

BOOK REVIEW: POINTING OUT THE GREAT WAY
The Stages of Meditation in the Mahamudra Tradition
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For those of you interested in or practicing Mahamudra meditation, here is what I consider an important book to know.

I will try to be succinct. I have co-directed a meditation center for some 25 years, studied (and practiced) under Tibetans for 40 years many of the practices and techniques described by Daniel Brown. I have worked with a high rinpoche for the last 30 years on studying and practicing Mahamudra. My point is that this material is not new to me.

When I first saw this very large book, I assumed that it was just another derivative dharma book of the kind that needs too-many words to say not enough, and seldom communicates what is actually needed by readers.

Once I slowed down enough to read the book carefully, I must say that my original impression of the book was wrong.

This book is written with great attention to detail and accuracy. More important to me, the author obviously is devoted to the subject matter, has direct experience in the practices, and expresses it in a kind and loving way, not just as a scholar. I find this same sense of authenticity and personal knowledge in the works of the great historian of comparative religions, Mircea Eliade. This combination of scholar and practitioner is rare in my experience. Brown actually demonstrates the fruits of the practices he so diligently documents.

I must have a thousand dharma books around the center, including many of the original texts that Dr. Brown refers to, so I did not expect to find much new to me. In fact, the way Brown has interwoven the original material with his own experience and knowledge is quite new (at least for a westerner), and extraordinary.

"Pointing Out the Great Way" summarizes a vast range of authentic sources and compiles them into a single volume with remarkable clarity. It occurs to me that this book is not unlike many of the great dharma reference texts Brown documents, and it is written by an author for whom English is the native language! I find this of real help.

In my opinion, this is not really a book for beginners in meditation, although the introduction is lucid and of use to everyone. From there on, Dr. Brown lays out the graduated path of learning meditation, from the beginning to techniques more advanced than I know or can follow. Along the way, Brown presents a special vocabulary that takes some learning, but in the long run it is necessary for clarity's sake.

In summary, I find it hard to believe I did not discover this book sooner and I find myself using it just as I use many of the classic Tibetan texts on Mahamudra. This book is indeed a "pointing out," just as the title (and tradition) requires. I seldom stray from reading the original Mahamudra texts themselves, but I have no problem whatsoever recommending "Pointing Out the Great Way" to any serious student of meditation.