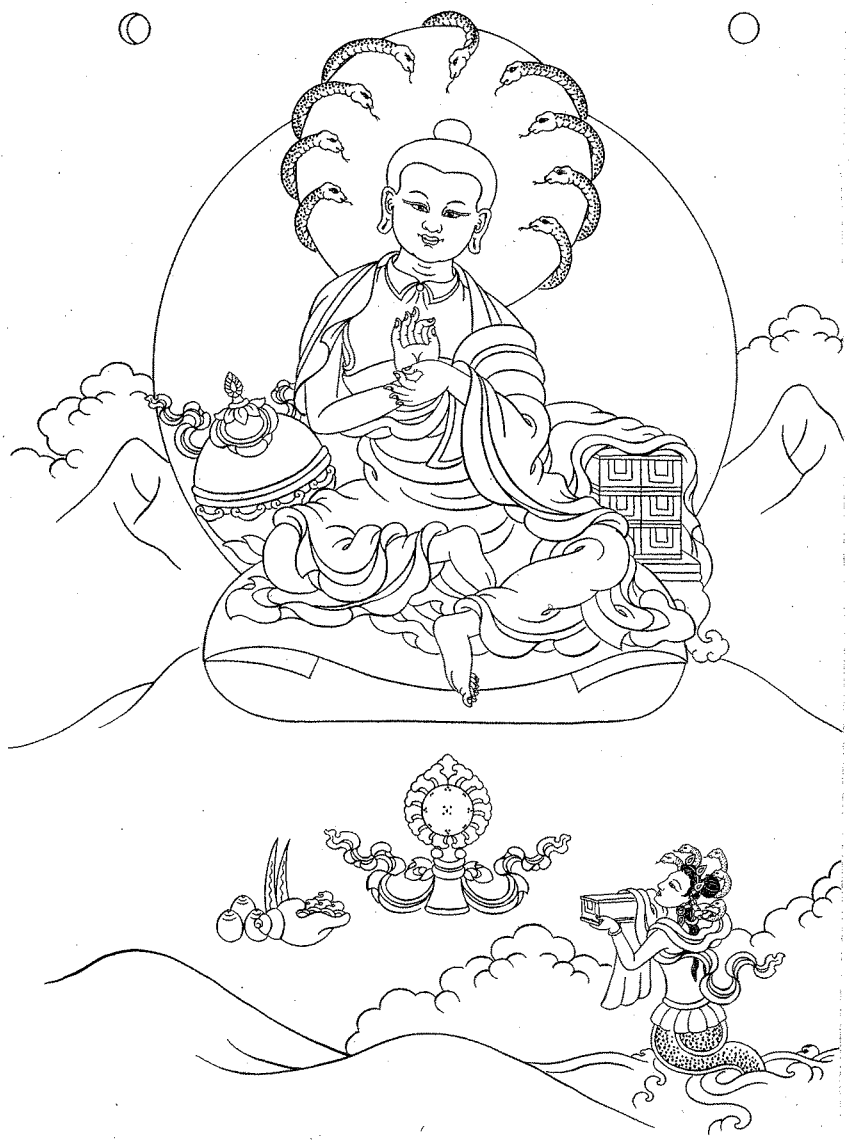
- Radical Rejection -
Parting from Extreme Views about Reality

A Graduate Level Course
Based upon the Madhyamakavatara by Chandrakirti
With Commentary by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche
And Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche

Part One: Madhyamaka & The Mahayana Middle Way

Sourcebook



Nāgārjuna

- RADICAL REJECTION -
PARTING FROM EXTREME VIEWS ABOUT REALITY

A Graduate Level Course
Based upon the Madhyamakavatara by Chandrakirti
With Commentary by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche
And Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche

PART ONE
MADHYAMAKA & THE MAHAYANA MIDDLE WAY

SOURCEBOOK

Radical Rejection
Parting from Extreme Views about Reality

A Graduate Level Course
Based upon the Madhyamakavatara by Chandrakirti
With Commentary by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche
And Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche

Part One: Madhyamaka
The Mahayana Middle Way

Sourcebook Table of Contents

Radical Rejection
Parting from Extreme Views about Reality

A Graduate Level Course
Based upon the Madhyamakavatara by Chandrakirti
With Commentary by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche
And Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche

Part One: Madhyamaka - the Mahayana Middle Way

Overview

I. Threefold Logic:
A. Ground: Belief in True Existence
B. Path: The Four Skills of Madhyamaka
C. Fruition: Indivisibility of Dependent Arising and Emptiness

II. Themes of The Five Courses:
A. Aspects of emptiness and its path
B. Refutation of truly existent things
C. Refutation of truly existent mind
D. Refutation of truly existent persons
E. Refutation of truly existent emptiness

III. Classes in Course One:
A. Intro, Review, Overview, Synopsis
B. Madhyamaka: Its Essence and Development
C. Compassion as the Basis
D. Emptiness and the Path of the Madhyamakavatara
E. Developing the Potential: Generosity, Discipline, Patience, Exertion, Meditation
F. Obstacles to Realizing Emptiness: Types and Stages of Ignorance
G. The Two Truths and the Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction
H. Mipham's Four Skills and the Madhyamakavatara

IV. Sources:
A. Mipham and Chandrakirti, *Introduction to the Middle Way: A Commentary on Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara* , Trs. Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, Boston, 2002
B. Dzongsar Khyentse, *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara with commentary by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche,* Khyentse Foundation, 2003
C. Various Excerpts

V. Pre-Requisite Readings:
A. Chögyam Trungpa, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism,* Shambhala, Boston, 1987, "Shunyata" chapter, pp. 187-206
B. Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness,* Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal, Auckland, 2002

Miscellaneous Notes

Typical Class Schedule:
1. Compassion practice
2. Manjushri chant
3. Middle Way Songs
4. Review of prior material and readings
5. Main Presentation
6. Chanting of verses
7. Review charts/outlines
8. Discussion
9. Middle Way Songs
10. Dedication

Challenges:
1. Making a complex subject understandable
2. Making the volume of the material manageable
3. Making the somewhat arcane verbal logic relevant
4. Making the use of conceptuality effective

Basic Projects:
1. Compiling a glossary of relevant terms
2. Compiling suggestions for Dzongsar Rinpoche's Commentary
3. Compiling questions for the "Masters"

Advanced Projects:
1. Researching views from other commentaries
2. Suggesting selected related readings
3. Creating simple outlines and charts

Radical Rejection
Parting from Extreme Views about Reality

A Graduate Level Course
Based upon the Madhyamakavatara by Chandrakirti
With Commentary by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche
And Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche

Part One: Madhyamaka
The Mahayana Middle Way

Syllabus

I. Intro, Review, Overview, Synopsis

A. Topics:

1. Enlightenment, the fruition
2. Ignorance, the ground
3. Wisdom and compassion, the path
4. Obstacles - the two obscurations
5. Challenge - use of conceptuality to undermine the mind
6. Importance of refining the view and the role of study
7. The five main areas of advanced Buddhist study
8. Layers of understanding and the variety of practices
9. The path of vipashyana and how this course fits into it
10. Importance of compassion as the motivation
11. The downfall of pride, thinking we know what is going on
12. The main point of the path – selflessness
13. Identifying the self, the object of negation, as merely an imputation
14. Overview of the five course series and of this course
15. Overview of the text – the four major sections and the outline
16. Review of important terms
17. Practices of generating compassion, singing and chanting
18. Class format, times, q&a, etc.

II. Madhyamaka: Its Essence and Development

A. Topics:

1. Origins of Madhyamika and the Buddha's Silence
2. Emergence of the Mahayana
3. Development of the Madhyamika School
4. Nagarjuna and the Mulamadhyamakakarikas
5. Chandrakirti and the Madhyamakavatara

B. Required Readings:

1. Mipham: Introduction, pp. 4-20
2. Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, *The Sun of Wisdom: Teachings on the Noble Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, trs. & ed. by Ari Goldfield, Shambhala, Boston, 2003, Introduction, pp. ix-xxii

3. Total Required Reading: 30

III. Compassion as the Basis

A. Topics:
   1. Importance of compassion
   2. Three types of compassion
   3. Shravakas, Pratyekabuddhas and Bodhisattvas
   4. Bodhisattvas and their three causes
   5. The path of the Bodhisattva
   6. Bodhicitta – absolute and relative

B. Required Readings:
   1. Root Text: Verses 1:1-17, pp. 59-61
   2. Dzongsar: pp. 1-25
   3. Mipham: pp. 143-148
   4. Total Required Reading: 31 + verses

IV. Emptiness and the Path of the Madhyamakavatara

A. Topics:
   1. Qualities of Bodhisattvas
   2. Greatness of Mahayana and of Bodhisattvas
   3. Types of defilements
   4. Belief in true existence
   5. The four extreme views of reality
   6. Stages of the path – paths, bhumis, major highlights
   7. The path of vipashyana – three stages

B. Required Readings:
   1. Dzongsar: pp. 26-44
   2. Dzokchen Ponlop Rinpoche, *Bodhi*, Volume 6, No. 3, Nalandabodhi, Seattle, 2003, Appearing Yet Empty: The Middle Way View of Shunyata, pp. 26-29 and 44-50
   3. Total Required Reading: 29

V. Developing the Potential: Generosity, Discipline, Patience, Exertion, Meditation

A. Topics:
   1. Importance of developing Merit
   2. Generosity
   3. Discipline
   4. Patience
   5. Exertion
   6. Meditation

B. Required Readings:
   1. Root Text: Verses 2:1-10; 3:1-13; 4:1-2; 5:1-4; pp. 62-67
   2. Dzongsar: pp. 45-63
   3. Mipham: pp. 148-161
   4. Total Required Reading: 35 + verses

VI. Obstacles to Realizing Emptiness: Types and Stages of Ignorance

A. Topics:

1. How to approach the Madhyamakavatara
2. Types of clinging - true existence and characteristics
3. Use of logic and reasoning
4. Types of cognition
5. Importance of inference and its role in the path
6. Use of the logical syllogism
7. Three stages of analysis
8. The four alternatives
9. Dependent arising vs. true production
10. Types of self – persons and phenomena

B. Required Readings:
1. Root Text: Verses 6:1-7, pp. 68-69
2. Dzongsar: pp. 64-76 (top)
3. Mipham: pp. 161-165
4. Lonchen Yeshe Dorje, Kangyur Rinpoche, *Treasury of Precious Qualities: A Commentary on the Root Text of Jigme Lingpa Entitled The Quintessence of the Three Paths,* trs. Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, Boston, 2001, An Explanation of the Treasury of Dharma: A General Explanation of the Two Truths, pp. 252-263
5. Total Required Reading: 27

VII. The Two Truths and the Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction

A. Topics:
1. The Two Truths
2. Svatantrika and Prasangika - A Difference in Method
3. Buddhapalita, Bhavaviveka and Chandrakirti
4. Madhyamaka in Tibet
5. Mipham Rinpoche and the Svatantrika-Prasangika Distinction
6. Differences:
   a) In the way of viewing ultimate truth
   b) In the way of viewing relative truth

B. Optional Reading:
a) Dzongsar Commentary: pp. 76-81 (top)

C. Required Readings:
1. Mipham: pp. 20-42
2. Dzongsar: pp. 81-88 (top)
3. Total Required Reading: 29

VIII. Mipham's Four Skills & the Madhyamakavatara

A. Topics:
1. Identifying the object of negation
2. The three major characteristics of true existence:
   a) Permanent
   b) Independent
   c) Unitary
3. True existence and true production
4. The Four Skills of Madhyamaka

5. Refutation of the self of phenomena – of things as truly existent:
    a) Causation – the four extremes: self, other, both, neither
    b) Interdependence of subject and object - Cittamatra
6. Refutation of the self of persons – of the self as truly existent
    a) One or many – the chariot and the skandhas
7. Refutation of true existent emptiness
8. The equivalence of dependent arising and emptiness

B. Required Readings:
1. Reggie Ray, *Indestructible Truth,* Shambhala, Boston, 2000, The Practice of Madhyamaka, pp.398-413
2. Jeffrey Hopkins, *Emptiness Yoga: The Tibetan Middle Way,* Ed. Joe B. Wilson, Snow Lion, Ithaca, 1987, Bringing the Reasoning to Life, pp. 249-262
3. Total Required Reading: 26

Radical Rejection
Parting from Extreme Views about Reality

A Graduate Level Course
Based upon the Madhyamakavatara by Chandrakirti
With Commentary by Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche
And Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche

Summary Outline of the Five-Course Program

I. Madhyamaka and the Mahayana Middle Way (53 verses)

A. Threefold Logic:
   1. Ground: True Existence and True Arising
   2. Path: The Four Skills of Madhyamaka
   3. Fruition: Reality is Mere Appearance

B. Topics:
   1. The Four extreme views of reality
   2. Use of logical reasoning
   3. Bodhisattvas and their path
   4. The Madhyamakavatara and its path
   5. The Four Skills
   6. Basic aspects of emptiness
   7. Overview of the remaining four courses

C. The Text
   1. Introduction (v. 1:1-4)
   2. The First Five Bhumis (v. 1:4-5:4)
   3. Preamble to the Sixth Bhumi (v. 6:1-7)

D. Commentaries:
   1. Dzongsar: pp. 1-88
   2. Mipham: pp. 143-165
   3. Mipham Introduction: pp. 4-42

II. The Fiction of Cause and Result (58 verses)

A. Threefold Logic:
   1. Ground: Reality is Mere Appearance
   2. Path: Rejecting belief in truly existing things
   3. Fruition: Appearances are Mind

B. Topics:
   1. Dependent arising versus true arising
   2. Refuting production from the four alternatives
   3. Tenants – Samkya, Vaibhashika and Sautrantika

C. The Text:
   1. Phenomena do not arise from self (v. 6:8-13)
   2. Phenomena do not arise from other – Part I (v. 6:14-44)
   3. Phenomena do not arise from both self and other (v. 6:98)

4. Phenomena do not arise from no cause (v 6:99-103)
5. Dependent arising as the truth of all phenomena (v. 6:104-119)

D. Commentaries:
1. Dzongsar: pp. 88-154 and 211-245
2. Mipham: pp. 183-228 and 260-281

III. Mind Has Never Been Seen (52 verses)

A. Threefold Logic:
1. Ground: Appearances are Mind
2. Path: Rejecting belief in truly existing consciousness or mind
3. Fruition: Mind is empty

B. Topics:
1. Tenents – Cittamatra
2. Perception and categories of Mind
3. Interdependence of subject and object
4. Mind Only
5. Alayavijnana
6. The Three Natures

C. The Text:
1. Phenomena do not arise from Other – Part II, Refuting the Cittamatra Viewpoint (v. 6:45-97)

D. Commentaries:
1. Dzongsar: pp. 155-210
2. Mipham: pp. 228-260

IV. Things are Not as They Seem, Nor are They Otherwise (58 verses)

A. Threefold Logic:
3. Ground: Mind is empty
4. Path: Rejecting belief in truly existing persons
5. Fruition: Emptiness is spontaneously present

B. Topics:
1. A truly existing self must be either one or many
2. Abhidharmic analysis of the self into the dharmas/skandhas
3. Sevenfold analysis of the chariot

C. The Text:
1. Absence of Self in the Person (v. 6:120-178)

D. Commentaries:
1. Dzongsar: pp. 246-287
2. Mipham: pp. 282-309

V. The Myth of Emptiness (55 + 57 = 112 verses)

A. Threefold Logic:
1. Ground: Emptiness is spontaneously present
2. Path: Rejecting belief in truly existing emptiness (i.e. characteristics)
3. Fruition: Spontaneous presence is self liberated

B. Topics:
    1. Types and stages of emptiness
    2. Clinging to characteristics
    3. True interdependence
    4. The Bodhisattva Path
C. The Text:
    1. Emptiness as it is to be realized by the Mahayana (v. 6:179-223)
    2. The Final Four Bhumis (v. 7:1-10:1)
    3. The Result, Buddhahood (v. 11:1-51)
    4. Colophon and Dedication (v. 11:52-56)
D. Commentaries:
    1. Dzongsar: pp. 288-412
    2. Mipham: pp. 309-354

Chants & Songs
To Accompany Radical Rejection: Parting from Extreme Views
A Study of Chandrakirti's "Entering the Middle Way"

Manjushri Supplication

Through the blessings of awareness-emptiness, Prince Manjushri,
Open the eight treasures of courage, which descend from the expanse of wisdom,
So I may become the commander of the ocean
Of the dharma treasury of scripture and realization.
I supplicate Mipham, the melody of gentleness (Manjughosha).

Om Arapachana Dhi Hum

Friends

Friends are empty forms just like a water moon
To think of them as being truly real
Will only make you many sufferings increase

To know they're empty forms like a watermoon
Will make illusion-like samadhi increase
Compassion free of clinging will increase

And non-referential view will also increase
And meditation that's fixation-free
And conduct free of doer deed increase

Of all the many marvels, this by far the most marvelous
Of all the many wonders, this the most wonderful

Composed by Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated and arranged by Jim Scott.

From Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way

Like a dream, like an illusion,
Like a city of gandharvas,
That's how birth, and that's how living,
That's how dying are taught to be

All These Forms

All these forms – appearance emptiness
Like a rainbow with its shining glow
In the reaches of appearance emptiness
Just let go and go where no mind goes

Every sound is sound and emptiness
Like the sound of an echo's roll
In the reaches of sound and emptiness
Just let go and go where no mind goes

Every feeling is bliss and emptiness
Way beyond what words can show
In the reaches of bliss and emptiness
Just let go and go where no mind goes

All awareness – awareness emptiness
Way beyond what thoughts can know
In the reaches of awareness and emptiness
Let awareness go – oh, where no mind goes

Composed by Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche in the Garden of Translation near the great Stupa in Nepal.
Translated and arranged by Jim Scott

Note: The Eight Great Treasures of Confidence/Courage:

1. Not forgetting is the treasury of memory
2. Discriminating well is the treasure of intelligence
3. Internalizing the meaning of all the sutras is the treasure of realization
4. Retaining everything one has heard is the treasure of perfect recall
5. Satisfying everyone with valuable instructions is the treasure of confidence
6. Guarding the noble dharma is the treasure of the dharma
7. Not letting the lineage of the three jewels be broken is the treasure of bodhicitta
8. Being able to remain in the unborn nature is the treasure of accomplishment

An Authentic Portrait of the Middle Way
A Vajra Song of Realization of the Lord of Yogins Milarepa

From the standpoint of the truth that's genuine
There are no ghosts, there are not even buddhas,
No meditator and no meditated,
No paths and levels traveled and no signs,
And no fruition bodies and no wisdoms,
And therefore there is no nirvana there,
Just designations using names and statements.

All animate, inanimate—the three realms,
Unborn and nonexistent from the outset,
No base to rest on, do not coemerge,
There is no karmic act, no maturation,
So even the name "samsara" does not exist.

That's the way these are in the final picture,
But oh, if sentient beings did not exist,
What would the buddhas of three times all come from?
Since fruition with no cause—impossible!
So the standpoint of the truth that's superficial
Is samsara's wheel, nirvana past all grief.
It all exists, that is the Sage's teaching.

Then what exists appearing to be things,
And their nonexistence, reality that's empty,
Are essentially inseparable, one taste,
And therefore there is neither self-awareness
Nor awareness of what's other anywhere.

All of this a union vast and spacious,
And all of those skilled in realizing this
Do not see consciousness, they see pure wisdom,
Do not see sentient beings, they see buddhas,
Don't see phenomena, they see their essence,
And out of this compassion just emerges
Retention, powers, fearlessness, and all
The qualities embodied by a buddha
Just come as if you had a wishing jewel—
This is what I, the yogi, have realized.

From Chandrakirti's Entering the Middle Way

There are two ways of seeing every thing,
The perfect way and the false way,
So each and every thing that has ever been found
Holds two natures within.

And what does perfect seeing see?
It sees the suchness of all things.
And false seeing sees the relative truth—
This is what the perfect Buddha said.

From Deshin Shekpa

The suchness of samsara is nirvana,
The suchness of thoughts is wisdom,
Beyond a nature of one or many,
May you have the intelligence of realizing dharmata.

From Shantideva's Entering the Bodhisattva's Conduct

Then wanderers, these dream-like beings, what are they?
If analyzed they're like a banana tree.
One cannot make definitive distinctions
Between transcending misery and not.

From the Sutra of the Noble Collection

Know the five skandhas are like an illusion
Don't separate the illusion from the skandhas
Free of thinking that anything is real
This is perfect wisdom's conduct at its best!

From the King of Samadhi Sutra

All the images conjured up by a magician
The horses, elephants and chariots in his illusions
Whatever may appear there, know that none of it is real
And it's just like that with everything there is!

Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated by Ari Goldfield and Jim Scott.

The Song of the Profound Definitive Meaning Sung on the Snowy Range

Supreme guru, I bow down at your feet
The siddhis of blessings come straight from the dakinis
Samaya's nectar is the most nourishing drink

Your offering of faith has kept me so healthy
This way of gathering merit it works quite well

For the mind that masters view the emptiness dawns
In the content seen not even an atom exists
A seer and seen refined until they're gone
This way of realizing view, it works quite well

When meditation is clear light river flow
There is no need to confine it to sessions and breaks
Meditator and object refined until they're gone
This heart bone of meditation, it beats quite well

When you're sure that conduct's work is luminous light
And you're sure that interdependence is emptiness
A doer and deed refined until they're gone
This way of working with conduct, it works quite well

When biased thinking has vanished into space
No phony facades, eight dharmas, nor hopes and fears,
A keeper and kept refined until they're gone
This way of keeping samaya, it works quite well

When you've finally discovered your mind is dharmakaya
And you're really doing yourself and others good
A winner and won refined until they're gone
This way of winning results, it works quite well

From the Tibetan Text at pages 222-3. Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated and arranged by Jim Scott and Ari Goldfield

Dedication Song

All you sentient beings I have a good or bad connection with
As soon as you have left this confused dimension
May you be born in the west in Sukhavati
And once you're born there complete the bhumis and the paths.

Composed by Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. Translated by Jim Scott

I.

Radical Rejection
Parting from Extreme Views about Reality

Important Terms

1. Historical Persons:
   - Shakyamuni
   - Nagarjuna & Aryadeva – Profound Lineage
   - Maitreya & Asanga – Vast Lineage
   - Buddhapalita & Bhavaviveka
   - Chandrakirti
   - Shantideva
   - Shantarakshita
   - Mipham
2. Categories of Awakened Ones:
   - Tathagatha, Buddha
   - Bodhisattva
   - Arhat
   - Shravaka
   - Pratyekabuddha
3. Texts:
   - Prajnaparamita sutras
   - Mulamadhyamakakarika
   - Madhyamakavatara
4. Teachings:
   - Four Noble Truths
   - Karma
   - Five Skandhas
   - Dharmas
   - Prajna
   - Sunyata
   - Two truths – relative/conventional and ultimate/absolute
   - Two accumulations - Wisdom and Compassion
   - Two obstructions – to liberation and omniscience
   - Two types of self – persons and phenomena
5. Schools/Stages
   - Sravaka – Vaibhashika & Sautrantika
   - Cittamatra, Yogacara, Vijnanavada
   - Svatantrika Madhamika
   - Prasangika Madhamika
   - Rangtong & Shentong

The Madhyamakavatara
By Chandrakirti

Summary Outline of the Text with Verses
Padmakara Version

VI. Introduction (v. 1:1-4), p. 59
- A. Title and Homages
- B. Praise of Compassion (v. 1:1-2)
- C. The three types of compassion (v. 1:3-4)

VII. The First Five Bhumis (v. 1:5-5:4), pp. 60-67
- A. The First Bhumi, Complete Joy (v. 1:4-17), pp. 60-61
- B. The Second Bhumi, Without Stain (v. 2:1-10), pp. 62-63
- C. The Third Bhumi, Giving Out Light (v. 3:1-13), pp. 64-65
- D. The Fourth Bhumi, Dazzling with Light (v. 4:1-2), pp. 66
- E. The Fifth Bhumi, Difficult to Overcome/Practice (v. 5:1-4), pp. 67

VIII. The Sixth Bhumi, Advancing/Knowing Clearly (v. 6:1-226)

A. Overview (v. 6:1-7), pp. 68-69

B. Establishing Emptiness by Rational Demonstration (v. 6:8-178)

1. Absence of Self in Phenomena (v. 6:8-119)

a) Refuting the Four Extreme Theories of Genesis (v. 6:8-103)

(1) Phenomena do not arise from Self (v. 6:8-13), 69-70

(a) On the Ultimate Level (v. 6:8-11), p. 69

(b) On the Conventional Level (v. 6:12-13), pp. 69-70

(2) Phenomena do not arise from Other (v. 6:14-97), pp. 70-74

(a) From viewpoint of Absolute Truth (v. 6:14-31), pp. 70-4

(b) From the point of view of Relative Truth (v. 6:32), p. 72

(c) Benefits of this analysis (v. 6:33-44), pp. 72-74

(d) Refuting Cittamatra Viewpoint (v. 6:45-97), pp. 74-81

(3) Phenomena do not arise from both Self & Other (v. 6:98), p. 82

(4) Phenomena do not arise from no cause (v 6:99-103), p. 82

b) Dependent arising as truth of all phenomena (v. 6:104-119), p. 82-85

2. Absence of Self in the Person (v. 6:120-178), p. 85-93

a) Preamble (v. 6:120), p. 85

b) Refuting the person as something substantial (v. 6:121-140)

(1) Refuting that the person exists with five aspects (v. 6:121-145)

(a) Self and aggregates are not different (v. 6:121-125) p. 85

(b) Self and aggregates not the same (v. 126-141) pp. 85-88

(c) Self & aggregates not support & supported (v. 6:142) p. 88

(d) Self does not possess the aggregates (v. 6:143), p. 88

Types of Existence in Buddhist Philosophy
From the Prasangika-Madhyamaka View Point

1. Inherent existence

Inherent existence (svabhaavasiddhi), is said to mean existence as the object's basis of imputation. For instance, legs and top are the basis of imputation of a table, but are not the table imputed onto them, and thus the table is said to lack inherent existence. Inherent existence is a mode of existence wrongly imputed on objects.

2. True existence

True existence (satyasat), or ultimate existence (paramaarthasiddhi), is said to mean existence independent from the object's appearance to a consciousness apprehending it. For instance, a table does not become a table until it appears to a consciousness apprehending table, and thus lacks true or ultimate existence.

3. Natural existence

Natural existence (svalak.san.asiddhi) is said to mean existence as the referent of a name and a conception. For instance, apart from the mere name and conception table, a table cannot be found, and thus a table is said to lack natural existence.

4. External existence

External existence, or the existence of external objects (baayaartha), or duality (dvaya) is said to mean the existence of the object as a different entity from the mind apprehending it. For instance, because all objects are nothing but mental images, like dreams, they are said to lack duality.

5. Imputed existence

Imputed existence (prajñaptisat) means an object's existence as a mere imputation, and not as its basis of imputation. Imputed existence entails the object's non-inherent existence. The "object's non-existence as its basis of imputation" is the object's emptiness of inherent existence. Thus, imputed existence entails emptiness of inherent existence and vice-versa.

6. Substantial Existence

When an object is either broken down physically or mentally divided into parts, the awareness of that object is not cancelled but remains.

7. Self-nature

Self-nature (svabhaava) may have several meanings. It may mean inherent existence; it may mean an object's conventional nature, such as the heat with respect to fire; it may also mean an object's ultimate nature, its lack of inherent existence.

In the context of Cittamatra, it is said that the duality of subject and object lacks self-nature because it does not exist, being just imagined nature (parikalpita-svabhaava); that the imagination of such duality lacks self-nature because it is other-powered, or dependent on causes (paratantra-svabhaava); and that the perpetual absence of the imagined in the imagination, or a thoroughly achieved nature (parini.spanna-svabhaava), lacks self-nature because it is a selflessness (anaatman), a self of phenomena being defined as duality.

8. Conventional Existence

According to Prasangikas, imputed and substantial existence are the same as conventional existence (sa.mv.rtisat), whereas for all other Buddhist tenet systems conventional existence entails inherent existence. From a Prasangika viewpoint, there is just one type of existence - imputed or conventional existence, all other types being denied.

Stages in the Analysis of Emptiness

1. Vaibhashika – Moments & Particles

When objects are destroyed or mentally dissected,
Nothing remains for mind to know.
Compounded objects and durations of consciousness are false,
The partless and point instants are genuinely existent.

2. Sautrantika – Generally and Specifically Characterized Phenomena

Whatever can perform its function ultimately
Is a specifically characterized phenomena.
Everything else is generally characterized.
These are ultimate and relative existents.

3. Cittamatra – Non-Dual Mind Only

That which has parts does not exist; subtle particles also are not existent.
Appearances apart from mind cannot be observed.
All experiences are like dreams.
Consciousness free from perceiver and perceived exists as the ultimate.

4. Svatantrika Madhyamaka – Ultimate Emptiness

Appearances exist only conventionally – they are like illusions.
Ultimately, nothing exists – it is like space.
Where there is observation - that is conventional truth.
That which is free from all observers and observed is ultimate truth.

5. Prasangika Madhyamaka – Freedom from Conceptuality

That which is imagined by mind is the conventional truth;
It is expressed following worldly customs.
Ultimate truth is free from conceptual elaborations –
It is beyond thought and expression.

6. Shentong Madhyamaka – Supremely Endowed Awareness

Imagined experiences are not true even conventionally,
Dependent natures are mere designations, only conventionally true.
Actual genuine truth is the thoroughly perfected nature -
Self-aware, primordial awareness.

Chandrakirti's Sevenfold Analysis
For the Emptiness of Self in Persons

First, ascertain the object to be negated. Then:

1. Realizing that the self is not other than the skandhas
2. Realizing that the self is not the same as the skandhas
3. Realizing that the self does not possess the skandhas
4. Realizing that the self does not depend upon the skandhas
5. Realizing that the skandhas do not depend upon the self
6. Realizing that the self is not the mere collection of the skandhas
7. Realizing that the self is not the shape of the skandhas

Result: realizing that the self is not inherently existent but is a mere imputation onto the skandhas

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.

Radical Rejection
Parting from Extreme Views about Reality

Primary Sources on the Madhyamakavatara

Texts for this Course:

1. Jamgon Mipham Namgyal, *Introduction to the Middle Way: A Commentary on Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara,* Trs. Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, Boston, 2002
2. Dzongsar Khyentse, *Introduction to the Middle Way: Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara with commentary by Dzongsar Jamyang Khyentse Rinpoche,* Khyentse Foundation, 2003

Other Translations of the Root Text:

3. Huntington, C.W. Jr., *The Emptiness of Emptiness*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989. (Full translation of the Madhyamakavatara from the Sanskrit)
4. Rabten, Geshe. Trans. by S. Batchelor. *Echoes of Voidness*. London: Wisdom Publications, 1983, 1986. (Translation of only Chapter Six of the Madhyamakavatara)

Other Commentaries on the Root Text:

5. Chandrakirti, *Explanation of the Supplement to the Middle Way Madhyamakavatara Bhashya by Chandrakirti,* Trs. Gelong Thubten Tsultrim (George Churinoff) and Acharya Thupten Jampa, FPMT, 1991/1994
6. Ponlop Rinpoche, The Dzogchen, *Commentary on The Chariot of the Takpo Kagyu Siddhas: The Quintessential Oral Instructions of Glorious Tusum Khyenpa Explaining [Chandrakirti's] Entrance to the Middle Way by Mikyo Dorje,* Nitartha Institute, 1997, 1998, 1999 & 2000. (Ponlop Rinpoche's commentary to Mikyo Dorje's commentary to the entire Madhyamakavatara)
7. Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, *Commentary to Chandrakirti's Entrance to the Middle Way*, Shenpen Osel, Volume 5, Number 2 & 3, Kagyu Osel Shenpen Choling, Seattle, December, 2001
8. Tsongkapa, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism,* Trs. Jeffrey Hopkins, Gabriel/Snow Lion, Valois, NY, 1980. (Tsongkhapa's commentary on Chapters One to Five of the Madhyamakavatara)
9. Kensure Yeshey Tupden, *Path to the Middle: Oral Madhyamika Philosophy in Tibet*, Trs. Anne Klien and Jeffrey Hopkins. (Tsongkhapa's commentary on verses 6:1-7 of the Madhyamakavatara)
10. Tsongkhapa, *Lama Tsongkhapa's Illumination of the Thought (dgongs pa rab gsal), Chapter 6, Verse 8 onward*, Trs. Joan Nicell and Thubten Sherab Sherpa, FPMT Masters Program (Tsongkhapa's commentary on verses 6:8 onward of the Madhyamakavatara)
11. Stoter-Tillerman, Jingen and Tsering, Acharya Tashi, *Rendawa Shonnu Lodro's Commentary on the Entry into the Middle - Lamp which Elucidates Reality,* Central Institute of Higher Tibetan Studies, Sarnath, 1997 (Commentary by an early Sakya Master)
12. Geshe Kelsang Gyatso, *Ocean of Nectar: The True Nature of all Things*, Tharpa Publications, Ulverston, 1995/2003

A Bibliography on Madhyamaka

Āryadeva and Gyel-tsap. Trans. by Ruth Sonam. *Yogic Dees of Bodhisattvas.* Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1994

Batchelor, Stephen. Trans. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life.* Trans. from the Tibetan of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra.* Dharamsala: LTWA, 1987

Batchelor, Stephen, *Verses From the Center: A Buddhist Vision of the Sublime,* Riverhead, New York, 2000

Brunnhölzl, Karl. Trans. *The Presentation of Grounds, Paths, and Results in the Causal Vehicle of Characteristics in* The Treasury of Knowledge (Shes bya kun khyab mdzod, *ch. 9.1 and 10.1).* Mt. Allison: Nitartha Institute, 2002a

——. Trans. *The Presentation of Madhyamaka in* The Treasury of Knowledge (Shes bya kun khyab mdzod, *Selected passages from ch. 6.3, 7.2, and 7.3).* Mt. Allison: Nitartha Institute, 2002b

Chandrakirti, *Explanation of the Supplement to the Middle Way Madhyamakavatara Bhashya by Chandrakirti,* Trs. Gelong Thubten Tsultrim (George Churinoff) and Acharya Thupten Jampa, FPMT, 1991/1994

Cozort, Daniel. *Unique Tenets of the Middle Way Consequence School.* Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1998 (not to be recommended)

Cozort, Daniel and Preston, Craig, *Buddhist Philosophy: Losang Gongchen's Short Commentary to Jamyang Shayba's Root Text on Tenets,* Snow Lion, Ithaca, 2003

Crosby, Kate and Skilton, Andrew. Trans. *Śāntideva. The Bodhicaryāvatāra.* Trans. from the Sanskrit of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995

Dalai Lama, *Stages of Meditation: Root Text by Kamalashila,* Trs. Geshe Lobsang Jordhen, Losang Choephel Ganchenpa and Jeremy Russell, Snow Lion, Ithaca, 2001

Della Santina, P. *Madhyamaka Schools in India. A Study of the Madhyamaka Philosophy and of the Division of the System into the Prāsaṅgika and Svatāntrika Schools.* New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1986a

Dreyfus, Georges B. J. *Recognizing Reality.* Albany: SUNY, 1997

Dreyfus, Georges B. J., McClintock, Sara L. ed. *The Svātantrika-Prāsaṅgika Distinction.* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2003

Dudjom Jikdral Yeshe Dorje, Trans. by Gyurme Dorje and M. Kapstein. *The Nyingma School of Tibetan Buddhism.* 2 Vol. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991

Eckel, Malcolm D. *Jñānagarbha's Commentary on the Distinction between the Two Truths.* Albany: SUNY, 1987

Garfield, Jay L. *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995

Gampopa, *Jewel Ornament of Liberation,* Trs. Khenpo Konchok Gyaltsen, Snow Lion, Ithaca, 1990

Guenther, Herbert V., *Buddhist Philosophy in Theory and Practice,* Shambhala, Boston and London, 1976. Includes 'Jigs-med dbang-po, "The Jewel Garland of the Dissertation on Philosophical Systems," and Mipham 'Jam-dbyangs rnam-rgyal rgya-mtsho, "The Summary of Philosophical Systems as Detailed in the Treasury which is like a Wishfulfilling Gem."

Gyamtso, Tsültrim, Khenpo Rinpoche. Trans. by Shenpen Hookham. *Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness.* Oxford: Longchen Foundation, 1988, and Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal, Auckland, 2002

——. *A Presentation of the Two Truths in the Three Yānas and the Mahāyāna Philosophical Traditions.* Halifax: Nālandā Translation Committee, 1992

——. *Ascertaining Certainty about the View,* Trs. Michele Martin, , Zhyisil Chokyi Ghatsal, Auckland, 2001

——. *The Sun of Wisdom: Teachings on the Noble Nagarjuna's Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way,* Trs. & Ed. Ari Goldfield, Shambhala, Boston, 2003

Harris, Ian Charles. *The Continuity of Madhyamaka and Yogācāra in Indian Mahāyāna Buddhism.* Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991

Hookham, Shenphen. *The Buddha Within.* Delhi: Sri Satguru Publications, Indian Edition 1992

Hopkins, Jeffrey. *Meditation on Emptiness.* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1983, 1996

——. *Maps of the Profound: Jam-yang-shay-ba's Great Exposition of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Views on the Nature of Reality,* Snow Lion, 2003

——. *Reflections on Reality - The Three Natures and Non-Natures in the Mind Only School: Dynamic Responses to Dzong-Ka-ba's The Essence of Eloquence,* Volume 2, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, 2002

——. *Emptiness in the Mind Only School of Buddhism: Dynamic Responses to Dzong-Ka-ba's The Essence of Eloquence,* Volume 1, University of California Press, Berkley and Los Angeles, 1999

——. *Emptiness Yoga: The Tibetan Middle Way,* Ed. Joe B. Wilson, Snow Lion, Ithaca, 1987

Huntington, C.W. Jr., *The Emptiness of Emptiness.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989

Inada, Kenneth. K. *Nāgārjuna. A Translation of his Mūlamadhyamakakārikā with an Introductory Essay.* Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1970

Indo-Tibetan Madhyamika Studies, Sambhota Series III, Tibet House, New Delhi, 1996

Kalupahana, David J. *Nāgārjuna. The Philosophy of the Middle Way.* Albany: SUNY, 1986

Klein, Anne. *Path To the Middle.* Albany: SUNY, 1994

Komito, David Ross, *Nagarjuna's "Seventy Stanzas": A Buddhist Psychology of Emptiness,* Commentary by Geshe Sonam Rinchen, Trs. Tenzin Dorjee and David Ross Komito, Snow Lion, Ithaca, 19??

Jamgon Kongtrul, *The Treasury of Knowledge Chapter Eight: The Progressive Classification Of the Training in Superior Samadhi Part One: The Stages of Meditation Of Shamatha and Vipashyana - The General Basis of All Samadhis,* Translated by Kiki Ekselius and Chryssoula Zerbini Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, Dhagpo Kagyu Ling, Montignac France, 1985

Lamrimpa, Gen, *Realizing Emptiness: Madhyamaka Insight Meditation,* Trs. B. Allan Wallace, Snow Lion, Ithaca, 1999

Lang, Karen, C., Trs. *Four Illusions: Chandrakirti's Advice to Travelers on the Bodhisattva Path,* Oxford University Press, 2003

Lindtner, Christian. *Nāgārjuniana.* Indiske Studier 4. Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1982a

Lonchen Yeshe Dorje, Kangyur Rinpoche, *Treasury of Precious Qualities: A Commentary on the Root Text of Jigme Lingpa Entitled The Quintessence of the Three Paths,* Trs. Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, Boston, 2001

Lopez, Donald S. Jr., *A Study of Svātantrika.* Ithaca: Snow Lion, 1987

Magee, William, *The Nature of Things: Emptiness and Essence in the Geluk World,* Snow Lion, Ithaca, 1999

Mipham and Chandrakirti, *Introduction to the Middle Way: A Commentary on Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara ,* Trs. Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, Boston, 2002

Murti, T.R.V. *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism.* A Study of the Madhyamaka System. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1955

Nagao, Gadjin M. Trans. by J. P. Keenan. *The Foundational Standpoint of Mādhyamika Philosophy.* Albany: SUNY, 1989

——. Trans. by L. Kawamura. *Mādhyamika and Yogācāra. A Study of Mahāyāna Philosophy.* Albany: SUNY, 1991

Napper, Elizabeth. *Dependent Arising and Emptiness.* Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1989

Newland, Guy. *The Two Truths.* Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1992

——. *Appearance and Reality. The Two Truths in the Four Buddhist Tenet Systems.* Ithaca: Snow Lion Publications, 1999

Padmakara Translation Group, *The Way of the Bodhisattva.* Trans. from the Tibetan of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra.* Boston: Shambhala Publ., 1997

Palden, Künzang, and Minyak, Künzang Sönam. *Wisdom: Two Buddhist Commentaries.* Trans. by Padmakara Translation Group. Saint-Leon-sur-Vezere: Editions Padmakara, 1993

John Whitney Pettit, Mipham's Beacon of Certainty: Illuminating the View of Dzogchen, The Great Perfection, Wisdom, Boston, 1999

Rabten, Geshe. Trans. by S. Batchelor. *Echoes of Voidness.* London: Wisdom Publications, 1983, 1986

Ramanan, K. Venkata, *Nagarjuna's Philosophy As Presented in the Maha Prajnaparamita Shastra,* Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi, 1975

Reggie Ray, *Indestructible Truth,* Shambhala, Boston, 2000, "The Second Turning: Madhyamaka," pp. 392-418

Robinson, Richard H. *Early Mādhyamika in India and China.* Reprint Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1976

Ruegg Seyfort, David. *The Literature of the Madhyamaka School of Philosophy in India.* Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1981. Definitely a classic

Śākya mchog ldan. Trans. by Iaroslav Komarowski. *Three Texts on Madhyamaka.* Dharamsala: LTWA, 2000

Singh, Jaidev, *An introduction to Madhyamaka Philosophy,* Motilal Banarsidass, Varanasi, 1968; Delhi 1976/78

Sopa, Geshe Lhundrup and Hopkins, Jeffrey, *Cutting Through Appearances: Practice and Theory in Tibetan Buddhism,* Snow Lion, 1989

Sprung, Mervyn. *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way.* Boulder: Prajñā Press, 1979

Stcherbatsky, Theodore and Singh, Jaideva, *The Conception of Buddhist Nirvana,* Motilal Banarsidas, Varanasi, 1968 & Delhi, 1977

Streng, Frederick J. *Emptiness. A Study in Religious Meaning.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967

Thrangu, Rinpoche. *The Open Door to Emptiness.* Trans. by Shakya Dorje. Vancouver: Publ. by Karma Thekchen Chöling, 1997

——. *Essential Practice: Lectures on Kamalashila's Stages of Meditation in the Middle Way School,* Trs. Jules B. Levinson, Snow Lion, Ithaca, 2002

Thurman, Robert A. F. Tsong Khapa's Speech of Gold in The Essence of True Eloquence: Reason and Enlightenment in the Central Philosophy of Tibet. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984

Traleg Kyabgon, Essence of Buddhism, Shambhala, Boston, 2001

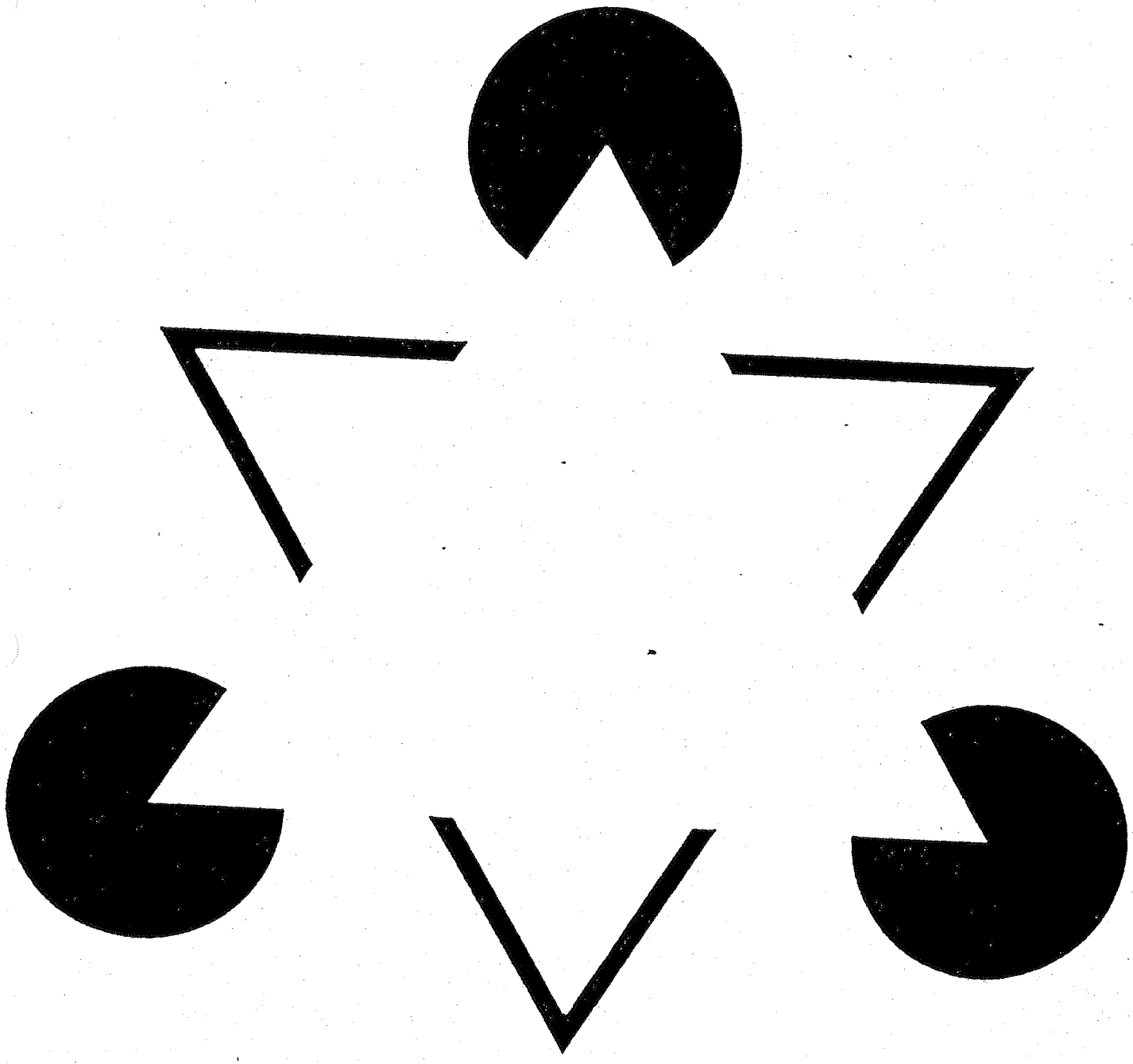
Trungpa, Chögyam, *Cutting Through Spiritual Materialism,* Shambhala, Boston, "Shunyata," pp. 187-221, 1987

Trungpa, Chögyam, *Glimpses of Shunyata,* Vajradhatu Publications, Halifax, 1993

Tsongkhapa, *Lama Tsongkhapa's Illumination of the Thought (dgongs pa rab gsal), Chapter 6, Verse 8 onward,* Trs. Joan Nicell and Thubten Sherab Sherpa, FPMT Masters Program

Tsongkhapa, *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment – Lam Rim Chen Mo by Tsong-Kha-pa,* Volume Three, Trs. The Lamrim Chenmo Translation Committee, Ed. By Joshua Cutler and Guy Newland, Snow Lion, Ithaca, 2002

Wilson, Joe, Chandrakirti's Sevenfold Reasoning: Meditation on the Selflessness of Persons, Library of Tibetan Works & Archives, Dharamsala, 1980



The Sun of Wisdom

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

❁ ❁ ❁ ❁ ❁

KHENPO TSÜLTRIM GYAMTSO

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 contained 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

you to see how wonderfully applicable they are to such a great variety of subjects. By reviewing these same basic reasonings as they apply to different subjects, your familiarity with them will grow and you will gain more and more certainty in their conclusions. Emptiness is the deepest and most subtle topic one could ever attempt to understand, so it is never enough to hear or read teachings on emptiness just once. Rather, we must analyze them again and again, apply them again and again, and continually cultivate familiarity with their profound meaning.

Along these lines, this book also includes other selections of texts that will help to deepen your understanding of emptiness and strengthen your certainty. The first is the *Heart of Wisdom Sutra,* one of the Buddha's most concise teachings on emptiness, yet incredibly powerful and profound. This sutra was actually spoken by the great bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, but since he did so through the power of the Buddha's blessing, it is considered to be the very speech of the Transcendent Conqueror himself. By analyzing the nature of reality with your intelligence in the way that Nagarjuna describes, you will gain stable certainty in the teachings of this sutra. Furthermore, seeing the similarity between the teachings of the Buddha and those of Nagarjuna will increase your confidence in Nagarjuna's words.

Also included here are the verses that describe the twenty emptinesses from the text by the glorious Chandrakirti[4] called *Entering the Middle Way*, itself a commentary on the meaning of Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*. Actually, within emptiness itself there are no distinctions between different types of emptiness because emptiness' true nature transcends all concepts that differentiate between one thing and another. Therefore, from the perspective of genuine reality, emptiness cannot actually be divided into twenty different categories or classifications. When the Buddha taught the twenty emptinesses, however, he did so from the perspective of the twenty different types of phenomena whose various appearances we cling to as being truly existent. Going through the twenty emptinesses helps us to free ourselves from this clinging step by step. The first sixteen emptinesses are the extensive presentation, and these are then summarized into four. Studying Nagarjuna's reasonings makes the twenty emptinesses easy to understand, and at that point Chandrakirti's verses will be a great help to your meditation practice. You can use these verses to practice analytical meditation by reciting the verses describing a particular emptiness and using the logical reasonings Nagarjuna presents to help you come to certainty in the verses' meaning, and then practice resting meditation by simply resting in that certainty that your analysis has produced. You can repeat this process as many times as you like. Machig Labdrön, the greatest woman practitioner in the history of Tibet, taught her students to meditate on the twenty emptinesses in this way as a method to help them realize *prajñāpāramitā*, the transcendent wisdom that realizes emptiness, that is called the Great Mother of all enlightened beings.

Finally, as mentioned earlier, this book includes the vajra song of the lord of yogis Milarepa called *An Authentic Portrait of the Middle Way*. This is one of Milarepa's most important songs because it teaches from the common perspective of the Autonomy and Consequence schools' views. If studying this great text by Nagarjuna, the basis of the Middle Way, leads you to wonder about the Kagyü tradition's particular perspective on these matters, you will find the answer by referring to this song of Milarepa, one of the founders of the Kagyü lineage. *An Authentic Portrait of the Middle Way* is a short song, but it contains a meaning that is profound and vast. It teaches that all of the phenomena of samsara and nirvana do not truly exist and yet they still appear—there is a mere appearance of things, and that appearance is the union of appearance and emptiness. Therefore, it is very helpful to read or sing this song, to memorize it, and to meditate on its meaning. That will be a very good connection for

4. A great Indian master of the Middle Way Consequence school.

you to make with the profound view of the lineage and the one who realized it perfectly, Milarepa.

Milarepa was the one yogi in the history of Tibet who was universally acknowledged to have attained buddhahood in a single life. If you have faith in him, then singing or reciting his *Authentic Portrait* as you study Nagarjuna's teachings will be of great benefit, because it will help you to overcome your fear of emptiness. If you already have certainty in emptiness, then singing the songs about emptiness that were sung by the realized masters will cause your certainty to grow greater and greater.

In general, all the verses in this book are excellent supports for developing your precise knowledge of genuine reality through study, reflection, and meditation. You should recite them as much as possible, memorize them, and reflect on them until doubt-free certainty in their meaning arises within. Then you should recall their meaning again and again, to keep your understanding fresh and stable. Whenever you have time, use them as the support for the practices of analytical and resting meditation. If you do all of this, it is certain that the sun of wisdom will dawn within you, to the immeasurable benefit of yourselves and others.

Opening Homage

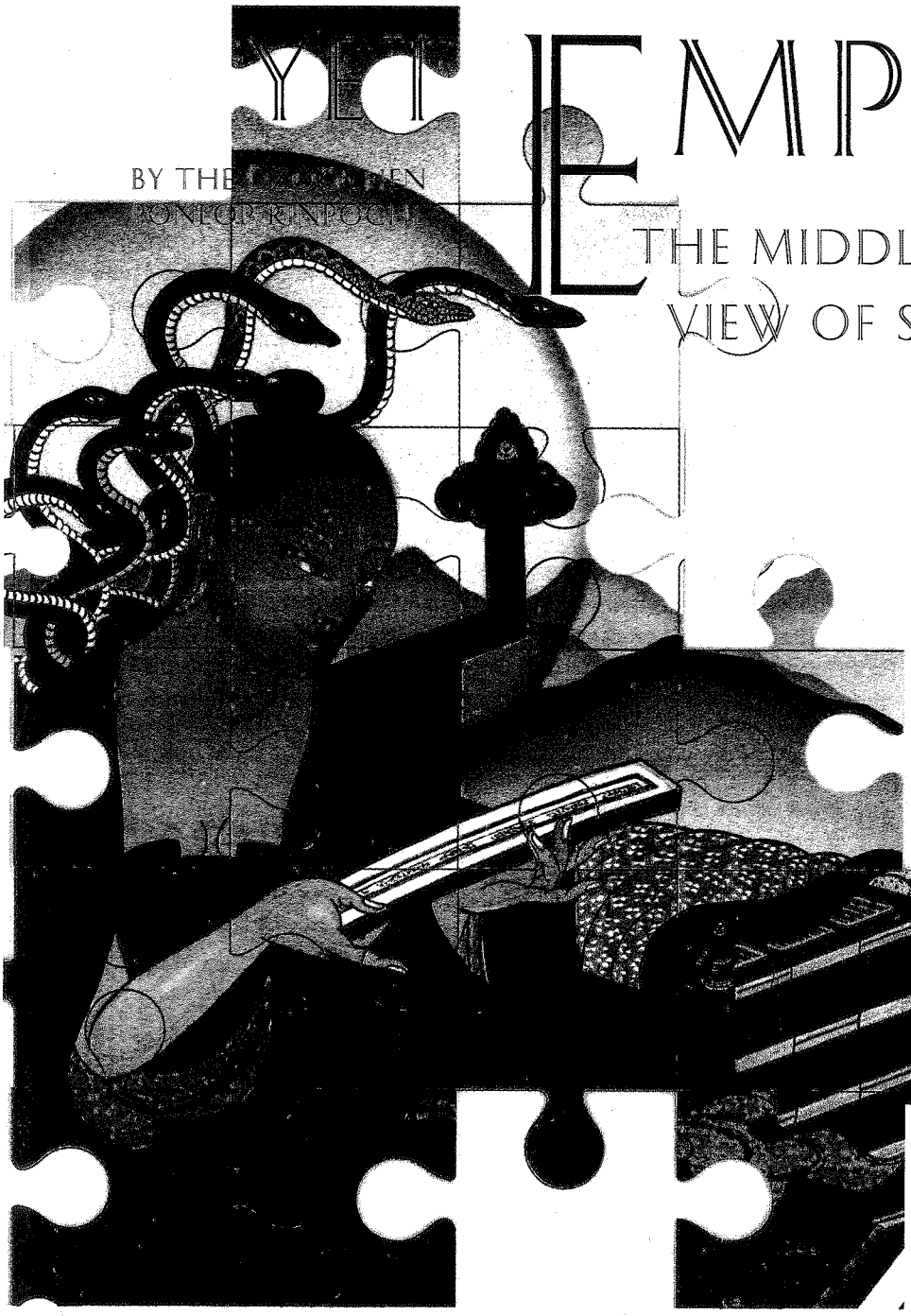
I prostrate to the one
Who teaches that whatever is dependently arisen
Does not arise, does not cease,
Is not permanent, is not extinct,
Does not come, does not go,
And is neither one thing nor different things.
I prostrate to the perfect Buddha, the supreme of all who speak,
Who completely dissolves all fabrications and teaches peace.

THIS VERSE OF HOMAGE with which Nagarjuna begins the text explains why it is that we should have such great respect for the Buddha. Why is the Buddha worthy of our prostration? It is because the Buddha teaches that all of the phenomena of samsara and nirvana are dependently arisen mere appearances, and that therefore their true nature transcends the concepts of arising and ceasing, of

APPEARING YET EMPTY

THE MIDDLE WAY VIEW OF SHUNYATHA

BY THE DZOGCHEN PONLOP RINPOCHE



ing of Nagrajuna by Robert Beer, used with permission from the artist.

When approaching the study of a topic such as Madhyamaka, or the Middle Way, it is helpful to understand its place in the overall Buddhist path. The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche approaches the complex and subtle philosophies of the Middle Way traditions of the Mahayana by, first, providing an overview of the ground, the teachings and perspectives from which it arose, and second, by providing a sense of its history and fundamental principles. The essence of the teachings and the skillfulness of its methods become increasingly apparent as we are able to see their relationship to the teachings and practices that precede it on the path. This is *Part One* in a series of teachings on Madhyamaka by Ponlop Rinpoche. The series continues in the next issue of *Bodhi*.

(38)

The enlightened master Buddha Shakyamuni turned the Wheel of Dharma three times. The First Turning took place in Deer Park in Sarnath, not long after the Buddha's enlightenment, when he taught the cycle of teachings known as the Four Noble Truths. The main focus of the teachings given in the First Turning is the recognition of the two natures of existence: the relative and the absolute.

THE NATURE OF SUFFERING

The first Noble Truth teaches that the relative nature of existence is that of suffering—the truth of suffering. Regardless of the type of life we may be leading, all of samsaric existence and all of our experiences of it are characterized by the basic and all pervasive nature of suffering and the truth of suffering. Instead of denying this suffering, these teachings tell us that we must recognize it and acknowledge it. Denial does not help us to alleviate our suffering or to develop a sense of freedom from suffering and its causes. So the first step is to recognize our fundamental suffering, and after that we might recognize that the nature of *all* our experiences is that of suffering, no matter whether we are experiencing pain or joy, agony or happiness. From the viewpoint of the First Turning, the nature of all these is suffering.

Why is suffering the nature of existence? The fundamental logic here is that since impermanence is found at every level of existence, so accordingly suffering is inherent in samsaric existence. Impermanence itself evokes suffering because, when we perceive its nature, we see that it renders us helpless in matters of choice. Do we have a choice to remain in this moment for another moment? No. There is no choice but to let go of this moment. We cannot hang on to any living experience for more than a tiny moment. So whether the moment is one of happiness, joy, pain, or agony, they are all in the nature of impermanence.

The Second Noble Truth deals with the origin of suffering, which means dealing with the notion of karma. When we examine that experience of suffering, we see that it is the result of karma, of cause and effect. The experience of suffering comes from certain antecedent causes and conditions. In his First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, Buddha taught that the origin of suffering is klesha.

We need to know the Sanskrit term, *klesha*, which has a number of translations, such as "afflicted mind," "destructive state of mind," or "disturbing emotions." It is klesha that causes suffering, and there are three root kleshas: ignorance or delusion, passion and aggression. When we search for the cause of these three root kleshas, we find our good old ego. The root of all three kleshas is ego-clinging, or self-clinging; consequently, the root of all suffering is ego-clinging, or the fixation on oneself as a truly existing entity. Thus, the truth of the origin of suffering is contained in Buddha's teaching about kleshas, ego, and the nature of karma, cause and effect.

In the first two Noble Truths, Buddha showed the cause and effect relationship of samsaric existence, which is our experience of suffering, and in the next two Noble Truths, Buddha showed the cause and effect relationship of freedom from suffering, which our discovery of the absolute nature. The Third Noble Truth asserts that, although the experience of samsaric existence is suffering, this is temporary and is something that we can transcend, something that we can go beyond. This is called the Truth of the Cessation of Suffering, which refers to the state of meditative absorption attained and enjoyed by the arhats, those beings who attained the highest level of realization in the Hinayana path.

In order to transcend the truth of suffering, we have to work with the causes of our suffering, which are the kleshas and ego-clinging. Therefore, in the Fourth Noble Truth, the Truth of the Path that Leads to Cessation, Buddha taught how to work with our kleshas and ego-clinging, how to transcend them and realize egolessness, so as to free ourselves totally from samsaric existence. However, while traveling this path to freedom, the Buddha taught that it is essential to develop renunciation of suffering and of samsaric existence. This is why it is said in this context that we may see samsara as "a party given by an executioner."

Along the path to nirvana, the path of liberation, the Buddha said that we can engage in different practices that will gradually lead to liberation and freedom from suffering. However, the main cause that actually frees us from suffering is the path of egolessness; without this, and without contemplating shunyata, there is no way we can achieve any state of freedom, or any state of liberation from samsaric existence. This is why, even in the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, Buddha gave profound teachings on shunyata—the state of selflessness, or egolessness.

However, from the Mahayana point of view, Buddha's teaching on egolessness in the First Turning does not present complete shunyata. At that time, Buddha simply presented the idea of the self being free from such imputations as permanence and inherent existence in any form. While there have been many different ways of asserting how, or in what manner, the self exists, in the First Turning, Buddha's central teaching was that the self does not exist in the nature of permanence and does not exist as a creator. Buddha taught the notion of "egolessness of self," the lack of a self or individual ego, in an ultimate sense. He taught that there is no permanent, solid individual ego or self-nature. It is important for us to recognize that Buddha taught shunyata in the First Turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

The Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma took place in Rajagriha, in a place known as Vulture Peak Mountain. There, Buddha taught the *Prajnaparamita* sutras to the bodhisattva sangha, the Mahayana sangha. In so doing, he taught the notion of complete shunyata: not only is the individual self empty of existence, but outer appearances are empty in nature as well. Thus, both outer and inner worlds are altogether in the nature of emptiness.

This emptiness is the basic nature of all phenomena, of all living experiences and all appearances. There is no solid and inherent existence in their nature. They are all in the nature of shunyata, emptiness. It is in this cycle of teaching that Buddha taught the sixteen emptinesses, outer, inner, and so forth. This complete emptiness is taught in the *Heart Sutra*, which many Mahayanists recite everyday. The *Heart Sutra* presents Buddha's teaching on the four-fold emptiness, the view of prajnaparamita: Form is emptiness; emptiness is also form. Form is no other than emptiness; emptiness is no other than form. This four-fold emptiness very clearly expresses that appearances are emptiness; yet at the same time, emptiness is also appearance. Appearances are no other than emptiness, and emptiness is no other than these appearances.

(40)

The shunyata teachings given by Buddha in the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma are known as the "great mother" prajnaparamita, because the complete realization of shunyata is the source of all realizations, and thus the source of liberation or enlightenment. This realization is also known as the mother of the four classes of noble beings: the shravakayana arhats, the pratyekabuddhayana arhats, the bodhisattvas on the bhumis, and the buddhas. This is why, from many Mahayana viewpoints, the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma is seen as Buddha's ultimate teaching, the highest level of teachings given in the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma.

The Third Turning of the Wheel of Dharma took place in Sravasti, not far from Rajagriha, and in many other places as well. The Third Turning did not happen in one particular place. In this final turning, Buddha said that the nature of reality, the nature of mind, is not simply empty; it is also luminous. It is not merely empty but embraces the whole field of clarity. Buddha taught that everything expressible stems from this basic nature of emptiness. Everything arises out of it; everything manifests from it. It is empty yet luminous, and this luminosity is completely free from any movement of thoughts.

This cycle of teachings on the nature of mind also includes the teachings on buddha nature, *tathagatagarbha*, or *gotra*. Gotra is a word that is translated in many different ways. This term connotes a sense of "family" or something like "genes." Thus, gotra conveys the notion that the basic nature of our mind belongs in the family of enlightenment, of buddhahood. Our mind possesses that nature.

The Second and the Third Turnings are both Mahayana sutras. The difference between them is that the Second Turning emphasizes emptiness and the transcendence of any conceptual clinging onto the true existence of phenomena. The Third Turning emphasizes the Buddha's teaching that the nature of phenomena is not *merely* emptiness—it is also fully luminous. Therefore, in the Third Turning there is greater emphasis on luminosity, or clarity, and the union of the two: emptiness-luminosity.

THE MAHAYANA VIEW OF THE MIDDLE WAY

The Mahayana view of Madhyamaka, or the Middle Way, originates with the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma. It includes the theory and teachings on buddha nature, or *tathagatagarbha*, which come from the Third Turning. The Third Turning also includes a certain element of the view of another Mahayana school, called the Chittamatra, or Mind Only school.

In each of the Three Turnings, Buddha presented the "right view" for each stage. This is very important to understand at the beginning because, without having the right view, one cannot find the right path. Without discovering the right path, one will not meet with the right realizations or experiences. Without realizing the nature of mind correctly, there is no way to free ourselves from samsara. This is why the right or correct view is so very important. What Buddha taught in the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma is the correct view of egolessness, selflessness, or emptiness. He taught this view in many different ways throughout his teachings. It is taught with the name of emptiness, or shunyata. It is taught with the name of Mahamudra, or the "great seal." It is taught with the name of Mahasandhi, or Dzogchen. So whatever we may be looking at, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, or Tantra, the same view of shunyata pertains to them all. Without the view of shunyata, there is no Mahamudra realization of "ordinary mind." Without the view of shunyata, there is no Dzogchen realization of *rigpa*, and without the view of shunyata, there is no achievement of profound wisdom through the deity yoga practice of Vajrayana. When we visualize a Vajrayana deity, it is said that we should visualize it like "a moon reflected in water, appearing yet empty." However, if you do not understand the view of shunyata, then you will have no idea what emptiness means. You will have to ask, "What does 'appearing, yet empty' mean?" In that situation, visualization practice would be very difficult.

(continued on page 44)

(continued from page 29)

MADHYAMAKA: NOT EVEN A MIDDLE

The term, *madhyamaka*, is a Sanskrit word; in Tibetan, the same term is known as *uma*. The word *uma* can be interpreted in two ways. In the most common interpretation, "*u*" means "middle" and "*ma*" is a feminine ending. In this case, the usual explanation of the term *uma* is that it simply means "the middle way," or that which is in between existence and nonexistence. In other words, it is a philosophy that refutes both extreme views: that things exist; or, that they do not exist. By refuting these views, it thereby abides in the middle. However, there is an uncommon explanation of the meaning of the term *uma*.

According to this explanation, the word *uma* means somewhat more than that. What Middle Way philosophy principally consists of is a refutation of *all* assertions. There is a refutation of the assertion that things exist; a refutation of the other extreme that things do not exist; a refutation of the assertion that things both exist and do not exist; and a refutation of the assertion that things neither exist nor do not exist. Having refuted all four possible assertions, there is nothing in the middle. There is no middle to stay in. Therefore, according to this interpretation, *uma* means "not to abide even in the middle." An illustration for this is the destruction of a building. If we destroy all four walls and the roof of a building so that there is no building any more, then we cannot reasonably talk about the center of the building. In the same way, when we refute all possible assertions about existence and nonexistence, there is a total transcendence of all conceptual attitudes about anything. This is why some scholars interpret this term *madhyamaka* as "not even a middle." You can see that this view is strongly concerned with emptiness.

However, the actual experience of emptiness that is expressed by this view is not so easy to realize fully or understand deeply. In the sutras, the Buddha taught that in order to realize emptiness one needs a strong karmic connection to these teachings, as well as an accumulation of merit and wisdom. Without these two accumulations, it is difficult to realize emptiness. Therefore, the realization or experience of shunyata may take some time. First, however, it is important for us to understand this view conceptually, because without a conceptual understanding we cannot realize it experientially.

RANGTONG AND SHENTONG

In Tibet, there are two schools of shunyatavada, or emptiness teachings: the Rangtong school of Madhyamaka, and the Shentong school of Madhyamaka. *Rangtong* basically means that the fundamental nature of all appearances is empty. The term *rang* means "self" and *tong* means "empty." Thus, *rangtong* is usually translated as "self-empty" or "empty of itself." In this view, one speaks about self being empty by nature. It is empty by itself. We do not need any sort of antidote to make phenomena empty; all phenomena are empty in their own nature. They are "self-empty." For example, when we look at our own mind, we see that it has no inherent existence of any sort. Therefore, we say mind is empty in its own nature, and this is why this view is known as *rangtong*.

The second school of emptiness teachings is called the Shentong school. *Shentong* is commonly translated as "other-empty" or "empty of other." *Shen* means "other" and *tong* means "empty." Other-empty means that emptiness itself is not merely empty; emptiness itself expresses the qualities of buddhahood, of enlightenment. However, this view says that the nature of mind is empty of "other," which refers to the defilements and obscurations that are not inherent aspects of the nature of mind. Therefore, we say that mind is other-empty because it is empty of other entities such as defilements, ego-clinging, and so forth.

When we consider these two Madhyamaka views, we can see that the Rangtong school puts more emphasis on emptiness; whereas, the Shentong school puts more emphasis on luminosity, the qualities

of buddhahood. However, in terms of realizing the nature of mind and in terms of the path leading to the actual state of enlightenment, there is no difference between these two views. They are the same. They both lead to the same realization, to the same achievement of enlightenment at the end. The difference between them is how emptiness is explained. One view says it is just empty, whereas the other says that emptiness is full of qualities. This is why the Shentong view of emptiness is called the "emptiness endowed with qualities." We need to understand that the Shentong view does not deny emptiness but explains it in a different way.

MADHYAMAKA LINEAGE HISTORY

After Lord Buddha Shakyamuni presented the first teaching on shunyata in the form of the *Prajnaparamita* sutra of the Second Turning of the Wheel of Dharma, various enlightened masters later commented on this teaching. The first was the great master Nagarjuna. Nagarjuna was born a Brahmin and later became a Buddhist bhikshu, that is, a Buddhist monk. He became the main student of Saraha, a great yogi and highly accomplished master in the Mahamudra lineage, who served for a period as an Abbot of the "great university," or *mahavihara*, of Nalanda. Following his teacher, Nagarjuna himself became one of the leading scholars and masters at Nalanda Mahavihara.

Nalanda is seen as the source of all knowledge and learning in ancient Buddhist history. There was no greater or more extensive place of learning than Nalanda Mahavihara in India at that time. To become either an Abbot or a scholar at Nalanda was extremely difficult as there were so many scholars and so many masters. Whoever became an Abbot of Nalanda had to have demonstrated an exceptionally high achievement in scholarship and realization. Nagarjuna became one of the Abbots of Nalanda Mahavihara and was the first to comment on the Prajnaparamita sutras. His collection of commentaries is known as the cycle of treatises on the Middle Way.

One of Nagarjuna's main treatises on the Middle Way is known as the *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, or the *Root Verses on Middle Way*. This text is the source of all of the Mahayana teachings on emptiness since the Buddha's presentation of the Prajnaparamita sutra. Because of his profound elucidation of the view of the *Prajnaparamita* sutra, Nagarjuna became one of the most well-known Mahayana teachers in India, and throughout the world. His treatises were translated from Sanskrit into Tibetan and have also been translated into Chinese. They are now being translated into English. Nagarjuna is therefore regarded as the founder of the Madhyamaka school of Mahayana Buddhism.

THE DIVISION INTO SCHOOLS

Two great Indian masters, Buddhapalita and Bhavaviveka, composed commentaries on Nagarjuna's view of shunyata. Buddhapalita was the first to explicate Nagarjuna's view. His commentary is simply called *Buddhapalita*. Bhavaviveka, another scholar who was a contemporary of Buddhapalita, later wrote a second commentary called the *Lamp of Wisdom*, or *Prajnapradip*. In that commentary, Bhavaviveka refuted Buddhapalita's view of Nagarjuna's work, asserting that it was incorrect. So Bhavaviveka wrote his own commentary to elucidate Nagarjuna's view.

These two views of Madhyamaka gave rise to the two main streams of Madhyamaka that exist today. The first school, initiated by Buddhapalita with his commentary, is known as the Prasangika Madhyamaka, or the Consequence school. It is an important lineage. The second Madhyamaka school, started by Bhavaviveka, is known as the Svatantrika Madhyamaka, or the Autonomy school, which asserts that phenomena exist by way of their own characteristics from the perspective of the relative truth.

...THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ON THE PATH IS STUDY, THEN REFLECTION.

The Prasangika Madhyamaka school was introduced to Tibet in the tenth century by a Tibetan translator called Patsap Lotsawa. The first Karmapa, Dusum Khyenpa, was one of his students. Since then, the Prasangika view has become one of the principal views in the Kagyu lineage. It has been thoroughly explained in the comprehensive commentary on Madhyamaka literature by the eighth Karmapa, Mikyo Dorje, called *The Chariot of the Siddhas of the Takpo Kagyu: an Extended Commentary on the Madhyamakavatara*. This important commentary is studied in the shedras, or monastic colleges, and is one of the historic commentaries by Tibetan masters on the Prasangika Madhyamaka school.

The Svatantrika Madhyamaka lineage was introduced to Tibet by the great master Shantirakshita in the late seventh or early eighth century. Shantirakshita is known as "the abbot of Samye" and was a co-founder of Samye, the first monastery in Tibet, along with Guru Padmasambhava. Shantirakshita composed the commentary, the *Madhyamaka-alankara* or *The Ornament of the Middle Way*. Together with his disciple, Kamalashila, he worked to continue the lineage of the Svatantrika Madhyamaka school in Tibet. Sometime later in Tibet, Lama Mipham Rinpoche wrote a wonderful commentary on Shantirakshita's Madhyamaka text called simply, *Commentary to the Madhyamaka-alankara*, which is also studied in the Kagyu shedras.

These two Madhyamaka lineages are very much alive in Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism. They are not just a part of the historical past, with only translations of their texts remaining in existence. They are actively studied and practiced today in the Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism.

Now we know how and when these two lineages, the two main streams of Madhyamaka, came to Tibet. There are many other aspects to these lineages, but we will leave that for now. The principal purpose and focus in both streams is, first, to understand the fundamental nature of reality, the fundamental nature of our mind, and second, to enter the path of experience—that is, to not only understand mind's nature, but also experience it. The final step is to go beyond conceptual understanding and experience to the direct realization of the reality of the fundamental nature.

Thus, in the basic Buddhist path, there is a three-stage process, which all practitioners go through, of developing one's higher knowledge or prajna: listening or studying; contemplating or reflecting; and meditation. This three-stage process is very, very important. Buddha said that as far as monastics are concerned, from the day you enter the monastery you must engage in this three-stage process of study, reflection, and then meditation. As far as lay practitioners are concerned, Buddha gave the same instruction: the most important thing on the path is study, then reflection, and then meditation. The great Kagyu master, Gampopa, said that when we blend these three together, then we enter unmistakenly into the dharma.

In the beginning, study will generate the prajna called the "prajna of understanding." After that, reflection or contemplation will cultivate the prajna called the "prajna of experience." Then meditation will generate the prajna called the "prajna of realization." The great yogi Milarepa said that understanding is like a patch tacked onto a garment. It can fall off at anytime. It never becomes one with the actual cloth. He went on to say that experiences are like the morning mist; they can disappear. In the morning the mist seems like thick clouds. You may wonder if the overcast weather is going to last the whole day. Then, when the sun comes up around nine or ten o'clock, the mist evaporates, and it is a hot day with a completely blue sky. Just like the mist, said Milarepa, your experiences can vanish. So don't hang onto or become attached to your experiences. However, Milarepa also said that realizations are unchanging like space. Space cannot be destroyed. Space can never disappear. Space is all pervasive, ever present and unchanging. The prajna realization is like that.

We have a story in Tibet that tells of a yogi meditating on shunyata in a cave. Once he was resting in a meditative state, and when we came out of the meditation, he noticed that he had made a very

deep handprint on the rock. Then he said, "Wow!" and thought "Well, if I make another handprint in front of all my students, it will be even better." So, when they were next having a teaching session, he did the same thing. He reflected on emptiness and then he hit his hand as hard as he could on a rock. But when he took his hand away, the palm of his hand was quite pink, but there was no handprint. This is why many meditation instructions say that such events are only experiences, and experiences are liable to change. They are only temporary. So, don't get attached to your handprint on a rock, if you have already made one.

So, there are two possibilities. One is an event that is a transitory experience. Another is an event such as a handprint on a rock that may come from ultimate realization. That is different. For example, when Milarepa walked back and forth from his cave, he could walk through the rock. There is also a story about Milarepa taking shelter from the rain inside a yak's horn. Milarepa did not shrink and the yak's horn did not expand. When masters such as Milarepa and the Karmapa engage in such miraculous activity, their actions come from realization, because they can perform them anytime. It is not a big deal for them, which is why they usually do not do it. When we manage to do something like that, then it is a big deal, because it is only a transitory experience. For this reason, engaging in the three-stage process of hearing, contemplating, and meditating seems to be very important.

THE THREE STAGES OF ANALYSIS

When approaching the Madhyamaka view and meditation, it is important to keep in mind that there are three different levels, or three different ways, to understand and to experience the Madhyamaka view. The first stage is known as the stage of "no analysis." The second stage is known as the stage of "slight analysis." The third is known as the stage of "thorough analysis." This can also be expressed as three situations: the situation where there is no analysis, the situation where one engages in slight analysis, and the situation where one engages in thorough analysis.

The first stage of no analysis occurs at the level of relative truth. The second stage of slight analysis is the beginning of entering into the absolute truth. The third stage of thorough analysis is the complete state of absolute or ultimate reality. Accordingly, when we talk about karma, the causal connections between actions and their effects, or impermanence, the suffering of the world, compassion and loving-kindness, all of these things function at the stage of no analysis. When we talk about shunyata, emptiness, selflessness, egolessness, and so on, these relate to the stage of slight analysis. When we talk about the realizations of the bodhisattva bhumis, the achievement of the complete state of freedom from samsara, or the state of complete enlightenment, then we are speaking from the perspective of the stage of thorough analysis, which is beyond words.

When we approach the Madhyamaka view by means of this three-stage process of analysis, then the Madhyamaka view becomes clear and many of the confusions surrounding the view of shunyata are resolved. Consequently, in presenting the Madhyamaka view, it is very necessary to introduce it from the point of view of the three stages of analysis, and it is equally important that we try to understand and experience this view through these three stages, without mixing them up.

The fundamental structure of the Madhyamaka view is based on the notion of two truths, the relative truth and the absolute truth. The whole cycle of teachings in the Prajnaparamita sutras, and the whole cycle of Madhyamaka teachings, approaches reality through these two truths. The great master, Lama Mipham, said that in order to understand the view of shunyata, or Madhyamaka, it is very important to distinguish between these two truths, to ascertain what is relative truth and what is absolute truth. He says that if we cannot distinguish these two truths clearly, then our mind will be confused and completely mixed up. He gave the

example of couchgrass, which grows in a confused and random way in all directions at the same time. When you pull out one clump of the grass, lots of other clumps come up with it because the roots are so tangled. Lama Mipham says that without understanding the two truths our minds will become like that grass, all tangled up, and then we will not be able to distinguish one thing from another. This is very clearly the view of Nagarjuna, and it is also clearly expressed in the teachings of the great masters of both the Prasangika and Svatantrika Madhyamaka schools.

THE TWO TRUTHS

According to the Madhyamaka school, the two truths are the relative, or conventional, truth and the absolute truth. In Tibetan, "relative" is *kundzop*. *Kun* means "all" or "everything." *Kun* is plural and refers to all levels of phenomena and experiences. The second syllable, *dzop*, means "false" or "untrue." *Dzop* has the quality of pretense, like a scarecrow for example, that looks like a person, but is not a person. That fake quality is present in the Tibetan word *dzop*. Furthermore, *dzop* has the meaning of transience, like bubbles. Bubbles exist only momentarily. Thus, *dzop* means something that is not as true or real as it appears to be. In this context, *kundzop* means "relative." *Denpa* in Tibetan is "truth" and so, *kundzop denpa* means relative truth.

If this is so, then why is relative reality referred to as "truth"? From the perspective of Madhyamaka, it is truth because ordinary samsaric beings experience phenomena as being real and true. That is why the enlightened master Buddha also calls this the relative truth. The example of a dream illustrates why it is called truth. In a dream, everything seems to be real and solid. When we see a mountain in a dream, it is a solid mountain. We can climb it and have altitude sickness, or feel a beautiful, refreshing breeze and look out over a wonderful view. Furthermore, within the context of our dream everything functions. The dream mountain functions as a mountain and dream fire has its own capacity of burning dream-like objects. In a similar way, the interdependent phenomena that we perceive to be true function naturally only in the relative sense. Their functioning must be experienced by our senses and conceptual mind to gain their validity. This is why in this context it is called truth.

Moreover, relative reality is called the truth because there is a genuine functioning relationship between cause and effect, which renders it true in the relative sense. It never fails and so it is called "truth." But that truth is a temporary truth; that truth is a genuine functioning relationship between cause and effect. Consequently, it is not ultimate truth. The reason it is not ultimate truth is because relative phenomena cannot withstand analysis. When subjected to analysis, they cannot be found. This is one of the logical reasonings used in Madhyamaka analysis. The Madhyamaka view depicts relative truth as dream-like or mirage-like experiences. Thus, the way that things appear to our six senses—the objects of our perceptions and mental occurrences—is known as the relative truth; the way that things abide—their true or inherent nature—is the absolute truth.

In this context, the absolute truth or the ultimate truth is called *dondam*. *Dondam* means "ultimate" or "absolute" and *denpa* again is "truth." In the term *dondam*, the first syllable, *don*, is translated as "meaning" or "purpose." *Dam*, the second syllable, means "genuine." So, *dondam* is the genuine meaning or the genuine purpose, and that is the absolute truth, the ultimate truth. When we ask, "What is the meaning of this? What is the meaning of that?" then we are talking about the real essence of something. The real essence, the "suchness" or "isness" of things is the absolute truth, the absolute reality.

This absolute reality can withstand any analysis. You can analyze and analyze and analyze and the real nature or essence does not disappear. It is not refutable. It does not merely temporarily exist. Therefore, it is ultimate and that ultimate nature is the main object of our realization. When we study, we try to understand what is the ultimate nature. When we contemplate, we try to experience that ultimate

(46)

nature. And when we practice meditation, we try to realize the ultimate nature. So this becomes our goal: it is the purpose of our study, our contemplation and our practice. The ultimate truth, according to the Madhyamaka view presented here, is shunyata, emptiness, selflessness, and egolessness.

CHANDRAKIRTI

The great master, Chandrakirti, who composed a Madhyamaka text called, *Madhyamakavatara,* or *Entrance to the Middle Way,* is a formidable master in the Prasangika lineage. He was a supporter of Buddhapalita's view of Prasangika. After some time, Chandrakirti's writings became the principle focus for the Prasangika Madhyamaka school. Nowadays, when someone brings up the topic of Prasangika, they are usually thinking of Chandrakirti because he wrote most of the commentaries.[1]

Chandrakirti was a great Prasangika scholar who propounded emptiness. His life history claims that not only was he a great scholar, but that he was also a great meditator. He was indeed a great, realized master. The story goes that one day Chandrakirti was walking around the Nalanda Mahavihara with his friends when he suddenly bumped into a pillar. His friends laughed at him saying, "Hey, Chandrakirti, where is your emptiness? What happened to your shunyata?" Then, Chandrakirti put his hand through the pillar and said, "Where is the pillar?"

Once he was appointed to be the monastery's kitchen manager. At that time, the monks had to take care of the buffalo and cows that provided the milk and yogurt for the monastery. One day, Chandrakirti and another monk took all the cows and buffalos to a wonderful grazing pasture where he just left them. His friend was worried and said, "We must bring them back because we need milk and yogurt." Chandrakirti replied, "Don't worry, just relax." As the time approached when the monks would need the milk, Chandrakirti's friend grew anxious and went to Chandrakirti again with his concerns. In response, Chandrakirti drew a very large cow on the wall and milked the drawing of the cow. This is why at the end of the *Madhyamakavatara,* it says that it is written by Chandrakirti, the one who milked the drawing of the cow. He is a very well-known Indian mahasiddha, an accomplished yogi, as well as a great scholar.

Chandrakirti opens the *Madhyamakavatara* by saying, "I pay homage to the noble heart of compassion." Usually a text will open with an homage to the buddhas or bodhisattvas. Instead of doing that, Chandrakirti says he will pay homage to the noble heart of compassion because compassion is the source, the root, of all enlightened realizations. He says that the realizations of the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas stem from the teachings of the buddhas, which inspire them to practice and to achieve arhathood. Furthermore, he said that the buddhas' realization of buddhahood itself is derived from the bodhisattvas' path. How do the bodhisattvas arise? They come into being after giving rise to bodhichitta, the enlightened attitude, or the awakened heart. From where does awakened heart or enlightened attitude arise? Chandrakirti says that it arises from compassion.

Considered from this viewpoint, compassion is the root of all. Without compassion, there are no bodhisattvas. Without bodhisattvas, there are no buddhas. Without buddhas, there is no activity of speech to enlighten the shravakas and pratyekabuddhas. Therefore, without compassion, there is no enlightenment; there is no liberation. This is why Chandrakirti says, "I pay homage to the noble heart of compassion."

At the outset, compassion is like the seed of enlightenment. Without the seed, we cannot grow anything and enlightenment will not bloom in our heart. He goes on to say that in the middle of the bodhisattva path, compassion is like the water for the seed. We have to water

1. In addition to the *Madhyamakavatara,* Chandrakirti composed a commentary to Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika,* called *Prasannapada,* which is translated partially into English with the title, *Lucid Exposition of the Middle Way.* The *Madhyamakavatara* also has many translations in English. One is called *Emptiness of Emptiness* translated by C.W. Huntington. Another translation of this text is called *Ontology of Madhyamaka* by Peter Fina, whose auto-commentary is also being translated into English, but is not yet published.

our seed regularly so that it grows. Without the water element, we cannot grow the seed. He concludes by saying that compassion at the end of the path is like the heat or the warmth of the sun. Without the heat, no fruits will ripen, for ripening needs warmth. Therefore, Chandrakirti says that nothing is more important than compassion.

In the relative truth then, the Madhyamaka path and practice is the cultivation of compassion and loving kindness toward all sentient beings. Cultivating or generating a genuine heart of compassion is extremely difficult, although it is a very easy and agreeable concept. We say, "Oh yes, we should have compassion; it's a good thing to have." It is widely talked about too. Compassion is a popular term, and everybody loves it. When you are talking about compassion, then everybody loves you for that. So, compassion is a good topic and easy to talk about, a very nice concept. In fact, though, giving rise to a genuine heart of compassion is not that easy. We are talking, here, about a compassion that expects nothing in return. It is a complete sense of caring, of giving. As far as the bodhisattvas are concerned, such a heart of compassion knows no limit. Consequently, the generation of this heart of compassion is a very important Madhyamaka practice, in the relative truth.

From the perspective of relative truth, the Madhyamaka teachings emphasize the bodhisattvas' practices, which begin with compassion, loving-kindness and seeing the true nature of interdependent reality. From the ultimate perspective, our goal when we practice is to try to realize the absolute truth, the genuine meaning, which is emptiness, selflessness, egolessness.

Accordingly, we can see clearly that the main focus of the Madhyamaka path is a sense of union: the union of genuine love and emptiness, the inseparability of compassion and emptiness. ❶

Appearing, Yet Empty: The Middle Way View of Shunyata, *by The Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche was originally presented as part of a series of talks on Madhyamaka at Samye Ling, Scotland, in May 2000. This is Part One in a series. Part Two will appear in* Bodhi *Vol. 6 Issue 3. Edited by Helen Silman and Cindy Shelton.*

The Padmakara Translation Group gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Tsadra Foundation in sponsoring the translation of this book.

TREASURY *of* PRECIOUS QUALITIES

A COMMENTARY ON THE ROOT TEXT
OF JIGME LINGPA
ENTITLED

The Quintessence of the Three Paths

by Longchen Yeshe Dorje, Kangyur Rinpoche
Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group
Forewords by H. H. the Dalai Lama
and Jigme Khyentse Rinpoche

SHAMBHALA
BOSTON & LONDON
2001

The country and the royal court[234] destroy!
Liberation is for those who do so.

It would obviously be a calamitous mistake to take such words literally.

The difference between implied and indirect teachings · In whichever way the implied and indirect teachings are presented, their meaning comes essentially to the same thing; they are separated only by a difference of emphasis. When a discourse of the Buddha is being explained in which the meaning is not literally expressed in the words used, and when the commentator emphasizes this underlying meaning, saying, "The Buddha said this, but in fact he meant that," as distinct from what the commentator understands to be the specific pedagogical purpose behind the Buddha's speech (namely, to lead people on the path), we have what are called the implied teachings. By contrast, when the commentator interprets the Buddha's words in a manner that particularly highlights their pedagogical purpose, saying, "The reason the Buddha did not speak directly but in a roundabout way was to guide certain people onto the path," we have what are called indirect teachings. Of course, the interpretation of the Buddha's words, meaning, and purposes is a vast and complex subject. But in short, the wisdom that correctly identifies the implied and indirect teachings constitutes the second key that opens the scriptures of sutra and tantra.

An explanation of the treasury of Dharma

A general exposition of the two truths

As an antidote to the eighty-four thousand types of defilement, the Buddha, expert in methods and rich in great compassion, set forth eighty-four thousand sections of teaching, classified as the four pitakas, or "baskets." Each of the first three pitakas counteracts one of the three principal defilements, while the fourth pitaka is an antidote to all three together. The range of these teachings is inconceivably vast, but they are all summarized in the doctrine of the two truths.

The relative truth embraces all the phenomena of samsara or the world, in other words, the mind and the phenomena that manifest from the mind. The absolute truth refers to supramundane primordial wisdom, all-discerning awareness, which has the same nature as the dharmadhatu. It follows from this that all possible knowledge-objects are accounted for in the two truths; there is no third truth.

The relative truth is subdivided into two aspects: unmistaken and mistaken, following the distinction made between accurate and defective cognition. All phenomena that appear to the deluded mind and are efficient (in the sense of the moon shedding light, fire giving heat, water being wet, and so on)—together with the consciousnesses that cognize them—are regarded as the "unmistaken relative truth."* They arise from their respective causes, although, when examined, they are found to be empty of inherent existence. By contrast, things like a mirage of water, a rope that is mistaken for a snake, or the vision of two moons instead of one (all of which might appear in hallucinations but are incapable of producing normal effects, in the sense of moistening, giving a poisonous bite, or shedding light)—together with the consciousnesses that cognize them—are referred to as "mistaken relative truth."† Thus the difference between mistaken and unmistaken relative truth depends upon the ability to function on the conventional level.[235]

The term "absolute truth" refers to the fundamental state of all things. It is primal wisdom, wherein samsara and nirvana are seen to have the same nature.‡ From the very first, neither the phenomena of samsara nor the phenomena of nirvana possess inherent existence, and they are not two separate classes of things. Phenomena have always been beyond the range of conceptual construction. And since the absolute truth is beyond all thought and verbal expression, it cannot be said to exist for those who have realized it and not to exist for those who have not done so. Whether it is realized or not, the absolute truth is the unchanging nature of all things. The regent Maitreya has said: "It is the unchanging ultimate nature, the same in the past and in the future."

The two truths are not separate like the two horns of a buffalo. From the beginning, they are blended together inextricably: appearance and emptiness inseparably united. Therefore, phenomena arising through interdependence are not totally nonexistent like a horned rabbit. They are rather like the reflection of the moon in a clear pool.

* *yang dag pa'i kun rdzob.*
† *log pa'i kun rdzob.*
‡ I.e., as seen at the level of buddhahood when mind and object are "of the same taste."

Phenomena appear, and this aspect of appearance corresponds to the relative truth. Nevertheless, in the very moment of their arising, they are lacking in true existence. This aspect corresponds to the absolute truth. Thus, while a distinction can be made between the two truths, these same truths have no intrinsic existence separate from each other.

For the moment, while we are on the path of aspirational practice, phenomena, the objects to which the senses are attracted (forms, sounds, and so forth), all appear clearly to our five sense consciousnesses, like the brilliant colors of the rainbow. But the mere appearance of the five sense objects is not what entangles us. It is rather that, when the duality of subject and object arises, the perceiver identifies a perceived object as something to be enjoyed and so on. Endless delusory perceptions of mind and mental factors occur, resulting in the rejection of the undesirable and indulgence in the desirable. Nevertheless, all these appearances are lacking in real existence. They are beyond the eight ontological extremes. One should reflect on them and analyze them according to the eight examples of illusion. Like appearances in a dream, phenomena have no origin; like an illusion, they are not subject to destruction; like a mirage they have no permanence; like a reflection of the moon in water, they are not completely nonexistent; like an optical illusion, they come from nowhere; like an echo, they go nowhere; like a castle in the clouds, there is no distinction in them; like magical displays, they are not identical. We must generate conviction in the inseparability of appearance and emptiness and, having done so, rest one-pointedly in it.

Merely to understand the indivisibility of the two truths and the absence of inherent existence according to the eight ontological extremes (using the eight similes quoted above), and to familiarize oneself with this, does not in itself mean that one attains to the ultimate nature of things. For no object of intellectual affirmation can be the absolute truth. The intellect pertains only to the relative truth and is itself the factor that veils the state of nonduality. The absolute truth can be realized only by thought-free primordial wisdom, wherein there is no duality of subject and object. The state beyond all conceptual constructs is incompatible with concepts of one and many, existence and nonexistence. Primordial wisdom, the ultimate nature, can never be the object of the intellect. As Shantideva says, "The absolute is not within the reach of intellect." (*Bodhicharyavatara*, IX, 2)

The four tenet systems

This, then, is an exposition of the two truths in the most general terms. However, each Buddhist school of tenets interprets the Buddha's teaching on the two truths in its own particular way, and thus sets forth its own particular teaching on the ground, path, and fruit.

The Vaibhashikas · The Vaibhashika school considers that, with regard to the six ordinary sense consciousnesses, the absolute truth, or ultimate reality, is the indivisible moment of consciousness, which, so they say, intellectual analysis is unable to divide into past, present, and future. Likewise, the indivisible particle of matter, which cannot be further divided, also has the status of an ultimate reality or absolute truth. By contrast, all gross, nonmental phenomena, which are composed of these tiny particles, are considered to lack true existence, being subject to destruction by opposing forces.[236]

The Sautrantikas · The way in which the Sautrantikas[237] account for phenomena in terms of the two truths is as follows. Efficient objects, like vases able to hold water and pillars able to support beams, have no absolute existence in that they are no more than collections of material atomic particles (which, however, are ultimately real). Consequently, the position of the Sautrantikas is the same as that of the Vaibhashikas in that they accept the reality of two partless particles—of matter and consciousness. The Sautrantikas differ from the Vaibhashikas, however, in saying that time (the past, present, and future) has no substantial existence and in denying that space is a permanent and real entity. They say, moreover, that a mental image of, for example, a vase or a pillar, insofar as it is unable to perform a concrete function such as holding water, belongs to the relative truth. It effectively obscures the specific character of the object as it is in itself. For it is the mental image alone that appears to the deluded mind and has no inherent existence. The absolute and relative truths are explained as relating respectively to specifically characterized things* (absolute) and generally characterized

* *rang mtshan.*

things* (relative). The tradition of the Sautrantikas is a system established through reason and elaborated through the application of logic.[238]

The Chittamatrins, the Mind Only school · The Chittamatrins[239] say that through the power of habit, we assign a distinct existence both to the perceiving mind and to its perceived object, whereas in reality the two do not exist as separate entities. The object-apprehending mind and the percepts of this mind, which are falsely reified as truly and separately existing entities, are referred to here as imputed reality. This imputed reality is the relative truth, and everything other than it is absolute. The absolute truth refers, in the first place, to the ultimate essence of the dependent reality, namely, the underlying substratum of mental appearances or percepts. This substratum itself is the self-knowing mind, void of duality of subject and object. In the second place, the absolute truth also includes the completely existent reality, namely, the fact that the dependent reality is empty of the imputed reality.[240] Of these two aspects of the absolute truth, the first is called subjective absolute truth,† and the second is objective absolute truth.‡

The Svatantrika Madhyamikas · The Svatantrika Madhyamikas say that phenomena (form and the other objects of the six senses) have a natural existence of their own on the relative level, and this is established by conventional reasoning. Although phenomena have no *true* existence, yet on their own level, so to speak, they do exist. In this context, "existing from their own side," "existing on their own level," "existing according to their characteristics," and "substantially existing" are regarded as synonymous, and what these expressions refer to is not considered the proper object of refutation by reasoning that establishes the absolute truth. Thus, for the Svatantrikas, it seems that when the Madhyamika texts say that phenomena are without inherent existence, it is necessary to add that this is to be understood on the level of the absolute truth alone.[241] Phenomena appear like illusions, according to the interdependence of causes and conditions; they are "really there," existing according to characteristics. It is thus possible to discourse about distinct phenomena, actions and their effects, and so forth. On the other hand, if the ontological status of these phenomena is examined using analysis and reasoning on the absolute level, they are found to be devoid of any kind of existence. They are utterly pure, empty like space. In this context, the expressions "true existence," "absolute existence," "completely existing," and "ultimate existence" are all synonyms and are equally the object of refutation by analysis at the absolute level. The Svatantrikas state that the objects of refutation are specifically the self of phenomena and the personal self. These are the general tenets of the Svatantrika Madhyamikas.

The Prasangika Madhyamikas · The Prasangika Madhyamikas accept that everything in phenomenal existence arises in interdependence; phenomena manifest like an illusion or dream. However, they refrain from investigating such appearances, to see whether they have some sort of existence or not, and group them all under the heading of relative truth, using this as a stepping-stone to the absolute truth. That phenomena are, ultimately speaking, without inherent existence and are void from the very beginning—this is their absolute truth. However, all such statements are mere labels, formulated from the conventional standpoint alone. In reality, the two truths, relative and absolute, are not correlated with appearance and emptiness, respectively. Phenomena are by their very nature ungrounded and rootless, beyond the four ontological extremes. All phenomena, forms and so forth, that are the objects of the six consciousnesses and appear to come into and pass out of existence—all arise and perish, come and go just like a reflection or a mirage. They have no ultimate existence. For the processes of origination and so forth are themselves mere appearances. They themselves have no real existence.

The Chittamatrins affirm that the self-knowing mind (i.e., the dependent reality) is really existent. The Svatantrikas assert that the phenomena dependent on causes and conditions, forms, and so forth, have an existence on the conventional level. By contrast, the Prasangikas, in their tenets, refrain from positing even the relative existence of things, let alone their absolute existence.

The great founder of the Prasangika tradition, the supreme Nagarjuna, whose birth was foretold in scripture, elucidated the sutras of ultimate meaning through the sheer strength of his own genius, without

* *spyi mtshan.*
† *chos can don dam.*
‡ *chos nyid don dam.*

recourse to other commentaries. It was thus that he established the Madhyamika dialectic, which prevails to this day.[242] It is written in the *Lankavatara-sutra*:

> In the land of Bheta to the south,
> A glorious monk of wide renown,
> By name of Naga will be called.
> "Is" and "is not" both he will refute
> And propagate my teaching in the world,
> Explaining Mahayana unsurpassed.
> Accomplishing the ground of Perfect Joy,
> He will depart for Sukhavati.

And in the tantra *'jam dpal rtsa rgyud* it is said:

> Four hundred years after I
> The Tathagata shall have passed away,
> A virtuous monk called Naga will arise
> To propagate and benefit my doctrine.
> Accomplishing the ground of Perfect Joy
> And living then six hundred years,
> This great being will attain
> To *Knowledge of the Mighty Peacock*,[243]
> To understanding of the different shastras,
> The meaning of the absence of existence.
> Relinquishing his mortal frame,
> He will take birth in Sukhavati
> Thence to gain the perfect fruit
> Of final buddhahood.

Nagarjuna's six (main) treatises[244] were commented on by the masters Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, Bhavaviveka, Chandrakirti, and others. Of these especially, the glorious Chandrakirti, possessed as he was of incomparable knowledge and ability, penetrated the teaching of the master Nagarjuna and unerringly elucidated the *Karikas* in his commentaries *Madhyamakavatara* and *Prasannapada*.[245] He perfectly set forth the ultimate meaning of the Buddha's teaching, and it was through his writings that the tenets of the Prasangikas rose like the sun over the world, scattering the darkness of false views.

Conclusion

The proponents of the three lower tenet systems impute existence to phenomena. They do indeed manage to overcome certain conceptual constructions by reflecting on the absence of self, the unborn nature, emptiness, and the absence of ontological extremes, which are the very object of wisdom inquiry. But they still retain a certain clinging to the reality of things. The Svatantrikas, for their part, accept existence on the conventional level. It is only the Prasangikas who contest such assertions, uprooting all extremes of conceptuality. Being immune to counterattack, the Prasangika tenets are supreme; they are the summit of all systems and utterly free from error.

In India there were many philosophical systems, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist. Likewise in Tibet, numerous distinctions were made according to respective beliefs, and there are several ways of comprehending the teachings of the proponents of the Madhyamika and the Secret Mantra. From their own standpoint, and according to their own understanding, the proponents of each of these systems claim finality for their own tenets. But if one analyzes them all in detail and gains a proper understanding of them through the wisdom arising from hearing the teachings, it is possible to differentiate clearly the character of the four main systems of Buddhist thought and achieve certainty that the ultimate path of practice is that of the Prasangikas. While the Svatantrikas are in harmony with the Prasangika position, the Vaibhashikas, Sautrantikas, and Chittamatrins diverge from it. Conviction in this matter goes far beyond the manipulation of mere words and expressions.* It is the wisdom resulting from reflection, which itself derives from the wisdom arising from perfectly hearing the teachings. Through meditation on the meaning thus understood, the perfect wisdom that accurately ascertains phenomena will subdue all negative emotions and the thought patterns that fixate upon the (supposed) reality of things. It will banish them

* It has nothing to do with a merely academic understanding.

from the mind, and an immense courage will arise in the face of evil and adversity, which in turn will be rendered powerless.

As the great upholders of Prasangika doctrine have shown, the ultimate aim of practice is the fundamental condition of phenomena. This is the dharmadhatu, which is by nature beyond all conceptual constructs. It is unspeakable, unthinkable, and impossible to convey. It is a peaceful serenity, the absence of all conceptual construction: the ultimate, absolute truth. Its unobstructed creative power is displayed as the dependent arising of phenomena, and it is this that the mind and its mental factors interpret, or rather misinterpret, as something that can be verbally expressed, mentally conceived, and demonstrated. Phenomena that arise unobstructedly and according to imputation are described as the relative truth. If in meditation one settles in the spacious state of wisdom free from thoughts, and if in the post-meditation period one unremittingly accumulates merit on the understanding that all is like an illusion, one will avoid falling one-sidedly into one or other of the two truths. Even in post-meditation, when appearances arise, it will be impossible to stir from the fundamental mode of phenomena, and, conversely, even when one rests in meditation in a state free from conceptual constructs, such an emptiness will not be a state of mere nothingness. At all times, the two truths are united and inseparable. This is the nature of the dharmadhatu, beyond all duality imputed by the ordinary intellect, beyond the division of an object realized and a mind that realizes. It is impossible for anyone to experience it in the manner of a knowledge-object. The dharmadhatu is, of course, invisible to the referential, dualistic view. It is not at all as though something is newly attained that had not been present before, or perfected through the laborious following of the path. Even those who fail to accomplish the path and who remain in ordinariness do not, for that reason, lose it. For in the natural condition of the ultimate nature, attainment is not good, and nonattainment is not bad; they are perfectly equal.

Dwelling in emptiness, the ultimate nature, means that the mind is attuned to emptiness and all clinging to ontological extremes is exhausted. Subject and object blend into one taste. Like salt dissolving in water, the mind and the ultimate nature are not distinct. This is what is correctly designated as the "realization of emptiness" and "the gaining of the result."[246]

THE WISDOM RESULTING FROM REFLECTION

The meaning of the treasury of the scriptures is that all the phenomena of the ground, path, and fruit arise interdependently. If, from listening to the teachings, we gain a clear understanding of this interdependence, and if we are then able to bring together the key points and penetrate them with the wisdom that results from reflection—a wisdom that is uncontaminated by adhering to extreme views—we will have in our possession, so to speak, a key with which to open the door to the scriptures' profound meaning.

Dependent arising with regard to the ground nature

All phenomena, all false and deceptive appearances, the fluctuating compoundedness of life, samsara with its karma and defilements, and indeed the liberation from suffering that we call nirvana are names superimposed on the ultimate nature. As to their origin, they arise from nowhere; as to their cessation, they go nowhere; and in the meantime they have no place of abiding. From the outset, phenomena dwell in the same essential equality of the three times. They arise in interdependence, an interdependence that is rendered possible by their ultimate nature. As it is written in the *Pitaputrasamagama-sutra*, "Phenomena are equal in the equality of the three times."[247]

This could be expressed in another way by saying that all phenomena seem to arise from origins and end in extinction. But in the very moment of their manifestation, they are without inherent existence. These appearances, which are empty by nature, arise unobstructedly. They are untouched by the ontological extremes of existence, nonexistence, and so forth. If through wisdom one gains a profound conviction that this is so, one will realize that all that appears within the sphere of the common consensus is without inherent existence; it is a mere imputation of the mind and is based on emptiness. This is the teaching of the Madhyamika path, in which there is no place for extreme ontological assertions.

True and fundamental reality is beyond the categories of pure and impure. Nevertheless, though devoid of true existence, external and in-

ternal phenomena appear—according to the habitual patterns set up by the adventitious* cognitive activity of the mind. But in reality there is nothing. These appearances are organized dualistically and are considered to exist inherently, some apprehended as subject and some as object. They are seized upon as things to accept or to reject, to accomplish or to avoid. Thus we wander endlessly, caught in the uninterrupted sequences of false appearances and false cognitions.

Proponents of philosophical tenets, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist, have reflected upon the nature of reality and repeatedly investigated it. But failing to comprehend the absence of ontological extremes, they take one of four possible positions which either overshoot the mark or fall short of it. Here we are referring, on the one hand, to those Buddhist schools which attribute true existence to either the outer object or the inner mind or which, by negating entities on the coarse level and refuting the duality of subject and object, express the ultimate reality as the mere emptiness of a nonaffirming negative. On the other hand, there are the proponents of non-Buddhist tenets. Some propound a theory of the eternal and unchanging *purusha* and *prakriti*; others hold the nihilistic view that phenomena existing here and now are purely random and that there is no causality and no past and future lives.

In addition to all this, if one intellectually elaborates a position that is free from extremes and calls it the Middle Way, proudly upholding it as supreme, this is a sign that one has failed to master the ultimate meaning.[248] Those caught in the toils of their own views and tenets are like silkworms imprisoned in cocoons devised from their own saliva.

But phenomena that are mere appearances and to which we impute real existence through the sheer power of our habits are by their fundamental nature unoriginate. (1) They are without origin. (2) They have no extinction. (3) They have no dwelling. (4) They arise from nowhere and go nowhere. And the reason for this is that (5) "self" and "other," consciousness and its objects, are neither the same (6) nor are they different. (7) They are not eternal unchanging entities, nor do they (8) have existence at the outset and fall to extinction at the end. The first six items of this list express nonaffirming negatives, while the last two are affirming negatives. Phenomena, in conclusion, are by their very nature devoid of the eight conceptual extremes.

As Master Nagarjuna has said:

> All things then dependently arise;
> They have no ending and they have no origin;
> They are not nothing, nor are everlasting;
> They do not come, they do not go;
> They are not different and they are not one.
> Thus the absence of conceptions is set forth.

The mind that truly understands this fundamental reality, the natural state of things as it is, has in its possession the unmistaken wisdom that arises from reflection.

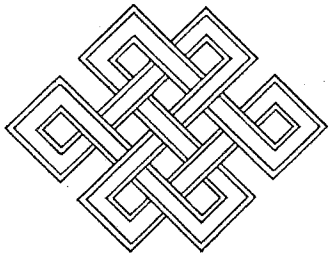
The dependent arising of samsara

All that appears on the conventional level to the deluded mind—the four elements of earth, air, fire, and water appearing within the bosom of open space; and all particular objects such as mountains, woods, villages, pitchers, woolen cloth, yak-hair fabric, soil, bamboo, and so forth—all such compounded things arise from their respective causes. In the outer world, phenomena occur due to the interdependence of twelve factors. Consider, for example, a plant, which manifests in dependence on six main causal factors (root, stem, branches, leaves, flowers, and fruit) coupled with six circumstantial factors, namely, the five elements in conjunction with time as expressed in the changing of the seasons. When all these twelve factors are present and complete, and as long as one still retains the propensity to perceive external appearances, the phenomenon "plant" will continue to manifest. Thus the outer world is the result of twelve interdependent links.[249]

In the same way, from Ignorance derive Conditioning Factors, which in turn give rise to Consciousness, and so forth. The twelve interdependent links gradually unfold, each link based on the one preceding it. They are seamlessly connected without interruption until Aging-and-Death. This is how "life" goes on, from beginningless time, until the

* *glo bur ba.*

Indestructible Truth



The Living Spirituality of Tibetan Buddhism

REGINALD A. RAY

SHAMBHALA · BOSTON & LONDON · 2000

gika cuts through the tendency to separate ultimate truth from the actual nature of relativity. The fact is that from the beginning, the relative world presents itself as empty of essence. To see the truth of relativity is to see the ultimate. To see samsara as it truly is, is to see its emptiness, which is itself a realization of the ultimate. The same is true of nirvana. The truth is that all experience, whether labeled samsara or nirvana, conditioned or unconditioned, is ineffable, beyond the reach of language. Khenpo Rinpoche explains:

> This amounts to a complete destruction of all conceptual views, leaving one with no alternative [other] than a non-conceptual view of the nature of reality. The aim of the Prasangika is to silence completely the conceptual mind, allowing the mind to rest in absolute freedom from concepts. Absolute freedom from concepts is what Prasangikas call emptiness. . . . Finally, therefore, the Prasangikas are not saying anything about the ultimate nature of reality or of emptiness. That is not the aim of their system. Their aim is to free the awareness of its conceptualizing habit and to let the ultimate nature of reality reveal itself in a totally non-conceptual way. It is a very powerful system in that it gives the conceptual mind nothing to grasp onto at all.[5]

THE PRACTICE OF MADHYAMAKA

The actual method of the Madhyamaka uses philosophical exposition, critique, and debate to bring the mind to its own nemesis. In his useful book *Open Door to Emptiness,* Thrangu Rinpoche summarizes a section of Mipham Rinpoche's *Gateway to Knowledge* on the "four skills of Madhyamaka" to illustrate the way in which the Madhyamaka method is applied.[6] These four skills include arguments that span the Indian Madhyamaka tradition but converge in their intention to render the conceptualizing mind inoperative. Each of the skills takes up a different area of conceptual thinking and explores it in depth. Thus the first skill examines our attribution of an origin or a source to things; the second, our thinking about results; the third, our conceptualizing essential nature; and the fourth our using these three habitual ways of thinking together. But although each of the four skills begins from a different starting point, they all arrive at the same destination, namely a view of the relational and finally empty nature of any and every phenomenon. Let us look briefly at these "four skills" in order to get a taste of the Madhyamaka method in action.

The Tiny Vajra

The argument of the "tiny vajra," or "little diamond," was developed by Chandrakirti. It approaches the reifying mind by examining the way in which we habitually conceptualize the *sources* of phenomena, the origins from which they arise. It is true that when we think about things, the concept of their "source" or "origin" is generally central. It certainly seems as if particular phenomena come from particular sources. When we plant a seed, that seed will give birth to a plant. But when we take any existent thing, is it possible to find a single definitive source for it? When we look closely, does the concept of a source, birth, or origin of things really make sense? Chandrakirti suggests four possible angles we could take in looking for a source. Something could be the source if the result derives from something identical with itself; from something entirely different from itself; from both itself and something other than itself; and from neither.

1. Something does not arise from itself or from something identical with itself. A seed does not directly produce another seed. It is followed by a seedling, then a plant, then a plant in flower, and eventually a plant with seeds. A source and its result cannot be identical.

2. Do things arise from something entirely different and distinct from themselves? In ordinary experience, a particular thing does seem to be produced by a specific other thing. Yet, when we examine closely, this conventional way of thinking cannot stand up. Three arguments are put forward to refute this possibility.

a) Certainly, the seed seems completely different from the plant. But for things to have a relationship of otherness or difference, it is

necessary for them to exist at the same time in order to be in relation with one another. Yet the source invariably disappears prior to the arising of the result. The seed is destroyed in the process through which the result comes to be. Since the source and the result do not occupy the same time, logically speaking they cannot really be compared with one another, and a relationship of total separateness cannot be established. The result occurs after the cause, placing it in some kind of karmic relation with the cause, and the result is also in proximity with it, again indicating some kind of close relationship.

b) It may be thought that there is some kind of purposiveness in the source that carries over into the result, making it happen. Thus, while the source may disappear prior to the result, its inner causal potency may inevitably express itself in the result and thus it may be designated as "the cause." However, in the example of the seed and the plant, the plant is very different from the seed and has come about, not just because of the seed, but because of a multitude of causes and conditions. One does need good seed, but in order for the plant to result, there must be someone to plant the seed, fertile soil in which to plant it, the right temperature, the appropriate balance of sunshine, fresh air, and rain, and so on. Thus there is nothing inevitable flowing from the seed to the plant, such that the seed would become "the source." The seed is thus not "the cause" of the plant, but one of many factors that collaborate to produce a situation in which the plant occurs.

c) Finally, someone might argue that our experience suggests that, as the source disappears, it immediately produces a result, that this then becomes another source producing another result and so on in linear fashion. But the fact is that this is not how our experience works. If we look closely, we see that things always arise out of a complex past situation, and we can never be certain what the outcome of any present situation will be. We often have the experience of thinking that we know the cause of something, perhaps some kind of interpersonal disagreement or problem. After talking with one person, we may have a pretty good idea of the problem and its origin. At this point, we may well have a fairly linear understanding of the causal pattern. But, the more we talk to those involved, the more our idea of *the* source of the

problem begins to change and we begin to see a much greater range of causal factors involved in the picture. If we go far enough with this process, we encounter the universe in all of its infinite multiplicity, its mystery, and its karmic inevitability.

3 and 4. The remaining two options—that something arises from a source that is both the same and different from itself and that it arises from neither—are more easily disposed of. A thing does not arise from a source that is both the same and different from itself, because each of these individual options has been previously refuted. Putting them together thus achieves nothing. And we can easily see that things do not arise from no source whatever. There is clearly some regularity in the way in which things work in the world. There is some kind of relation of seed with plant, although it is not a simple, substantial, and linear connection. Seeds do not produce rocks or iron.

Thus we cannot point to anything as a source of anything else. This discovery has a profound impact on the way in which we think about and interact with the world. For example, suppose someone insults me. Initially I will think, "That person said a nasty thing to me; he did it out of his jealousy, competitiveness, and aggression. I do not like him." Having determined the source of my hurt feelings, I may then begin to strategize how to get back at this person or be ready for him the next time he tries anything. I may maintain this way of thinking for hours, days, or even longer. Sometimes an unkind remark can stay with us for years and form part of our regular mental inventory.

But suppose we really begin to look closely at what we think is the source of our pain, this other person. The more we look, the more discoveries we are likely to make. For example, we may begin to see the pain this person is in. We may acquire some understanding of what he is dealing with, how hard he tries to work his life out, and the many obstacles he feels. We may further remember past interactions where we have been unkind or unfair with this person, something that we had completely blocked. At this point, we begin to see his insult partially as a response to the way we have been behaving toward him, perhaps for a long time. We may begin to feel that actually his insult was a justified

response to our own behavior and we may end up feeling that we are primarily responsible for the situation. As our understanding grows, the anger we feel begins to dissipate, and we start to feel sympathy for our "enemy." We may even come to a place of seeing his good intentions: we may begin to recognize in his insult an attempt—albeit unconsciously driven—to open up some kind of communication with us and resolve bad feelings. All this, from looking deeply at our habitual way of trying to pin down a source in any situation and from realizing that that kind of thinking is purely a function of ego's attempt to secure itself and its world, to make things simple, solid, linear, and controllable.

Thrangu Rinpoche summarizes: "We have now refuted the four possible modes of arising of phenomena: from self or from something of identical nature; from other; from both self and other; and from neither self nor other, that is, causeless arising."[7] Thus we cannot locate an origin or a source of anything. Any concept we may give to the notion of "source" is merely a selection, from the plenum, of one factor as the responsible party in the present situation. This may be our stubbornly held idea of the arising of a phenomenon, but it is an idea that does not accord with reality. Even if we select a few sources, we are still caught in our own game. Only when we realize that it does not make any sense to talk about a source of phenomena, that things arise without coming from any particular place or origin, that they are born from the totality about which nothing can be said, are we beginning to sense emptiness.

If we cannot locate any actual source for something, then we cannot talk about its having been born. Why? Because the concept of birth implies being born from something else. Something cannot arise out of nothing. Yet that is our situation, because we cannot locate any "thing" that anything has been born from. Since no source or origin can be identified, we cannot talk about birth. Thrangu Rinpoche concludes:

> We can thus see that there is no way for anything to arise; nonetheless, things continue to appear. That is, in the common mode of experience, things unceasingly arise in a functional and structured relationship with a basic source, conditions which are necessary for that source to come to fruition, and so on. If we

examine how they arise, it becomes obvious that this arising is itself an absurdity and that all arising of phenomena is empty, has no objectifiable reality of its own.

In the ultimate sense, if there is no way for anything to arise, it follows that there is no way for anything to stay; to abide. There is nothing actually there, nor is there anything that can pass away. In the Buddhist commentaries, this is called "the horns of a rabbit." If rabbits have no horns, the length of time that horns stay on a rabbit is meaningless, as is any talk about a rabbit losing his horns. According to this example we can see that since there is no way for things to arise in an ultimate sense, there can be no abiding or passing away. All appearance is mere appearance, which occurs but has no reality in itself.

Just as there is no abiding of phenomena, then neither can there be an arising and nonarising of phenomena, nor can there be neither an arising nor nonarising. In an ultimate sense, everything is totally beyond any conception whatever. This is what is meant by saying that everything is of the nature of emptiness—it is beyond any kind of conception.[8]

Looking at Results

The second skill, developed by Jnanagarbha, the teacher of Shantarakshita, looks for the supposed results or outcomes of any situation. Much of our habitual thinking is based on attributing results to things. When we act in the world, we do so with the idea that we are going to produce some kind of result. On the conventional level, situations do seem to produce definite results. However, when we look closely at the nature of things, can we say that anything ever actually produces a true, independently existing result?

Jnanagarbha suggests four perspectives to examine in looking for results: Do results exist at the point of their arising? Do they not exist, or both exist and do not exist, or neither exist nor do not exist at the point of their arising? [1] Results do not exist at the point of their arising because then they would exist along with their causes and would no

longer be results. [2] Results are also not entirely nonexistent at the point of their arising because that would require them to pass from a state of nonexistence to a state of existence.

Thrangu Rinpoche:

> The argument that prior to the occurrence of a particular effect, there was a non-existence of that effect which then is transformed into existence at the point of arising can be refuted by reference to the mutual exclusiveness of being and nothingness. There is no way for something which does not exist to suddenly transmute into existence, for appearances do not occur causelessly out of nothing at all, rather they appear in dependence on previous conditions and causes. The notion that whatever obviously did not exist has come into existence is a mere intellectual construct, a projection about a particular situation having no genuine reality.[9]
>
> . . . Any notion of things arising out of nothingness, or passing into nothingness, is just a *post factum* judgement. That is, in observing a particular, previously unnoticed phenomenon, we imagine that it has newly come to be, or we fail to observe a previously noticed phenomenon and we suppose that it has ceased to be. This is merely a mental construct with no actual reality behind it.[10]

Recall the example of the person insulting me. From my point of view, the only "result" was my feeling of pain and anger. Any other possible result was for me, literally, not worth thinking about. Having identified the result as the sole, intended outcome of the cause, I felt confirmed in my own feelings and my ill-will toward my "enemy." However, suppose I begin to look at the result more closely. I may begin to see the impact of the insult on the person who made it. I may remember a look of remorse on his face right as he blurted forth his insult, a fact that I had conveniently blocked out before. I may recall the reactions and feelings of others who witnessed the insult, perhaps the hope of someone who had been wanting me and the other person to begin dealing more directly with one another, or the fear of another who

wanted us to get along. Then there is the way this incident will impact the dynamics of the group of which we are both a part. The more I think, the more the outcomes of the insult proliferate. It is clearly not possible to identify a definitive result of the incident. I begin to realize that my attempt to identify a single result of the insult is inaccurate conceptualization, the attempt to contain a very large situation—which caused me distress—into a small, convenient, comfortable conceptual box of my own fabrication.

The fact is that the original insult arose out of a vast, unimaginably complex web of causes and conditions. There was no single origin and the situation of origin is ultimately beyond our concepts or language. Likewise, there is no single result of the insult, although I had a personal investment in thinking that there was. The results, like the causes, are multitudinous and beyond our ability to conceptualize.

[3] If we cannot say that resultant conditions exist at the point of arising or that they are entirely nonexistent, then, these two options having been refuted, we cannot say that they both exist and do not exist. [4] Finally, to say that resultant conditions neither exist nor do not exist doesn't make any sense.[11]

Thrangu Rinpoche concludes:

> In examining the outcome of any given cause, any specific source, we can see that there is no particular truly existent thing which can be designated as the result but neither is there a mere nothingness, for results are not totally non-existent. Conventionally speaking, resultant conditions appear, but from an ultimate point of view there has never been any result to anything, there being no truly existent causes.[12]
>
> There is no arising of phenomena or no passing away of phenomena and there is no abiding of or lack of abiding of appearances; there is no self-nature or lack of self-nature in phenomena. Everything that appears is mere appearance with no essence at all. In the final analysis there is nothing that can be said about phenomena. We cannot validly indicate any arising, any passing away, any coming, any going, any increase, any

recognition, or any obscuration of anything. Everything that appears is mere appearance, without further identifiable characteristics.[13]

Examining the Essence, Essential Quality, or Identity

The third skill of Madhyamaka, developed by Shantarakshita, looks to see whether we can locate the essence, the essential quality, or true identity of any phenomenon. For Madhyamaka, the essence or identity of anything is the idea or conceptual image that we have of it. This idea or concept represents our previous experience of that phenomenon, manipulated through our having selected some features, changed some around in our minds, and ignored still others, until we arrived at a version of the phenomenon in question that our egos can live with. The essence of a phenomenon can be gross, as when we meet a person from a culture that we do not like and we give rise to the thought, "This person comes from X, which I do not like; I do not like this person." The essence can also be subtle indeed, as when we recognize someone on the street, without any awareness of any thinking having occurred. Such an experience is concept operating at the level of the third skandha, perception, before we attached any labels to it, as in the fourth skandha. However, the unreliable nature of such a subtle, unconscious, perceptual attribution of "essence" is revealed by the following example. One day I was walking along a street in Chicago when I saw approaching me a lovely and gentle young woman whom I had known many years before and had cared for very much. As she approached and I recognized who she was, I suddenly found myself feeling the very same emotions I had experienced so long ago—here they were, so fresh and new. So familiar were her walk, the tilt of her head, the sweep of her hair. She came closer and my mind was racing, thinking, "What can she possibly be doing in Chicago?" and attempting to come up with something to say and wondering how it would be to talk with her again. Then, as she drew very near, I suddenly saw: *This was not her at all!* The saying was literally true: my mind had played a trick on me. Yet, for those few moments, I had the full and complete experience of seeing

her. It *was* her! All this occurred through my attributing the same "essence" or "identity" to this other person.

In our daily life, it is true that we are constantly conferring an essence, a concept, an identity to everything we experience. We perceive and relate to things based on the particular identity that we attribute to them. When I walk through the mountains at nightfall, that large, dark shape looming ahead of me shocks me into alertness. It is a huge bear, standing stock-still by the side of the trail, watching and waiting as I approach, blocking my only way home. Bears attack people, do they not? I am frozen with fear. But moments pass and the shape still does not move. Looking more closely, I see a harmless oblong boulder along the trail. Now I can relax and move ahead, continuing whatever train of thought I had been engaged in. My attribution of an essence created a false reality for me. But what if part of that dark shape on the path ahead of me is a mountain lion crouching on top of the boulder? The alacrity with which I "recognized" a harmless boulder, my relieved attribution of an essence to that shape, may have blinded me again, and this time to a much more serious danger.

Shantarakshita wants to find out whether the habitual attribution of "essence" or "own being" has any basis in reality. He is asking whether the way in which we take things as certain known quantities, with certain definite qualities and characteristics, can stand close scrutiny. Since this process of attribution is something we are engaged in all the time and something we base our lives on, it is certainly an interesting question to ask. Shantarakshita explores this issue by asking himself: If an essential quality to anything were to be found, would it be unitary or multiple? When we look at multiplicity, we immediately see that multiples are made up of units. We can only have multiplicity because we first have single things that then collectively make up the multiplicity. So our question becomes: What kind of single, unitary essential quality can we find in anything?

Thrangu Rinpoche, commenting on Shantarakshita's argument, bids us consider the example of a hill. When we think of a certain hill that we have visited, a picture comes into our minds, and we experience the identity, the essential being, of that hill as the hill that is so familiar to

us. Perhaps as a child we spent many happy hours lying in the warm summer grass at the top, watching clouds sail by. Perhaps, older, we spent time here with a sweetheart. Yet if we go to look at this hill, we see in a most dramatic way that the actual reality is not the same as our thought. We will see that the hill has a top, sides, a lower part, and various directions. It does not have one shape, size, or mood—it appears differently depending on where we stand. The hill may have rocks, meadows, trees, and bushes upon it, and perhaps a stream, but only some of these have contributed to our memory. Moreover, unlike our memory, there is no young child there watching the clouds go by or sweethearts sitting idly and contentedly in the warm, musty field grass. There is no one here, and the contrast of our memory of the hill and the stark, lonely reality can give rise to a feeling of sorrow and desolation. What, then, is "the hill," really? We must ask ourselves, can we find any one thing that is actually "the hill"? Where is this mental image that we see every time we think of the hill? It does not exist. Nothing in reality corresponds with the "essence" that I attribute to the hill in my own mind. There are many aspects to the hill, many features, but no unitary thing, "the hill."

By way of another example, let us consider our car. When we think of it, we form a definite picture and see clearly before us its identity, defined by certain features and characteristics. Yet, when we go to look at that car, we see that it is made up of many parts such as wheels, a windshield, an engine, a roof, seats, and so on. Where is the essential nature of the car located, exactly? If we begin removing parts of the car, at which point does it stop being a car? The answer is that there is no point at which it stops being a car other than when I stop thinking of it in that way. It is my attribution that locates this expensive mass of metal as a car. Moreover, in taking the car apart, ten people would probably have ten different points at which they felt that the essential nature of car had ceased to be. This indicates clearly that essential nature is not something residing in the object, but rather something that resides just in our own thinking. The car, in and of itself, possesses no essential nature.

What if we take one of the elements that, together, make up a car?

Let us consider a tire. When we think of this tire, we seem to see a specific, existent thing, with a particular essence or meaning. However, when we look at the tire, we see that it also is multiple, made up of a rim, rubber, a valve, various nuts and bolts, and so on. So it too is multiple, without essential nature. Let us consider one of the nuts that hold on the tire. It too is a compound, being made up of a metallic alloy, shaped in a certain way, threaded, with top, bottom, and sides. That nut may seem unitary in our thinking, having an essential nature, but when we look at it, we find all of these distinct elements and are in a quandary exactly where the essence of the nut is to be found.

The previous examples have been drawn from the external world of appearances. Would it be possible to find a single, essential essence to our inner mental world? Most of us think we have a "mind" and we have some idea what the essence of our mind is. However, what we call our "mind" is, like external phenomena, in fact multiple, being composed of various kinds of consciousness—visual, auditory, and so on—and various kinds of mental contents including feelings, perceptions, and karmic formations. Even what we may identify as the second skandha, feeling, does not have an essential nature, as it is made up of pain, pleasure, and neutral feelings. Let us consider "pain." We would certainly all admit to knowing what this word refers to, and each of us can probably readily call up an image of "pain," revealing that we have an idea of its essential nature. Yet, if we look closely at the actual and literal experience of that which we call pain, we may be in for a surprise. We may find that what we label as pain is, in fact, made up of an infinite variety of experiences—of appearances, for want of a better word—of energy of different temperatures, colors, intensities, and so on. In fact, there appears to be nothing in the experiences themselves that invariably and definitively marks them all as one thing, pain. The only common thing we may be able to find in what we call pain is that each of us chooses to think of certain experiences in that way and labels them as "painful."

In a similar fashion, we might look at elemental realities of our lives, such as time. It is obviously so central to my life that I definitely think that I know what time is. It certainly seems to have an essential nature, an identity that I can picture. But let us look more closely and ask, what

is time and what is its essential nature? Time, again, is multiple, being dependent on the existence of past, present, and future. If only the present existed, if past and future did not exist, then where would be no time. Let us consider the past. Surely when I think of the past, I have a clear idea of what the essential nature of the past is. Yet in looking closely at "the past," we see that it is only an experience that occurs in the present that we choose to call "the past." When we are thinking about "yesterday," we are experiencing certain images in this present moment. Ultimately, "the past" is a label given to certain currently occurring thoughts and images that we designate "memory." Yet how is a memory different from a simple image and how is this different from an intimation of the future? There is no difference in essence, only the difference that we choose to impute.

Thus is it that no single phenomenon is unitary in nature with a single, essential nature. Everything that appears is a compound. Thrangu Rinpoche concludes, "In examining objective appearances in this way, it becomes obvious that there is no essential quality to any of it. There being no essential quality in any of the appearances which nonetheless occur, we may conclude that all is Emptiness, all is of the nature of Shunyata."

> Thus we can conclude from the foregoing analysis that there is no way for there to be any particular single real nature or essential quality to anything. And if there is no single real nature, there could also not be any multiple real nature, because multiplicity is based on single units and if there is no single unit there can be no multiple. These being the only possible alternative modes in which a real essential nature or quality might exist, we can see from this one method of examination that there is no self in any appearance, no self in any dharma, no essential nature to anything at all.[14]

Recognizing the Interdependent Nature of Everything

The fourth and final skill of Madhyamaka, attributed to Nagarjuna, is to recognize the interdependent, relational nature of everything. This

skill puts together the three previous skills and examines causes, results, and essential nature together, without dividing them up. To illustrate how this works, let us again bring up the example of a hill to illustrate this point. Thrangu Rinpoche points out:

> If we are standing on a hill, the hill we are standing on is the hill over here, and the hill we see in the distance is the hill over there. But if we go over to the other hill, the hill we are then standing on is the hill over here, and the hill we were standing on before is the hill over there. Like that, things that are interdependent exist only in a relative sense—they do not exist in their own right but are always conditioned, dependent on circumstances.[15]

When we attempted to try to find an objectifiable source for things, we could not do so. Nevertheless, we also saw that things do not arise arbitrarily. There is some regularity in the world. When we attempt to contravene that regularity, we are hit with an unmistakable karmic effect, such as when we touch a hot stove, stub our toe against a rock, or say something mean to a friend.

> Phenomena have no discoverable essence or real nature, but appear without any objectifiable reality, like reflections in a mirror, due to causes and conditions. Phenomena, having no objectifiable real nature, are not eternal, but neither are they merely nothing. They do not come from anywhere, nor do they go anywhere. There is not real arising of them, nor is there any actual passing away of them. They do not exist independently, but occur interrelatedly due to the presence of sources and appropriate conditions. Thus all phenomenal occurrence[s] are beyond any possible conception.[16]

How are phenomena, then? They may be compared to the image of a person in a mirror. The image certainly appears, but we do not think that someone is actually there in the mirror. We do not attribute the essence or identity of "actual person" to the image. The image may be

alive, breathing, even smiling and laughing, but we are aware that it is an image, not the real thing. There is no real arising of a person in the mirror and no passing away of such a person. It is similar with all of our experience.

> Phenomena are merely an unending succession of momentary arising, structured in a particular fashion, having no independent existence. They are not describable by any of the four propositions of being, non-being, both and neither, either in their sources or in their results. No particular real point of their arising can ever be discovered, and partial notions about them, such as that they are permanent, impermanent, and so on, are all inadequate to describe their actual nature. This unreal, apparitional existence of reflections in the mirror is of mere appearances occurring due to causes and conditions. And these conditioned appearances are in no way distinct from the fundamental emptiness.[17]

Upon close analysis, then, we do not find any objectifiable essence to anything. As we saw, this does not mean that things are completely nonexistent, a mere nothingness, but that they continue to appear. At the same time, their actual appearance is beyond any definitive objectifiable identity or essential nature. So it is that the ordinary things of this world, the people, places, and situations that we encounter every day, all these phenomena are fundamentally beyond thought, ineffable, and empty of essence. Thrangu Rinpoche:

> The lack of objectifiable reality nonetheless permits the continued expression of all kinds of experiences. When investigating the ultimate nature, we discover that there is no fundamental characteristic, no essential reality, no objectifiable reality to anything, so it is said that all things are empty, that there is no true reality at all. However, Emptiness is not distinguishable from the appearance of the phenomena we experience. These phenomena themselves are not separated from the fundamental nature, so our basic experience in the world is, in reality, never

> anything but fundamental Emptiness, or lack of reality in everything. So the conventional truth concerning the way all appearances and experiences function, and the ultimate truth concerning the lack of objectifiable reality in everything, are inseparable; they are not two different things, but rather an integrated whole. This is the basic viewpoint of Madhyamaka as expounded by Nagarjuna, and it is a description of the actual viewpoint on reality of an enlightened Buddha.[18]

THE RESULT OF MADHYAMAKA

The method of Madhyamaka, as mentioned, is not an abstract intellectual exercise without practical meaning or results. In fact, realizing the absence of any inherent nature in phenomena has profound effects on the practitioner of Madhyamaka. Most fundamentally, that person is plunged into the essence of what is sometimes called in Zen "don't-know mind." One sees one's thoughts and preconceptions as transparent and without substance or reality. One does not fall into the trap of coming to definitive conclusions about things. One is always waiting and watching.

In such a state of suspended belief, one's senses and one's intuition become more and more highly attuned. If one cannot rely on what one thinks, one must then rely on what one sees. One must look closely at the nature of the present moment in order to know what is so.

The present moment reveals itself as empty of essence, empty of self-nature or any objectifiable reality. But, for all that, it is not utterly empty and void, either. It cannot be said to be nonexistent either, for then it would again have an essence, the essence of nonexistence. One is then left only with the indescribable, ineffable reality that composes the fabric of our experience.

It is this ineffable reality, the very nature of emptiness, that, according to the Mahayana, alone provides a sound basis for ethical conduct. The bodhisattva, rather than acting toward sentient beings based on his opinions of what is "good" for them, knows that he does not *know* and can

Emptiness Yoga

The Tibetan Middle Way

Jeffrey Hopkins

Edited by Joe B. Wilson

Snow Lion Publications
Ithaca, New York USA

16 Bringing the Reasoning to Life

COMMENTS

An example is easier to understand than the thing itself. Taken at face value, this should mean that it is easier to understand the absence of inherent existence of a chariot than it is to understand the absence of inherent existence of a person. However, it is traditionally said that the selflessness of persons is easier to understand than the selflessness of phenomena and that this is the reason why one meditates on the selflessness of persons first. As Dzong-ka-ba says in his *Middling Exposition of Special Insight*:[273]

Chandrakīrti's *Clear Words* and Buddhapālita's *Commentary on (Nāgārjuna's) "Treatise on the Middle Way"* explain that when entering into suchness, one initially enters by way of the selflessness of persons. Shāntideva also says the same. The reason why it must be done this way is that, although there is no difference in subtlety with regard to the selflessness to be ascertained in terms of the persons or the phenomena that are its base, selflessness is easier to ascertain in terms of a person, due to essentials of the substratum, whereas it is more difficult to ascertain in terms of [other]

phenomena. For example, since it is more difficult to ascertain the selflessness of phenomena in terms of an eye, ear, and so forth and easier to ascertain it it terms of a reflection and so forth, the latter are posited as examples for settling selflessness in terms of the former.

Dzong-ka-ba clearly says that selflessness is to be ascertained first with respect to persons and then with respect to other phenomena; he says that this is due to "essentials of the substratum" but does not say what these essentials are. Lati Rinbochay, recently abbot of the Shar-dzay College of Gan-den Monastic University in Mundgod, Karnataka State, in South India, explained that the person is always present and thus it is easier to realize its emptiness than that of other phenomena. However, our minds are also always present, and they are phenomena other than persons.

The Dalai Lama explained that we already have some suspicions about the status of the person, since the lower Buddhist schools hold that only persons are empty of self-sufficient, substantial existence. Because we already have suspicions that persons do not exist in accordance with their appearance, it is easier to realize emptiness in terms of a person than in terms of other phenomena.

Still, Chandrakīrti seems to use a selflessness of a phenomenon other than a person (a chariot) as the example for the selflessness of persons in the sevenfold reasoning. Putting this together with what Dzong-ka-ba and the Dalai Lama have said, perhaps it is that although, in the strict usage of examples in Buddhist reasoning, the predicate of a thesis (such as the absence of inherent existence) is realized first in terms of the example and then in terms of the subject, here that is not case; rather, you are not fully cognizing the emptiness of a chariot but are merely gaining some familiarity with the procedure of the reasoning. Perhaps the tradition first examines a chariot because it is an external object, such that when we analyze it and take it

apart, it does not affect us quite as much as would taking apart our own sense of self and thus is easier for getting a sense of how the reasoning works.

In any case, we have to throw ourselves into the analysis of a chariot, after which that understanding is to be applied to the person, oneself. Since it is the person who travels in cyclic existence and who is the focus, or the knot, of all the trouble, emphasis has to be put on it. It may be the case that until we work on breaking through the heavy encrustations of inherent existence that are superimposed on this I which is most important in terms of being caught in cyclic existence, it is impossible to *realize* the selflessness of another phenomenon no matter how facilely the format of the reasoning may appear to our minds.

It is a basic tenet of the Consequence School that when the emptiness of inherent existence of one subject is realized, all superimpositions of inherent existence have been removed with respect to all other phenomena, due to which you need only turn your mind to other phenomena in order to realize their emptiness. Thus, overcoming the superimpositions of inherent existence and realizing emptiness is an horrendous task, and without explicitly taking the person, I, which is the center of all the troubles of cyclic existence as the basis of your meditation, it is impossible to penetrate the webs, veils, and encrustations of the superimpositions of inherent existence with respect to another phenomenon to the point of *realizing* emptiness. Although it is the case that when you apply the sevenfold reasoning to a chariot, or a car, you can be shocked to the very depth of your being that it is not an analytically findable entity as you previously thought, still actual *realization* of emptiness is even more profound. The Dalai Lama described developing a correct assumption of emptiness as like being hit by lightning, and thus the development of inferential realization must be a thousand times more shocking. Therefore, the reason why the emptiness of a chariot is given as an example of the emptiness of a person may be that it is easier to learn the

format of the reasoning with this less touchy subject even though it is not easier to realize the *emptiness* of this less touchy subject.[274]

Being Unfindable and Yet Being Validly Established

A chariot is analytically unfindable but is nevertheless validly established. We usually think that if something is valid, it must be findable. For instance, a valid car must be usable, able to perform its functions. Suppose I told you that I had bought a great new car and would take you for a ride. If we went outside, and there was only a bumper and a part of an engine, you would say, "That is not a car, it cannot perform the functions of a car." This is not the unfindability the Proponents of the Middle Way are talking about. A car that has valid nominal establishment can perform the functions of a car, even though it cannot be found under the sevenfold analysis.

If you went to a movie and the film was ripped so badly that you could see only the left half of the picture, there is no question that the film would not be performing its proper function. You would get fed up with it and leave the theatre, maybe go to another movie. You would have become discouraged about that movie. Or, suppose you go to a store and buy a lot of heavy things, canned goods, milk, and so on, and the clerk gives you a wet paper bag to put them in. You would say, "This is not a paper bag," and would start thinking about how you could get a paper bag to put your groceries in. Your mind would race to something else. Just so, because we are not accustomed to the Middle Way view, when we search to find things and do not find them, we become discouraged and depressed. Our minds want to race on to something else and are not impressed by this unfindability since we take it to be a type of non-finding that we are already used to.

We have little choice but to work within the context of our own mind, and indeed this is the way in which our minds have been conditioned to operate. However, discouragement at the lack of analytical findability is mistaken; it comes from our foolish habituation to the sense of inherent existence. In this vein, the Fifth Dalai Lama says that for a beginner the experience of emptiness carries with it a sense of loss:[275]

If you have no predispositions for emptiness from a former life, it seems that a thing which was in the hand has suddenly been lost. If you have predispositions, it seems that a lost jewel which had been in the hand has suddenly been found.

Emptiness is the key to mental and physical transformation; thus, for someone who is used to it, it is not at all like losing something. Rank beginners, however, would have a hard time staying with the process of realization due to their sense of loss; we have ingrained tendencies to leave such a state.

We have to be able to search for objects, not find them, and then remain in the vivid realization that they cannot be found. We have to realize, for instance, that there is a book here, Jang-gya's *Presentation of Tenets,* which he wrote and yet we cannot analytically find any writer who wrote it, subject written about, or readers for whom it was written. We have to understand, moreover, that this unfindable writing nominally performs a function and realize that unfindability is not a reason for giving something up.

Thus, it is within the context of their being unfindable that things are validly established. It is not that unfindability contradicts the valid establishment of the object; it contradicts the object's inherent existence. Also, it is not that you first develop a wisdom consciousness that does not find inherent existence and then, when you cease meditating, ignorance comes back, within the context of which things are validly established and exist.

We can also say that a conventionally existent table is refuted as ultimately existing, but this only means that an *inherently existent* table is refuted as being conventionally

existent. Ultimate analysis cannot negate a conventionally existent table. It can only negate a findable, ultimately existing table. We also need to counteract the tendency to consider even nominal existence as if it were findable, as if it could bear ultimate analysis.

The cognition of emptiness has great meaning; in time, it will get us out of cyclic existence. If we immediately cognized it *directly*, we would naturally appreciate its significance, but when we set out on a path to this direct realization and get to a point where we tend toward depression or want to turn away to something new, we have to be careful not to veer off this path. Thus, you need firm motivation for meditation, as well as perseverance. If you have tremendously good predispositions, you will appreciate the significance of this unfindability right away. If you do not, you just have to keep reminding yourself that this is the real nature of objects, or, if you have the wish to help others, that this is a supreme way to bring that about. In cultivating altruism you are developing love and compassion for all sentient beings and the determination to attain enlightenment in order to help them. Necessary for attaining this position through which you can help sentient beings on a vast scale is direct cognition of emptiness. If you cannot make effort at realizing emptiness, then your desire to help all beings is merely words. So, here is something you can do: you can stay with this realization that will help clear up your mind so that eventually you can liberate all other beings. If you do not do this, what are you going to do?

In his *Precious Garland*,[276] Nāgārjuna says that if you saw a mirage in the distance and, after going over to see if water was there and finding none, thought, "That water no longer exists," you would be very stupid, for that water never existed. You were living with a mistake, a dream; now you have awakened, and you mourn the loss of the dream-objects. Similarly, although since beginningless time we have been convinced that the object of negation, inherent existence, has existed, we have to realize that it is just made

up, that it was not there at all, and that now we are seeing the reality that was there all the time. Proud people do not have the slightest hope of realizing this. People who insist on being right have no hope at all. It must be that when you realize emptiness, you understand that you were mistaken in every perception you have ever had. We are wrong from beginning to end, completely foolish in terms of the status of objects. Ignorance may actually be a small thing when you see the truth — wisdom and ignorance being as if you could have gone this way or that way; still, it produces a huge error. Those who are proud and want to be right all the time just cannot face how wrong they have been. It is no one's fault but our own.

At the beginning of 1965 at the Tibetan Buddhist Learning Center in New Jersey, I spent a lot of time just meditating on the fact that I was wrong, given that in all my perceptions everything appeared to exist from its own side. I kept repeating to myself, "I am wrong, I am wrong, I am wrong," imagining people pointing their fingers at me and saying that I was wrong. In time, I was able to think, "There is just no question about it. I accept it completely, I am wrong." We are afraid to be wrong; it takes courage to be wrong, to be able to take being wrong. If you are willing to accept your error, you develop greater strength of character just from the fact that you are wrong. You can even carry it further and let yourself be wrong in every instance where someone thought it was a question of right or wrong, for no matter what the situation was, you really were wrong — about the mode of existence of the object. Which is more important, the way in which the whole world exists or whether so-and-so said this or said that? Even if you win the argument, you are still wrong; you should face the fact that you are wrong.

You might become proud that you are facing the fact that you are wrong, but this means that you are looking at it incorrectly. You have to take this vastly, as when you do everything for the sake of all beings. You can take the very

pride that swells up and meditate from within that, thinking that this pride itself is for the sake of all sentient beings. Inside, where you want it for yourself, it is all knotted up; if you take this pride outside for the sake of all sentient beings, the knot will loosen. It is no longer the same kind of pride that it used to be.

The main point is to realize how wrong one is. We have to get rid of the pride that always wants to be right and accept being wrong about the most important thing. Suppose that when you were a child you learned that all people of a certain country were bad. This was reinforced over and over again in newspapers and so on. If you later studied and found out that all people of that country are not bad, you would go back in your memory through your whole lifetime to undo this conditioning, seeing yourself as wrong in every single one of these instances where the opinion that all those people are bad was reinforced. The meditation on wrongness is similar.

Determining the Entailment

Once you understand something about how these seven reasons work, it can be determined whether or not it follows from them that a chariot is not inherently existent: if something does not exist in any of these seven ways, does it then follow that it is not inherently existent? First, you have to be able to decide that if a chariot exists in accordance with its concrete appearance to you — like your car or your house — you ought to be able to find it. Once you have determined this, the question becomes, "What kind of a mind is qualified to find such concrete existence?" If you thought, for example, that you had termites in your house, you would put a lot of energy into trying to find out whether or not you actually did have termites. You would try to find someone who knew where the termites would likely be found. Just so, you have to give inherent existence every possible chance there is. Go out to your car and try to find it, really.

If you determine that the object must not inherently exist if, after looking in all seven of these places, you still do not find it, then you have established the entailment, the second of the nine essentials. For me, these seven ways cover all possibilities. Take a car, for example. You have some parts: metal, paint, seat, an engine and so forth, and you have a car. This car, if it is really there, must either be, in brief, the same as these parts or different from them. This is so; there is nothing unfair in saying that. Still, as soon as you realize that if something inherently exists, it must exist in one of these seven ways, you already have some doubt about its inherent existence. When you realize the entailment, the pervasion, you have already changed a bit. You have not yet found that the car does not exist in any of these seven ways, but your usual mind that is overwhelmed by the appearance of a car is interrupted.

There is no question that we are now overwhelmed by what appears to us. Why else would we be so deceived by dreams unless we were overwhelmed by appearances? We feel that the basic stuff of the universe is impinging on us and that we are correct in responding to these appearances. I have had many dreams about getting on and off buses searching for a place; all of a sudden there I am, there is a bus, and I am getting on it. The wish to get on it and the wish to find a certain place are already there. I do not even consider whether I want to find the place or not; the mind to do so already exists right there. I am already completely inside this unfolding scene, and yet it is merely beginning. I accept it as if it were all logical and sensible, as if there were a whole sequence of events that led up to it. But, actually, all I have done is to lay my head on a pillow. For us to agree with it, the appearance must be very powerful; we must be addicted to accepting appearances. We have acquired a need and have to fulfill it. In meditation on emptiness, reason is being used to counteract this.

If something were inherently existent, it would have to exist in one of these seven ways. If it does not exist in one of

these seven, it is not inherently existent and, therefore, does not exist the way it appears. What seems so bothersome about the reasoning is its decisiveness. We could decide that although it is possible to consider these things from many points of view, there is nothing that one can really do about the basic appearance, and thus we should just put up with it. Or, we could decide that the reasoning simply is incapable of indicating anything about the basic appearance. However, what we are doing here is the opposite; we are getting down to the raw stuff of existence itself, challenging through reasoning the very way that things appear to us, not just abstractly dealing in theories. Many people nowadays think that reasoning is useless with respect to direct experience; however, here reasoning is used to refute direct experience by telling us something earth-shattering about it: that is, that objects falsely appear to have a far more substantial status than they actually do.

Presently, we are part of the end result of a process of over-concretization. Object and subject are already there, appearing to us. Thus, to make any kind of decision about the way in which things appear seems to contradict our own status. Nevermind searching, in seven ways, for the phenomenon designated, even to ascertain the entailment is for us like challenging the process of appearance. Who are we to make such a judgment? It seems tantamount to creating our own data. We feel as if this is not our place at all, that our place is to be someone who is just a responder.

Our usual sense is of a reality that is there like Mother Nature herself; we feel that there is nothing we can do about it, it is just there. The sevenfold analysis interferes with all this. It changes our position in the carnival of appearance — instead of being the end result of appearance, we are going back down inside it. We are taking this end-result, the responder-mind that agrees with things as they appear, and analyzing, "Do these things exist the way that they appear?"

Upon initially analyzing in this manner, it is not as if we

suddenly have a new kind of mind. We are consuming the fuel of wrong conception with the fire of conception itself. We are lighting the fire of right thought which will burn away wrong thought so that in the end there will be no conceptual thought left at all. The "Kāshyapa Chapter" of the *Pile of Jewels Sūtra* says:[277]

Kāshyapa, it is thus: For example, fire arises when the wind rubs two branches together. Once the fire has arisen, the two branches are burned. Just so Kāshyapa, if you have the correct analytical intellect, a Superior's faculty of wisdom is generated. Through its generation, the correct analytical intellect is consumed.

By using conceptuality to burn conceptuality away, only direct perception is left at Buddhahood.

This kind of practice is emotionally harrowing, for our mind has been convinced to remain in its place for eons and eons. Over and over and over again everything has convinced us that it would be better to stay as we are and leave things be. The inertia to stay with the status quo is great. We feel that otherwise there would be no way at all for us to get along, whereas in fact we would get along much better if we could figure out the actual status of objects.

This conceptual mind, the mental consciousness, has to make a decision, has to do some unusual thinking. Instead of taking everything as given, it must challenge appearances. Children often enter into these kinds of probing thoughts; eventually, however, they are conditioned such that they no longer ask these questions. At a certain point, we accept things as reality, no longer feeling to question. For, "reality" will not bear these questions. If this is going to be reality, its very precondition is that you will not ask such questions of it. Thus, when you do ask them, it is upsetting. We have become used to it this way. We need a willingness for new experience even if it entails the reopening of wounds of emotions built on views of reality. This

analysis involves anxiety, fear. It is necessary to build the kind of mind that will not want to sink back and be overcome by inertia, a mind willing to change, willing to see everything change.

Practices that are a great help in the midst of these changes are love, compassion, and the altruistic intention to become enlightened. Realizing emptiness helps to develop such altruism, but altruism also helps in understanding emptiness. No matter what type of practice you are doing, meritorious power helps, and altruism is the best kind of merit. It loosens up the mind and relaxes it so that, when these changes in state occur, bad events do not have the chance to take over.

If you can challenge appearances, you can ask whether these seven questions are sufficient. We have to determine whether, through employing these seven reasonings, we can create a consciousness that is like a pest control person who knows how to find cockroaches. Is this consciousness that applies these seven criteria sufficient to find inherent existence? A policeman, for example, applies criteria in order to find out if someone is the killer or not. Are these seven criteria sufficient to investigate inherent existence?

If you leave it for the rest of the world to decide, people will say that you should not ask these questions. They will say that you are being too literal, that since everything is related and mutually dependent, it is not necessary to be so literal. Dependence for them means inherent existence. They feel that the way things appear is correct. Furthermore, if you were to ask philosophy experts how many agree that these seven criteria are sufficient to establish or reject, once and for all, the existence of things as we conceive of them, I think that not many would feel they are; it is too conclusive.

We need a competent mind, one that could find inherent existence if it were there. You will perhaps feel that you already have a mind that is finding inherent existence. For when you think about your car, there it is. You already have

a mind capable of finding it, why look for another one? Why structure one, why use a whole lot of words? This car is a valid appearance, isn't it? This, however, is to accept the given, living in the end result of appearance. Is such a mind actually competent? Just because when you go out, the car appears to you to exist from its own side and you think about it that way, is such a thing valid?

The Nying-ma lama Khetsun Sangpo tells a story about someone who finds a scorpion and, not knowing that it is a scorpion, puts it in his hand. Looking at it, he says, "How fantastic! How beautiful, how black!" Then someone says, "That's a scorpion," and he goes, "Eek!" Now what was that lovely thing he saw? Was such a mind competent? Suppose you think that you have termites in your house and want to find out where they are. Some person comes up to your door, a real bum, who comes into your house and says, "Man, that's a termite trail; you give me five hundred dollars, and I'll get rid of your termites for you." You will wonder if he is competent. He has come in, and he is definitely there; he is very vividly appearing to you. However, is he competent? Does he have the materials? Does he have the training, and could he get rid of the termites? Is five hundred dollars a fair price?

Is the dream-mind that accepts the so vivid appearances of dreams competent? Usually we do not stop in dreams and think about them; it is rare to have a mind that can relate to dreams in this fashion. However, is our dream-mind a competent mind? When, in a dream, I try to find out if I am dreaming or not, whether these things are false appearances or not, I find that at times I am just overwhelmed by appearances. Though I start out realizing that I am dreaming, having the very strong thought, "Dream, dream, dream ...", after a while it is as if I am being pressured out of retaining the thought that I am in a dream, and I capitulate. Eventually, I wake up, see that it was a dream, and feel like a fool. This experience makes me question whether these non-dream minds are competent or not in that they

accept how things appear just because they appear vividly.

Here you might think, "Since our minds have been conditioned from time without beginning to assent to this appearance of objects as if they are established by way of their own character, how can we possibly have a mind competent to determine the truth or falsity of this appearance?" If it were possible to develop ignorance limitlessly, which it is not, we would indeed be without any hope. If you could bring ignorance to full, utter completion, there would be no point in trying to overcome it. But ignorance does not accord with the fact, whereas what does accord with the fact can, over time, develop force. Emptiness has valid backing. Therefore, the wisdom that cognizes emptiness also has valid backing and can be developed limitlessly and brought to full fruition.

The beginning of a wisdom consciousness cognizing emptiness is developed by reflecting on the reasons proving an emptiness. The reasoning process is a chain leading from what is in experience to something that is not obvious. Still, you do not take two obvious things and put them together and have another obvious thing. You have to go through what may seem like a dark passage where you start with a few obvious things and then progress to the unknown. It is not like passing from one room to another, but is more like finding out that there is a palace of jewels right here under your basement. The reasoning is not like reading a map in order to learn the route to go to some *other* city. It seems that when emptiness is realized, you are doing something the very type of which you have not done before.

17 I As a Basis of Emptiness

We have studied the example, a chariot; now, let us consider the meaning exemplified, the person.

APPLYING THE EXAMPLE TO THE MEANING

> One should consider whether this so-called person or self which is the basis of the conception thinking "I" is the same as one's own [mental and physical] aggregates or different from them.

The person or self is the basis of a consciousness conceiving "I" and is the object that generates the thought "I". It is the conventionally existent I. A consciousness that apprehends or conceives it is correct, valid, because a conventionally existent I does indeed exist. This explanation, despite the fact that it is technically correct, is, at this point, only theoretical since, prior to realizing emptiness, it is impossible to realize that a person or any other phenomenon only conventionally exists.

As with the chariot, what we are considering is the relationship between the phenomenon designated and its basis of designation. A person in our realm, the Desire Realm, is