

The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness

A six-week course from May 21 to July 2 (omitting June 18), 2019

For those interested in exploring the depths of the Mahayana Buddhist contemplative tradition of the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages. This will be an accessible introduction to the stages of understanding of the nature of reality and how to contemplate and meditate upon those. Each class will consist of meditation, presentation and discussion and guided contemplation.

This course will focus on a contemplative approach to the stages of the experience of emptiness. It is based upon a classic text, *The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness (PSME)*, by one of the main teachers of the Kagyu School today, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. Please purchase a copy on your own. Classes are recorded, so you can catch up on any you miss, and placed on the following website, along with handouts: www.rimsehdra.nyc.

Classes are held on the third floor of #307 West 30th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues (closer to 8th). It is a walkup.

Summary Syllabus

1) May 21: Introduction and Overview of the Progressive Stages

a) **PSME:** Intro, Conclusion and Appendix

2) May 28: Stage One - Sravaka Meditation on Not Self

a) **PSME:** Stage One-The Shravaka Approach

3) June 4: Stage Two – Mind Only

a) **PSME:** Stage Two-The Cittmatra Approach

4) June 11: Stage Three – Madhyamika Part I: Svatantrika

a) **PSME:** Stage Three-The Svatantrika Approach

5) June 25: Stage Four - Madhyamika Part II: Prasangika

a) **PSME:** Stage Four-The Prasangika Approach

6) July 2: Stage Five – Madhyamika Part III: Shentong

a) **PSME:** Stage Five-The Shentong Approach

The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness

Detailed Syllabus

PSME = Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness, Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

1) Introduction and Overview of the Progressive Stages

a) Threefold Logic:

- i) Ground: Conceptual understanding of the process of approach to emptiness – generating the meaning generality.
- ii) Path: Refining that by means of the three prajnas
- iii) Fruition: The five stages of progressive understanding of emptiness

b) Topics:

- i) Direct perception of emptiness as the goal
- ii) Inferential understanding as the starting point
- iii) Establishing the initial conceptual image
- iv) Refining the conceptual image
- v) The stages of refinement

c) Contemplation:

- i) Identification of the self
- ii) Three qualities of the imputed self

d) In Class Reading:

- i) PSME: Intro, Conclusion and Appendix

2) Stage One - Sravaka Meditation on Not Self

a) Threefold Logic:

- i) Ground: Refining the sense of self as possessing three qualities
- ii) Path: Analyzing the self into components and investigating their possession of the three qualities
- iii) Fruition: Understanding the sense of self as a conceptual imputation upon the five aggregates

b) Topics:

- i) The specific identification of the sense of self
- ii) The three qualities of this imputation
- iii) The Five Skandhas as the basis of imputation
- iv) Resolution of experience into the matrix or flux of point specific dharmas

c) Contemplation:

- i) The Seven-fold analysis of the emptiness of the self of the person

d) Reading:

- i) PSME: Stage One-The Shravaka Approach

3) Stage Two – Mind Only

a) Threefold Logic:

- i) Ground: Experience as the flux or matrix of interdependently arisen phenomena/dharmas
- ii) Path: Examination of the process of perception from form to contact to consciousness, the 18 dhatus
- iii) Fruition: Experience of the non-duality of subject and object of perception, Mind Only
- b) Topics:**
 - i) Experience as a continually fluctuating matrix of pratityasamutpada dharmas
 - ii) The perceptual process: the five skandhas and the 8 consciousnesses
 - iii) Investigating the boundaries: Where does matter end and mind begin? Where does mind end and matter begin?
 - iv) Experience of objects, the perceived, as not different from the mind, the perceiver
 - v) The Three Natures – imaginary, dependent, and completely perfected
 - vi) The Mind Only View
- c) Contemplation:**
 - i) The perceptual process of the 18 dhatus
 - ii) Lack of duality in perception, subject/object
- d) Readings:**
 - i) PSME: Stage Two-The Cittmatra Approach

4) Stage Three – Madhyamika Part I: Svatantrika

- a) Threefold Logic:**
 - i) Ground: Experience of non-dual awareness, Mind Only
 - ii) Path: Analyzing this awareness Mind as empty of essence
 - iii) Fruition: Emptiness of conceptuality, mind as empty like space
- b) Topics:**
 - i) The view and practice of Madhyamaka, the middle way
 - ii) The extremes of existence and non-existence
 - iii) Their relation to the self of persons and phenomena
 - iv) The Middle way view of emptiness
 - v) The Middle way view of the Two Truths
 - vi) The reliance upon reasoning
 - vii) The relation between language and the mental process
- c) Contemplation:**
 - i) The Four Skills (one and two)
 - (1) Introduction to the four skills
 - (2) Emptiness by analyzing Causes
 - (3) Emptiness by analyzing Results
 - ii) Empty Space
- d) Readings:**
 - i) PSME: Stage Three-The Svatantrika Approach

5) Stage Four - Madhyamika Part II: Prasangika

- a) Threefold Logic:**
 - i) Ground: Emptiness of conceptuality

- ii) Path: Refinement into a non-implicative negation
- iii) Fruition: Complete freedom from conceptual fabrication/elaboration; simplicity
- b) Topics:**
 - i) Beyond mental grasping/cutting conceptual mind
 - ii) The non-affirming or implicative negation
 - iii) The refinement of the Two Truths
- c) Contemplation:**
 - i) The Four Skills (three and four)
 - (1) The emptiness of identity by analyzing one or many
 - (2) The emptiness of interdependence
 - ii) Empty Space
- d) Reading:**
 - i) PSME: Stage Four-The Prasangika Approach

6) Stage Five – Madhyamika Part III: Shentong

- a) Threefold Logic:**
 - i) Ground: Freedom from conceptual elaboration
 - ii) Path: Resting in luminous empty awareness
 - iii) Fruition: Self illuminating primordial awareness
- b) Topics:**
 - i) Rangtong – empty of self; Shentong – empty of other
 - ii) Identification of Jnana, the Wisdom Mind
 - iii) The Third turning and Tathagatagarbha
 - iv) Difference between Shentong and Mind Only and Prasangika
 - v) Resting in the essence
- c) Contemplation:**
 - i) Identifying and resting in the clear light nature of mind, naked awareness
- d) Readings:**
 - i) PSME: Stage Five-The Shentong Approach

7) Questions to Contemplate

- a) What is the difference between the self of persons and phenomena?
- b) What are the three attributes of a self and how do we experience them?
- c) What is the instantaneously fluctuating matrix of specifically characterized phenomena?
- d) What are the three natures? Provide an experiential example
- e) How does Mind Only differ from pure idealism?
- f) What is an implicative negation?
- g) How does the wisdom mind differ from Mind Only?
- h) Do you generally live as if believing in existence or non-existence?
- i) How does the structure of language relate to our perceptual process?

Stages in the Analysis of Emptiness

1. **Vaibhashika** - The self is a generally characterized imputation projected onto compounded phenomena
2. **Sautrantika** - Compounded phenomena are mere specifically characterized appearances
3. **Cittamatra** - Appearances are mind
4. **Svantrika Madhyamika** - Mind is empty
5. **Prasangika Madhyamika** - Emptiness is spontaneously present
6. **Shentong Madhyamika** – Spontaneous presence is self liberated

1. Shravakayana – Moments & Particles (Vaibhashika and Sautrantika)

When objects are destroyed or mentally dissected,
Nothing remains for mind to know.
Such things are completely false, like water and vases.
The genuinely existent are other than that.

2. 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.
Experiences are like dreams.
Consciousness free from perceiver and perceived exists in genuine actuality.

3. Svatantrika Madhyamaka – Ultimate Emptiness

Appearances exist completely falsely – they are like illusions.
In genuine reality, nothing exists – it is like space.
Where there is observation - that is completely false truth.
That which is free from all observers and observed is actual genuine truth.

4. Prasangika Madhyamaka – Freedom from Conceptuality

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

5. Shentong Madhyamaka – Supremely Endowed Awareness

The imaginary and the other-dependent natures are the completely false truth;
Actual genuine truth is the perfectly existent nature -
Self-aware primordial awareness.

Dedication to *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way*, by Arya Nagarjuna

I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha, the best of teachers,
Who taught that whatever is dependently arisen
Is unceasing, unborn, not annihilated, not permanent
Not coming, not going, without destruction, without identity
And free from conceptual construction.

The Seven Stages in the Analysis of the Emptiness of Self in Persons

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

The 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.