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Five Questions about the Mind

Extracted at the end of a weekend's teaching.

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In the tradition, we have five basic questions about the mind which allow us to get close to some of the assumptions we might have about ourselves.

The five questions are:

Does the mind come from anywhere?

Does the mind stay anywhere?

Does the mind go anywhere?

Does the mind have any shape and colour?

Does the mind have any size or dimension?

Pretty much everything in the universe can be fitted into these five questions. This room has come from somewhere. Eventually this room will go somewhere. This thing will get knocked out. For a while it's here in Hackney. The room has a size, a shape. The camera has a size and a shape. The people in the room have their own size and shape. So we use these attributional identifications as a way of determining the presence or the fact of some thing's existence. A car – white, red or black – has to be some colour. People look healthy or not, they're tall or small. The garden looks well cared for or not cared for. **We're always putting attributions onto phenomena.**

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When we look at our mind, does it have a shape? Does it have a colour? Is the mind a circle? A square? Is it red? Is it blue? Is it something with attributes that bring it into the field of other phenomena with attributes? That is to say **can the mind be compared and contrasted?**

We often have a sense that feelings have a colour. We could say that red can be associated either with intense sexual desire or with anger. Jealousy might have a green tone. These are conventional associations, but we get used to them. But does our mind have any colour? You might have a mood, a brown, grey or black, yellow or bright mood. There are many different ways of thinking about moods. But moods come and go in the mind. These are patterns of the energy of the movement of the mind. But **does the mind itself have a shape or colour?**

Does it have a size or dimension? Most especially, is it small? Does it fit inside my body? Is the mind inside me? My mind is looking out through my sense organs. Maybe my body is inside my mind. Maybe the room is inside my mind. Maybe England is inside my mind. Maybe the world, the universe is all inside the mind. How big is the mind? How small is the mind? Does it have a definite size? Maybe sometimes it's big and sometimes it's small. These are very important questions.

Usually we don't look. We learn something in school, neuro-psychology and neuroscience look at the brain, the amygdala. On the basis of this received knowledge, we build up patterns and use it to interpret. But here we are not talking about patterning of concepts.

We're talking about direct access to our mind. If we don't have a mind, we're dead.

Everything is revealed through the clarity of the mind, so what is this mind? **Does our mind come from anywhere?** We have a thought. We didn't have that thought before. Now we have that thought. Now that thought is going. So thoughts clearly come and stay and go. Does the mind come and stay and go? If it comes, does it come from somewhere? If it stays, is it staying anywhere? If it goes, is it going anywhere? These questions are the five Buddhist dating agency questions. If you join a dating agency, they will ask you questions such as who do you like, what's your hobby and so on. So, if you're interested in getting to know your mind really, then why don't you explore through these questions? Would you like a red mind, a blue mind? What are you looking for? Then you start to see that you have some assumptions.

Breathe out, relax and just look. How is your mind? Again, it's a how question. It's not a why or a what or a where or a when, but a HOW question. How does it reveal itself? So we have to take up the questions very gently, very delicately. We're not investigating, we're being-with in the space of revelation. So it's as if we're like the mirror. The mirror reveals what is placed in front of it. The mirror is a showing. Awareness is a showing. So what is shown as a reflection

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in the mirror is not the mirror itself. If you study the shape and colour of the reflection, does that show you the shape and colour of the mirror? No. So, it's the same with your mind.

Our tendency is to take an arising, an experience and to think that it's like this! The thing to do at that moment is to stay quiet. You've found the answer and it's vanished. That's a sign that the answer was a reflection. It was a movement in the mind. It was a thought, sensation, memory, a construct of some kind. The truth of the mind is inexpressible, but we're using these questions to get close to it. In your own time at home, you can inquire into that.

Practice: Does the illuminator have any qualities?

Sit, do the practice, open. Life is going on. Experiences are arising. You have the feeling of your body sitting on the seat. You have sensation, you hear sounds and so on. *Ok, so I'm not dead, there is experience. I can talk about experience. I have templates for organising the raw data and formulating a conclusion about some experience. This taste is sour, this taste is bitter, and so on.* So these questions are bringing you close without a template to the question: can I apprehend my mind as something? Everything has a shape and a colour. Does my mind have a shape and a colour?

Let's just enter quickly into open sitting. As you're sitting, after a minute or so, here you are, experience is arising and passing. Your mind is present because that's what's illuminating/showing this experience. So, does this illuminator have any qualities – shape, colour, size, location, origin, destination? Start to have an inquiry into this.

Again, with this kind of looking, you don't want to try too hard because the more you try hard, the more you mobilise your energy in the direction of getting something. **We're concerned here with revelation.** The mirror doesn't move. The mirror is just there revealing whatever arises. When we do this practice we want to release ourselves from our subject-object relation. Then there's just the space. Things are moving in the space.

Who is the experiencer of the experience? Normally we think that's me. *I am the experiencer of my life. It's happening to me.* But we are meditators and hopefully not so naïve. So we see that that's a thought, a concept.

The concept arises: that's me, I am the one doing this, I am the thinker of the thought, and then it's gone. So, the vanishing of the answer opens a space. So, who is the thinker? Is the mind a production factory? Where do thoughts come from? They arise from the mind. Therefore, the primary question is what is the mind? Which is why looking at these questions are so helpful.

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In a mirage nothing is produced, yet something is produced. Something which is produced is not a something. It's a form of nothing. Due to causes and conditions – the light, the heat, the road surface – the mirage appears. And then it dissolves. Nothing was born and nothing ends. When a thought arises in the mind, it's as if something has been born, but it's already gone.

There is a wall of mirrors in this room and when we look, we see many different reflections. These reflections are very precise. We can see the details of someone's face and recognise a person. But it's unborn. The reflection is not something but it has the patina, the appearance, the surface of something. It seems to be imbued with something-ness. *Oh yeah, there you are, I can see you.* But you don't see them, you see a simulacrum, some illusory form. You seem to be able to catch them, but there's nothing to catch. You see that with your thought, it's like reflection – it arises in the mind, it has precision, it has impact because when you have a reflection, your body has a different physical reaction to the shapes of different people. We are relational in that sense.

Something is happening and nothing is happening

So, this is a thought, a feeling, a sensation. Everything is like that. It's appearance and emptiness. The Tibetan word for appearance is **nang-wa** (Tib. sNang Ba) that indicates light as well. So what we see is the appearance of light. What we hear is sound, whether it's Polish or Italian or English, it's a mixing of the energy of conceptualisation with the energy of appearance. But the appearance prior to the interpretation is just LIGHT. This is the field of experience.

There is a show-ing. Is there a show-er? This is so important. Why did no one in school ask you this question? They ask you your opinion of Shakespeare, they ask you to remember a bit of Milton's poetry or algebra. But no one says: *you're sitting in this class, you're looking at me, you don't understand a single thing I say. So, we're going to get you to look at your mind before we look at history or geography or anything else. Because you don't know who you are.* The teacher wouldn't dare say that because the teacher knows who they are because they have a register in which they write comments, and at the end of the year they write a report card.

Johnny is having a real difficulty with algebra. So we know about Johnny. Johnny doesn't know about Johnny except that he's worried that when dad comes home, he's going to be pissed off. So, who is Johnny? Johnny is the anxiety of having a critical father who wants him to do well at school. Who is Johnny? I just said, Johnny is the boy worried about his critical father responding to his report card. This is how we were brought up. This is why we get deluded so easily.

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Because we believe the construct, the narrative, the interpretation, the story about ourselves to be the truth of ourselves. Now we're moving from the about, the layering, the smearing over the projection to the direct perception.

Just sit again a little bit.

Take perhaps just one of the questions: where's the mind? The mind is here but what is the meaning of that? Don't conceptualise it. Just try to allow the revelation of the openness of the mind.

(Practice for sometime)

Question: How much do we use language when we do this inquiry into 'where is the mind'? I am confused, please explain.

James: Very little. We want to be like the mirror, an open receptivity. The mirror doesn't run around trying to collect particular images. It's a non-selective open presence. Everything is welcome. Whatever comes comes, whatever goes goes. It's allowing the free flow without processing, without thinking about it. As soon as you get into thinking about it, you get located in your power base, into I am here, I am the experiencer of the experience. Awareness as the basis of the experience is not a personal experiencer, but it reveals everything.

If you get caught up in a flow of thought identifications, then you're just in this cocoon of yourself. You can't think your way to the answer. So, in that sense, you have to stop making sense. You have to not know.

In the Tibetan language we have **consciousness** and **awareness**. The Tibetan term for consciousness is **nam-par she-pa** (Tib. rNam Par Shes Pa), it means to know something, to be able to apprehend something. And then you have the clarity of the mind, **ye-she**, which is like a primordial knowing or showing. So, consciousness takes hold, shapes, apprehends. *I'm conscious that I'm in the room with you.* You're conscious when the thought arises that it's Sunday and so forth. Consciousness is always building pictures, images. It's a constructive thing how we human beings formulate ourselves in the world with others. Whatever construct arises will vanish.

Now **ye-she, primordial knowing**, or the knowing which is the clarity of the ground, is not doing anything. It's simply revealing the play of the energy arising from the ground.

So when we get caught in thinking, we're engaged in our familiar process of trying to work out what's going on. And we do this through identification, attribution, pattern formation

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and so on. Which means we are perhaps developing our capacity to function in samsara, but we are not going to get much freedom.

So when we find ourselves doing that, just relax in the out-breath. Or if the thought formations are very strong, you can get up, shake, look out the window. If you're in a room at home, see the wind blowing in the clouds, and then you come sit again. The subject is always intoxicated by thought.

When we're sitting and open, when I'm looking out here, when the presence of THIS is with me, this is my mind. The wall is my mind. The people are my mind, the camera is my mind. Sometimes the mind looks object, sometimes the mind looks subject. The mind is not a thing, it shows itself in multiple ways. The mind itself cannot be caught.

A summary

The mind is not a thing. It's emptiness, it's ungraspable, and yet it is the mother of all the Buddhas. It's the place where you find the illumination of clarity. When we go looking for something, we certainly find lots of 'somethings', but we don't find the mind. Because **the mind is unfindable, but always present.** This is paradox. This is mystery. This is not knowing.

Knowing usually means the product of the activity of our consciousness, in which we process what's going on. If I say the wall and people are my mind, this might sound like some of psychotic inflation. It seems very, very strange to say 'you are my mind'. I'm not even saying 'you are in my mind', but 'you are my mind'.

The mind reveals itself through the radiance of the field.

If we go back to the three aspects we talked about yesterday: **ngo-wo, rang-zhin, thug-je.** Ngo-wo is the emptiness of the mind. Awareness is inseparable from the ground that has the five qualities. It's infinite. It's beyond appropriation. It's just there by itself, rang jung (Tib. Rang Byung), it's just there. It's not made of anything, it's not a construct. It's just this. And this is this.

If you were to say that there is the pure mind but then all this rubbish nonsense arises in it, that would be crazy! This is the non-duality of the mind and appearance – kha-dag and lhun-drup – together. That is to say it is because my mind is empty, that this is my mind. This is **lhun-drup.** Lhun-drup isn't something I have in me. This is in here, you. When I am egocentric, everything comes back to me. This is the tantric view.

The tantric purification is the mandala. In the mandala there is always a **tso-wo**, a chief god, a central figure. So, you've got this central god and sometimes hundreds of different deities

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going out in the different directions. They all refer to the central point where you have a pulsation that's centrifugal, centripetal – just pulsing all the time. But that central deity is empty. There is nothing there. This is all the flow of illusion. Tantra is all about the purification of imagination, so that the last trace of reification, of thingness falls away from it. And then you have pure imagination. In that way it's similar to some of the tō-gal practice, where you are just staying with pure appearance.

For our purpose, the emptiness of the mind is the basis of the showing of the mind, and the mind shows itself as the inseparability of subject and object. So you have, if you like, a two-way non-duality. You have the non-duality of the ground and the field of appearance. And within the field of appearance, you have the non-duality of the subject and the object.

Although I am called James and James seems to refer to this particular skin bag, which is separate from your skin bags, as Norbu Rinpoche used to say again and again, 'senza limita'. Don't try to put any limitation on the situation. **Don't try to apprehend what is going on, but open to it.** What is going on is all of this, lhun-drup – it all comes together without any division of subject and object.

Soon our time together will come to an end, we'll say goodbye, move the chairs a bit and then we go out into the world. A body is moving in a world of appearance. The body is an appearance with certain particular qualities. The street is an appearance with certain particular qualities. However you travel, in a motorcar, in a train, whatever you do, if you go to a café – it's appearance with qualities. If you go to a café, there'll be different kinds of seats, high seats, low seats, according to the seat you have a different posture, according to the posture you have pressure on the diaphragm and your breathing changes... It's all moving together. Subject and object are not separate. If you really see this, this is your mind! This... and this... This and this... No division. This is dzogpachenpo.

When you retreat into this little box and you look out thinking: *who are you, do you like me, do you want me?* It's terrible, disaster! *Poor, lonely me, wandering in my lonely life. Where will I go, what will I do, will you adopt me, please? I am an orphan, my mom is dead.* Every ego is like that. Pathetic! Pathos is also very moving. We go to the opera to enjoy pathos, so we can cry. Pathetic. Nothing to be done. That is pathos. When you see Michelangelo's mass of stone, the Pietá, you weep. You really see this is mother and son. The crushed, dead body of Christ and the mother Mary in one block of stone. Amazing! But it's pathos. Touched, moved.

It's not about losing these feelings. Every feeling tone can be allowed. It's aesthetic. We're not going dead and neutral. Equanimity is not homogenisation. It's not dullness. The finesse, colour, shape or anger, all the pulsations are there, moving in your mind. When we say

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there is Padmasambhava and he represents the mind, and he's surrounded by dakinis – this is thoughts, colours, appearances, shapes. Tax bills, absence of toilet paper in the shops – this is the world as it is and this is your mind.

You are experience. Subjectivity is one modality of your experience. Sometimes you're an object. You might hate yourself. Some people bang their head on the wall, cut their throat, they jump out of a window. There, the subject is dissolving into the object. There are many possibilities of the energy of the mind. That's why in the meditation practice, we don't try to correct the mind. This is the big difference between dzogchen practice and practice in general Buddhism.

In general Buddhism, you're always trying to make the mind a particular way; before sitting down, you have an agenda. You're going to pray to Vajrasattva to wash away your sins. You're going to visualise Kalachakra or whatever because you want to do things. These kinds of practices are called **trin-le (Tib. 'Phrin Las)**, trin-le means activity. These are doing kind of things.

Here we are not doing anything. We're offering hospitality. Whatever comes comes. I'm not in charge. And I'm not afraid because, like the mirror, the reflection won't harm me. The reflection doesn't define the mirror. So you sit and you're full of a sad, jealous or angry thought, and you don't want that thought. Who doesn't want that thought? The thought of yours, doesn't want that thought.

Thoughts contaminate each other. You look in the mirror, somebody moves and then somebody else becomes obscured. Reflections interact and transform each other. They don't touch the mirror! You are the mirror and because you relax in the mirror, you can allow any old shit in the world. It doesn't matter.

When you come out of the practice, and someone is nice to you... WELL. Someone is horrible to you... WELL. You don't have to do anything with it. This is an appearance. The appearance appears. They're not a thing to be got. To be pulled in or pushed away. *I like you, I don't like you.* Most of life is that kind of ego-centric pulsation. It's simply arising and passing. Whatever has to be done, you do it with finesse, with delicacy, with attunement, and it dissolves. And it dissolves.

Everything is your mind. Everything is experience. It doesn't escape from the mind, but it isn't reducible to the mind. You can't take to a laboratory and dissolve it down. It is what it is, and it's empty and appearing, always, ceaselessly, for ever. This is something quite amazing! You might turn it into something a bit dialogical—*I am you and you are me and we are all together, kukukachoo* as the John Lennon sang—but it's not like that. Because in that situation, www.simplybeing.co.uk

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I'm here and you're there and, due to the wonderful power of drugs, we appear to be kind of merging into something. The mind, awareness, is not like that.

From the very beginning the ground is the source, the basis of everything. Everything arises at once. So when you go outside, the sky is your mind, the rain is your mind, the wind is your mind. The problem here is of course the language. The 'your' immediately makes it into a kind of possession, some centripetal thing has been pulled back to the central position. This stands in relation to me. *No, I am arising in relation to this.* This is the dialogic pulsation which is dynamic and never-ending.

It is so important to dissolve the fantasy of autonomy and mastery. I am sitting according to the seat. The seat is sitting me. If I was sitting there in the back, the level is a bit higher, so I would be sitting according to these seats. But I'm sitting according to this seat. And the people on the floor are sitting according to the mat. So their bodies are adopting postures in dialogue, in conversation/ dialogue with the situation. Knife, fork, chopsticks, Indian hand – these are ways of eating.

You do particular things with knife and fork: you stab the potato, you slice the potato mercilessly and then you chew it up until it's nothing at all. This is the violence of life. But why do you do that? Because in this culture we use knife and fork. There is a logic in that. You hold the knife in a different way than you hold the fork. And if you had a spoon, you would hold it differently from a knife. You feel the mastery: *I can drink soup without spilling it on my shirt...* Sometimes. So, I feel I'm the master. But simultaneously, I am the slave of the spoon because my hand is adopting the particular tension of muscles and tendons determined by the shape of the spoon, depending on the weight of the spoon.

When you cut something, you get tension if it's a hard thing you're cutting into. Or you get a simple, soft kind of giving-way if it's a soft thing. That will determine how the muscles in your arm or how the elbows or shoulder is going to be involved. The potato DOES you. If you see this, every moment of your life is dynamic pulsation. Moving out, moving in, together. This is the meaning of **non-duality**. I don't dominate the world, the world doesn't dominate me, but we're constantly in conversation, in pulsation. And the emptiness of that is clear, because we see it comes from the ground. It has no other source.

So you might like these chairs. You might think, they're very helpful. They fold away very easily. So you might ask where do they come from, and you're given the name of a shop. You go to the shop and ask: *where do these chairs come from?* They come from the big supply. You got to the big supply. *Where do they come from?* Well, the wood comes from the forest. You got to the forest. *Where do the trees come from?* We plant the seeds in the earth. *Where does the earth*

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come from? There is no end to these questions. It's beginningless... it's interaction, dependent origination, multiple factors. But we say it comes from a shop which is stupid and intelligent simultaneously. It's intelligent because, at least, you know where to buy the chair. It's stupid because you've come to a conclusion that allows you to go to sleep and not see the dynamic relatedness of phenomena.

If you stay in the flow, you cannot fall asleep. You have to be present. You have to be here. Here-ness is everything. Presence. Rig-pa. You usually translate it as awareness, that's how I usually use it, but you can also have it as presence. It's not a mental function, although it's the mind. Mind here means everything, dzogpachenpo, the whole. Everything arising together in its luminosity.

The luminosity of seeing the ground and what arises from the ground, inseparability of primordial purity and spontaneous appearance – that's inseparable from the ground. The arising of me as a person in a room, liking and not liking, that also arises from the same ground. One ground, one source, and these two pathways arise.

All we're trying to do is believe what the primordial Buddha said: if you see the source, you're free because you've always been free. You're not freed from anything except a delusion. You might know the feeling of camping in the countryside and waking up in the morning. It's completely foggy and you don't know where you are. You go out of your tent and there's just fog, fog, fog. After a while the sun comes out and the fog starts to disperse. Then you see where you are. Now you know! You were always there, but you didn't know where you were because you had an interpretive criterion you required for interpreting where you were. When you get out of the tent in the fog – *here I am!* But where are you? *I'm here!* That's not much good. *Yes it is! What could be better than being here in the fog! I'm having a foggy day! I'm lost. Hey, I'm lost! That's where I am. I'm lost. I'm fucked up, depressed. Everything is gone.*

C.R. Lama used to explain dzogpachenpo by saying imagine that you're lying in the gutter, you've got no money, you've messed yourself and people spit at you as they go by. That's dzogpachenpo! *It's not going to get better.* It is what it is. Wow! It's not bright and shiny. Perhaps you go into polarities: *"But I want to be happy all the time!"* Why would you want to be happy all the time? Children are dying in Syria and all over the Middle East. Hear one word of that and you want to cry. So how are you going to be happy all the time? It's ridiculous. Happy Buddha? Smug Buddha? Comfortable Buddha? We don't want to go in that direction.

We are affected, affective creatures. We are touched and moved. Otherwise compassion would have no meaning. It's not about stasis. It's not about arriving anywhere in particular, but about continuing to be open to whatever happens.

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So, we'll do a little quiet sitting and then we'll come to the end.

(Practice for some time)

We've covered a lot of ground. It's recorded, so you can listen again, if you're interested. Take half an hour and then reflect on it and bring it into your practice. The reason for giving a lot at one time is to help you see how this patterning fits together. Also, we never know, if we're going to meet again. Life passes very quickly. And whatever I've managed to get in my life from my various gurus, I want to make available to you.

Dharma is not serious and it's not holy. That's why, we can have some jokes and some funny examples. If you make it too serious, too high, too special, you make a cut, a dualistic formation: dharma and adharma (not dharma). Everything is dharma. Everything is within the dharmadhatu, the space of all dharmas. All charms, all phenomena have the flavour of dharmata, the thus-ness of direct presence. So, holy is not such a great thing. If you want to respect the Buddha, awaken to your own Buddha. If you do the dharma practice, it's going to make the Buddha much happier than bowing in front of a statue.

If you awaken to your own mind, in that moment all the tensions release. The negative impulses release and you are able to connect, because it's there from the beginning. It's not done by you. None of us are doing by ourselves; we are the blossom, the breath of the Buddha. That's all. Alive in this form for a while, dissolving and changing. We are not things. We are light and colour and shape and beauty. So, in this way hopefully we continue.

Maybe we meet again, maybe we don't. Thank you for your attention. I hope it has been useful for you.