

The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness

First Stage: **LOOKING**



Novosibirsk Program, January 2021

Jim Scott

THE SONGS3

Light Offering	3
Giving Rise to Bodhicitta	3
Arousing Bodhicitta	3
The Problem with Self	3
Identifying a Capable Student	4
Six Examples of Illusion that Teach Impermanence	4
A Song of No Attachment to This and That	5
Eighteen Kinds of Yogic Joy	5
Words of Dakini Niguma	6
Verses on the Samadhi of Illusion from Texts on the Middle Way	7
• From the Sutra of the Noble Collection	7
• From the King of Samadhi Sutra	7
• From Nagarjuna's Knowledge Fundamental to the Middle Way	7
Impartial Aspiration Prayer	7
Milarepa's Dedication	7
Friends	7
Self-Appearing Illusion	8
Long Life Supplication for Khenchen Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche	8

THE ANALYSIS HOW TO LOOK FOR A SELF9

The Lamp of Wisdom: Excerpts from Verses on Meditating on Selflessness	9
The Noble Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika, The Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way	10
Excerpts from chapter 18: The Examination of Self and Phenomena	10
A REFUTATION OF "I" AND "MINE"	10
THE WAY LIBERATION IS ATTAINED THROUGH EXHAUSTING FIXATION	11
A PRESENTATION OF THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACTUAL NATURE	13
The Four Seals Characterizing the Buddha's Teaching	14
Appearance Emptiness Equality	14
Excerpt from Eight Flashing Lances by The Dharma Lord Gotsangpa	14

THE SONGS

Light Offering

May the shining light of this candle flame we offer
To the ten directions' Victors and their Heirs
Remove the darkness of all beings' ignorance;
May the shining light of knowledge and wisdom blaze!

Spoken by Khenchen Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated and arranged by Jim Scott

Giving Rise to Bodhicitta

The precious supreme bodhicitta
Where it has not arisen, may it arise
And where it has arisen, may it never decline
But continue increasing further, further and beyond

Copyright 2015 by Marpa Foundation and the translator. Translated and arranged for song by Jim Scott

Arousing Bodhicitta

An excerpt from the *Thirty Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*

From beginning-less time, my mothers have cherished me.
What's the point of my happiness, if they are left suffering?
So, in order to liberate the countless numbers of sentient beings,
To arouse bodhicitta is a bodhisattva's practice.

Copyright 2015 by Marpa Foundation and the translator. Translated and arranged for song by Jim Scott, 2015.

The Problem with Self

Wherever there is self, there's a sense of other too;
With self and other, anger and attachment follow too.
And, through complete involvement in everything like this,
All the problematic states in all their guises manifest.

*Verse from the Commentary on Valid Cognition by Dharmakirti
Translated and arranged by Jim Scott, Karne Choling, November 2002*

Identifying a Capable Student

To the guru who has realized basic selflessness
I pray in awe with body, speech and mind;
Please bless us, me and all my students to come,
That we too realize basic selflessness.

Please hold us in compassion's steady grip
That keeps our skandhas free of ego-idea,
Of everything that idea's feeding on;
Now we've prayed, O watchful shepherd, listen to this.

This consciousness conceiving "I" and "me,"
I look at it but know not how to see;
If you can meditate on mahamudra,
Your seeing will be one where nothing is seen.

You got the picture when you said it like this:
"What I think is me, I cannot find."
You're done with personal lack of self.
You want phenomena's lack of it too?

Then follow me throughout the next twelve years,
And then you'll recognize your mind itself.
So then, to recognize your mind itself,
O young apprentice, work with mind like this.

Translated and arranged by Jim Scott, Cha'n Centre, Tenerife, arr. at KTC, New York City, Summer, 1995, Tibetan page 294

Six Examples of Illusion that Teach Impermanence

Look at the objects there appearing outside—
Impermanent, like last night's dream
Remembering the dream, confusion makes me sad
Have you cut through confusion, Rechungpa?
When I think of this, I remember the divine Dharma.

Take a look back here at your own body—
Impermanent, like a city of gandharvas
The body's growth and decay make me sad
Have you cut birth and death, Rechungpa?
When I think of this, I remember the divine Dharma.

Look at perceiving mind, here on the inside
Impermanent, like a little bird in the trees
It doesn't stay where you put it—this makes me sad
Have you seized mind's fortress, Rechungpa?
When I think of this, I remember the divine Dharma.

Take a good look now at breath moving inside—
Impermanent, like light mist at dawn
Watching the mist disappear makes me sad
Have you found what's pure in the movement, Rechungpa?
When I think of this, I remember the divine Dharma.

Take a good look now at your circle of friends
Impermanent, like the crowd at a fair
Friends will certainly part—this makes me sad
Have you improved your relations, Rechungpa?
When I think of this, I remember the divine Dharma.

Take a look at the wealth you've hoarded away
Impermanent, like the honey of the bees
Your food eaten by another—this makes me sad
Have you opened mind's treasure, Rechungpa?
When I think of this, I remember the divine Dharma.

Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated by Ari Goldfield, December 21, 1999. Tibetan pp.590-2. Translation copyright 2012, Ari Goldfield

A Song of No Attachment to This and That

Though shifting appearances ceaselessly rise
Just be unattached as a child at play

Though seeming joys, troubles, friends, enemies rise
All thoughts free themselves like the waves of the sea

What a wealth of thoughts – passion, aggression, praise, blame
Just look at their essence, the naked clear void

To walk, sit, eat, lie down and all you can do
Just empty forms shining in clear light's expanse

Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated and arranged by Jim Scott, Halscheid, Germany, August 12, 1996

Eighteen Kinds of Yogic Joy

IN PRAISE OF YOLMO GANGRA, A SONG ON WAKENING THE HEART

I bow at the feet of the genuine guru
Because of merit gathered I've met this lord
The guru with his prophecy is what has brought me here
My comfortable castle this wooded mountain range

This is a meadowland so beautiful in bloom
The trees are dancing in the midst of all the trees

This is a place of play where the monkeys and the langurs play
A place where birds speak in bird-like tongues

A land of flying bees on gentle wings
Where day runs into night and rainbow paintings shine
Summer runs into winter a light drizzle falls
Autumn runs into springtime the mist comes rolling in

In a solitary place like this I, the yogi Milarepa
Am feeling very clear light well meditating on emptiness mind
When I get a lot of stuff coming up I feel extremely well
When the highs roll into lows feels even better still

Feels so good to be a human being without the karmic deeds
When confusion gets complicated I feel extremely well
Fearsome visions getting worse and worse feels even better still
Kleshas, birth and death, and freedom from those is a good way to feel

With the bullies getting worse and worse I feel extremely well
When there's not a painful illness in sight feels even better still
The suffering being bliss feels so good that feeling bad feels good
Since the trulkhor comes from what I am it feels extremely good

To leap and run about is dance feels even better still
To be a king of speech with a treasury of song feels good
That the words are like the buzzing of bees feels extremely good
That the sound it makes is merit collecting feels even better still

The bliss is good in the expanse of the confidence of strength of mind
What develops on its own by its own force feels extremely good
What comes out looking like a hodgepodge feels even better still
This happy experience song by a yogi carefree
Is for you who believe in what you're doing here
To take along with you when you go

Translated by Jim Scott, Karme Choling, Vermont, 1994, Tibetan page 255

Words of Dakini Niguma

What throws you down into samsara's deep ocean
Are these thoughts of attachment and anger.
But realize they don't truly exist,
And all is an island of gold!

Composed by The Wisdom Dakini Niguma. Translator and composer of melody unknown.

Verses on the Samadhi of Illusion from Texts on the Middle Way

- **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!

- **From Nagarjuna's *Knowledge Fundamental to 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.

Impartial Aspiration Prayer

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 Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, August 29, 1999.
Translated and arranged by Jim and Birgit Scott*

Milarepa's Dedication

May we live long and be free of illness,
Enjoy freedom, great resources, and happiness.
Next life, may we meet in the pure realm,
May we always practice Dharma and benefit beings.

Sung by Milarepa. Under the guidance of Dechen Rangdrol (Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche), translated by Ari Goldfield, Guayrapa Asociación Cultural, Tarragona, Spain, May 3, 2003. Translation copyright 2012, Ari Goldfield.

Friends

A SONG OF THOSE WHO ARE FULL OF LOVE BUT FREE OF ATTACHMENT

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

To know they're empty forms, like a water moon
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 Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche at Marpa House, England, Aug. 1997. Translated and arranged by Jim Scott

Self-Appearing Illusion

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 thought can know
In the reaches of awareness emptiness
Let awareness go, oh, where no mind goes

Composed by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche in the Garden of Translation near the Boudha Stupa in Nepal. Translated and arranged by Jim Scott, March 1998

Long Life Supplication for Khenchen Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche

You who shine with the radiance of intelligent skillful play
You who are a fertile field of excellent qualities
You manifest an ocean of Dharma, with each point clear and distinct
In all ten directions the melodious sound of your song reverberates
You sing the songs of the deep meaning of the view and meditation
Genuine spiritual friend, may your feet continue their playful dance
We beg you to always remain

This supplication for the long life of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, the unequaled spiritual friend, I make out of my own devotion to this genuine master, and also in response to the repeated requests of many groups of his Eastern disciples, who possess the jewel of faith. On the topmost floor of the Gyuto Ramoche Temple in the noble land of India, the one fortunate to receive the healing nectar of his excellent teachings, Karmapa Orgyen Trinle Palden Wangi Dorje, makes this supplication with a clear mind, and may its aspiration be realized in precisely the way it has been made. At the gracious bidding of Dzogchen Ponlob Rinpoche, Translated and arranged by Jim Scott, Warsaw, Poland, October 10, 2010

THE ANALYSIS

HOW TO LOOK FOR A SELF

The Lamp of Wisdom:

Excerpts from **Verses on Meditating on Selflessness**

To the unequalled Teacher, the perfect Buddha,
To the Lord of perfect wisdom, the noble Manjushri, and all the others—
To the holders of definitive meaning's lineage, I prostrate.
Here I will briefly explain the stages of meditating on selflessness. (1)

The five aggregates are not the individual's self:
There is no self that is the same as the aggregates
And there is no self that exists apart from the aggregates.
The self does not possess the five aggregates.
The aggregates do not rely on the self and the self does not rely on the aggregates. (2)

Why is it necessary to meditate on the individual's selflessness?
Because the root of samsara is clinging to self,
And apart from its remedy, selflessness,
You will not find a single thing that can oppose it. (7)

All this virtue that effort has accumulated,
If not dedicated to perfect enlightenment,
Will be destroyed by anger and so forth.
So seal this virtue with non-referential dedication again and again. (10)

Aspiration prayers follow the dedication:
"To benefit all sentient beings, including my enemies,
May I be born as animals, people, gods, demi-gods, and in other realms too—
In all sorts of bodies may I tame beings," I pray. (11)

By the power of completely perfecting the two accumulations in this way,
May all beings be filled with love for one another,
May they enjoy peaceful prosperity without strife,
And by this may auspiciousness light up the whole universe! (12)

Composed extemporaneously at Kagyu Thubten Chöling, Wappingers Falls, New York, October 18, 1998, by the one only called "Khenpo", Tsultrim Gyamtso. Translated by Ari Goldfield. Translation copyright 2012, Ari Goldfield.

The Noble Nagarjuna's *Mulamadhyamakakarika*,
The Fundamental Wisdom Of The Middle Way

With Commentary by Ju Mipam Rinpoche:

Excerpts from chapter 18: **The Examination of Self and Phenomena**

A commentary on this subject is found in the sutras in words stating the emptiness of I and mine. Our commentary on this subject is as follows.

A REFUTATION OF "I" AND "MINE"

The examination here will be directed at the instinctive sense of "I," which is perceived in conjunction with the instinctive sense of "mine." Are these the same as or different from the skandhas, and where might they be located?

If it were such that self were the aggregates,
It would be prone to arising as well as ceasing.
And if it were something else than the aggregates,
It then would lack the aggregates' characteristics.

If it were such that the self were the cluster consisting in the five aggregates (skandhas), the self would also be subject to arising and ceasing; there would be many selves; and there would be no compelling force driving [the self] to take on [the skandhas], because the skandhas and their essence [i.e., the self] would be inseparable.

If, on the contrary, the self were something other than the skandhas, it would then be lacking in the skandhas' three characteristics of arising, staying, and then disintegrating. If one claims this to be the case, the consequence would be that the self would be non-composite because it would be a non-thing. And a non-composite has no essential makeup whatsoever, like a sky flower. In being permanent, it would not be able to perform any of the actions of a self, so it would be pointless.

And if there is no actual "I" existing,
How could there then be any "mine" existing?
Since "I" and "mine" are totally at peace,
Clinging to "me" and "mine" is eliminated.

If, on these grounds, there is no actual "I" existing with a constituting essence, how could there be any skandhas and so on existing as mine, which could only exist in dependence on an "I"? Since the observed factors, "I" and things conceived of as "mine," are at peace by nature, that is to say, have never existed as objects of observation, their observer, the idea clinging to a "me" and "mine," is corrected and thus eliminated.

THE WAY LIBERATION IS ATTAINED THROUGH EXHAUSTING FIXATION

If you say, “The yogi, who sees that there is no ‘I’ and ‘mine’, exists; so this proves there is a self,” [the reply would be:]

The one for whom there is no “I” and “mine”

Is not someone who has existence either.

The very one who sees existence lacking

For the “I” and “mine” conceived does not see self.

The one for whom there is no “I” and “mine,” namely the yogi who sees that these do not exist, has no existence as someone whose nature would be that of a self, because no [personal] self, other than the self and skandhas just examined is possible. Hence, the very yogi who sees existence lacking for the “I” and “mine” conceived does not see a self.

A yogi is one for whom there is no supposition of “I” and “mine” taking place. One could, therefore, say that a “yogi” seeing anything as existing with a substantial component would not actually be seeing the ultimate nature and would not be able to relinquish views regarding the transitory collection.

All afflicted states of mind have the views regarding the transitory collection as their root. But since these views have no valid application, the compulsion to adopt [afflicted states and thereby skandhas] can be completely exhausted. When this has been accomplished, there is no further accumulation of karma and, because of that, no further birth [due to karmic compulsion] is taken.

And why is that? It is because karma and kleshas and the rest derive from thoughts and thus do not inherently exist, since such afflicted states of mind are mere by-products of thoughts connected with erroneous beliefs and the interpretation [of appearances as being] pleasant or unpleasant, and so on.

The thoughts comprising erroneous beliefs are produced through beginningless habituation to a process of fabrication involving strong assumptions which adamantly cling to there being a knower and a known, as well as a signifier and something signified through such terms as “vase,” “carpet,” “man,” “woman,” “loss,” “gain,” and so on. These fabrications are bound up with taking things to be truly existent. When the objects to which they refer are seen to be nothing but empty, they will cease [seeming to be real].

When the supposition, “‘I’ is the internal

And ‘mine’ is the external,” has been dropped,

That which is adopted with compulsion

Will end, and with it, birth will end as well.

One is involved in views regarding the transitory collection which suppose that the internal animate skandhas are “I” and the external inanimate skandhas are “mine.” When these have been eliminated, four factors which are compulsively taken on will come to an end. These include compulsively adopted desires, views, fixation on one’s own disciplinary code as superior, and claiming there to be a self. Because the compulsive adoption of such factors has been eliminated, the type of birth whose characteristic is to provide samsaric existence will end as well.

Karma and kleshas gone is liberation.

Not only did he say, “There is a self,”
He also sometimes taught, “There is no self.”
But the buddhas also teach the total absence
Of both the self and also of its absence.

Not only did the Buddha on some occasions say, “There is a self,” indicating that it exists in order to guide those holding nihilistic views, such as Charvakas, to the next step. He also sometimes taught that there is no self, in order to correct those holding views regarding the transitory collection. But there are some who, due to previous habituation, have a superior commitment to the teachings treating of the profound and are close to nirvana. These are the advanced students, who are able to understand that, when the Mighty Sage taught freedom from passion in the scriptures, he was getting at something far deeper, the most profound point contained in the scriptures, the ultimate nature. To such students, the Buddha provided the means for cutting through both of the former by demonstrating the absence of both the self and also of the absence of self. *[Here the Buddha taught that the actual nature is neither of the former, meaning it is not a self and not a non-self. In other words, there is neither a truly existent self nor a truly existent non-self. So, the first two cases (self and no self) do not point out the actual nature. Why not? Because thinking there is a self is one concept, and thinking there is no self is another concept. The actual nature is beyond concepts and therefore cannot be expressed using conceptual fabrications. But the order in which these are taught is important.]*

First is the teaching that there is a self, which the Buddha taught first to counteract nihilism: the idea that there is no consequence of one’s actions. So here he was teaching the foundational level, where students need to know about karma and suffering.

Second, the Buddha taught there is no self in order to correct the idea that the self he taught first is a truly existent permanent self.

Third he taught that the true nature is beyond both of the conceptual fabrications of self and no self.

This is presented in the scriptures as follows:

Just as the view that there is a self is not correct,
Similarly, its remedy—the absence of self—is not correct either.
Thus, there is no self whatsoever, and there is no non-self whatsoever.

In a sutra, the Buddha teaches:

Kashyapa, what is called “self,” this is one extreme. What is called “non-self,” this is a second extreme. What is the middle between these two extremes? It is where there is no form, no description, and so on.

[Nagarjuna’s] *Ratnamala* says, among other things:

Thus it is that self and lack of self,
Correctly understood, are not observed.
And that is why the Mighty Sage corrects
Both the view of self and lack of self.

The text called *Clear Words* [*Prasannapadda*, by Chandrakirti] explains this as representing a stepwise progression corresponding to the level of the student, progressing respectively from inferior to middling to most advanced.

In this same vein, Aryadeva said:

First it was those deficient in merit he counseled.

In the middle, he corrected [belief in a] self.

In the end, he eliminated everything these views are based on.

Anyone who understands this is wise.

From a sutra:

Just as when teaching someone the alphabet,

One introduces the letters in natural sequence,

Just so the Buddha, when teaching beings the dharma,

Provides them precisely with what they are able to manage.

The *Prajnaparamita* says:

If you experience something you call “an existing self,” you are not experiencing transcendental knowledge. And the same goes for non-self. And the same goes for calling the skandhas empty.

A PRESENTATION OF THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACTUAL NATURE

You might then ask, “How is the object of realization, the actual nature, defined?”

It has already been demonstrated that it transcends thought and expression. But you may nevertheless insist that its defining characteristics be described in terms that correspond to conventions used in the world.

In that case, [its first defining trait is that] it cannot be understood just as it is through presentations given by others using reasons and examples. This would correspond to someone with grey cataracts “seeing” without cataracts by being taught that the hairs they were seeing were not there. One cannot correctly realize the object of realization in this fashion, since one is not actually seeing what is being described. One would merely understand that one’s way of seeing were mistaken. If the eye disease is eliminated, however, through medical procedures able to remove it, proper vision will directly emerge.

The Four Seals Characterizing the Buddha's Teaching

- All composites are impermanent
- Everything defiled is suffering
- All phenomena are empty and lacking self-entity
- Only Nirvana is liberation and genuine peace

Appearance Emptiness Equality

Not to know the equality of appearance emptiness
And get attached to appearances alone is delusion
But to get attached to emptiness alone is delusion too
If you know the equality of appearance emptiness
There's no need to get caught up in or give up phenomena
Those appearances and emptiness
What you must do is to rest in the spaciousness
Of the equality of appearance emptiness

Composed by Dechen Rangdrol. Translated and arranged by Dechen Gyalpo, at Tegchokling, Boudha, Nepal, 2010

Excerpt from *Eight Flashing Lances* by The Dharma Lord Gotsangpa

Self-concern's ambitions are exhausted
Uplifting waves of love without contention
Tireless, relentless, not self-seeking
These are three which make compassion fully free
Like a lance that flashes free in the open sky

*Composed by the lord Götsangpa
Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated and arranged by Jim Scott, Kamalashila, Schloss Wachendorf, Germany, 7
Aug. 1996*