

GESHE KELSANG GYATSO

*How to
Understand
the Mind*

THE NATURE AND POWER
OF THE MIND



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Introduction

We should know that in recent years our understanding and control of the external world have increased considerably and as a result we have witnessed remarkable material progress, but there has not been a corresponding increase in human happiness. There is no less suffering in the world today, and there are no fewer problems. Indeed, it might be said that there are now more problems and greater unhappiness than ever before. This shows that the cause of happiness and the solution to our problems do not lie in knowledge or control of the external world. Happiness and suffering are feelings – parts of our mind – and so their main causes are not to be found outside the mind. If we really want to be truly happy and free from suffering we must improve our understanding of the mind.

When things go wrong in our life and we encounter difficult situations, we tend to regard the situation itself as the problem, but in reality whatever problems we experience come from our mind. If we were to respond to difficult external situations with a positive or peaceful mind they would not be problems for us; indeed we may even come to regard them as challenges or opportunities for the growth and development of our happiness. Problems arise only if we respond to difficult external situations with a negative state of mind. Therefore, if we really want to be free from problems we must learn to control our mind by controlling our desire.

By controlling our desire we can make ourself happy all the time. This is because uncontrolled desire is the source of all suffering and problems. We have strong attachment to the fulfilment of our own desires, and because of our uncontrolled desire we human beings create so many problems and dangers in the world. We experience so many problems because we are unable to control our desire. By controlling our desire we can be free from all problems.

The instructions presented in this book are methods for controlling our mind, such as our attachment to the fulfilment of our own wishes. Especially, through studying and practising the different subjects and topics presented in this book, we can improve ourself and advance from the state of an ignorant lower being to that of a higher and higher being and finally to the highest state, that of an enlightened being. We human beings have this opportunity, and it is this that makes our life very precious and meaningful. Animals such as dogs do not have this opportunity, no matter how intelligent they are. We should recognize how fortunate we are and rejoice in our good fortune.

Geshe Kelsang Gyatso
June 4th 2013

PART ONE



Follow the path to enlightenment



What is Our Mind?

We often say, 'My mind, my mind', but if someone were to ask us, 'What is your mind', we would have no correct answer. This is because we do not understand the nature and function of the mind correctly. The nature of the mind is clarity, which means it is something that is empty like space, always lacking form, shape and colour. The mind is not actual space because produced space possesses shape and colour. During the day it can be light and during the night it can be dark, but mind never possesses shape and colour.

As I said, the mind is empty, but we should not say the mind is emptiness. What is the difference between empty and emptiness? In Buddhism, emptiness has great meaning. It is the real nature of things and is a very profound and meaningful object. If we realize emptiness directly we will attain permanent liberation from all the sufferings of this life and countless future lives; there is no greater meaning than this. So emptiness is a very meaningful object, but an empty is just empty – it has no special meaning. Therefore, we have to say that the mind is empty, which means it always lacks form, shape and colour; and we have to say that space is empty, which means it lacks obstructive contact. When we say, 'My purse is empty', this means there is no money inside it. Through this we understand that different empties have different meanings.

The function of the mind is to perceive or understand objects. We normally say, 'I see such and such'; this is because our mind sees that object. Because our mind understands

things we say, 'I understand.' So our perception and understanding are functions of our mind; without mind we are powerless to perceive and understand objects.

Also, one of the main functions of the mind is imputing things. Without names things cannot exist. A name is imputed by mind thinking, 'This is this.' So things exist only because mind imputes them. Through this we can understand that everything including the world is created by mind. There is no creator other than the mind. This truth is not difficult to understand if we check it carefully.

In conclusion, the definition of the mind is something whose nature is empty like space, always lacking form, shape and colour, and whose function is to perceive or understand objects. Through understanding the nature and function of the mind correctly, we can understand that our mind is completely different from our body, and this proves that after our death although our body will cease the mind will not. The mind leaves the body and goes to the next life like a bird leaving one nest and moving to another. Or, for example, during sleep when we are dreaming our body is as if dead, and our mind leaves the body and goes to the dream world experiencing a dream life, which is a new life. Through contemplating this alone we can understand clearly the existence of our future lives.

How the Mind is Able to Move

Our mind is like a person who possesses eyes but no legs, and so can see things but cannot move from one place to another by himself. In the same way our mind can see objects but cannot move from one object to another by itself. It can move from one object to another only through the force of a mount. The mount for the mind is the inner winds. Inner winds are the subtle winds associated with the mind, and flow through the channels of the body. It is said that there is nothing quicker than the mind. For example, our mind can reach the moon in an instant by thinking of the moon, but without inner winds this is impossible. A detailed explanation about inner winds can be found in Appendix IV of *Modern Buddhism*.



Cut the root of suffering



The Gross, Subtle and Very Subtle Minds

From the point of view of its different levels, the mind is divided into three: gross, subtle and very subtle.

THE GROSS MIND

During our waking life we normally use gross minds such as our eye awareness through which we can see things, ear awareness through which we can hear sounds, nose awareness through which we can smell, tongue awareness through which we can taste, body awareness through which we can experience tactile objects, and mental awareness through which we strongly think 'I' and 'mine'. These awarenesses are gross minds because they are relatively easy to recognize. Without these awarenesses we cannot communicate with others and we cannot perform our daily activities. However, these awarenesses are mistaken awarenesses. They perceive inherently existent objects, which do not exist, and therefore they cause us to experience suffering. For example, when our mental awareness thinks 'I' or 'me' through perceiving either our body or mind, we mistakenly perceive our body or mind to be our self. This is a hallucination, and because of this when our body is sick we think 'I am sick', when our body is old we think 'I am old', and when our mind experiences suffering or pain we think 'I am suffering' or 'I am in pain.' Because of this hallucination we experience suffering and problems throughout our life and in life after life without end.

This is our normal, painful situation. Understanding this we should develop renunciation, the sincere wish to liberate ourself permanently from this hallucination by realizing the true nature of things, the emptiness of all phenomena.

THE SUBTLE MIND

During sleep while we are dreaming we use subtle minds such as our dream eye awareness, ear awareness, nose awareness, tongue awareness, body awareness and mental awareness, through which we experience the appearance of various kinds of dream things. All these appearances are mistaken appearances. In the same way that all our waking appearances are mistaken appearances, Buddha says, 'You should know all phenomena are like dreams.' Dream awarenesses are called subtle minds because they are difficult to recognize.

Because the appearances in our dreams and during our waking life are all mistaken appearances and hallucinations, our normal activities both in dreams and while we are awake have no real meaning. So we should think, 'What is the real meaning of our human life?'

THE VERY SUBTLE MIND

The very subtle mind is so called because it is extremely difficult to recognize. Without the very subtle mind we would have no life because our gross and subtle minds cannot hold our life. This is because they are only temporary minds, and very unstable. They suddenly arise and quickly disappear like clouds in the sky. Therefore only our very subtle mind holds our life continuously throughout the day and night, and in life after life until we become an enlightened Buddha. When we become a Buddha our very subtle mind will

become a Buddha's mind and our very subtle inner wind will become a Buddha's body. Our very subtle mind, or 'continuously residing mind', is therefore our Buddha nature. Since our very subtle inner wind, or 'continuously residing body', will never die we have a deathless body that is our own body. In truth, our present body is a part of our parents' bodies, and so it belongs to our parents and not to us.

Our very subtle mind – our Buddha nature – is very precious, like a priceless jewel, but we cannot recognize it unless we engage in special methods for recognizing it that Buddha explained in his Highest Yoga Tantra teachings. These special methods are the meditations on the central channel, indestructible drop, and indestructible wind and mind. Through these meditations we can gather and dissolve our inner winds into the central channel. When all our inner winds completely dissolve into the central channel through the force of meditation, all our gross and subtle minds will also dissolve and our very subtle mind will naturally manifest. We will then be able to recognize it through our own experience. When our very subtle mind manifests through the inner winds dissolving into the central channel, this manifest very subtle mind is called 'clear light'. It is so called because it is a clear perception and an inner light. Thus, whenever our very subtle mind manifests it is clear light. Normally, for ordinary beings, the very subtle mind manifests only during deep sleep and at the end of the death process, but Highest Yoga Tantra practitioners can manifest their very subtle mind during meditation by dissolving inner winds into the central channel through the force of meditation; this is the clear light of realization. There are three different clear lights: the clear light of sleep, the clear light of death and the clear light of realization.

When we are in deep sleep our gross and subtle inner winds and minds naturally dissolve into the central channel,

and as a result our very subtle mind manifests. This manifest very subtle mind is the clear light of sleep. However, normally we cannot recognize it because during deep sleep our memory is unable to function.

At the time of our death, when we experience the death process, our inner winds naturally dissolve into the central channel. First our gross minds will dissolve and cease, and only the subtle mind remains. Then our mind becomes more and more subtle until finally, when all inner winds have completely dissolved into the central channel, our very subtle mind will manifest. This manifest very subtle mind is the clear light of death. Its nature is great bliss, it is extremely peaceful; and it perceives only emptiness, the mere absence of all phenomena. Normally we cannot recognize it because at that time our memory cannot function.