

## **A Commentary on the Manjughosa Stuti Sadhana** by Kamalashila October 2020

In front of me here is the special edition of 50 copies of the sadhana that was printed for a three day seminar held by Sangharakshita at Padmaloka in October 1977, over 40 years ago. It's a proudly FWBO production, printed at the Windhorse press at Sukhavati by David Living, with illustrations by Chintamani and artwork from Siddhiratna. The whole thing is lovingly typed by Ashvajit and all the diacritical marks are added in by hand.

It is rather beautiful, so I have reproduced a digital PDF of this edition which you can download from the retreat resource page.

It consists of a little preface and then a frontispiece, an image of Manjughosa, and then the text of the sadhana which is five pages, followed by three pages of notes.

It says in the notes that the sadhana was received by Sangharakshita from Jamyang Khyentse Rimpoche on October 24th, 1957, in Darjeeling. The text was then translated from the Tibetan by John Driver, and the translation edited by Bhikshu Sangharakshita.

It seems from the title there was a Sanskrit original. I am in some discussion with Anandajyoti about that, and I hope we can get some more information, if only to put on the resource page later. So the title of the sadhana is: 'Mañjunathapramodasya pūjameghanāma bhattāraka-mañjughosasya stutisādhanasti' which translates 'A Cloud of Worship pleasing to the Protector Manjusri—being the way to practise the Profound Stuti-Sadhana of the Holy Manjughosa.'

There's a short introduction which explains that the sadhana was composed by Vajrayudha, believed to be an Indian Master (though that is a constructed name, since his name is only found in Tibetan). To do it you need to have received an abhisekha, a ritual initiation into the practice. As Order members we received this at our ordination, with the introduction to the sadhana, and that experience works for other sadhanas as well in a general sort of way. You know, you feel that having gone through ordination training and having taken up a visualisation of, say, Tara for a couple of years, say, you would be able also to engage with Padmasambhava. You have enough familiarity with what visualisation practice is about. This kind of ritual connection becomes a very natural thing and even if we aren't familiar with the Manjughosa sadhana I think the meditations on this retreat will give us enough confidence for developing what the practice is about. And of course what is most important is the realisation that comes from the practice. The connection to the chosen deity, the ishtadevata, the Yidam, is important; you naturally develop a kind of loyalty or fidelity towards the particular figure you meditate on, you get to know them or the deity gets to know you (after a while you're not quite sure which way round it is). That is all to be encouraged but we also have to remember the provisionality of any practice. The Dharma is a put-together, a raft solely for getting to the other side. The vehicle is not perfect, it is the result that is: awakening. So the point of cultivating this 'relationship' with the chosen deity is awakening. The deity is empty of self nature — how are you supposed to have a relationship with something whose existence is highly provisional? Well, this is the thing, you can. That applies to all relations, because everything is empty of self nature, yet the meaning and significance is clear. Anyway, we are going to far too fast. Let's get back to our sadhana, because we have hardly even started yet!

But I think the point is made. Remember why you do things. Mindfulness of purpose, mindfulness of the domain of practice. The purpose of doing this sadhana is cultivating Spotless Wisdom or vimalajnana.

The text says,

Namo guru-Manujughosaya. Whatever intelligent being - for the sake of acquiring Spotless Wisdom [vimala-jnana], which is the root of all the virtues making for obvious advancement [i.e. birth as man or god] and the true Good [i.e. Nirvana] - wishes to practice the sadhana of the "Srijnana-Gunaphala [-nama] Stuti", composed by siddhacarya rDorje mTshon-cha [Vajrayudha], should previously have duly received the Bestowal of Science [abhisekha] for this from a guru in the succession. Then, in a state of powerfully generating the mood of aversion (nihsarana) and Great Compassion, he should start on the sequence of the devotion.

So once you have received a suitable induction from a qualified person, it should put you in a mood of turning away from samsara and regarding the suffering of all beings with the compassionate eyes of a Bodhisattva. So let's hope you are getting in the mood now!

And the sequence of the sadhana, it says, is (1) Preparation or Cittotpada, that is the cultivation of Bodhicitta, (2) Main Matter or Analamba which means support, i.e. it's what supports the whole thing, and (3) Conclusion or parinama, which refers to the turning over or dedication of merits.

So coming on to that first stage, the preparation by connecting with the Bodhicitta.

I and all else that moves, until enlightenment, take the guru and the triple gem as Refuge.

In order to gain perfect buddhahood for others' sake, we practise the Manjusri-stuti-sadhana;

whereby May sentient beings possess happiness, with its causes; be parted from all grief, with its causes; Not become parted from the happiness wherein no grief is; and dwell in the condition of Equanimity.

Along with all beings, we take refuge in the Three jewels and in the teacher who in some way reveals through their person. We resolve to practice so that we realise awakening for the sake of all beings because through our example others may find their own way to the four sublime states, the Brahmaviharas, and also full awakening.<sup>1</sup>

We repeat that three times, or more, until the mood of Bodhicitta arises in us. I don't know if these verses work for you, you could use any Bodhiscitta verses, but the outcome of the

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<sup>1</sup> With regard to John Driver's note 7 after these verses (copied below), it seems to me that another reason the absolute Bodhicitta is not generated here is because it is generated through the sunyata mantra that follows straight after.

("7. These six lines constitute the Generating of the samvrtti or relative Bodhicitta, 'Thought of' or 'Will to' Enlightenment. Generation of the Absolute or paramartha Bodhicitta pertains to a higher division of the Tantras than that to which this text as a whole belongs and therefore finds no place here. While the first two lines embody the prasthanabodhicitta, the following four lines each of which represents one of the four brahma-viharas (i.e. maitri, karuna, mudita, and upeksha), embody the pranidhibodhicitta. Both together constitute the generating of the (samvrtti) Bodhicitta according to this text.")

reflection should be a real sense of solidarity with all beings moving on the earth, and maybe also those who can't move, like trees and other suffering plant beings in the natural world that is so ravaged by our culture, a solidarity that could move you to tears of sincerity and well wishing. Other people are so fragile and so easily led into wrong views, and the potential for suffering is so universal. At the same time, the potentials for awakening are simple and available, if only people would make those the focus of their energies. So you strongly think — yes! May it happen!

So we take the first step. And this is a meditation on emptiness:

OM SVABHAVASUDDHA SARVADHARMA SVABHAVASUDDO' HAM

We take a big step into the provisional, impermanent, inexpressible, unconcluded nature of all things. We do not simply say the mantra. We also make an attempt to realise what it indicates. We do this by at least momentarily recalling what emptiness actually means, and feeling how that applies to us, here and now. It is better not to do it just momentarily of course, and to spend some time connecting with the reality of sunyata. This in a way is the most important moment in the sadhana, it is the element that makes the whole thing happen. It is also how you get the image of the blue sky, though that image has been rather done to death and needs revitalising ... it is the sense of complete unobstructedness that is cosmic sunyata.

There are actually three very important elements in sadhana practice, of which this is the central one. First the Bodhicitta which we looked at just now, second this—accepting the emptiness of the apparent world—and third opening up to a visionary way of seeing. So there is recollecting our motive, which is Bodhicitta, then fully embodying the truest view of reality, which is sunyata, and then allowing the goal of our dharma practice to be embodied in a visionary way, like a dream or like a fantasy even, but it's a vision we can place our heart on, a vision that really channels our aspiration.

This stage of opening to sunyata is marked in many sadhanas simply by the sunyata mantra. Here though, we are lucky to have an amazing verse that draws out the meaning of emptiness in a very helpful way. Before we go into that, let me say though that for this stage to work, for us really to step into a mini realisation of sunyata, it is good to do the preliminary work in our daily meditation. What can prepare us are practices like mindfulness — perhaps not the popular variety but I mean real satipatthana practice, where there is that element of letting go conventional constructions into a deeper reality. Also of course the six element practice. And also various contemplative exercises and reflections to do with impermanence or the Yogacara perspective of the nonduality of the perceiver and what is perceived. Also very good are direct pointing types of practice like insight inquiry, and often these are done in combination with some kind of just sitting with our experience. Just sitting with it and seeing its open, empty nature. Which is also what we do here. We hear the mantra, and we just sit in our experience that we know is empty of self nature. So all these exercises and meditations can prepare us, but realisation of sunyata is also something beyond us, it is beyond what we can understand from our present perspective. We cannot make it happen, it can only happen to us.

The verse that follows the sunyata mantra is as follows.

Whilst we thus "integrate", in the maya-way that does not prevent the causally-originated semblances though it transcends the construction "all things" and "I", "the skandhas" and consciousness [vijnana].

This is pretty cryptic so you have to open it out to understand it. Then actually the meaning is straightforward and it is helpful for our attempt at connecting with the reality of sunyata, or integrating with it. 'Maya' refers to the illusory aspect of experience. Nothing is ever quite how it appears to be. Look beyond the surface appearance and things are very different. We have our habitual ways of interpreting our experience. We construct out of our experience, for example, "me" or "I." It is a common way that people interpret their experience, but it is not truly like that for anyone. It is a construction, actually there is far more to it. Constructions like "all things" and "I", "the skandhas" or "consciousness" are all to be transcended, gone beyond. In fact they are what is holding us back, keeping us in ignorance. Looking into maya is the way to go beyond these interpretations and the darkness of habitual ignorance. And when you look into what is beyond the appearances of maya you don't see anything unusual, the world looks just the same, you see the same appearances you saw before, of course you do. Simply because you look doesn't stop things arising, because the causes for them are still there. The causally originated appearances, or semblances, will always arise, they are not prevented by the fact that you are trying to integrate with the real nature of things. So to paraphrase the whole verse now, when we make that attempt to integrate with the reality of sunyata, that is the maya way, and it doesn't stop appearances arising at the same time as it exposes the emptiness of our constructions of self and world.

I find it is helpful to think through and understand the meaning of that verse, and then stop thinking, put the understanding aside for now, and as wholeheartedly as we can just sit, letting go directly our construction of a self and a world.

When we have done that for a while we can start opening up to the visualisation.

There arises from the letters 'OM', 'AH', 'HUM' of our own three centres, and 'DHIH' upon a moon within the heart, light:  
Which having invited Manjusri the Prince, the jnanasattva,  
He sits, in well-pleased fashion, on mats of lotus and moon in the sky [akasa] before us:

Two things here, two big things. The visualisation of Manjusri, out there, which we will explore in a minute, but in this verse there is something else which comes before that, and it's another very important fourth element in sadhana practice. This is the self visualisation or Vajra Body. The sadhana says that light arises from the letters 'OM', 'AH', 'HUM' of our own three centres, and from 'DHIH' upon a moon within the heart. So before we see Manjusri out there in the form of Manjughosa, we look at the way we are perceiving our own body, as much as possible free of the *construction* of 'body,' because this is now post sunyata — we have passed through the fires of transformatin and are no longer experiencing anything, inner or outer, in the ordinary way. We are experiencing as much as we can in the maya way, beyond mere appearance.

The inner body visualisation is sometimes called the Vajra Body or the Subtle body. We experience it in terms of energy and this is expressed in terms of seed syllables or bijas, that are felt at chakras or energy centres, and the movement of energy from and between these centres is expressed in the form of light or nectar. There is a lot of detail to this that in some ways I feel is basic to sadhana visualisation. I have a talk on this on video somewhere. Visualising the inner vajra body is similar to visualising the buddha out there, in that it can work as a cultivation or as something that evokes something already cultivated. In other words you can initially imagine or visualise the vajra body and later on, it evokes that experience of the body. In just the same way, we imagine or visualise the body of the Buddha, and later on, the visualisation actually evokes a particular experience of the Buddha.

So anyway we start with that inner visualisation. “There arises from the letters 'OM', 'AH', 'HUM' of our own three centres, and 'DHIH' upon a moon within the heart, light.” OM is white and evokes, from the crown and brow which are one energy centre, a sense of calling out to the ultimate reality. AH is red and situated in the very interior feeling of the Throat centre, and is quite a complex evocation, to do with expressing ourselves and all that that involves for us. It can be very emotional. That painful sense of what is inexpressible, that feeling of having a lump in our throat, that aspect of tearing up where the jaws and the throat tremble... these energies at the throat centre are very powerful — where head and heart meet. Then the HUM is blue and evokes that sense of earthedness and solidity and final decision, in or around the heart. The notes say the HUM is on the outside of the body at the chest to allow the DHIH to occupy the heart centre. You can also have it behind the heart. If you get these seed syllables (and it is really up to you how you visualise them, it can simply be a coloured light or roman letters)...then the light that emanates from them can express ‘the heart of you’ — the prayer that is you, the mysterious cosmic force that is you is poured out into the open empty space to evoke... Manjughosa.

So now we begin the visualisation out there. Manjughosa out there is also seen in the same deconstructed way, in terms not of ordinary appearance but again in terms of the energy body, the Vajra body with the central channel running from the pelvic floor right up to the crown and “his three centres marked by the three grains, and the moon-mat inside his Heart by a blazing reddish-yellow letter ‘DHIH’.” That is the essential energy of Manjughosa, the embodiment of Wisdom.

And after that, the other more familiar and less mysterious aspects of the visualisation. He is beautiful, dressed as a Bodhisattva, and holds the symbols of wisdom, the volume of prajnaparamita and the sword.

In saffron-coloured, twice-eight youth, the glory of his Marks and Signs excellently blazing;

With five side-crests in his oil black hair and graced by bunches of utpala over his ears;

His right hand brandishing the sword of jnana whilst his left grasps the prajnaparamita volume.

Decked as adornments with jewels and silks of all kinds; seated with both legs in the vajra-paryyanka posture;

His three centres marked by the three letters, and the moon-mat inside his Heart by a blazing reddish-yellow letter 'DHIH'.

This is also the maya way, but this time it is the deliberate appearance of the Bodhisattva — it is the Bodhisattva's manifestation in the world of appearances. At least you could see it like that. Certainly, we are using our own ability to construct a world of appearances, and interpret what arises to our senses in particular ways. With imagination, we draw forth from the seed store of memory various forms that to us display Manjughosa. We do this deliberately, we manifest Manjughosa ourselves, using the medium of maya, the method of magical illusion. We do this using the exact same process as we construct our world of me and the objects of my world. The people and participants in my world that I recognise in the very limited, preferential, partial way that I do. Our constructions are false and deluded in many ways. Now, this method of magical illusion, that we call visualisation, enables us to set up a kind of replica of the process of deluded perception, and to play with it as though it were a magical theatre. We have been doing that for some time, with our visualisation practice. And we could learn a great deal from it, if we look at it like that, as a means of relaxing with the illusory creations we are making all the time.

Anyway, so Manjughosa is there, glorious and wonderfully symbolic with his wisdom sword and book.

And as already noted, with his own inner vajra body experience with seed syllables located in a similar way to how we imagined them in our own body at the beginning of the practice. And just as we did earlier, Manjughosa also emanates light from his three centres, expressing his essential heart and mind, calling out to something beyond him—to the Five Buddhas who now appear above him in response.

Once again light goes forth to invite the empowering deities, and then by the jnana-amrta consecration,  
His whole body is purged of the obscurations [of our vision], and [He is] adorned on the head by Aksobhya and the rest: we devoutly worship and petition him.

So in this consecration of wisdom nectar from the Jinas a nectar light, the colour of each buddha but paler and more transparent, gently blesses him at the crown, and this enters his body and completely fills it, in a similar way to the Vajrasattva practice, except the nectar light is rainbow coloured. Eventually it fills Manjughosa and the completed colour is like honey, soft and glowing. And he then has the crown of the Five Buddhas. At this point the image is seen as the Jnanasattva, the 'gnostic being' the one who knows the truth.

So the visualised form is fully charged with significance and overflows with this, and we make a very special connection with him.

From the very axis of his heart the words of stuti, and rosaries of the mantra, issue without pause,  
And as clear as the light that makes it daytime dissolve into the inside of our heart.  
Whereupon through the dispersal of all the darkness of ignorance and shining forth

of omniscience, kindness and power,  
Our lotus of Knowledge and Kindness, fully blown, has gained the rank of the  
Protector Manjusri.

Stuti means praise or appreciation and the words of Manjughosa's stuti emerge from his heart like sunlight, they come to us and melt into our heart, dispersing the darkness of our ignorance and causing all kinds of good qualities to arise — goodness, kindness, energy and power — so that we become more like Manjughosa ourselves. The flower of our good qualities blossoms.

So here we begin the recitation. In what follows I have removed the biblical Thee's and Thou's of John Driver's rendering, but kept his language otherwise.

To you, whose understanding, purifying like a cloud-free sun the two obscurations,  
and very clear,  
Sees all matters as they are, so you hold the volume of Prajnaparamita to your heart;  
To you who in kindness, as though to an only child, to living beings —covered as they  
are in the prison of temporal existence with the darkness of avidya and afflicted with  
dukkha—  
Utter your speech, with a sixty-fourfold voice, resounding loud as thunder, waking the  
sleep of the klesas, unfastening the iron fetters of karma,  
Dispersing the darkness of ignorance, and who, cutting off every sprout of dukkha,  
grasp the sword:  
To the body of the chief among Jinas and their lineage, his body-of-virtues perfected,  
pure from the start and arrived at the end of the ten bhumis,  
Adorned with the ten tens of ornaments and twelve, dispersing the darkness of our  
mind—to you, Manjughosa, I bow.

To paraphrase:

Your **mind**, Manjughosa, is clear and pure like sunlight. Kleśa and jñeya, obscurations built up by unskillful actions and unhelpful views, are simply dissolved in its clarity. Your understanding sees everything just exactly as it is, and that's why you hold the book of the Perfection of Wisdom at your heart. I bow to you who is kind to all beings as though each one were your only child. All beings who are as though imprisoned by their perceptions of time, whose ignorance is dark and painful. You speak to them in a **voice** they can't help but hear, penetrating their dark, ignorant sleep, waking them up and freeing them from the habits that hold them down. You take hold of the sharp sword of wisdom, cutting off each such tendency, however tiny, and thus ending the suffering that would otherwise follow. I bow to your **body**, long perfected by deeds of merit, that was always pure in essence. You have attained all the Bodhisattva levels, you shine with the ornaments of a great practitioner, and you disperse all my darkness. With great gratitude, I bow to you.

We repeat the stuti and the mantra as they issue without pause from Manjughosa's heart, streaming their meaning through space to us in a mysterious communication evoked through our own imagination — itself a mystery of the maya way.

OM A RA PA CA NA DHIH

Three stutis, then twenty one mantras, three stutis, then twenty one mantras, three more stutis, and then round the whole rosary plus a few more to make it up to 112, and then a final three stutis. This is the way I have always done it anyway. Then you stop reciting, become calm, and focus on what you want from the practice.

There are other traditional ways of doing the recitation. According to the sadhana text you can also do the stuti seven or twenty one times, and then recite an unlimited number of mantras after. It recommends that to really cultivate this sadhana you need to have a long term plan to do seventy thousand stuti recitations and up to seven hundred thousand mantra recitations. This is a common way traditionally to give a sense of how much time, how much of one's life to dedicate to this purpose.

Anyway, however you do the recitation, now you stop still, and you rest your focused attention on the object, the point, of the practice. This is actually a very important moment. Perhaps you could say it is the climax of all this cultivation. The prayer that follows attempts to express this, but it really needs to come from your own heart and it is worth pausing and giving space at this point to your heart, so that the purpose of your practice becomes as clear as it can. This could be an interval of several minutes of open sitting.

Kind Sun of Speech, when the beams of Thy Wisdom (prajna ) and Compassion (karuna )  
Have quite dispersed the dark of my mind's confusion (moha ), that partakes equally (samapanna) of klesa and jneya,  
I pray that they may engender the shining forth of confident understanding, that realizes correctly the meaning of the scriptures—  
The well-uttered Word, and the sastras explaining its thought— and cause me to gain Omniscience.

Opening to Manjughosa as the illuminator of all expression, we allow a wish to form in our heart: that from his special influence, received through the sadhana, confident understanding and realisation of the Buddha's teaching may shine forth in us.

As though in response, according to the note here (22), the figure of Manjughosa shrinks in size, brightening as he does so, becoming like a tiny sun, a star or tiny spherical point of light. It moves towards us, pausing above the crown of the head, and finally enters at the crown, descending down the central channel and remaining in the heart centre.

As an alternative approach, the form is no longer perceived but becomes '[merged]... into the undifferentiated sunyata which is in reality his essential nature.' It is worth practising this way as well from time to time, to connect with that earlier reflection on the inseparability of form and emptiness.

The effect of this is to induce a state of stillness and deep integration of all that has gone into the practice with our potential for awakening. This is like the response to our wishing prayer. The sadhana states,



One should become absorbed-in-samadhi, for as long as it abides in the state of union (*yuganaddha*) of quiescence and insight brought about by the actuality of the two non-selfhoods (of personality and of dharmas).

Anatman, non-self, is an actual truth we can rely on, and this underlying truth makes possible a special samadhi at this point in the practice which according to John Driver's note (24) accords with the mahamudra or mahayoga.

The important thing is to allow space for it, allow oneself to deeply let go and relax into present experience without thought, or if or when thoughts do arise allow these, too, to be let go of, to be just an aspect of ongoing impermanent, self-empty experience. Sit like this for as long as it feels useful.

We conclude the practice with a verse of dedication that expresses how we now resolve to live integrating the view and spirit of this practice. We wish, as the sadhana puts it, to 'bridge the gap' between this and the rest of our life.

Through this beneficent act may I acquire the two stocks (of punya and of jnana )  
and so gain clarity on the meaning of non-selfhood;  
Thereby may I see manifestly, with exalted mind, the Manjusri-jnana  
which is free from discursiveness;  
And through the Vajra-like samadhi - having abandoned completely the klesas,  
contrived (*parikalpita* ) and inborn (*sahaja* ) -  
May I make an end of the jneya-obscurations, with all its parts, and gain the Wisdom  
(*prajna* ) of the Sugatas.

There are reflections and explorations suggested in this verse that are well worth following up as one continues with the practice: looking at spiritual life in terms of the two *sambhāra*-s of merit and wisdom, the nature of vajropama samadhi, the different kinds of *kleśa* mentioned here, and the two veils (of conflicting emotions (*klesha-varana*) and cognitive distortions (*jneya-varana*). It's a rich field and in what has been rather a long commentary on the Manjughosa stuti-sadhana, I thought I would leave at least a few details for you to explore for yourself. There is so much more you can look up in Sangharakshita's seminar on the sadhana.

As the text concludes, you get up from the practice and enter daily activity, yet being inseparable from our inherent nature of potential awakening to both wisdom and compassion.

