**Setting the *Ocean of True Meaning* material in the context of Triratna; possible difficulties and advantages of this kind of approach**

Difficulties or issues:

1. All this is set in a Triyana framework with a traditional Indo-Tibetan view and this is not how Bhante sees and approaches things these days. However, the shamatha and vipashyana sections are just very experiential, looking at mind and body and how you use them to be free. Those chapters don’t have any Tantric content – except at one point: visualising the Buddha to settle the mind…
2. He is also wary of people taking on this kind of approach and doing a lot of Just Sitting when they don’t have any stability, so they’re just doing ‘klesha soup’ - if you just sit without any awareness, then your mind will just do what it's done since beginningless time and that hasn't yet led to awakening so there's no indication that it will now…
3. You can use this approach for spiritual bypassing. For example, if you have an emotional experience you don't like the look of, you can apply this view to see that ‘it's all empty and if I leave it alone it will self-liberate anyway’, which is really a misunderstanding of what the text is saying. However, we have to be aware that if we teach anything, then we also invite any misunderstandings connected with it. Taken right, seeing the true nature of whatever habit or tendency we have can really take some of the fixedness, heaviness and difficulty out of it and make it easier to come into relationship with it, to turn towards it and for it to transform.
4. Some Mahamudra teachers will put the teachings in a Buddha Nature context which Bhante is very wary of indeed, because depending on how you present it, Buddha Nature can come perilously close to seeming like some sort of entity. But you can do this work and use these texts without presenting things in this way. The advantage of talking in terms of Buddha Nature is that it gives you confidence. If we’re not going to use that term, we need to be clear and enable people to be confident that when they really relax, good things happen spontaneously. Buddha Nature is a more philosophical way of explaining that when mind really relaxes, positive qualities appear.
5. Bhante is also wary of people looking for advanced teachings and because Mahamudra can be a way of talking about the highest experience or realisation, sometimes Bhante has felt that there were people practicing methods from the Mahamudra or Dzogchen tradition and putting on airs because this is the highest teaching, where actually the level at which they’re practising is nowhere near that.

The Mahamudra tradition itself doesn't put on airs, or use lots of high-sounding terms with lots of capital letters. For example, ‘realisation’- realisation is referred to in Mahamudra as ‘ordinary mind’ – when you really allow mind to relax and it isn’t constructing a sense of me, mind is just very ordinary. That’s part of our objection to it, because as human beings we want to be special, but when the mind is open, and the body is relaxed, there's really nothing special about it. It’s the same for all of us. It’s that being special that we can't let go of. It seems as if we would rather suffer and be special than have a relaxed open mind and be nothing special.

Some of the advantages of this approach, certainly for Order members and other people with interest and capacity to make use of it are:

1. This approach does introduce a strong emphasis on relaxation, being in the present, and not grasping after results. Relaxation is helpful at all levels, especially as the tendency for leaning into the future, and the tension associated with that, is now so prevalent in our society. Just practising to relax the gaze and take some of the tension out is important.
2. This is a tradition which has been very focused on meditation for a long time, around 1,000 years, and out of all of that practice there are a lot of very practical instructions which have been handed down, many orally but some written. Therefore, there is a lot in this tradition which can be a real aid to those of us who are trying to establish a deeper meditative tradition within Triratna. Although we need to keep forging our own path, we don't have to reinvent the wheel in terms of what works with meditation and being on retreat - there's a lot of experience we can learn from.
3. For those interested in insight work, it can open up new horizons, new ways to explore and new ways in. For example, we have the Order Insight Inquiry, which is having a positive effect on the Order. That is mainly an exploration of *anatta* – or of the three marks if you do it that way - so when you come to the end of that, and there are ‘no more questions’, where do you go from there? There is the possibility of exploring desire and ill will, and there is now a stream of order members who are going there and beyond. This tradition gives us other possible areas to explore and other questions to ask to illuminate aspects of our experience.

Another possible answer to the question of "where do I go from here?" when we've done some work on no-self, is "keep looking" - keep checking whatever we've discovered, because there is always that tendency to stop looking afresh at what we've discovered and for the old way of seeing things to sneak back. Sometimes new questions can help us keep unravelling, because we've seen certain things but there are other aspects which are unquestioned about our experience and about how we are approaching the world, which the angle we came in at and the question we asked still left standing. Sometimes another set of questions or way of looking at things will take out another set of concepts that we hadn't quite realised were there, which enables more to unravel. Another part of deepening our insight tradition in Triratna is getting some sense of how and why it is that these traditions structure the questioning in the way that they do. In doing that we’re taking the Yogacara and Madhyamaka and seeing directly what they’re talking about. This way of looking at the nature of mind may be an appealing way to explore for some people.

1. Mahamudra practice is also helpful at a point in your practice where that self who is striving for enlightenment is starting to get in the way. This approach is designed to deal with that aspect of the path.

So, there are various possible advantages for us. Mahamudra is often seen as mainly Just Sitting, but it also contains a lot of structured practice. It's about getting a balance; if we have a very busy life and on top of that all we do is structured practice, then our mind can end up feeling very squeezed. It can get tired of structure. This also gives us a way in to big, open space and very relaxed practice, which is a real antidote.

From Karunagita’s notes on Vessantara’s 2018 *Ocean of True Meaning* retreat at Vajraloka (with thanks to her!)