

# THE PATH OF THE MIDDLE WAY

The Profound Buddhist Teachings  
On the Absence of Mental Fabrication

## Source Book



*For internal use only*

~

*Exclusively for the use of  
Westchester Buddhist Center  
First Edition - 2015*

# The Path of the Middle Way

## The Profound Buddhist Teachings On the Absence of Mental Fabrication Source Book

### Table of Contents

- 1) Syllabus, **SB p. 1**
- 2) *Prajnaparamita Upadesha*, by Aryadeva, 2 pages, **SB p. 3**
- 3) *Profound Instruction on the View of the Middle Way*, by Mipham Rinpoche, 2 pages, **SB p. 5**
- 4) *Madhyamaka Pith Instructions*, by Atisha, 2 pages, **SB p. 8**
- 5) Introduction, *The Sun of Wisdom: Teachings on the Noble Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, pp. ix - xix, **SB p. 9**
- 6) Verses on the Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, **SB p. 21**
- 7) The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, *The Center of the Sunlit Sky: Madhyamaka in the Kagyu Tradition*, Karl Brunnholzl, pp. 295-310, **SB p. 22**
- 8) Verses on The Four Skills, by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, **SB p. 41**
- 9) The Prasangika Madhyamikas, *Treasury of Precious Qualities: The Rain of Joy by Jigme Lingpa with The Quintessence of the Three Paths: A Commentary by Longchen Yeshe Dorje*, pp. 417-429, **SB p. 42**
- 10) The Four Great Logical Arguments of the Middle Way, *The Gateway to Knowledge*, by Mipham, 12 pages, **SB p. 56**
- 11) *The Key to the Middle Way*, by Tenzin Gyatso, Dalai Lama XIV, pp. 1-26, **SB p. 68**

**I prostrate to Gautama  
Who through compassion  
Taught the true doctrine,  
Which leads to the relinquishing of all views.**

**Mulamadhyamaka Karikas, XXVII.30  
By Nagarjuna**

*The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*  
Translated by Jay Garfield

**The Path of the Middle Way**  
**The Profound Buddhist Teachings on the Absence of Mental Fabrication**  
*Twelve Sundays from September 13 to December 20<sup>th</sup>*  
*(Omitting September 20, November 29, and December 13, 2015)*  
*Suggested donation \$200 (please offer based upon your means)*

**Sources**

1. *The Path of the Middle Way Sourcebook (SB)*
2. *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*, by Ven. Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated and arranged by Shenpen Hookham (**PSME**)
3. *Introduction to Emptiness: As taught in Tsong-kha-pa's Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path*, by Guy Newland (**ITE**)

**Syllabus**

- 1) Introduction and Overview of the Middle Way (In class reading)
  - a) *In Class Reading:*
    - i) *Prajnaparamita Upadesha*, by Aryadeva, 2 pages **SB**
    - ii) *Profound Instruction on the View of the Middle Way*, by Mipham Rinpoche, 2 pages **SB**
    - iii) *Madhyamaka Pith Instructions*, by Atisha, 2 pages **SB**
    - iv) *Introduction, The Sun of Wisdom: Teachings on the Noble Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, pp. ix - xix **SB**
- 2) The Shravaka Stage of Understanding of Emptiness
  - a) PSME: Introduction, p. 1-8
  - b) PSME: Stage One - The Sravaka Meditation on Not-Self, p. 9-26
- 3) The Mind Only Stage of Understanding of Emptiness
  - a) PSME: Stage Two - The Cittamatra Approach, p. 27-44
- 4) The First and Second Madhyamaka Stages of Understanding of Emptiness
  - a) Stage Three - The Svatantrika Approach, p. 45-54
  - b) Stage Four - The Prasangika Approach, p. 55-64
- 5) The Third Madhyamaka Stage of Understanding of Emptiness
  - a) Stage Five - The Emptiness of Other (Shen Tong) Approach, p. 65-80
- 6) A Review of The Progressive Stages of the Understanding of Emptiness

- a) The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, *The Center of the Sunlit Sky: Madhyamaka in the Kagyu Tradition*, Karl Brunnholzl, pp. 295-310 **SB**
- 7) Reasoning into Emptiness
  - a) The Prasangika Madhyamikas, Treasury of Precious Qualities: The Rain of Joy by Jigme Lingpa with The Quintessence of the Three Paths: A Commentary by Longchen Yeshe Dorje, pp. 417-429 **SB**
  - b) The Four Great Logical Arguments of the Middle Way, The Gateway to Knowledge, by Mipham, 12 pages **SB**
- 8) The Mechanics of Understanding Emptiness, Part 1
  - a) ITE: How to Be Free, pp. 5-16
  - b) ITE: Following the Path of Wisdom, pp. 17-26
- 9) The Mechanics of Understanding Emptiness, Part 2
  - a) ITE: Our Choices Matter, pp. 27-38
  - b) ITE: Ultimate and Conventional Radio, pp. 39-47
- 10) The Mechanics of Understanding Emptiness, Part 3
  - a) ITE: Reliable Sources, pp. 48-55
  - b) ITE: Ultimate Reality Exists Conventionally, pp. 56-66
- 11) The Mechanics of Understanding Emptiness, Part 4
  - a) ITE: Intrinsic Nature, pp. 67-75
  - b) ITE: The Two Types of Madhyamaka, pp. 76-85
- 12) The Mechanics of Understanding Emptiness, Part 5
  - a) ITE: Who Am I, Really, pp. 86-100
  - b) ITE: From Analysis to Insight, pp. 101-113

### **Post Class Holiday Reading**

- *The Key to the Middle Way* by Tenzin Gyatso, pp. 1-26 **SB**

## **The Prajnaparamita Upadesa by Aryadeva**

<http://www.empty-universe.com/prajnaparamita/prajnaparamita.html>

*These are the direct verbal instructions (upadesa) concerning how to practice  
Prajnaparamita as explained by Aryadeva in his Prajnaparamita Upadesa.*

Through awareness free of artifice and corruption  
Recognize your mind as the root of both samsara and nirvana.  
It's not produced by causes or conditions,  
Unborn, naturally serene, its nature is emptiness.

So with regard to all phenomena with form or formless,  
Whether the karmic impact is positive or negative,  
Don't turn anything into a fixed reference or support,  
Not even so much as an atom.

The meaning of the Prajnaparamita  
Is not to be looked for elsewhere: it exists within yourself.  
It's neither real nor endowed with characteristics,  
The nature of the mind is the great clear light.

Neither outer nor inner, neither god nor demon,  
Not existent within samsara's cycles nor nirvana's beyond,  
And neither manifest nor empty:  
Mind is free from any such dual appearances.

This is the Buddha's true intention, his flawless view.  
If looking for a simile, one could say it is like space.  
The supreme method to realize the nature of mind  
Is to unite space and awareness.

When thus mixing space and awareness,  
You spontaneously purify all fixed notions  
Such as a reality and characteristics, negating and establishing,  
And you abide in the truth of suchness, dharmata,  
Free from dualistic subject-object cognition.

With both body and mind thus in their natural state,  
Without further intervention fresh awareness arises,  
Extending just as far as the reach of empty space,  
Within this vast expanse remain absorbed without constraints or limits.

At that time you will experience a state of consciousness  
Free from any support or from any sort of foundation,

An awareness abiding nowhere,  
Not absorbed in either the aggregates or any outer object.

Having moved to desolate places,  
When magical displays of gods or demons, grasping or aversion arise,  
Separate awareness from the gross material body.  
The physical body is like a stone--nothing can harm it--  
And mind has no real existence, being similar to space.  
So who or what could then possibly be harmed?

Pondering this, remain in suchness, with no anxiety, no fear.  
Attachment to a philosophical tenet is obscuration.  
Nondual, self-liberated is the ultimate nature of mind.  
So take refuge in the essence of reality  
And constantly generate the bodhi mind.



*Profound Instruction on the View of the Middle Way*

*by Mipham Rinpoche*

Namo Mañjushriye!

Once you have gone through the training in analysis  
And developed confidence in the crucial point  
Of how the individual is devoid of self,  
Then consider how just as the so-called “I” is

An unexamined conceptual imputation,  
All phenomena included within  
The five skandhas and the unconditioned are just the same,  
Labeled conceptually as this or that.

Although we cling to all these various phenomena,  
When we investigate and search for them they cannot be found.  
And when we reach the ultimate two indivisibles,  
Even the most subtle and infinitesimal can not be established.

It is the same for all that appears through dependent origination.  
Entities themselves arise dependently,  
Whereas ‘non-entities’ are dependently imputed.  
So whether an entity or a non-entity,

Whatever is conceived of uncritically,  
Once it is analyzed and investigated,  
It is found to be without basis or origin,  
Appearing yet unreal, like an illusion, a dream,

The moon’s reflection, an echo or city in the clouds,  
A hallucination, a mirage and the like.  
Appearing yet empty, empty yet appearing—  
Meditate on the way empty appearances resemble illusions.

This is the ultimate that is categorized conceptually.  
It has the confidence of a mind of understanding,  
And it is indeed the stainless wisdom of seeing  
The illusory nature of post-meditative experience.

Yet it has not gone beyond focus on apprehended objects,  
Nor have the features of a subjective mind been overcome,  
And so since it has not gone beyond conceptuality  
The true reality of natural simplicity is not seen.

When this kind of certainty has arisen,  
Then even the clinging to mere illusion  
Can be understood as conceptual imputation.  
There is apprehension, but no essential nature to the perceived,

And even the perceiving mind can not be found,  
So without clinging, one is brought to rest in natural ease.  
When you remain like this, all experiences,  
Both external and internal, are not interrupted.

Within this fundamental nature free from grasping,  
All the projections imposed upon phenomena,  
Have never arisen and never ceased to be,  
And, free from the duality of perceiver and perceived,

One rests in the all-pervading space of equality.  
This is beyond any assertions such as 'is' or 'is not.'  
And within this inexpressible state of true and natural rest  
An experience dawns that is free from the slightest trace of doubt.

This is the actual nature of all things,  
The ultimate that can not be conceptualized,  
And which can only be known individually,  
The non-conceptual wisdom of meditative equipoise.

When you become familiar with this state,  
In which emptiness and dependent arising are an inseparable unity,  
The ultimate condition in which the two truths can not be separated,  
Then that is the yoga of the great Middle Way.

Those who wish to realize this swiftly  
And make evident non-dual primordial wisdom  
Beyond the domain of the ordinary mind,  
Should meditate on the pith instructions of secret mantra.

This is the ultimate profound and crucial point  
Of the progressive meditations on the Middle Way.  
So begin by thoroughly refining your conduct,  
And then arrive at certainty, experientially and in stages.

With confidence in the illusory nature of empty appearance,  
There is nothing to be eliminated or enhanced upon the path,  
And within the equality of the all-pervading space of perfect wisdom,  
You will come to find complete liberation.

In a place where people suffer drought and dehydration,  
Hearing about water will not be enough to quench their thirst,  
And it is only by drinking that they will find relief.  
The sutras say this is how it is for learning and experience.

Someone with only dry and theoretical understanding,  
Who is worn out by all kinds of reasoning and ideas,  
Does not need sporadic practice, but meditation in proper stages.  
This is how to swiftly gain acceptance of the profound.

Jampal Gyepé Dorje wrote down whatever came to mind,  
On the twenty-ninth day of the eleventh month of the Water Dragon year (1892).  
May all beings realize the meaning of the profound Middle Way!

*Mangalam!*

Translated by Adam Pearcey  
© Adam Pearcey 2004.

## Madhyamaka Pith Instructions – Madhyamakopadesha - By Atisha

*From Straight from the Heart: Buddhist Pith Instructions*

Translated and Introduced By Karl Brunnholzl

The Mahayana's pith instructions on the center 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 [Madhyamaka] 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 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 [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 mindfulness and mental engagement. For as long as the enemies or robbers of characteristics and thoughts do not arise, 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 rest in meditative equipoise at all times.

# *The Sun of Wisdom*

---

Teachings on the  
Noble Nagarjuna's  
*Fundamental Wisdom*  
*of the Middle Way*



KHENPO TSÜLTRIM GYAMTSON

Translated and edited by Ari Goldfield



SHAMBHALA Boston & London 2003

# Introduction

---

WHATEVER ACTIVITY WE ENGAGE IN, our motivation is very important. According to the tradition of Mahayana (Great Vehicle) Buddhism, the motivation we should cultivate is *bodhichitta*—the mind turned toward supreme enlightenment. One way to do so is to think first of our father and mother in this lifetime, and then extend the love and compassion we feel for them to all sentient beings, including even our enemies. It is the case that all sentient beings, including our enemies, have been our own father and mother countless times, and therefore they have been indescribably kind to us countless times. The greatest thing we can do to repay sentient beings' kindness is to lead them all to the state of complete and perfect enlightenment, the state of buddhahood, and in order to do this, we must listen to, reflect upon, and meditate on the teachings of the genuine Dharma with all the enthusiasm we can muster. This is the supreme motivation of *bodhichitta*—please give rise to it as a first step whenever you read, reflect on, or meditate upon the teachings in this book.

The topic of this book is the text known as *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, composed by the noble protector Nagarjuna. Nagarjuna is a special teacher in the history of Buddhism. The Buddha himself prophesied that Nagarjuna would be born four hundred years after the Buddha's own passing and that he would give vast and perfect explanations of the Buddha's teachings. Nagar-

juna fulfilled this prophecy both as a teacher of many students who went on to become great masters themselves and as an author of texts that expound and clarify the meaning of the Buddha's words. Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike have studied these texts from Nagarjuna's time to the present.

Nagarjuna's commentaries form three main collections of texts that explain, respectively, the Buddha's own three series of teachings known as the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma. Thus, in the set of compositions known as *The Collections of Advice*, Nagarjuna's focus is the first turning of the wheel. He describes how a human life gives one the invaluable opportunity to practice the Dharma; how this life and everything one knows of and experiences within it are impermanent; how samsara—the cycle of existence in which confused sentient beings endlessly wander from one lifetime to the next—is characterized by constant suffering, in both gross and subtle forms; and how practicing the Dharma leads to the attainment of nirvana, the state of liberation that transcends samsara's suffering once and for all. This is a brief summary of the teachings the Buddha gave in his first turning of the wheel of Dharma. These are teachings from the perspective that appearances truly exist in just the way they seem to—that the individual, the individual's past and future lives, the suffering the individual experiences in samsara, and the liberation the individual can attain in nirvana all exist in precisely the way they appear.

In the middle and final turnings of the wheel, the Buddha described the true nature of reality, explaining that the way things appear to be is different from the way they actually are. The Buddha taught that of all the progressively subtle ways of explaining the true nature of reality, the ultimate description one can make is that the true nature of reality is the true nature of mind, the union of luminous clarity and emptiness. It is difficult, however, to understand what “the union of luminous clarity and emptiness” means as an initial statement, and therefore the Buddha taught about the two aspects of emptiness and luminous clarity separately and in great

detail in the sutras of the middle and final turnings, respectively. Once students understand what emptiness is, and then what luminous clarity is, they can then much more easily understand how it is that genuine reality is in fact the union of the two.

Nevertheless, the profundity and vastness of the Buddha's teachings in the sutras make them difficult for ordinary individuals to understand. For this reason, Nagarjuna composed *The Six Collections of Reasonings* to explain the middle turning's *Sutras of Transcendent Wisdom* (the *Prajñāpāramitā Sutras*), and *The Collection of Seventeen Praises* to explain the final turning's *Sutras on the Buddha Nature*. From among *The Six Collections of Reasonings*, the major text is *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*.

### WHAT IS THE MIDDLE WAY?

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—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 Conse-

quence 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.

#### DEPENDENTLY ARISEN MERE APPEARANCES

Understanding these three stages of the Buddha's teachings highlights one of the main differences between the Middle Way view that Nagarjuna teaches and the view of nihilism. A nihilistic view would have a strong clinging to the notion of nonexistence, whereas in the third stage, the Middle Way explains that the nature of reality transcends both existence *and* nonexistence.

A nihilistic view would also completely deny the existence of past and future lives, the law of cause and result, the rare and supreme Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and so forth. The Middle Way does not fall into that extreme, however, because it does not deny that all these things—in fact all the outer and inner phenomena that compose samsara and nirvana—exist as dependently arisen mere appearances. The best example to help us understand what this means is the moon that appears on the surface of a pool of water. When all the conditions of a full moon, a cloud-free sky, a clear lake, and a perceiver come together, a moon will vividly appear on the water's surface, but if just one condition is absent, it will not. Thus, the moon has no independent power to decide to appear—it appears in

the water only in dependence upon the coming together of these causes and conditions. At the same time, it appears, however, it is just a mere appearance, because it is empty of true existence—not the slightest atom of a moon can be found anywhere in the water. Thus, the water-moon is a mere appearance of something that is not really there. In the same way, all the phenomena of *samsara* and *nirvana* appear due to the coming together of causes and conditions, and at the same time as they appear, precise knowledge (*prajñā*) that analyzes their true nature cannot find the slightest trace of their actual existence. They are appearances that are empty of any substantial essence, just like water-moons, but just like water-moons, their emptiness of essence does not prevent them from appearing vividly when the proper causes and conditions come together. This is the truth of dependent arising, the union of appearance and emptiness that is the essence of the Middle Way view. It frees the Middle Way from the extreme of realism, because it does not superimpose true existence onto the nature of genuine reality where there is none, and from the extreme of nihilism, because it does not deny that things appear due to the coming together of causes and conditions.

Gaining certainty in this view is incredibly beneficial, because such certainty helps us to begin to eradicate the root cause of our suffering—our confused tendency to cling to things as being truly existent. As a result of thinking that things truly exist, we become attached to things we like, averse to things we do not like, and stupidly indifferent to everything else. Such experiences of attachment, aversion, and stupidity are called the mental afflictions (*kleshas*), and when we come under their influence, our minds become agitated and we accumulate karma, meaning that we think confused thoughts and perform confused actions in a constant attempt to get the things we like and avoid the things we dislike. The only result, however, of all our confused struggles to gain happiness and avoid suffering is to become further enmeshed in the mental afflictions,

in hope and fear, and in the suffering of losing or not getting what we like and of meeting up with what we do not wish for.

If, however, we can see that things are not truly real—that they are mere appearances whose true nature is beyond all concepts of what it might be—then our experience of both good and bad events in life will be open, spacious, and relaxed. When something good happens, we will be able to enjoy it in a relaxed way, free of clinging to it and free of the fear of it departing. When something bad happens, if we recognize its true nature, we will be relaxed within it and our minds will be undisturbed. In short, realizing the true nature of reality brings inner peace—genuine happiness and ease that outer conditions cannot disturb. As the lord of yogis Milarepa describes it in a vajra song of realization called *An Authentic Portrait of the Middle Way*, also included in this book, appearance-emptiness is “a union vast and spacious,” and realizing that this is the true nature of reality brings the experience of genuine reality’s natural openness and spaciousness. The enlightened masters of the past have all described this experience of realization in precisely this way, and some of their songs appear in this book to give you an idea of what this direct experience of reality is like. By gaining certainty in emptiness, instead of accumulating the causes of suffering, you will accumulate the causes of gaining this very realization that Milarepa and all other enlightened masters have achieved.

Our current confusion and the prospects of liberation from it are illustrated well by the example of dreams. When we dream and do not know that we are dreaming, all the forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations we seem to perceive on the outside, and all the thoughts we seem to have on the inside, appear to be real; we believe they are real, and we have further experiences that seem to confirm to us that they are real. As a result, we experience the turmoil of attachment to things in the dream that we find pleasing and of suffering when we think something or someone is harming us, even though all the while there is nothing really there at all. If we can simply recognize that we are dreaming, however, then all that

trouble just vanishes. We see that all the images that appear in the dream—appearances of clean and dirty, good and bad, friend and enemy, happiness and suffering, and everything else—are all mere appearances that are not real. They are actually of the nature of perfect equality—there is really no difference between them at all. We see that the true nature of all of these appearances is beyond all concepts of what it might be. Then, whatever good or bad appears to happen, since we know that it is just a dream, we know that we do not need to fixate on it—we can just experience whatever it is in a way that is untroubled by the mental afflictions, in a way that is open, spacious, and relaxed. We can even do things like fly in the sky.

Like dream appearances, the daytime forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile sensations we perceive on the outside, as well as our thoughts and mental states within, are all mere appearances that are empty of inherent nature, that do not truly exist. Appearing while empty, empty while appearing, all the phenomena we experience are the union of appearance and emptiness, like dreams and illusions. The more you understand this, the less troubled you will be by the mental afflictions—in fact, even when mental afflictions and suffering arise, you will be able to know that they too are illusory, and they will gradually lose their strength and dissolve. You will gain deeper and deeper insight into the genuine nature of reality beyond concept, insight that will become more and more subtle and will eventually transform into the wisdom of direct realization.

## WISDOM AND COMPASSION TOGETHER

The Mahayana path that leads to the state of complete and perfect enlightenment, however, is not just the path of wisdom realizing emptiness alone—it is rather the path that combines wisdom and compassion together. In fact, the easiest way to understand what it means to attain “complete and perfect enlightenment,” or buddhahood, is to know that it is the state one achieves when one has taken one’s wisdom realizing emptiness to its ultimate degree and one’s

compassion for others to its ultimate degree. Upon achieving that level, one has the greatest motivation and ability to be of benefit to others, and, putting that ability into action in a truly infinite way, one performs limitless benefit for others and naturally benefits oneself at the same time. Therefore, cultivating compassion for others is an essential component of Mahayana practice.

How should we cultivate compassion? From among the many different methods the Buddha taught, all of which are important for us to train in, the one that is particularly connected with the view of the Middle Way is this: Understanding that reality is appearance-emptiness, one cultivates compassion for those sentient beings who suffer because they mistakenly believe that appearances, particularly appearances of suffering, are truly existent. As Milarepa once sang, "I see this life to be like an illusion and a dream, and I cultivate compassion for sentient beings who do not realize this."

This is the answer to the question raised above: From the perspective of the Middle Way's teachings on emptiness, what is the meaning or purpose of life? The purpose is to follow Milarepa's example by, first, continually training in the view that sees that all our experiences in this life are dependently arisen mere appearances whose true nature is beyond conceptual fabrications, is open, spacious, and relaxed; and second, cultivating compassion for all sentient beings who suffer as a result of not realizing that this is the genuine nature of reality. We should do whatever we can to help others on a conventional level, for example, by practicing generosity toward those in need and taking care of those who are sick; and at the same time we should continually make aspiration prayers that in the future we will be able to help all sentient beings realize the true nature of reality, because when they do so it will most definitely liberate them from samsara's ocean of suffering once and for all. In order to help them gain this realization that is the one certain antidote for suffering and the one certain bestower of happiness, we need to gain it ourselves, which we do by studying, reflecting, and meditating upon the teachings on the true nature of reality con-

tained in such extraordinary texts as *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. Dedicating ourselves in this way to training on the Mahayana path of wisdom and compassion together, whose fruition is the attainment of buddhahood, and which is of infinite benefit to limitless sentient beings, is the greatest purpose we could ever have.

## ABOUT THIS BOOK

*The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* is composed of twenty-seven chapters. Each is itself a commentary on a different statement made by the Buddha in the sutras comprising the second turning of the wheel of Dharma. Nagarjuna proves the validity of the Buddha's teachings with logical reasoning. The chapters also answer the successive arguments put to Nagarjuna by those who believed that things truly exist. In each chapter, Nagarjuna would successfully refute one such argument; his opponents would then come up with another argument that they thought proved that things were real, and Nagarjuna would refute that, and so on—that is why there are twenty-seven chapters! They are all very beneficial to us because they help us to overcome our own doubts, the same doubts that Nagarjuna's opponents had.

Some of the chapters are long and the logical reasonings they present are quite detailed. This book examines the most important verses from each chapter. It is necessary to proceed in this way because very few people today have the time to study the entire text. People in modern times need concise Dharma teachings that are profound, easily understandable, and readily applicable to daily life. By reading, contemplating, and meditating on the teachings in this book, you will get to the heart of Nagarjuna's text in a direct way that will greatly enhance your precise knowledge of the genuine nature of reality.

There are similarities from one chapter to the next in the methods of logical inference and reasoning used to help you gain certainty in emptiness. This similarity of method makes it easier for you to gain facility with these logical reasonings, and will also help



## **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,  
And 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-or-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.

# THE CENTER OF THE SUNLIT SKY

## *Madhyamaka in the Kagyü Tradition*

---

Karl Brunnhölzl

*Including a Translation of Pawo Rinpoche's Commentary  
on the Knowledge Section of Śāntideva's The Entrance  
to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra)*

SNOW LION PUBLICATIONS  
ITHACA, NEW YORK ♦ BOULDER, COLORADO

ses. Being empty is just their nature, whether we analyze them or not. Through the analytical approach, we proceed toward realizing for ourselves how things really are. If we do not apply essential Buddhist notions to the deeply ingrained habitual tendencies of our belief systems and only work with them on a superficial intellectual level, the teachings will be merely words without a deeper impact on our experiential world. As it is said, mind and dharma will not blend into one. This is especially important with such key Buddhist topics as emptiness, personal identitylessness, and phenomenal identitylessness, since it is precisely the instinctive assumption of a personal self and really existent phenomena that governs our experience and actions. To address these topics and make them personally relevant to our life cannot be accomplished without some degree of personal investigation, which entails honestly looking into our own view of the world and being willing to revise it.

Atiśa's *Centrist Pith Instructions, Called The Open Jewel Casket* highlights the essential points of the entire process:

One may wonder, "From where did all of this come in the first place, and to where does it depart now?" Once examined in this way, [one sees that] it neither comes from anywhere nor departs to anywhere. All inner and outer phenomena are just like that. Therefore, everything is the illusory magical display of one's own mind. It is appearing yet delusive, and delusive while appearing. Thus, all of it is contained in the body, and the [body] is again contained in the mind. As for the mind, it has no color and no shape. It is natural luminosity that is primordially unborn. The very knowledge that discriminates this is also luminosity. In this interval, consciousness is nothing whatsoever, does not abide as anything, is not established as anything, and has not arisen as any aspect, and all discursiveness without exception is completely at peace. This meditative concentration of space-vajra that is without appearance and in which the entire dust of characteristics has vanished is like the very center of the sky that is lit up by the autumn sun. In it, dwell as long as possible.<sup>668</sup>

### *The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness*

The systematic, gradual succession of meditations that deal with personal and phenomenal identitylessness is often called the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness.<sup>669</sup> These stages are briefly outlined in the sūtras and further explained in Centrist texts such as Nāgārjuna's *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment* and his *Stages of Meditation*,<sup>670</sup> Bhāvaviveka's *Jewel Lamp of Centristism*, Jñānagarbha's *Path of Yoga Meditation*, Kamalaśīla's *Stages of Meditation*

and *Entrance into Yoga Meditation*, Atīśa's two *Centrist Pith Instructions*, Jñānakīrti's *Instructions on the Stages of Meditation of the Vehicle of Perfections* and *Entrance into True Reality*,<sup>671</sup> and Vimalamitra's *Topics of Gradualist Meditation*.<sup>672</sup> From among these, Kamalaśīla's three-volume *Stages of Meditation* gives by far the most detailed instructions. This text also calls the meditative progression "the stages of prajñā meditation."

To illustrate this gradual progression, Nāgārjuna begins his *Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment*<sup>673</sup> by saying that bodhisattvas, after having generated the aspiring mind of enlightenment, should generate the ultimate mind of enlightenment through the power of meditation. Thus, he commits to explaining the meditation on this mind of enlightenment that destroys cyclic existence. The actual progression of this meditation starts with analyzing for the lack of a real personal identity. The reason to start with negating personal identity is that it represents the object of a coarser level of clinging to real existence than the clinging to a real identity of all phenomena. Accordingly, Nāgārjuna first shows that there is no personal self within the five aggregates, the twelve sources, and the eighteen constituents.

Next, Nāgārjuna turns to phenomenal identitylessness. He negates the possibility of infinitesimal material particles—as asserted by various non-Buddhist schools as well as the Buddhist Followers of the Great Exposition and the Sūtra Followers—by showing that such particles can be broken up infinitely without any remaining indivisible core ever being found. As a consequence, Nāgārjuna states that whatever appears and is experienced is nothing but an appearance in one's own mind and that there are thus no outer material objects that are established as something other than or independent of mind. His text says:

As the entities of apprehender and apprehended,  
The appearances of consciousness  
Do not exist as outer objects  
That are different from consciousness.

Therefore, in the sense of having the nature of entities,  
In any case, outer objects do not exist.  
It is these distinct appearances of consciousness  
That appear as the aspect of form.

Just as people with dull minds  
See illusions, mirages,  
And the cities of scent-eaters,  
So do form and such appear.<sup>674</sup>

Nāgārjuna further emphasizes that the reason the Buddha taught the aggregates, sources, and constituents was solely to negate a personal self and not to establish what is contained within these aggregates and so on as really existing entities. The text continues:

The teachings on the aggregates, constituents, and so on  
Are for the purpose of stopping the clinging to a self.  
By settling in mere mind,  
The greatly blessed ones let go of these too.<sup>675</sup>

In the above four verses, Nāgārjuna clearly presents the intermediate step of realizing that all appearances occur solely within one's own mind as the expressions of this mind. However, just like all other Centrists, he does not stop at that point but—as the following verses and all his other texts show—negates the real existence of the mind as well. Candrakīrti's *Entrance into Centrism* also mentions this step as a help for those who do not immediately see that, just as all other appearances, the mind as their experiencer is empty too:

The Buddhas said, "If there are no knowable objects,  
One easily finds that a knower is excluded."  
If knowable objects do not exist, the negation of a knower is established.  
Therefore, they first negated knowable objects.<sup>676</sup>

Thus, in terms of the view, Centrists make sure to refute all philosophical systems that assert any kind of truly established mind. At the same time, in the context of the progression of an individual's personal meditation and realization of emptiness on the path, the intermediate step of seeing that, just as in a dream, all appearances are nothing but mental images is considered crucial, for it eliminates the clinging to a solid and really existing material world that "leads a life of its own" apart from our perceiving mind. According to Centrists, the main reason the Buddha taught the three realms to be "mere mind" was in order to refute any kind of creator or agent that creates the world. Rather, everything in cyclic existence appears as the result of the karmic actions that originate and are experienced within the minds of individual sentient beings. Another reason for the expedient teachings on mere mind is to temporarily calm people's fear of the complete emptiness of all phenomena without any reference point to hold on to. As Nāgārjuna says:

The teaching of the Sage that  
"All of these are mere mind"

Is for the sake of removing the fear of naïve beings  
And not [meant] in terms of true reality.<sup>677</sup>

The third step in Nāgārjuna's analysis is that mind itself is also unarisen, without nature, and empty. He describes what this emptiness means and why the example of space is used to illustrate it.

It is without characteristics and unarisen,  
Not existent, and free from the ways of speech.  
Space, the mind of enlightenment,  
And enlightenment have the characteristic of not being two.<sup>678</sup>

In his *Exposition of The Commentary on the Mind of Enlightenment*, the Fourth Shamarpa Chökyi Tragpa<sup>679</sup> (1453–1524) explains this emptiness of mind. He starts by quoting the Indian master Smṛti's commentary on Nāgārjuna's text:

Our own mind is primordially unarisen.  
It has the nature of emptiness.

and continues:

This meaning of Madhyamaka in our own [Buddhist] system—as it is expressed in the lines [of Nāgārjuna's verse 46]—is extensively taught. [Madhyamaka or emptiness] means being without characteristics that define true reality. It [means] to be unarisen, since it is neither existent nor nonexistent. It is neither something existent that has already arisen nor something nonexistent that is not suitable to arise. It is free from being demonstrable through words and expressions by the [various] ways of speech. This [emptiness] has the characteristic that space as its suitable example, nonconceptual wisdom (the mind of enlightenment), and enlightenment that clearly realizes all phenomena in an unmistaken way are not two [that is, not different]. The meaning of this is as follows: Conventionally, space exists, but ultimately it is unobservable. Likewise, enlightenment exists on the seeming level, but ultimately it does not exist. Also the nonconceptual mind of enlightenment can be expressed in conventional terms, but it is without nature when analyzed. Therefore, the characteristics of these [three] are not different.<sup>680</sup>

Fourth, Nāgārjuna presents the defining characteristics of the proper meditation on emptiness and identifies three ways of misunderstanding emptiness.

The emptiness that is called “nonarising,”  
“Emptiness,” and “identitylessness”  
Is what inferior beings meditate on.  
It is not the meditation on the [actual emptiness].

What has the characteristic of the stream  
Of positive and negative thoughts being cut off  
The Buddhas taught to be emptiness.  
The other [emptinesses] they did not declare to be emptiness.

To abide without observing the mind  
Is the characteristic of space.  
Their meditation on emptiness  
Is declared to be space meditation.<sup>681</sup>

Chökyi Tragba comments:

One may wonder, “Is there a difference between being skilled and being unskilled in the way of meditating on emptiness?” [These verses] teach that there is a difference. [The three emptinesses as misunderstood by inferior beings] are the [kind of] emptiness that [merely] represents the lack of reality. They are called [1] “nonarising” of all phenomena, these being like sky-flowers,

[2] “Emptiness” that is a nonimplicative negation,  
And [3] “identitylessness” even on the conventional level.<sup>682</sup>

Inferior beings are those of weak insight, which is to say those without much study or beginners who have not trained in knowledge. The emptiness in the sense of extinction on which they meditate in these [three] ways is not the meditation on this [actual] emptiness of true reality. . . .

Positivity means to abandon killing and such. Negativity means to engage in the karma of putting [others] down and so on. Or, positivity [can refer to] sharp knowledge that analyzes conceptuality, while negativity is its opposite, ignorance. [However, all] such thoughts are [just various forms of] clinging to characteristics in terms of the factors to be relinquished and their remedies. Only [the meditation on emptiness] that is characterized by the stream of [these thoughts] being cut off is what the Buddhas taught to be the supreme nonconceptual meditation on emptiness. They did not declare that [to meditate on] the

other [emptinesses listed above] is the meditation on emptiness and identitylessness.

Therefore, to abide within the state that is without observing any conceptual characteristics with regard to nonconceptual wisdom (the ultimate mind of enlightenment) refers to the characteristic of space that was explained above. Hence, the proper meditation of yogic practitioners on emptiness is declared to be the meditation that is nonconceptual like space. . . . This meditation that is praised by noble Nāgārjuna in such a way is proclaimed by some earlier and later Tibetans to be the meditation of the Chinese Hvashang. However, in this treatise, [Nāgārjuna] takes it to be the style of the great bodhisattvas.<sup>683</sup>

To summarize this quote, meditation on emptiness is mistaken when emptiness is misunderstood as (1) absolute nonexistence (such as the nonexistence of a sky-flower), (2) a mere nonimplicative negation, or (3) total identitylessness or utter nonexistence of things even on the conventional level.

Fifth, Nāgārjuna states that both cyclic existence (ignorance) and liberation (realization of true reality) occur within and depend on our mind. Thus, the meditation and realization of emptiness is not spacelike in the sense of a blank nothingness, but it is an open, nonreferential state of mind that is at the same time profoundly peaceful and blissful.

The seeming comes from afflictions and karma.  
Karma originates from the mind.  
The mind is constituted by latent tendencies.  
Freedom from latent tendencies is bliss.

This blissful mind is peacefulness.  
A peaceful mind will not be ignorant.  
Not to be ignorant is the realization of true reality.  
The realization of true reality is the attainment of liberation.<sup>684</sup>

Kamalaśīla's *Stages of Meditation* presents the exact same progression of meditation on emptiness but in a much more detailed way. The meditation likewise starts with personal identitylessness and then proceeds to phenomenal identitylessness. As a sūtra source for these stages of meditation, Kamalaśīla quotes three crucial verses from *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lanka* for a brief overview and then explains them in detail:

By relying on mere mind,  
One does not imagine outer objects.



By resting in the observed object of suchness,  
One should go beyond mere mind too.

Going beyond mere mind,  
One must even go beyond the nonappearance [of apprehender  
and apprehended].  
The yogic practitioner who rests in nonappearance  
Sees the great vehicle.

This spontaneously present, peaceful resting  
Is completely purified through aspiration prayers.  
Genuine identityless wisdom  
Sees by way of nonappearance.<sup>685</sup>

The meaning of this is as follows: First, yogic practitioners should analyze phenomena with form that are imputed by others as outer objects, such as visible forms. “Is it that these are something other than consciousness, or is it consciousness itself that appears in this way? Is this just like in a dream?” Thus, they investigate infinitesimal particles external to consciousness. When these infinitesimal particles are examined as to their parts, yogic practitioners do not see such [outer] objects. Since they do not see them, they reflect, “All of these are mere mind, while outer objects do not exist.” Thus, it has been said above:

By relying on mere mind,  
One does not imagine outer objects.

This refers to relinquishing conceptions about phenomena that have form. For when one analyzes what [first seems to] possess the characteristic of being suitable to be observed, it is not observable. After one has investigated phenomena that have form, those that have no form should be investigated. Here, “mere mind” means that when there is nothing apprehended, an apprehender is not reasonable [either], because an apprehender depends on something apprehended. Therefore, the conclusion is that mind is devoid of something apprehended and an apprehender and is just without this pair [or nondual in this sense]. This is the characteristic of nonduality [on this level]. By resting in the observed object of suchness, you should go beyond mere mind too. Go far beyond [any] aspect of an apprehender and thus rest in the nonappearance of this pair [of apprehender and apprehended], that is, in consciousness without these two. Thus, having gone beyond

mere mind, go beyond even this consciousness without the appearance of this pair. Since it is not justified that entities arise from themselves or something other, apprehender and apprehended are nothing but delusive. Since such a [consciousness without apprehender and apprehended] does not exist apart from these two, it is also not real. Having examined [in this way], also abandon reification with respect to such a consciousness without this pair. This means that you should solely rest in the wisdom that is without [even] the appearance of nondual wisdom. In other words, rest in the realization that all phenomena are without nature. Through [your] resting in this [realization], supreme true actuality and thereby nonconceptual meditative concentration are entered.

At the point when yogic practitioners rest within the wisdom that is without the appearance of nondual wisdom, they dwell on the path of seeing. Therefore, they see the great vehicle. Seeing genuine true reality is called the great vehicle. As for the seeing of genuine true reality, it is the very fact that there is nothing to be seen, when the light of perfect wisdom dawns through the examination of all phenomena with the eye of supreme knowledge. This is also expressed in the sūtras:

One may wonder, “What is seeing the ultimate?” It means that all phenomena are not seen.

Here, [the Buddha] talked about “not seeing” by having in mind that there is no such seeing [of any phenomenon]. However, this “not seeing” is not like not seeing when the conditions [for seeing] are incomplete (such as in a blind person and when closing one’s eyes) or when one does not mentally engage [in seeing]. . . . It is through this sequence of meditation that one should meditate on the true reality [of all phenomena].<sup>686</sup>

These successive stages of Centrist meditation on emptiness represent the basic structure of Kamalaśīla’s entire text. The major portions of his work consist of detailed elaborations on the various aspects of the above progression. Atīśa’s *Centrist Pith Instructions* agrees on the same outline:

Entities are of two kinds: those that possess form and those that are without form. Those that possess form are collections 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

without any shape. Since they are just like space, they are not established. Or, they are free from unity and multiplicity. Thus, they are without color and utterly without appearance.

What is without form is the mind. As for that [mind], the past mind has [already] ceased and perished. The future mind has not [yet] arisen or originated. As for the present mind, it is also difficult to examine: It has no color and is without any shape. Since it is just like space, it is not established. Or, when analyzed and scrutinized with the weapon of reasoning, it is free from unity and multiplicity. In other words, it is unarisen. Or, [it may be said that] it is natural luminosity and so on. Therefore, one realizes that it is not established.

At the point when these two [what possesses form and what is without form] definitely do not exist and are not established as [having] any nature whatsoever, the very knowledge that discriminates them is not established either. . . . once all specifically characterized and generally characterized phenomena are established as nonexistent [through knowledge], this knowledge itself is without appearance, luminous, and not established as [having] any nature whatsoever. . . . For as long as neither characteristics nor the enemies and robbers of thoughts arise, consciousness should rest in such a [state]. When wishing to rise [from the meditation], slowly open the cross-legged position and stand up. Then, in an illusionlike frame of mind, perform as much positivity with body, speech, and mind as possible.<sup>687</sup>

These stages of meditation on emptiness by Nāgārjuna, Kamalaśīla, and Atīśa are presented here in detail to clearly put forth the standard outline of the Centrist approach to such meditation. In addition, the way in which these masters unfold this progression shows a clear continuity in what is known as the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness as they are explained in the Kagyü lineage.

The Kagyü version of such meditation on emptiness, as presented by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, names the above stages after certain Buddhist philosophical systems as they are presented in Tibetan Buddhism. His book *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness* lists the following five stages:

- 1) the hearers<sup>688</sup>
- 2) Cittamātra
- 3) Svātantrika
- 4) Prāsaṅgika
- 5) Shentong-Madhyamaka

These correspond respectively to meditating on

- 1) personal identitylessness
- 2) mere mind without the duality of an internal subject and external objects
- 3) emptiness as a spacelike nonimplicative negation
- 4) emptiness as utter freedom from discursiveness
- 5) emptiness and luminosity inseparable

As the book says at the outset, these stages are given the names of these schools, but in terms of actually practicing such analytical meditations, the point is not to ascertain these schools' precise positions nor to look for the exact historical and philosophical correspondences between these five stages and the views of the schools whose names they bear. The presentation of these stages is meant to be understood as a pedagogical model for the progression of the personal insights of a practitioner who meditates on emptiness. This is, for example, evident from many Autonomist texts in general and the quotes from *The Stages of Meditation* above, in which the Autonomists themselves say that the notion of emptiness as a mere nonimplicative negation has to be left behind. Moreover, Autonomists also emphasize the freedom from discursiveness and its inseparability from luminosity.<sup>689</sup>

So the crucial point here—and this cannot be overemphasized—is that the focus of this progressive meditation is not at all on what various people or schools say or think but on the development of experience and realization in the minds of individuals who are actually engaging in such meditation. Thus, these stages represent a succession from a coarse understanding to increasingly subtle and refined insights that culminate in the direct seeing of emptiness or true reality. Except for a few especially gifted persons, most people cannot immediately grasp—let alone fully realize—the more subtle aspects of the teachings on emptiness. Rather, they have to take a gradual approach by starting with the most fundamental issues and then proceeding to the subtle points, just as physicians do not start their careers by performing open-heart surgery but first study the anatomical and physiological basics. All the details of the very subtle states of mind during the more advanced stages of meditation on emptiness are not likely to be understood if we have not gone through the basic levels of this process. In other words, in order to be able to tackle our subtle mental obscurations and to see the true nature of our mind, we have to start with its coarser obscurations. Otherwise, we would not even be aware that we have these subtle obscurations, just as a person whose entire body is in severe pain due to cancer is not aware of a minor twinge that is caused by a little scratch on the back.

This progressive approach can also be compared to a treasure hunt. If we are told about a treasure somewhere under a finger-shaped rock in a remote place, we first have to get a large-scale map that shows us how to get to the area where this treasure lies. Then we need a small-scale map of that area. Eventually, hav-

ing arrived in the area in question, we have to find this particular fingerlike rock with our own eyes, dig up the treasure with our own hands, and enjoy its beauty with our own senses. In the same way, we are gradually guided toward the realization of emptiness, but in the end the true nature of our mind can be seen by nothing but this mind itself.

Since a number of books provide detailed instructions on how to proceed through these progressive stages of meditation, I will offer just a few practical remarks here.<sup>690</sup> The above five stages as they are outlined in all the texts mentioned simply sketch the gradual dwindling of all our reference points in terms of personal and phenomenal kinds of real identity. This is just another way of saying that emptiness is initially understood on increasingly subtle, conceptual levels and finally directly realized.

The first step—the meditation on personal identitylessness, or looking for a self in relation to our five aggregates—can basically have two approaches. First, we may compare all the various parts of our five aggregates with what we spontaneously or experientially feel our self to be. We simply ask ourselves questions such as: Is my body my self? Is my head my self? Do I think that my mind is my self? Are my emotions my self? Are they controlled by my self? If so, how? For many of these questions, our spontaneous answer will be no. For example, during analysis, we do not feel that our self is limited to only our body or any of its parts. This simply is not our experience of “me.” However, when it comes to mind, emotions, and so on, the answer might not be that straightforward. When not sure, we should analyze further. We could ask: If our mind is our self, how exactly is that so? Is it our entire mind or just parts of it? Does this correspond to our experience of “me” in all situations?<sup>691</sup> By going deeper with our analysis, sooner or later we will inevitably hit the crucial question that actually should have been posed at the beginning of our search: What exactly is my self?

This leads us to the second, more systematic and thorough approach of investigation. In general, to compare two things, we must know what each of them is. We cannot really compare the five aggregates with our self if we do not know what this self is. So the next step is to try to define or describe our self. This process in itself is already very illuminating in terms of whether the self exists or not, since—apart from a definite “feeling” that we have a self—most people have a very hard time coming up with an exact description of what it might be. Paradoxically, one of the major reasons we are convinced that we have a self is that we don’t actually know what it is or what it looks like. Since our sense of having a self is so vague, it is open to almost any kind of projection or identification. In fact, we constantly shift the objects on which we build this idea of a self. Sometimes we relate it more to our body, sometimes more to our thoughts, sometimes to our emotions, sometimes to our career, and so on. We tend to say such things as “I am sick,” “My head hurts,” “I am a doctor,” “I quit being a doc-

tor,” “I think,” “There are too many thoughts in my mind,” “I am sad,” or “My depression has worsened.” All of these statements expose a variety of different ways of assuming and relating to an underlying self, yet we usually do not see the contradictions. Therefore, it is easy to take the existence of some underlying true “I” somewhere in our five aggregates for granted and to constantly refer to it

As was said earlier, in Buddhism in general, a personal self is described as something that is single, lasting, and independent or in control. These are very general features that for most people apply to their sense of self. Usually, we think that we have a single self and not multiple selves; that this self has a lasting quality and does not constantly change; and that we are—more or less at least—in control of or independent in what we think and do. However, when doing the actual analysis here, it is very important to try to come up with our own description or definition that applies to our personal sense of self and corresponds to our actual experience of “me.” Otherwise, we are just comparing our five aggregates with some vague general notion of self that has little to do with how we experience our own self in everyday life. Once we have found such a description—even if it is not completely satisfying—we should then see whether something can be found in our five aggregates that matches this identification of our self. To do this in a systematic way, we can use the sevenfold reasoning of a chariot that was explained earlier.

We may compare this analysis to searching a house for a lost car key. First, we have to know what this key looks like—otherwise, what are we looking for? We are not looking for just any key. We also have to know how many rooms the house has and where they are, including the basement and the attic. Then we can systematically go through each room, open all the closets and drawers, look under the beds, and so on. Once we are sure that this key is not in one room, we go on to the next. Finally, when we have not found it any place, we have to conclude that there is no such key in the house. As we probably all know, when searching for something, we sometimes remain unsure and think, “It must be here somewhere.” Then we go back and repeat our search even more thoroughly. This may happen several times before we finally have no doubt that there is no key, since we have turned the whole house upside down. In a similar way, when we look for our self, we have to know what we are looking for, and we must clearly identify the places in which we are looking for it, that is, our five aggregates. If we do not search in every corner of them, or if we still have doubts as to whether there is something that corresponds to our individual notion of a self, we have to repeat our analysis until we are absolutely sure that there is no such self in our aggregates. If we still think there must be some self, we can go back and repeat the same search with an alternative description of what this self might be. In this way, we have to go through this process again and again until we never again experience

the slightest doubt that there is no personal self of any kind. This then is the realization of personal identitylessness.

The discussion up to this point has concerned the first step of the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness, the stage of the hearers who investigate the lack of a personal self. Now, from the second step (Cittamātra) onward, we deal only with phenomenal identitylessness. This second step of “mere mind” basically says that all our experiences, whatever they and their objects may look like, do not occur anywhere other than within our mind. In other words, both the apprehending subject and the apprehended object are of a mental nature. The analysis here involves two parts:

- 1) Through analysis, the existence of outer objects as anything other than mental experiences is negated.
- 2) The meditator rests in nondual experience without subject and object.

The first step—negating outer objects—is approached from three sides:

- 1) breaking them down into infinitely smaller pieces
- 2) analyzing the object and our perception of it on a causal time line
- 3) seeing the subjectivity of every appearance and experience

The issue of whether there are any really existing outer objects can be analyzed through an approach very similar to that of modern physics: by breaking up these objects into smaller and smaller parts without finding any indivisible core. If there are no identifiable external objects, we must conclude that what we experience as outer objects is nothing but a projection in our mind, just as in a dream, in which we also seem to experience outer objects while clearly there are none.

Second, the analysis focuses on whether there is any causal relation between objects and our perception of them. We consider that, in terms of our personal perception, we can only speak about the existence of an object once we perceive it. As long as we do not perceive it, we have no way of directly knowing whether there is such an object. Thus, it is obvious that what we call an object and the subjective consciousness that is aware of this object occur simultaneously. However, if there were outer objects that exist external to our mind and serve as the causes for our perception of them, they would have to exist before the perceptions that are their results. For, causes must precede their results in time and must also cease before the arising of these results. But if these outer objects existed before our perception of them, what would we perceive, since they are already gone at the time of this perception? This is the background for one of the two major reasonings that are used in this context of denying outer objects, which is called “the invariable co-observation”<sup>692</sup> of appearances and mind.

The third approach focuses on the subjectivity of perception. If we consider what exactly we know of objects, then we see that every perception is only a subjective experience in our mind as the perceiver. If we touch or smell a rose, “its softness” or “its fragrance” is nothing but our mental experience of softness or fragrance. This accords well with what modern science says: that there is no other or “objective” softness and fragrance apart from what we subjectively experience. It is this fact that is expressed by the second major reasoning concerning the nonexistence of outer objects, which is called “invariable sameness of appearances and mind as the nature of mere lucidity.”<sup>693</sup> It says that there are no objects outside of the mind, because all our perceptions and what they perceive are alike in that they are nothing but immaterial clear appearances in our mind. In other words, objects are not different from the cognizing consciousness because of the very fact of being cognized. The reason is that consciousness—lucid awareness that neither consists of particles nor has spatial extension—can only cognize what has the same nature as consciousness, but not some material objects that have an altogether different nature (that is, lacking cognizance, consisting of particles, and possessing spatial dimensions). Consequently, objects in a dream and in the waking state are not fundamentally different. Both seem to perform their functions in their respective contexts, but in actual fact, none of them is really existent as something separate from our experience. This is not to deny that the objects of our perceptions appear to us as if they existed externally. However, apart from the fact that it subjectively appears this way, there is no evidence that there really are external objects in any way other than what appears as such objects in the mind. The relatively greater stability and regularity of daytime appearances in comparison to, for example, appearances in a dream, is said to be experienced only because of comparatively more stable and regular patterns of habitual tendencies for such appearances in our minds.

In the second part of the stage of “mere mind,” the meditator rests in the non-dual experience of the lack of subject and object. If there are no really existent objects, neither is there a really existent corresponding subject that perceives them. However, since our mind is not just nothing but is full of experiences, clarity, and movement, the meditation and realization of this step is said to be resting in bare mental experience without the duality of subject and object.

The third step in the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness is named after the Autonomists and refers to emptiness as a spacelike nonimplicative negation. Even if we realize that there are neither really existent outer objects nor subjects to perceive them, there is still the subtle clinging to the reality of our mere mental experience free from perceiver and perceived. Therefore, through the five great Centrist reasonings and such, we proceed to the stage of seeing that this lucid momentary experience too is empty of an intrinsic nature. Thus, starting with our self, we find neither any material objects nor mental subjects nor a bare



experience free from duality. This nonfinding of all phenomena, or the absence of an inherent real nature of all phenomena—a nonimplicative negation—is then the object of our meditation in the third stage.

The fourth step in the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness is called the stage of Consequentialists and presents emptiness as utter freedom from discursiveness. As was explained, any nonimplicative negation is still a conceptual object and thus a reference point. So even the nonimplicative negation of emptiness in the sense of the mere absence of a real nature, nonarising, and such (as in the third step) is still a subtle reference point. In order for our mind to be able to fully relax within the space of the expanse of dharmas free from center or edge, it has to let go of even its most subtle grasping at any reference point including the freedom from reference points. This is the space of the actual freedom from all discursiveness that we allow for during the fourth step.

The fifth step in the progressive stages of meditation on emptiness is named after Shentong-Madhyamaka and presents emptiness as inseparable from mind's luminosity. Since the very freedom from discursiveness and reference points described in the last step is not just some blank space or mere absence (which would be the extreme of extinction or nihilism), it is also described as luminosity, or the unity of wisdom and expanse. Hence, in terms of the actual nature of mind, the fifth stage is not really an additional or higher stage above the freedom from discursiveness. As Sakya Paṇḍita says in his *Distinction of the Three Vows*, the very attempt to go higher or beyond the freedom from all reference points would just mean to fall out of nonreferentiality by inevitably creating a reference point again.<sup>694</sup> Thus, the fourth and fifth stages indicate the two aspects of the nature of our mind, which is the undifferentiable unity of the freedom from discursiveness and luminosity. *Moonbeams of Mahāmudrā* also highlights the eventual experiential unity of the last two steps:

There are many ways in which mind is similar to space, but here this refers to the following: When one analyzes through discriminating knowledge, finally, also the very [process of] discrimination subsides, upon which [the mind] becomes pure as [a state of] nonconceptuality, just as seeing ceases through looking at space. As Tilopa says:

For example, through looking at space, seeing will cease.  
Likewise, when mind is looking at mind,  
The collection of thoughts ceases and unsurpassable enlightenment  
is attained . . .<sup>695</sup>

First, one analyzes [the mind] through discriminating knowledge. It is explained that, through this, the very [process of] discrimination itself

subsides, upon which nonconceptual wisdom dawns. You may then wonder whether there is some difference between mind and space. Yes, there is, since space is not a cognition that personally experiences itself. When mind is realized, this in itself is explained to be personally experienced wisdom.<sup>696</sup>

In summary, we could outline the progression of our experiences and realizations while meditating on emptiness in this way as follows. We start with the meditation and realization of personal identitylessness. Then, in terms of phenomenal identitylessness, we proceed from the coarse notion of real outer objects via the more subtle notions of mere nondual mental experience and emptiness as a nonimplicative negation all the way up—or rather back—to just letting our mind be in its natural state of nonreferential freedom, unconditionally aware of its own radiant display.

### *Mental Nonengagement in Meditation*

One of the main issues in the well-known debate at Samye, where the Indian master Kamalaśīla is said to have defeated his Chinese opponent Hvasang Mahāyāna, was whether meditation on the ultimate is to be understood as just letting the mind settle in a state that is completely without any thought or focus or whether analysis and some focus are required. This is related to the question of whether progress on the path is gradual or instantaneous. Since that time, the designation “Hvasang meditation” has become Tibetan shorthand for an exclusive cultivation of a thought-free mental state as representing the realization of the ultimate. It goes along with a complete rejection of the aspect of means, such as the accumulation of merit and proper ethical conduct. It was after this debate that Kamalaśīla wrote his *Stages of Meditation* in order to clarify such issues by establishing the gradualist approach and describing in detail how to train in meditation on emptiness. Despite the different accounts of what the view of the Chinese master Hvasang really was and what exactly happened during the debate at Samye, all of its issues continued to be major points of controversy between the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>697</sup>

One of the key terms in the context of how to properly cultivate meditation on emptiness is what is called “mental nonengagement.” Pawo Rinpoche summarizes the correct understanding of mental nonengagement:

Its meaning is to rest one-pointedly on the focal object [of meditation], without being distracted by other thoughts. If this [one-pointed resting] were stopped, all meditative concentrations would stop. Therefore, in general, “mental nonengagement” has the meaning of not

660 VI.175a–c.

661 Tib. gzung ba la mi dmigs pa'i rnal 'byor.

662 Tib. 'dzin pa la mi dmigs pa'i rnal 'byor.

663 Skt. animittayoga, Tib. mtshan ma med pa'i rnal 'byor.

664 ACIP TD3916@049B–050A.

665 ACIP TD3916@050B–051A.

666 These are the four applications of mindfulness, the four correct exertions (Skt. catvāri samyakprahāṇāni, Tib. yang dag spong ba bzhi), the four limbs of miraculous powers (Skt. catvāra rddhipādāḥ, Tib. rdzu 'phrul gyi rkang pa bzhi), the five faculties (Skt. pañcendriyāṇi, Tib. dbang po lnga), the five powers (Skt. pañcabalāni, Tib. stobs lnga), the seven branches of enlightenment (Skt. saptasaṃbodhyaṅgāni, Tib. byang chub kyi yan lag bdun), and the eightfold path of the noble ones (Skt. āryaṣṭāṅgamārga, Tib. 'phags pa'i lam yan lag brgyad). As for the four correct exertions, while *prahāṇa* can mean either “relinquishment” or “exertion,” it is always rendered as the former in Tibetan (spong ba). However, here, the term clearly refers to four activities in which one exerts effort.

667 For more details on this fourfold practice of mindfulness, see the translation of Pawo Rinpoche's commentary below (3.2. Phenomenal Identitylessness).

668 P5325, fol. 107a.6–107b.2.

669 Skt. śūnyatābhāvanākrama, Tib. stong nyid sgom rim.

670 As Lindtner (1997, p. 164) reports, all the verses of this text are found in Chapter X of *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lanka*.

671 P4532 (fols. 69a.7–74b.4).

672 P5334. In terms of both layout and content, this text can be considered as an abbreviated version of Kamalaśīla's three-volume *Stages of Meditation*. As a counterpart, Vimalamitra also wrote *The Topics of Instantaneous Nonconceptual Meditation* (Skt. \*Sakṛtprāveśikanirvikalpa-bhāvanāpada, Tib. cig car 'jug pa rnam par mi rtog pa'i sgom don, P5306).

673 Even if Nāgārjuna's authorship is disputed, the text is clearly written from a Centrist point of view and outlines the typical sequence of the progressive stages of meditation as found in all the other Centrist texts on this topic listed above (see the more detailed presentation in Kamalaśīla's *Stages of Meditation* below).

674 Verses 22–24.

675 Verse 25.

676 VI.96.

677 Verse 27. He elaborates on this in the next verses by stating that the three natures—the imaginary nature, the other-dependent nature, and the perfect nature—are nothing but enumerations of emptiness in relation to labeling our mind as being without nature. Furthermore, he refutes a ground consciousness and self-awareness as ultimately existing real entities. For more details on the Centrist interpretation and use of the teachings on “mere mind,” see Chapter 4.

678 Verse 46.

679 Tib. chos kyi grags pa.

680 Chos kyi grags pa 2001, p. 94.

681 Verses 49–51.

682 These two lines are again a quote from Smṛti's commentary.

683 Chos kyi grags pa 2001, pp. 95–97.

684 Verses 69–70.

685 X. 256–258 (ACIP KLo107@270A). The first two verses are also found in Nāgārjuna's *Stages of Meditation* (verses 54–55).

686 ACIP TD3915@033A–033B, 037B. The above three verses are also quoted in Śāntarakṣita's *Commentary on The Ornament of Centrism* (ACIP TD3885@79B) and explained in Kamalaśīla's subcommentary (fols. 137a–138a). Just as an aside, the above quote and many others from *The Sūtra of the Arrival in Lañka* show clearly that it is highly inappropriate to categorically characterize this whole sūtra as just teaching “Mind Only” in the sense of a really existing mind that is ultimate reality.

687 P5324, fols. 105b.4–106a.7.

688 Here this term refers to the philosophical systems of the Followers of the Great Exposition and the Sūtra Followers.

689 For more details on this, the problem of a “Mind Only school,” and whether there is a Shentong school, see Chapters 3 and 4.

690 See mainly the works by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche in the Bibliography.

691 See also the section above entitled “The Two Types of Identitylessness” for more ideas on similar questions (such as what happens to our self when we lose some parts of our body or how we use language when referring to “I” and “mine”).

692 Skt. sahopalambhaniyama, Tib. lhan cig dmigs par nges pa.

693 Tib. snang ba dang sems gsal tsam gyi ngo bor gcig par nges pa (in Western scholarship, following Iwata (JIBS 1984), often referred to as “the *saṃvedana* inference”). These two reasonings are found, for example, in Dignāga's *Compendium of Valid Cognition* (I.9–10) and its autocommentary as well as in Dharmakīrti's *Ascertainment of Valid Cognition* (*Pramānaviniścaya* I.55bff). The first one also appears in his *Commentary on Valid Cognition* (v. 388–391) and the latter in Śāntarakṣita's *Synopsis of True Reality* (lines 2001, 2003, and 2029–2033).

694 Tib. sdom gsum rab dbye (*Sa skya pa'i bka' 'bum*, vol. 5, Tokyo: 1968, p. 311.2.5).

695 Dvags po bkra shis rnam rgyal, n.d., p. 357.3–6.

696 Ibid., pp. 359.1–4.

697 There are at least two Tibetan versions of this debate, and the more verifiable one presents quite a different account of what Hvashang actually said. For details, see Karmay 1988, the *Bsam gtan mig sgron* by Nubchen Sangye Yeshe (Tib. gnubs chen sangs rgyas ye shes ) from the eighth/ninth century, and the *Sba bzhed* chronicle. Chinese sources refer to this debate but do not elaborate on any of its issues, obviously not considering them as problems to be addressed.

698 Dpa' bo gtsug lag phreng ba, n.d., p. 325.

699 Skt. Sāgaramatipariṣcchāsūtra, Tib. blo gros rgya mtshos zhus pa'i mdo.

## **Verses on Mipham's Four Skills of Madhyamaka Analysis of the Emptiness of Essence in Phenomena**

### **First, Identifying the Object to be Negated**

Like taking a rope to be a snake, the self is a perceptual imputation.  
The essential nature of the self is the clinging to what appears to an ordinary mind  
As truly existent in terms of specific characteristics

#### **1. Analyzing Causes, Chandrakirti's Vajra Slivers**

Neither from themselves, nor from another cause,  
Not from both, nor yet without a cause –  
Phenomena indeed of any kind are never born.

#### **2. Analyzing Results, by Jnanagarbha**

Contributive causes cannot be ascribed to things existing or without existence.  
If things do not exist, what contribution can such causes make?  
And if things “are,” what is the cause accomplishing?

#### **3. Analyzing Essence – Beyond One or Many, by Shantarakshita**

See how an instant has an end and likewise a beginning and a middle.  
Because an instant is in turn three instants,  
Momentariness is not the nature of the world.

#### **4. Analyzing Interdependence, by Nagarjuna**

Like a moon in water, a rainbow, and a movie, mere appearances are interdependent arisings;  
No phenomenon exists through possessing an essence.  
But for what originates dependently, there are no phenomena;  
Therefore without emptiness, there are no phenomena.

### **Conclusion – Freedom from Conceptual Fabrication**

Not existence and not nonexistence,  
Not these two conjoined nor the opposite of this:  
Freed from four extremes, the truly wise  
Are those who keep within the middle way.

# TREASURY *of* PRECIOUS QUALITIES

## *The Rain of Joy*

by JIGME LINGPA

WITH *The Quintessence of the Three Paths*  
*A Commentary by Longchen Yeshe Dorje, Kangyur Rinpoche*

BOOK ONE

*Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group*  
*Forewords by H. H. the Dalai Lama*  
*and Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche*



SHAMBHALA  
BOSTON & LONDON

2010

By adopting the Svatantrika method for establishing the two truths, one can gain conviction that phenomena are without true existence on the absolute level, even though, through dependent arising, they manifest unobstructedly. Such certainty is the point of entry to the Great Madhyamika, which is utterly beyond ontological extremes. On the other hand, if, while failing to undermine the powerful conceptual propensity to apprehend true existence, ingrained from beginningless time, one contemptuously dismisses other views and simply snatches at the highest (i.e., Prasangika), the only result will be the fault of disparaging the lower schools and abandoning the Dharma. And the realization of the higher teachings will be rendered even more difficult. By contrast, if the pith instructions of our teachers, sharp and penetrating, strike upon the hard terrain of *our own minds*, it is said that the entire textual tradition (of both Svatantrika and Prasangika) will have the effect of teachings that directly elicit experience.<sup>283</sup>

The Svatantrikas refute the extreme views of permanent existence and nothingness by using the same great logical arguments as propounded in the Madhyamika texts. And as these are not dissimilar from those of the Prasangikas, they will be set forth in due course. . . .

## THE PRASANGIKA MADHYAMIKAS

### Establishing the ground Madhyamika

The Prasangikas consider that all phenomena, arising through interdependence and appearing in the manner of mirages or dream visions, are relative truth. They do not analyze phenomena as to their existential status but regard them as being of relative validity, seeing them as a means of getting at something else, namely, the absolute. In his auto-commentary on the *Madhyamakavatara*, Chandrakirti says, “The relative truth is an avenue of approach to the absolute truth. No analysis is made of relative phenomena to see whether they are self-generated or produced from extraneous causes. On the contrary, phenomena are simply accepted on an empirical basis and as they appear to the common man.” Moreover, Lord Buddha himself is quoted in one of the sutras as saying, “People argue with me, but I do not argue with them. What

they believe to exist in the world, I also affirm. What they disbelieve, I also disallow.”

This appeal to “empirical reality” is not just a sop to general opinion. It means that the Prasangikas accept all interdependently produced phenomena, which appear as undeniably to them as to anyone else. They accept them just as they arise, *without investigating their existential status*. The true reality of these phenomena, however—in other words, their ultimate nature inseparable from them—has from the very beginning been emptiness, *shunyata*, beyond the four extremes of existence, nonexistence, and so on. This is what is referred to as the absolute truth of phenomena, and it is of course no more than a mere label on the relative level. Indeed, the two values (of relative and absolute) are not two separate categories, with phenomena on the one side and emptiness on the other. No, the very nature of phenomena *is* emptiness. The very nature of phenomena is to be groundless and rootless. Phenomena in fact elude every position that the intellect can take in their regard.

By contrast, some people refute only what they call the “true existence” of things, regarded as somehow separate from their conventional existence (which is not itself negated). They may refer to this as the absence of conceptual construction (*spros bral*), but it resembles it only in name and is something quite different. The inseparable union of appearance and emptiness in the authentic *spros bral* disallows both extremes of existence and nonexistence. To deny the true existence of an object and at the same time affirm its conventional existence is to dissociate existence from nonexistence. And in any case, even if someone were to succeed in recognizing this “absence of true existence,” such a recognition would be useless as a means of removing attachment. However much one were to meditate on such an emptiness (i.e., an emptiness of “true existence”), it would do nothing to dissipate the perception of conventional phenomena as existing in their own right. And if such an apprehension is not dissipated, how can aversion and attachment to it be overcome?<sup>284</sup> In *The Treasure of Wish-Fulfilling Jewels*, in the section dealing with the refutation of the system of the lower Svatantrika school, according to which the appearance of a thing is different from its emptiness, the omniscient Longchen Rabjam says, “Emptiness that is other than appearance is an impossibility, whether on the relative or absolute



level. Such an emptiness is unrealizable, and since it is other than phenomena it would be powerless as an antidote to them. When anger against an attacker arises, merely knowing that it is empty is of no help. In the same way, the simple assurance that desired objects are lacking in some 'true existence' separate from them will likewise be of no avail." As the *Samadhiraja-sutra* says:

As long as man a "woman" apprehends,  
Desire for her will powerfully arise,  
But let such apprehension be destroyed  
And lust's defilements will depart as well.

The objection might be raised that without perception it would be impossible to meditate on love and so forth, because the true existence of the referent must be apprehended as a basis of such a meditation—given that one must have both a referent and the perception of it. To this we answer that that which apprehends objects as desirable or hateful is dualistic thought. It is this that brings forth the defilement, and it is this that must therefore be removed. Aside from dualistic thought, there is no such thing as the so-called true existence of phenomena—somehow standing apart from them as a possible object of refutation. In his *Songs of Realization*, Jangya Rolpa'i Dorje himself says:

Our great intellects these days,  
Leave things appearing clearly on one side  
And look for hares with horns as something to refute.  
Old grandmother\* will run away from them!

Therefore, even though, as a help for beginners, it is possible to speak of "relative phenomena" as being devoid of true existence, on the ultimate level, nothing of the kind can be found. As far as meditation on love is concerned, this can be explained as follows. Suppose a man is having a nightmare. He is suffering because he is dreaming that he is being chased by a frightful enemy or a wild beast, and he looks every-

\* A humorous reference to the Prajnaparamita, sometimes referred to as the Great Mother.

where for somewhere to hide. A clairvoyant person (able to see what the man is dreaming about) knows perfectly well that the dreamer has no such enemy and that he is not being chased. Such a person will conclude that in order to comfort the sleeper and remove his fear it would be best to wake him.<sup>285</sup> In the same way, it is said that one must understand that whereas on the absolute level no phenomena are to be found, on the conventional level such phenomena are indeed present. These two modes, relative and absolute, are not mutually exclusive. Thus, phenomena, the objects of the six consciousnesses, *seem* to arise and subside, come and go, and so on. They do so in the manner of reflected images or mirages. In themselves, however, they do not in fact pass through these four processes—for the simple reason that, in themselves, they lack all existence. From this point of view, in accordance with which, phenomena, dependently produced, are primordially “unborn,” it is said that appearance and emptiness are essentially one and the same thing. It is as when the four modes of emptiness are proclaimed in the text of the *Hridaya-sutra*: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Emptiness is none other than form; form is none other than emptiness.”

The Chittamatrins claim that in absolute terms, the nature of the “dependent reality,” namely, the self-knowing mind, is not empty. The Svatantrika Madhyamikas say that phenomena dependent on causes and conditions have a conventional existence on the relative level. By contrast, the Prasangikas refrain from making assertions about the existence of phenomena even on the relative level, let alone on the absolute level. As Nagarjuna has said, “If I assert anything, then I am at fault. But since I assert nothing, I alone am faultless!” And Aryadeva said, “One who refrains from asserting inherent existence or nonexistence, or the two combined, is beyond dispute.” And finally, Chandrakirti said in the *Madhyamakavatara*:

Unlike you, who think dependent nature is a true existent,  
 Even for the all-concealing relative we make no claims.  
 And yet, to gain the fruit, we speak in harmony with worldly folk,  
 And grant that things exist (though they do not).  
 (VI, 81)

## Identifying the object of refutation: the two selves

### *The difference between the “self” and “apprehension of (or clinging to) self”*

Although the object of refutation, namely, a concretely existent self, has no reality, unless the conceived object (*zhen yul*) of ego-clinging (or ego-apprehension) is dissipated, this clinging itself cannot be neutralized. We can see this in the example of the rope and the snake.<sup>286</sup> When a distinction is made between persons and phenomena, a person is the subjective individual, such as “Devadatta,” imputed upon his own collection of aggregates, which are the basis of such a labeling.<sup>287</sup> By contrast, phenomena are Devadatta’s aggregates, his eyes, for example, which act as the ground on which the person “Devadatta” is imputed. The term “phenomena” refers to all other things, in addition to the personal aggregates.

The “personal self,” or ego, is the name given to what is assumed to be our inherently existing person; the “phenomenal self” is what is assumed to be the inherently existing phenomenon. These are the conceived objects apprehended in the two kinds of self-clinging. In the example of the rope mistakenly apprehended as a snake, they correspond to the snake. They are as nonexistent as a rabbit’s horns, even on the relative level.<sup>288</sup>

In addition to this, there is self-apprehension, or self-clinging. To cling to the personal self means to believe that one’s self is truly existent. To cling to the phenomenal self means to believe that phenomena are truly existent. The person and phenomena<sup>289</sup> are thus the referents of these two self-clingings. In the example given, they are like the colored rope that acts as the basis for the mistaken perception of the snake.

The “personal no-self” is the absence of inherent existence in the person. The “phenomenal no-self” is the absence of inherent existence in phenomena. This is understood by the “wisdom of realizing no-self.” Persons and phenomena are, of course, said to exist on the conventional level. The roots of the two veils, which are to be dispelled, are thus the two kinds of self-clinging,<sup>290</sup> the conceived objects of which are the two kinds of self. These are thus the objects of refutation. The conceived

object assumed by deluded thought, which takes for real what is utterly without existence, may be dissipated by the analysis that demonstrates its nonexistence. Thus a firm understanding of the two kinds of no-self may be cultivated. One should again and again strive to maintain the continuity of this illuminating conviction that counteracts the two kinds of self-clinging, and one should exert oneself in the techniques that remedy the mental darkness created by mistaken discursive thoughts. If this conviction weakens, it should be reinforced by repeated analysis. On the other hand, it is said that, when it is stable, one should lay aside analytical investigation and simply rest in that state of insight. In the early stages, beginners should meditate by concentrating on the nonexistence of self. But when, thanks to the meditation just mentioned, conviction is gained, there is no need to focus on the “nonexistence of the self” as such. And at length, when one is free from all false assertions, it will be possible to meditate on the great emptiness that is conceptually ungraspable. . . .

## **Analysis through the application of reason**

This method consists of four or five great arguments that establish the fact that phenomena are without inherent existence. The specific explanation of these arguments is preceded by a general exposition of how such assessments are made.

To begin with, the *prasangika* approach is unlike that of the *Svatantrikas*. The *Svatantrikas* disprove true existence on the relative level but then assert an illusory existence. Likewise they disprove conceptual construction on the absolute level, but then go on to assert (positively) that this absolute is beyond conceptual construction. The *prasangika* method is simply to demolish the defective propositions of their opponents by directly refuting every assertion to which the mind might cling. But they do not accompany this with any kind of independent pronouncement. In order to eliminate clinging to real existence,<sup>291</sup> it is essential to eradicate the conceived object of such clinging. Therefore, as we have said before, it is necessary to analyze and achieve certainty about the true nature of the two selves which are the object of refuta-

tion. Otherwise it is like shooting arrows without seeing the target, and it is impossible to eliminate the assumption of the real existence of a self.

When one uses the madhyamika arguments to search for the meaning of suchness, the idea that “the opponent is wrong” is enough to cause one to stray off the point. Therefore, from the outset, do not refute only the assertion of an opponent, but work to eradicate completely all the innate discursive thoughts in *your own mind*, which have been left unexamined from beginningless time and which deviate from the Truth or Suchness. Likewise, eradicate all clinging to positions or theories, which are imputations arising from philosophical inquiry and which are found in all tenet systems whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist. Subsequently, when you meditate, simply rest without clinging to anything, in the sense of having an object of meditation. This, however, is not to say that you should remain in a state of blankness, a “foolish meditation,” so to speak. On the contrary, through the certain knowledge deriving from the realization of the absence of inherent existence, your vipashyana will be rendered extraordinary and you will be able to rest in the union of shamatha and vipashyana. And you will have no doubts. All this is the sign that your analysis has hit the mark.

Generally speaking, at the present time, all the great beings who uphold the Madhyamika declare that the way the phenomena of samsara or nirvana appear is as the mere imputation of thought; they are without real existence. Emptiness consists in dependent arising; emptiness and dependent arising are indissociably united. Everyone is in agreement about this. In our tradition, however, we do not consider that the expression “imputed existence” implies the presence of a “something” that lacks true existence and to which true existence could be ascribed. We say that the object referred to is a kind of empty form, an originless display of the mind’s creative power.\* Consequently, when emptiness is said to be inseparable from dependent arising, this is not meant to imply that there is a validly established appearance from which emptiness is inseparable. On the contrary, we understand that phenomena are

\* *rtsal snang*.

themselves ungrounded and rootless. There is no way in which they could exist. And yet they arise freely, produced in interdependence.

Therefore, once the object of refutation, which is to be identified as the two really existing selves, has been eliminated, its place is not still occupied by some (residual) basis of refutation—a so-called person or phenomenon. There is simply nothing left at all. Persons and phenomena are empty of *themselves*. For one cannot say that they are empty of true existence while holding that phenomena themselves (the basis of emptiness) are not empty of themselves on the relative level.<sup>292</sup> It is rather that form, for example, is empty of form and so forth. Therefore, because all phenomena are devoid of real existence, there is no “concrete” object of refutation. All that is refuted is the false imputation that ascribes existence to what does not exist. Nagarjuna says in his *Vigrahavyavartani*:

Since no object of negation can be found,  
I myself have nothing to negate.  
And so, by saying “I refute,”  
You’re the ones who falsely testify.

It might be objected that there is a contradiction in saying, as we have just done, that the two selves are devoid of true existence, while at the same time affirming that persons and phenomena exist on the relative level. All we mean is that as long as there is the tendency to delusion, relative appearances arise constantly and unhindered. But this does not mean that they exist inherently.

### *The four arguments*

Four separate arguments are employed. The first is the so-called Diamond Splinters argument and addresses the question of causes. This is followed by an argument dealing with effects, which shows that no effects, whether existent or nonexistent, can be said to be produced. Then comes the refutation of the idea of production from any of the four alternatives (as will be explained), which is an examination of both

cause and effect together. Finally, there is the great argument that investigates the nature of phenomena. This is subdivided into two separate arguments: (1) the argument of dependent arising and (2) the argument of “neither one nor many.”

#### AN INVESTIGATION OF CAUSES: THE DIAMOND SPLINTERS ARGUMENT

Phenomenal appearances are unborn. This is so because it is impossible for appearances to arise either (a) produced from themselves; (b) produced from something else; (c) produced from both self and other; or (d) produced causelessly through sheer randomness.<sup>293</sup>

*Self-production.* The thesis that phenomena are self-produced is untenable. This is so because in the process of production from self, the product must arise from what is either present (at the time of production) or not present. In the first case, arising cannot be explained because (a) there is no difference between the producer and the produced; (b) since the product is already present, there is no time when it is not actually produced; and (c) there is no end to the process of production. If the product arises subsequently, then given that the cause is itself not present, it cannot properly be so labeled, and this amounts to saying that the product has arisen causelessly.<sup>294</sup>

*Production from other.* So-called production from other is also impossible. It is unacceptable to say that phenomena are produced from something other than themselves because (a) if the product has not yet been produced, no extraneous object can be qualified as being its producer and (b) if that were the case, anything could arise from anything.<sup>295</sup>

*Production from self and production from other combined.* This too is impossible since production from self and production from other are mutually exclusive and because both kinds of production have already been refuted.

*Causeless origination.* It is impossible to say that things are produced causelessly, since (a) this contradicts the evident experience of causality; (b) it would necessarily follow that lotuses could grow from thin air; and (c) all action would be rendered pointless.<sup>296</sup>

The *Mulamadhyamaka-karika* says:

Neither from themselves, nor from another cause,  
Not from both, nor yet without a cause—  
Phenomena indeed of any kind  
Are never born.

(I, 1)

AN INVESTIGATION OF RESULTS: NO EFFECTS, WHETHER  
EXISTENT OR NONEXISTENT, CAN BE SAID TO BE PRODUCED  
Objects that appear to be different kinds of product are in fact unpro-  
duced. The reason for this is that a product, whether regarded as truly  
existent or truly nonexistent, is empty of origination. No origin can be  
ascribed to a truly existent product for the simple reason that it is already  
possessed of existence. Likewise, no origin can be ascribed to a truly nonex-  
istent effect since, in this case, there is nothing that might receive the as-  
cription of origin (like the rabbit's horns). The *Mulamadhyamaka-karika* says:

Contributive causes cannot be ascribed  
To things existing or without existence.  
If things do not exist, what contribution can such causes make?  
And if things "are," what is the cause accomplishing?

(I, 6)

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CAUSAL PROCESS ITSELF: A  
REFUTATION OF ORIGINATION RELATED TO FOUR POSSIBLE  
ALTERNATIVES

The apparent production of effects from causes cannot be accounted  
for in rational terms. (1) A single cause cannot be shown to give rise to  
a single result; (2) a plurality of causes cannot be shown to give rise to  
a plurality of results; (3) a single cause cannot be shown to give rise to a  
plurality of results; and (4) a plurality of causes cannot be shown to give  
rise to a single result. Since neither the cause nor the result is an indivisi-  
ble discrete entity, they are devoid of both singularity and plurality. To  
speak of production is therefore as far-fetched as saying that space is  
solid. The *Introduction to the Two Truths* says:

By many things a single thing is not produced,  
And many things do not bring forth plurality;



A single thing does not give rise to many things,  
And from a single thing, a single thing is not produced.

#### AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE NATURE OF PHENOMENA

1. The Great Interdependence argument, which constitutes an affirming negative: mere appearances are not discrete, existent entities, because—being interdependently produced—they are beyond the eight extremes of arising, cessation, and so forth, and are thus empty of inherent reality, like the reflection of the moon in water. As it is said in the sutra:

Whatever has arisen from conditions is indeed unborn.  
No true origin can be ascribed to it.

And it is said in the *Mulamadhyamaka-karika*:

But for what originates dependently,  
There are no phenomena;  
Therefore without voidness,  
There are no phenomena.\*

2. The argument of “Neither One nor Many,” which constitutes a nonaffirming negative: all external and internal phenomena are devoid of real existence, because that which is neither a single truly existent thing nor a plurality of existent things must of necessity be empty of true existence. Aryadeva has said:

See how an instant has an end,  
And likewise a beginning and a middle.  
Because an instant is in turn three instants,  
Momentariness is not the nature of the world.

The above techniques of rational analysis are used when debating philosophical tenets and also when, while practicing on the path, one tries to free oneself (from defilement) through the application of intelligence. Because the proponents of Madhyamika make no assertions, they

\* In other words, emptiness is not different from phenomena.

have no need to prove a position nor to extricate themselves from difficulties. They merely point out the flaws in the propositions of substantialist thinkers and thereby uproot the assumption of true existence. While on the path, when one is engaged in the process of freeing oneself through the application of wisdom, it is important to investigate any assertion or position taken with regard to objects of perception whether in the outer world or in the inner forum. It is necessary to investigate thoughts, the thought-free mind, the absorptions and meditative experiences, and so forth. Similarly, one should examine one's practice of Dharma, oneself and others in all manner of activities, and such matters as samsara and nirvana, existence and nonexistence, happiness and suffering, rejection and acceptance; one should ask oneself what is virtuous and what is not virtuous. One should subject all these matters to analysis, scrutinizing their most elementary constituents. And one should settle in a state devoid of any fixation and clinging, in a spaciousness that is free from conceptual construction. It is said that the Sevenfold Reasoning<sup>297</sup> (based on the image of a chariot) proves that there is no such thing as a personal self. In fact, these same arguments disprove the existence of both types of self (personal and phenomenal).

### **Why the Madhyamika dialectic is superior to all other tenet systems**

Because the Prasangika Madhyamikas make no assertions that presuppose the reality of phenomena, they are without fault and utterly pure. According to their own understanding, the three lower tenet systems take up a position with regard to the nature of phenomena and proceed to investigate that to which wisdom is applied: no-self, non-origination, emptiness, and the absence of ontological extremes. They go some way to dispelling false notions, but each of them assumes true existence in one way or other. In addition, the Svatantrika Madhyamikas assert existence on the relative level. The Prasangikas contend with all of these schools and demolish their extreme positions. They themselves, however, are invulnerable to attack, and thus the Prasangika approach is regarded as faultless, the culmination of all tenet systems.

Consequently, the view of Madhyamika is nothing other than the mind's certainty with regard to the ground nature, a certainty gained through the application of the four arguments. The view itself, however, cannot be regarded as the *object* of this certainty, in the sense of being "emptiness beyond all ontological extremes." This is because if you take this *emptiness* for your view, you have failed to distinguish between the four extremes and the apprehension of these same extremes. If you entertain such a view, you have in fact become embroiled in these four extremes. Therefore, it is important to refrain even from asserting, "The view is beyond all ontological extremes."

In the words of Aryadeva:

Not existence and not nonexistence,  
Not these two conjoined nor the opposite of this:  
Freed from four extremes, the truly wise  
Are those who keep within the middle way.

*[Taken from the commentary of Khenpo Yönten Gyamtso, YG II, 479–526]*

# **The Four Great Logical Arguments of the Middle Way**

*From The Gateway to Knowledge*

**By Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche**

**The four great logical arguments of the Middle Way are:**

- I. The investigation of the cause: the Diamond Splinters
- II. The investigation of the result: refuting existent or non-existent results
- III. The investigation of the essential identity: 'neither one nor many'
- IV. The investigation of all: the Great Interdependence

## **I. The Investigation of the Cause: the Diamond Splinters**

### **A. Refutation of Production from Four Extremes**

#### **1. Production from Self**

On a mere conventional level, it is indeed true that an effect is produced from a cause, but, if investigated on the ultimate level, production cannot be observed. If production capable of withstanding logical analysis did exist, it must necessarily be a production by means of one of the following four extremes: self, other, both or neither (or causeless). But these are unreasonable.

As it is said in the *Root Verses of the Middle Way*:

Not from self, not from other,  
Not from both and not from neither—  
Not for any entity at all anywhere,  
Is there ever any production.

Why? For a thing to be produced from itself is illogical, because once something exists with its own particular identity, it is pointless for it to arise once again. It is like a child that has already been born and is not born again. If a seed, for example, were produced over again, it would be produced again and again without end. There would be no opportunity for the development of the other stages, such as the sprout, the stalk and so on.

According to the Samkhyas who assert self-production, in the same way that different manifestations, such as vases, can be created from the single nature of clay, seeds and so on are of a single nature, and abandon their seed-like manifestation as they are transformed into the manifestation of a sprout. If it is claimed that the various stages such as those of the seed and sprout are one, in spite of the fact that they have distinctions in terms of existing or not existing presently, colour, shape and so on, then that is open to invalidation by consequential reasoning, since it would follow that fire and water, or virtue and evil, must also be one.

You might think that a seed and sprout are not equivalent to fire and water because they belong to the same continuum. Yet a "continuum" is merely an imputation based on the uninterrupted resemblance of momentary phenomena, and does not really exist.

As it says in the *Madhyamakavatara*:

If one supposes that what has already been produced is re-produced,  
Then the actual arising of a sprout and so on will never be discovered.  
The seed would go on reproducing itself until the end of the world.

For you, there can be no difference between the seed as the active cause  
And the sprout in terms of shape, colour, flavour, capacity or ripening.

If this seed of yours is no different from the sprout,  
Then whilst the seed exists, there is nothing one might call 'sprout',  
Or else, since they are identical, whilst the sprout exists  
How could that [i.e. the seed] be apprehended? It is untenable.

And:

Only once the cause has disappeared does one see the effect,  
So the claim that they're the same is rejected even by the world.

It is not only according to treatises, but also the direct experience of worldly beings that the effect follows the disappearance of the cause, and so since even they would not accept the cause to be the same as the effect, self-production does not exist on either of the two levels of truth.

## 2. Production from Other

You might agree that production from self is illogical, and think that just as a child is born from its mother and a sprout is produced from its seed, production can only occur from something 'other.' It is indeed true that cause and effect are labeled as 'other', but this is not a self-production that can be proven logically.

If the cause were proven to be inherently different from the effect, then the effect would not need to depend on the cause, and both would be equal in terms of their capacity. While something exists, it is unnecessary for it to be produced from something else, just as two people who have already been born are not dependent upon one another.

If one thing were to arise from another, it would follow that anything could arise from anything else, like darkness arising from a butter lamp and so on, given that there is no difference in terms of their being other.

It is said [in the *Madhyamakavatara*]:

If things could arise on the basis of something 'other',  
Well then, thick darkness should come from flames.

And:

For the cause and effect to be entirely 'other',  
Is never feasible.  
If the cause and effect were entirely other,

Causes would be just the same as non-causes.

Then you might say, “In the case of anything truly different such as light and darkness and so on, cause and effect would be unpredictable. But seeds and sprouts and so on have an uncommon acting causal relationship of influencer and influenced, and so the preceding cause produces a subsequent effect. And so there is no question of anything arising from anything else, like darkness from flames and so on.”

Then, it is said [in the *Madhyamakavatara*]:

You do not accept that barley, stamens, Kimshuka and so on  
Can produce a rice sprout, because they lack the capability,  
They are not within the same continuum, and are not similar.  
It is the same for the rice seed, we say, because of being ‘other’.

In the same way that barley and flowers, stones and so on can not be included within the same continuum as the cause of a rice sprout or be said to be of ‘similar type’, so too, the barley seed and its sprout, if they are established as truly ‘other’ from the perspective of ultimate analysis, cannot ultimately belong to the same continuum.

Even though this does not affect the ultimate conclusion that it is wholly unacceptable for a thing’s own producers to belong to its same continuum, it is acceptable to classify a producer as belonging to the same continuum on the conventional level, based on the ultimately incontrovertible point that things are not inherently ‘other’, but arise in interdependence.

Moreover, since at any given time, either the seed or the sprout will be non-existent, having not yet arisen or already ceased, how could it be feasible for them to be ‘influencer’ and ‘influenced.’ These are mere imputations.

“Although the seed and sprout do not exist at the same time, there is no fault because they arise and cease like the up and down movements of a pair of scales.” If this is your claim, then while the seed is ceasing, it is approaching destruction and although it exists in the present, it does not remain in the next instant. And the sprout, while it is in the process of arising, is approaching production so it does not exist at the same time as the seed. So there never could be any contact between the two, and the example of the scales is meaningless.

The *Madhyamakavatara* says:

If the eye consciousness already exists as other than its own simultaneous producers,  
Such as the eye and the co-emergent perception and so on,  
What need is there for it to be produced?  
If it does not exist, then the faults of this were already explained.

If eye consciousness already existed as something other than its own producers such as the eye faculty and the visual object and so on, and also its concurrent mental states such as sensation and perception, then there would be no need for its production. If it did not exist already, then these could not be something ‘other’.

Therefore, the mind and mental states and the four elements that exist at the same time are merely labeled as causes and effects, whilst if the mind and mental states and so on were produced inherently as something truly 'other', that would entail the faults already described.

So, regarding production such as that of the sprout from the seed, the Acharya Nagarjuna said:

From a seed that is destroyed or intact,  
The sprout is not produced,  
So you taught that all production  
Is just like magical creation.

As it is said, the appearances of dependent origination cannot withstand logical analysis, and when investigated using reasoning that inquires into the ultimate, not even the slightest so-called 'production' may be observed. Yet, when left unanalyzed, just like the appearances during a dream, a sprout appears to be produced from a seed. This is simply the way in which the conventional is presented.

Similarly, at a merely conventional level, the continuum of similarity is said to remain and cease, but ultimately, since no arising is observed in the beginning, there can be no true ceasing at the end nor any abiding in the interim. Thus things are devoid of arising, dwelling and ceasing.

Therefore, appearances—when viewed from the perspective of the non-paradoxical unity of the two truths—are just like the examples of an illusion, dream, city of gandharvas, reflection of the moon in water and so on.

When analyzing in this way, using ultimate reasoning, because of the crucial point that all phenomena lack inherent existence, seeds and sprouts and so on can not be established as having any essential identity, whether as truly identical, 'other' or whatever.

Others (the proponents of real entities within the Buddhist tradition) may say: "Although the other three types of production—self-production and so on—may be refuted, if we do not accept production from other, won't we be contradicting the normal conventions of the world, such as the fact that sprouts arise from seeds and butter from curd?" There is no contradiction. In reality, if we apply reasoning, then not only at an ultimate level, but also conventionally speaking, arising is never really observed. If production were observable and proven conventionally, then it would follow that conventionally true phenomena such as the aggregates and elements would become immune to ultimate analysis. It would also follow that ultimate or truly existent arising would not be refuted. And it would follow that the equipoise of noble beings would become a cause for destroying previously existent conventional phenomena, which would lead to the extreme of deprecating the existent by labeling it non-existent. In any case, what is claimed is not possible.

In short, from the perspective of ultimate analysis, no phenomena whatsoever may be observed that are established as genuinely existent, whilst from the perspective of reasoning inquiring into the conventional, things are observed. That these two points are

consistent, and established as a single reality is the assertion of the followers of the Middle Way beyond extremes.

Yet those who speak of real entities disagree, for they consider emptiness and dependently originating appearance to be mutually opposed. They believe that whatever is refuted by ultimate analysis must be completely non-existent even on a conventional level, just like the horns of a rabbit. Or else, that whatever exists conventionally, such as pillars and vases, could never be refuted by ultimate reasoning. They conceive of some independent object of negation separate from the conventional phenomena that are the basis of negation and they consider emptiness—which for them is the refutation of a separate phenomenon called “true existence”—and appearances, the basis for that refutation, to be directly opposed to one another, like the total non-existence of the horns of rabbits and the real existence of the horns of cattle. Asserting this to be a unity, by mentally ‘binding’ these two to an entity such as a vase is tantamount to claiming that emptiness is an affirming negation, and in the end it does not even go beyond the views of the proponents of true entities. This point has already been well made by the great logicians of the past.

### **3. Production from Both**

The Samkhyas who speak of primal substance and an almighty god assert production from both self and other, but this carries the faults mentioned in both the earlier positions. As it is said [in the *Madhyamakavatara*]:

Production from both is inherently unreasonable,  
Because it would entail the problems already explained.

So, this position is unacceptable from the perspective of either of the two truths.

### **4. Production without Cause**

As for the assertion that there is no arising from self, from other or from both, but that there could be production without any cause, it is said [in the *Madhyamakavatara*]:

If the world were devoid of any cause, then it might be apprehended  
Like the fragrance and colour of a blue lotus in space,  
Yet this world is apprehended in all its rich variety,  
And so, just like one’s own mind, it should be known to arise from causes.

This has already been refuted in more detail above, in the context of the philosophical schools, [1] where it was shown how it entails either permanent existence or non-existence.

In this way, when analyzing properly using the logical arguments that refute production from the four extremes of self, other, both and neither, no phenomenon whatsoever may be seen to arise in the beginning, and therefore to possess the other features of remaining in the middle or ceasing in the end. And so the conceptual elaborations of the eight extremes [2] such as ultimate arising and so on are pacified with regard to these unceasing mere relative appearances, and this should be understood as the unity of appearance and emptiness. This is taught more elaborately in the *Madhyamakavatara*.



## **B. The Refutation of Production from Four Alternatives**

When analyzed, production cannot be established as occurring in any of these four possible ways:

1. Several causes producing a single result
2. Several causes producing several results
3. A single cause producing several results
4. A single cause producing a single result

You might think that it is only possible for several distinct causes, such as the object of a visible form, the unimpaired sense faculty, the immediately preceding mental attention, an unobstructed appearance and accommodating space, to produce the result of a single visual consciousness.

In which case, since several distinct causes produce only a single result, the object, faculty and so on do produce the visual consciousness, but it must follow that there can be no other cause for its singularity. Similarly, as long as a single cause is incapable of producing a single effect, there is no cause for singularity or plurality, one-ness or many-ness. And since there is no knowable phenomenon that does not fall into either category (of one or many), whatever is singular or plural must either remain that way forever or never come into being at any time or place. This is because there is no cause for being singular or plural.

You might think that several causes produce several effects, the immediate intention of wishing to look producing the visual consciousness of a mental nature, the support of the eye faculty producing the apprehension of the object, and the apparent object such as a vase producing its own particular mental features. In that case, since it would be produced by these various causes, it would have the various features just described, such as having a mental nature and so on, and so that eye consciousness would become many, equal in number to its aspects described above. If that is accepted, then the resultant visual consciousness is not produced by these causes such as the intention and so on. The particular aspects such as the mental nature, the endowment with the features of the object and so on are produced individually, but the one who possesses these aspects, the visual consciousness itself, has no cause and is therefore not produced by anything.

You might respond by saying that the apprehension of the object and the other aspects are not separate, in the sense that they are nothing other than consciousness. But then it would be meaningless to call this "several causes producing several effects". It becomes "several causes producing a single effect", and the problems involved in such an assertion, i.e. because one and many are uncaused, things must be either permanently existent or non-existent, have been explained above.

You may think that there is still no fault because the aspects and the possessor of these aspects are of the same essential identity, and only labelled as separate based on conceptual distinctions. In that case, the causes such as attention, would perform their function for the conceptual distinctions, the imputed phenomena such as the mental

nature and so on, but the substantially existent consciousness itself would not be produced by any cause, and so consciousness would be causeless.

If you claim that the essential identity of the effect is one, but its aspects are multiple, then this leads to the fault of the qualities being separate from that which possesses them.

You might consider that the single cause of a blue flower produces several effects, such as that flower's own subsequent 'similar type' and the visual consciousness of sentient beings, for example. The question is: does that cause, i.e., the flower, perform this production by itself exclusively, without relying on any other factors, or is it done together with other assisting factors, such as the faculties? In the first case of production by itself alone, since it would not be able to produce a plurality, this implies causeless production. Similarly, since one cause also can not perform the function of producing one effect, then it follows that the single and the multiple must both lack causes, and once again there is the fault of production occurring without any cause, as explained above.

If the object, like the blue [flower], produces the visual consciousness in dependence on other causes, such as the appearance, sense faculty, attention and so on, and you say that it has been produced by other causes as well, the result will cease to be singular, because it will possess several features or qualities that have been produced by the various causes, such as the object, faculty and attention.

Then, it might be said that a single cause only produces its own single result. If that were the case, then since a cause such as the eye faculty could only produce the result of its own subsequent 'resemblance', and could never perform the function of producing anything else, such as a visual consciousness directly apprehending an object, there would be no cause for beings' visual or audial consciousnesses and so on, and so these effects would be impossible, with the absurd consequence that everyone would be deaf and blind.

As it says in the *Two Truths of the Middle Way* [by Jñānagarbha]:

Several things do not produce just one thing,  
And many things do not create a multiplicity.  
One thing is not produced by many things.  
And from a single thing, a single thing is not produced. <sup>[3]</sup>

This was stated in accordance with such reasoning.

Moreover, other arguments might be given in response to one who asserts that several causes, such as the appearance, faculty and attention, give rise to a single result, such as visual cognition. [For example,] even if it is granted that the resultant eye consciousness does not have several qualities and is singular, it is impossible for any knowable phenomenon to be truly singular, as in the case of a visual consciousness devoid of its accompanying mental states, such as the ever-present states and so on.

You might think that many causes produce many effects, but then since it would be impossible for several causes to produce only a single effect, it would be quite meaningless to speak of a gathering of several causes. When singular phenomena

cannot be established, the 'many' that they go together to produce will not be established either, and will not exist.

The assertion that one cause produces several effects is also unsound, since it presupposes a single cause that cannot be divided into parts, and this is impossible. It can be seen that a single cause such as a seed would be incapable of producing its effect, the sprout, without relying upon other conditions, such as earth, water, warmth, time and so on.

It is also not the case that a single cause gives rise to a single effect, since this is contrary to direct experience, namely the successive production of a variety of effects like the sprout, the flower, the fruit and so on, from a variety of causes and conditions such as the seed, water, fertilizer, heat, moisture and so on.

Therefore, when thoroughly examining, a truly singular phenomenon that lacks a plurality of features or qualities cannot be established at all, whether as a causal or resultant entity. And without any such singular phenomenon, then the plural too, which must necessarily be composed of the singular, must also be non-existent.

Nevertheless, in the case of a thing such as a sprout, even though it consists of several parts such as its colour and shape and so on, they are still labeled as one thing, i.e. a sprout, based on their similarity of type and so forth. And also in the case of a single phenomenon such as a particle, when dividing it according to its features, such as substance and direction, it is labeled as multiple. Yet it is simply through the power of dependent origination or 'dependent definition', that these are conventionally designated as causes and effects. When analyzing with ultimate reasoning, they cannot be established according to any of these four alternatives of single, multiple, etc., and therefore since these conventional entities do not withstand investigation, they should be understood to be just like the appearances during a dream.

Although this reasoning is sometimes called "the investigation of both the cause and the effect: refuting production according to the four alternatives" thus giving a total of five great logical arguments—and ultimately there is no real contradiction in explaining it that way—it seems reasonable to include it within the category of investigation of the cause, so that there are a total of four great logical arguments.

There are also other arguments which investigate the cause, effect and identity, such as, for example, the division into the three times of past, present and future, i.e., the result that was produced in the past has already arisen and has now ceased, so it is not produced. The result of the future has not yet arisen in the present, and so it is not produced. And finally, the present result has already been established as its own identity and so it would be meaningless for it to be produced again.

## **II. The Investigation of the Result: Refutation of Existent or Non-Existent Production**

This is divided into an actual explanation and elimination of doubts.

### **A. Actual Explanation**

Regarding the effect that is produced, if one examines whether it is an existent effect that arises or a non-existent one, or one that is both or neither, the *Madhyamakavatara* says:

If it is something existent, what need is there for its production? But if it does not exist, what could be done to it?

If it is both [existent and non-existent], what can be done? And if neither, what can be done?

If you consider that the result to be produced is something existent which develops, this is unreasonable. Why? If it is existent, then it must exist having already established to its own identity as a sprout and so on, and being existent, it would be unnecessary for it to be produced anew. It is just like a grain of barley, which, having ripened once, does not need to ripen all over again. If something already existent still needed to be produced then that would lead to the fault of production continuing *ad infinitum*.

“Well then,” you might think, “It is something non-existent that is produced.” But in that case, it would be impossible to produce. For example, even if someone were to go to great lengths to assemble hundreds of causes and conditions, they would still never be able to produce the non-existent horns on the head of a rabbit.

You might think that the effect, such as the sprout, was formerly non-existent, but is made anew into something existent by the causes such as the seed. It is not so. Since existent and non-existent are mutually contradictory, they could never combine on the basis of a single entity. In terms of actual entities, there are no phenomena whatsoever that were formerly non-existent, and later changed into something existent. Causes and conditions could not transform unconditioned space, for example, into the identity of a conditioned, existent phenomenon.

Thus, simply on a conventional level, effects appear based on causes. Formerly, prior to the gathering of their causes and conditions, they did not appear, and now, when the causes and conditions are assembled, they do. The mind relates these two stages to one another, and then there is the merely conceptual statement, “This did not exist before, but now it is arising!”

Similarly, one mentally relates earlier and later occasions and, in relation to a given phenomenon, thinks, “This existed previously, and then it did not exist.”

Thus, the phenomena that are conventional entities simply appear by the force of dependent origination, and in reality there are no existent phenomena whatsoever that transform into non-existent ones, and there are no non-existent phenomena that transform into existent ones.

It is similar in the case of conditioned formations arising anew and finally ceasing, or the continua of ‘similar type’ remaining and not remaining, the perception of an existent self of the individual or phenomena and the perception of no-self. The explanation is similar to that given in the case of existent and non-existent phenomena. They are all merely appearances on the conventional, relative level, and ultimately, they are empty of their own essential identity. At the level of the genuine nature of things, there is no observation of any features such as the transformation of something existent into

something non-existent or non-existent into existent, of any going or coming, arising or ceasing, increasing or decreasing.

## **B. Eliminating Doubts**

You might wonder how it is that production of results should be asserted, given that neither existent nor non-existent effects are produced, and that, aside from these two, no third mode of production is possible. It is asserted that the arising of effects is nothing other than the undeceiving appearance of dependent origination, and when analyzed as to whether it is existent or non-existent, it is not established in any way whatsoever, but is just like the example of a magical illusion and so on.

It is impossible for a knowable phenomenon to be both existent and non-existent since these two are directly opposed to one another. And it is also impossible for a phenomenon to be neither existent nor non-existent, because it is impossible for there to be some third option in between these two directly opposed positions.

“Well then,” you might think, “just as it is impossible here to have the option of neither, there can not be this option of ‘neither’ in the context of freedom from conceptual elaboration of the four extremes, such as existing, not existing and so on.” And, you might think, “Just as in the assertion made without specifying ‘not existent and not non-existent’, it is impossible for there to be a third option between direct opposites, so the natural state can be understood through the two negations, and there is nothing meaningful in defining what ‘nothing whatsoever’ means. Thus, apart from the rather deceitful position of asserting nothing at all, our own tradition does not make any kind of definite statement about how things are.” This might be how spiritually immature beginners think it is, but it is not like that at all.

As long as one still maintains a basis for conceptual reference, there can not possibly be an apprehension that does away with the four extremes altogether. Therefore, whatever assertions are made by applying particular distinctions—like saying, “There is no snake in this house, but there is a vase”—they are conceptual references involving particular conceptual ideas, and so they are not beyond the realms of ordinary conceptual thought. In the actual state of simplicity, in which all conceptual focus has subsided, there are no assertions or conceptual references whatsoever with regard to the four extremes. Even so, it is quite unlike the dull confusion of not having realized ultimate reality, or a state of unconsciousness. It is a state difficult to express by words or through examples, that is—as it says in Rahula’s *Praise to the Great Mother Prajñāparamita*—beyond words, beyond thought and beyond description. It is simplicity that is discerned by means of one’s own individual awareness, in which all doubts have been cut through: a non-conceptual primordial awareness free from dualistic perceptions, but naturally luminous like the shining sun.

## **III. Investigation of the Essential Identity: ‘Neither One Nor Many’**

To begin with, there is an analysis of the essential identity of all conditioned and unconditioned phenomena to determine whether or not there is true singularity. In the case of those conditioned phenomena of the five aggregates possessing physical form,

there is a division into above, below, the cardinal and intermediate directions and the centre. Through this, it can be seen that, for something such as a vase, singularity is simply a conceptual notion applied to the various features that are the basis for such an imputation. True singularity is not established, and the same applies in the case of its component parts. The body and the limbs are also divided into parts in the same way.

In short, all that possesses physical form and is composed of material particles may be broken down to its basis, which is the infinitely small particle. And, according to the logic explained before, for that most subtle particle to be surrounded by particles in the various directions, it must have sides, which means it must have parts, and so on, in an infinite regression. If not, then however many subtle particles are gathered together, they could never grow any larger. Thus, all phenomena with material form lack true singularity.

In addition, the eight or the six collections of consciousness can not be established as truly singular since they consist of various cognitive acts and mental states, take various features as their focus, and arise in different forms from the gathering of the four conditions, and then cease.

By analyzing everything that has the nature of arising and ceasing deriving from its own causes, even the subtlest indivisible moment can not be established, and so all phenomena included within mind and matter lack any true singularity. As for non-concurrent formations, they are simply imputations made upon the 'occasion' of mind and matter, and so they lack any essential identity. Unconditioned phenomena are imputations made with regard to the eliminated aspects of objects of negation, and are also lacking in any essential identity.

In short, all conditioned and unconditioned phenomena can not be shown to have any true singularity, and since this is not established, plurality that is made up of what is singular must also remain unestablished. And so, since there is no mode of true existence aside from being truly singular or plural, it must follow that individuals and phenomena are proven to be without inherent identity, just as it is explained more elaborately in *The Ornament of the Middle Way*.

#### **IV. Analysis of All: The Logical Argument of Great Interdependence**

All phenomena do not come into being through their own inherent identity, but as a result of the coming together of causes and conditions, and when there are no conditions they do not arise. Even at the time when they appear, they appear whilst lacking any inherent existence, since they are like reflections, brought about by causes and conditions. Free from any conceptual elaborations such as being permanent or non-existent, going or coming, arising or ceasing or being one or many, they appear whilst lacking true reality.

When evaluating in this way, using reasoning investigating the ultimate in accordance with the actual nature of things, they are found to be mere unfailing dependent arising. Otherwise, if they were truly established in any way, such as arising according to the four extremes or four alternatives, or being existent or non-existent, or permanent or impermanent etc., then that would be inappropriate as an explanation for the conventional, and would result in a deprecation of all conventions.

According to the Middle Way tradition, for whom the unreal illusory appearances of dependent origination and emptiness arise in the same reality, all the conventions of mere appearance are extremely reasonable. This being so, the conventions of the world, as well as the supermundane conventions of the Four Truths, Three Jewels and so on, are all perfectly established.

This kind of reasonings, the Great Interdependence, includes all the other types of ultimate logic, such as the Diamond Splinter and so on, because they are all concerned with the seemingly real, unexamined appearances of dependent origination. When analyzed, no causes, effects or essential identities whatsoever can be established. The extensive variations of this logic that investigates the meaning of dependent origination are to be found in *The Root Verses of the Middle Way* and elsewhere.

### Conclusion

Therefore, at the relative level, cause, effect and inherent identity appear in that way, and are labeled with such conventions. Ultimately, causes, effects and inherent identities lack any true nature, being emptiness with the identity of the three doors of liberation. The emptiness in which the two truths are inseparably united like this is the *dharmadhatu*, the object to be realized through the path of the Middle Way. It is the supreme of all that might be realized, the ‘mother’ of the victorious buddhas and their heirs.

This point concerning equalness in which the truths of appearance and emptiness are indivisible is just like the sphere of space, and is beyond the realm of conceptual thought, unimaginable and inexpressible, yet with non-conceptual wisdom, it can be meditated in the manner of pure self-knowing awareness. During the post-meditation phase, one has the confident certainty that all things appear yet lack true reality, just like the examples of a magical illusion, dream, reflection, magical creations and so on. And, with the wisdom that thoroughly discerns the two truths, one is brought to an undeluded realization concerning all the categories of the ground, path and fruition.

Through comprehending the meaning of emptiness in this way, all the enlightened qualities of the path and fruition of the Great Vehicle will arise.

Footnotes:

1. i.e., earlier in the text of the *mkhas 'jug*. See *Gateway to Knowledge* vol. I, Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1997, pp. 64-65.
2. The eight extremes are: arising, ceasing, permanence, non-existence, coming, going, plurality and singularity.
3. This is verse 14 of the text. Khenpo Nuden gives the quote with the lines in a slightly different order, but I have followed the original.

(Taken from Mipham Rinpoche's *mkhas 'jug*, with supplementary material from Khenpo Nüden's commentary.)

Translated and edited by Adam  
<http://www.lotsawahouse.org/>

**The Key to the Middle Way**  
**A Treatise on the Realisation of Emptiness**  
**By The Fourteenth Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso**  
**Translated by Jeffrey Hopkins and Lati Rimpoché**  
**With Alexander Berzin, Jonathan Landaw and Anne Klein**

*[The text was translated by Jeffrey Hopkins, who orally retranslated the English into Tibetan for verification and correction by Lati Rimpoché and then worked with Alexander Berzin, Jonathan Landaw, and Anne Klein to improve the presentation in English.]*

**Homage**

Homage to the perfection of wisdom.  
I respectfully bow down to the Conqueror,  
Protector of all beings through boundless compassion,  
With dominion over glorious wisdom and deeds, but who  
Like an illusion is only designated by words and thoughts.  
I will explain here in brief terms the essence  
Of the ambrosia of his good speech,  
The mode of the union of emptiness and dependent-arising,  
To increase the insight of those with burgeoning intellect.

**Foundations**

**It is all about the mind**

We all want happiness and do not want suffering. Moreover, achieving happiness and eliminating suffering depend upon the deeds of body, speech and mind. As the deeds of body and speech depend upon the mind, we must therefore constructively transform the mind. The ways of constructively transforming the mind are to cause mistaken states of consciousness not to be generated and good states of consciousness to be both generated and increased.

What are the determinants, in this context, of a bad state of consciousness? A state of consciousness, once produced, may initially cause ourselves to become unhappy and our previously calm mind suddenly to become excited or tense. This may then act as the cause of hard breathing, nervous sweating, illness, and so forth. From these, in turn, bad deeds of body and speech may arise, which directly or indirectly may also cause hardship for others. All states of consciousness that give rise to such a causal sequence are assigned as bad.

The determinants of good states of consciousness, on the other hand, are just the opposite. All states of consciousness that cause the bestowal of the fruit of happiness and peace upon ourselves or others, either superficially or in depth, are assigned as good.

As for ways of causing mistaken states of consciousness not to be generated, there are



such means as undergoing brain operations, ingesting various types of drugs, making our awareness dull as if overcome with drowsiness, and making ourselves senseless as if in deep sleep. However, apart from only occasional superficial help, these mostly do more harm than good from the point of view of deep solutions.

Therefore, the way of beneficially transforming the mind is as follows:

- First we must think about the disadvantages of bad states of consciousness, identifying them from our own personal experience.
- Then we must recognise the good states of consciousness. If familiarity with them is developed through thinking again and again about their advantages and about their supporting validators, then the various types of good states of consciousness will become stronger.
- This occurs through the force of familiarity and through these good states of consciousness having valid foundations and being qualities dependent on the mind [and thus capable of limitless development]. Then, it is natural that the defective states of consciousness will decrease in strength. Thereby, in time, sure signs of goodness will appear in the mind.

Many such different methods of transforming the mind have been taught by the many great teachers of this world, in accordance with individual times and places and in accordance with the minds of individual trainees. Among these, many methods of taming the mind have been taught in the books of the Buddhists. From among these, a little will be said here about the view of emptiness.

Views of selflessness are taught in both Buddhist vehicles, the Mahayana and the Hinayana, and with respect to the Mahayana in both sutra and tantra divisions. When a Buddhist and a non-Buddhist are differentiated by way of behaviour, the difference is whether or not the person takes refuge in the Three Jewels. When they are differentiated by way of view, the difference is whether or not the person asserts the views which are the four seals testifying to a doctrine's being the word of the Buddha.

#### The four seals

The four seals are:

All products are impermanent.  
All contaminated things are miserable.  
All phenomena are empty and selfless.  
Nirvana is peace.

Therefore, all Buddhists assert that all phenomena are empty and selfless.

- With respect to the meaning of selflessness, here is a selflessness of persons, that is the non-existence of persons as substantial entities or self-sufficient entities. This is asserted by all four Buddhist schools of tenets: Vaibhasika, Sautrantika, Cittamatra and Madhyamika.
- The Cittamatrins assert, in addition, a selflessness of phenomena that is an emptiness of objects and subjects as different entities.
- The Madhyamikas assert a selflessness of phenomena that is an emptiness of

inherent existence.

The meaning of the views of the lower and higher schools of tenets differs greatly in coarseness and subtlety. However, if understanding is developed with respect to the lower systems, this serves as a means of deep ascertainment of the higher views; therefore, it is very helpful to do so. Here, selflessness is to be discussed in accordance with the Madhyamika system, and within the division of the Madhyamika into Svatantrika and Prasangika, in accordance with the Prasangika system.

#### The Four Schools of Tenets

Question: Did the Blessed One set forth all these different schools of tenets? If he did, on what sutras do each rely? Also, does the difference of status and depth of the schools of tenets necessarily depend on scriptural authority?

Answer: The different views of the four schools of tenets were set forth by the Blessed One himself in accordance with the mental capacities of his trainees, whether superior, middling, or low. Some trainees were likely to fall into views of nihilism or were in danger of losing faith if taught selflessness. For them Buddha even taught the existence of a self in some sutras. Also, some trainees were likely to go either to the extreme of eternity or to the extreme of annihilation if Buddha answered their questions in the positive or the negative. For them Buddha did not say either 'exists' or 'does not exist', but remained silent, as in the case of the fourteen inexpressible views. Also, with respect to the modes of selflessness, Buddha set forth many forms as was briefly explained above.

The sutras on which each of the schools relies are as follows. The Vaibhasika and Sautrantika schools of tenets rely mainly on the sutras of the first wheel of doctrine, such as the Sutra on the Four Truths (Catuhsatya). The Cittamatra school of tenets relies mainly on the sutras of the last wheel of doctrine, such as the Unravelling of the Thought Sutra (Samdhinirmocana). The Madhyamika school relies mainly on the sutras of the middle wheel of doctrine, such as the Hundred Thousand Stanza Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (Satasahasrikaprajnaparamita). There are ways of presenting the three series of wheels of doctrine from the point of view of place, time, subject and trainee [but this is not a place for such a lengthy discussion].

#### Provisory and Definitive Teachings

If it were necessary to differentiate the status and depth of the schools' different views in dependence on scriptural authority, then, since the individual sutras each say that the system which it teaches is the superior system, we may wonder which scripture should be held as true. If one scripture were held to be true, we would then wonder how the other discordant sutras should be considered. But, if the modes of truth of one sutra and the non-truth of the others were necessarily provable only by scriptural authority, then the process would be endless. Therefore, the differentiation of the superiority and inferiority of views must rely only on reasoning.

Thus, the Mahayana sutras say that it is necessary to distinguish what requires interpretation and what is definitive. Thinking of this, Buddha says in a sutra:

Monks and scholars should  
Well analyse my words,  
Like gold [to be tested through] melting, cutting and polishing,  
And then adopt them, but not for the sake of showing me respect.

### The Four Reliances

In his Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras (Mahdyanasutralamkara) Maitreya commented well on the meaning of Buddha's thought in that statement and set forth the four reliances:

1. One should not rely on the person of a teacher, but on the tenets or doctrines that he teaches.
2. One should not rely merely on the euphony and so forth of his words, but on their meaning.
3. With respect to the meaning, one should not rely on those teachings that require interpretation. Such interpretation would be necessary if there were some other non-explicit base in the teacher's thought, if there were a purpose for the teaching's being stated in interpretable form, and if the explicit words of the teaching were susceptible to refutation. One should rely, rather, on those teachings that have definitive meaning, that is, which do not require interpretation.
4. With respect to the definitive meaning, one should not rely on a dualistic consciousness, but on a non-conceptual wisdom.

### **What is Emptiness?**

#### We need to get a conceptual understanding of emptiness through reasoning

With respect to a non-conceptual wisdom that apprehends a profound emptiness, one first cultivates a conceptual consciousness that apprehends an emptiness, and when a clear perception of the object of meditation arises, this becomes a non-conceptual wisdom. Moreover, the initial generation of that conceptual consciousness must depend solely on a correct reasoning. Fundamentally, therefore, this process traces back solely to a reasoning, which itself must fundamentally trace back to valid experiences common to ourselves and others. Thus, it is the thought of Dignaga and Dharmakirti, the kings of reasoning, that fundamentally a reasoning derives from an obvious experience.

#### The object of negation

Question: For the sake of improving the mind what is the use of developing valid cognisers and states of consciousness that realise the presentations of views of emptiness? What practitioners need is a sense of practical application and goodness; it is the scholars who need to be learned.

Answer: There are many stages in the improvement of the mind. There are some in which analysis of reasons is not necessary, such as when trusting faith alone is to be cultivated single-pointedly. Not much strength, however, is achieved by just that alone. Especially for developing the mind into limitless goodness, it is not sufficient merely to familiarise the mind with its object of meditation. The object of meditation must involve reasoning.

Further, it is not sufficient for the object to have reasons in general; the meditator himself must know them and have found a conviction in them. Therefore, it is impossible for the superior type of practitioner not to have intelligence. Still, if we were forced to choose between a sense of practical application and learnedness, a sense of practical application would be more important, for one who has this will receive the full benefit of whatever he knows. The mere learnedness of one whose mind is not tamed can produce and increase bad states of consciousness, which cause unpleasantness for himself and others instead of the happiness and peace of mind that were intended. One could become jealous of those higher than oneself, competitive with equals and proud and contemptuous towards those lower and so forth. It is as if medicine had become poison. Because such danger is great, it is very important to have a composite of learnedness, a sense of practical application and goodness, without having learnedness destroy the sense of practical application or having the sense of practical application destroy learnedness.

Concerning the improvement of the mind, in order to ascertain the meaning of a selflessness or of an emptiness, it is necessary to ascertain first the meaning of just what a phenomenon is empty of when we refer to 'an emptiness'. The Bodhisattva Santideva says in his Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds (Bodhicaryavatara, IX. 140):

Without identifying the imputed thing  
Its non-existence cannot be apprehended.

Just so, without ascertaining that of which a phenomenon is empty, an understanding of its emptiness does not develop.

#### Emptiness means emptiness of inherent existence

Question: Of what is it that a phenomenon is empty?

Answer: [When we Prasangikas speak of an emptiness, we are not referring to the situation in which one object is empty of some other existent entity. Thus] though we may commonly speak of an 'empty rainbow', since the rainbow is empty of anything tangible, this type of an emptiness is not what we have in mind. [This is because anything tangible can exist separate from an empty rainbow; and, moreover, there is still something positive about this rainbow empty of anything tangible, such as its having colour.] Though we may also speak of 'empty space', since space is empty of anything physical, this too is not an example of what we mean by an emptiness [although here there is nothing else positive implied about space, which is the mere absence of anything physical.

This is because here too anything physical can exist separate from empty space.] Rather, when we speak of a phenomenon as being empty, we are referring to its being empty of its own inherent existence [which does not exist at all, let alone exist separate from the phenomenon. In one respect, then, there is a similarity here in that just as a rainbow is naturally empty of anything tangible—it never has been tangible—so too, a phenomenon is naturally empty of its own inherent existence—it never has had inherent existence.] Further, it is not that the object of the negation [inherent existence] formerly existed and is later eliminated, like the forest which existed yesterday and which is burned by fire today, with the result that the area is now empty of the forest. Rather, this is an emptiness

of an object of negation [inherent existence], which from beginningless time has never been known validly to exist.

Also, with respect to the way in which a phenomenon is empty of the object of negation, it is not like a table top being empty of flowers. [There, the object of the negation, flowers, is an entity separate from the base of the negation, the table top. With the object of the negation being inherent existence, however, we are not negating an entity separate from the base of the negation, a phenomenon, but rather we are negating a mode of existence of the base of the negation itself. Thus] we mean that the base of the negation, a phenomenon, does not exist in the manner of the object of the negation, its own inherent existence. Therefore, without ascertaining just what the object of the negation is of which phenomena are empty, that is, without ascertaining the measure of what self is in the theory of selflessness, we cannot understand the meaning of an emptiness. A mere vacuity without any sense of 'The object of the negation is this' and 'It is not that' is utterly not the meaning of an emptiness.

Ignorance of the emptiness of inherent existence is the root cause of all bad consciousnesses and their consequential suffering

Question: What is the use of going to all the trouble of first understanding what something definitely non-existent [inherent existence] would mean if it were existent; and then, after that, viewing it as definitely non-existent?

Answer: It is common worldly knowledge that by believing untrue information to be true we fall into confusion and are harmed. Similarly, by believing phenomena to be inherently existent when in fact they are not inherently existent, we are also harmed. For example, with respect to the different ways in which there can be a consciousness of 'I', there is a definite difference between the way the 'I' is apprehended when desire, hatred, pride and so forth are generated based on this 'I', and the way the 'I' is apprehended when we are relaxed without any of those attitudes being manifest. Similarly, there is the mere consciousness that apprehends an article in a store before we buy it, and there is the consciousness apprehending that article after it has been bought, when it is adhered to as 'mine' and grasped with attachment. Both these consciousnesses have the same object, and in both cases the mode of appearance of the article is the appearance of it as inherently existent. However, there is the difference of the presence or absence of our adhering to it as inherently or independently existent.

Also, when we see ten men, just from merely seeing them it appears to us that ten men exist there objectively or inherently; however, there is no certainty that we will go on to adhere at that time to this appearance of ten objectively or inherently existent men and posit truth to it. [If we were to posit truth to the appearance of these men as being inherently existent, the process of doing so would be as follows.] For either right or wrong reasons, a strong thought [based on having conceived these ten men to be inherently existent] will be generated, which incorrectly considers one from among these ten men as good or bad. At that time, our intellect will falsely superimpose on the appearance of this man a goodness or badness that exceeds what actually exists. Desire and hatred will then be generated, and consequently we will adhere at that time to this object [the appearance of an inherently existent good or bad man] tightly from the depths of our mind as true, most true.

Therefore, a consciousness conceiving inherent existence precedes any bad consciousness, leading it on by the nose, and also accompanies, or aids, many other bad consciousnesses as well. Thus, if there were no ignorance conceiving inherent existence, then there would be no chance for desire, hatred and so forth to be generated. Since that is so, it is important to identify the beginningless emptiness of the object of the negation, which is to say, it is important to identify as non-existent that non-existent entity [inherent existence] which has never validly been known to exist. Once we have made this identification, it is necessary to generate conviction in it as well. The purpose of this process is to cease the arising of incorrect thoughts, inexhaustible like ripples on an ocean, which arise through the force of the appearance of inherent existence as existent, even though it is non-existent, and through the force of the adherence to that false appearance as true. As Nagarjuna says in the eighteenth chapter of his Fundamental Text Called 'Wisdom (Prajna-nama-mulamadhyamakakarika, XVIII. 4-5):

When the thought of the internal  
And the external as 'I' and 'mine\*  
Has perished, grasping ceases  
And through that cessation birth ceases.

When actions and afflictions cease, there is liberation;  
They arise from false conceptions, these arise  
From the elaborations [of false views on inherent  
Existence]; elaborations cease in emptiness.

### The Two Truths

Inherent existence has never been validly known to exist; therefore, it is impossible for there to be any phenomenon that exists through its own power. Since it is experienced that mere dependent-arising, which are in fact empty of inherent existence, do cause all forms of help and harm, these are established as existent. Thus, mere dependent-arising do exist. Therefore, all phenomena exist in the manner of appearing as varieties of dependent-arising. They appear this way without passing beyond the sphere or condition of having just this nature of being utterly non-inherently existent. Therefore, all phenomena have two entities: one entity that is its superficial mode of appearance and one entity that is its deep mode of being. These two are called respectively conventional truths and ultimate truths.

The Superior (Arya) Nagarjuna says in his Fundamental Text Called 'Wisdom' (XXIV. 8):

Doctrines taught by the Buddhas  
Rely wholly on the two truths,  
Conventional and worldly truths  
And truths that are ultimate.

Also, the glorious Candrakirti says in his Supplement to (Nagarjuna's) 'Treatise on the Middle Way (Madhyamakavatara, VI. 23) :

[Buddha] said that all phenomena have two entities,

Those found by perceivers of the true and of the false;  
Objects of perceivers of the true are realities,  
Objects of perceivers of the false are conventional truths.

The divisions of ultimate truths will be briefly explained below. Conventional truths themselves are divided into the real and the unreal just from the point of view of an ordinary worldly consciousness. Candrakirti says (Supplement, VI. 24-25):

Also those which perceive falsities are said to be of two types,  
Those with clear senses and those having defective ones.  
A consciousness having a defective sense is said to be  
Wrong in relation to one with a sense that is sound.

Objects realised by the world and apprehended  
By the six non-defective senses are only true  
From a worldly point of view, the rest are presented  
As unreal only from the viewpoint of the world.

The purpose of knowing thus the presentation of the two truths is as follows. Since it is utterly necessary to be involved with these appearances which bring about varieties of good and bad effects, it is necessary to know the two natures, superficial and deep, of these objects to which we are related. For example, there may be a cunning and deceptive neighbour with whom it is always necessary for us to interact and to whom we have related by way of an estimation of him that accords only with his [pleasant] external appearance. The various losses that we have sustained in this relationship are not due to the fault of our merely having interacted with that man. Rather, the fault lies with our mistaken manner of relating to him. Further, because of not knowing the man's nature, we have not estimated him properly and have thereby been deceived.

Therefore, if that man's external appearance and his fundamental nature had both been well known, we would have related to him with a reserve appropriate to his nature and with whatever corresponded to his capacities, and so forth. Had we done this, we would not have sustained any losses.

#### The Middle Way between existence and non-existence

Similarly, if phenomena had no deep mode of being other than their external or superficial mode of being, and if thus the way they appeared and the way they existed were in agreement, then it would be sufficient to hold that conventional modes of appearance are true just as they appear, and to place confidence in them. However, this is not so. Though phenomena appear as if true, most true, ultimately they are not true. Therefore, phenomena abide in the middle way, not truly or inherently existent and also not utterly non-existent. This view, or way of viewing—the knowledge of such a mode of being, just as it is—is called the view of the middle way.

With respect to this, the way in which there is no inherent existence or self is as follows. Whatever objects appear to us now—forms, sounds and so forth which are cognised by the eyes, ears and so on, or objects cognised by the mind, or objects of experience and so forth—these objects are the bases of negation, in relation to which the object of that

negation, inherent existence, is negated.

They appear to be inherently existent, or existing as independent entities, or existing objectively. Therefore, all consciousnesses are mistaken except for the wisdom that directly cognises emptiness.

Emptiness doesn't deny the possibility of valid conventional truths / laws, sciences

Question: [If all those consciousnesses that are not directly cognising emptiness are mistaken, does this mean that] there are no valid cognisers which could certify the existence of conventionally existent phenomena, such as forms and so on? Or, does this mean that since the criterion for a phenomenon's existing conventionally would have to be its existing for a mistaken, perverse consciousness [rather than its existing for a valid cogniser], it would follow that the non-existence of any phenomenon could not occur [because any phenomenon could be cognised by a mistaken consciousness]?

Answer: It is not contradictory for a consciousness to be mistaken, on the one hand, because objects appear to it as if they inherently existed, and, on the other, for it to be valid, because it is not deceived with respect to its main object. For example, a visual consciousness perceiving a form is indeed a mistaken consciousness because the form appears to it as inherently existent. However, to the extent that it perceives the form as a form and does not conceive the form to be inherently existent, it is a valid cogniser. Not only that, but a visual consciousness perceiving a form is also a valid cogniser with respect to the appearance of the form and even with respect to the appearance of the form's seeming to be inherently existent. All dualistic consciousnesses, therefore, are valid direct cognisers with respect to their own objects of perception, because in the expression, 'a consciousness knowing its object', a consciousness refers to a clear knower which is generated in the image of its object through the force of the appearance of its object.

Further, the criterion for a phenomenon's existing conventionally is not merely its existing for a mistaken, perverse consciousness. For example, an appearance of falling hairs manifestly appears to the visual consciousness of someone with cataract. Because his consciousness has been generated in the image of falling hairs, it is a valid, direct cogniser with respect to that object of perception. However, since the falling hairs, which are the basis of such an appearance, are utterly non-existent, the consciousness is deceived with respect to its main object. Thus, because this consciousness of falling hairs is directly contradicted by a consciousness with a valid mode of perception, it is asserted to be a wrong consciousness. How could existing for this mistaken consciousness be the criterion for a phenomenon's existing conventionally?

In short, it is said that though there is no phenomenon that is not posited by the mind, whatever the mind posits is not necessarily existent.

When a phenomenon appears thus to be inherently existent, if the phenomenon existed in the same way as it appeared, then the entity of its inherent existence would necessarily become clearer when its mode of existence was carefully analysed. For example, even in terms of what is widely known in the world, if something is true, it becomes clearer and its foundation more firm the more one analyses it. Therefore, when sought, it must definitely be findable. If, on the contrary, it is false, then when it is analysed and sought, it becomes



unclear, and in the end it cannot stand up. Nagarjuna's Precious Garland (Ratnavali, 52-53) says:

A form seen from a distance  
Is seen clearly by those nearby.  
If a mirage were water, why  
Is water not seen by those nearby?

The way this world is seen  
As real by those afar  
Is not so seen by those nearby,  
[For whom it is] signless like a mirage.

### Examples

Let us give an example. When it is said and thought that human beings should have happiness, a human who is one who should have happiness appears boldly to our mind as if existing in his own right. To create human happiness, one must achieve the favourable circumstances for physical pleasures such as food, clothing, shelter, medicines and transportation for the body, and the favourable circumstances for mental pleasures such as higher education, respectability, good disposition and tranquility for the mind. It is necessary to create a human's happiness through physical and mental pleasures. That being so, if we search, wondering what the real human is, we find that his body and mind individually are not the human, and there is also no identifying, 'This is the human,' separately from these two.

Similarly, when we have met an acquaintance named 'Lucky', we say, for instance, 'I saw Lucky,' 'Lucky has become old,' or 'Lucky has become fat.' Without analysing or examining those statements, seeing Lucky's body is said to be seeing Lucky; seeing his body weaker is said to be seeing Lucky weaker; and seeing his body larger is said to be seeing Lucky larger. A consciousness that perceives such without analysis is not a wrong consciousness, and these statements also are not false. [However] when analysis is done, a real Lucky himself who is the possessor of the body is not to be seen, and his ageing and becoming fat also cannot stand up to analysis. Further, with respect to the goodness or badness of Lucky's mind, Lucky is designated as a good man or a bad man. But Lucky's mind itself is not Lucky. In short, there is not the slightest part which is Lucky among the mere collection of Lucky's mind and body, his continuum, or individual parts. Therefore, dependent on the mere collection of Lucky's body and mind, we designate 'Lucky'. As Nagarjuna says in his Precious Garland (80):

The person is not earth, not water,  
Not fire, not wind, not space,  
Not consciousness and not all of them;  
What person is there other than these?

## **Further Explanations of Emptiness**

### Emptiness of body & mind

Further, with respect to the statement, 'I saw Lucky's body,' seeing merely the external skin from among the many parts of the body, flesh, skin, bones and so forth, functions as seeing his body. Even if the blood, bones and so forth are not seen, it does not mean that the body is not seen. To see a body it is not necessary to see all of the body; seeing even a small part can function as seeing the body. However, sometimes by the force of general custom, if a certain amount is not seen, it cannot function as a seeing of the body. As above, if the body is divided into its individual parts, legs, arms and so on, a body is not found. Also, the legs and arms can be divided into toes and fingers, the toes and fingers into joints and the joints into upper and lower portions; these can be divided into small parts and even the smallest parts into parts corresponding with the directions. When they are divided in this way, none of these entities are findable. Also, if the smallest particle were directionally partless, that is, if it had no sides, then no matter how many directionally partless particles were collected, they could never be arranged side by side to form a mass.

Furthermore, Lucky is said to be happy or unhappy according to whether his mind is at ease or not. What is this mind which is the basis of this determination? It does not exist as anything physical, it lacks anything tangible, any object can appear to it, and it exists as an entity of mere knowing. Further, it is like this when it is not analysed; but when it is analysed, it is unfindable.

When Lucky's mind is happy, the entity of that mind is what is to be analysed. If it is divided into individual moments, there is no mass that is a composite of the many former and later moments. At the time of the later moments, the former moments have ceased; therefore, the former ones have gone and their conscious entity has disappeared. Because the future moments have not yet been produced, they are not existing now. Also, the single present moment is not separate from what has already been produced and what has not yet been produced. Therefore, when it is sought thus, one is unable to establish a present consciousness. When the happy mind, which is the object discussed in 'His mind is happy,' is sought, it is utterly unfindable. In short, happy and unhappy minds and so forth are designated to a mere collection of their own former and future moments. Even the shortest moment is imputed to its own parts; it has the individual parts of a beginning and an end. If a moment were partless, there could be no continuum composed of them.

#### Emptiness of external objects

Similarly, when an external object such as a table appears to the mind, a naturally existent or independent table appears. Let us analyse this table by dividing it into a whole and parts. In general, the table is put as the base of its qualities, and by examining its qualities such as shape, colour, material and size, we can speak of its value, quality and so forth. For example, when we say 'This table is good, but its colour is not good,' there is a table that is the base of the estimation of the quality of its colour. A base of qualities that possesses these qualities does [conventionally] exist, but the qualities and parts individually are not themselves the base of the qualities. Also, after eliminating the qualities and parts, a base of these qualities is not findable. If there is no such base, then since qualities are necessarily established in dependence on a base of qualities and, moreover, since a base of qualities is necessarily established in dependence on qualities, the qualities also will not exist.

Let us illustrate this with the example of a rosary which has one hundred and eight beads. The whole, the one rosary, has one hundred and eight beads as its parts. The parts and the whole are [conventionally] different; yet, when the parts are eliminated, a rosary cannot be found. Because the rosary is one and its parts are many, the rosary is not the same as its parts. When the parts are eliminated, there is no rosary which exists separately; therefore, it is not inherently or fundamentally different from its parts. Because the rosary does not exist separate from its parts, it does not inherently depend on its parts, nor do the parts inherently depend on it. Also, the beads do not inherently belong to the rosary. Similarly, since the shape of the rosary is one of its qualities, this shape is not the rosary. Also, the collection of the beads and the string is the basis in dependence on which the rosary is imputed; therefore, it is not the rosary. If it is sought in this way, a rosary is unfindable as any of the seven extremes. Further, if the individual beads are sought as above, that is, as one with their parts, or different from their parts and so forth, they are unfindable as well. Furthermore, since forests, armies, continents, and countries are imputed to aggregations of many parts, when each is analysed as to whether it is this or not that, it is utterly unfindable.

#### Emptiness of characteristics, elements, samsara & Nirvana, sentient beings & Buddhas

Further, it is extremely clear that good and bad, tall and short, big and small, enemy and friend, father and son and so forth are all imputations of the one based on the other. Also earth, water, fire, wind and so on are each imputed in dependence on their parts. Space is imputed in dependence on its parts, which pervade the directions. Also, Buddhas and sentient beings, cyclic existence and nirvana and so forth are only just imputed in dependence on their parts and their bases of imputation.

#### Emptiness of production

Just as it is widely known that, 'An effect is produced from causes,' so production does exist [conventionally]. However, let us analyse the meaning of production. If effects were produced causelessly, they would either always be produced or would never be produced. If they were produced from themselves, it would be purposeless for what has already attained its own entity to be produced again; and if what had already been produced is produced again, then there is the consequent fallacy that its reproduction would be endless. If effects were produced from entities other than themselves, they would be produced from everything, both from what are considered conventionally to be their causes and from what are not [since both are equally other]. Or, it would be contradictory for effects to depend on causes [for, being totally separate, they could not be inter-related]. Production from both self and others is not possible either [because of the faults in both these positions demonstrated separately above].

Thus, if the meaning of the designation 'production' is sought, production is not capable of being established. As the Superior Nagarjuna says in his Fundamental Text Called 'Wisdom (I. 1):

There is never production  
Anywhere of any phenomenon  
From itself, from others,

From both, or without cause.

### Emptiness of causality

Though it is widely known [and conventionally correct] that causes do produce effects, let us analyse these effects. If the produced effect inherently existed, how could it be correct for what already exists to be produced newly? For, causes are not needed to create it anew. In general, causes conventionally do newly create that which has not been produced or which is non-existent at the time of its causes. However, if the non-produced were inherently true as non-produced, it would be no different from being utterly non-existent; therefore, how could it be fit for production by causes? As Nagarjuna says in his Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness (Sunyatasaptati):

Because it exists, the existent is not produced;  
Because it does not exist, the non-existent is not produced.

### Everything is empty because everything is dependently arisen, and vice versa

In short, once the existence of something is necessarily dependent on causes and conditions and on others, then it is contradictory for it to exist independently. For, independence and dependence on others are contradictory. The Questions of the King of Nagas, Anavatapta, Sutra (Anavataptanagarajapariprccha) says:

That which is produced from causes is not [inherently] produced,  
It does not have an inherent nature of production.  
That which depends on causes is said to be  
Empty; he who knows emptiness is aware.

Nagarjuna's Fundamental Text Called 'Wisdom (XXIV. 19) says:

Because there are no phenomena  
Which are not dependent-arising,  
There are no phenomena  
Which are not empty.

Aryadeva says in his Four Hundred (Catuhsataka, XIV. 23):

That which has dependent-arising  
Cannot be self-powered; since all these  
Lack independence there can be  
No self [no inherent existence].

If phenomena were not empty of a fundamental basis or of inherent existence, it would be utterly impossible for the varieties of phenomena to be transformed in dependence on causes. If they existed by way of their own fundamental basis, then no matter what type of entity they were, good, bad and so on, how could they be changed? If a good fruit tree, for instance, were inherently existent by way of its own entity or its own inner basis, how would it be true that it could become bare and ugly? If the present mode of appearance of these things to our minds were their own inner mode of being, how could we be deceived? Even

in the ordinary world many discrepancies are well known between what appears and what actually is. Therefore, although beginninglessly everything has appeared as if it were inherently existent to the mind that is contaminated with the errors of ignorance, if those objects were indeed inherently existent, their inner basis would be just as they appear. In that case, when the consciousness searching for the inner basis of a phenomenon performed analysis, that inner basis would definitely become clearer. Where does the fault lie, that when sought, phenomena are not found and seemingly disappear?

Further, if things inherently existed, it would be as Candrakirti says in his Supplement (VI. 34-36) :

If the inherent existence [of phenomena] depended [on causes, the yogi  
Realising emptiness], by denying that, would be destroying phenomena;  
Therefore, [seeing] emptiness would be a cause which destroys phenomena, but  
since  
This is not reasonable, phenomena do not [inherently exist].

When these phenomena are analysed, they are not found  
To abide as other than phenomena with the nature  
Of reality [having no inherently existent production or cessation] ;  
Therefore, worldly conventional truths are not to be analysed.

When reality [is analysed] production  
From self and other is not admissible,  
Through the same reasoning [inherently existent production] also is not admissible  
Conventionally; how then could your [inherently existent] production be  
[established]?

Thus, Candrakirti is saying that if phenomena existed naturally or inherently, it would follow that a Superior's meditative equipoise realising emptiness would cause the destruction of these phenomena. Also, it would follow that conventional truths would be able to stand up to a reasoned analysis. Further, it would follow that production would not be ultimately refuted, and that many sutras which teach that phenomena are empty of themselves in the sense that they are empty of their own natural inherent existence would be wrong. For instance, a Mother Sutra, the Twenty-Five Thousand Stanza Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (Pancavimsatisahasrikaprajnaparamita) says, 'With respect to this, Sariputra, when a Bodhisattva, a great being, practises the perfection of wisdom, he does not see a Bodhisattva as real. . . . Why? Sariputra, it is like this: a Bodhisattva is empty of being an inherently existent Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva's name also is empty of being a Bodhisattva's name. Why? That is their nature. It is like this: it is not that a form is empty on account of emptiness; emptiness is not separate from a form. A form itself is [that which is] empty; just [that which is] empty is also the form.' Further, the Kasyapa Chapter in the Pile of Jewels Sutra (Ratnakuta) says, 'Phenomena are not made empty by emptiness, the phenomena themselves are empty.' Therefore, all phenomena lack inherent existence or their own basic foundation.

#### Emptiness doesn't mean nihilism

Question: If a real man and a dream man, a form and a reflection, a real thing and a picture

are the same in that they are not found when sought, would it not follow that there would be no differences among them? There would be no differences as to their truth, falsity and so forth. Thus, what would be the use of searching into the view of emptiness? For, the searcher and the view itself would be none other than non-existent.

Answer: This touches on a difficult point. There is a great danger that because of this subtle point those of immature intelligence might fall to a view of nihilism. Therefore, to avoid that, some who were skilled in means, the Svatantrika-Madhyamika Bhavaviveka and his spiritual sons [Jnanagarbha, Santaraksita, Kamalasila, etc.], used reasoning to refute that phenomena exist from the point of view of their own particular mode of subsistence and without being established through their appearance to a faultless consciousness.

However, they asserted natural or inherent existence conventionally. For those whose minds could not cope even with this type of truthlessness, the Cittamatrin teachers, Vasubandhu and so forth, used reasoning to refute external objects, yet asserted that the mind does truly exist. For those who could not be vessels of a teaching of the selflessness of phenomena, the proponents of truly existing external objects—the Vaibhasikas and Sautrantikas—asserted in the place of emptiness a mere selflessness, which is the person's non-existence as a substantial or self-sufficient entity. The non-Buddhists could not even assert the mere selflessness of persons, and from that, therefore, they derive the necessity of asserting a permanent, partless, independent person.

#### Everything is merely imputed by the mind, but not from the mind only

Question: If it is asserted that phenomena do not exist by reason of their not being found when the object imputed is sought, that contradicts what is widely known in the world; for it goes against obvious experience. Our own experience affirms the existence of these phenomena which are all included in the terms 'environments' and 'beings'. Our own experience affirms as well the fact that varieties of help, harm, pleasure and pain are produced. Thus, what is the meaning of not being able to find such things as self and other, environments and beings, when we seek these varieties of definitely existent phenomena?

Answer: The Twenty-Five Thousand Stanza Perfection of Wisdom Sutra says,

'It is thus: this "Bodhisattva" is only a name; this "perfection of wisdom" is only a name; these "forms", "feelings", "discriminations", "compositional factors", and "consciousnesses" are only names. It is thus: forms are like illusions. Feelings, discriminations, compositional factors and consciousnesses are like illusions. Illusions also are only names; they do not abide in places; they do not abide in the directions. . . . Why? It is thus: names are fabricated and imputed to the individual phenomena, names are adventitiously designated.

They are all designations. When a Bodhisattva, a great being, practices the perfection of wisdom, he does not view names as real. Because he does not view them as real, he does not adhere to them. Further, O Sariputra, when a Bodhisattva, a great being, practises the perfection of wisdom, he thinks thus: this "Bodhisattva" is only a name; this "enlightenment" is only a name; this "perfection of wisdom" is only a name; these "forms"

are only names; these "feelings", "discriminations", "compositional factors" and "consciousnesses" are only names. Sariputra, it is thus: "I" for example is designated, but the "I" is unapprehendable.'

In many sutras and treatises phenomena are all said to be only names. When imputed objects are sought, they are utterly not there in any objective way. This is a sign that all phenomena are not objectively existent and are only established as existing through subjective designations and thoughts. Existing merely in this way functions as existing.

Let us explain this further in fine detail.

For something to exist conventionally, it must satisfy three criteria:

1. The object must be generally well known to a conventional consciousness. Yet, if merely being well known were sufficient [to establish the conventional existence of an object], then even the commonly cited 'son of a barren woman' would exist. Therefore, for any object to exist conventionally,
2. It must not be possible for a conventional valid cogniser to contradict it. Yet, since a conventional valid cogniser cannot refute inherent existence [which otherwise would exist conventionally by merely the above two criteria],
3. It must not be possible for a reasoning that analyses the ultimate to refute it either.

Therefore, an entity existing objectively without existing merely through the force of subjective designations is the measure or meaning of what is negated; it is that of which phenomena are empty in the expression 'emptiness'. It is also called 'self or 'object negated by reasoning'. Since it is utterly not known validly to exist, a consciousness that adheres to it as existent is called an ignorant consciousness. In general, there are many types of mere ignorance; however, that which is being explained here is the ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence, the opposite of the wisdom that cognises selflessness. Nagarjuna's Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness says:

The thought that phenomena produced  
From causes and conditions are real  
Was called ignorance by the Teacher;  
From it the twelve branches arise.

A mere non-existence of the self which is the object of negation, that is, the mere non-existence of an inherent existence as apprehended by such an ignorant consciousness, is called a selflessness, a truthlessness and an emptiness. Just this is the deep mode of subsistence or final mode of being of all phenomena; therefore, it is called an ultimate truth. A consciousness that cognises it is called a consciousness cognising an emptiness.

### Emptiness of emptiness

Question: Since emptinesses are ultimate truths, do emptinesses themselves exist?

Answer: An emptiness is the way of being, or mode of existence, of the phenomenon qualified by it. Therefore, if the phenomenon qualified by an emptiness does not exist, there is no emptiness of it. The empty nature of a phenomenon is established in relation to that phenomenon which is qualified by this empty nature, and a phenomenon qualified by

an empty nature is established in relation to its empty nature. Just as when a phenomenon qualified by an empty nature is analysed it is not found, so too when this phenomenon's empty nature itself is analysed, it is unfindable as well. Therefore, when we seek the object designated as 'an empty nature', this empty nature is also not found. It merely exists through the force of subjective designation done without analysis. Thus it does not inherently exist. The thirteenth chapter of Nagarjuna's Fundamental Text Called 'Wisdom' (XIII. 7-8) says:

If anything non-empty existed, then  
Something empty would also exist;  
If the non-empty does not exist  
At all, how could the empty do so?

The Conquerors said that emptiness  
Is the remover of all [bad] views;  
Those who view emptiness [as inherently existent]  
Were said to be incurable.

Also, Nagarjuna's Praise of the Supramundane (Lokatitastaya) says:

Since the ambrosia of emptiness is taught  
For the sake of forsaking all misconceptions,  
He who adheres to it [as inherently existent]  
Is strongly berated by you [the Buddha].

Therefore, when a tree, for instance, is analysed, the tree is not found, but its mode of being or emptiness is found. Then, when that emptiness is analysed, that emptiness also is not found, but the emptiness of that emptiness is found. This is called an emptiness of an emptiness. Thus, a tree is a conventional truth, and its mode of being is an ultimate truth. Further, when that ultimate truth becomes the basis of analysis and when its mode of being is posited, then that ultimate truth becomes the basis of qualification in relation to the quality that is its mode of being. Thus, there is even an explanation that in these circumstances an emptiness can be viewed as a conventional truth.

Though there are no essential differences among emptinesses, it is said that emptinesses are divided into twenty, eighteen, sixteen, or four types in terms of the bases qualified by emptiness. Briefly, all are included within these two categories: selflessness of persons and selflessness of other phenomena.

Emptiness is also a conventional truth when reified

Question: How does an emptiness appear to a mind when it ascertains an emptiness?

Answer: If one has a mistaken view of an emptiness, equating it with a vacuity which is a nothingness, this is not the ascertainment of an emptiness. Or, even if one has developed a proper understanding of an emptiness as merely a lack of inherent existence, still, when the vacuity which is a lack of inherent existence appears, one may subsequently lose sight of the original understanding. This vacuity then becomes a mere nothingness with the original understanding of the negation of inherent existence being lost completely.



Therefore, this is not the ascertainment of an emptiness either. Also, even if the meaning of an emptiness has been ascertained, but the thought, 'This is an emptiness,' appears, then one is apprehending the existence of an emptiness which is a positive thing. Therefore, that consciousness then becomes a conventional valid cogniser and not the ascertainment of an emptiness. The Condensed Perfection of Wisdom Sutra (Sancayagatha-prajnaparamita) says, 'Even if a Bodhisattva realises, "These aggregates are empty," he is acting on signs of conventionalities and does not have faith in the state of non-production.'

#### Emptiness is a non-affirming negative

Further, 'an emptiness' is a negative [an absence] which must be ascertained through the mere elimination of the object of negation, that is, inherent existence. Negatives are of two types: affirming negatives in which some other positive phenomenon is implied in place of the object of negation, and non-affirming negatives in which no other positive phenomenon is implied in place of the object of negation. An emptiness is an instance of the latter; therefore, a consciousness cognising an emptiness necessarily ascertains the mere negative or absence of the object of negation. What appears to the mind is a clear vacuity accompanied by the mere thought, 'These concrete things as they now appear to our minds do not exist at all.' The mere lack of inherent existence or mere truthlessness which is the referent object of this consciousness is an emptiness; therefore, such a mind ascertains an emptiness. Santideva's Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds (IX. 34-35) says:

When with the thought 'it does not exist' the thing analysed  
Is not apprehended [as inherently existent],  
How could there stand before the mind an [inherently existent] non-thing lacking  
A base [that is, an inherently existent emptiness without the object it qualifies]?

When [inherently existent] things  
And non-things do not stand before the mind,  
Since there is nothing else [inherently existent],  
Then with the intended objects [of the conception  
Of inherent existence] being non-existent, elaborations  
[Of duality and inherent existence] are extinguished.

If an emptiness were not a non-affirming negative but were either an affirming negative implying another phenomenon or a positive phenomenon itself, then a consciousness cognizing it would have apprehension [of an inherent existence] or would be involved with signs [of conventionalities]. Thus, the possibility of generating a conceiver of inherent existence would not be eliminated. In that case, the wisdom cognising emptiness would not be the antidote of all conceptions of inherent existence and would be incapable of eliminating the obstructions to enlightenment. Thinking of this, Santideva says in his Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds (IX. 110-111) :

[Question] When the analyser analysing [whether phenomena inherently exist]  
Analyses [and determines that they are empty of inherent existence],  
Because the analyser also is to be analysed,  
Would it not then be endless?

[Answer] If the objects of analysis [all phenomena in general]  
Have been analysed [and determined not to exist inherently],  
Then [for that mind] no [further inherently existent] basis [requiring more  
analysis] exists.  
Because the bases [which are the phenomena qualified by emptiness] do not  
inherently exist,  
[An object of negation], inherent existence and its negative  
Are not inherently produced, that too is called [the natural] nirvana.

Thus, viewing a base—self, other, and so forth—we ascertain the meaning of its being essentially or naturally at peace, free of inherent existence. If we become familiar with this, the objects viewed—self, other, and so forth—appear as illusion-like or dream-like falsities which, although not inherently existent, appear to be so.

### **Results of Understanding Emptiness**

#### Benefits of realizing emptiness: not being fooled by appearances

Question: What is the imprint or benefit of such an ascertainment of an emptiness?

Answer: Nagarjuna's Fundamental Text Called 'Wisdom (XXIV. 18) says:

That which is dependent-arising  
We explain as emptiness.  
This is dependent imputation;  
Just this is the middle path.

Thus, we understand the natural lack of inherent existence to be the meaning of dependent-arising and understand dependent-arising to be the meaning of the natural lack of inherent existence. Then, we ascertain that emptiness and dependent-arising accompany each other. Through the force of this ascertainment, conventional valid cognisers properly engage in that which is to be adopted and cease doing that which is to be discarded within the context of mere nominal existence. Perverse consciousnesses such as desire, hatred and so forth, generated through the force of adhering to objective existence or non-nominal existence, become gradually weaker and can finally be abandoned.

Let us explain this a little. If the actual experience of the view of emptiness has arisen, we can identify within our experience that whatever objects presently appear to our consciousnesses [eye, ear and so on], they all seem to be inherently existent. We can then know with certainty how the conceiver of inherent existence is generated, and how—at the time of strong attention to these objects—it adheres to the way they appear, and posits them to be true. We will then further know that whatever afflictions are produced, such as desire, hatred, and so forth, a conceiver of inherent existence is acting as their basic cause. Moreover, we will ascertain clearly that this conceiver of inherent existence is a perverse consciousness that is mistaken with respect to its referent object. We will know with certainty how the mode of apprehension of this consciousness lacks a valid foundation. We will also know that its opposite, a consciousness which perceives a

selflessness, is a non-perverse consciousness and that its mode of apprehension has the support of valid cognition.

Thus, the glorious Dharmakirti says in his Commentary on (Dignaga's) 'Compendium on Valid Cognisers' (Pramanavarttika, Chapter I) :

An ascertaining mind and a falsely superimposing mind  
Are entities of eradicator and that which is eradicated. And  
(Chapter I):  
All [defects such as desires] have as their antidote [the wisdom of  
selflessness]  
In that their decrease and increase depend [on the increase and decrease of that  
wisdom].  
So through familiarity the mind assumes the nature of  
That wisdom—thus in time the contaminations are extinguished.

A conceiver of inherent existence and a consciousness that has a contradictory mode of apprehension are respectively the eradicated and eradicator. Therefore, it is natural that if one becomes stronger, the other will become weaker.

Nagarjuna's Praise of the Element of Superior Qualities (Dharmadhatustotra) says:

When a metal garment which has become stained with  
Contaminations and is to be cleansed by fire,  
Is put in fire, its stains  
Are burned but it is not,  
So, with regard to the mind of clear light  
Which has the stains of desire and so forth,  
Its stains are burned by the fire of wisdom  
But its nature, clear light, is not.

The Conqueror Maitreya's Sublime Science (Uttaratantra.) says:

Because the bodies of a perfect Buddha are emanated [to all sentient  
beings], because reality  
Is not differentiated [since it is the final nature of both Buddhas and sentient  
beings],  
And because [sentient beings] have the [natural and developmental]  
lineages [suitable  
To develop into a Truth Body and a Form Body],  
Then all embodied beings have the Buddha Nature.

Thus, not only is the ultimate nature of the mind unpolluted by contaminations, but also the conventional nature of the mind, that is, its mere clear knowing, is unpolluted by contaminations as well. Therefore, the mind can become either better or worse, and it is suitable to be transformed. However, no matter how much one cultivates the bad consciousnesses that provide a support for the conception of inherent existence, they cannot be cultivated limitlessly.

Cultivation of the good consciousnesses, on the other hand, which are opposite to those and which have the support of valid cognition, can be increased limitlessly. On the basis of this reason, we can ascertain that the stains on the mind can be removed. Thus, the final nature of a mind that has removed its stains so that they will never be generated again is liberation. Therefore, we can become certain that liberation is attainable. Not only that, but just as the contaminations of the afflictions are removable, so are their predispositions as well. Therefore, we can be certain that the final nature of the mind with all the contaminations of the afflictions and their predispositions removed is attainable. This is called a non-abiding nirvana or a Body of Truth. Thereby it is generally established that liberation and omniscience exist.

From this we gain faith in the other teachings of the Buddha

Nagarjuna's Fundamental Text Called 'Wisdom' (I. Invocation) says:

I bow down to the perfect Buddha,  
The best of teachers, who propounded  
That what dependently arises  
Has no cessation, no production,  
No annihilation, no permanence, no coming,  
No going, no difference, no sameness,  
Is free of the elaborations [of inherent  
Existence and of duality] and is at peace.

Thus Buddha, the Blessed One, from his own insight taught this dependent-arising as his slogan—showing that because phenomena are dependent-arising, they have a nature of emptiness, free of the eight extremes of cessation and so forth. If Buddha is thus seen as a reliable being who without error taught definite goodness [liberation and omniscience] along with its means, one will consequently see that the Blessed One was not mistaken even with respect to teaching high status [the pleasures of lives as men and gods] along with its means.

The glorious Dharmakirti says in his Commentary on (Dignaga's) 'Compendium on Valid Cognisers' (Chapter I) :

Because [it is established by common inference that Buddha's word] is not  
mistaken with regard to the principal meaning [the four truths],  
[Due to similarity, Buddha's word] can be inferred [to be not mistaken] with  
regard to other [extremely obscure subjects as well].

Also, Aryadeva's Four Hundred (Chapter XII) says:

Whoever has generated doubt  
Towards what is not obvious in Buddha's word  
Will believe that only Buddha [is omniscient]  
Based on [his profound teaching of] emptiness.

In brief, through coming to know the Conqueror's scriptures as well as their commentaries, which are all aimed at the achievement of high status and definite

goodness, we will attain faith in them. Thereby, induced by valid cognition, we will generate from our hearts faith and respect for the teacher of these scriptures, the Blessed Buddha, and for his followers, the great masters of India. Similarly, we will be able also to generate firm, unchangable faith and respect for the spiritual guides who presently teach us the paths without error and for the Spiritual Community who are our friends abiding properly on the paths on which the Teacher himself travelled. The master Candrakirti says in his Seventy Stanzas on the Three Refuges (Trisaranasaptati) :

The Buddha, his Doctrine and the Supreme Community  
Are the refuges of those wishing liberation.

Thus, we will easily generate certainty that the Three Refuges are the sole source of refuge for those wishing liberation. Those bothered by suffering will go to the Three Excellences for refuge and will generate a firm, indestructible attitude of wishing for liberation, thinking, 'If I could only attain liberation!' Similarly, having understood the suffering condition of all other sentient beings from our own experience of suffering, we will generate the wish to establish them as well in liberation, that is., in emancipation from suffering, and in omniscience. For the sake of accomplishing this, an extremely steady and very powerful aspiration to enlightenment, wishing to attain enlightenment ourselves, will be produced, and the ability to generate this attitude will arise.

#### The three levels of motivation

If our motivation is that of a Hinayanist, working only for our own release from cyclic existence, our progress is as follows. First, we establish as our foundation any of the forms of ethics for householders or monks. Then with this foundation as our base, when we are on the path of accumulation, we familiarise ourselves again and again with the subtle, deep and very meaningful view of emptiness explained above through hearing and thinking about it. Thereby, our viewing consciousness gradually develops into the wisdom which arises from meditation and which is the union of calm abiding and special insight cognising an emptiness conceptually. In this way, the path of preparation is attained.

Then, gradually we attain the path of seeing, a true path, a jewel of doctrine, perceiving emptiness directly. [Thus paths in this context are states of consciousness leading to a nirvana, and] through the path of seeing acting as an antidote, we begin to attain true cessations of suffering. These true cessations are states of having utterly abandoned forever both true sources of suffering, such as intellectually acquired conceptions of inherent existence, as well as true sufferings, such as rebirths in bad migrations. That which is abandoned in both cases follows a progression of increasing refinement. Thus, through the path of meditation, which is a further familiarisation with the truth, i.e., emptiness, already seen, we attain step by step the true cessations, which are states of having utterly abandoned forever the innate afflictions, again beginning with the gross ones. Finally, when we attain liberation, which is the state of having abandoned the subtlest of the small afflictions together with their seeds, the travelling of our own path [as a Hinayanist] has finished. Thus is realised the stage of no more learning, a position reached in the Hinayana by a Foe Destroyer [or arhan, the chief enemy being the conception of inherent existence].

When our motivation is to attain highest enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings,

the wisdoms of hearing, thinking, and meditating, directed towards the meaning of emptiness, are generated in such a way that they are accompanied by the skilful means of the perfections [giving, ethics, patience, effort, concentration, and wisdom], which arise from this Mahayana motivation. The view becomes more and more profound, and when emptiness is cognised directly, the path of seeing, and simultaneously the wisdom of the first stage of the Mahayana, are both attained. The first of the accumulations of wisdom and merit, which takes one countless aeon [begun on the path of accumulation], is thus completed. As was previously explained, we then begin to realise the true cessations, which are states of having utterly abandoned forever the intellectually acquired conceptions of inherent existence and so on. Then, during the seven impure Bodhisattva stages, the accumulations of merit and wisdom are amassed over a second countless aeon.

During the three pure stages we begin the gradual abandonment of the obstructions to simultaneous cognition of all objects of knowledge. These obstructions are the predispositions that have been established by the conception of inherent existence and the subtle bad habits produced by them. When the third accumulation over a countless aeon is completed, a Body of Truth, a true cessation, which is the state of having utterly abandoned forever all types of defects, is attained. The Three Bodies of Truth, Complete Enjoyment, and Emanation are simultaneously manifested, and the position of Buddhahood, which is the perfection of wisdom, love, and power, is realised.

Moreover, if we have trained our mental continuum well by means of: 1 the thought definitely to leave cyclic existence, 2 the altruistic aspiration to highest enlightenment, and 3 the correct view of emptiness, and, in addition, have the fortune of having completed well the causal collections of both merit and wisdom [then we are qualified to enter the tantric path]. If from among the quick paths of Secret Mantra we advance through any of the paths of the three lower tantras, we will become enlightened more quickly [than had we followed the sutra paths alone]. Enlightenment is speedily attained through the power of special means for achieving a Form Body and through the quick achievement of the yoga of the union of calm abiding and special insight, and so forth. Further, on the path of the fourth and highest tantra we learn, in addition to the former practices, to differentiate the coarse, subtle, and extremely subtle winds [energies] and consciousnesses. The extremely subtle mental consciousness itself is generated into the entity of a path consciousness, and through cultivating it, the consciousness cognising emptiness becomes extremely powerful. Thus, the highest tantra has the distinguishing feature of making the abandonment of obstructions extremely swift.

### **How to “Practice” Emptiness**

#### How to internalise the view of emptiness

Let us speak briefly about how to internalise the view of emptiness. Meditation on the view of emptiness is done for the sake of abandoning obstructions; therefore, a vast collection of merit is needed. Further, to amass such through the rite of the seven branches encompasses much and has great purpose. The seven branches are prostrating, offering, revealing our own faults, admiring our own and others' virtues, petitioning the Buddhas to teach, entreating the Buddhas to remain in the world, and dedicating the merit of such to all sentient beings.

With regard to the field for amassing the collection of merit, it is permissible to do whatever suits our own inclinations, either directing our mind towards the actual Three Excellences in general or towards any particular object of refuge that is visualised in front of ourselves. [For this see the Precious Garland, 466-85 in volume 2 of this series.]

Then, after we petition the refuges for help in generating the view of emptiness in our continuum, the way to conduct the actual meditation session is as follows.

If initially we meditate on the selflessness of the person, it is said to be easier for meditation, because the subject [is continually present].

Therefore, we should ascertain well how the meditator appears to our mind in the thought, 'Now I am meditating on the view of emptiness.' We should ascertain well how the 'I' appears to the mind when the 'I' experiences pleasure or pain. We should also ascertain well the mode of the adherence to the 'I'. Based on that, we should analyse the way the 'I' exists as was explained above. Gradually our understanding and experience of the view of emptiness becomes more profound, and when we engage in analysis at that point, the thought will arise, 'The independent mode of appearance of the "I", such as previously appeared, is utterly non-existent.' At that time, we should set our mind single-pointedly for a period of time on just that clear vacuity which is the mere negative of the object of negation and then perform stabilising meditation without analysis. If our mind's mode of apprehension of this clear vacuity of the negation loosens slightly [and this vacuity starts to become a mere nothingness], then we should again perform analytical meditation on the 'I' as before. Alternately sustaining analytical and stabilising meditation thus serves as a means of transforming the mind.

If through having analysed the 'I' a little understanding of emptiness arises, we should then analyse the mental and physical aggregates in dependence on which the 'I' is imputed. It is very important to analyse well the aggregates of forms, feelings, discriminations, compositional factors, and consciousnesses in general and the aggregate of consciousnesses in particular.

Further, it is in general difficult to identify even the conventional mode of being of the mind. Once the conventional nature of the mind—the mere clear knower—has been identified, then, through analysing its nature, finally we will gradually be able to identify the ultimate nature of the mind. If that is done, there is great progress unlike anything else.

At the beginning we should meditate for half an hour. When we rise from the session and various good and bad objects appear, benefit and harm are manifestly experienced. Therefore, we should develop as much as we can the realisation that these phenomena do not exist objectively and are mere dependent-arising of appearances, like illusions [in that they only seem to be inherently existent].

We should meditate in this way in four formal sessions: at sunrise, in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Or, if possible, we should meditate in six or eight or more sessions, scheduling them at equal intervals throughout the day and night. If this is not possible, we should meditate in only two sessions, in the morning and the evening. When our understanding and experience of the view of emptiness become a little stronger,

ascertainment of the view will arise spontaneously during all activities, when we are going, wandering, sleeping, or staying. Also, since without a calm abiding directed toward an emptiness there is no chance for generating a special insight that cognises an emptiness, it is definitely necessary to seek a calm abiding. Therefore, we should learn its methods from other books.

If we do not wish merely to know intellectually about the view of emptiness, but rather wish to experience it ourselves in our own continuum, we should build a firm foundation for this through what has been explained above.

Then, according to our mental ability we should hear and consider both the sutras and treatises which teach the profound view of emptiness as well as the good explanations of them by the experienced Tibetan scholars in their commentaries. Together with this, we should learn to make our own ways of generating experience of emptiness accord with the precepts of an experienced wise man.

Through the collections of virtues arising from my effort here  
May all sentient beings wishing happiness, myself and others,  
Attain the eye which sees reality, free of extremes,  
And proceed to the land of enlightenment.

---

*This has been written for the sake of helping in general those with burgeoning intellect in the East and West and in particular those who, though they wish to know the very profound and subtle meaning of emptiness or selflessness, either do not have the opportunity to study the great Madhyamika books or cannot read and understand the treatises existing in the Tibetan language. Thus, it has been written mainly with the intent of easy comprehension and for the sake of easy translation into other languages. May this which has been written by the Buddhist monk, Tenzin Gyatso, bring virtuous goodness.*