

The Key to the Middle Way
A Treatise on the Realisation of Emptiness
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[The text was translated by Jeffrey Hopkins, who orally retranslated the English into Tibetan for verification and correction by Lati Rimpoche and then worked with Alexander Berzin, Jonathan Landaw, and Anne Klein to improve the presentation in English.]

Homage

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

Foundations

It is all about the mind

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The four seals

The four seals are:

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

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

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

inherent existence.

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

The Four Schools of Tenets

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

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

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

Provisory and Definitive Teachings

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

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

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

The Four Reliances

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

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

What is Emptiness?

We need to get a conceptual understanding of emptiness through reasoning

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

The object of negation

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emptiness means emptiness of inherent existence

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

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

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

been known validly to exist.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Two Truths

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

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

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

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

[Buddha] said that all phenomena have two entities,
Those found by perceivers of the true and of the false;

Objects of perceivers of the true are realities,
Objects of perceivers of the false are conventional truths.

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

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

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

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

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

The Middle Way between existence and non-existence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

When a phenomenon appears thus to be inherently existent, if the phenomenon existed in the same way as it appeared, then the entity of its inherent existence would necessarily become clearer when its mode of existence was carefully analysed. For example, even in terms of what is widely known in the world, if something is true, it becomes clearer and its foundation more firm the more one analyses it. Therefore, when sought, it must definitely be findable. If, on the contrary, it is false, then when it is analysed and sought, it becomes unclear, and in the end it cannot stand up. Nagarjuna's Precious Garland (Ratnavali, 52-53)

says:

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

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

Examples

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

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

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

Further Explanations of Emptiness

Emptiness of body & mind

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

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

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

Emptiness of external objects

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

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

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

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

Emptiness of production

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

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

There is never production
Anywhere of any phenomenon
From itself, from others,
From both, or without cause.

Emptiness of causality

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emptiness doesn't mean nihilism

Question: If a real man and a dream man, a form and a reflection, a real thing and a picture are the same in that they are not found when sought, would it not follow that there would

be no differences among them? There would be no differences as to their truth, falsity and so forth. Thus, what would be the use of searching into the view of emptiness? For, the searcher and the view itself would be none other than non-existent.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"consciousnesses" are only names. Sariputra, it is thus: "I" for example is designated, but the "I" is unapprehendable.'

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

Let us explain this further in fine detail.

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

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

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

Nagarjuna's Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness says:

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

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

Emptiness of emptiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Emptiness is also a conventional truth when reified

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

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

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

Emptiness is a non-affirming negative

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

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

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

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

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

[Answer] If the objects of analysis [all phenomena in general]

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

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

Results of Understanding Emptiness

Benefits of realizing emptiness: not being fooled by appearances

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

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

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

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

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

support of valid cognition.

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

An ascertaining mind and a falsely superimposing mind
Are entities of eradicator and that which is eradicated. And
(Chapter I):

All [defects such as desires] have as their antidote [the wisdom of
selflessness]

In that their decrease and increase depend [on the increase and decrease of that
wisdom].

So through familiarity the mind assumes the nature of

That wisdom—thus in time the contaminations are extinguished.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cultivation of the good consciousnesses, on the other hand, which are opposite to those

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In brief, through coming to know the Conqueror's scriptures as well as their commentaries, which are all aimed at the achievement of high status and definite goodness, we will attain faith in them. Thereby, induced by valid cognition, we will

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

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

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

The three levels of motivation

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

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

When our motivation is to attain highest enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, the wisdoms of hearing, thinking, and meditating, directed towards the meaning of

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

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

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

How to “Practice” Emptiness

How to internalise the view of emptiness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

wandering, sleeping, or staying. Also, since without a calm abiding directed toward an emptiness there is no chance for generating a special insight that cognises an emptiness, it is definitely necessary to seek a calm abiding. Therefore, we should learn its methods from other books.

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

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

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

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