

**The Nature of Mind**  
**By**  
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**Part 1:**  
**Defilements as Wisdom**

I have been asked to give an introduction to the nature of mind. 'Nature of mind', in one way or another, covers everything; otherwise, we wouldn't be here. You have all come up here, driven a long way, or walked, and have come into this room thinking you would be hearing some explanations about the dharma. In a way, we have already introduced ourselves to the mind. It is something obvious, perhaps too obvious. Still, we want to learn something about it.

I don't think I will ever have the chance to see my own face directly. But I have seen a photograph of it. I have seen it in the mirror, as a reflection, but then always I have seen it with right and left reversed! The same thing will happen to us when we talk about the nature of mind. If we talk about it for years, we will be more familiar with it; we will have an intellectual understanding about it. This intellectual understanding will be helpful, certainly, but it won't be totally accurate—no way. Yet, if we say something about it, it won't be a waste of words; if we think about it, it won't be a waste of thought; if we do something about it, it won't be a waste of action.

There is a simple verse in the Mahamudra Prayer, which says in Tibetan:

*CHHÖ NAM T'HAM CHE SEM KYI NAM T'HRUL TE  
SEM NI SEM ME SEM KYI NGO WO TONG  
TONG SHING MA GAG CHIR YANG NANG WA TE  
LEK PAR TAK NE SHI TSA CHHÖ PAR SHOK.*

The first line says, "Everything is a manifestation of mind." Here, 'everything' means what you see, what you hear, what you touch, what you smell, what you feel—everything that is out there—as well as the one who hears it, who touches it, who smells it, and so forth—everything in here. 'Everything' covers all of it.

The second line says, "This mind is beyond any solid identity," which is quite true. For example, if we stand in the middle of the street, we will be quite disturbed, because there is chance that a huge truck, maybe an 18-wheeler, might run over us, and we'd be flat on the street, maybe stretched out for one hundred meters. That's not funny, you know; it's serious. That chance is there, so we will certainly feel disturbed.

Or, we might just sit under a tree in a beautiful serene place such as here in Woodstock, a place famous all over the world. Sitting here, you can feel serenity, peacefulness, and a kind of freedom within yourself. In either case, you will feel that the mind is there, it is real, it is not a game. But at the core of it, the heart of it, you cannot grasp it, you cannot box it in, you cannot pin it down, you cannot point to it—that is what the author means by the second sentence in the prayer.

So, the mind is beyond any solid identity. Then the third line says, "Yet everything continuously appears from it." This means there is nonexistence, but at the same time, not just nothingness. The mind has two sides, like a coin. On one side is nonexistence, emptiness, and on the other side, it's not totally empty—it is there. It is the king, the master, the source from which everything manifests. So that is the character, the personality, the image of the mind.

The last sentence says, "May we realize with confidence this potential through contemplation." Now, all people go through different experiences in life. Some people go through a lot of confusion and all kinds of delusion. Their life process is filled with harshness and chaos, and they must manage somehow to survive. Other people, the so-called lucky ones, have comfort and positive circumstances. For them, everything falls into the right order and everything seems to go quite smoothly. All of these different aspects of life's journey lead to one goal. The purpose of the existence of all sentient beings is to awaken. That is the final destination. Until we awaken individually, we will go on; we cannot stop—not in any way. Even if you try to escape this planet, maybe go to another planet, you will still have to go through the same old trip; maybe worse, maybe better, but still the same thing.

Thus the final thing for us to do is to awaken this nature, to awaken this potential that is within us. If we try to put an image to it, we might say it shines within us like a lamp inside a house. If we put in a window, a little bit of light may come out; if we put in a door, maybe more light will come out. If the whole house is made of glass, the entire light might come out, and if there is a mirror behind the light, it will expand even more.

That is an explanation about the nature of mind that comes from a Mahamudra text, and it says a lot to me. It is a short, four-line message that describes, roughly, everything about mind—this mind which is pure, which is clear, which is beyond existence and nonexistence. At the moment, however, the relative manifestation of the mind, the relative character of the mind, is what we're directly involved with, and it is through this relative character of the mind that we relate to the potential within us. I have heard that Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche's favorite subject is 'The nature of defilements as wisdom, and the nature of samsara as nirvana'. Isn't that beautiful? I like that, I must say I like that.

How can defilements exist? We can use the word defilement or kleshas, but what it really means is desire, anger, jealousy, and pride—all these emotions that are within us. They are called defilements because they somehow prevent us from seeing our ultimate nature. It is quite simple. The way we relate to something causes us to have desire for it, to have anger about it, jealousy about it, pride about it, and all these things are interrelated.

I would like to share something with you. In 1984, I went to Tibet and visited certain places high up in the mountains. From the nearest airport I had to drive four days by jeep—can you imagine driving on a dirt road for four days? After that, it was almost two days more on horseback. And this was in December. I'm thankful for being healthy. If I had been sick I might have been stranded up there for months, and there are no hospitals. Up there I met some nomadic people who, of course, have their own defilements, which are quite different from ours. For them, cars, fashion, credit cards, the stock exchange, The Wall Street Journal, the world news—those things don't mean anything; they simply don't exist for them. Nothing, absolutely nothing, exists in their heads about those things. For us though, because of our circumstances, our conditioning, our habits, the way we are introduced to these things, they mean everything. If we own stock in a company and that stock goes down, we can't go to sleep at night. For us it is very real, it is not a game. But in Tibet, they have their own different reality.

Thinking about that gave me a clear picture. Before that, when I was small, I used to watch rock music stars on television and I used to think that they were great. But when I came back from Tibet and I went to the United States and I turned on MTV, I couldn't believe what I saw, and I thought, "How can I say this is great?" It is just like a dramatization of hell—people make faces, people scream and jump

around like mad. I'm not saying that it's bad, but after being in Tibet for four months, the influence of that culture changed my perception.

The Tibetan way of beauty and expression is very different from our way, and their way of relating to things, their sort of thrill is very different from ours. This was something very subtle, but was a kind of revelation to me. It shows that in any culture or any sort of environment, we go through all sorts of interrelated encouragements for our own defilements. I knew all of this before 1984, but this trip made it very clear to me. One more step, I guess.

And definitely it is okay to have defilements, it is not a terrible thing, but we have to be able to deal with them properly. It is not that we are not allowed to have defilements, or that they are totally bad or negative.

Then, what does 'the nature of defilements as wisdom' mean? This is a very important statement. The ultimate nature of those defilements is wisdom—it has to be, otherwise what could it be? Since defilements exist, there must be another side to them—and that side is wisdom—but it is wrong to think that we just have to sit back and let everything happen. That is wrong, totally wrong. We have done that already, and see how we've ended up! What we must do is learn to deal with our defilements properly, and that is what dharma is all about.

In Buddhism, the basis for dealing with the defilements is motivation. This motivation is supported by mindfulness and awareness, constant mindfulness and awareness in every situation of everyday life, under the umbrella of motivation. This doesn't mean we are not allowed to rest. We can rest, but we must rest mindfully. We will have a happy rest, but we will not rest in the middle of the highway—that would not be mindful, and we might again be flattened! So, we rest with mindfulness.

If we use mindfulness and awareness, then we can deal with our defilements accurately and correctly. Then, whatever defilements we have can be transformed into their ultimate nature, which is wisdom. Take anger, for example. Anger comes quite easily for people who work hard. That's because after you work hard, you like to rest. The work pushes you, and you get a little tired and things don't fall in order—they are a little bit early or a little bit late—and then you get disturbed, and it gets on your nerves, and that's where the anger comes in.

Now, anger is totally the opposite of compassion, isn't it? That's what most people think. But, let's be sympathetic about it, try to learn more about it, and say that it is more like a two-sided coin: this side is compassion, the other side is

anger—compassion, anger; compassion, anger. Now if you go deeper and deeper into the anger, it will lead you definitely to compassion. Until you do that it will never stop. That means the ultimate nature of anger is compassion. Now, there are hundreds of ways to deal with anger—it is all individual—but let's give an example. If you have tremendous anger, you could try one of two options, basically, unless you are a special person. You can either get into it and smash something—it can be cups or saucers or anything—or you can say, "All right, face it and let it go."

What is the best way to let it go? Of course it depends upon the situation you are in and why you are angry, but most of the time somebody makes you angry, somebody irritates you and gets on your nerves and you get angry. One thing to do then is say to yourself, "Does this person honestly wish to make me angry?" It's unlikely. Out of a hundred people who irritate you, maybe only one person means it. You think of that person's circumstance, you think of that person's reason. That person is not just doing something—there is always a reason. He or she is going through many things, and all of these circumstances together made that person get on bad terms with you.

There are so many reasons lying behind it, and if you think about them, that makes you say, "Poor fellow," because of all those circumstances that the other person has to endure. You can see that he or she doesn't mean to make you angry, so you can develop some sense of compassion inside you, which makes you say, "Let him be the winner," and just let it go. Then tomorrow, you will find everything in your kitchen is fine, nothing is broken, no broken cups, no broken saucers. That is the practical way to deal with anger.

Of course, we have to practice when anger is not there, so we will be able to cope with it when anger arises. Even if you are totally disturbed by anger, there is still a chance for you to overcome that emotion if you can look at the anger itself, the emotion itself, honestly. In the situation of anger, a lot of excuses and self-brainwashing take place. When you're angry at a person, you are aware of that person's good part, but you always deny it. You close the curtain, you close the door and lock it, you give yourself no chance to see the good part of the person. It's very easy for someone to get carried away by anger. When some people get angry at their best friends, they say, "I will kill you!" They don't mean it, but they say it. But when you look at the anger and reduce it to its reality, that is an improvement; there will be no exaggeration. You will be able to see the good part of the person as well

as the bad part. That way it balances. Your anger is not totally gone, but you have reasonable anger, so it becomes not impossible, but possible to overcome it.

As a Buddhist, another way to deal with defilements is through meditation practice. In each meditation practice we generate loving kindness, we generate compassion, and we generate impartiality. We generate these things by saying them, praying, thinking about them—and that is directly dealing with and connecting with our own selves. Who is praying? Ourselves! And when we pray we think about what we say and we mean what we say. Those, then, are ways we can transform our negative defilements into their positive, ultimate essence. These are simply basic concepts to give you an immediate solution to any particular defilement you may encounter.

To summarize: the nature of mind is the essence, the essence of each of us, the ultimate of everything. Defilements are relative manifestations of it, unfortunately; but fortunately, the essence of those defilements happens to be wisdom. The entire practice of dharma, then, is for the purpose of awakening that ultimate nature, by transforming those defilements into wisdom, and so reaching the final destination of every sentient being. This is practiced with the basic motivation and method of mindfulness and awareness.

## **Part 2: Samsara as Nirvana**

I have discussed the nature of defilements as wisdom. That leads us to the nature of samsara as being nirvana. The direct way of dealing with this subject is to introduce some of the abhidharma principles.

As you know, the teachings of the Buddha were compiled into texts, and those texts are known as the Kangyur in Tibetan and as the Tripitaka in Sanskrit. The Tripitaka, a term common to Theravada, Mahayana, and Vajrayana, means 'three containers', and a lot of scholars call it the 'three baskets'. These 'three containers' are the vinaya, the sutra, and the abhidharma. The vinaya is simply about physical and verbal discipline. The sutras include stories and philosophy, and the Mahayana sutras tell about bodhisattvas, bodhichitta, and all those things.

Abhidharma is a Sanskrit term; when it is translated into Tibetan, we say, *chö ngönpa*. 'Chö' means 'dharma'—dharma here means anything that exists, anything the mind has a subject-object relationship with. That means whatever we hear,

whatever we see, whatever we can imagine—it's all dharma. 'Ngönpa' means 'just there', like the reality that is 'just there.' It is not hidden somewhere, it is not a kind of imagination; it is right there as sure as we are right here in this room.

In the abhidharma, the Buddha teaches about the mind, about emotion, about reality. He explains time, solid material, and the evolution of living beings, and he also explains the kleshas—the emotions. In the abhidharma it is said that this world, this solar system, is just a little spark of the entirety of existence. One solar system makes one small spark of space, but a thousand solar systems make one circle—we call it a 'first thousand'. A thousand of those make a thousand thousand—that makes a 'second thousand'. The galaxy makes a 'third thousand', and that is one group; that is a little dot in endless space. The abhidharma says that space is endless, and this endless space is filled with universes, filled with 'third thousands'. In that way, it immediately gives one the perspective of what is there, what we are involved with.

The abhidharma says that at this level there is no up, there is no down, there is no east, west, north, or south, there is no direction. There is direction, indeed, if we are relating with one particular planet of one particular solar system. But all of this is relative, even within the relative level. It is not only relative, but relative of relative. These things exist as interrelated, interdependent—not for real, just interdependently. Interdependent origination is categorized into twelve 'links', and I am sure most of you know about those twelve links as they relate to states of consciousness. But it doesn't end there; it also relates to the outside world. The principle of interdependence covers everything, in a relative sense.

This interdependent origination leads to a term that is widely used: emptiness. You say, "Everything is here, (knocks on table) and I can't go through the wall, and it hurts; it is real," and, "If I don't eat, I go hungry; it is not pleasant; it is real." It is true that everything exists here, everything works here, everything matters here—but only interdependently, not for real, only interdependently. This concept of interdependence, which leads to the understanding of emptiness, serves very well the concept of 'samsara as nirvana'. Relatively, everything happens—that is interdependence—but ultimately, it is emptiness, and the two do not contradict each other.

In the abhidharma, as one example, there is mention of a planet where human beings have only one leg. They don't walk, they jump. When people from that planet come here and see us walk, they laugh; they think it is very funny. If we were to go there and see

them jump, that would be very funny, too.

That is one way of looking at samsara as being nirvana, because relatively everything has happened, or is happening, and there is a lot that still will happen. Ultimately, however, nothing has happened, nothing is happening, and nothing will happen, and there is no contradiction here. There is nothing secret about it; one just has to be aware of it and be introduced to this concept.

Now another way of looking at samsara as being nirvana can be related to tantra or Vajrayana. This is more the destination of an individual's evolution, which is reached not just through understanding but through experience. The relation, on a deeper level, is between everything that is here, and mind, which relatively are two things. I can be dead, but my dead body will be here when I am dead. So, there are two things in a relative sense; mind and matter. There is a connection, but the study of it can give us only knowledge, not wisdom. The wisdom of it comes from experience.

At this point, we will use some of the Vajrayana terms. In basic Vajrayana terms, you will come across the words dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, nirmanakaya—the three kayas. You also will come across another set of terms; vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind. All of those terms express this concept.

Now, let us learn a little about the vajra body, because a body is solid—we see it. There is this physical body, and there is the universal body; and there is one more step, the sacred body—the inner body. I think you will understand better if I say chakras and nadis. The chakras and nadis, then, are the sacred, inner body. The universal body and this physical, personal body have not just a vague connection, but a direct connection; that is why there exists such knowledge as astrology, and why people can make astrological charts to show how it works. It is also very obvious why there is medicine. Why are there so many herbs and chemicals that can affect the physical body? It is because of this relation, because of this connection. The universe is our body, but bigger than our body, and the connection is there, so they have an effect.

Thus the outer, universal body affects this personal, physical body. This personal, physical body lives and survives through chakras and nadis, which are a network of energy channels that is directly connected with the mind. So the mind connects with the sacred body, and that connects with the physical, personal body, and that connects with the outer, universal body. The ultimate of these bodies—the universal,

the physical, and the sacred—is the mind. The word 'vajra' in the terms 'vajra body', 'vajra speech', and

'vajra mind' is Sanskrit, but when it is translated into Tibetan, it indicates the strongest, most powerful, unchangeable nature, and that is indicated by diamonds, thunderbolts, and other kinds of examples. 'Unchangeable' refers to the unchanged nature of body, speech, and mind. In the universal body there can be disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, a nuclear explosion (as in Japan), or a nuclear power station meltdown (as in Russia); anything can happen. But all of this is happening in the relative sense. Ultimately, it does not change anything, and so that is the vajra body of the universal body.

With the physical body, we can get sick, we can get cancer, or an incurable disease like AIDS—anything. All of these things can happen, but ultimately it does not change anything. Only relatively is it a big deal; it only affects things in a relative sense. The ultimate aspect of any of these natures, the part that cannot be touched, is the vajra body of that level.

When something goes wrong with the inner or sacred body—the chakras and the nadis—people can become mentally disturbed, people can become disabled. Many things can happen to people when this inner network gets mixed up. Anything can go wrong, but only in a relative sense. In an ultimate sense, nothing goes wrong. That is the vajra body of that sacred, subtle, inner body.

Next is the vajra speech. Here, speech relates directly to talking, but it does not end there. Everything that is a manifestation of mind and body is somehow covered by this concept of speech. If I suddenly cannot talk anymore, I might use sign language. Any expression that comes from someone is a relation between the body and the mind, so that is covered in the concept of speech.

Speech can be good, or speech can be bad. If this relationship between mind and body is good, then speech is good, and if this relationship between mind and body is not good, then you say everything is wrong. When you want to talk about the air conditioner, you will talk about the heater, and when you want to talk about the loudspeaker, you might talk about the floor. So that is speech. It can be negative, it can be positive, but in the ultimate sense, nothing changes. Then the essence of it, which always remains unchanged and unchangeable, is vajra speech.

Finally there is the vajra mind. In a relative sense, we can somehow feel the mind, but we cannot quite understand it. We just say, "I," or "my mind," and then

stop right there, with that concept of 'I' or 'my mind'. This develops into desire for favorable conditions and compliments, and anger toward things that hurt, things that somehow do not suit our idea of 'I'. Then, naturally, between these two there is ignorance and confusion, and then out of all this comes jealousy, pride, and everything else. That is the relative manifestation of the mind. But no matter what happens, it does not change the ultimate nature of the mind. That ultimate nature always remains as it is, and that is the vajra mind.

When we use the words dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya, that is what we are talking about. That unchangeable essence of the mind is dharmakaya; that unchangeable essence of speech is sambhogakaya; that unchangeable essence of body is nirmanakaya. Therefore, when we talk about the Buddha at this point, or nirvana, we are not talking about somebody disappearing into the air. This is a very important point, I feel. Otherwise, people don't quite understand what the Buddha is all about. A lot of people's concern about becoming a Buddha is that you just disappear. "There is nothing great about disappearing," they say; "I want to be here!" The realization of Buddhahood, or enlightenment, means the destination of body as nirmanakaya, the destination of speech as sambhogakaya, and the destination of mind as dharmakaya. It is the fully developed and awakened state of body, speech, and mind, which are all interrelated. If you have the realization of mind, you have the realization of everything else, which is just a manifestation of mind.

Enlightenment doesn't mean disappearing and becoming nothing; enlightenment is becoming everything; that's what it is. We use the word 'becoming', but that's not really the right word; it's more like awakening. The word for Buddha in Tibetan says it quite well: *sang-gye*. 'Sang' means 'awake', like when you get up in the morning and you are a little sleepy, and then you take a cold shower and you feel really awake. And 'gye' means 'fully developed', like a flower that's fully opened. That says it very well. It doesn't say, 'becoming nothing;' it says, 'fully awakened and fully developed'—becoming everything.

In this way, the essence of samsara is nirvana, because ultimately enlightenment, the enlightened state, the enlightened nature, is right here with us.

A lot of people talk about enlightened society, and that is not such an impossible thing, because we have enlightened nature. So many things are happening, however, in everybody's lives, in every society, even between societies, that it seems almost impossible to have an enlightened society.

It is only a matter of time. Anything that happens right now, in a relative sense, is happening because of all these interrelationships. In the ultimate sense, nothing is really happening. That is the point, that is the hope. If one person individually reaches this enlightened state of consciousness, the vajra body, vajra speech, and vajra mind, for that person, everything—all sounds, all expressions, whatever exists, even other people, even the land itself, even the world itself—everything becomes dharmakaya, sambhogakaya, and nirmanakaya.

A few of you must be familiar with this. In Tibetan Buddhism, we say all appearances are the image of the deity, all sounds are the sound of mantra, all thoughts are wisdom. This, then, indicates the nature of samsara as wisdom, in the Vajrayana terminology, which is taking one more step than the direct way of seeing it, the abhidharma way.

### **Part 3: Mahamudra**

I would like to talk briefly about Mahamudra. I have covered the subject of defilements being wisdom and samsara being nirvana by exploring the subject in several different ways. We did not explore the subject using Mahamudra terms and Mahamudra style, however, so I would like to say a few words regarding this.

The particular lineage we are following and practicing is the Mahamudra lineage. The word 'Mahamudra' is a Sanskrit term; in Tibetan it is *chak gya chen po*, which means 'the great gesture'. There are many ways to translate this term, but 'the great gesture' is the simplest way. This 'great gesture' means that everything in relative existence is a gesture of the ultimate: that explains the basic principle of Mahamudra.

The Mahamudra principle puts emphasis on practice. It's not that you are becoming something else. To be what you are, to relate properly to the things you are involved with, and to grow from this reality that you are already involved with—that is the general impression you should get from the term 'Mahamudra'. Instruction in Mahamudra is broken down into four categories or steps. It starts with one-pointedness, then it steps into non-complication. The third step is impartiality, or non-duality. The fourth step is beyond

meditation—there is no more meditation and there is no more practice. It is a gradual process.

One-pointedness means 'to be together'. The mind, the emotions, and the consciousness should be together, not scattered. When this togetherness develops, non-complication just happens. That's because when you are together you will be able to see the situation—or anything—exactly as it is; so it is not complicated. Once you develop this non-complication, it leads to non-duality, because non-duality is the essence of everything.

To put it simply, everything we are related to is interdependent with us as manifestations—manifestations of our actions, manifestations of our intentions, and the causes of our future manifestations of actions and intentions. There is an expression that says it well: "What you have done in the past you can know by seeing where you are right now; what you will be in the future you can know with certainty by seeing and knowing what you are doing right now."

That sort of interrelation brings us to the conclusion, which is very simple and very clear and very true, that it is all non-duality. It is not two things we are experiencing; we are experiencing our own manifestations. When we reach that stage and go beyond it, we have reached the destination, and so there is no more meditation.

It sounds quite easy—I can say it in a few minutes, you can hear it in a few minutes—but to really get something out of it, you have to live with it, so it will take time, definitely. In the ultimate sense it is not supposed to take any time, but to reach that state takes time. That is the Mahamudra way of looking at samsara as nirvana and defilements as wisdom. It also gives us a sort of step-by-step guidance. First we have to be together, our minds have to be able to concentrate and relate smoothly. That is the first step, and anything that is done to reach that stage is important to begin with. For example, there are the foundations of understanding the precious human life and all those things. Also, you have to develop, in general Buddhist terms, the shamata (tranquillity) and vipasyana (insight) meditation. That is the basic sort of training that you have to go through. That is our alphabet, that is our kindergarten—we have to carry those little bags and go to school.

If we have been to kindergarten already, we don't have to go again; but if we are beginners we have to go through that, I'm afraid. When we reach that stage of one-pointedness, then the second step—non-complication—happens almost spontaneously. Then that leads to the third stage, which leads to the final stage. And

for each one of those steps there are a number of methods of practice, which guide us in a gradual process.

In a particular text, which was written by the Ninth Karmapa, this gradual process of four steps is taught in 97 sessions—97 chapters of meditation instruction. In that way you complete the first step, then you go into the second step, and so forth; it's a gradual guide to lead people from where they are to their final destination.

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