Six Yogas of Naropa

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Mahamudra and Six Yogas are quintessential of Kagyudpa, tradition of Tibetan Buddhism. The Six Yogas of Six Dharmas (Chen-drug) are meditation techniques which enhance the practice of Mahamudra (Phyah rgya-chen po) at certain points and under special conditions i.e., at that level of practice which is known as the Perfect stage (Sampannakrama, rulöpa-zim) of the Anuttara Yogas such as like Ghyasamajpa, He-sarja, Chokrasamvara and Kalacakra, etc.

Tilopa (988-1059 A.D.), the first Guru of the Kagyu lineage, received the teachings of the Six Yogas from various Gurus. He received the teachings of Illusory Body and Transference of Consciousness from Nagar-juna and the teachings of Dream and Intermediate state from Choyapa; the teachings of luminosity from Lawapa (Dochwapa) and the teachings of Candali (mystic heat) from Yogen Sumati (Sudhagiri). As the four oral traditions merged into one, Tilopas lineage came to be known as Kagyu (the oral tradition). Naropa (1016-1100 A.D.) received the lineage of six Yogas from Tilopa and he along with his sister Niguma expounded the teachings so much so that the teachings became known as the Six Yogas of Naropa and Six Yogas of Niguma, both of which are still preserved in Kagyu teachings.

Marpa, the translator (1012-1097 A.D.), carried them to Tibet and through his noted disciple the saint poet Milarepa (1040-1127 A.D.) spread to all sub-sects of Kagyu School. The teachings have been zealously guarded and secretly transmitted for the last thousand years. They are still preserved in the original form as an oral tradition which is transmitted only after thorough preparation so that they may not be wasted or confused. The Ahamarama-samaya-namadakini-odpasma (bka-yong-dakba'i -sbed-ma-don- gyi-yigs-paang-ba-eiktba-'gro' 'i sman-ngag) with its commentary by Marpa, forms the principal work of the Six Yogas. Among the 30 odd different kinds of literature on this topic available in India are the earlier and later Kapes (bka'-dpe) written by Tilopa and Naropa, respectively. Tibetans saints and scholars of course wrote many commentaries later on. But it should be pointed out here that despite the vast literature available one cannot practise the Six Yogas without the assistance of an experience dGur.
Here is given a general idea of the Six Yogas of Naropa without going into the esoteric aspect of the Teachings. Kanjrol or Tummo means 'fiery' or 'vitalful'. A kind of psychic heat is generated and experienced through certain meditative practices. This heat serves to burn up all types of obstacles and confusion. It is a fiery or vitalful mystic heat.

Mystic heat fire. Although the heat generation is given emphasis (guan-no—candali) Candali does not deal with heat generation alone. Another important part of this Yoga is the practice of nadi, prana and bindu. (Tibetan, rong, tigle) practice helps one to attain realization by synchronising body and mind.

The Tantric texts describe prana as the house, mind-consciousness as the rider, nadi as the pathway and bindu as mind-nourishment. The prana functions in the left and right channels called Symbolic representation blata and rasana and therefore our mind conceives of Prana, Mana and the things in duality. In other words, we lapse Nadi in Tantric text into duality because the prana functions in blata and rasana. These two channels represent the subjective objective activities and karmic activities. If the prana functions in the central channels (Avadhuti) the prana transforms into wisdom-prana.

The mind then conceives the non-duality of the things, and realizes all dharma as unborn. The meditation on prana, nadi and bindu is called inner gTummo. When the inner candali is synchronized with the outer candali which is Mahakaruna, prana, nadi and bindu dissolve into sampasankram non-duality delight. This is known as the attainment of vajra body, vajra speech and vajra mind. Candali is the root or foundation of all other Yogas.

Illusory body or apparition is broadly divided into three categories, viz., the mundane illusory body; the immaculate Illusory body; and the most immaculate illusory body. (gyuLam—mayadecha) The universe and its contents are nothing but illusions as they have no substance in their nature. They just appear like illusory bodies, like dreams, like mirage-reflection and the like. To understand this and to meditate upon this helps one to cut off the mundane attachments and to realize the ultimate truth. This practice is known as mundane illusory body. Higher Tantricism makes one realize that the five aggregates, the twelve dhana and the six sense-organs.
are divine by nature. This practice transforms all the mundane thoughts into divine thoughts. The universe becomes a Manala of divine deities where the forms are gods and goddesses; sounds are mantras; and thoughts are transcendental wisdom. Even this immaculate appearance has no substance and hence is illusion. This practice is, therefore, known as the immaculate illusion body.

The immaculate illusion body still has a tinge of artificiality. The most immaculate illusion body, however, is a spontaneous, natural experience, born out of completely pure prana and non-dissociative thought to achieve the last illusion body.

The first stage of dream practice is to recognize dreams during the time of dreaming. The next stage (Midsam, awapa) is to use the dream as a means to practice various spiritual exercises including that of illusion body.

Dreams are then transformed into the practice of luminosity. A constant practice on dream will have great effect on waking hours. There will be a time when the learner will see no distinction between the dream, waking hours and the death. The Practice of luminosity is believed to be the essence of the path. Luminosity in Tantric Buddhism is the spontaneous, self-illuminating enlightened (Hod-gsal, prabhavara) Buddha-nature which could be seen only with the ultimate intuitive perspective or the deepest meditation. Though a momentary flash of luminosity appears when, dying, fainting, yawn and copulating, it is not recognized as such. The technique here would help to recognize those moments especially in dreams. It is therefore said that a Yogi is meditating even when asleep. Luminosity is regarded as the last stage of Sampunjakrama of Anustarayoga Tantras and its practice leads directly to the experience of Shambhakalya and Dharmakalya.

Intermediate stage has been classified into many different ways. Of these, the most popular one is Marpa’s classification where the bardos is classified into three types—the intermediate state between birth and death (L1: the intermediate state of dream); and intermediate state of becoming (between death and rebirth). The practice of Budro-yoga is the last stage.

The intermediate state after death is called the mind body. This
is an important stage at a strong reaction at this period will have an immediate effect in deciding the realm into which the person will be reborn.

"In our being we find passion, aversion and bewilderment. Through passion we become spirits, through aversion desiers of hell and through bewilderment brute animals. While though these poisons we bound to wander endlessly in Samsara, by making them a path according to the teaching of Naropa, there will be no birth for us (in Samsara") 1.

The three stages of practices are, therefore, recommended for this period. The best of these is to recognize the luminosity when it is experienced at the time of death. The next stage is the practice of illusionary body which is practiced when the mind-body is separated from the dead physical body. If both of them fail to liberate the subject, the meditative techniques to stop entrance into the six realms of the world are applied. A few of these techniques have been discussed in the Book of Dead.

Pho-br is also known as the teaching to achieve Buddhism without meditation. The purpose of these teachings is to be ready to die and to avoid being reborn in unfavourable situations. This is also divided into three stages of practice as found in Barlo. The first stage is to transform one into luminosity. The second stage is to realize the divine nature and accomplish the illusionary body. The last stage is to transfer one's mind-body into the wisdom-mind of the Guru and Yidam or into some Buddha in Sakayavari. These trainings are practised during the life-time and they are used when all the signs of death are manifest. An accomplished person can help another person to a happy departing.

It may be noted here that it is not necessary that all the six Yogas should always be practised together. But they as a whole make a complete path. The first four are known as the root Yogas and the last two as their parts. It is also not always necessary for the total number to be a ly six, although the six Yogas of Naropa are the most popular. There are texts which mention eight, ten or varying numbers with the addition of more branch Yogas.

1. sGampopa, Vol.32, 1, 30a.
References:
2. gdams-ngag-mrin (Kagyu part)