thoughts. Second, it is the dagger of luminous transcendental insight, which pierces the heart of confused darkness. Third, it is the dagger of the state of nonmeditation, which pierces the heart of thought-formed meditation, so that the meditator is delivered from subject matter. Fourth, it is the dagger of complete devotion to the all-pervading guru, which stabs to the heart of hopes and fears so that the teacher and pupil become inseparable. These four penetrations of HUM are described in the text of the anuyogatantra.

Guru Padmasambhava said that when you sing the crescendo music of HUM and let go of all thoughts, the ultimate meditation experiences are the echo of this music. Also, HUM is referred to as the concentration of all blessings and energy. Etymologically speaking, the Sanskrit word *HUM* means "gathering together." HUM is not a magic spell to increase the power of ego, but it is concentrated power devoid of ego. HUM

combined with complete devotion is like an arrow piercing the heart—it takes the form of the memory of the guru. Also the abrupt experience of cutting through all thoughts is the action of HUM. Therefore HUM is the energy of universal force which transcends the limitations of ego, or rather, pierces through the wall of ego.

I hope that the people who practice *The Sadhana of the Embodiment of All the Siddhas* [*The Sadhana of Mahamudra*] will study this essay very closely. May we all unite in the crescendo of HUM and liberate all sentient beings into the oneness of HUM.

