

Looking Into The Nature of The Mind

(part 2)

by His Holiness the Sakya Trizin

The practice of looking into the nature of the mind is called “insight meditation”. The first requirement for practising insight meditation is that we should have stable concentration. Without concentration, we cannot practise insight meditation. We first need to practise concentration so that our mind is stable, without thoughts. Then, on the basis of this, we can build our practice of insight meditation.

There are three parts to insight meditation. The first part is to recognize the clarity of the mind. First we need to analyse this clarity a little bit. According to the Buddha’s teachings, there is no self. The aggregates of physical form and mental factors, mind and feelings and so forth, all together, all this we cling to as self. We cling to it as *I*. But where is this *I*? If there is an *I*, it has to be our name, our body, or our mind. But our name is empty, it’s something that was given to us, it could have been given to anybody else, anything else. So our name is empty, it is not the *I*. We say ‘my house’; the house is not *my*, the house is not *I*. We say ‘my car’, ‘my house’; there is a link, but the house is not *myself*. Similarly, when we say ‘my body, my hands, my feet’, the *I* is somewhere else, it’s not the body. If we try to find the *I* inside, outside, anywhere, we won’t find it. It is my body, but where



is the *my* itself? We can look in our head, our hands, our heart, but the *my* itself, where is the *my* itself? You cannot find anywhere the *I* or the *my*, so where is the real owner, the real *myself*?

The *I* is not the body. Is it then the mind? But

if we look at the mind, we see that it is changing at every moment. The past mind has already gone, the future mind has yet to arise, and the present mind has itself also already gone. The present mind is changing at every moment. And yet we say '*my mind*', in the same way that we say '*my house*'. The mind itself is not mine.

Myself is something else. We say 'it is *my mind* and it is *my body*, it is *my house*, it is *my car*', but the *my* itself, where is the *my* itself? We cannot find it anywhere. The *my* itself is neither body, nor name, nor mind, it is neither outside the mind, nor is it created by anybody else. We cannot find the *my* itself, the *myself*.

And then there are the phenomena that we perceive. They appear because of our very strong propensities. There is no solid reality in the outside objects that we see, in the sounds that we hear, in the foods that we taste. All these, our life, the visions or appearances that we experience, all this is not real. It is just due to our very strong propensities that these things appear, just like in a dream. In our dreams, we see many things. When we see nice things, we feel very happy, just like in real life. We can also see very fearful things in our dreams, and wake up frightened. Similarly, this life is like a dream. Outer objects don't really exist. There are no objects, no things, no phenomena behind the forms, sounds and tastes that we experience. There is no subject.

As for the mind, if it exists, where is it? Is it inside the body, outside the body, in between the body? Which part of the body contains the mind? If there is mind, it has to have a shape. What shape does the mind have? Round or square? Even if it did exist, it would have to have a shape and a colour, our mind would have to be white, yellow, or green or blue, or any other colour. But we cannot find any colour or any shape to the mind. It is just clarity.

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Clarity in the sense that we're not dead, or we're not unconscious. We are awake, we are alive, and there is a continuity of the mind. The clarity of the mind, the stream of the mind, continues, as we have continued from being a baby to becoming an adult, and will continue until we end this life. Also it has continued from our previous life, continues throughout this life, and will continue into our next life.

We could say that the continuity of clarity is one aspect of the mind. Each and every thing has special characteristics that distinguish it from other things. For example, the special characteristics of a flower are in that it has petals, a particular colour, a particular shape. This is what makes it a flower. It is different from other things, it is different from a microphone, or a table. Tables do not have petals, as the flower does; microphones don't have the same colour or shape as flowers do.

Similarly, the special characteristic of the mind is clarity, the continuity of clarity. We cannot say that the mind exists, nor can we say that it doesn't exist, because there is a mind. It is the mind that does everything. It is the mind that does right things, it is the mind that does wrong things. It is the stream,

the continuity of the clarity that is the special characteristic of the mind. So the first part is to recognize the clarity of the mind.

The second aspect of the mind is emptiness. We need to ask ourselves: where is this clarity? From where does it arise? Where is it going? In fact, it is emptiness, it is never arising, it is never residing, and it has no cause.

If it does reside, it has to reside inside the body, or outside the body, in between the body; it needs to have a particular shape or colour, but it does not. So the nature of the mind is void, it is emptiness. The void aspect is emptiness. Emptiness is another aspect of the mind. The nature of the mind is emptiness, and its special characteristic is clarity. Emptiness is inseparable from clarity. Clarity itself is emptiness. Emptiness itself is clarity. If you try to search for the mind, you cannot find it anywhere, in any shape, in any colour, in any part of your body, so it is emptiness. And yet there is a mind. You cannot say that there is no mind. If there is no mind, then who is it that thinks, that experiences the happiness, and the suffering?

And so you might say that mind is the combination of the two, clarity and emptiness. Clarity and emptiness are inseparable. Though clarity and emptiness seem contradictory, they are inseparable just like fire and its heat. You cannot separate fire from its heat. The fire itself is heat, the heat is the fire, they are inseparable. In the same way, clarity and emptiness are inseparable, and together they are the true nature of the mind.

The mind has three aspects. The clarity is one aspect, and emptiness is another aspect. The combination of these two aspects, their inseparability, is the true nature of the mind. And so, on the solid foundation of a very clear concentration, we try to meditate on clarity, emptiness and the combination of the two. We'll eventually find that there is no meditator, no method of meditation, no meditation itself. It is all beyond our present mental concepts; all the things that we see, all the things that we do, are at the relative level. Our mind itself is at the relative level. The relative level of the mind cannot comprehend the absolute. The absolute is away from

all extremes, for example the concept of existing and non-existing. Ordinary people do not even bother to find out what life is, why we are here, why we have to go through this life. They just take it as it is. But more intelligent people, different schools of thought, Buddhist schools, non Buddhist schools, conceive many, many different philosophies. Many different cultures and many different religions try to find out what this life is, what its

real meaning is, why we are here, how it all appeared. And they all come to different conclusions. They all have something to say: "life is like this, it is created in this way, or in that way, or the creator made it, or everything is mind, mental projections", and so on. In Buddhism, however, there is a philosophy that differs from the rest. Considered the highest school within Buddhist philosophy, Madhyamika was formulated by the great master Nagarjuna. The Lord Buddha himself, prophesied that after his mahaparinirvana, there would

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be a monk called Nagar, who would be able to explain the true philosophy, the true wisdom of the Buddha's teachings.

Nagarjuna's philosophy of Madhyamika is different from other schools, including Buddhist schools, in the sense that Nagarjuna does not offer a definition of the nature of reality. He divides reality into two aspects: the relative truth, and the absolute truth.

He describes how things are in both aspects. He looks at relative truth, where there are ordinary people, who lead an ordinary life, who experience the results of causes, who enjoy and who suffer. And then, when his very sharp reasoning examines what is this life, what are all these appearances, he differs from all the other schools in that he draws no conclusions.

For him, true reality, absolute truth, is beyond all description. It is beyond all extremes. We cannot say that anything exists or doesn't exist, or both exists and doesn't exist, or neither exists nor non-exists. All these considerations belong to ordinary reality, the relative level. On the absolute level, none of this applies. He doesn't deny the relative level, and does give

an analysis of its components. He accepts that there is interdependent origination, interdependent in the sense that everything arises due to causes and conditions. Nothing, not a single thing exists independently, without relying on causes and conditions. Each and everything must have its own causes and conditions in order to exist.

On the relative level, there is interdependent origination. If one single cause is missing, then the

object will not appear. Everything is dependent on causes and conditions. On the absolute level, there is void, emptiness. This is not meant in a nihilistic sense, but rather in the sense that it is away from all descriptions. On this level, we cannot say that things are like this, or like that; they are impossible to describe; they are beyond our current way of thinking, beyond this dualistic net that we are caught in. After meditating for a while, we begin to have an intellectual understanding of the true nature of reality and, through sustained concentration, we gradually attain more wisdom, until we eventually realise ultimate truth. And then we are completely free from all our karmic propensities and so forth. So how can this be achieved? How do we meditate to attain wisdom? This cannot happen straight away. It's

easy to say "ultimate truth is away from all extremes, it's beyond thought, and so on". But how do we actually experience this? In order to really do so, we as ordinary beings must go step by step.

The first step is that we must establish all outer appearances as mind. As we mentioned before, everything is mind. It is the mind that creates all the good things, the bad things,

happiness, suffering, everything. We must establish all outer appearances as mind. We see many quotations in the sutras and in the teachings of great masters that our current life, everything we experience, is our own mind. And how do we come to understand that our life is mind? There are many examples of how to realise this. One important example is that of the dream. In our dreams, we have many experiences and, while we're dreaming, it feels as real as this life. We can

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see colours, shapes, everything, and it can have an effect on our mind. If it is a happy dream, we enjoy it, and our mind is happy. Actually, there's no difference between our dreams and the life that we are living. It is we who experience the dreams, and it is we who experience this life. There is no difference between the dream and the present life. The only difference is that our normal life is influenced by very strong propensities while our dreams are not so strongly affected by them. But it's actually all the same. So the first step is to establish everything as mind.

So everything is mind, all that we see, hear, all that we taste, all that we feel, everything is mind. When our mind is happy, even if we're in the poorest of conditions, we feel happy. But if our mind is not happy, even if our circumstances are favourable, we don't feel happy. It is the mind that determines the way we feel. Similarly, a place can be a very happy place for one person, and a very unhappy one for another person. If it really exists outwardly, then it has to feel the same for everyone. If it's a happy place, then it must be so for everyone, and if it's an unhappy place, then it must also feel unhappy for everyone. But it's not that way. It feels different for everyone. Each person experiences it differently.

The second step in discovering ultimate truth is to establish all mental appearances as a magical show. Magicians use certain ingredients, or certain mantras to create a magical show, and they conjure up many

things. When we see these things, they feel as real as this life. In the same way, when the right causes and conditions all meet, mental appearances come up. If the slightest cause or condition is missing, then the mental appearance doesn't come up.

After meditating for a while, we begin to have an intellectual understanding of the true nature of reality and, through sustained concentration, we gradually attain more wisdom, until we eventually realise ultimate truth.

The third step is to establish that everything is devoid of self-nature, everything is interdependent. Due to these causes, due to these conditions, those things appear; but in reality, everything is beyond existing or non-existing.

And then we need to establish that everything is inexpressible. Things appear, we experience things, but it is impossible to describe why they appear, why we experience them. Just

like young babies when they laugh; they must have a reason to laugh, otherwise they wouldn't. And yet the reason for their laughter is indescribable.

So, to conclude, the true nature of mind has three aspects: clarity, emptiness, and the inseparability of the two. We have seen a few examples of each here, but there are many, many more. By remembering these examples and mixing them with our everyday life, we'll become more and more familiar with them, and wisdom will gradually arise in our mind. And it is through this wisdom and the merit accrued by our efforts that we achieve ultimate enlightenment.