

Readings on the Middle Way

Jason Espada, Editor

Preface to two volumes on the Middle Way

For years I have had my favorite selections on the Middle Way teachings in one large folder. They were in the form of photocopies from books, together with my own essays. Eventually I decided to separate the two, and this volume has passages for study and reflection by some of my favorite Buddhist teachers.

This is a profound subject, and one that can often feel inaccessible to the average reader. As with my other writings, my motivation then has been twofold: to have the Dharma be clear in my own mind, and to help others to appreciate and make use of liberating teachings.

I have placed my writings on this subject in the volume called *Essays on the Middle Way - A New Telling of Vital Truths*.

May all beings benefit

Jason Espada
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From the Gandhavyuha Sutra

Sentient beings,
trapped in aging, and sickness,
and tormented by a hundred pains –
seeing them assailed by the terrors of birth, death, and sorrow,
he directs his conduct for their weal

Sentient beings,
crushed by the wheels of suffering
within the circle of birth and death –
seeing this,
he seeks the thunderbolt of Wisdom,
that smashed to dust
these wheels of woe

Seeing the world of sentient beings,
so full of suffering,
the bodhisattva reflects,

*'By what means can these beings,
fallen as they are into such misery,
be lifted out of it?'*

and it occurs to them,

*'The means to do this is nowhere else
but in the knowledge of liberation...'*

The bodhisattvas thus apply themselves
to their realization of the Buddha's Way,

From The Avatamsaka Sutra - 722

Recognize that suffering is empty by nature

Suffering comes from conceptual thoughts, which can be eradicated through realizing emptiness.

In his Four Hundred Stanzas on the Middle Way, Aryadeva states,

The fetter of delusive conceptual thoughts can be removed by realizing the view of emptiness.

Why? The suffering "I" and suffering itself exist interdependently. Without one, the other can't exist.

It's also said in The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way,

Apart from the object, how can the subjective person exist? Apart from the subjective person, how can the object exist?

Some people make complaints all day long, but where is this suffering "I"? Through scrutinizing it with the right view of the Middle Way, we can understand that "I" doesn't exist at all. If this is true, the suffering "I" is just illusory fabrication.

Without realizing emptiness, one is unable to see through the "I" or let it go, and they take illusion for intrinsic existence. If we can eliminate self-clinging through understanding emptiness just as many great practitioners have done, all sorts of suffering will disappear without residue and the resultant enlightenment will bring indescribable happiness.

- Khenpo Sodargye

We all act as if we had permanent, single, and independent selves - and that it is our constant pre-occupation to protect and foster. It is an unthinking habit that most of us would normally be most unlikely to question or explain. However, all our suffering is associated with this pre-occupation. All loss and gain, pleasure and pain arise because we identify so closely with this vague feeling of self-ness that we have.

Where there is suffering, clinging to self must also be present. Where there is clinging to self, ignorance of not-self must be present. The only way to remove suffering is therefore to remove the ignorance that causes the clinging to self.

When meditators address themselves to what or who this self is, they cannot find it. Then gradually, very gradually, it dawns on them that the reason they cannot find it is that it is not there and never was.

There is tremendous emotional resistance to this realization so it takes a long time to break through, but when it does there is an immediate release of tension and suffering. The cause of it has gone. The cause of it was a mental attachment to something that was not there.

- Khenpo Tsultrim Gyatso Rinpoche, From Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness

From Essential Practice

Lectures on Kamalashila's Stages of Meditation in the Middle Way School

by Khenchen Thrangu Rinpoche

Generally speaking, there are many types of meditation. In some meditations, such as the meditative absorption in which there is no discrimination, a meditation that is cultivated by non-Buddhists, the mind stops. When the mind stops in that way, afflictions do not arise for as long as we remain in meditative equipoise. Afflictions do not arise and bad thoughts do not arise. However, except for thought and affliction stopping for the duration of this meditative stabilization, the seeds of affliction have not been destroyed.

In dependence upon the seeds of affliction not having been destroyed, when the meditator rises from such meditative stabilization, afflictions arise once again. What is the reason for their arising again? They arise in dependence upon the root of affliction not having been abandoned. Therefore, we must abandon the root of affliction.

What is the root of affliction? Our afflictions- desire, hatred, bewilderment, pride, envy, and so on- serve as the causes for the arising of various types of suffering and as conditions that prevent liberation from cyclic existence. Even if we identify them and think, "I will annihilate this affliction, desire," we are not able to annihilate them. What must we do?

If we conceive all things to exist truly, then, in dependence upon that, desire, hatred, and other afflictions will arise. What will prevent them from arising? If we know that all things lack inherent existence and are emptiness, we will know that the objects of desire, hatred, and so on do not exist. Through investigating and analyzing all things, we realize them to be emptiness. In dependence upon realizing things to be emptiness, all afflictions together with their seeds will be stopped from the root. In

dependence upon that reason, when afflictions are abandoned in this way, they do not arise again. That is to say, when afflictions are abandoned by way of our having meditated upon emptiness, they have been abandoned from the root. Because their root has been cut, they do not arise again in any way.

In order to realize emptiness, we must stop believing in visible forms and so on. To stop that, we need to know with certainty that forms are emptiness; that is to say, we need to know for sure that these things lack inherent establishment. Ascertaining that requires us to overcome our doubts; we will have to go beyond just wondering whether or not things are established. If we do not go further than wondering and doubting, we will not come to certain knowledge of emptiness. For that reason, we will have to abandon our doubts.

How shall we do that? We cannot extract doubt in the way that we remove a thorn from our hand. To abandon doubt, we will need meditative stabilization and knowledge.

First, we will need the meditative stabilization of calm abiding so that our minds abide in a stable manner.

After our minds have come to abide in a stable manner, knowledge must correctly investigate and analyze the object that calm abiding observes.

If meditative stabilization and knowledge are present, we can leave doubt behind, and certainty can be born.

Here, mistaking a rope for a snake is given as an example. When I mistake a rope for a snake, I become afraid, thinking, "A snake has come into my house, and now I'm in danger." Mistaking a rope for a snake exemplifies well the misleading appearances of cyclic existence. It accords well with the misleading appearances of cyclic existence. The misleading appearances of

cyclic existence are, in fact, not established. Similarly, the snake is not established in the rope. Nevertheless, when we fear the rope that we have mistaken for a snake, we cannot stop being afraid no matter what we do, even if we have a rifle or a knife in our hand. Those methods cannot abolish our fear, but neither do we need them. Why not? For instance, if we shine a light on that rope, illuminate it, and investigate it well, we will know, "This is not a snake. It is a rope." Certain knowledge will arise.

When I have seen the rope directly, then, even if someone else says to me, "It is a snake," and goes on to tell me a story- "There is a snake. Really, there is. Yesterday the snake came in through there."- I will not become confused. I will have confidence that the supposed snake is really a rope, that there is nothing to fear, and that there is no danger.

Similarly, all phenomena are emptiness. Having investigated and analyzed with correct reasoning, I can know them to be emptiness. In dependence upon my knowing that, my afflictions are abandoned. Even if a bad advisor tells me that all phenomena are not emptiness and gives me a slew of reasons why they are not emptiness, that will not change my mind at all because I will have given rise to conviction from the depths. For that reason, I will have no doubt whatsoever and afflictions will not arise.

With regard to such certainty, if meditative stabilization and knowledge do not combine together, doubt and affliction cannot be annihilated. For example, in darkness, I will not know where my stuff is. Similarly, without meditative stabilization and knowledge, we cannot know emptiness. Therefore, we need meditative stabilization and knowledge.

This treatise (by Kamalashila) illustrates the need for meditative stabilization and knowledge with an example. In this example, our bad thoughts are compared to an illness. What must we do in order to abandon these bad thoughts, which are like illnesses? With the hand of meditative stabilization, we take hold of knowledge, which resembles a weapon, such as a knife {or in the case of a surgeon, a scalpel}, and grip it firmly. The

fine means of knowledge performs careful surgery upon our minds and removes the internal illness.

We must without fail dispel this illness, and we need both the hand of meditative stabilization and sharp the tool of knowledge if we are to accomplish that. In the absence of the meditative stabilization and such knowledge, the illness within our minds cannot be removed. Therefore, the afflictive obstructions must be abandoned.

The abandonment of the afflictive obstructions is not a negligible suppression; abandoning them entails cutting them from the very root. To cut them from the very root, we will need both calm abiding and insight. When we have both calm abiding and the knowledge of insight, then those afflictions cannot remain at all. For example, when the sun shines, darkness cannot remain. Similarly, when we see reality's mode of abiding clearly, ignorance and the afflictions will naturally vanish. That vanishing will not be a negligible vanishing. Rather, ignorance and afflictions will be uprooted, never to arise again. Their destruction will be complete.

When we see such an emptiness, there is nothing to be seen that will surpass this and there is no road more distinguished. There is nothing other than this that we must view and there is nothing more distinguished than this that we must know.

We must realize things to be empty in this way. When we realize things to be empty in this way, generally speaking, we realize all things to be not established, to lack existence, and to be emptiness in this sense.

Having realized things to be empty in this way, do we conceive their emptiness to mean nonexistence? No, conceiving nonexistence does not occur either. After the conception of things as existing has been abandoned, the conception of their nonexistence will naturally be pacified. What is the reason for that? If even one thing were to exist, its nonexistence, which depends upon its existence, would be possible. Because not even one thing

has ever been found to be established at all, the nonexistence of things is also naturally not established.

In this sense, when a yogin views with the eye of knowledge, all things in the three times- past, future, and present- are not observed. Since things are not present to begin with, an absence of things that trounces them is not present either. Therefore, elaborations are pacified, afflictions are abandoned, and a peace that is both flawless and fully endowed comes to pass.

When the sphere of reality that is free from elaborations is realized, two types of obstructions are abandoned. What are those two obstructions? Afflictive obstructions and obstructions to knowledge.

What are the afflictive obstructions? Generally, the term “affliction” means extremely painful and extremely difficult. What is the cause of such pain and difficulty? Afflictions such as desire, hatred, bewilderment, and pride. Realization of emptiness abandons them.

There is also a second obstruction that is not an affliction. What is that? It is called the obstruction to knowledge *{a-vidya}*. The mere presence of afflictions produces various types of suffering, but the mere presence of obstructions to knowledge in us does not produce suffering. Still, the obstructions to knowledge do gradually serve as the causes for the arising of afflictions.

What are obstructions to knowledge? Obscuration. Even though all things lack inherent establishment and are empty, we conceive of them as not being so. For instance, we think that mountains, enclosures, and houses really do exist. We think also that our bodies and so forth really do exist. Such conceptions will serve as the causes of afflictions arising in the future, and they are called obstructions to knowledge. These two obstructions serve as the roots of all the suffering of cyclic existence. How can we abandon those two?

In dependence upon thoroughly pure calm abiding and thoroughly pure insight, thoroughly pure knowledge arises and abandons the two obstructions from the root.

Even though the opportunity to liberate yourself has always been there, so far you have not taken it.

You have been completely trapped in hallucination. Besides being caught in the present hallucination, by following ignorance and not meditating on emptiness, sentient beings continuously create the cause for more hallucination in the future.

It is like a fly inside a house. The windows and the doors may be open, but the fly does not go out. It does not go to where there's an opening but flies around where there is no exit. Hitting its body against a closed window again and again, it ignores the freedom offered by all the open windows. It never even looks in their direction. Nobody is keeping the fly trapped in the house; the fly itself stays there. It never pays attention to the big space that is open all the time. It only looks where there is no space and goes around and around. Even though seeing the open space and flying there is so easy- there is no suffering or hardship involved- it does not do that, but the door is always open.

Your life is just like this example. The opportunity to attain liberation from samsara is always there.

All phenomena, including I, action, and object, have been empty from beginningless time. It is not that phenomena have been empty at certain times and inherently existent at others. They have never been inherently existent. Therefore, the opportunity to realize emptiness has always existed and always will. By generating that realization, you will be able to eliminate the root of samsara, ignorance, the innate conception of inherent existence. By eliminating ignorance, you will cease everything that stems from it- all the other disturbing attitudes and emotions, all karma, the whole of samsara. You will attain complete cessation of suffering and its cause...

- Lama Zopa Rinpoche

On Wisdom, from The Door to Satisfaction, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Our whole problem is not being aware of the reality of things. Just like hallucinogenic drugs or mushrooms, wrong conceptions make our minds hallucinate. We are unable to practice awareness of reality- that is, that all causative phenomena are transitory, and, the basic thing, that what appears to us does not exist in the way it appears to exist.

The ignorance in our mind grasps a truly existent I, which doesn't exist. Everything our ignorance focuses on- I, body, mind, others, six sense objects- does exist, but not in the way ignorance apprehends it. That is the hallucination.

The I, for example, which is just a name, which is labeled on the aggregates, does not exist in the way it is seen by our ignorance. Ignorance holds the I not as merely labeled but as existing from its own side. This truly existent aspect does not exist. We have to be aware that what appears to exist from its own side is empty of existing from its own side.

All things that exist, starting with the I, are just a name, are nothing other than what is merely imputed. There is no I other than what is just a name, other than what is merely imputed. There are no aggregates, no body, no mind, other than this. Similarly, action, object, friend, enemy, stranger, possessions, sense objects, all these are nothing other than what is merely imputed by the mind. They are just thought.

Happiness, unhappiness, praise, criticism, good reputation, bad reputation, getting things, not getting things, the appearance of all these things as real, as existing from their own side, has nothing to do with reality.

However, due to imprints left on our mental continuum by our past ignorance, which held everything to be truly existent, as it appeared, again we project true existence onto these things now, which in reality are

produced by our own mind. The seed, or potential, left on the mental continuum is actualized in this way.

The I doesn't exist without labeling 'I'. The aggregates, samsara, nirvana, these do not exist without labeling. Everything that appears to exist from its own side- self, action, object, friend, enemy, stranger, sense objects, is just thought.

From morning to night, we talk about things that are merely imputed, think things that are merely imputed, hear things that are merely imputed, look at things that are merely imputed. From morning to night, from birth to death, from beginningless rebirth to enlightenment, everything is like this.

So there is no reason to generate attachment, anger, and ignorance. It is complete nonsense, unnecessary and meaningless. Without reason, your mind has created these problems. Your own mind has made up ignorance, attachment, and anger. The conclusion is that there is no reason at all for discriminating thoughts of attachment, anger, and ignorance to arise.

(91, 92, 93)

The way that Lama Zopa appears to exist is not the way that Lama Zopa really exists.

We are living our lives in a big hallucination. We lack the awareness that the way everything appears to us as real from its own side is a hallucination. The 'real' Lama Zopa means the one that has existence from its own side. When we say 'real', we actually mean 'truly existent'.

But the existence of Lama Zopa is something completely other than what you normally think. The reality is something else, completely something else. The reality of the way Lama Zopa exists is extremely subtle, something we don't normally think about. The way we normally

apprehend Lama Zopa has nothing to do with the way Lama Zopa exists. The way Lama Zopa exists is completely something else.

The way things exist is extremely subtle.

(94, 95, 96)

The self in selflessness can refer to anything; it does not necessarily refer to the person. Look at everything here: table, brocade, light, walls, curtains, flowers, action, object, sense object. With the example of Lama Zopa, you can see how we are completely trapped in a heavy hallucination, which has nothing to do with the reality. It is the same way with these objects- what we grasp has nothing in the slightest to do with reality.

For example, the way the table exists in reality is completely different from the way we normally think of its existence. When we analyze what the table is, trying to see the reality of the table, how it actually exists, we discover that the table is something other than what we normally think of as a table.

The base is not the label- look at the nature of everything in this way. To our mind the base and the label seem to be mixed, or one. That is the actual object to be refuted, the object that we have to realize as empty {or not existing in the way it appears}.

(97, 98, 102)

When we practice awareness of this, it is another world. When we are not aware of reality, we live in one world: truly existent I living a truly existent life in a truly existent world. When we don't see reality, we live our life as a truly existent I (which doesn't exist), with truly existent aggregates (which don't exist) and truly existent sense objects of form, smell, taste, sound, and touch (which don't exist).

We believe in truly existent true suffering (which doesn't exist) and truly existent cause of suffering (which doesn't exist). We think of real negative karma from its own side (which doesn't exist), real liberation from its own side (which doesn't exist), and the real path that we are meditating upon (which doesn't exist).

Be aware of reality all the time

The Bodhisattva Togme Zangpo says:

*Even though I can sit up here on a throne and talk a lot about emptiness,
if someone criticizes or praises me a little, my mind goes crazy.
Even though I can say the words 'nothing that appears has true existence',
like and dislike arise with just a little praise or criticism.
Not one single practice can be called the path of the middle way.*

You may be able to recite by heart and brilliantly explain all the teachings on the Wisdom Gone Beyond, but if in daily life someone says something a little negative or a little positive, offers a little criticism or a little praise, immediately the mind becomes emotional. There is no stability; immediately there is like and dislike. If this is what happens to our mind in daily life, there is not even a particle of practice of right view.

Be aware that all these 'real' things that appear to exist from their own side are empty. When you do not practice awareness of this in day-to-day life, the mind is overwhelmed by hallucinations, by wrong conceptions, like a city flooded by water. The mind is possessed by wrong thoughts, wrong appearance, wrong view.

(at the first appearance of a delusion, that is the time to apply penetrative insight, then it goes no further)

As long as the mind is overwhelmed by wrong conceptions, there is no real peace. Life is lived in hallucination. Not seeing everything we grasp as

illusory is the fundamental hallucination. The people who have not realized this emptiness and do not see things as illusory not only see everything as truly existent, which is an illusion, but also experience the basic problem of clinging to everything as if it were true. This wrong conception, this ignorance, is the origin of all the other delusions, which then motivate karma; that karma leaves on the mind the seeds that are the causes of samsara.

Not the slightest benefit comes from following this ignorance, for you or for others- only harm. Everything that is labeled, that is produced by thought is without true existence, so it is complete nonsense for your mind to apprehend it as true just because it appears that way. This is unnecessary and meaningless, and the shortcomings are infinite. The harm this causes you is enormous.

There is no reason at all to follow ignorance, which apprehends everything that appears as truly existent. And there is no point at all in allowing discriminating thoughts of attachment and anger to arise.

Since the I that exists is merely imputed, there is nothing to cherish, nothing to cling to. If you check, self-cherishing is completely silly, and only creates problems.

Just like you, other sentient beings want happiness and do not want suffering. Others are numberless and you are just one person. When you think about the numberless others who, like you, want happiness and do not want suffering, there is nothing to do other than to work for others, to cherish others. With this attitude, work for other sentient beings with your body, speech and mind. There is nothing more important in life than this.

(104, 105, 106, 107)

Eradicating the root of all suffering completely, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The practice of religion, spirituality or dharma has to be a method that completely destroys all suffering, a method that brings about the complete cessation of suffering, and not just temporarily. That depends upon completely eradicating the root of all the billions of sufferings that exist - ignorance and all the other delusions that spring from the root of ignorance. True peace is received whenever we completely eradicate this root of suffering. In other words, cessation of ignorance, attachment and anger is real freedom, true peace - the peace that never changes; the peace that once received can never change, is everlasting.

- From Freedom Through Understanding

From Kindness, Clarity, and Insight I and II, by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama

From the Chapter 'Altruism and the Six Perfections'

With respect to the last perfection, wisdom, there are in general many types of wisdom; the three main ones are conventional wisdom realizing the five fields of knowledge, ultimate wisdom realizing the mode of subsistence of phenomena, and wisdom knowing how to help sentient beings. The main one being explained here is the second, the wisdom realizing selflessness.

With regard to selflessness, it is necessary to know what "self" is- to identify the self that does not exist. Then one can understand its opposite, selflessness.

Selflessness is not a case of something that existed in the past becoming non-existent; rather, this sort of "self" is something that never did exist. What is needed is to identify as non-existent something that always was non-existent, for due to not having made such identification, we are drawn into the afflictive emotions of desire and hatred as well as all the problems these bring.

What is this self that does not exist?

In this context, "self" refers not to the person or "I" as it usually does but to independence, something that exists under its own power. You should examine all types of phenomena to determine if they exist under their own power, to see whether they have their own independent mode of subsistence or not. If phenomena do exist under their own power, then when you investigate to find the object designated, it should become clearer and clearer.

For instance, consider your own person (the usual type of "self") or "I." The "I" appears from within the context of mind and body; however, if you investigate these places from which it appears, you cannot find it. Similarly,

with regard to this which we point out as a table, if you are not satisfied with its mere appearance but investigate its nature, searching among its various parts and separating out all of its qualities and so forth, there is no table left to be found as the substrate of those parts and qualities.

The fact that things are not findable under analysis when you search to find the object designated indicates that phenomena do not exist under their own power.

Objects are not established objectively in and of themselves but do indeed exist; even if under analysis I search to find the table and cannot find it, if I hit it with my fist, it will hurt my knuckles. Thus, its existence is indicated by my own experience. However, that it cannot be found under analysis indicates that it does not exist in its own objective right, and thus since it exists, it is said to exist through the power of a subjective conventional consciousness. {it does not exist as it appears}

That objects exist in dependence upon a subjective designating consciousness is the same as saying that they are only nominally existent. Therefore, with respect to your “I” or person, when you search to find it among its bases of designation, mind and body, it cannot be found, and thus there is just the mere “I” that exists through the force of conceptuality.

*How things appear and how they actually exist differ greatly. A person engaging in practice of the perfection of wisdom does this kind of analysis and then examines how things appear in ordinary experience, alternating analysis and comparison with the usual mode of appearance in order to notice the discrepancy between the actual mode of subsistence of phenomena and their appearance.

In this way the inherent existence which is the object of negation will become clearer and clearer. As much as the object of negation becomes clearer, so much deeper will your understanding of emptiness become.

Finally, you will ascertain a mere vacuity that is a negation of or the opposite of inherent existence.

Since emptiness here, from between positive and negative phenomena, is a negative phenomenon and, from between affirming negatives and non-affirming negatives, is a non-affirming negative, when it appears to the mind, nothing will appear except an absence of such inherent existence- a mere elimination of the object of negation. Thus, for the mind of a person realizing emptiness there is no sense of, "I am ascertaining emptiness," and there is no thought, "This is emptiness." If you had such a sense, emptiness would become distant. Nevertheless, the emptiness of inherent existence is ascertained and realized.

After such realization, even though whatever phenomena appear to exist in their own right, you understand that they do not exist that way. You have a sense that they are like a magician's illusions in that there is a combination of their appearing one way but actually existing another way. Though they appear to exist inherently, you understand that they are empty of inherent existence.

When phenomena are seen this way, the conceptions that superimpose a sense of goodness or badness on phenomena beyond what is actually there and serve as a basis for generating desire and hatred lessen; this is because they are based on the misconception that phenomena are established in their own right. On the other hand, those consciousnesses that have a valid foundation increase in strength. The reason for this is that the meaning of emptiness is the meaning of dependent-arising. Since phenomena are dependent-arisings, they are capable of increase and decrease in dependence upon conditions.

In this way, cause and effect are feasible, positable, and once cause and effect are validly positable, it can be posited that bad effects such as suffering can be avoided by abandoning bad causes and that good effects such as happiness can be achieved by training in good causes. If, on the

other hand, phenomena did exist in their own right, they would not depend on others, and if they did not depend on others, cause and effect would be impossible. Thus, once dependence is feasible, causes and effect can be posited, and if dependence were not feasible, causes and effects could not exist.

The final reason proving that things are empty of inherent existence is just this dependence on causes and conditions. When people do not understand this doctrine well, they mistakenly think that because phenomena are empty, there is no good and bad, no cause and effect. This is complete misunderstanding. It is so important to be able to posit and have conviction in cause and effect that it is said that between giving up belief in the cause and effect of actions and giving up belief in emptiness, it is better to give up the doctrine of emptiness.

Also, due to the importance of having belief in cause and effect, various explanations of emptiness are given in the Middle Way and Mind-Only Schools. In some systems of tenets it is even accepted that phenomena inherently exist because without analytically findable existence many persons cannot posit cause and effect for the time being.

Knowledge of the final mode of subsistence of phenomena must be within the context of not losing the cause and effect of actions conventionally; if in an attempt to understand the final mode of subsistence one lost the presentation of conventionally existent cause and effect, the purpose would be defeated.

Just as children must go to primary, secondary, and high school before going to college or university- proceeding to the higher levels based on the lower- so, it is in dependence on having gained ascertainment with respect to the cause and effect of actions that later the profound view of the emptiness of inherent existence is ascertained without losing the earlier conviction in cause and effect and its consequent practices.

If someone thought that because phenomena are empty there could not be any good or bad, even if that person repeated the word “emptiness” a thousand times, he or she would be moving farther and farther away from the meaning of emptiness. Hence, a person who has great interest in emptiness should pay great heed to the cause and effect of actions.

That, in brief, is the practice of the perfection of wisdom.

From the chapter on Eight Verses for Training the Mind

8

*I will learn to keep all these practices
 Undefined by the stains of the eight worldly conceptions
 And by understanding all phenomena as like illusions
 Be released from the bondage of attachment.*

In terms of method, these practices should be done one-pointedly within altruistically seeking the benefit of others; you should not come under the influence of the eight worldly styles of behavior- like and dislike, gaining and losing, praise and blame, fame and disgrace. If these practices are done with a motivation to inflate yourself, to cause others to think that you are a religious person, to gain renown, and so forth, then the practice is not pure but has become defiled by worldly concerns. Instead, virtue should be totally for the sake of others.

The latter part of the stanza refers to the factor of wisdom: You should engage in this practice from the viewpoint of knowing that compassion itself, the practitioner of compassion, and the objects of compassion are like a magician's illusions in that they appear to exist inherently but do not. In order to understand these three factors as like illusions, it is necessary to know that even though these factors appear to be inherently existent, they are empty of such inherent existence.

For instance, if persons working at the altruistic intention to become enlightened were to view themselves as existing in their own right, or were to view the persons for whose sake enlightenment is being sought as inherently existent, or were to view enlightenment itself as inherently existent, this viewing of inherent existence would in fact prevent that meditator from achieving enlightenment. Instead, it is necessary to view yourself- the cultivator of the altruistic intention- the enlightenment you are seeking, and all other sentient beings- those for whom you are

seeking enlightenment- as not inherently existent, but rather as like illusions, existing one way but appearing in another. By means of viewing these as like illusions their inherent existence is refuted.

*This refutation of inherent existence is not a case of removing something that formerly existed. Rather, you are identifying that something that never did exist does not exist. Due to our own ignorance, phenomena appear to exist inherently even though they do not; due to this appearance of inherent existence, we conceive that things exist the way they appear; due to that, we are drawn into afflictive emotions and thereby are ruined.

For instance, you look at me and think, "There is the Dalai Lama," and suddenly, without any fabrication, it seems to your mind that there is a Dalai Lama separate from his body and independent even of his mind.

Or, consider yourself. If your name is David, for instance, we say, "David's body, David's mind," and it seems to you that there is a David who owns his mind and body and a mind and body that this David owns, does it not?

We say that the Dalai Lama is a monk, a human, a Tibetan. Does it not seem that you are saying this not with respect to his body or his mind, but that there is something independent?

Persons do exist, but they do so only nominally, through designation. Yet, when they appear to our minds, they appear not as existing through the force of being posited by names and terminology but as if they exist in their own right, {from their own side}, able to set themselves up, self-instituting. Although it is a fact that phenomena do not exist in and of themselves but depend on something else for their very existence, they appear to us to be independent.

If things did in fact exist the way they appear- if things did exist so concretely- then when one looked into and investigated them, this inherent existence should become even clearer, more obvious. However, when you

seek for the object designated, you cannot find it under analysis. For instance, conventionally there is an “I” undergoing pleasure and pain, accumulating karma, and so forth, but when we analytically search for this “I” we cannot find it. No matter what the phenomenon is, internal or external, whether it be one’s own body or any other type of phenomenon, when we search to discover what this phenomenon that is designated is, we cannot find anything that is it.

This which gives rise to the appearance of “I” is mind and body, but when you divide this into mind and body and look for the “I,” you cannot find it. Also the whole, the body, is designated in dependence upon the collection of the parts of the body; if you divide this into its parts and look for the body, you cannot find it either.

Even the most subtle particles in the body have sides and hence parts. Were there something partless, it might be independent, but there is nothing that is partless. Rather, everything exists in dependence on its parts, is only designated in dependence on its parts- its basis of designation- through the force of conceptuality; there is nothing analytically findable. There is no whole which is separate from its parts.

However, these things appear to us as if they do exist objectively and in their own right, and thus there is a difference between the way things appear to our minds and the way they actually exist, or the way we see them to exist when we analyze. If they did exist in accordance with how they appear to be established in their own right, this mode of existence should become clearer and clearer as we investigate. Yet, we can come to a decision through our own experience that when we search for these things, analytically we cannot find them. Thus they are said to be like illusions.

Since phenomena appear to us in a way that is different from what we discover when analyzing, this proves that their concrete appearance is due to a fault of our minds. After you understand that these phenomena appearing to exist in their own right are empty of existing in the way that

they appear, you have realization of phenomena as like illusions in that there is a composite of knowing the appearance of phenomena and understanding that they are empty of existing in the way they appear.

What is the benefit of understanding this? Our afflictive emotions of desire, hatred, and so forth arise because we superimpose upon phenomena a goodness and badness beyond that which they actually have.

For instance, when we get angry or desirous, we have during that time a strong sense of the goodness or badness of that object, but later when these emotions calm down and we look at those same objects, we ourselves will even find our earlier perception laughable. The benefit or assistance of wisdom is that it prevents us from superimposing on objects a goodness or badness beyond what is actually there, whereby we are able to stop desire and hatred.

Thus, the two parts of this unified practice are method and wisdom—method being the cultivation of the altruistic attitudes of love and compassion and wisdom being the view understanding the absence of inherent existence of all phenomena. These two must be in union.

Madhyamaka Pith Instructions – Madhyamakopadesha – By Atisha
From Straight from the Heart: Buddhist Pith Instructions

Translated and Introduced By Karl Brunnholzl, edited

The Mahayana's pith instructions on the Middle Way are as follows.

On the level of the seeming, in terms of the perspective of those who only see what is right in front of them, all presentations of cause and effect and so on [explain] all phenomena to be real in just the way they appear. However, ultimately, or actually, when just this seeming [reality] as it appears is scrutinized and done away with through the great Middle Way reasonings, there is nothing that can be grasped, not even something as tiny as a fragment of the tip of a hair that is split a hundred times. This is what you should internalize with certainty.

Sit on a comfortable seat in the cross-legged position. As a start, [let us say that] entities are of two kinds: what possesses form and what is without form.

1. What possesses form is a collection of infinitesimal particles. When these are analyzed and broken up in terms of their directional parts, not even their minutest [part] remains and they are utterly without appearance.

2. What is without form is the mind. As for that, the past mind has [already] ceased and perished. The future mind has not [yet] arisen or originated. As for the present mind, it is very difficult to examine: it has no color and is without any shape. Since it is just like space, it is not established.

In other words, it is free from unity and multiplicity, unarisen, natural luminosity. When analyzed and scrutinized with the weapons of reasoning, such as [those just mentioned], you realize that it is not established.

3. At the point when those two [what possesses form and what is without form] definitely do not exist and are not established as [having] any {independent} nature whatsoever, the very knowledge that discriminates them is not established either. For example, if you rub two sticks [against each other], fire comes forth. Through this condition, the two sticks are burned and become nonexistent. Thereafter, the fire that has burned them also subsides by itself.

Likewise, once all specific characteristics and general characteristics are established as nonexistent {not existing independently} [through discriminating prajna], this prajna itself is without appearance and luminous, not being established as any nature whatsoever. Thus, all flaws, such as dullness and agitation, are eliminated.

4. In this interval [of meditative concentration], consciousness is without any thought, does not apprehend anything, and has left behind all applications of mind and mental engagement. For as long as the enemies or robbers of characteristics and thoughts do not arise, {their appearance not established, and they are known as not found} consciousness should rest in such a [state].

When wishing to rise [from the meditation], slowly open the cross-legged position and stand up. Then, with an illusionlike [frame of] mind, perform as many positive actions with body, speech, and mind as possible.

By practicing with devotion, for a long time, and uninterruptedly, those with the proper fortune will see reality in this very lifetime. All phenomena are revealed as effortlessly and spontaneously present of their own accord, just as the middle of space. Through [the wisdom] that is attained subsequent to the [meditative equipoise described], all phenomena are known as illusions and the like. From the time of having manifested the vajralike meditative concentration onwards, these [bodhisattvas] do not even have a [phase of] subsequent attainment, but are in meditative equipoise at all times.

From Advice from a Spiritual Friend, by Geshe Rabten

2 The Main Practice

At the centre of the transformational psychology of training the mind is the practice of activating the awakening mind- *bodhicitta*- which, like all phenomena, has two aspects: ultimate and conventional. The first aspect involves developing the right view, or the realization of emptiness (*stong-pa-nyid*; *shunyata*). The second, the conventional awakening mind, itself has two aspects: cultivating the altruistic aspiration to attain the fully awakened state of mind, and then venturing into the actual practices and meditations in order to attain it.

In many other Mahayana texts the conventional awakening mind is explained first but here the method is reversed. Both orders are correct and our practice can follow either.

1 *Generating the ultimate awakening mind*

Having gained stability, receive the secret (teaching).

Prior to receiving the secret teaching on the ultimate awakening mind it is essential to be well-prepared and have full conviction in and complete understanding of the fundamental topics such as actions and their consequences, the suffering of cyclic existence, and impermanence. After having gained firmness and stability in these we can safely be instructed in the secret teaching; without this firm basis, there will be the danger of falling into the extreme of nihilism.

Of all the teachings of Buddha Shakyamuni, emptiness is the most difficult to understand. Each of the four main schools of buddhism (the *Vaibhashika*, *Sautrantika*, *Chittamatra* and *Madhyamika*) has a different level of understanding of emptiness according to the degree of precision with which they comprehend it. The most subtle view is expressed by the Middle Way (*Madhyamika*) school of philosophy founded by Nagarjuna.

Since the comprehension of emptiness is difficult and, if misunderstood, even treacherous, Nagarjuna has said in his *Fundamental Treatise called 'Wisdom,'* [18]

*Viewing emptiness mistakenly,
like grabbing a snake incorrectly,
brings ruin to those of little intelligence.*

A. The meditation period

(i) *Discerning the object of refutation.*

Within the cycle of existence myriad beings are oppressed with suffering because they continually carry within themselves the root of countless emotional afflictions.

*The single root of all mental afflictions is the ignorance that grasps at phenomena as being inherently or independently existent.

This is known as the self-grasping ignorance (*bdag-dzin ma-rig-pa; atmagraha-avidya*). Therefore, meditation on emptiness is explained here first because it is the most powerful opponent for eliminating this self-grasping ignorance. In a battle, soldiers try to kill each other, but they especially aim to kill the opposing leader. In the same way the main aim of dharma practice should be to destroy the self-grasping ignorance within oneself because this is the root of all suffering.

Basically it is said that there are two kinds of self-grasping ignorance: inwardly holding the idea of a self or substantial ego-identity in relation to our own being, and outwardly holding the idea of an inherent identity in relation to other phenomena.

Mediation on emptiness is not just making the mind completely blank and empty of all thoughts. Rather, an effort must be made in the beginning

stages of meditation to discover the nature of the ignorance that is grasping the concept of a self and understand exactly how it functions. Only then can we discover the falsity, or emptiness, of this ignorance.

In the same way that shooting an arrow without clearly seeing the target accomplishes nothing, meditating on emptiness without recognizing the concept of a self-identity is meaningless.

The following is a brief explanation of the way in which everything appears because of ignorance.

It may be that some of us already have some intellectual understanding that at present our minds view phenomenal appearances in a mistaken manner. We may even make such statements as, 'Oh, what I perceive does not exist in the way I now see it, but really exists in some other way.' Yet most of us have no true appreciation of the full implication of such words and we continue to believe that we ourselves, and all external phenomena as well, exist as independent units or things.

If someone were to ask us if anything could possibly exist independently all by itself, we would be forced to answer that despite conventional appearances, nothing actually exists in this way. Nevertheless, most of us still feel deeply that whatever we perceive appears to exist independently by itself.

For instance, when reading the words on this page, we automatically tend to think that they exist independently from their own side. We do not take into consideration their relationship to ourselves, the factor of our consciousness, or our manner of perceiving them. Holding on to the concept of independent existence, we continue to read without awareness of the interdependence of things. This applies to all phenomena we perceive. However, this appearance of all external objects and of our own person as being independent entities is merely superficial and does not withstand analysis.

If we search thoroughly for the underlying mode of existence- the actual nature of reality- then the appearance of things as independent entities gradually loses its clarity until finally it disappears.

Generally this false idea that external phenomena exist independently is no different from the way most of us view ourselves, thinking that we too exist independently. Usually it is unclear to us how the belief in the ego-identity within our person actually operates, but when strong emotions such as joy, sorrow, hatred and fear arise, it is easier to perceive.

For instance, if the police were to arrest us unjustly, we would experience an intense emotional reaction. On such an occasion we would find a very strong 'I' expressed by a thought such as 'I cannot be arrested like this!' When this happens we must forget our accusers and instead look within ourselves examining this 'I' that seems to exist by itself, independent of body and mind. Such a situation presents an excellent opportunity to find and analyze our concept of an 'I'.

By regularly observing the way our ego functions and also by analyzing the way we grasp at outer objects as having some sort of self-existence, we shall eventually realize that while all phenomena seem to have a true existence, this appearance is merely the product of our ignorance- in nature, like a dream. Therefore the text reads:

Consider all phenomena as a dream.

Dreams sometimes appear to be totally realistic, especially nightmares in which, for example, a fierce animal attacks us or some frightening apparition pursues us. When dreaming, everything seems to have physical reality and to be fully capable of causing benefit, suffering or fear. In fact, a nightmare may be so vivid that we suddenly awaken, panting and drenched in perspiration. However, all that we feel and see in a dream is merely illusory and does not have any real or true existence.

In the same way, * when we feel strong emotions arise, we are presented with a special opportunity to look within and clearly observe how the appearance of the ego-identity relating to our person is grasped by our ignorance. This ignorance itself is like a dream- an illusion deeply rooted within ourselves. It usually holds on to the idea of a self in relation to everything, but under special, emotionally-charged circumstances it grasps at an independent identity more intensely than usual, and thus can be observed more clearly. Under calmer conditions we cannot see how it operates because it is very subtle.

The initial step in the meditation on emptiness is to spend many months simply trying to recognize the object of ignorance and see how it functions by grasping on to the self. It will only be after we have gained this understanding that we shall be able to refute this object and not be swayed by the detrimental influence of grasping at it.

Seeing the emptiness of the object of ignorance, then, is a way to approach an understanding of the true meaning of emptiness. To meditate without this initial understanding, not recognizing the object that is to be refuted, and to think that emptiness is like the empty space in a room, will never lead to complete realization, since this is not at all the meaning of the ultimate truth.

If a thief mingled with a group of people in a house, first we would have to track him down before we could expel him and confidently assert that the house was empty of thieves. Similarly, in order to understand emptiness, which is the direct refutation of the self-grasping ignorance, first we must recognize the object of this ignorance and the manner in which such ignorance holds on to both our own personality and all outer phenomena as being self-existent. Merely to read, listen to or study teachings on emptiness without regularly meditating on it will never lead to direct and intuitive realization.

The first point of this meditation is to see how ignorance grasps at an ego-identity of our own being. Only after familiarizing ourselves with this can we turn our meditation towards examining the concept of how all outer phenomena seem to exist in the same way- that is, as independently existing selves or units. Thus we should examine how we perceive all things through the five sensory bases (eye, ear, nose, tongue and body) in relation to the five sensory objects (forms, sounds, smells, tastes and objects of touch).

With increased awareness of how our ego and ignorance function, we shall come to see the fallacy of our present mode of perception. The way in which all external objects appear to exist independently, by themselves, without any relationship to our perception or the mental labels we impute on them, is the view of ignorance.

In truth, there is nothing whatsoever that exists in this way. We are convinced everything has true inherent independent self-existence because our mind is obscured by ignorance. Desire, greed, hatred, pride and all other afflictions of the mind arise from this mistaken view.

Even though the images that appear in dreams seem to be very real, they are actually illusions of our mind. Likewise, viewing each phenomenon as existing by itself, completely independent of its surroundings, causes, conditions and our mental labelling of it, is the same as regarding dreams as real.

This view, although apparently based on reality, is completely mistaken and unfounded. However, the analogy of dreams should not be applied too thoroughly: the images that appear in dreams have no objective existence at all, and if we apply this same reasoning directly to our non-sleeping state, thinking that although animals and other objects do appear to our senses they in fact do not exist at all, we then fall into the nihilist extreme. Such a false conclusion as the belief in complete non-existence is a dangerous and perverted view; holding it is like grasping a venomous snake by the tail.

The comparison of reality to a dream, therefore, is based on this point: that contrary to our ignorant conception, neither ourselves nor other objects have any independent self-existence, just as images in a dream have none.

This negation of independent, or inherent, existence is not the negation of existence itself. If we did not exist we could neither meditate nor realize the view of emptiness, nor could we come into contact with various objects and situations. If we do not exist, then who is it who thinks we do not exist?

We do exist, but not in the manner our ignorance leads us to believe. If, for example, we were to look at a snowy mountain while wearing yellow sunglasses it would appear yellow, but when we took them off this illusion would disappear and we would see the snow as white. Similarly, all phenomena appear to exist independent of their causes, conditions and the mode of our perception of them because our perception and consciousness are obscured by the affliction of the self-grasping ignorance. This covering of ignorance is like the yellow sunglasses that obscure our vision, for just as the snow does exist, but not with a yellow color, all phenomena seen as truly self-existence still do exist but not independently.

Trying to realize emptiness is like walking across a narrow and treacherous track with deep snow on either side. In order to negotiate the way safely we have to be alert and skillful so as not to fall to either side.

In meditating on emptiness we should skillfully avoid falling into either of the two extreme views. The first is the affirming extreme, which is a firm adherence to the view of the self-grasping ignorance. This belief in the self-identity, of both phenomena and our person, will lead to the amplification of the ego.

The other wrong view is the nihilist extreme: through reasoning that the view of ignorance is mistaken we reach a conclusion that everything is non-existent. Therefore we must protect ourselves from both faults and

exercise skill in following the middle way (*madhyamaka*). *We must maintain full concentration on the emptiness of self-existence and not on mere nothingness.*

To meditate on the outright negation of existence is completely wrong. We have been caught in the cycle of confusion since beginningless time and have become so completely accustomed to it that we now feel inseparable from the ignorance that holds us here. We cannot differentiate between the deluded conceptions of ignorance and the true mode of existence. Instead, we believe that our perception, which is in fact based on lack of awareness, is the only way of relating to appearances in the phenomenal world. Yet, just as images in a dream have no substantial existence, our emotional afflictions- which arise from the ignorant concept that all phenomena exist independent of their causes, parts and our imputation of them- also do not exist in truth.

When we speak of the emptiness of phenomena, what is it they are empty of? They are empty of independent self-existence.

(ii) *The emptiness of the mind*

Examine the nature of unborn awareness.

Although it is difficult to realize emptiness it is possible, by meditating on our own being and on outer phenomena, to recognize the invalidity of our ignorant concept of self-existence. However, a further complication remains because our conception of independent existence also applies very powerfully to the mind that is meditating. When such a difficulty arises we must concentrate on consciousness itself in order to perceive that the mind too is empty and does not exist independently.

The mind has not come from somewhere, like a guest who has come into a room, nor does it go anywhere. It has no form or colour, and does not abide in any definite place. In fact it is completely intangible and depends on only

two things- the object that is perceived and the senses through which it is perceived.

Through constant observation of the mind in this way we shall see that it does not exist in the way we previously conceived it to. When we had thought that our mind was meditating, it always seemed as though we could hold on to and isolate this concept, but after meditating as described we shall recognize the emptiness of this previous ignorant conception. However, this emptiness does not imply that mind does not exist, but rather that there is no mind that can be grasped and isolated. Since it does exist we are able to use it for meditation.

(iii) *The emptiness of emptiness*

The remedy itself is released in its own place.

After meditating for some time on outer phenomena and also on the consciousness that is meditating, we should attain an insight into emptiness. However, with this limited insight another wrong concept leading to difficulties will arise, because emptiness itself will then appear to be independently existent. At such a time we should meditate on emptiness itself in the same way.

Emptiness does not exist by itself, because it is completely dependent on its base. Without this basis of emptiness there can be no emptiness. For example, this page or any other phenomenon is known as the base of emptiness (*stong-gzhi chos-can*). Since the base, or this page, is not independently self-existent, its essential nature is empty. However, emptiness also does not exist independently by itself because it too is dependent on the base and cannot possibly exist by itself.

As said in the *Heart of Wisdom Discourse*,

O Shariputra, form here is emptiness and emptiness indeed is form.

*Emptiness is not different from form;
 form is not different from emptiness.
 What is form, that is emptiness;
 what is emptiness, that is form.
 The same applies to feeling, recognition, karmic formations
 and consciousness ...*

One example traditionally used for non-existence is the horn of a rabbit. Since this base- in this case the horn of a rabbit- is completely non-existent, we can never speak of its emptiness. Both emptiness and the base of emptiness, form and so forth, totally depend on each other in a way similar to two planks of wood leaning together and giving mutual support to each other. Without one the other will fall down.

The realization of emptiness is the most effective remedy for curing the chronic disease of ignorance. However, holding the remedy to be something exceptional and self-existent is one of the grossest ignorant conceptions. The remedy itself must also dissolve into emptiness and be released in itself.

When we begin to approach meditation on emptiness, we should apply the meditation to our own ego-identity, then later transfer that awareness to the concept of self-existence in relation to outer phenomena, including the mind that is meditating.

Finally we should direct our insight towards emptiness itself. After meditating on these aspects progressively, we should meditate on them collectively, trying to keep the mind stabilized on the negation of our ignorant conceptions for as long as possible.

Six examples are traditionally given to assist the meditator in maintaining concentration on emptiness.

1. Like the sunlight that brightly illuminates all the land, the mind should not be dark and dull but bright, clear and alert; the mind should be illuminated and radiant.
 2. Like the stillness of the deep and vast ocean which, unlike a small stream or river, is not easily agitated, the mind should be kept calm and tranquil, far away from any agitation.
 3. Just as a young child's reaction on first viewing intricate temple murals is without any discrimination as to good or bad, all our concentration should be unwaveringly maintained on emptiness without discriminating about its depth or profundity. Just as the child stares wide-eyed at the painting, we should view emptiness with the eye of intelligent awareness fully open.
 4. In the same way that eagles can soar high in the sky with little exertion, needing to flap their wings only occasionally, we should stay aloft in the space of emptiness, only once in a while applying intense examination to the nature of the self, when our concentration slips into boredom or mental dullness. Having applied analytical meditation (*dpyad-sgom*), we gather the energy to resume meditation placed (*jogsgom*) effortlessly on emptiness.
- If, like small birds that continually flap their wings yet never rise to great heights, we engage only in this analysis, our overall meditation will never develop. On the other hand, if we make no use of this faculty but remain immersed in emptiness, gradually the power of this mediation will exhaust itself and sleep will overcome us- just as an eagle that never flaps its wings will eventually fall to earth.
5. With regard to extraneous thoughts that arise during meditation, we should relate to them as does a pigeon to a ship it is on in the middle of the ocean. If it flies from the ship it may first stray some distance, but since there is only the ocean to be found, it will soon return. In the same way, since trying to suppress stray thoughts that arise during meditation may lead to unnecessary complication, we should allow them to arise and

simply observe their nature and development, without getting involved in them. Thus gradually extraneous thoughts will diminish and the mind will return to the ship, the object of meditation.

6. However, this technique may not always be sufficient, so we should be vigilant for any distracting thoughts, especially emotional afflictions such as fantasies involving desire, aggression and so forth, and be like a skillful swordsman defending himself from the attack of an archer. In this example, the archer constantly shoots arrows, which the swordsman skillfully deflects with his sword. At such times, the swordsman must concentrate intensely because, if his attention lessens for an instant, he will be struck.

Just so, we should wield the sword of intelligent awareness with complete mindfulness and skill in order to avoid being wounded by the sharp arrows of the emotional afflictions.

Although these six methods may be helpful in meditating, if we do not have a correct idea of what emptiness is, time spent in meditation on it will be completely wasted.

(iv) The space-like meditation

Place (our meditation) on the nature of the foundation of all: the essence (of the path).

The term 'foundation of all' here is a synonym for emptiness. This instruction is the culmination of prior explanations because, after realizing the emptiness of our ignorant conception that things exist independently, we should maintain all energy and attention on this emptiness- the essence of the path and the very foundation of all. We must not expend our energy on sense objects, dissipating it through the five sensory organs.

By sustaining our mind in emptiness, our understanding will gradually become clearer until, after repeated meditation, we shall attain a non-conceptual, or intuitive, realization.

The more powerful the realization of emptiness, the weaker the force of ignorance becomes until it finally ends. The clearer our view of the true way in which things exist, the clearer we see the faults and false nature of ignorance. Finally, we shall kick ignorance away and simultaneously the production of mundane actions (*las*; *karma*) and the corresponding creation of instinctive propensities will weaken until they also cease completely.

Keeping our mind placed on the direct negation of the independent self-existence of both the ego and the self-identity of outer phenomena is known as space-like meditative equipoise. The stronger this is, the purer will be our view while we engage in the activities of the post-meditation period.

B. The post-meditation period

In the meditation break be a creator of illusion.

When we are not formally meditating on emptiness, but are engaged in the activities of daily life such as reading, eating, walking and working, we should reflect on our mistaken view of all phenomena in the same way that a conjurer regards his own illusory creations.

For instance, a conjurer, being a master of illusion, is able to transform one thing into another magically, such as a rock into a bird. Both he and his audience see the bird, but there is an important difference between his attitude and theirs; he is not deceived by his own creation because he knows that it has appeared only as a result of his ability.

In the same way, when we are out of the formal meditation on emptiness and again have to experience our external environment, we should regard

the mistaken view we have of it, which will still continue to arise, as merely the illusory creation of the ignorant propensities in our mind.

Since we have seen previously in the meditational period that the object of such a mistaken view is empty of independent existence, we should regard this deceptive view of things as completely false, just as the conjurer regards his illusory creations.

Most serious emotional afflictions arise not when we are meditating intensively but when we are engaged in daily activities. Therefore, if we treat the appearance of phenomena and our ego with the same attitude as that which a magician has towards his own illusory creations, then even if emotional afflictions do arise we shall not grasp them with as much ignorance as we would have before we practised meditation. Such intelligent awareness is extremely precious and will help to diminish the force of the ignorance that clings to the independent existence of all phenomena. Thus meditation and post-meditation sessions will be mutually beneficial.

C. The true mode of existence

If phenomena do not exist in the manner in which we now perceive them, what is their actual mode of existence?

Let us each take ourselves as an example and examine our past activities. Who is the person, the 'I' who was born, who has grown, travelled and studied? Who is here? Whose name is this? Who am 'I'?

Then we should meditate more objectively by searching deeply. What is the 'I' and where is the 'I'? We should look for it within this body and this existence.

Meditating deeply, we should examine all parts of our body from the top of our head down to the tips of our toes, through our veins, bones, nerves, flesh and skin and even between the layers of our skin.

Once we have acquired the certainty that the 'I' does not reside in any of these parts of the body, another question will arise. Is the 'I' the mind, the consciousness? However, even the mind is not our self. If we look closely at what would follow if this were the cause, we discover many contradictions.

For instance, all aspects of the mind can be included in three categories: virtuous, nonvirtuous and indifferent. Now, if the virtuous mind were to be identified as the self, then when it arose the self would be very strong and when it diminished the self would be weak. It would follow that those who are non-virtuous would have little ego since such an ego is exclusively the virtuous mind.

In the same way, if the self were the non-virtuous mind, then, since this also arises and perishes, it would follow that when a non-virtuous mind had been eliminated the ego would also be eliminated.

Furthermore, the unwholesome mind itself can be classified into many additional aspects such as lust, aggression and so on. Which of these is the self?

And if the ego-identity, or self, existed only in the indifferent mind, then whenever a virtuous or non-virtuous thought arose, the indifferent mind, together with the ego, would disappear.

Although there are more subtle means of investigating this 'I' in the consciousness, searching in this manner will reveal that the self or ego does not exist, even as the mind, and it is impossible for a self-identity to exist in any third place apart from the body and the mind.

By these means we shall conclude that although our existence is obvious, the very strong and independent sense of 'I' has merely been fabricated by our ignorance and does not actually exist.

At that point we may almost decide that perhaps we do not exist at all. However, although the 'I' is not findable, we should not be carried away by thoughts of non-existence. The very fact of our existence allows us to investigate in this way and doubt our existence. Yet exactly how do we exist?

Neither the mind alone nor the body alone is our self. The self arises through the interdependence of the body and mind and that aspect of consciousness that identifies such feelings as 'I am sick,' 'I am hungry' and so forth. The conventional appearance of a self comes into existence based upon a special combination of these parts- that is, the body, the mind and the consciousness that incorporates it all.

Take a watch, for example. None of its parts alone is the watch. None of the cogs, wheels or springs inside are the watch. Neither the dial nor either of the two hands is itself a watch. However, when these parts, none of them individually a watch, are gathered together and combined in a certain way, we can apply a mental label and conventionally designate this object a 'watch.'

Similarly, neither the body alone nor the mind alone is our self. But when our consciousness, form and name combine in a particular relationship with each other, we say that they exist relatively as 'I' or 'myself.'

This has been merely a brief explanation about emptiness, or the negation of the ignorance that grasps at an independent self-identity, together with some meditational methods and techniques. We should approach qualified spiritual teachers well versed in this subtle subject and study it more deeply in order to comprehend it, for it requires both much learning and much meditative practice before it can be realized directly.

We may now have a slight intellectual understanding of it, but only after having attained an intuitive insight into emptiness shall we be aware of the true mode of existence of all phenomena. Then we shall be able to perceive the conventional and ultimate ways in which things exist. However, the reasoning that leads us to the complete denial of existence is faulty and totally unfounded.

The Heart of Practice, by the Second Dalai Lama

Emptiness, Meditation, Action, and Attainment

To the feet of my holy teacher constantly I bow down;
 And I bow to the feet of the great master Lama Tsong-kha-pa,
 A thought of whom destroys the terrors of samsara
 And in a single moment bestows all needs, ultimate and mundane.

The view which understands things as they really are,
 the deepest mode of Being,
 Is a meditative experience divorced from mental dullness or agitation.
 In action it perfectly unites wisdom with method
 And it spontaneously produces the fruit of Buddhahood's
 three perfect bodies.

As for the object of the view.
 It is not made artificial by conditions;
 in essence it is unchanging.
 By nature it is pure,
 it is beyond concepts of good and evil.

It is all-pervading,
 the ultimate nature of everything
 And is the quintessence of the essence;
 And, understanding it,
 one passes beyond the bounds of entanglement.

This world we see is a painting
 Born from the brush of discursive thought,
 And within or upon it nothing truly existent can be found.
 All things in samsara and nirvana
 are but mental labels and projections.

Knowing this, one knows reality;
seeing this, one sees most true.

Understand clearly the natures
Of both the limitless diversity
and the one-tasteness of things,
And make this understanding firm as the very King of Mountains.
This is the key which opens the door of a hundred samadhis.

Mental calm which abides firmly and without motion,
and insight which reasons precisely
to the underlying nature of all things:
By combining these,
the seeds of the two obscurations are forever abandoned.
He who does just that is known as a great meditator.

In essence, from the very beginning
No difference can be found between samsara and nirvana;
Yet good and evil actions invariably produce according results.

Mahayana in action is the practice of the six perfections
On the basis of this understanding.
The inseparability of emptiness and the manifest
Is the basis of the view;

The path to be practiced is the two-fold
collections of goodness and wisdom;
The result is the spontaneous birth of Buddhahood's two kayas.

These are the view, meditation, action, and attainment
Most pleasing to the Enlightened Ones.

The Colophon: Verses on the characteristics of the view, meditation, scope of action and attainment of the Buddhadharma; written by the Dharma teacher Gen-dun Gya-tso at the repeated request of a great meditator when Gen-dun Gya-tso was making retreat in the Ol-kha Mountains.

How to Meditate upon the Ultimate Bodhimind

Sometimes the thought of 'I' suddenly arises with great force. If at these moments we look closely at how it appears, we will be able to understand that although from the beginning this manifest 'I' seems to be inherently existent within the collection of body and mind, in fact it does not exist at all in the manner that it seems because it is a mere mental imputation.

The situation is like that of a rock or tree seen protruding from the peak of a hill on the horizon. From a distance it may be mistaken for a human being, yet the existence of a human in that rock or tree is only an illusion. On deeper investigation, no human being can be found in any of the individual pieces of the protruding entity, nor in its collection of parts, nor in any other aspect of it. Nothing in the protrusion can be said to be a valid basis for the name 'human being'.

Likewise, the solid 'I' which seems to exist somewhere within the body and mind is merely an imputation. The body and mind are no more represented by the sense of 'I' than is the protruding rock represented by the word 'human'. This 'I' cannot be located anywhere within any individual piece of the body and mind, nor is it found within the body and mind as a collection, nor is there a place outside of these that could be considered to be a substantial basis of the object referred to by the name 'I'.

Meditate in this way until it becomes apparent that the 'I' does not exist in the manner it would seem.

Similarly, all phenomena within cyclic existence and beyond are merely imputations of 'this' and 'that' name, mentally projected upon their basis of ascription. Other than this mode of existence they have no established being whatsoever.

Meditate prolongedly upon this concept of emptiness. Then in the post-meditation periods maintain an awareness of how oneself, samsara, and

nirvana are like an illusion and a dream. Although they appear to the mind, they are empty of inherent existence.

Because of this non-inherent nature of things it is possible for creative and destructive activities to produce their according karmic results of happiness and sorrow. They who gain this understanding become sages abiding in knowledge of the inseparable nature, the common ground, of emptiness and interdependent origination.

This then is an easily understood explanation
 Of the glorious practices of higher being
 That plant the imprint of the two Buddhakayas
 I urge you to practice it,
 The pure essence of the great Mahayana.

The Colophon: Written by the Buddhist teacher Gyal-wa Gen-dun Gya-tso at the request of the female practitioner Kun-ga Wang-mo.

The King of Reasonings Establishing Emptiness

Homage to the lotus feet of the inseparable masters

Manjushri, Nagarjuna, and Tsong-kha-pa.

Now herein is set forth an explanation of how

To cultivate their view free from extremes.

The method of practicing the view of profound emptiness begins with attempting to recognize the object to be refuted [or the quality of which a thing is empty]. One then applies the methods of actually refuting it. This is done by maintaining awareness of emptiness in formal meditation sessions; and secondly, by maintaining the illusion-like awareness between sessions. I have discussed these subjects extensively in earlier essays so I will not do so here.

The subject here will be the extraordinary facet of the Middle View Rationalist reasoning that uses (the manner of) appearance to eliminate the eternalistic view of existence, and (the specific meaning here of) emptiness to eliminate the nihilistic extreme of non-existence.

The syllogism goes as follows:

The topic is a sprout; *it is not inherently existent because it is a dependent arising.*

If we look at his statement more closely we notice that we are not merely saying, 'It is not existent'. The object being refuted is clearly specified. If we say that *it is not inherently existent*, this specification of 'inherence' directs us to think that we are talking of something other than total non existence. If we were only speaking of general non-existence, there would be no need to specify inherence as included in the object of refutation. This is what is meant by the statement that (the meaning of) 'emptiness (here) eliminates the extreme of non existence', or nihilism.

Now, the reasoning in the syllogism

'because it is a dependent arising',

indicates by the word '*dependent*' that it exists in reliance on factors and conditions; and by the word '*arising*' that it is produced in dependence on causes.

If it were inherently existent it would not have to rely upon causes and conditions. From this reasoning we can understand that it is not inherently existent. This is how

(the manner of) appearance eliminates the extreme of existence, or eternalism.

Thus the reasoning '*because it is a dependent arising*' has the ability to eliminate both extremes of nihilism and eternalism at one and the same time. Hence it is called '*dependent arising, the King of Reasonings*'.

Let me take this a little deeper.

When we say that a phenomenon is not inherently existent or not naturally existent we are not saying it is like a horn on a rabbit, which simply is not an established base. 'Person' is a label imputed upon a collection of psychophysical aggregates, and 'cart' a label imputed upon a collection of parts, such as wheels and so forth. In the same way, all phenomena from the most coarse form, up to and including the most subtle wisdom of an omniscient mind, are only concepts imputed upon their own basis of imputation.

No 'person' or 'cart' exists on the side of the object. For example, when someone sees a scarecrow but apprehends it as being a man, 'man', except for being an imputation placed upon the scarecrow, has absolutely no basis of representation within the object itself.

In the same way, there is nobody who has been called 'Lhai-chin' or 'So-nam' from the beginning. These are but names given by their parents or a Lama after the children are born. Yet in this world the people who see these children perceive them as though they were inherently 'Lhai-chin' or 'So-nam'.

In the same way, all phenomena are solely mental imputations of 'this' and 'that'; upon the objects there is no 'thisness' or 'thatness'.

When this is realized one enters into an undistorted understanding that all conventional realities- karma and its fruit, samsara and nirvana, qualities to be accomplished and faults to be overcome, and so forth- are but paintings born from the brush of names and mental imputations. This understanding protects one from falling into the extreme of nihilism.

Moreover, one gains a definite understanding that all objects of perception are without an atom of real existence, and this frees one from the extreme of eternalism.

The significance of this double-pointed understanding the two truths is that even while one is being progressively led to a profound understanding that every thing in samsara and beyond does not exist inherently, there is a proportionate deepening of one's understanding of how conventionally these things, which are merely names, operate unfailingly in a chain of cause, effect, and dependent arising.

Thus simultaneous with the discovery of the profound intuition of how all things are only mental imputations, one gives birth to the peerless vision that not an atom of what appears to the mind exists on the side of the object.

When this occurs, (knowing the nature of) appearance automatically eliminates grasping at the extreme of (what is called) existence, and

(understanding the meaning of what is called its') emptiness eliminates grasping at the extreme of non-existence.

At that moment, the emptiness of inherent existence effortlessly appears as the fact of dependent arising.

By the strength of this composition born
 From the white thought to slightly benefit
 Some beginners in emptiness meditation
 May beings never part from the view free of extremes.

The Colophon: At the request of Yon-tsun Ge-lek Gya-tso, who asked for a brief elucidation of the King of Reasonings, this was written by the lazy Buddhist monk Gen-dun Gya-tso while he was residing at Gya-ri Cho-kor.

Teachings on The Middle Way, by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

The Path of the Middle Way

The insight of the Middle Way's teachings is that whatever is dependently arisen is empty of its own essence. The reason for this is that whatever thing it may be, its existence is not inherent but rather is merely imputed in dependence upon some other basis.

For example, when we look at a collection of parts and give it a name "automobile," then "automobile" is a mere name, a mere imputation, that has no existence other than being merely that.

This understanding is the path of the Middle Way, free from the extremes of existence and nonexistence, permanence and extinction, realism and nihilism.

- From The Sun of Wisdom, p. 157.

From the Introduction to Sun of Wisdom

Since it is a commentary on the middle turning of the wheel of Dharma, the main topic of The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way is emptiness. In fact, the terms Middle Way and emptiness are synonyms.

Middle Way means that the true nature of the phenomena we experience lies in the middle, between all possible extremes that can be conceived of by the intellect. The true nature of reality cannot be described by any conceptual fabrication, by any conventional term or expression. Thus, it is not existent, not nonexistent, not something, not nothing, not permanent, not extinct; it is not the lack of these things, and it is not even the middle in between them, for that is a conceptually fabricated extreme as well.

The true nature of reality transcends all the notions we could ever have of what it might be. This is also the ultimate understanding of the second turning's description of emptiness. Emptiness ultimately means that genuine reality is empty of any conceptual fabrication that could attempt to describe what it is.

The path leading to the direct realization of this inconceivable, genuine nature of reality begins with gaining certainty in this profound view of emptiness. This is an essential first step because it is not enough just to read the teachings that say, "All phenomena are emptiness; the nature of reality is beyond concept," and, without knowing the reasons these teachings are accurate, to accept them on blind faith alone. If we do, we will not remove our doubts, and our mere opinion that the teachings are valid will not do us any good when these doubts come to the surface. When we gain certainty in the teachings on emptiness, however, then it will be impossible for doubts to arise.

The way that Nagarjuna helps us to gain such certainty is through the use of logical reasoning. This is particularly important for us in this day and age, when academic inquiry, science, and technology are at the

forefront. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, people are very well educated and are used to using their intelligence to examine and understand things. Nagarjuna's method is perfectly in harmony with this - he teaches us how to determine the true nature of reality for ourselves by logically analyzing the things that appear to us. By analyzing in this way we can gain stable certainty in the profound view.

Many of Nagarjuna's logical reasonings negate the true existence of things and conclude that things do not truly exist, that they are empty of inherent nature. This leads some people to think that Nagarjuna's view is nihilistic - he negates actors, actions, causes and results, the Buddha, and everything else in samsara and nirvana. What then is left of our experience? What is the use or meaning of life if everything is empty in this way?

The Three Stages of Analysis

It is therefore very important to know that the Buddha taught about the nature of reality in three stages. First, in order to teach his disciples that positive actions lead to happiness and negative actions lead to suffering, the Buddha taught about these things as if they were real. In order to help disciples give rise to renunciation of samsara and longing for nirvana, he taught about samsara's suffering and nirvana's liberation from that suffering as if they were real.

Furthermore, since all of these teachings depend upon the existence of a self, the Buddha taught about the self, who performs positive and negative actions and experiences their results, who wanders from lifetime to lifetime in samsara, and who can gain the liberation of nirvana, as if it were real. This was the first stage of the teachings, the teachings of the first turning of the wheel, called the stage of no analysis - (in the sense that there is) no analysis of the true nature of the phenomena about which the Buddha taught.

The second stage reflects the fact that once students gain confidence in the law of cause and result and develop renunciation of samsara and longing for nirvana, it is then important that they reverse their clinging to themselves and these phenomena as being truly existent, because this clinging actually prevents them from gaining the liberation for which they strive.

In the second stage, therefore, the Buddha taught that phenomena do not truly exist. For example, in the Heart of Wisdom Sutra, the Buddha taught, "There is no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind," and so forth. This second stage is called the stage of slight analysis the point at which phenomena are analyzed and found to be lacking in inherent nature, to be empty of any truly existent essence.

In this way, we can see that we need the teachings on nonexistence to help us reverse our clinging to things as being existent. The true nature of reality, however, transcends both the notion of existence and that of nonexistence. Therefore, in the third stage, the stage of thorough analysis, the Buddha taught that we must also give up our clinging to nonexistence if we are to realize the simplicity, the freedom from all conceptual fabrications, that is reality's ultimate essence.

The Buddha taught these latter two stages in the middle turning of the wheel of Dharma. Of the two philosophical schools whose explanations are based on this middle turning, the Middle Way Autonomy school (Svatantrika Madhyamaka) emphasizes the second stage, that of slight analysis, whereas the Middle Way Consequence school (Prasangika Madhyamaka) emphasizes the third stage, that of thorough analysis. The Autonomy school refutes true existence and asserts emptiness to be the true nature of reality; the Consequence school refutes true existence but does not assert anything in its place, because its proponents recognize that to do so would obscure realization of the freedom from all conceptual fabrications that is the true nature of reality itself.

The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way teaches from the perspectives of both the second and third stages, and therefore both the Autonomy and Consequence schools find their roots in this text.

It is important for us to identify what stage a particular teaching in the text is coming from so that we can link it with the explanations of one of these two schools and also understand its intended purpose.

If it is a refutation of existence, its purpose is to help us overcome our clinging to things as being real; if it teaches the freedom from all conceptual fabrications, it is intended to help us understand how reality is actually beyond all our concepts of what it might be.

From Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness

From Dancer of Great Bliss: Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso

The Way to Meditate on Selflessness

In order to gain knowledge about the abiding nature of reality,
 Know that the five aggregates are not the self,
 and that the mind believing in the self is not the self, either,
 When you gain certainty in this, rest right within that.

The Way to Meditate in the Mind-Only Tradition

Since perceived objects are the confused projections of habitual tendencies,
 they do not truly exist.
 Therefore, the mind that perceives them does not truly exist either.
 When you gain certainty that reality is empty of this duality,
 settle naturally into that—
 without contrivance, let go and relax.

The Way to Meditate in the Autonomy Tradition

Since they are neither one nor many,
 phenomena have no inherent nature.
 Since they neither arise, abide, nor cease,
 thoughts have no inherent nature.
 Since there is neither bondage nor liberation,
 the disturbing states of mind have no inherent nature.
 Knowing this well, rest within great emptiness.

The Way to Meditate in the Consequence Tradition

Existent, nonexistent, and so forth,
 empty, not empty, and so forth,

permanence, extinction, and so forth-
genuine reality transcends all such conceptual fabrications.

The Way to Meditate in the Empty-of-Other Tradition

When we analyze this mind, we cannot find any essence,
but when we do not analyze,
experiences of luminosity are unceasing.
Therefore, mind is luminosity and emptiness,
primordially inseparable,
and this is known as luminous clarity, the buddha nature.

Notes from the lectures of Lama Lodu, On Emptiness and the Nature of Mind

It is necessary to know the essential nature of the mind, right view, without which you will grasp what you visualize, and with your grasping this will become reality. This will make a big obstacle.

View means emptiness, emptiness, everything. In order to bring confidence to your mind, you have to use discriminating wisdom to analyze what which we see, what you feel, to determine whether these things are real or not real.

Analyze, check up, use your intellect, and the result you will find.

Self of person, self of phenomena, we are holding as self, 'me' and 'I', and phenomena as real.

These two make confusion. These two make dualistic mind, and lead us to become confused.

Having an 'I' leads to 'mine'. Without 'I' there cannot be 'mine'; 'my hand', 'my hat', 'my feet', 'my clothing', my food'... Then, 'I like', 'I dislike', clothing, food, house, relating to phenomena through strong grasping.

I project phenomena, which becomes like and dislike, ego becomes tight, narrow.

Things distract us, we allow distraction.

Human beings have 'I' and 'mine'; 'my mother', 'my father', 'my brother', 'my sister'. Without I, no mine. This is attachment, clinging. Then if they dislike another, I don't care, but 'my' family, I dislike them. Why? Because ego grasps them. My family is relative to me.

Through ignorance possessing an artificial I, we have strong grasping, holding, and this produces anger towards anyone who doesn't like 'me', and 'I'. Attachment, then anger, pride, greed, jealousy.

Due to these the mind is completely artificial. 'Me' and 'I' become a strong center, and the true nature becomes lost, covered over. With these afflictions there is no right speech, action, motivation, which contributes to suffering, and we blame family, world, government. I'm the only good one', loneliness, fear, longing, drug, drink, crazy...

As soon as 'I', then desire, greed, due to ignorance, wrong actions, confusion, pain, blame. You never think you're responsible.

You have to use discriminating wisdom to analyze what you see and what you feel, to determine whether these things are real or not real.

Right now we are holding as self an 'I', a 'me' and phenomena as real. Through ignorance we possess an artificial I which we hold with strong grasping.

The misconception, the idea of 'I', which does not exist there, which is not true but which we think is true, that makes all afflictions come, then wrong action, negative action, then suffering.

We ignore our true nature, and we place, instead of our true nature, an 'I', 'me'.

Wisdom is to put an end to the ignorance that holds and artificial 'me', and 'I', and to bring the true nature.

To pacify afflictions and make a purified mind, we practice concentration, then the mind becomes calm. We can see what we are doing and stop wrong actions.

We should keep concentration continuously, the clear and sharp mind. Then you can see whether the 'I' or 'me' is real or whether it is an artificial concept that we grasp and hold and think is real.

The ego is the question. Is it real or not real?

We can think: 'My name is Michael. People call me Michael, and I say 'Yes'.

Even when I talk to myself, I use my name, 'Michael', and I believe I am the Michael.

But we can see, if this is real, then where is the Michael? Is it the body? The body has many parts. which part is the 'Michael'. The practice is to take this apart, looking, 'Where is the Michael?' Is it the skin, flesh, bone, lung? In detail, everything you take apart. Which is the Michael?

Head is called head, hair is called hair, eye is eye, nose is nose, ear, ear, skin is skin, blood is blood, flesh is flesh. Each has its own name. None are called Michael.

Michael is not found. Did I not find Michael, or does Michael not exist? If 'Michael' exists, it must be found by looking for it. We can see 'Michael' is an artificial concept.

'Michael', and 'me' is the same. Sometimes we call the name 'Michael' and sometimes 'me', 'I'. Both at the same time you are able to analyze.

Not seen inside, outside, in the same way, the 'I', the 'me', which creates confusion, is not real, it is an artificial concept. But we get caught.

Look from the top of your head to the bottom of your feet for whatever you are called by name, for 'I', 'me'.

You can see it's not there. It's a concept.

This I is a concept, it does not exist, inherently. Me and I, they do not exist inherently, their nature is emptiness. Emptiness is the real thing, but through affliction, ego, that makes the difficulty.

Now look carefully to not finding 'I', 'me'. What is its location? What color? What shape? It has no location because it doesn't exist. Bring your mind to that stage.

You can analyze, each time: is the I there or not? Is this concept, 'I', 'me' there or not? Is it artificial or truly existent? Is this a concept or really there?

Look one time each session, then, when you come to the point that you realize there's nothing there, then stay there. Don't analyze further.

When you find and still you're looking, that's wrong. So first analyze, then just stay with that nature without bringing artificial thought.

Bring your spacious nature of mind, and leave it that way, without any kind of thought.

At a point, further analysis is only a distraction.

This emptiness is not a blank, forgetting everything, but this emptiness is very much aware, bright and shining.

Everything you can see or hear, or feel, the reality is empty, completely without anything artificial there.

Atisa taught that is very important to first analyze the 'me' the 'I', and carefully check up. Look into it. Is it real or not? When you don't find it, stop looking. You found it already. When you have found, stay with that nature.

Selfishness leads to suffering, self-lessness leads to nirvana. 'Self-lessness' is when you have completely found nothing, then you stay with that stage. That is the meditation on selflessness.

II.

'Empty' is the opposite of things existing inherently

Phenomena - nothing exists inherently. Whatever is dependent on conditions, is emptiness. Whatever is depending on other, not created by singleness (by itself), not creating its own reality, that does not inherently exist also.

All details of internal, external, is empty.

Table is emptiness. With ignorant I, with selfishness, we can see grasping, but with enlightened mind, Dharmakaya mind, we can look - this table is emptiness.

Why is it called 'table'? We have to find. We find wood, not table. All together, with the parts dependent on each other, it is a table. When we take it apart, where is the table? Is it one, or many? Actually there is no table. 'Table' is merely named, a concept. Actually this is a piece of wood. No table. Table is empty.

Same kind of analysis, we can take apart anything, looking for what we call an object. None inherently exists.

Thinking that things actually exist as we conceive of them, this is the mistaken idea.

Same with country, the United States of America (it does not inherently exist)

As soon as I landed here, I thought,

‘This is the United States.’

‘The airport is the United States, this house is the United States.’

But a rock is a rock, a tree, is a tree, the earth is the earth, but there is no ‘United States’ to be found there. The United States is empty of The United States. It is a concept. It does not exist inherently at all.

So in that way we come to the conclusion that things do not exist at all. They are emptiness; they are not inherently existent.

First analyze the self. Become self-less. ‘Self’ is like a dream, not existing inherently. At the same time you eat, drink, are happy, upset, then we cling to that artificial idea and we suffer, feel pain, confused, happiness, unhappiness in dream time. Why? Because we don’t realize it as a dream.

This phenomena, an enlightened being can see does not exist inherently - it is like a dream. Therefore they are not effected mentally, good, not good. There is equipoise, evenness. Samsara and nirvana, suffering and happiness becomes the same. Due to their realization, there is no grasping. One is not effected by samsaric suffering or happiness.

Self, phenomena, then self and other, they are not two. Leave your mind on that stage.

When you go into this more deeply, your mind becomes more clear, and you go beyond conceptualization, beyond intellect.

Practice concentration, and purify enough, then analyze one time, and you can stay longer in this kind of meditation.

You have to have lots of conditions to be able to maintain this emptiness; the accumulation of merit, and purification, concentration and good karma.

With more accumulation of merit, meditation on emptiness becomes more profound. It lasts longer. Being more purified, you can go deeper. Merit and purification, and good deeds, the Six Perfections, the wisdom of emptiness requires these.

Motivation is important, If it is just for the present, it is so limited. Practice Dharma so that all can become completely enlightened, completely free from suffering. That motivation is very important.

Keeping vows aids your realization.

Create, and maintain good conditions.

Do your best to have right speech, right mind, right action, and especially to have a pure mind, compassion and kindness toward other beings. With this, action is always positive. A mind that is kind, loving, compassionate, and warm - cultivate and generate this as much as you can. Live positively in your daily life, and then during meditation you can experience a deeper, longer duration of emptiness meditation.

The Six Perfections, and emptiness, go together, the Six Perfections with compassion, with loving kindness.

In skillful means, wisdom is the eye, means is the foot to walk. These two conditions bring you to where you want to go.

Wisdom and means have to be practiced together, not emptiness, wisdom alone, not skillful means, positive actions, compassion and kindness alone. They have to go together, in conjunction.

Offering, prostration, mantra, and visualization are skillful means to attain the mahamudra state of enlightenment, to purify and accumulate merit.

In general, tantric practice is developing pure view, one's self as deity, others as entourage, as retinue, sound as mantra, and place as mandala of the deity, the place as a pure land. Hold this in your mind perfectly and purely viewing that way. At the same time know that all these things are not inherently existent. The true nature of all these things is emptiness., Dharmakaya wisdom.

To visualize the deities and phenomenal world as the pure land is the purification. Knowing all this nature is not existing inherently, that all this nature is emptiness, that is wisdom.

So, tantric practice is this way.

To go deeper in practice, empty of self, empty like the sky, try to become accustomed to that stage. If you can keep this in your mind it will be helpful.

What is real then? Real is the nature of the mind. Our Mind is emptiness without any kind of conditions. It is emptiness, beginning emptiness, in between emptiness, and emptiness in the future. Emptiness never changes.

Emptiness, Dharmakaya, that is true, that is indestructible.

'Mind is real, unchangeable, indestructible.'

Everything is emptiness, things do not exist inherently. What is real is the true nature of mind. It is real because it is permanently there. It is not born, it never dies; it never exists, therefore it can never disappear.

No harm can destroy it; no one can destroy it. It is a very good friend. That is called Dharmakaya enlightenment.

Especially in the Kagyud-Nyingma, that is the special view. That's why in their introduction to the Mahamudra and Maha-Ati, someone going into the Mahamudra and Maha-Ati definitely it is important to have first that view for a long time, and to practice.

All of these are very important: devotion, compassion and kindness, very important, good actions. And with that good action you put all your effort into the practice of concentration, but before you go to emptiness you must have some experience of mental stability, samadhi practice, it's very important. Then you can go on to tantric practice.

We ignore our true nature of mind, and we place, instead of emptiness, 'I', 'me'. Ignorance puts an artificial 'me' and 'I' there, and 'others' completely burying the true nature of emptiness. Then we have to work hard like this.

The misconception, the idea of 'I' which does not exist there, which is not true, but which we think is true, that makes all the afflictions come, then unskillful, wrong actions, negative, then suffering. Then we are confused. First we go that way, then we return.

Everything is empty, bright, but you see, hear, feel. Everything is aware around you, but at the same time everything is empty, space.

The presentation of this depends on the personality.

Mental stability is very important.

Emptiness means that the mind does not have any artificial thought, any concept. You hear, see, feel, but it's still emptiness.

This means when you sit, and meditate on emptiness, you are aware of everything, but you are not grasping onto it. The nature of what appears or is experienced is completely emptiness.

Blank is just being unconscious, so the more you meditate on emptiness, the more sharp your awareness has to be, but without grasping anything.

Don't invite anything, also don't resist. Then bring the descriptions of emptiness to mind. That you have to cultivate.

Intellectually, when you check up, you never see the inherent existence of 'I'. Then stay on that stage of emptiness. Emptiness quality is exactly like that. Aware of everything, but without grasping anything.

Don't invite anything, or suppress. Do not grasp or hold. Mind stays as emptiness.

Feeling, sound, their color or shape you cannot see, which means the feeling is emptiness. Then taste, same thing. Then touch.

When confident, don't look anymore, just stay with that emptiness.

Mind is like a small vase. Broken, the space inside merges with the whole space of the universe. Emptiness becomes vast and deep, and profound, if you can integrate that. If not, cultivate selflessness, the quality I just described, the same thing.

(Maitreya)

'The nature of mind has never been defiled; it has never contained any kind of fault or impurity, so there is nothing to remove from that.'

The nature of mind is, from the beginning, very pure and stainless, therefore there is nothing you have to remove from the nature of mind. It has never been defiled, therefore there is nothing to remove.

Mind is spontaneously, naturally pure and permanently stainless.

'There is nothing to add, no quality or perfection of the Buddha to add into the mind.'

Even a little bit, there is no need to put in. Mind itself is Buddha. There is no need to put in any Buddha quality or perfection. It is there already.

'Look at it as completely perfect in itself.'

But then, when you look at it, who are you that is looking?

'That which is looking is the perfect one.'

This perfect, completely stainless pure nature, spontaneous Buddha nature, that is not looked at by something other than that which is the perfect wisdom.

The wisdom of meditation is capable of seeing the perfect things within us, within our Buddha nature, completely.

'Look at the perfect through perfect wisdom. If you see the perfect through perfect wisdom, then you are completely liberated from suffering.'

Mind has no substance. That emptiness is Buddha nature. That mind is completely separate from the emotions, afflictions, ego. Therefore, it is naturally, completely, spontaneously perfect Buddha himself.

So you have to look that way, very directly. The Buddha is in your hand. There is no distance for you. The Buddha is within view.

The nature of mind is Buddha himself. It is not mixed with any kind of affliction, or the emotions.

The mind, nature of emptiness, is never born, never dies, and it is permanently existing. Because it is never born, it never dies, and does not depend on anything else. It is just spontaneous nature. That is the nature of our mind. It is there all the time.

Other afflictions are the new things, the temporary things. Anger is temporary, desire, temporary, pride is temporary, ego is also temporary, because mind and ego are completely separate things, not one.

If the nature of the mind, Buddha nature and ego were mixed, it would be very hard to become enlightened. When the ego was removed, Buddha nature would be removed also.

Understand that ego and mind are completely separate things but the ego obscures. It's like the sun in the sky, bright and shining, that is covered by clouds. Sun and clouds are separate, yet clouds can temporarily obscure the sun, and envelop the sunlight. At the time, the sun and clouds are still separate.

Our mind, Buddha nature, and our afflictions are also not identical. They have a separate identity.

So this is a very important point. When you are introduced to Mahamudra, Maha-Ati practice, that's the way you look.

The nature of mind is Buddha itself, so you have to maintain that nature, that perfection, that quality. Then you are enlightened that very moment, at that very time.

The problem is that although Buddha is within us right now, we are not able to maintain it. At the same time, that nature, that quality, that perfection is there all the time.

Why don't we see it? Due to afflictions, obscurations - that's the reason. We have to remove them stage by stage, through concentration, meditation on emptiness, applying the skillful means of method.

All these can remove the obscurations little by little. Then, finally, you are able to relax and rest on the nature of what you own mind quality is.

Another way is, you just sit down and do not cultivate any concept, and just look directly at the mind. Its quality is completely emptiness. The essence of mind is emptiness, externally, internally.

Look at it that way, and at the same time, its aspect is luminosity, bright, and shining. Empty, yet of every single thing you are aware, but never clinging, grasping or holding. The reason you notice things is because of the aspect of luminosity.

Emptiness becomes more bright and shining because of that awareness. Essence is emptiness, and aspect is luminosity, radiance, bright, shining - it means the luminosity that can see different forms. That awareness is very

necessary. If your meditation is missing that one quality the meditation is incomplete.

Emptiness in essence, yet the aspect of mind is not expressed fully if you don't bring a state of mind that is very aware, awake. Of everything you are aware, that's called luminosity.

Then, unimpededness - when you hear sounds, what you hear is luminosity. Unimpededness is that you are not clinging to the sound that you hear. That is unimpededness.

So these three: essence of emptiness, aspect of luminosity, and the nature of unimpededness. That is the complete form of the qualities of the mind.

That is the direct teaching, if you can keep it. You can see if you can keep it or not keep it. Don't deceive yourself, thinking you can keep it. High teaching can be very risky, dangerous, low teaching, no risk.

Mind is very tricky. Even if you are qualified for high teaching, it's still o.k. to go stage by stage, you're not losing anything at all. You still get what you need to get. And if you're not qualified, going after the higher teachings, you're wasting your time.

This Buddha quality, if you can keep it, there's no need to do anything. Stay with that. That is the best practice.

Your nature as it is, that is the fire puja, that is the rite, that is the Six Perfections. Even if for a single moment you can keep your mind that way, that is the most perfect thing you can do. If you cannot do this, then you do other practices, fire puja, Six Perfections, in order to develop, to cultivate, to purify. To this practice all these things are illusion.

So staying as it is, as Buddha himself within you, without speaking, doing, thinking, if you can stay that way, then everything is there. That is called the direct way to understanding.

The main thing, think of the essence of emptiness, the aspect of luminosity, and the nature of unimpededness. These three. If you are missing one, you fall into some extreme. Emptiness without luminosity, meditation on emptiness alone, you fall into the formless god realm; luminosity, clinging you fall into the form realm; and meditation with grasping you fall into the desire realm.

The Three Kayas

Essence is emptiness, this is the Dharmakaya, the wisdom of emptiness; aspect is luminosity, this is the Sambhogakaya, the enjoyment body; and the nature of unimpededness, this is the Nirmanakaya.

The speech, mind and body are the basis, or foundation of our three kayas. They are immature, but mind is Dharmakaya, speech is Sambhogakaya, and body is Nirmanakaya.

Speech, mind, body, that is the source, the potential. That is the basis, the source of the three kayas.

When you practice, then that is the path three kayas. Cultivating the view that the mind is emptiness, speech, luminosity, and form and appearance is unimpeded, that we call path three kayas. What we attain is the result three kayas. That is the destination of our practice.

Mind, speech, body are the source of the three kayas, yet manifesting in an immature way. The three kayas- speaking, doing, thinking, the immature way they are expressed outside, this will bring karma.

Instead of emptiness, we are thinking something, holding something. Instead of luminosity, we are grasping whatever you see or hear, whatever you like or dislike. Instead of unimpededness, you grasp here or there. The three kayas are used that way.

Yet the mind has very much potential. The three kayas are the potential for enlightenment. Every living being has Buddha nature.

The path in general is made of shinay practice, to make the mind stable, concentrated, one pointed, free of thought, purification, and accumulation of merit. Then you look at the nature of mind, viewing emptiness without grasping or holding, with radiance of mind. This is called path.

You are applying the path. It is not something you find from outside, it is always there.

From Meditation - Advice to Beginners, by Bokar Rinpoche

The example of the stuffed tiger

As long as we do not know the nature of the mind, we live with the conviction that thoughts really exist (as they appear). Taken as real, they become the cause of suffering. One sees some people so tormented by a thought that they cease to eat, becoming thin and pale, with hollow expressionless eyes. These physical repercussions illustrate well the force of these thoughts when they are taken as real.

One sees children's stuffed animals, which sometimes look real. Tigers, lions and leopards have wide open jaws, threatening fangs and fix their prey with fighting eyes. Any little child can be frightened by a stuffed tiger, as he or she believes he or she is in the presence of a real threat. His or her mistake is the unique cause of his or her suffering. Thus, where there is no real tiger, the child believes there is one.

On the other hand, the same child may be very happy with a stuffed horse, according it a real existence, and investing it with the kindness and gentleness of a genuine horse. Not recognizing the nature of our thoughts, we are similar to this little child. We take as real something that is not, and from there we feel suffering or joy.

On the other hand, the meditator who achieves mahamudra, recognizing the true nature of his or her mind, is comparable to an adult who would not be misled by an imitation of a tiger or a horse. The adult would think, "It is so well made, one would think it is a real tiger, or one would think it is a horse." But he or she does not mistake the reality of the object, and is not led to react as he or she would in the presence of a true tiger or true horse. He or she is free of the fears and joys which would be present in a real situation.

Similarly, for the one who has realized mahamudra, thoughts from which the real character is uncovered will not give rise to emotional complications. They engender neither suffering nor joy.

All kinds of thoughts and images appear in our mind, but they do not have any real existence. Lhatong recognizes simultaneously the mental manifestations, and their absence of inherent existence. This does not mean that one should attempt to erase the manifestation, to deny the creative faculty of the mind, rather one should see its character devoid of self-existence. A false tiger does not appear with less "form," it is the aspect of manifestation. Knowing that it is not real corresponds to the aspect of vacuity. Superior vision recognizes the form of the tiger and its unreality, the union of manifestation and vacuity at the same time.

Searching for the Causes of Unhappiness, by Lama Thubten Yeshe

An understanding of the true nature or reality of inner phenomena has the power to cut through unclear or foggy states of mind. Such wisdom is like a sword slicing through delusion. This diamond-hard blade is capable of destroying negativities completely. With the wisdom gained from deep understanding, your mind automatically attains a state of clear tranquility and a truly peaceful inner environment is established.

For this reason, the Buddha dharma does not emphasize blind acceptance of doctrinal statements. Your own personal investigation and inner experience of the truth of the teachings are much more important than an unquestioning belief in dogma. Gaining such wisdom is the only effective way of training your mind and achieving your goals.

You will not make much progress along a religious path if your wisdom-knowledge is not functioning sharply. This is contradictory to what most people think about religion. For them, religion is a set of rigid beliefs that are removed from or even opposed to reason. They are therefore assumed to be beyond questioning, logic, argument or scientific verification.

Unfortunately, the deterioration into dogmatism of so much religious thought strengthens this cynical viewpoint. However, I am not talking here about such degenerate forms of what might be called religion but which is in fact mere superstition. Rather I am concerned with inner disciplines capable of bestowing true peace on the minds of oneself and others.

It is a common mistake to think that a religious person is someone who is afraid of new and potentially challenging situations that might threaten his or her beliefs. As true religion is the very light of wisdom, why should a religious person ever be afraid of darkness? The nature of light cannot be affected by shadows. Similarly, the clean, clear light of wisdom-knowledge cannot be disturbed by confused and foggy states of mind.

Nor is the spirit of scientific investigation in any way contrary to true religion. After all, scientific experiments do not contradict the light of the sun and moon, so why should they be opposed to the light of inner wisdom?

The weak- those who lack the discriminating eye of wisdom- accept religious beliefs passively. Having no background in philosophic thought and ignorant of the reasons supporting their faith, they experience great uneasiness when someone questions their beliefs. Such people often lead closely guarded lives, fearful of encountering someone or something that might shatter their insecure spiritual foundation. This attitude, however, is not the fault of religion but of their own limited understanding.

True dharma leads in exactly the opposite direction. It enables one to integrate all the diverse experiences of life into a meaningful and coherent whole, thereby banishing fear and insecurity completely.

Of course, the type of philosophy and logical thinking that underlies true religious belief is not exactly the same as that taught in schools. Mathematical logic, for instance, enables you to deal with a certain strictly defined external problem in a reasonable manner. The original problem is restricted in scope and the solution that is found completely satisfies it.

Dharma-logic, on the other hand, has a much higher and more all-encompassing goal. It deals with inner problems and looks for solutions to the most important questions in life: how to find happiness and avoid suffering for oneself and others.

When you arrive at solutions using such dharma logic, you find that you have not merely answered one isolated problem, but have discovered the inter-relatedness of many inner processes previously thought to be unconnected.

This type of reasoning, therefore, is very demanding, for you must continually check up and investigate the many hows and whys you uncover, but it is ultimately more satisfying because it affects the very quality of your life.

How do you apply this inner dharma logic? Perhaps you feel unhappy and as a result the thought of hatred starts to arise within you. Rather than observing this process passively or being swept along by it involuntarily, you should investigate what is happening. Try to discover why you are unhappy and check to see if hatred is an appropriate response.

In other words, ask yourself whether what you are about to express will improve your situation or not. Making such an analysis is not an act of neurotic self-preoccupation. Rather, it is a way to reveal the light of an answer to your problems.

Such questioning, then, is a process of causation in that it leads to a solution. It is the same as a scientist's trying to come up with the best answer to his or her problem.

While making inner experiments, you should ask yourself a series of questions in the same way. By doing this properly you will develop and mature spiritually, and as a result will overcome the uneasiness and dissatisfaction gnawing at your life. You will be able to analyze your growing hatred, for example, and discover not only its causes but an effective way to disperse and eventually eliminate it.

We often suffer from strong desire or craving for something. This follows from uncontrolled "happy" feelings experienced in relation to the object. When such feelings arise, you have to check up and see clearly what is happening. It is very important to investigate why these happy feelings produce the uneasiness of craving and desire.

Similarly, when you are unhappy, try to discover why such a feeling automatically leads to hostility. Sometimes you feel neither happy or unhappy about something. This neutral feeling often leads to mental foggiess, an ignorant state in which you do not wish to be bothered about considering the object at all.

These three ways of responding to your experiences are not always gross and obvious, but often so subtle as to be barely noticeable. As humans, we are under their influence at all times, even though we are usually unaware of it. Therefore, if you wish to train your mind, you must sharpen your wisdom and become more aware of what is actually happening within.

When you look closely at the main characteristic of your feelings and see how they function, you discover something very interesting. If I can make a statement here, all psychological problems come from feelings.

When a happy one arises, your uncontrolled mind is tossed here and there by it. When it is an unhappy feeling then of course your mind is uncontrolled and it is obvious that problems arise in its wake.

Even neutral feelings, which are neither pleasurable nor painful, lead eventually to problems and suffering. You wish to ignore whatever aroused these in-between feelings and therefore you avoid exploring its reality. This reaction of closing yourself off from something is the very nature of ignorance and is totally contrary to the development of liberating wisdom-knowledge.

While it is true that feelings produce desire, hatred and other psychological problems, this is only half the story. These psychological states in turn arouse further disturbing feelings. It is a circle. Each is the cause of the other and they all spin endlessly in our consciousness, occupying nearly all of our time and energy.

It is very worthwhile to look closely into the nature of your feelings and investigate what goes on in your consciousness, mind, psyche or whatever you wish to call it. This is so worthwhile, and who could ever deny it? Do religious doctrines teach a more effective approach for attaining true peace of mind? Are science and philosophy opposed to this method of investigation? Not at all. In fact, a background in philosophy, as stated before, only strengthens the realizations gained from such inner explorations.

Without such solidity to your beliefs, you might feel you have an answer to a particular problem only to see it disappear when someone questions you about it. Psychological solutions should not be as flimsy as this.

Let us look deeper into the nature of feelings. Whether they are happy, unhappy or neutral, most feelings arise from wrong discriminations. Such discriminations are mistaken because they are based on false projections of the mind which keep you from perceiving the true nature of reality. This can refer to the reality of any phenomena, outer or inner, animate or inanimate. Feelings do not only arise when one human reacts with another. They can occur in relation to anything.

In most instances of conflict there is an object and your disturbed feelings about it are the subject. These may be thought of as distinct and separate from one another- as when one feels, 'I hate that person'- but in fact your feeling has somehow created this object. By this I mean that the object of your feeling has nothing whatsoever to do with the reality of any external phenomena. It is merely the painted projection of a falsely discriminating mind.

Therefore it is really quite simple to deal with potential sources of mental conflict. Merely remember that whatever arouses disturbing feelings within you is but the conception of the mistaken superstitious mind. Investigate the object in these terms and you will be able to gain a clearer view of what is happening without resorting to a very complicated line of reasoning.

Just experiment with your life. Whenever you are perceiving, acting or feeling, check up immediately and see if you might be cheating yourself. Or, more accurately, see if your mind, projecting unreal discriminations onto the objects you perceive, might be cheating you by causing conflict and disturbances.

We always think that it is someone else who is causing our problems and robbing us of happiness. If we look carefully, however, there is no such enemy to be found. From beginningless time, throughout countless lives, and from the moment of our birth until now, we have been cheating ourselves.

You may think, 'I never act that way; I'm a good person', but you will never gain absolute understanding if you look at things in such a simplistic way. Investigate your mental attitude towards things and discover how you impose your mistaken projections onto the people you meet and onto other phenomena as well.

Most of the time we paint. We put our own limited interpretation on everything. You can discover this tendency even without resorting to an analysis of the ultimate nature of reality.

Merely taking into account the relative, conventional appearance of things, ask yourself, 'Who am I? What am I' - A certain definite picture of who it is you think you are will appear suddenly on the relative level of truth.

Now subject this self-image to close scrutiny. 'Is this who I really am? Do I in fact appear this way to everyone all the time?...'

When you do such an investigation honestly, this painted image will fade. As you see it disappear into unreality you will discover for yourself how distorted your perception of other phenomena must be as well. You will see that your painted sensory world is but the product of mistaken projections and that the feelings aroused by such a fictitious universe keeps you

shuttling back and forth between elation and despair. This circle of dissatisfaction, built on illusion, is samsara itself, and your investigation will show you that it is fashioned within your own mind.

If you train yourself to look at things in this way, you will never think that your problems are the fault of society, your country, your father or mother. You will realize that the problem is within you.

In order to prepare yourself for this task of self-analysis, you first need some instruction in how to think clearly. This will help you put in order the many diverse mental phenomena you will uncover. In addition, as certain truths are not immediately obvious, these must be shown to you beforehand by a trusted guide. It is in this sense that there is a doctrinal aspect to this process of self-analysis as well, but the true force of this investigation is your own unmistakable wisdom-energy which will give you powerful control over your life.

There is no danger involved in accepting this way of experimenting with your everyday experiences. There is nothing tricky or misleading about such a practical philosophy. You see that your mental problems arise from painted projections of an illusory world.

Fooled by this illusion, you falsely discriminate certain feelings to be 'good' and others to be 'bad', but this illusory world is no one's world. Whose could it be? Investigate! My projection of 'California' is no one else's projection. That is why Buddhist philosophy says that in this respect all phenomena are created by your own mind. These words have a profound, essential meaning that cannot be discovered by the hypocritical, intellectually polluted mind. You must experiment and experience yourself the illusory nature of your projections. Only in this way will you be able to perceive the underlying reality.

Investigation is active. Meditation does not mean sitting in a corner and doing nothing. It is not like that at all. No matter what you are doing or

what company you are in, you can always be checking, can't you? This is something that is always possible to do.

It is a complete misunderstanding of Buddhist meditation to think it is designed for lazy people who do not want to work. 'All those meditators do is sit around, eat, sleep and go to the toilet!' People with no understanding can think this way if they wish, and even some meditators may feel this way, but a true meditator is someone who takes full responsibility for his or her growth and development. He or she should not be so afraid of everything that it becomes necessary to hide in a corner. The Buddha never intended meditation to be anything like that.

A small and imperfect understanding of Dharma or religion may give rise to insecurity and a desire to withdraw from reality, but true meditation is an active, alert confrontation that pierces through illusion to the very heart of reality.

It is important to remember that feelings include more than mere physical sensations. They can be mental, emotional, or sometimes even superstitious.

All existing phenomena are the objects of one type of feeling or another. Most of the time, however, you are unaware of how you feel. That is why you must always look within and check yourself. By doing so you will slowly develop discriminating wisdom-knowledge. Such knowledge has the power to control unclear and involuted feelings and release you from their bondage.

Many times it is said, 'Don't discriminate! Discrimination is the source of all problems.' You must realize, however, that this word has two very different meanings. False discriminations arise when the painted illusory world of your projections is confused with reality and you compulsively think, 'I like this', 'I hate that', 'He's right', 'She's wrong', and so forth.

These reactions have absolutely nothing to do with the nature of reality, and therefore such discriminations are totally deluded.

But there is a correct discrimination which is the very essence of wisdom-knowledge. It sees what things really are and helps your mind function in a clean and clear manner. Otherwise things would appear confused and jumbled together. Even on the mundane level it is very important to have this type of discriminating mind or you would not even be able to prepare your lunch. If you were to think, 'I am free of all discriminations, so I'll just lump everything together in this pot', your meal would turn out to be a disaster, wouldn't it?

Thus, in order to look deeply into your mental attitudes and thereby discover what should be strengthened and what corrected, of course you need discrimination. Otherwise, who is there to check on you?

When you are engaged in meditation, for instance, one part of your mind should stay back and be mindful of the quality of the energy flowing properly? 'Am I still holding onto my object of meditation?' If you do not understand this, your unchecked mind may wander off in ten thousand million directions.

Some people think that deep contemplation means that the mind is no longer engaged in any discrimination whatsoever, but you must never do away with mindfulness. No matter what you are doing- examining a particular dharma point, trying to develop single-pointed concentration or practicing deep penetrative insight- your meditation and your mindfulness of it should be simultaneous. It is very important and worthwhile to keep this watch alertly posted at the door of your mind.

Think for a moment how much energy goes into shopping in a supermarket. It seems so important and worthwhile to choose correctly that you become deeply involved in the glittering array of detergents and

toothpaste before you. 'Should I buy this? Maybe that one is better. Which one is cheaper? That package is prettier.'

So much energy!, but while you are standing there in dazzled indecision, ask yourself which really offers you more pleasure: these supermarket items or the wisdom-knowledge of your own mind. The pleasure afforded by the supermarket is quite limited, but the deep understanding gained through wisdom-knowledge is an everlasting, blissful enjoyment. This is true.

Furthermore, no one can ever interfere with or disturb the happiness you obtain from such wisdom, because it exists within the potential of your own mind. All you have to do is train yourself properly and you will never be separated from this bliss.

You have such a precious, powerful opportunity to do something truly meaningful with your existence, but before you accept the practice of dharma, religion, or any other form of mental cultivation, you must clearly decide what offers you the most in life. Can you really expect to find satisfaction in the maze of worldly desires, or must you search deeper for the source of true joy? If you never discriminate and make a clear decision in this matter, your acceptance of a path- religious or otherwise- will be merely superficial. There will be little spiritual growth, for it lacks a foundation deep within your own personality. Nothing clearly beneficial will arise in your mind because it will remain covered in fogginess and conflicting emotions. So please look inwards, decide what is truly best for you, and discover the pure nature of your mind. Thank you so much.

From Introduction to Tantra, by Lama Yeshe

Chapter 7 - Dissolving Self-Created Limitation

The Burden of Mistaken Views

So far we have seen how two of the prerequisites for pure tantric practice, renunciation and bodhichitta, help create space for us to discover our essential nature. Renunciation loosens our habitual grasping at pleasure and reliance upon externals for satisfaction, while bodhichitta opposes the self-cherishing attitude with which we focus upon our own welfare to the neglect of others. Now we will consider the third basic prerequisite: cultivation of the correct view.

In this context the correct view means the wisdom that clearly realizes the actual way in which we and all other phenomena exist. This wisdom is the direct antidote to all the mistaken conceptions we have about who we are and what the world is truly like. As long as we are burdened by these misconceptions, we remain trapped in the world of our own projections, condemned to wander forever in the circle of dissatisfaction we have created for ourselves. But if we can uproot these wrong views and banish them completely, we will experience the freedom, space, and effortless happiness we presently deny ourselves.

Realizing the correct view of reality is not something mysterious. It is not a matter of staring up into space and praying for a glimpse of the truth. It is not that the wrong view is down here on the ground while the right view is somewhere up in the sky. Nor should we think that the wrong view dwells in the polluted cities of the West while the right view is to be found in the pure air of the Himalayas. It is nothing like that. The right view is available anywhere and everywhere, at all times. The beautiful face of reality exists within all phenomena, right here and now. It is only a matter of removing the layers of our own projections obscuring the pure vision of reality. The fault is ours, and the solution is ours.

Whenever we fix upon the idea that we exist in a certain specific way, we are hallucinating. Every time we look at ourselves in a mirror we have such a fixed idea- "How do I look today? I don't want people to see me looking like that!"- although, in reality, we are changing all the time. We are different from one moment to the next, but still we feel we have some sort of permanent, unchanging nature.

Our view of the external world is just as deluded. Our sense organs habitually perceive things dualistically; that is, every sensory object that appears to us seems to exist from its own side as something concrete and self-contained. We think that merely because we can see, hear, smell, taste, and touch these objects they must be real and true, existing solidly out there in their own right, just as we perceive them. But this concrete conception we have about how they exist is also a hallucination and has nothing whatsoever to do with their reality.

It takes time, training, and clear-minded investigation to cut through these deeply ingrained wrong views and discover the actual way in which things exist. But we can begin this process right now merely by being a bit skeptical about what appears to our mind. For example, as soon as we realize that we are holding onto a solid view of ourselves- "I am like this," "I should be like that"- we should remember that this view is nothing but a fantasy, a momentary projection of our mind.

Nor should we passively accept that external phenomena exist in the concrete self-contained way they appear to us. It is better to be slightly suspicious of what our senses and ordinary conceptions tell us, like the wise shopper who, when buying a used car, does not immediately believe everything the salesman claims about it.

Dreams and Emptiness

If we want to understand how we are ordinarily misled by our false projections and how we can begin to break free from their influence, it is helpful to think of the analogy of our dream experiences. When we wake up in the morning, where are all the people we were just dreaming about? Where did they come from? And where did they go? Are they real or not? Of course not. These dream people and their dream experiences all arose from our sleeping, dreaming mind; they were mere appearances to that mind. They were real only as long as we remained in the dream-state; to the waking mind of the next morning they are only an insubstantial memory. While we were asleep they seemed so true, as if they were really out there, having a concrete existence quite apart from ourselves. But when we wake up we realize that they were only the projections of our dreaming mind. Despite how real they seemed, these people in fact lack even an atom of self-existence. Completely empty of any objective existence whatsoever, they were only the hallucination of our dream experience.

In a very similar way, everything we experience while we are awake, including our strong sense of self, is also empty of true existence. Despite their concrete appearance of existing out there somehow, these phenomena do not in fact exist from their own side at all. Only as long as our ordinary, conventional mind is functioning, or switched on, do these relative phenomena exist for us. If this ordinary mind were to be switched off, these ordinary phenomena would cease to appear to our mind.

The point is that the people and things that make up our sensory world do not exist in the solid, objective way that they now appear to us. These appearances are nothing but the manifestations of our ordinary consciousness; they are merely apprehended or labeled by our superstitious mind. However, our basic problem is not that things appear to be self-existent, but that we accept the appearance as if it were true.

Our habit of believing in, or holding onto, merely conventional appearances as if they were most true and ultimately real has been with us since beginningless time; it is not a newly-learned philosophical view. For this

reason it is not easy to overcome. However, we can begin uprooting this mistaken habit merely by realizing that the ordinary way in which we view our reality is deluded, that our instinctive belief in the self-existence of things is an invalid concept having nothing whatsoever to do with the actual way in which things exist. Understanding even this much will begin to free us from our superstitious habits. Then we can begin to wake up.

Ego Grasping and Insecurity

Not only are the things outside ourselves empty of the solid, objective reality we project onto them, the same is true for our inner sense of self. We instinctively feel that we exist as something very real, definite, and substantial. We have no doubt about this real me and it seems absurd to think of it as just another hallucination. Yet if we take the trouble to search for this supposedly concrete “I” or “me” we will discover that we cannot find it anywhere. Neither our head, our arm, our leg, nor any other part of our body is our “I.”

The same is true of our mind: none of the countless thoughts or feelings that continuously arise and disappear is the real me. And, of course, this solid sense of self is not to be found somewhere outside this body-mind combination. Yet despite the fact that we cannot discover an independent, self-existent I anywhere, either within or outside our body and mind, we still hold onto it tightly in the very depths of our heart as if it were most real.

This innate belief in something that is not true, this fundamental source of all our problems, can be called “ego-grasping.” We did not have to learn this mistaken belief; it has been with us intuitively since birth. In fact, it was ego-grasping itself that propelled us to take birth as we did in the first place.

In what way does ego-grasping hold onto its wrong view? We can get a general idea by looking at our thoughts from moment to moment: "How is my mind interpreting reality? Who does it believe that I am?" If our investigation is sharp enough, we will discover that we carry around with us a certain preconceived, concrete notion about ourselves- "This is exactly who I am"- and that this notion has nothing whatsoever to do with reality.

Our ordinary ego-conception thinks, "I definitely exist somewhere, I am real." Not for a moment do we consider that what or who we are is only the result of giving a name or a label to a group of ever-changing mental and physical parts. Our ego-grasping mind, so intent on establishing and maintaining a solid and secure sense of identity, would never accept that the self is just an imputation, a mere name or designation. It asserts instead, "I exist from my own side, inherently. I am not something merely conjured up by superstition." But this assertion is completely mistaken. It is the wrong view that lies at the root of all our difficulties.

We are so familiar with the apparently concrete appearance of things, including ourselves, that it is not easy to switch suddenly and adopt a looser, more relaxed vision. Our ego- in this context, the neurotic mind that grasps onto a solid sense of self-identity for support- is extremely powerful and will fight against any view that threatens its security. It is deeply disturbed by the suggestion that the "I," like everything else, is something merely designated by conceptual thought. Therefore we should expect a lot of resistance when we meditate on the non-self-existence of the "I." This is natural; it is only our deeply ingrained ego struggling against annihilation.

Identifying the Inner Enemy

As long as our ego-grasping continues to project its solid, restrictive vision of reality, there will be no space in our mind to experience the expansive vision of totality that we all inwardly desire. Therefore, in order to reach beyond our false concepts and projections, first it is necessary to eliminate

all the wrong ideas we have about ourselves. We need to gain as clear a picture as possible of the way we presently conceptualize ourselves, how we hold onto the false sense of ego, because there is no way of generating a correct view until we understand clearly what our habitual wrong view is like.

The great meditation masters of the past have stressed the importance of identifying as exactly as possible the conceptual nonsense of our mind. There is no benefit in using powerful techniques of insight meditation to overcome a vague or merely theoretical wrong view of self. This will not help us at all. We have to identify the root of our difficulties by looking deeply into our own mind for its characteristic misconceptions. Only then will it be possible for us to attack the fundamental cause of our problems. Otherwise it is as if our enemy were approaching from the east and we were pointing our weapons toward the west.

This point is worth emphasizing: one of the main reasons why we continue to experience the various miseries of cyclic existence, repeatedly moving from one unsatisfactory situation to another, is our inability to recognize where our problems are coming from. Even when we overcome the common mistake of thinking that our difficulties are caused externally, we still often fail to identify the inner enemy correctly. We may mistakenly conclude, for example, that the source of our dissatisfaction and frustration is a particular intellectual view or opinion that we hold and that all we have to do to correct the situation is adopt a higher, more respectable philosophical position. But such a superficial approach never strikes at the root of our difficulties.

Our basic problem is not an intellectual one. We may start out by subscribing to a particular analysis of who and what we are and then later change our mind and adopt an opposing view. While such a change may be intellectually satisfying, it does not solve our basic, organic problem of ego. In fact, although we may take pride in our new level of intellectual understanding, all we have done is substitute one set of superstitions for

another. Instead of weakening our ego-grasping, we have merely given it something else to hold onto.

Loosening the Grip of Misconception

We must understand that we cannot banish our habitual, concrete view of ego immediately. It takes time for this solid appearance to be overcome completely. But we can attack the grosser levels of misconception now by loosening our tight grip on what we think reality is. Then, even though the concrete appearance of things still remains, we are not so readily led astray by it.

The traditional Buddhist texts illustrate this point with the analogy of a magician and his audience. By reciting hypnotic spells over pieces of wood or stone, a skilled magician can trick people into seeing horses, for example. The people affected by these spells not only see these illusory animals, they believe them to be real. They are entranced by the magician's powers and taken in by his illusions. Owing to the power of the spells, the magician also sees the horses but of course does not believe in them; he knows they are illusory because he himself conjured them up. Thus while the audience can be dazzled by the performance, the magician himself remains unmoved and unaffected.

Ordinarily, we are like that audience. We believe everything that our dualistic conceptions conjure up. If something seems to be attractive, we are immediately taken in by this superficial appearance and run after it. If its appearance changes to something not so attractive, we immediately want to run away from it, not stopping to consider how these changing appearances are a reflection of our own mind and have little or nothing to do with the object itself. As a result we are continuously led from one unsatisfactory state of existence to another, vainly seeking support for an illusory ego-identity by running after, or away from, illusory objects. In this way our life becomes an absurd drama filled with emotional conflict, frustration, and disappointment.

But it is possible for us to let go of these ignorant beliefs. Like the magician, even when concrete appearances of this and that arise, we need not be swayed by them. Eventually, when our mind has become completely cleansed of all distorted views, even these dualistic appearances will cease. But we do not need to wait until then to be liberated from our conflicting emotions. The moment we start loosening our concrete conceptions we will experience a taste of this freedom.

Cultivating the Middle Way

With all this talk of non-self-existence and the illusory nature of phenomena we might conclude that ourselves, others, the world, and enlightenment are totally non-existent. Such a conclusion is nihilistic and too extreme. Phenomena do exist. It is their apparently concrete and independent manner of existence that is mistaken and must be rejected.

Take the example of a rainbow. Does it exist or not? Of course it does, but how? As something arising from the interplay of droplets of water in the sky, sunlight, and our own point of observation. A rainbow, then, is an interdependent phenomenon and if we investigate we can discover its various causes and conditions. But when we gaze at this rainbow we may be so moved by its beauty that we try to reach out and touch it. Yet as we advance, the rainbow appears to retreat. No matter how fast or how far we run, we can never catch up with anything solid to grasp onto. A rainbow is by nature intangible and we have to be content with the realization that this beautiful phenomenon is an appearance that we can neither hold nor possess. In a similar way, all existent phenomena are mere appearances to the mind; lacking concrete self-existence, they come into being from the interplay of various causes and conditions. They arise, abide, and disappear, all the while constantly changing. This is true of ourselves as well. No matter what our innate sense of ego- grasping may believe, there is no solid, inherent self to be found anywhere inside or outside our ever-changing mental and physical components. We and all other phenomena

without exception are empty of even the smallest atom of self-existence, and it is this emptiness (shunyata) that is the ultimate nature of everything that exists.

The discourses in which Shakyamuni Buddha set forth his most profound teachings on emptiness are the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras (a text of which is symbolically held in the left hand of Manjushri, the embodiment of fully awakened wisdom). And the Indian commentator who clarified and spread these teachings was Nagarjuna who, in addition to being a profound philosopher, was a great tantric adept, a mahasiddha, as well. Nagarjuna's system of philosophical analysis is known as the Middle Way, or Madhyamaka, for it avoids the extreme views of self-existence and non-existence, of eternalism and nihilism, of over-estimation and underestimation. According to Nagarjuna, all the ordinary concepts we have of this and that are mistaken. Why?

Because we habitually superimpose onto the objects of our experience qualities of concreteness, independence, and self-existence- which they in fact lack. In other words, our ordinary, ignorant view of reality- both our inward sense of self and the external appearance of other phenomena such as sights, sounds, and so forth- is superstitious and dualistic.

As we have discussed before, we continually project a false image onto whatever we are dealing with and then believe that the false image is the object itself. When we gain some idea of how habitually false our dualistic vision of reality is, we may overreact and deny the existence of everything. This is the nihilistic extreme and is not only completely mistaken but dangerous as well. What we have to understand is that things do exist, but not in the concrete way we habitually suppose. The challenge in cultivating the correct view of emptiness is to refute completely all notions of independent self-existence without denying valid interdependent existence.

When we try to apply logical reasoning to prove to ourselves that something is empty- that it lacks inherent, concrete self-existence- it may sometimes feel that we are pushing too hard. "This is empty for this reason...or that reason...or that reason." Somehow it feels uncomfortable. This can definitely happen; strenuous application of logic can often harm our understanding rather than help it. At such times it is a good idea to relax the force of our logical investigation and merely observe how the thing we are examining functions, how it works, where it came from, and so forth.

For instance, if we are examining something to discover if it is as self-existent as it appears, we can remember: "This item was put together by people in a factory; then it was shipped to the market to be sold; then I came along and bought it; and now I am using it." Looked at in this way, the non-self-existent nature of the thing becomes a bit clearer. We see it as something that grew out of causes, that depends on many things for its existence, that functions this way and that; this understanding will soften the general impression we have that it is something independent and concrete, existing out there as a solid, self-contained object.

This approach to understanding interdependence and non-self-existence, or emptiness, is comfortable and direct. Once we are familiar with it we will easily see why many great masters of the past have claimed that interdependence, or dependent arising, is the king of logical reasoning and the best way of understanding the actual condition of things.

From Nagarjuna's point of view, there are no exceptions to the assertion that all things lack true, independent self-existence. The mind is not an exception; Buddha is not an exception. We cannot say that some unworthy object, like a garbage bin, is empty and non-self-existent, while a highly respected object, such as Shakyamuni Buddha himself, is absolute and truly self-existent. This is not so. From the point of view of their being empty and nondualistic, the ultimate reality of Buddha and the ultimate reality of the garbage bin are identical.

The practical conclusion of all this is to refrain from immediately accepting all our dualistic appearances- this and that, good and bad, and so on- as being ultimately true, and also to refrain from denying them completely. Instead, we should remain a bit loose, a bit skeptical. We should be aware that because objects now appear to us so concretely as this and that, they have the power to lead us into conflict and confusion. If we are clearly aware of this, we will not allow ourselves to fall so readily under their spell. And if we then train ourselves to contemplate the basic clarity of the mind in which these appearances arise, we will be able to enter an experience of nonduality in which all conflict and confusion ultimately subside.

Chapter 8 - The Clear Spaciousness of Mind

MAKING SPACE THROUGH “NOT SEEING”

AS WE HAVE DISCUSSED, renunciation, bodhichitta, and the correct view of emptiness are three of the prerequisites for the practice of tantra. This does not mean, however, that our realization of these three has to be complete and perfect before we can start following the tantric path. An approximate understanding is sufficient for us to begin.

Take the realization of emptiness, for example. To gain a perfect understanding of the ultimate nature of all phenomena is a profound accomplishment. If we were to wait until then before we could practice tantra, when would we ever begin? Perhaps never! Fortunately, this is not a problem. In order to train in the various transformations of tantra, it is enough for us to be able to relax our ordinary sense of ego-identification somewhat. We do not need a perfect realization of our lack of self-existence, but we do need to be able to give ourselves some space from our ordinary, compulsive role-playing.

Tibetan lamas often say: “Not seeing is the perfect seeing.” Strange words, perhaps, but they have a profound meaning. They describe the advanced meditator’s experience of spacious, universal reality, the experience beyond dualism.

In our ordinary experience we are overwhelmed by countless dualistic perceptions and conceptions. Every day we are attracted to pleasurable objects and repulsed by unpleasant ones. Burdened with a narrow idea of who we are, we spend our time running toward this and away from that. As we have already seen, this deeply ingrained habit of viewing things dualistically and believing in our dualistic discriminations leads to nothing but confusion and repeated dissatisfaction. But it is possible to cultivate a completely different view of reality. Fed up with the endless rat-race of our

compulsive cyclic existence, we can train in penetrative awareness and cultivate a direct perception of the actual way things exist.

This training proceeds in different stages, some of them highly analytical and conceptual and others more direct and experiential. Eventually, as we become more and more deeply absorbed in the experience of spaciousness, the ordinary, concrete appearances normally crowding our vision begin to dissolve. Like summer clouds disappearing back into the clear blue expanse of the sky, our dualistic visions cease and we are left with nothing but the clear, empty space of nonduality. In this space empty of all concrete discriminations of this and that, our mind feels calm and boundless, free of limitation. No longer occupied with “seeing” and believing in the ultimate reality of ordinary appearances, we enter into the “perfect seeing” of the nonduality experience.

Far from being in a state of sleeplike blank-mindedness, our mind at such a time is awake and alert—rejecting nothing, asserting nothing, yet accepting everything. Instead of feeling trapped and limited, forced to play the same pointless ego games over and over again, we begin to taste the true liberation of unencumbered consciousness. This liberation is possible because the superficial, conventional, fantasy, dualistic mind is not the fundamental nature of human beings. Our fundamental nature is as clean and clear as crystal, and there is no place for the self-pitying imagination. It automatically dissolves. And with it dissolve all our imprisoning limitations.

If we can enter and then remain within the naturally clear state of our own mind, we will have the time and space to see things without confusion. We will even be able to handle the business of everyday life more skillfully. Many people wonder about this. “If I allow my mind to return to its natural, uncomplicated state, how will I be able to function in this complicated world? How can I get from one place to another? How can I hold down a job? How can I cook a meal? How can I do anything?” But there is no reason to carry on this type of argument with yourself. The fact

is that when you are in a clean, clear state of mind you will be free to pay full attention to what you are doing and you will therefore naturally do it well. Problems come when you are not living in a natural state of mind. Then, no matter what you are doing your mind will be on something else. You are supposed to be cleaning your house but your mind is thinking about going to the beach and eating ice cream. That is when you run into difficulties.

CLARITY AND NONDUALITY

By contemplating our stream of consciousness in meditation we can be led naturally to this spacious experience of nonduality. As we observe our thoughts carefully we will notice that they arise, abide, and disappear themselves. There is no need to expel thoughts from our mind forcefully; just as each thought arises from the clear nature of our mind, so too does it naturally dissolve back into this clear nature. When thoughts eventually dissolve in this way, we should keep our mind concentrated on the resulting clarity as undistractedly as we can.

We should train ourselves not to become engrossed in any of the thoughts continuously arising in our mind. Our consciousness is like a vast ocean with plenty of space for thoughts and emotions to swim about in, and we should not allow our attention to be distracted by any of them. It does not matter if a certain “fish” is particularly beautiful or repulsive: without being distracted one way or the other we should remain focused on our mind’s basic clarity. Even if a magnificent vision arises—the kind we have been waiting years to see—we should not engage it in conversation. We should, of course, remain aware of what is going on; the point is not to become so dull-minded that we do not notice anything. However, while remaining aware of thoughts as they arise, we should not become entranced by any of them. Instead, we should remain mindful of the underlying clarity out of which these thoughts arose.

Why is it so important to contemplate the clarity of our consciousness in this way? Because, as we have seen again and again, the source of all our happiness and suffering, the root of both the pains of samsara and the bliss of nirvana, is the mind. And within the mind it is our habitual wrong view—our ignorant, insecure ego-grasping—that holds onto the hallucination of concrete self-existence as if it were reality. The way to break the spell of this hallucination is to see the illusory nature of things and recognize that all phenomena are nothing but fleeting appearances arising in the clear space of our mind. Thus the more we contemplate the clarity of our own consciousness, the less we hold onto any appearance as being concrete and real—and the less we suffer.

By watching our thoughts come and go in this way, we move ever closer to the correct view of emptiness. Seemingly concrete appearances will arise, remain for a while, and then disappear back into the clear nature of our mind. As each thought disappears in this way, we should train ourselves to feel that this disappearance is even more real than the thought's original concrete appearance. The more we train in this type of "not seeing," the more familiar we become with the clear spaciousness of our mind. Then, even when extremely destructive thoughts and emotions such as anger and jealousy arise, we will remain in contact with the underlying purity of our consciousness. This purity is always with us and whatever delusions we may experience are only superficial obscurations that will eventually pass, leaving us with the essentially clear nature of our mind.

When you contemplate your own consciousness with intense awareness, leaving aside all thoughts of good and bad, you are automatically led to the experience of nonduality. How is this possible? Think of it like this: the clean, clear blue sky is like consciousness, while the smoke and pollution pumped into the sky are like the unnatural, artificial concepts manufactured by ego-grasping ignorance. Now, even though we say the pollutants are contaminating the atmosphere, the sky itself never really becomes contaminated by the pollution. The sky and the pollution each retain their own characteristic nature. In other words, on a fundamental

level the sky remains unaffected no matter how much toxic energy enters it. The proof of this is that when conditions change the sky can become clear once again. In the same way, no matter how many problems may be created by artificial ego concepts, they never affect the clean clear nature of our consciousness itself. From the relative point of view, our consciousness remains pure because its clear nature never becomes mixed with the nature of confusion.

From an ultimate point of view as well, our consciousness always remains clear and pure. The nondual characteristic of the mind is never damaged by the dualistic concepts that arise in it. In this respect consciousness is pure, always has been pure, and will always remain pure.

“Is the nature of deluded minds such as jealousy and anger also clear?” you may ask. Yes, all minds equally possess this clear, immaterial nature. Whether they are positive or negative, unmistakable or deluded, all minds clearly reflect their own appropriate objects. Just as a mirror has to be clear and uncovered for it to reflect the image of the face before it, whether the face is handsome or ugly, so too must the mind be clear. If any state of mind were not clear, it would not reflect anything, good or bad.

We can compare positive states of mind to water at rest and deluded states of mind to turbulent, boiling water. If we investigate the nature of the boiling water we will discover that, despite the turbulence, each individual droplet is still clear. The same is true of the mind: whether it is calm or boiled into turbulence by the overwhelming complexity of dualistic views, its basic nature remains clear and conscious.

The conclusion, then, is that we all have the capacity to move from the confused, polluted state of ego-conflict to the natural clean and clear state of pure consciousness itself. We should never think that our mind has somehow become irreversibly contaminated. This is impossible. If we can train ourselves to identify and enter into the natural, unaffected state of our

consciousness, we will eventually experience the freedom of nondual awareness.

Merely Labeled, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

From How Things Exist, pages 97 to 105

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Recognizing the object to be refuted

To us, this I always appears inherently existent, or real.

Everything always appears inherently existent.

Everything always appears as the object to be refuted.

Even saying “this I” is enough to make the object to be refuted appear...

We don’t need to describe true existence or anything else. For most of us, when we simply say “I,” what appears to us, and what we believe it to be, is the truly existent I.

The {collection we call} form is not this I,

the collection we call feeling is not this I,

the collection we call recognition is not this I,

the collection we call mental formations are not this I,

and the collection we call consciousness is not this I...

The term mental formations (compounding aggregates), or compositional mental factors, refers to all the fifty-one mental factors apart from feeling and

recognition.

What they compound is their own result, their own continuation. For example, since today's consciousness produces tomorrow's consciousness, it compounds the result, tomorrow's consciousness.

Even the whole group of the five collections together is not the I because it is the base to be labeled "I."

This makes it clear that it is not the I.

The I exists nowhere on these collections, neither on the body nor on the mind nor even on the whole group of the collections.

This is a clear way to meditate on emptiness, enabling us to understand the base, and the label.

However, this doesn't mean that there's no I. There is an I. The reason there's an I is that there are the collections, the association of body and mind. Simply because of that, we believe that there's an I.

Another way to meditate on emptiness is to ask yourself,

"What am I doing now?"

You reply, "I'm sitting."

Then ask yourself, "Why do I say that I'm sitting?"

"There's no other reason at all to believe that I'm sitting except that my body is doing the action of sitting."

And when you say,

"I'm thinking"

or

"I'm listening to teachings,"

why do you believe *you* are thinking or listening to teachings?

There's no other reason at all except that your mind is thinking or listening to teachings.

This way of meditating helps us to recognize the object to be refuted. It is only because the collections are sitting, standing, eating, drinking or sleeping that we believe "I'm sitting," "I'm standing," "I'm eating," "I'm drinking" or "I'm sleeping."

The I is merely imputed in dependence upon the collections and the actions of the collections...

With this reasoning, there's suddenly a *big* change in your view of the I.

The concrete I, the sense of the real I, suddenly becomes empty *right there*...

The real I from its own side that appeared before is not there...

When you don't think of this reasoning, everything comes back, and the I, which is merely imputed, appears as real.

Analyzing the nature of the I by using the reason of the existence of the collections and its actions helps us to see more and more clearly what the emotional I is.

The I that appears to be real from its own side is completely empty; it doesn't exist...

When your mind becomes distracted, look again at how the I appears and apply the reasoning.

When you analyze, again you won't find that real I, that emotional I...

Not being able to find the emotional I is a sign that it doesn't exist.

You are unable to find the I on these collections...

None of these collections is the I and on these collections there's no I...

But that doesn't mean that the I doesn't exist. The I exists. There is I in this temple.

During this time that the collections are in this temple, we believe "I am here in this temple." Just by that, we believe "I am in this temple." And we believe "I'm listening" or "I'm talking"- or "I'm feeling tired" or "I'm sleeping" as this never-ending talk goes on and on!

Recognizing the hallucination

The different meditations I have mentioned can be used to meditate on emptiness, to see the nature of the I.

Look at how things appear to you...

They appear as real, as existing from their own side...

The most important point is to then think that this is a hallucination, a projection...

A camera records various activities, such as fighting, and if you have power and a projector you can then project the film onto a screen.

But what you see there on the screen is not real.

You might see thousands of people fighting on a TV screen but there's nobody really there on the screen.

What appears is not real; it's not true...

Exactly like a camera recording images on a film, ignorance leaves imprints on our mental continuum and we then project true existence onto the things we experience...

The main point to meditate on is that the projection of true existence is a hallucination.

When you think of hallucination, the understanding should come in your heart that these things are empty; they don't exist...

It's not that the building doesn't exist, but *the truly existent building, the building that appears to exist from its own side*, doesn't exist.

That's completely empty.

That is the emptiness, or ultimate nature, of the building...

Everything else - self, action, object,

all the department stores,

the whole city-

is also like this...

Everything that exists is covered by this hallucination of true existence...

When you recognize that it is a hallucination, the understanding should come in your heart that everything is empty...

You should then practice awareness of that emptiness.

In your everyday life, not only during meditation but also when you're at work, remember again and again to practice this awareness.

Look at how things appear to you: they all appear as unlabeled, which means that they are projections, hallucinations. They are empty.

You don't have to actually say the word "empty" because when you say that these unlabeled things are hallucinations, the understanding that they are empty naturally arises in your heart...

With this awareness, you can then go shopping.

You stand up, put on your shoes and with this awareness go out in your car.

When you are walking in the street, you also do it with the recognition that the truly existent things appearing to you are hallucinations...

After recognizing that the I that appears to be real is a hallucination, you understand that it is empty...

This empty I then walks along the empty street to the empty shops.

In reality, everything is like this.

Everything is merely labeled

“I” is merely imputed to these collections.

None of the five aggregates is the general collections...

Even the whole group of the five collections is not the general collections, because it is the base to be labeled “general collections.”...

So, “collections” is also merely imputed to them...

With respect to the collections of form, no part of the body is the collection of form

and even the whole group of the parts of the body is not the collection of form...

“Collection of form” is merely imputed to this body...

In the same way, each of the collections is merely imputed to its own base...

For example, “collection of consciousness” is merely imputed to the particular mental factor whose main function is to see the essence of an object and which continues from one life to another, carrying the imprints left by karma.

That phenomenon is labeled “consciousness.”...

With respect to the head,

the mouth is not the head,

the nose is not the head,

the brain is not the head,

the ears are not the head.

No part of the head is the head.

Even the whole group of the parts of the head is not the head; it is the base to be labeled "head."

Each part of the head-

mouth,

nose,

brain,

ear-

is merely labeled on another label,

and that label is given to another label...

"Arm" is labeled on this particular object, but each part of the arm is not the arm

and even the whole group of the parts is not the arm. . .

Since the whole group is the base to be labeled "arm," it's not the arm...

Again, each part is also labeled on another label.

It is the same with the leg.

Each part of the leg, such as the thigh, is not the leg,
and even the whole group of the parts is not the leg...

The whole group is the base to be labeled "leg"...

Each part is labeled on its own base...

This is how it is down to the atoms, and even the atom is labeled...

Each particle of the atom is not the atom,
and the group of the particles is the base to be labeled "atom."

And even the particles of the atoms are labeled on their own base...

From the I and the collections down to the atomic particles, everything
is labeled on another label.

Something is imputed to one base, which is labeled on another base, and
that base is labeled on another base.

Everything exists being labeled.

Everything is a label, starting with our collections...

So, from the I and the collections down to the atomic particles, everything
is completely empty of existing from its own side...

The concrete things that appear to us are hallucinations...

The real, concrete, truly existent I and collections are hallucinations...

It is the same with this temple.

None of the parts of the temple is the temple...

Even the whole group of the parts is not the temple; it is the base to be labeled "temple"...

So, the temple is completely empty of existing from its own side...

With respect to the ceiling, each part of the ceiling is not the ceiling,
and even the whole group of the parts is not the ceiling,

because the whole group is the base to be labeled "ceiling"...

With respect to the windows, each part is not the window, and even the whole group of parts is not the window, because it's the base to be labeled "window"...

The reality of the temple, ceiling and windows is something completely different from what we normally think of as 'the temple', 'ceiling' and 'windows'...

When we analyze we find that how they really exist is completely something else...

All the time we talk, talk, talk and think, think, think and write, write, write, but when we analyze we find that reality is actually something we *have never talked about, have never thought about and have never written about...*

It is something that has never appeared to us...

Everything is like this.

Even the floor is like this.

Each piece of the floor is not the floor, and even the whole group of pieces is not the floor, because they are the base to be labeled “floor”...

When we again analyze each piece, down to its atoms, it's also the same with the atoms and their particles...

Because they are particles *of* the atom, it means the particles are not the atom.

And even the whole group of the particles is not the atom; it is the base to be labeled “atom”

So, from the temple down to its atoms, everything is labeled.

We put one label on this label, and then put another label on that label.

We put one name on another name.

Even though this is the reality, what appears to us is a concrete temple with a concrete ceiling,

concrete windows and a concrete floor.

What appears to us is something existing from its own side.

This is a projection by ignorance; this is a hallucination...

In reality it's empty...

It is like this from morning until night.

We build a house, which is empty,

and eat food, which is empty;

We marry a wife or husband, who is empty,

and have a child, who is empty;

We work in an office, which is empty;

We get empty money

and go to the empty supermarket

to buy empty food

then go back to our empty house...

The merely labeled I is born from merely labeled parents

and goes to a merely labeled school to get a merely labeled education

from a merely labeled teacher

to get a merely labeled degree,

then get a merely labeled job,

as a merely labeled professor,

then marries a merely labeled wife or husband,

and has a merely labeled child;

With merely labeled money,

the merely labeled I goes to the merely labeled shop

and buys merely labeled things;

The merely labeled I

wears merely labeled clothes,

and eats merely labeled food.

It is like this from birth to death,

from the merely labeled birth to the merely labeled death.

The whole thing- beginning with birth and ending with death and everything in between- is merely labeled.

This is how it is in reality.

Remembering emptiness in everyday life

Sometimes you might think, "What's the use of teachings on emptiness?

How does this philosophy help me when I have problems in everyday life?"

However, if you can think like this, it's the most powerful meditation to shatter the hallucinations. It's like an atomic bomb.

Problems happen in your daily life because you believe the hallucinations to be real...

The most powerful, immediate way to stop problems is to remember emptiness.

You should especially remember emptiness when you are in situations where there's a danger of giving rise to strong anger or uncontrolled desire and creating heavy negative karma and causing great harm to others.

When you have a very dissatisfied mind and don't succeed in getting what you want, you experience depression. Even though you might not remember the particular reasons you are depressed, most of the time there are reasons.

Depression happens because you didn't succeed in getting what your desire or selfish mind wanted. Depression happens when you not aware of the emptiness of the I and other things.

When you are aware of emptiness, when you're meditating on emptiness, there's no depression. There's no way depression can be there at that time. Depression happens when you believe the hallucinations to be real.

It is especially important to remember emptiness in those situations in your daily life that create a lot of confusion, where there is danger of great harm to you and other sentient beings.

It is very important to remember that the things that look real from their own side are projections, hallucinations.

Then meditate strongly that they are empty...

One way to meditate on how everything is empty is to meditate on dependent arising, looking at how everything- self, action, object - is merely imputed...

This is one way of practicing awareness of emptiness in everyday life.

Do this while you are at work,

talking to people

or having meetings,

or at home with your family.

Do it especially when you are having a conversation with someone who is complaining about or criticizing you or when somebody is praising you, which causes the delusion of pride to arise.

Again meditate on emptiness; again practice awareness of either dependent arising or emptiness.

Anyway, they're the same; it's one meditation.

The Staircase to Emptiness

Meditation on Ultimate Reality

Geshe Dorji Damdul

The greatest gift of the compassionate Buddha Shakyamuni to all beings on earth is twofold – the wisdom of emptiness and the unconditional love of bodhicitta. The infinitely numerous ill experiences that we go through in our lives, such as - dissatisfaction, fears, anxiety, depression, anguish, lamentation, grief and so forth - although they appear to be diverse, can all be subsumed under the category of fear.

Just as it requires the coming together of two hands for the sound of a clap to be produced, similarly, all our fears and pains too are created by depending on two factors – external factors and internal factors – which are akin to the two hands. Just as both hands are required for the sound of a clap to arise, just so, both the internal and external factors are necessary for creating fears in us.

The external factors in the form of a bully or any other obstacles, and the internal factor of the self-referential ego (which is nothing but the combination of the self-grasping ignorance and self-centered attitude). In order to stop the sound of a clap, either of the hands must be removed.

Likewise, to stop all our miseries and pains, we have to either remove the external factors or the internal factors.

The reality is that, however, there are no means by which we can completely stop all the external factors that disturb us. For example, when one is by oneself, one feels lonely and when one is surrounded by others, one feels deprived of privacy. These are the only two possible external options that can exist in this situation, and both options create unhappiness in the individual. If one really wants to be freed of pain, then

the only choice left is to remove the internal factor, symbolised by the other hand.

This will invariably lead us to ask two questions:

What is the internal factor?

And,

How can I get rid of the internal factor for good?

From what we are going to learn here, the internal factor is a very specialised type of ignorance, also referred to as the self-grasping ignorance (or the ignorance that grasps at true existence). This ignorance propels all phenomena to appear as objectively real, while in reality, all phenomena exist simply through the projection of one's own mind.

This can be better understood through the analogy of how a person who is dreaming sees the entire contents of their dream as existing totally independent of their mind i.e. as objectively true, while in reality, the dream contents exist only from the subject, which in this case is the dreaming mind.

Seeing what is projected by the subjective mind as being objectively real is known as the self-grasping ignorance and it is this ignorance, which is responsible for the nightmares in our dreams.

This is akin to our experience of watching a movie that is projected on a screen. While we are looking at the movie on the screen, it is actually being projected by the movie projector, which lies on the opposite side of the screen. The movie on the screen resembles the object and the projector resembles the subjective mind. In reality, the movie is totally empty from the screen.

Likewise, everything that appears to us is like a movie, it is all subjectively existent and totally empty from the object. This is also known as emptiness or the ultimate truth.

Whether one is a believer or a non-believer, educated or uneducated, rich or poor, high or low, man or woman, every single being yearns for complete freedom from fear and wishes to attain maximum joy. Contemplate on this to see for yourself - how true it is, that each one of us embodies the desire to get away from the fears of life such as sickness, ageing, death of near and dear ones etc.

If we really want to be fearless and wish to counteract our fears completely, then the best possible means to do so, that exists in the entire universe, is the wisdom of emptiness, i.e. seeing the interdependent nature of all phenomena. Other means do exist but the supreme elixir that dispels all fears is the wisdom of emptiness.

If one gets even a glimpse or an inkling of emptiness, it will literally make one feel mentally and physiologically extremely peaceful and calm, thus giving one a profound conviction and comfort that I am neither hopeless nor is my life worthless; I have finally found the answer to all my grief.

Bodhisattva Aryadeva clearly indicated in his treatise, Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way [Skt. *chatuhśataka śāstra nāma kārikā*; Tib. *bzhi brgya pa*]:

*Those with less merit will not even have a doubt
In this Dharma (of ultimate reality).*

*Should an enquiry ever arise in someone,
It will shatter samsara into pieces.*

Therefore, those who encounter the teachings on emptiness are indeed very fortunate. Even more meritorious are those who actually reflect and

meditate on the efficacy of the wisdom of emptiness, alongside their learning about it.

The following is a very simple, step-by-step outline for meditation on the wisdom of emptiness, which practically anyone can do. Engaging in this practice helps to leave a special and powerful imprint in the mind and helps one to become calmer when confronted with day-to-day experiences of sadness, agitation, and so forth, not to mention the fact that it leaves a very meaningful predisposition in one's mind towards becoming consistently fearless and achieving full awakening.

The following passages will be very helpful in gaining some understanding of emptiness, and these passages are cherished by all the Buddhas and the Bodhisattvas.

Acquaint yourself well with the Four Essentials to Discern Emptiness, as given below, with special emphasis on the first essential – the essential of identifying the object of negation. Never mind if one is not familiar with the concept of the object of negation as yet, I suggest you to still go through the section on the 'Sequence of the Meditations on Emptiness', right below.

The Staircase to Emptiness: Meditation on Ultimate Reality

Four Essentials to Discern Emptiness

1. The essential of identifying the object of negation i.e. the belief in the existence of the object from it's own side (objectively existent object).
2. The essential of understanding the emptiness of the object's being one with its parts.
3. The essential of understanding the emptiness of the object being different from its parts.
4. The essential of understanding the pervasion that anything which is empty of being one with its parts and different from its parts, should be empty of objective existence and only subjectively existent i.e. for an object to exist from its own side, it has to be either one with its parts or different from its parts.

Sequence of the Meditations on Emptiness [A Sample]

1. Meditation on the Emptiness of an Object (e.g. flower)
2. Meditation on the Emptiness of your 'Self'
3. Meditation on the Emptiness of your Mind

Inanimate objects such as a flower, as well as animate objects such as a person or (one's) self, exist in space with directional parts, as well as in time with temporal parts; whereas the mind exists only in time, having temporal parts.

The flower or one's body consists of millions of atoms existing in different directions, such as east, west, north, south, northeast, northwest, southeast,

southwest, up and down. Whereas those things that exist in time, such as the mind, do not have directional parts in space; since the mind is immaterial, it is rather constituted of temporal parts.

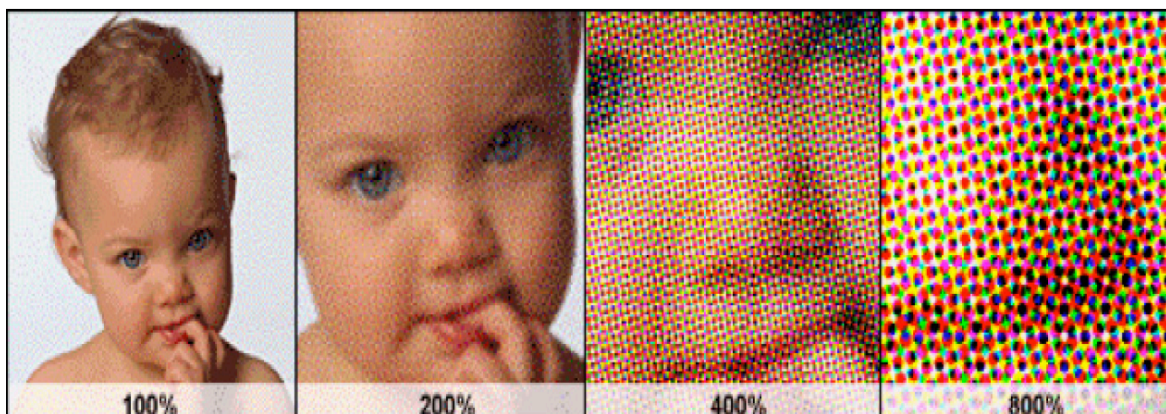
For example, if you think about your mind today - today's mind exists over the duration of a day with 24 hours and hence today's mind exists in 24 segments of time that are referred to as 24 temporal segments.

The first of the 24 temporal segments, further consists of 60 temporal segments because each hour is made up of 60 minutes. We can go on like this ad infinitum.

I. Meditation on the Emptiness of an Object [e.g. flower]

Visualise a very beautiful and appealing image of a flower in your mind, of the size one inch by one inch, 200 dpi in resolution (i.e. the picture is made of 200×200 dots per inch, a total of 40,000 dots) and this image is greatly enlarged into a gigantic picture, 20 feet by 20 feet in size (the developer can be creative and make the 40,000 dots, each in the form of demons' faces, for example).

The same analytical meditation can be extended to any other objects such as this picture –



Q 1: From a distance, what do you see?

A 1: A picture of a very beautiful tender flower.

Q 2: What is your mental reaction towards this picture of the flower?

A 2: It is so appealing.

[Technically, your mind is pulled by the object thinking that the picture is there from the screen. Here, one can see the dynamic relationship between ignorance (grasping at true or objective existence)²²⁸ and all other afflictions (such as attachment and aversion), and how they are all triggered by this ignorance.

Seeing the picture as existing from the screen is the 'ignorance viewing objective reality'. Your mind being pulled towards the picture is the 'afflictive emotion of attachment'. If presented with an ugly image, your mind will be repulsed by the picture and that is the 'afflictive emotion of aversion'. As mentioned before, all afflictions are either inclined towards the nature of attachment or towards the nature of aversion. Those which are not inclined to either are neutral, but still are of the nature of ignorance.]

Q 3: Does the picture of the flower exist or not? Be very sure of your answer.

A 3: It does exist, it is there on the screen. It is such an attractive picture, I would like to see it more closely.

Q 4: Go up to the screen. What happens to the picture of the flower now?

A 4: The picture of the flower disappears.

Q 5: What happens to the appealing feeling that arose in you earlier?

A 5: It also disappears. Instead, aversion arises upon seeing the 40,000 pictures of demons' faces.

[This indicates how all our afflictive emotions such as attachment and anger are triggered by our mental perception which is always under the influence of the ignorance grasping at objective or true existence (except for the wisdom having a non-dual experience of emptiness). Likewise, it shows how all our afflictions will come to cease if this ignorance is eliminated, just as the attachment to the flower stops as soon as the flower disappears upon closer analysis].

Q 6: [Ask the same question again] Does the picture of the flower exist or not? If it does, where is it now - on the screen, inside your eyes or somewhere in between?

A 6: Yes it does exist, though I am no longer sure where it really is!

Earlier, I thought it was on the screen but now I have come close to the screen and to my amazement, it is not there. As Arya Nagarjuna said in Precious Garland [skt: ratnāvalī; Tib. rinchen phreng ba]:

*If the mirage were to be water,
Why is it not seen (as water) by those close to the mirage?*

The picture of the flower does not exist from the screen because if it did then I should also be able to see it now, from up close. Likewise, it does not exist inside my eyes as I am not looking at my eyes for the picture. It makes no sense either, to say that it exists in between the screen and the eyes.

Q 7: Why have you come close to the screen, in search of what?

A 7: I came closer to the screen to look at the flower more clearly.

[Rephrasing the same response in more technical terms – you came closer to the screen to look for an objectively existent picture of the flower, as opposed to a merely mentally imputed picture of the flower. By doing so, you are looking for something ultimate, i.e. something more than just what your perception creates. If you do find something to exist in that way, then that should be the ultimate reality of the picture of the flower].

Q 8: What did you find upon coming closer to the screen?

A 8: I did not find anything amidst the 40,000 dots of demons' faces, they are all separated by a wide distance.

As Arya Nagarjuna cautioned in Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, Verse 24.18 [Skt. *mūlamadhyamakakārikā*; Tib. *dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab*]:

*That which dependently originates
Is posited to be empty (of independent existence).
That being dependently designated,
This is the Middle Way.*

The picture of the flower disappears, it is not there. The screen is empty of the picture of the flower. The disappearance of the picture of the flower is found, i.e. absence or emptiness of the flower is found.

[On the screen, you see two things - the 40,000 dots that are in the form of the faces of demons and the emptiness of the flower. While the two, like the two sides of the same coin, are the same entity, they are different isolates.

Of the two isolates, for the specific purpose of meditation on emptiness, simply pick up the isolate of the emptiness of the flower – the disappearance of the flower. Pay no attention to the isolate of the dots.

Of the two isolates, by using the appearance of the first isolate which is the 40,000 dots of demons' faces, shift your focus onto the isolate of the disappearance of the flower, which is also referred to as the emptiness of the flower.

The emptiness of the flower should be seen as a non-affirming negative phenomenon (simply an absence) instead of an affirming negative or a positive phenomenon. If your mind shifts its attention to and remains focused on seeing the 40,000 dots or the demons' faces, then you are not meditating on emptiness since both of them are a positive phenomenon, and correct meditation on emptiness is done only by focusing on a non-affirming negative isolate - this is a very important point which cannot be emphasised enough.

It is only by meditating correctly on emptiness as mentioned here, that our self-grasping ignorance can be uprooted and liberation from samsara will thus be possible.

Maintaining one's focus on the mere absence of the flower in the form of a non-affirming negative is really very challenging for ordinary beings who are not used to this experience for even the shortest duration of time, let alone for an extended period of time. This is because our mind is completely addicted to seeing (hearing, smelling, tasting etc.) things in the form of a positive or affirming negative phenomenon].

To put it simply, in order to bring the correct isolate of emptiness to your mind, ask these two questions:

Q. What are you seeing now?

A. I am seeing the 40,000 dots, each in the form of demons' faces.

Q. Where is the flower?

A. It disappears, it is empty. (Exactly in the moment that this answer comes to you, the isolate of the emptiness of the flower is also appearing to your mind).

In order to habituate and familiarise our mind so that it retains its focus on the emptiness of the flower in the form of a non-affirming negative phenomenon, continue to ask the above two questions over and over again. Do so as soon as the 40,000 dots in the form of demons' faces start to appear to your mind and you lose the experience of the emptiness of the flower. This will slowly help you to acquire a stable experience of emptiness. Over time, you will be able to obtain and hold the experience of emptiness for longer durations.

This is an extremely precious practice for awakening us from the deceptive dream of the fears of samsara. Otherwise, no matter what one does, it is like doing good things and bad things in a dream, while misapprehending those actions as real and not as a dream. This is how we are slaves to the deception of the self-grasping ignorance which imposes itself as real and sways us.

Being under the sway of the deception of ignorance constantly agitates our mind - moving it here and there - this is also referred to as the involuntary pull and push of the mind, which is nothing but the loss of freedom. This loss of freedom causes all our miseries, and this is what is called samsara. Therefore cultivating a precise and sustained experience of emptiness is so precious.

Abide in the experience of emptiness as mentioned above for a while.

Q 9: Now, moving away from the screen while continuing to look at the screen, what appears to your eyes when you are at the same distance from the screen as you initially started out with?

A 9: The picture of the flower returns.

[This is the infallible dependent origination. Only the picture of the flower appears and, not that of a tree or a house. Every phenomenon, while lacking objective reality, still exists and functions infallibly, but merely on the conventional level, through dependent origination. In this case, the picture of the flower arises by dependence on various factors such as the dots, the space in between the dots, the light, the screen and the perceiving mind. This should generate in us a deep conviction in the efficacy of dependent origination, which permeates all phenomena, including the law of karma.

While everything exists, it never exists on the ultimate level but only on the conventional level. Our chronic ignorance always drives us to misperceive and believe that things do exist on the ultimate level. This understanding of the infallible dependent origination does not bring the phenomenal world from the ultimate level to the conventional level, it has always been on the conventional level since beginningless time (and never on the ultimate level). This understanding allows our mind to shake off its chronic ignorant belief and makes us realise that everything operates only on the subjective level].

Q 10: As you keep going towards and away from the screen, again and again, what is happening to the perception of your eyes?

A 10: The perception keeps on changing from that of the picture of the flower, to the emptiness of the picture of the flower.

Remark 1a) This indicates that the same object on the screen shows two faces or two aspects. While nothing changes at all from the object's side on the screen, your perception of the object keeps changing. This is indicative of the fact that what you see on the screen as the picture of a flower is nothing other than just your own perception.

Perception means something which is purely mental and hence it is totally subjective.

Remark 1b) Just as a ghost in a dream does not exist in reality from its own side and thus is a dream ghost, just so, the picture of the flower is merely our mental projection and is only subjectively existent. Conversely, it is said to be empty of objective existence and thus dream-like or illusion-like.

Abide in this experience of emptiness for a while.

Remark 2: When you look very closely, what you see of the same object on the screen (i.e. the emptiness of the picture of the flower) is the face of the ultimate reality of the picture of the flower. What you see as a picture of the flower from a distance is the face of the subjective / conventional reality of the picture of the flower.

These are the two truths of the same object. Every phenomenon necessarily possesses these two truths or realities and emptiness is no exception; emptiness also possesses two truths.

II. Meditation on the Emptiness of your 'Self'

In a similar manner, meditate on the emptiness of your 'self.'

Keep in mind the following analogies:

1) The picture of the beautiful tender flower is analogous to your 'self'.

2) The 40,000 dots of demons' faces are analogous to the atoms or the six elements (earth, water, fire, air, space and consciousness) or the five collections (or aggregates) (form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and mental consciousness) that constitute you.

3) The emptiness of the flower is analogous to the fact that there is no singular, independent entity called 'self' which can be found as objectively existent upon (ultimate) analysis.

The self is merely designated on the basis of the parts (such as the atoms or the five collections or the six elements). There is no 'self' which is found, as either being one with its parts or different from its parts

(Essential No. 2 and 3 to Discern Emptiness).

Abide for sometime in the experience of the emptiness of the self, this meditation on emptiness is precious beyond words.

III. Meditation on the Emptiness of your Mind

In a similar manner, meditate on the emptiness of your mind.

Keep in mind the following analogies:

1) The picture of the beautiful tender flower is analogous to your mind.

2) The 40,000 dots of demons' faces are analogous to the temporal moments of the mind which constitute the whole mind, in relation to the emptiness of your mind.

3) The emptiness of the flower is analogous to the fact that upon analysis, there is no independent moment of mental experience which can be found as objectively existent.

4) For meditating on the emptiness of the mind, analyse that the present moment, which is the frame of reference for the three times (past, present and future), is not findable.

Analyse the mind's deceptivity of experiencing its objects. Through close analysis, one realises that the mind cannot discern the object that it thinks it is discerning or experiencing, due to the object's fast moving transitoriness.

The following verses may be used during the meditations on the emptiness of the self and the mind:

Arya Nagarjuna's Precious Garland, Verse 1:80 - 81

[skt: ratnāvalī; Tib. rin chen phreng ba]

*If the person is not earth, not water,
Not fire, not air, not space,
Not also consciousness, and not all (of them)
Where is the person out of those?*

*Just as a person is not truly existent,
Because of being an aggregation of the six constituents,
So each constituent also is not truly existent
As they are aggregations (of their own constituents)*

Arya Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way,
Verse 22.1 [Skt. mūlamadhyamakakārikā; Tib. dbu ma rtsa ba shes rab]

*Neither the aggregates, nor different from the aggregates,
The aggregates don't (depend) on him, nor is he (dependent) on them,
The Tathagata does not possess the aggregates,
What is the Tathagata? [Insert your name] [What is Jason?]*

Bhikuni Vajira's Utterance in a Fundamental Vehicle Sutra

*Just as one designates a cart,
In dependence upon a collection of parts,
So we assert the conventional sentient being,*

In dependence upon the aggregates.

Remark 3: Repeatedly recite the above verses as often as possible in order to abide in the experience of emptiness which you obtained (from Question 8 and Remark 1b), both in meditation as well as in post-meditation.

Recite the sacred verses from sutras and other compositions on emptiness by Indian saints, to reinforce your experience (refer to selected verses). This practice is the essence that gives profound meaning to your whole life. Make sure you do not lose the regularity of this practice by doing it on a daily basis.

Remark 4: In all moments of your waking state, try to be mindful to the best of your ability that everything (i.e. the three spheres of action) is dream-like:

(1) the objects you are interacting with (2) you, as the agent who is interacting, and (3) the action of interaction itself (refer to Remark 1a).

All these three lack true objective reality. Yet, to our mind, they deceptively appear to exist from their own side i.e. as truly existent, in all moments of the waking state, as well as during sleep and while dreaming.

Remember the verses from Buddha's sutras, such as the ones given above and below, as they will help you to engage in daily activities with the mindfulness and awareness that everything you encounter is dream-like.

As advised by Lama Tsongkhapa in Lamrim Chenmo (The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment), engage in all virtuous actions by seeing them in the light of their dream-like nature. This helps us accumulate the two collections of merit and wisdom from all the actions that one engages in, throughout one's life.

Selected Verses on the Middle Way

From The Sutra Requested by Upali

*The various delightful flowers blossom,
And the sparkling, supreme, golden abodes stand so alluring.
For none of these is there a creator.
They are posited by the power of thought.
It is through conceptualisation that the world is imputed.*

From The King of Concentration Sutra

*Just as in the dream of a young girl,
She met with a boy and saw his death,
Joyous was she at the meeting and anguished at his death,
View all phenomena as thus.*

From Arya Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way, Verse 18.5

*The ceasing of karmas and afflictions leads to nirvana.
Karmas and afflictions arise from conceptual thought.
These arise from (mental) elaboration (that follows after grasping at true existence).
Elaboration ceases by (the meditation on) emptiness.*

From Aryadeva's Four Hundred Verses on the Middle Way

*When dependent arising is seen,
Ignorance does not occur.
Thus through all efforts,
Strive to find this subject.*

From A Song of the Four Mindfulnesses as a Guide to the View of the
Middle Way, by the Seventh Dalai Lama

*At the crossroads of the six collections (of consciousness)
that have diverse perceptions,
Are seen the hazy dualistic phenomena which are baseless.
There is a magical show that is by nature deceptive.
Don't believe them to be true,
but view them as having the nature of emptiness.*

*Don't let your mind go astray, but place it within
the nature of appearance-emptiness.
Through not losing mindfulness,
hold it within the nature of appearance-emptiness.*

*The sphere of appearing and existing phenomena
Is pervaded by the space of the ultimate clear light of suchness.
There is an ineffable ultimate reality.*

*View this nature of emptiness
through abandoning mental contrivances.
Don't let your mind go astray,
but place it within the ambience of reality.
Through not losing mindfulness,
hold it within the ambience of reality.*

Remark 6: You should not give in to the ignorance grasping at true existence anymore. Dispel this darkness of ignorance from your mind and the minds of all dear mother sentient beings by sharing this light of the wisdom of emptiness with others. It is better that we do not waste our precious time and rather engage in the urgent mission of bringing unconditional happiness and peace to all our mothers and to ourselves.

Concluding the day with a meditation on emptiness and sealing the day's virtuous practices with prayers would be profoundly helpful.

Remark 7: After gaining some understanding of how things exist subjectively and are devoid of objective existence, it is beneficial to think of the dependent nature of phenomena in terms of the mutuality of dependence of cause and effect, labels and the labeled, characteristics and the characterised, the mind and its objects, the whole and the parts, big and small, and so forth.

Dedication Prayer

*Throughout my future lifetimes,
May I always be guided by Arya Manjushri
And be able to uphold the Dharma in general,
and the teachings on Dependent Origination in particular,
Even at the cost of my life.*

Note: A student-practitioner interested in refining their experience of emptiness can use the 'Staircase to Emptiness' as a support to set-up an initial practice but they should try their best to keep expanding their meditation experience and make it more nuanced through engaging in further extensive learning, reflection and meditation on the wisdom of emptiness.

Written by Geshe Dorji Damdul at the request of Ellora Mubashir for the participants of the Bodhicitta Retreat [Series I] at Shree Raghavendra Krupasharma, Punyasthala, January 15 - 28, 2013.

For the sake of all who struggle and suffer,
all those who have not yet reached the highest state of freedom and peace,
to relieve their suffering and to bring them happiness,

I take refuge in the Buddha,
the Great Compassionate Teacher,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
in all the Liberating Teachings,
and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
the Enlightened Spiritual Community,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

By this practice,
just as my teachers before me have done,
May I realize the state of Peace, Perfect Freedom, and Happiness,
and Great Love, ~ the Mind of Enlightenment,
and bring all others to that very same state

The concerns of all others are my concerns,
is that not so?

For their sake, then

May I accomplish this Path,

and,

May all temporal and ultimate aims be fulfilled

However many species of living beings there are, we must lead all these beings to perfect peace and freedom; And when this innumerable, immeasurable, infinite number of beings has become liberated, we do not, in truth, think that a single being has been liberated...

Why is this so? If a bodhisattva holds on to the idea that a self, a person, a living being, or a life span exists, that person is not one who is both willing and able to lead others to freedom...

{The Diamond Sutra, verse 3}

If no beings exist [in ultimate reality], toward whom should we have compassion? To attain the result [of buddhahood, which is to be achieved only through the awakening of both great compassion and wisdom], one should direct one's compassion toward whatever it is that unenlightened beings call 'beings. {Shantideva}

On the conventional level of reality, beings do not exist as they are perceived by other unenlightened beings. The bodhisattva realizes that, in ultimate reality, there are no beings who exist as unenlightened beings think, but he directs his mind toward those beings as they perceive themselves.

On the ultimate level, he sees no beings, but he realizes that on the conventional level, beings think they exist and do experience suffering. Out of objectless compassion, therefore, he directs his mind toward them. {Deshung Rinpoche}

So, Subhuti, all the bodhisattva mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit... They should give rise to an intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere...

{The Diamond Sutra, verse 10}

From The Middle Way View #1

When teachings speak of non-referential compassion, there is an immediacy that is referred to, a newness, and resourcefulness, and timeliness.

From The Middle Way View #2

When we can begin to see with the eyes of the spirit, we are not separate from one another, or our own depths.

This is referred to at times as non referential compassion, seeing in a way that is not separate, dynamic and resourceful, and naturally responsive to every need.

The Illusory Spiritual Path

By Mipham Rinpoche

If all phenomena are unreal and illusory, like mirages, why should one train on the path, practicing generosity and so on- like tiring oneself trying to buy an illusory horse?

The answer is that it is for the end result or rather out of necessity that one simply enters the path without subjecting it to analysis and investigation.

But why is this necessity? The fact is that the appearances of samsara and nirvana, illusion-like as they are, are inescapable owing to the power of interdependent origination.

And until dualistic, subject-object fixation is dissipated in the expanse of suchness, these same appearances will continue to affect living beings without interruption, helping or harming them as the case may be.

It is as a means to remove the suffering of ourselves and others, and in order to find benefit and happiness, that we persevere- not because we believe in the real existence of the path and its result. It is like emanating a phantom army in order to deliver people from their [phantom] enemies.

If an illusory patient can go to an illusory doctor
 complaining of an illusory ailment,
 and receive an illusory remedy,
 that brings an illusory recovery

then in the same way
 an illusory student can go to an illusory teacher,
 with their illusory suffering,
 receive illusory teachings
 and accomplish an illusory result

Another way of saying this, more plainly, is that:
 someone taking themselves to be a self,
 can go to a teacher they also assume to be a self,
 and tell of suffering,
 that, though it appears, is similarly misconceived,
 existing differently than the way it appears;

They can receive teachings that are actually without a basis in self view,
 even though they may seem to be just that,
 and accomplish a result-
 all of which is ungraspable,
 without any independent self existence that appears whatsoever,
 from the beginning,
 remaining so in the middle,
 and in the end

This is like awakening from a dream-
 From within the dream, everything seems one way
 and then, seen afterwards, as its mistaken basis fades,
 and all the dream effects subside as well

{this is a teaching I heard a couple of different versions of many years ago. I
 don't remember the source, but the message was clear, and true}

From The Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sutra, Chapter 7

Thereupon, Manjusri, the crown prince, addressed the Licchavi Vimalakirti:

"Good sir, how should a bodhisattva regard {the appearance of self of} all living beings?"

Vimalakirti replied,

"Manjusri, a bodhisattva should regard {the appearance of self of} all living beings

as a wise man regards the reflection of the moon in water,
or as magicians regard men created by magic.

He should regard them as being like a face in a mirror;
like the water of a mirage;

like the sound of an echo;
like a mass of clouds in the sky;

like the previous moment of a ball of foam;
like the appearance and disappearance of a bubble of water;

like the core of a plantain tree;
like a flash of lightning;

like the fifth great element;
like the seventh sense-medium;

like the appearance of matter in an immaterial realm;
like a sprout from a rotten seed;

like a tortoise-hair coat;
like the fun of games for one who wishes to die;

like the egoistic views of a stream-winner;
like a third rebirth of a once-returner;

like the descent of a non-returner into a womb;
like the existence of desire, hatred, and folly in a saint;

like thoughts of avarice, immorality, wickedness, and hostility
in a bodhisattva who has attained tolerance;

like the instincts of passions in a Tathágata;
like the perception of color in one blind from birth;

like the inhalation and exhalation of an ascetic
absorbed in the meditation of cessation;

like the track of a bird in the sky;
like the erection of a eunuch;

like the pregnancy of a barren woman;
like the un-produced passions of an emanated incarnation of the Tathágata;

like dream-visions seen after waking;
like the passions of one who is free of conceptualizations;

like fire burning without fuel;
like the involuntary reincarnation of one who has attained ultimate
liberation.

"Precisely thus, Manjusri, does a bodhisattva who realizes the ultimate
selflessness consider all beings."

Manjusri then asked further,

"Noble sir, if a bodhisattva considers all living beings in such a way, how does he generate the great love toward them?"

Vimalakirti replied,

"Manjusri, when a bodhisattva considers all living beings in this way, he thinks:

‘Just as I have realized the Dharma, so should I teach it to living beings.’

Thereby, he generates the love that is truly a refuge for all living beings;

the love that is peaceful because free of grasping;

the love that is not feverish, because free of passions;

the love that accords with reality because it is equanimous
in all three times;

the love that is without conflict because free of the violence of the passions;

the love that is non-dual because it is involved neither with the external nor
with the internal;

the love that is imperturbable because totally ultimate.

"Thereby he generates the love that is firm, its high resolve unbreakable,
like a diamond;

the love that is pure, purified in its intrinsic nature;

the love that is even, its aspirations being equal;

the saint's love that has eliminated its enemy;

the bodhisattva's love that continuously develops living beings;

The Tathágata's love that understands reality;

the Buddha's love that causes living beings to awaken from their sleep;

the love that is spontaneous because it is fully enlightened spontaneously;

the love that is enlightenment because it is unity of experience;

the love that has no presumption because it has eliminated attachment and aversion;

the love that is great compassion because it infuses the Mahayana with radiance;

the love that is never exhausted because it acknowledges voidness and selflessness;

the love that is giving because it bestows the gift of Dharma free of the tight fist of a bad teacher;

the love that is morality because it improves immoral living beings;

the love that is tolerance because it protects both self and others;

the love that is effort because it takes responsibility for all living beings;

the love that is contemplation because it refrains from indulgence in tastes;

the love that is wisdom because it causes attainment at the proper time;

the love that is {liberated and}

liberative technique because it shows the way everywhere;

the love that is without formality because it is pure in motivation;

the love that is without deviation because it acts from decisive motivation;

the love that is high {in its} resolve because it is without passions;

the love that is without deceit because it is not artificial;

the love that is happiness because it introduces living beings to the happiness of the Buddha.

Such, Manjusri, is the great love of a bodhisattva."

Before dedication

A preceding reflection from the teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

‘All phenomena – including the I, the action of dedicating, the merits that are dedicated, the goal of enlightenment to which they are dedicated, and the sentient beings for whom they are dedicated – are completely empty of existing from their own side. With the continual awareness of this, I now impute labels, and dedicate...’

Ways to dedicate with wisdom by Lama Zopa

Due to all the merits of the three times collected by me, buddhas, bodhisattvas and all other sentient beings- which are like a dream, an illusion, and appear to be inherently existent even though they are not-

may the I- which is like a dream, an illusion, and appears to be inherently existent even though it is not, even though the I has never had inherent existence-

achieve Guru Vajrasattva's enlightenment- which is like a dream, an illusion, and appears to be inherently existent even though it is empty of inherent existence, even though it has never had inherent existence-

and lead all sentient beings- who are also like a dream, an illusion, and appear to be inherently existent even though they are completely empty of inherent existence-

to that enlightenment- which is also like a dream, an illusion, and appears to be inherently existent even though it is not-

by myself alone- who is also like a dream, an illusion, and appears to be inherently existent even though it is empty of inherent existence.

(or)

2.

which are merely labeled by the mind...

3.

which appear to me as independent, inherently existent, real, appearing from there, but which buddhas and bodhisattvas realize are totally non-existent;

which I apprehend in my daily life as really true but which buddhas and bodhisattvas realize are totally non-existent,

which I believe to be one hundred percent true, real, existing from there but which buddhas and bodhisattvas realize to be totally non-existent, totally empty...

4.

which appear to be real merits, existing from there, from their own side, as projected by my hallucinating mind's ignorance, but are in reality empty of that...

5.

which appear to my hallucinated mind as something real, something real existing from there, but which in reality are totally non-existent, totally empty...

6.

which, while they exist, are totally non-existent from their own side...

7.

... which are totally non-existent from their own side-

they exist, but they are totally non-existent from their own side. They exist, but it's like they don't exist. When you see the very nature of that, you see that they exist, *but it's like they don't*.

They are not totally non-existent, but *it's like* they don't exist. The way things exist is extremely subtle.

When you look at the very nature of phenomena, such as merits, it's like they don't exist... (May I...)

8.

which is totally non-existent

(we put in all this effort to collect merit and it's totally non-existent!),

totally non-existent from its own side...

9.

which are totally non-existent from their own side... (May I) ...

10.

which appear to be real, from there, but which are empty... may the I ...

From The Continual Practice of Right View

Khenpo Choga has said:

‘The strongest way to dedicate merit is called ‘a dedication that does not conceptualize the three factors’. This dedication is done while recognizing the buddha nature. In that recognition there is no subject who dedicates the merit, no merit to be dedicated and no object who receives the merit. A mind that has truly realized the buddha nature actually does pervade the totality of space so the dedication of such a mind actually reaches all beings in all universes. This is the most powerful form of dedication.’

In the words of the Avatamsaka Sutra:

*To all internal and external worlds
Bodhisattvas have no attachment at all,
Yet do not abandon works beneficial to sentient beings;
The great ones cultivate this kind of knowledge.*

*In all lands in the ten directions
They do not depend or dwell on anything;
They do not grasp things, such as livelihood,
And do not arbitrarily create distinctions.*

*They engage with all sentient beings
In all worlds in the ten directions;
Observing their essential nature,
They practice dedication reaching everywhere.*

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing.
May all beings enjoy an abundance of positive conditions,
well being, and peace.

