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A Mahāmudrā Investigation into Confusion: *An Instruction on Identifying the Mode of Confusion*

To the one from the pure palace of *dharmadhātu*,
The primordial buddha who is never confused,
The actual buddha before the two truths,
The Precious Protector of the World,
I prostrate to you respectfully and take refuge [in you].

Bless me so that I realize primordial suchness,
And so that I may dispel the darkness of sentient beings
By merging the expanse with wisdom.

When the Protector of the Three Worlds, the Essence of All the Buddhas of the Three Times, turned sixty-one years old, divinations, dreams, and omens unanimously declared: “This year, the Precious [Guru Jigten Gonpo] is going to have an obstacle,” And because of this, everyone was worried. At that time, one night, Khenpo Zodpa had a dream in which he saw the Precious Lord walking through an open plain, saying he was going somewhere. After [Khenpo Zodpa] held him and begged him to stay, the Precious Guru gave in and sat down. At that very moment, [Zodpa] woke up with tremendous joy, and, during the night, he went upstairs and knocked on [the Guru’s] door. Then, Lopen Dopa asked: “Who is that?” [Zodpa] replied: “Please open the door, I have something urgent to tell [the Guru].”

Then, after [Zodpa] went in front of [his guru] and described the dream, [Jigten Gonpo] said: “Oh! This night you have been extremely generous to the inhabitants of Jambudvīpa.”

Zodpa asked: “A dream is confusion. But what is the basis of confusion in terms of these truly established [phenomena] being confusion?
What comes first, the buddha or the sentient being?”

If the buddha came first, then one would become a buddha first and then become confused again as a sentient being. Therefore, there would be no purpose in the attainment of buddhahood, and even the practice of the Dharma would just be a burden.

If the sentient being came first, then who taught the Dharma to the first sentient being? Who had the idea of the Three Jewels? Without someone teaching the Dharma, there would be no opportunity for the coming of a buddha.

If the buddha and the sentient being came into being at the same time, then they would have come about as distinct individual [mind] streams. In that case, since the buddhas and the sentient being would have different causes, which one of the two would act as an antidote to the other? Precious Lord, please take this to heart! Please ease me!”
[Jigten Gonpo] replied: “O Zodpa, you contribute again and again! Keep this also in mind for the benefit of some of the future generations! I will explain to you.”

[Then, Jigten Gonpo said:] “Between the buddha and the sentient being, one does not come before the other. At first, when there was neither the buddha nor the sentient being, there wasn’t any ground, path, and result: there was no mind, no Dharma, no teacher; there was nothing to say, think, and describe; there was no listening, no hearing, and no words; there was no self and other, no good and bad, no joy and suffering, no excellent and wicked, and so

forth. Thus, it is just like space, without divisions, and it is neither being full nor empty, neither increasing nor decreasing.

In terms of the buddha, the earliest is the *dharmatā*, what is known as the original tathāgata, the unproduced, self-arisen, primordial buddha. In terms of the sentient being, the earli[est] is the unceasing *dharmīn*, what is known as the mind, the mental consciousness, and the dependent. Since these two occur simultaneously, the *dharmīn* and the *dharmatā* serve as the bases for both the buddha and the sentient being, and, thus, they came into being simultaneously.

The *dharmatā* is also known as the primordial buddha. It is also known as the spontaneously present buddha, the ground. It does not waver from the state of the great primordially pure ground, it is the state of sameness, and it is spontaneously present. It is devoid of the three times and it has no arising, ceasing, and changing. This, known as the primordial, original Ādibuddha, is present in all beings. The one that does not recognize [such] presence is known as the *dharmīn*, the mental consciousness, and the mind.

If someone asks how the *dharmīn* and the *dharmatā* serve as the bases for the buddha and the sentient being, it is like this. “All” indicates the *dharmīn*, the mental consciousness, and the mind. “Ground” indicates that the *dharmatā* is devoid of any ground or foundation.

Among these two, with respect to the *dharmīn*, the mental consciousness, or the mind came into being the co-emergent ignorance (*lhan skyes kyi ma rig pa*). Since such [ignorance] occurred freely, it simultaneously served as the ground for the sentient being, and, subsequently, the *samsāric* sentient being came into being due to confusion.

The *dharmatā*, co-emergent wisdom (*lhan skyes kyi ye shes*) came into being. Since such [wisdom] occurred freely and, thus, became the basis for the buddha, nirvāṇa came into being. In general, these two are known as the “all-basis” (*kun gzhi*). Moreover, the *dharmīn*, which is the mental consciousness, is the aspect of method. The *dharmatā* is the aspect of insight.

As for these two, respectively, the co-emergent ignorance [came into being with respect to] the *dharmīn*, accumulated outwardly, and is similar to a baby girl. The co-emergent wisdom [came into being] with respect to the *dharmatā* and is similar to a guardian. The sources or the life stories of buddhas and sentient beings are just like that.

In general, for what reason do the sentient beings of *samsāra* suffer?

That is because, after the *dharmīn*, namely the mental consciousness, looked inwardly at the basis, which is *dharmatā*, and at itself, it fixated on them as ‘I’ and ‘Self,’ thereby accumulating afflictive obscurations.

In this situation, it did not ascertain the “all-basis,” and, subsequently, there arose the mental consciousness that is called ‘ignorance of imputation’ (*kun btags kyi ma rig pa*), a mental consciousness that discriminates between entities (*dngos po*).

For example, just like the baby girl grew up and then started to look for a home and a husband, the mental consciousness looked outward and then went after the five sense doors and their objects, thereby accumulating various karmas.

Thus, after it apprehended non-entities as entities and as an ‘I’ and a ‘self,’ it accumulated virtuous and non-virtuous karmas as well as various habitual tendencies. With this as the producing cause, sentient beings created the root of sufferings and *samsāra*. There came into being many sufferings that [consist] of discomforts for the mind, such as birth, aging, sickness, and death.

Moreover, as the [‘ignorance of] imputation’ is similar to the girl choosing her home, the mental consciousness, just like a companion, led to external distraction. For example, just like in the case of a man and a woman having intercourse, one follows the [companion] through the five sense doors and, as a result of this, a family line of children and grandchildren grows. Accordingly, one becomes confused in terms of the six types of beings,

the four types of rebirths, and the five paths of being.

Listen Zoda! Attaining buddhahood is as follows. As mentioned before, the *dharmatā*, which is without foundation and without a base, is the *dharmadhātu*, which is the object of knowledge. And the *dharmīn*, the mental consciousness or the mind, is the awareness-wisdom (*rig pa ye shes*), which is the knower (*shes byed*). These two primordially abide as sameness, that is, selflessness. For this reason, one does not see the *dharmadhātu* in terms of apprehended and apprehender or partially, and, after discovering it as the great bliss wherein the expanse (*dbying*) and wisdom (*ye shes*) are indivisible, the self-arising wisdom manifests from that state. Thus, the co-emergent ignorance ceases.

The girl becomes old and withered. Confusion turns into wisdom. Suffering turns into happiness. Thoughts turn into the *dharmakāya*. Therefore, this is known as the *dharmakāya* co-emergent wisdom that cognizes itself. Thus, as one becomes familiar and acquainted with that, the mind resolves that the mind itself lacks any nature.

As one actualizes the realization that that is free from union with and separation from great bliss (*bde chen 'du 'bral med pa*), buddhahood is attained. The five paths of being cease, the four modes of birth vanish, the karma of the six realms is swept away, the buddha-fields of the three bodies unfold without requiring reach them, and the result is intrinsically discovered. Zoda, this is known as 'buddhahood in terms of the actualized realization' (*rtogs pa mngon gyur gyi sangs rgyas*).

This also comes with the following initial signs.

When realization first dawns, one understands the entirety of appearances and possibilities, *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa*, as appearing while inherently not existing, just like reflections in a mirror.

When proficiency dawns in the stream of one's mind in regard to the 84000 doors of the Dharma, one becomes endowed with the Dharma eye (*dharmacakṣu, chos kyi spyan*) and, in that moment, understands without hindrances all the characteristics of the generic and the actual phenomena.

At this point, the meditative absorption (*samādhi*) cannot be diminished by any condition and thus many treasuries of wisdom become accessible.

After abiding in that meditative absorption for an extended time, one realizes subject and object, or equipoise and post-equipoise, as non-dual, or appearance and mind as non-dual. Thus, there occur the signs of having attained the first *bhūmi* of the perfection [vehicle].

After attaining the first *bhūmi*, one becomes free from the five fears. One has no fear for one's life [due to the lack of] food, drink, clothes, fire, water, and so forth. And, as one abides on the extraordinary stage, realization dawns vividly. Thereby, one sees the truth within this life. At that point, one transcends the world.

In general, what is the sign of mind and appearances merging? Lord Gampopa said to Gomtshul: "This is what happens when body, appearance, and mind merge." Then, he moved his hand without any obstructions through the pillar [near his] pillow. Thus, it happens that one is not obstructed regarding the structure of physical appearances and so forth.

At that time, speaking from the perspective of tantra, one will attain the eleventh *bhūmi*, the Constant Illumination (*samantaprabhā; bcu gcig pa kun tu 'od kyi sa*). The five elements become clear, clairvoyance dawns, and one's mind, clear like space, settles within the intent of the tathāgata. Since the powers and the abilities proliferate in the non-conceptual expanse, one displays many manifestations for benefitting beings by taming whoever by whatever means."

Zoda said: "If, after understanding this mode of confusion, one has fervent devotion for the guru, the practice of Dharma should be more robust."

Hence, Jigten Gonpo said: "That is known from the type of person. After understanding this,

those with the highest capacity liberate instantly by having devotion for the guru; they don't go after confusion and, thus, they liberate on the spot. There are also those of intermediate and lesser capacities, who, after understanding that, need to practice in accordance with the Fivefold Dharma.”

In general, there are six queries and one example regarding the mode of confusion:

1. On what basis does confusion [arise]?
2. By what cause does confusion [arise]?
3. At what point of time does confusion arise?
4. What is the essence of confusion?
5. How does confusion arise?
6. What is the result of confusion?
7. What is it like?

[1.]

It is like this. On what basis does confusion [arise]? Confusion [arises] based on the innate ‘all-basis’ (*kun gzhi gnyug ma*). If we follow the word order, “all,” refers to the mind, the *dharmā*, which is the mind that craves habitual tendencies (*bag chags sred byed, tr̥ṣṇā*). The “basis” is the groundless *dharmatā*, the sphere, but becomes the basis of confusion after one thinks and suspects that it has [a basis].

[2.]

By what cause does confusion [arise]? It arises out of ignorance. “Ignorance” means being ignorant about one’s own reality. For example, [let’s consider] a man who has never seen his own male sexual organ, does not even know its name, and has no clue whether or not he has one. At a certain point of time, he somehow sees it and, therefore, feeling uneasy, he thinks about cutting it off. He rolls it and, thus, since he cannot believe [it is actually there], he goes through various sufferings. Similarly, not knowing that wisdom that is actually present in oneself, one accumulates various habitual tendencies and, therefore, becomes confused.

[3.]

At what point of time does confusion arise?

[It arises] when the mind is imputed as the aspect that causes [its own] movement.

Moreover, the equanimity of the all-basis abides as the *dharmadhātu*, and since what does not cease from the *dharmadhātu* is discriminated, [the notion of] object and mind, or many dualistic fixations, manifest. This is the moment [in which confusion arises].

[4.]

The essence of confusion is self-fixation (*bdag tu 'dzin pa*). That is, the afflicted mind (*nyon mongs pa 'i yid*) looks inward at the space-like all-basis and fixates on it as the ‘self.’ The mental consciousness looks outward and follows the consciousness of the five sense doors. Thus, it accumulates various karmic causes and becomes confused by many **analyses** such as: being one or two and self or other.

[5.] How does confusion arise?

By imputing labels, such as outer container and inner content, to the unelaborated essence of the mind, one perceives the labels as real. Then, one takes the labels as objects of perceptions and, therefore, develops many [types of] attachments and aversion, thereby becoming confused in terms of perceived and perceiver.

[6.]

The result of confusion is wandering through the six realms and experiencing suffering. All these are neither created by someone else nor have come from somewhere else: they are there due to the confusion of one’s own mind only.

[7.]

An example of confusion is that it is similar to an insect-bite in a dream. One must know how to counter and eliminate [one’s] confusion in that regard.

There are many methods for eliminating [confusion]; all of them are included in the following eight [categories]:

1. Method
2. Analogy
3. Cause
4. Condition
5. Time
6. Essence
7. How does one counter [confusion]?
8. The result of countering the [confusions]

[1.]

First, the method [consists of] recollecting the sufferings of *samsāra*, developing sadness for worldly phenomena, stimulating the mind [with the thought of] death and impermanence, taking refuge in the Three Jewels, and relying on a guru who possesses instructions.

[2.]

An example of having countered confusion is that it is just like waking up from sleep. What appears as various pleasant and unpleasant dreams is real as long as one does not wake up. Yesterday, you held me in your dream. You were dreaming, but when you woke up there was nothing real or false [about it]. It was an additional confusion upon confusion. The entire appearance of the present moment appears to be real for the sole confused mind. However, in terms of *dharmatā*, [that is,] awareness, it has never been established as real or false.

Because we will all die, we are not real. Because I will also die, I am not real. Even death itself is not real. Countries, estates, and dwelling places are all not real, because their owners have been changing. Even this current billionfold universe is not real, because it is destroyed by fire and water. The major elements such as fire are also not real, because they exhaust and disappear instantly.

[3-4.]

The causes and conditions through which one counters confusion are, for example, like when the spring sun, the condition, hits the winter ice and this becomes water. Likewise, one is confused based on the original cause, existing as the basis. Thus, since that original basis is shown by the guru, the condition, the confusion grows into wisdom. Ice comes originally into being from water and, therefore, it finally becomes water through heat.

[5.]

The time when one counters confusion is now, as one makes an effort and strives, when the freedoms and riches have been attained.

[6.]

The essence of countering confusion is the actualization of the union of awareness and emptiness of the stainless mind as it is.

[7.]

How does one counter [confusion]? The *dharmatā* within oneself outshines all the *dharmas* and makes them inseparable from itself. Thus, insofar as the body and the mind have been merged, there is no attachment to the body, the appearing aspect, and there is no attachment to the mind, the awareness, the empty aspect. There is no attachment to the relatives, such as one's parents, and there is no aversion to the unpleasant and enemies. If so, one has countered confusion.

[8.]

The result of having countered confusion is that *samsāra* itself is established as *nirvāṇa* without one abandoning it. While the two form bodies are not differentiated into form and non-form, bodies that tame whoever by whatever means operate for the benefit of sentient

beings in hundreds of billions of worlds. Thus, this is how a person of medium [capacity] counters confusion and becomes liberated.

The way a person of lesser capacity counters the confusions and becomes liberated is as follows.

For example, considering the ‘all-basis consciousness’ (*kun gzhi’i rnam par shes pa*), the basis is similar to a treasure-house where all valuable things are stored. Likewise, [the all-basis] serves as a container that stores all of the karmas and habitual tendencies.

The afflicted mind (*nyon yid*) is similar to a housewife who holds the valuable things in her custody. Likewise, the all-basis consciousness looks inwards, fixates on various good and bad habitual tendencies, and stores them.

The ‘mental consciousness’ (*vid kyi rnam shes*) is similar to a householder who seeks riches. Likewise, the mental consciousness looks outwards, fixates on the signs regarding various particular objects, and conceptualizes them.

The eye-consciousness and the [consciousnesses of] ear, nose, and tongue are similar to the children who enjoy all the wealth [of the householder]. Likewise, the [sense-consciousnesses] generate various [types of] attachment and aversion for their respective objects and enjoy them separately.

As for this, the body consciousness (*lus kyi rnam shes*) is similar to a daughter in law, who enjoys the wealth. Likewise, [the body-consciousness] experiences pleasant and unpleasant sensations. These are the modes of confusion.

With respect to that, in order to counter confusion, one has to gain a thorough knowledge of suchness. Then, [confusion] is countered through one’s own diligent effort and devotion for the guru, and, one realizes *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* as indivisible, that is, one understands that they abide inseparably just like a solution of salt and water or a conch and its whiteness. That is the moment in which one has countered confusion.

The essence of having countered confusion refers only to the nature of mind being free from adventitious stains. The undifferentiated experience of the object of knowledge, namely the unfabricated *dharmadhātu*, and the knower, namely the unobstructed self-aware wisdom, is the essence of having countered confusion.

Moreover, the nature of all phenomena, that is, that empty essence which is [their] fundamental nature or condition, is known as the *dharmadhātu*, the object of knowledge.

The one that knows the primordial non-inherent existence,
The knower, is wisdom.
One who realizes the primordial inherent non-existence
Attains the unsurpassed state.

Confusion and wisdom,
Similar to the sun and darkness,
Do not coexist but are not different.
At the time of ignorance, there is confusion,
That is the time when wisdom spontaneously ceases.

When one knows that ignorance lacks inherent existence,
Wisdom arises and, thereby, ignorance ceases,
The sun rises and, thereby, darkness ceases.

What appears as entities is the mind.
Knowing the mind in terms of being empty,
Is wisdom. Therefore, ignorance has ceased.

Separately from ignorance,
There is no wisdom elsewhere.
Separately from wisdom,
How could there be ignorance?

In general, all apparent and possible phenomena are waves of wisdom. However, the result of purifying confusion consists of the Three Bodies. The Truth Body is primordially pure like space. The Enjoyment Body, which arises from that state, is adorned with the major and minor marks. This is the *dharmadhātu*, not established in any of the extremes. From this all-pervasive [state] there arises the Emanation Body. This is unadulterated by the view of transitory collections, and is intrinsically effortless and at ease, free from doubt, the *dharmatā* devoid of any sign, what is known as ‘self-arisen wisdom (*rang byung ye shes*).’

Without being distracted from that, [by remaining in meditative] equipoise and through familiarization, all phenomena of *samsāra* and *nirvāṇa* help one to augment experience. At this point, “confusion arises as wisdom.” The one who has this [experience] has no risk of going astray (*gol sa*).

Whenever this body disintegrates, that which is the ‘all-basis consciousness’ dawns for the sublime Truth Body as the wisdom [of] the *dharmadhātu*. The consciousness of the five sense doors dawns as the mirror-like wisdom. The mental consciousness dawns as the discriminating wisdom. The afflicted mind dawns as the wisdom of equanimity.

After the mental consciousness turns into the form of pure wisdom, the accomplishing wisdom of the two form bodies performs activities for beings until *samsāra* is emptied.

Moreover, the Truth Body is spontaneously present and transcends all of the colours, shapes, and so forth.

As for the Complete Enjoyment body, which is like the essence of the Sixth Vajradhara Lord in the *dharmadhātu* palace of Akaniṣṭha [who] has attained buddhahood blazing with the major and minor marks, it continues teaching the Dharma on the level of the appearance of the tenth *bhūmi*.

The Emanation Body, the body which tames any sentient being by any means, emanates as tigers, rabbits, and so forth, and thus establishes all beings in goodness.

These three bodies are also one in terms of the Essence Body. Moreover, the essence of the mind, the completely pure and extensive *dharmadhātu*, abides as the embodiment of the Five Buddha Bodies of the five all-pervading wisdoms. In order to realize that, it is crucial that one practices abandoning distraction with intense effort, with devotion for one’s guru at all times and with a firm meditative equipoise.

This is the buddha in terms of the basis, known as ‘Buddha of Perfectly Pure [Mental] Continuum’ (*rgyud rnam par dag pa’i sangs rgyas*). The one that possesses the twofold purities is known as the Truth Body, and the Enjoyment Body and the Emanation Body are regarded as a yogin who has realization.

In general, when one meets the Three Bodies, one sees the Enjoyment Body first and the Truth Body next.

When one has attained [buddhahood], one first attains the Truth Body and the Emanation Body next.

This is how [a person] of lesser [capacity] becomes liberated.

This [teaching], requested by Khenpo Zodpa in the presence of the Precious Glorious Drikungpa, was written down under the title ‘*Identifying the Mode of Confusion*.’ May it be auspicious!

Translated by
Khenpo Konchok Tamphe

Edited by
Filippo Brambilla and Casey Kempt

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