

Chapter 3

An Explanation of the Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra

IV. THE DETAILED EXPLANATION

A. AN EXPLANATION OF THE MAHAYANA ABHIDHARMA SUTRA

We have now come to the fourth of the five major sections of the text and this detailed description will take up most of the treatise. This detailed explanation has five parts: (1) an explanation of the *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra* quotation, (2) the correct and incorrect concepts, (3) an explanation of Buddha-essence, (4) a refutation of the objections of others, and (5) a description of Buddha-essence through its qualities. In this chapter we will take up the first point which is a detailed explanation of the quotation from the *Mahayana Abhidharma Sutra* which is given in lines seven through ten. This detailed explanation deals with six terms used in the quotation. First the term “beginningless” is explained.

1. BEGINNINGLESS

15. *“Beginningless” means that*
16. *There is nothing previous to it.*
17. *The “time” is that very instant,*
18. *It hasn’t come from somewhere else.*

There are two aspects to the concept of “beginningless,” relative beginninglessness and ultimate beginninglessness. Relative beginninglessness is the teaching that beings have primordially always wandered in samsara without realizing their true nature and therefore remain in a state of delusion.

There are the teachings from the sutra tradition, from the

Madhyamaka (the Middle-way) school, and also the vajrayana tradition on ultimate beginningless. The meaning in these traditions is the same, but the method of explanation is different. In the Madhyamaka tradition, one consciously thinks, “This is what the relative is like, this is what the ultimate is like,” in analytical meditation. In this way, one gains the understanding through a process of analysis. In the mahamudra tradition of the vajrayana one follows what is called the direct path where, instead of relying on deduction, one relies on a direct insight into the actual nature of the mind with this nature of the ultimate being directly understood. The meaning is the same, but the approach is different.

The Madhyamaka can be divided into two views or schools: the Rangtong and the Shentong view. The Rangtong view makes a clear distinction between the sutra and the tantra tradition. In the Rangtong tradition one develops an understanding of emptiness by a careful, analytical analysis of phenomena. The school practices the tantric path by visualizing the yidam deity, the deities ornaments, the deity’s palace and the pure realm the deity resides in. One might then ask, “If the nature of phenomena is emptiness, why does one have to meditate on all these details of the deity?” There seems to be a problem in this Rangtong separation of the sutras and the tantras. In terms of meditating on the pure nature of the mind, there is the analysis which establishes emptiness. But this analytical analysis of emptiness does not seem to be related to the appearance, the manifestation, of the deities and their palaces, as expressions of wisdom.

So how can we join together the sutra and the tantra view? This can be done through the Shentong tradition in which the yidam deity becomes the natural embodiment of the pure nature, of the Buddha-essence. All these wisdom qualities are manifested as the body, the palace, the pure realm of the deity. Thus in the *creation stage* and also in terms of the *completion stage*, there is the resting in the true nature of the mind and in the Shentong view, there is the joining of the sutra and tantra tradition.

So Buddha-nature is the foundation for the appearance of the *yidam* deity, the deity’s palace, and so on. Although the essence of the true nature of the mind is emptiness, there is also clarity, and through this clarity there is the appearance of the yidam deity. We

can therefore transform impure appearances into pure appearances through meditation on the manifestation of the deity by means of the creation stage. In the completion stage, with the instructions of one's teacher, one gains the direct recognition or introduction to the true nature which is the basis for these manifestations of the yidam deity.

In the Shentong tradition, a definite understanding of the nature of the mind is gained through understanding Buddha-essence. In the Maha-mudra tradition, there is also an understanding of the true nature of the mind through the instructions on how to see the nature of the mind. So what difference is there between the Shentong and the Mahamudra? There is a difference in terms of the instructions. In the Shentong tradition, by reasoning one deduces that there is Buddha-essence and that this Buddha-nature, though empty, has its own natural luminosity or the qualities of clarity. In the mahamudra tradition, one receives meditation instructions from one's guru and through these instructions, one directly sees the nature of the mind; one sees that the mind has no reality of its own. One sees this emptiness; seeing that it's not just a material voidness, but that it also has the qualities of clarity. So one has this direct recognition of the nature of phenomena. In short, in the Shentong view, one gains this view of Buddha-essence through reasoning; whereas in the mahamudra tradition, one gains this understanding of the true nature of the mind through direct perception. Basically these two traditions are the same, whether they talk of the Buddha-nature or the true nature of the mind. With the mahamudra, this is a direct insight due to the meditation instructions of one's teacher, and with the Shentong view, it is through a process of reasoning, not a direct perception. Both traditions give rise to certainty, but the Shentong view is more an intellectual certainty.

The text explains things in terms of the *mahamudra* of the vajrayana. The second Sharmapa, Kacho Wangpo, taught that there is the present mind which has a clear state in which thoughts arise. The present mind with its clarity, therefore, is relative. So that aspect or appearance which is relative or deluded is just seen without attempting to change it in any way, leaving it as it is and that itself is the ultimate. Thus when the ultimate aspect and the relative aspect are not recognized, they seem to be different; but when they are recognized, there is no real difference between the two.

Lines 15 and 16 say the term beginningless is used meaning that there is nothing that has come before it. Lines 17 and 18 say “The time is this very instant” meaning that, in the very instant, there is the present mind whose essence is emptiness and whose nature is clarity. So when one recognizes this nature, that is the realization of ultimate beginningless. And from the expanse of the ultimate nature of the mind, there arises the relative. So it’s not that a deluded state is something different from the ultimate. This very instant of the mind itself has no beginning; it is not something that has come from far away or from somewhere else, it is beginningless. That is the ultimate explanation of what is meant by beginninglessness.

What is meant by ‘time’? Time is just that very instant, the very instant of arising. There is just that instant because time itself has no reality. The past time is merely a mental creation, a mental fabrication, and the future time is also merely a mental fabrication. So there is just this very fine subtle instant, the instant of the arising of appearances. The arising of relative appearances is something which has no real basis in terms of a perceiver and a perception because that instant of the arising of relative appearances is due simply to not having realized the true nature. Because it is an arising of appearances due to not realizing the true nature, there is nowhere for those appearances to go; they just vanish, they just disappear. Therefore, in terms of time, there is just that single instant of the arising of the relative appearances. There isn’t really a yesterday or a tomorrow or a today; they are just mental fabrications. Therefore there is this state of beginninglessness which is alluded to in line 15.

The last line says “It hasn’t come from somewhere else.” There is just that instant of relative appearances of these incidental obscurations which arise due to not having understood the true nature, and that is all. That instant of relative appearance of the incidental obscurations is not there due to something else, due to some previous cause and due to that previous cause something else happens and due to that, something else happens, and so on. These incidental obscurations and so on just arise in that instant due to not having understood the true nature. But in terms of the twelve phases of *interdependent origination*, ignorance gives rise to activity, which gives rise to consciousness, which gives rise to name and form, and so on; that is a description of the process that occurs on a relative

level. Also one has had previous lives, so one life leads to another life which leads to another life, and so on, and in that sense, there is a sequence of events. But this sequence also is just on the level of relative appearances. However, looking at it in terms of the ultimate level, these appearances arise purely because of not having understood the true nature, that the radiance or clarity of the true nature is not recognized, and in not recognizing it, there is this perception of relative appearances. Other than that, there is no cause. In terms of ultimate truth, there is just the one or two instants of the arising of relative appearances from the clarity of the dharmata of the true nature because of failing to recognize it.

If one searches for the source or origin of these appearances, one cannot find them; they just arise because we have not recognized the true nature. We can examine or analyze these appearances in terms of their arising, abiding and where they go. If we examine these appearances to find out from where they arise, we cannot find any place from whence they arise; if we look for the nature of this arising to see where or what it is, nothing can be found. Then if we examine them to try to see where they go to, there is nowhere that they go, they simply disappear. So in examining these things, they are found not to have any source, any location, nor anywhere they go. There is only this single arising in that instant of the relative appearance, so that they do not come from somewhere else, and for that reason, they are said to be beginningless. Although they are beginningless, they do have an end because these delusory appearances and obscurations cease when the true nature has been realized. So although beginningless, they have a conclusion.

2. THE ELEMENT

19. The "element" has no creator,

20. But is give in this name, because it remains it own characteristics.

“The element has no creator” refers to a beginningless element that is always present with us. So the first point was an explanation of beginningless, and the second point is an explanation of what is meant by element which here means Buddha-essence. One might ask, “Who created this element?” No one created it; it has no creator,

but it does possess its own qualities and characteristics. The knowledge of the Buddha, the love of the Buddha, the qualities of the Buddha's speech, the qualities of the Buddha's mind are all present in this element; they are all ready to manifest. The text condenses this thought into "element," but it means "the essence of the tathagatas" or "the essence of the sugatas" or the "essence of the buddhas." So the essence of the buddhas is this element which has within it all the qualities or characteristics of a buddha ready to manifest.

Then follows a description of the word 'element'. Element means the true nature, the Buddha-essence. Earlier, it was said Nagarjuna and Candrakirti taught on emptiness only. However, Nagarjuna wrote many different texts and treatises in relation to the three turnings of the wheel of the dharma. For the first turning of the dharma wheel he wrote on the nature of samsara—how samsara is without any essence, the law of karma, and so on. These teachings were in the form of letters or advice to a friend. For the second turning he wrote a collection of works on the methods of logical reasoning that established the Middle-way. The main text of this collection is *The Wisdom of the Middle-way*. For the third turning he wrote a collection of praises, for example, *Praise to the Dharmata* and *Praise to the True Nature*. In these, he says that all beings have this element and it is due to this element that beings can accomplish a result. He gives the analogy that if gold exists, then we can search for gold and eventually find it; but if gold does not exist, then no matter how much we search, we will not find any. Because this Buddha-essence exists, this element exists then beings can practice and attain the goal. They can reach enlightenment because all beings have the Buddha-essence.

This element has no creator; it is beginningless. As well as having no creator, it also is not part of the appearances that arise from oneself. It is not a part of worldly appearances being not a thing or substance. So its essence or nature is emptiness. However, it is not just a voidness because is an emptiness which is inseparable from the *dharmadhatu*, so it has the nature of clarity. This element is called a dhatu or an element because it possesses its own characteristics. It is different from all other things in that it possesses its own characteristics while being empty and not having any true reality, it

also has the nature of clarity. So the Buddha-essence has the characteristics of both emptiness and clarity, and also inseparability from the dharmadhatu, and for that reason it is called the element.

3. PHENOMENA: SAMBARA AND NIRVANA

21. *“Phenomena” are explained to be*
22. *Samsara and nirvana appearing as a duality.*
23. *This is named “the ground of the latencies of ignorance.”*
24. *The movement of mental events—correct and incorrect thoughts*
25. *Is the cause of that arising of samsara and nirvana.*
26. *The condition for their causes is taught to be the alaya.*

There are two kinds of phenomena—samsara and nirvana. The phenomena of samsara is a state of delusion in which the beings of samsara don't recognize their mind. The Tibetan word for samsara is *khorwa* which literally means “to go around and around” meaning beings in samsara sometimes experience happiness and sometimes suffering and are continually involved in birth, illness, aging, and death in an endless cycle. Samsara is the result of being in a state of the delusion of not recognizing one's own nature. When there is freedom from that delusion, the result is freedom from suffering and pain and one reaches a state of nirvana where there is the state of peace and bliss. But in actual fact, these two aspects of samsara and nirvana have no true reality; when there is a state of delusion, then samsara and nirvana appear to be two separate things.

Samsara and nirvana appear to be two separate states, but in actual fact, they are not separate. The basis for this dualistic appearance is called the “ground,” in which are the latencies (Skt. *vasana*) of ignorance. In the sutra tradition, particularly in the *Prajnaparamita* sutras, it is taught that all phenomena are empty. The *Heart* sutra says, “There are no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind.” In this way it is taught that everything is empty. In the shastra tradition emptiness is explained through reasoning. By using three main logical arguments, it is explained why there is no true nature to the eyes and why the eyes are by nature empty and why all phenomena being empty have no true nature. So the great masters such as Candrakirti (600 C.E.) set forth

logical arguments explaining why all phenomena have an empty nature. Nagarjuna also presented other lines of reasoning to explain why phenomena are empty by nature. Shantarakshita also set forth reasons explaining why all phenomena are empty by nature. Through hearing these logical arguments, one gains a conviction and certainty in the empty nature of phenomena.

Thus, through these commentaries or shastras, one gains the understanding that all phenomena are relative appearances, but that ultimately they are empty.ⁱⁱ It is taught that all appearances are empty. But this does not mean that they are void like empty space, like a vacuum, or, as they say in Tibetan, like a “dead emptiness.” It’s not like that. There are these pure and impure aspects, but there is the pure aspect which is Buddha-essence, which has the power of clarity and awareness. So Buddha-essence is present; it’s not just a void. The Buddha in his teachings, and Maitreya in the *Uttaratantra* taught how luminosity or clarity (Tib. *salwa*) of this Buddha-essence is present everywhere.

In the mahamudra, Buddha-essence is said not to be concealed or distant or remote. When we just look at our mind, we see various thoughts arise, but instead of following after these thoughts, we look directly at the mind to see from where this mind has arisen, what the source of this mind and these thoughts are. In mahamudra meditation we discover that the source of mind and thoughts cannot be found.

Then we look through our body from head to foot for the location of the mind and we cannot find it within the body, outside the body, or in between. That is because the mind and thoughts do not have any reality. There is no reality to dualistic appearances. Then, one might think, “Well, if that is so, does that mean that there’s just nothing at all?” No, there isn’t just voidness, because the mind has clarity and the ability to understand and know; clearly the mind is not just nothing.

The mind has this empty nature, but it also has the aspect of luminosityⁱⁱⁱ and an unceasing nature. Due to this power of the clarity of the mind, there are all the various appearances and things that can be known. Because the mind is directed outwards, through the power of the clarity and the unceasing appearances, the empty nature of the

mind is not recognized.

Since the empty essence of the mind is unceasing and clarity, the empty nature of the mind is forgotten. When this empty nature of the mind is forgotten, then this is called the “ground of the latencies of ignorance” because, it is this ground from which all delusions and delusory appearances arise.^{iv}

In the Kagyu tradition, the realizing or the “seeing” of the true nature of the mind is described in terms of seeing “*ordinary mind*” (Tib. *thamel gyi shepa*). “Ordinary” in this case doesn’t mean “common,” but it means mind without any contrivance, mind as it always was. One just looks at the nature of the mind without any thought of “I have realized something.”

Through mahamudra meditation there is direct recognition of ordinary mind. Without that direct recognition, there is the ground with all the latencies of ignorance. This means that, due to the presence of ignorance, all the delusory appearances gradually arise with correct and incorrect thoughts of conceptualization also arising. These arise like air from this ground.

So there is this very subtle movement of the wind of conceptualization.^v It is not an obvious movement of energy but a very subtle movement in this ground of ignorance. First there is this ground of ignorance, then within that there is the subtle movement of conceptualization which then creates the movement and instability of the mind.

With the recognition of this ground, all the wisdom, compassion and power of Buddhahood arises. When one does not recognize this ground, then there arises delusion. Thus, the ground of ignorance is like the root for both delusion and liberation and is therefore called the universal ground (Skt. *alaya*) in terms of its being the condition through which samsara arises.

Rangjung Dorje explains that due to not realizing the element, the Buddha-essence, there is samsara and due to realizing the element, there is nirvana. So by either realizing or not realizing, there is the arising of nirvana and samsara respectively, and this is what is meant by phenomena. So whether samsara and nirvana arises depends upon whether the element is realized or not. Therefore samsara and nirvana are the phenomena which appear as the duality.

In the line “the ground of the latencies of ignorance.” not understanding the Buddha-essence, is what is meant by this ignorance. The latency of ignorance is the tendency of the subtle ignorance to not understand the true nature. So there is the ground of the latencies of ignorance, and because of that, there are correct thoughts and incorrect thoughts, as is said in line twenty-four. Correct thoughts are those which do understand the true nature, and incorrect thoughts are those which do not understand the true nature. Both of these kinds of thoughts arise on the basis or the ground of the latencies of ignorance.

There is the movement of mental activities, of mental events (these correct or incorrect thoughts) on the basis of the ground of the latencies of ignorance. The mind is itself in a state of peace or stillness, and then this movement occurs due to the arising of these thoughts of mental events, like waves on water agitated by wind. So there is this movement, the causal condition of which is the universal ground, the alaya.

This is described by Milarepa in his song to the girl Paldarbum in the collection of the Kagyu songs, the *Rain of Wisdom*. Paldarbum asks how she should meditate on the nature of the mind when thoughts arise, and Milarepa says: “When you are able to meditate on the nature of the mind, when thoughts arise, these thoughts should be seen as being a manifestation of the mind.” So once she has gained a definite understanding of the nature of the mind and definite understanding of the arising of these thoughts, once she has understood them to be just manifestations from the mind, these thoughts themselves then can become pacified so that the nature of the mind can be seen dearly and clarity is established. So in lines 24 and 25 where the text says, “The movement of mental events, correct and incorrect thoughts, is the cause of the arising of samsara and nirvana,” it’s the same thing that Milarepa is saying when he says that the thoughts are the manifestations arising from the mind.^{vi}

4. THE LOCATION OF BUDDHA NATURE

27. “The location” is the Buddha-essence.^{vii}

28. Incorrect conceptualization

29. Is completely located within the mind's purity

The ground or alaya consciousness is the location or the basis for all samsara and nirvana. The basis or location for all of this is called “the essence of the jinas” in the text and is another term for “the essence of the sugatas” or “the essence of the tathagatas.” So everything is located within Buddha-essence.

So there is Buddha-essence and also there is this conceptualization which is incorrect. Where does this incorrect conceptualization have its basis? This incorrect conceptualization is itself based upon Buddha-essence; there is nowhere else that it can be based on.

There was a great Gelugpa scholar, Changcha Rolpe Dorje, who taught meditation in terms of finding his mother. He described how, as a small child, he was sitting in his mother's lap and was looking for his mother. He looked in all directions, but couldn't see his mother anywhere. Eventually his elder brother said, “Your mother's right there.” He looked back up and there was his mother because he had been sitting in her lap all the time. In the same way, we are in the expanse of the *dharmata*, the true nature of phenomena; we are looking at all of the delusions, we're looking for this true nature everywhere. But if we just look inwards, even with all the deluded thoughts, it will be there because we are within that true nature. There's nowhere else that we can be.

5. THE NATURE OF SAMBARA

30. That very purity exists now.

31. It exists, but due to ignorance conceptualization

32. Is not seen, therefore there is samsara.

In regard to Buddha-essence in the present, we might ask, “Does this Buddha-essence undergo any change or transformation?” It does not undergo any change; it is pure and it always remains in that state of purity. But, due to all the delusions arising from our ignorance, we are not able to see that pure nature. So it is present, but we are unable to see it.

In the previous example of gold, even though gold lying

beneath the ground for thousands of years, it undergoes no change. It always remains gold, but it can't be seen because it's obscured by the ground. In the same way, Buddha-essence undergoes no change and always remains pure but, due to the conceptualization arising from ignorance, it is obscured and we are unable to see it. So that is the nature of samsara.

6. THE END OF SAMBARA

33. If they are dispelled, there is nirvana,

34. And this is termed "the end."

When ignorance is dispelled, samsara comes to an end. It is said in Gampopa's *Jewel Ornament of Liberation* that Buddha-essence is all pervasive; it's like the sesame oil within sesame seeds or like butter in milk or like silver in silver ore. Buddha-essence is present but, unless one pounds the sesame seeds, one won't get any oil; without churning the milk, one won't get any butter; without melting the ore, one won't get any silver. So one has to pound, churn, or grind to get to the useful substance of sesame oil, milk, or silver respectively. In the same way, one must act on samsara to bring it to an end.

While in the state of ignorance, we have a limited amount of understanding and wisdom. When ignorance is dispelled, we develop wisdom, compassion, and other enlightened qualities. With this wisdom we are able to encounter Buddha-essence directly, causing ignorance to be dispelled and to let limitless wisdom, love, compassion, and understanding to shine through. This wisdom is not mixed with pride and anger; but is mixed with a supreme love and compassion for beings. Ordinary love and compassion is compared to a mother with no arms who sees her only child being carried away by a river and cannot do anything to save her child. But the compassion developed from directly seeing Buddha-essence is not like this helpless kind of compassion; it is a compassion that has power. Therefore when there is the direct meeting with Buddha-essence, there is the wisdom and compassion and power which is the end of samsara.

So when ignorance is dispelled, then there is the end, the state of nirvana. Ignorance is said to be beginningless, but it does

have an end with the realization of the true nature. But ignorance isn't something that really does have an end because the delusory appearances, the incidental obscurations, never had any real existence. Not having any reality, there isn't really something that is ending. And as for the wisdom which is one's nature, the primordial nature, that also never ends. So there isn't ultimately an end, but in terms of relative appearances, there is an end. There is a beginningless state that ends and so, for that reason, the term "end" is used.

These were the six points making up the section explaining the quotation from the sutras.

Questions

Question: You said that Buddha-essence is empty, that it has clarity and awareness, and that when emptiness is somehow forgotten, that is what causes the universal ground to come into existence. Can you say more about it?

Rinpoche: If one looks at the mind, there is clarity and one cannot find the mind. But normally, one does not recognize that, because one is looking outwards towards all the different appearances. When the mind is directed to all these appearances, these become clearer, more vivid, so that there are more and more thoughts. It's like when we're dreaming which first begins with some thoughts arising, then after that, we see all sorts of appearances. Things in the dream become stronger, so we see horses and elephants, and these strong experiences occur. These experiences come from thoughts arising in the mind, and then these thoughts manifest so they appear as concrete images outside us. That's what happens when we are dreaming. When Buddha-essence or the true nature of the mind is not considered, then these manifestations as appearances become stronger and coarser causing more delusions and conceptualizations.

Question: So should we direct our mind to that very moment and does that very moment contain Buddha-essence? If we are able to rest upon that very moment, we could unfold our Buddha-essence?

Rinpoche: In the sutra tradition one uses the process of deduction and analysis to arrive at the understanding of emptiness. It is said that Buddha-essence by nature is empty, that it is the inseparability

of space and wisdom. This means Buddha-essence is empty by nature and doesn't exist as anything material. Even so, there is still the ultimate wisdom and compassion for beings. Even though Buddha-essence has no solid reality, still there is this wisdom and compassion. So in the sutra teachings this is proved through deduction and analysis. In the vajrayana tradition we do not use analysis, but look directly at Buddha-essence to gain the understanding of it.

Question: If we are able to rest our mind without movement in meditation, how does that unfold our Buddha-essence?

Rinpoche: It's not just resting the mind without movement. The difference is that one rests the mind without movement but, as well as that, one needs to look at the nature of the mind. One needs to see the empty nature of the mind and its characteristic of luminosity. This is something which is inexpressible in words, so one directly looks at it. Many of the sutras of the Prajnaparamita literature and also many of the spiritual songs of the great *mahasiddhas* such as Saraha state that this cannot be expressed in words or thoughts. It is said to be like a mute person who tastes molasses; so he experiences the sweet taste, but if someone asks him what it is like, he can't say anything because he can't speak. One looks at the nature and sees it as being beyond expression in words.

Question: Could you say more about the expression "samsara and nirvana are not far away."

Rinpoche: Generally, it seems that samsara and nirvana are very separate from each other, in that to reach nirvana we have to accumulate a great deal of merit and to apply ourselves to the path. In the sutra tradition, it is said that we have to gather merit for three eons lasting millions of years before we can reach liberation. So it sounds as if nirvana is very far away. But in the vajrayana, we work with the direct recognition of the nature of the mind. If there is the recognition of the true nature of the mind, then there is no ignorance and we achieve liberation. So in the vajrayana, samsara and nirvana are not far apart from each other.

From the beginning, we have been in a state of delusion and ignorance. But the nature of the mind is emptiness and the mind has the characteristic of luminosity. So if we look at the nature of the mind, we will see its emptiness and its clarity. This has not been

newly created; it is always there, but we need to have the direct recognition of it. It's not that we have to meditate on something which is not empty to make it empty, or something which has no luminosity so we can make it have luminosity. The nature of the mind is this emptiness and has the characteristic of clarity. All we have to do is directly see the nature of the mind. So this is the special method used in the vajrayana.

In the sutra tradition there is the analysis of external phenomena to prove that it is empty with a set of logical proofs so that one then has the conceptual conviction of the emptiness of phenomena. But when one looks directly into the mind, one sees the emptiness of the mind. One sees that there is no shape, no color, no form to the mind and that there is no mind to be found. So when thoughts or feelings such as anger arise, one normally does not examine them and they are not recognized. If anger arises and is unexamined, then it feels very sharp, very strong, and powerful. But if one examines it and thinks, "Where is this anger? What is this anger? Where has it come from?" One does not end up saying, "Ah, here it is. This is the anger," or, "The anger is outside me, just over there," or, "I found the anger in my head." One will not find the anger anywhere because the nature of the anger is emptiness. One has to look at anger directly in order to have the recognition of the very nature of this anger. This is called the direct path because something is directly known or directly seen, not worked out through deduction.

Question: You described the characteristic of clarity. Is it an aspect of Buddha-essence?

Rinpoche: When we translate the Tibetan word *salwa* as "clarity" or "luminosity" in English, it may sound like something very intense, such as a bright electric light. But it's not like that. It means that when you look into the mind, you cannot find anything, yet this does not mean that the mind stops so that you become like a corpse. There is still the presence of a kind of awareness; one can still understand, one can still see things, and so on. This continues, so there isn't just a blankness. In relative terms, this is called clarity, and then, as this clarity increases, it can become the wisdom of the Buddha, the wisdom that knows all the nature of things and the wisdom that knows all the variety of appearances. So this clarity can develop into

that wisdom.

Question: Rinpoche, you said that the mind is not seen, the mind cannot see the mind. But on the other hand, yesterday you said that the mind arises. I am confused.

Rinpoche: We must look at the *relative level* and the *ultimate level* of reality. When we speak of the mind not being able to see the mind or that the nature of the mind is emptiness, we are talking about a teaching on Buddha-essence, which is an ultimate teaching. Then when our attention is directed externally, there is the mind there. Thoughts arise in the mind; sometimes there is desire, sometimes there is anger, so at those times, there is the mind. So, on a relative level, there is the mind, but on the ultimate level, its nature is emptiness. We could say it is “mind as it appears” (relative level) and “mind as it really is” (ultimate level).

Question: Rinpoche, you said that the mind is directed outwards and that is the reason why mind does not perceive the true nature of mind. Could you clarify this?

Rinpoche: That explanation is based on one’s experience. In one’s experience of samsara, the mind is focused outwards on the perceptions of form, taste, sound, smell, and touch, and so thoughts are directed or focused outwards and one becomes involved with those thoughts without turning inwards and looking to see who is experiencing these appearances, who is thinking. Instead of the mind being focused inwards on who is experiencing or thinking, the mind is focused outwards and becomes engaged with those thoughts.

Question: When you say that the mind should focus inwards, that sounds dualistic. By focusing inwards, does he mean self-awareness?

Rinpoche: There is what is called self-knowing wisdom in which the mind sees itself in meditation. But Candrakirti, in *Entering the Middle-way* and Shantideva in the wisdom chapter of the *Way of the Bodhisattva* say that the mind cannot see itself. Basically they refute the Cittamatra view; they say that the mind is unable to see itself. Therefore some people then have a doubt about that in meditation, saying: “One can’t do a meditation in which the mind is supposed to see itself because it is not possible for the mind to see its own nature.” But if the mind were a thing, then it would not be able to see itself. But because the mind has no reality, then that can be known, and when that is known then the mind is seeing its own true nature; it

is “self-knowing.” This term, self-knowing, (Skt. *svasamvitti*, Tib. *rang rig*) can be used in different ways. In the Pramana, in the teachings of epistemology and logic, this term is used in a specific way in the context of direct perception; when there is direct knowledge through the perception of the senses, there is also this direct knowledge of self-knowing, which is purely a description of the fact that we know what we see or we know what we think. That is what is referred to in the Pramana teachings as self-knowing. But that is not the same thing that is being denied by *Entering the Middle-way* or the wisdom chapter of the *Way of the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*. There what is being denied is the mind as being a real entity, some kind of thing which is yet able to see itself and know itself. When they say that the mind is not able to know its unreal nature, is not able to see its empty nature and its clarity, that is something else again. And that is what is meant by this turning inwards.

In the sutras it is described as being something beyond words and thought. We can just describe the true nature of the mind by saying: “It has no true reality but it has clarity” and so on. But it cannot be fully described in words and it can’t be fully understood through analysis or reasoning. We can analyze it thinking: “There’s no place from which it came, there’s no cessation, and it has no real nature, it’s empty” and so on. We can understand it through reasoning, but still this true nature is beyond that. It is like the field of perception of the individual self-knowing wisdom which one gains through a direct experience in meditation and that is why it is just the field of perception for that, and not for ordinary words or thought.

Question: Rinpoche, you said that at the ultimate level, things arise because we do not recognize the true nature. Does that mean that if we recognize the true nature, nothing would arise?

Rinpoche: In terms of the path that one follows, there are five paths. First there is the path of accumulation where one is accumulating merit and wisdom. Second there is the path of application where one is practicing meditation. Third there is the path of vision, the first level of the bodhisattvas, where, due to the previous two paths, one gains the vision of the true nature of phenomena; one sees the true nature of phenomena but one still has these latencies of tendencies.

Although one sees the true nature of phenomena, the relative appearances still arise from the latencies that one has. This means that sometimes in meditation these appearances do not arise, but afterwards, in the postmeditation stage, one does experience these relative appearances. Because of this, one must then follow the fourth path, the path of meditation, in which one gradually habituates oneself to the vision of the true nature of phenomena. Finally, having done that, one reaches the fifth path where there are no longer any latencies; these relative delusory appearances no longer arise. Nevertheless one has the wisdom of being able to see all of the impure appearances that are arising to other beings. So one can perceive the appearances which other beings experience, and therefore one has compassion without an object. Along with this objectless or nondualistic compassion for beings, one also has activity to benefit beings for as long as there is samsara.

In the *Uttaratantra* there is first the description of Buddhahood, then of the qualities of Buddhahood and then of buddha activity which is permanent and continuous, and spontaneous. Because of having wisdom and compassion without reference point, there is the continuous unceasing activity of a buddha.

Question: If the correct thoughts and incorrect thoughts both come from a subtle ignorance, how does learning help us? Is learning a kind of strengthening the correct thoughts in regards to the true nature of our mind?

Rinpoche: Both correct and incorrect thoughts are within dualistic appearances. But studying and developing the correct thoughts, will eventually transform our ignorance into an understanding of the true nature. Correct and incorrect thoughts are still dualistic, so that they are the cause of the movement of mental events.

iRelative (Tib. *kunzop*) here refers to conventionally perceived reality in which an object or person appears to be solid and real Ultimate (Tib. *dondom*) refers to ultimate reality which is that in essence all objects are empty of any inherent nature.

Using a more familiar Western example of conventional and ultimate reality, we can say water has the relative reality of being

solid and cold (as in ice), wet and fluid (as in water), and hot and gaseous (as in steam). These are the outer appearances of the object and everyone will agree with us that ice is cold and hard, for example, and we can use this conventional reality in solving, for example, chemistry problems.

However, on the ultimate level water's true nature is neither a solid, liquid, or gas but more like two hydrogen atoms combined with one oxygen atom. When we understand this ultimate nature, then we can describe and understand all the relative appearances of water and not be fooled by them.

ii When we say that external objects are "empty" we do not mean "empty" when we talk about say an empty glass which has no water in it. By "empty" we mean "empty of inherent nature" which is different because objects such as walls and doors are there and we can walk into them and hurt ourselves.

By empty of inherent nature we mean something more like when we have a brick in front of us our mind sees a solid red object and all our friends will agree with us that it is indeed red, square, and hard. However, if we examine the brick closely with the help of science we discover the brick is not uniform but is made up of atoms of silicon, oxygen, hydrogen, etc. and that these atoms are moving at thousands of miles an hour with literally millions of atoms flying off the brick into the air every second. The radiation given off by these atoms makes us see "red" and this is seen as red only by human eyes. The atoms are also so far apart that the brick is 99.99% empty space.

So "empty of inherent nature" means the characteristics our mind puts onto all the objects in our world (what we have been calling phenomena) are not real, so we say they are empty.

Thrangun Rinpoche often points out that great meditators who have completely realized the nature of emptiness through their meditation such as Milarepa can put their hand through solid rocks with no problem. In fact in Tibet there is a rock with a huge hole in it that His Holiness the 17th Karmapa put his hand through just a few years ago.

iii The mind is empty of inherent nature in that it is not a solid object which can be found like a rock. Rather it is empty which allows all kinds of thoughts, feelings, and images to manifest in it. However,

the mind is not empty like an empty glass, because it has a feature of *salwa* of “luminosity” which is often translated also as “clarity” or “luminous clarity.” This is the quality of intelligence or awareness that the mind possesses or even though we can’t find a solid mind or find a location for this mind, we clearly have this uninterrupted awareness of intelligence.

iv These latencies are called *chakpa* in Tibetan. In the Cittamatra school of mahayana Madhyamaka Buddhism the mind is made up of eight consciousnesses. The eighth consciousness, the alaya consciousness, stores all the events that take place in the mind. So it becomes a kind of storehouse of karma. With unenlightened persons the alaya consciousness stores external phenomena as really existing and this creates latencies that lead one to believing in the delusion that everything is solid and real.

With enlightened beings the true nature of phenomena is realized and so these latencies stored phenomena as they really are or as objects empty of inherent existence and this, of course, leads to seeing the world without delusion.

v In Tibetan medicine and psychology there are subtle channels called *tsa* which are not anatomical like meridians in acupuncture. Energies flow through these channels and thoughts are also considered movements of these energies. Thrangu Rinpoche says that proper posture in Shamatha meditation, for example, leads to straightening these channels so the energies can flow better and produce better meditation.

vi This is explained by Thrangu Rinpoche in his *Ten Teachings of Milarepa* and the passage is:

vii In this verse Buddha-nature is actually called *rgyal ba'i snying po* or “The essence of the Jinas” where a Jina is a “victorious one.” This is another word for Buddha-nature so we use Buddha-nature here.