

The Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness

Stages III-IV: A Presentation of the Middle Way

LOOKING FOR THE HEART OF COMPASSION



Online Program, May 2021

Teachings by Jim Scott

LOOKING FOR THE HEART OF COMPASSION

THE SONGS	3
1. Light Offering.....	3
2. Giving Rise to Bodhicitta.....	3
3. Arousing Bodhicitta	3
4. Making the Bodhicitta Commitment.....	3
5. A Prayer for a Swift Journey to the Pure Realm	4
6. Excerpt from Thirty Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva.....	4
7. Excerpt from Mahamudra Aspiration Prayer.....	5
8. The Importance of View	5
9. Listening, Reflecting, And Meditating—An Aspiration.....	5
10. The King of Swans	5
11. A Praise of Nagarjuna	6
12. Excerpt from The Profound Definitive Meaning	6
13. Prasangika Song.....	7
Two Verses on the Samadhi of Illusion from The Jewel Ornament of Liberation	
14. From The Sutra of the Noble Collection.....	9
15. From The King of Samadhi Sutra	9
16. From Nagarjuna's Knowledge Fundamental to the Middle Way	9
17. From Chandrakirti's Entrance to the Middle Way.....	9
18. Looking and Finding	9
19. Auspiciousness that Lights Up the Universe.....	10
20. Eight Kinds of Mastery	12
21. Nagarjuna's Dedication	13
22. Impartial Aspiration Prayer	13
23. Milarepa's Dedication	13
24. Friends.....	14
25. Self-Appearing Illusion.....	14
26. Long Life Supplication for Khenchen Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche	15
27. Long Life Prayer of Amassed Blessing Clouds for Jim Scott.....	15
THE ANALYSIS: HOW TO LOOK FOR THE HEART OF COMPASSION	17
Examination of the Two Kinds of Selflessness	17
Examination of Self and Phenomena	19
The Ornament for the Thought of the Master Nagarjuna which Clarifies the True Nature	21
1) The Steps Involved in Gaining Entrance to This Nature.....	21
a) A refutation of "I" and "mine"	21
b) The way in which liberation is achieved through exhausting fixation.....	22
c) Eliminating [apparent] contradictions in the scriptures	25
2) The Presentation of the Defining Characteristics of the Actual Nature.....	27
3) The Fruition Accruing to One in the Process of Learning the Actual Nature.....	29
Clips of Rinpoche's Explanations.....	30
• The Reasoning for Past and Future Lives	30
• The Importance of Compassion	30
• The Main Reasoning Employed by Svatantrika, the Autonomy Middle Way.....	30
A Guide to the Middle Way.....	31

THE SONGS

1. 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

2. 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

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3. 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.

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4. Making the Bodhicitta Commitment

In the actual presence of the Guardians of the world
I resolve to accomplish complete enlightenment
I invite all you beings to come along as guests
And gain your liberation from the wheel of suffering.

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5. A Prayer for a Swift Journey to the Pure Realm

Lord Deity of Great Compassion

Please lead my father and my mother,

My relatives, friends, enemies, and all sentient beings

To the western paradise of Sukhavati. } x 2

(Recite OM MANI PADME HUM)

Lord Deity of Great Compassion

Please lead my mother sentient beings,

All wanderers in the six realms, with not one left behind

To the western paradise of Sukhavati. } x 2

(Recite OM MANI PADME HUM)

Lord Deity of Great Compassion

All beings are my friends and family,

Please lead my friends and family, every single sentient being

To the western paradise of Sukhavati. } x 2

(Recite OM MANI PADME HUM)

Lord Deity of Great Compassion,

All beings have been my kindest parents,

Please lead my kindest parents, all sentient beings

To the western paradise of Sukhavati. } x 2

(Recite OM MANI PADME HUM)

Sung by Dechen Rangdrol, July 8, 2004, Dechen Chöling, France, and July 21, 2004, Karma Theksoum Tashi Eubar Ling, France. Translated and arranged by Ari Goldfield and Jim Scott.

6. Excerpt from Thirty Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva

All suffering comes from yearning for your own happiness.

The perfect Buddhas emerge from the intention to benefit others.

Therefore, to sincerely exchange your own happiness

For the suffering of others is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

Composed by Ngulchu Thogme, trans. by Jim Scott

7. Excerpt from Mahamudra Aspiration Prayer

With the waves of thought, the coarse and the subtle, at peace in their own ground
Mind's river settles naturally in unmoving mind's expanse
With the mire of the murkiness of dullness and torpor gone
May the ocean of shamatha remain unmoving, undisturbed

Composed by Karmapa Rangjung Dorje, translated by Jim Scott

8. The Importance of View

A practitioner who meditates without the view,
What could a meditator like this be likened to?
To someone who's been blind from the instant of their birth,
Who is wandering around in a trackless wilderness

*Verse from the Song of Lodro Thaye
Translated and arranged by Jim Scott, Pullahari, Nepal, 2002*

9. Listening, Reflecting, And Meditating—An Aspiration

At the beginning, when by listening we cut through our superimpositions,
May we not be deceived by biased thoughts about friends and enemies;
May we not follow others blindly, nor speak without a basis for our words;
And may our knowledge of the true nature of reality increase.

And in between, at the time of gaining certainty through reflection,
May we not be deceived by thoughts that any object appearing and the label are the same;
May our own analyses not bind our own mindstream,
And may we gain certainty in the true nature, which is equality.

At the conclusion, when we're turning all this into experience, in meditation,
May we not be deceived by outer distractions of perceiver and perceived;
On the inside, may we not get bound up in thoughts of proofs and refutations,
But may we rest right within the native state, relaxing naturally.

Composed by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. Trans. and arranged for song by Jim Scott. Copyright 2021, Jim Scott

10. The King of Swans

The king of swans spreads his great white wings
Of the relative and ultimate,
Bringing up the ranks in dignified formation,
The ordered ranks of his following of swans.
Riding on the wind of excellence,
With its powerful force, he makes his way

Across the ocean of the Victors' qualities
To its farthest shore, to excellence supreme.

*Composed by the master Chandrakirti
Translated and arranged by Jim Scott, January 2004, Jamgon Labrang, Pullahari, Rigpe Dorje Winter Program*

11. A Praise of Nagarjuna

Just as the Teacher, the Perfect Buddha, prophesied,
You dissolved all fabrications,
And described the freedom from the extremes,
I bow to you.

All these phenomena in samsara and nirvana—
When we're confused and don't analyze, they seem to be real,
But when logically analyzed, not the tiniest thing can be perceived,
And when thoroughly analyzed, it's beyond all concept.
This is your teaching.

The form of the sun that shines up in the cloudless sky's expanse
On the surface of a clear blue lake, manifests so bright,
Just so, all phenomena as dependent mere appearances
The shining sun of wisdom will today illuminate.

From the utterly secluded, beautiful, peaceful heights
Of the Glorious Southern Mountain, Lho Chok Pal-kyi Ri,
This appearing yet empty, illusory person
Has sung out this sound-emptiness inseparable sound!

*February 8, 2004, Nagarjunakonda (the home of Nagarjuna), India.
Translated by Ari Goldfield. Translation copyright 2012, Ari Goldfield.*

12. Excerpt from The Profound Definitive Meaning

SUNG ON THE SNOWY RANGE

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

Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gvamtso Rinooche, translated and arranged by Jim Scott. Tibetan text at page 222.

13. Prasangika Song

To get into the habit of emptiness
Is the way to break the habit, substantial things,
But the habit developed of thinking of it as nothing
Must sooner or later be given up as well.

[: Because they are not real, they are not empty;
Because there is no thing, there is no non-thing;
Free of speculation in pure being,
Just rest relaxed without a reference point. :]

At the point when there is neither thing nor non-thing
To occupy a place before the mind,
At that point there is no projected image—
This lack of reference point is perfect peace.

Because...

This being so, there's no such thing as stopping,
Nor is there such a thing as things existing;
And that is why, of all these beings, there are none
Who ever were born or ever will perish again.

Because...

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

Because...

When things themselves in such a way are empty,
Then, what is there to gain and what to lose?
And who is there to offer you their service?
And who indeed is there to put you down?
From what would happy and painful states develop?
And where's what flatters and where's what puts to shame?

Because...

Whatever consciousnesses see or hear
Is not at this point something to be stopped.

Here, it is what causes beings to suffer,
The thought of true existence, to be dropped.

Because...

The mind equipped with focal referent
Will come to settle down to some extent,
But mind that's not in touch with emptiness
Will find cessation found gets lost in birth,
As in the equilibrium void of notion—
That's why we meditate on emptiness.

Because...

May the rain of my contentment's falling raindrops,
Descending mercifully from merit's cloud,
Pacify some day their aching torment
And cool the burning fires of their pain.

Because...

May the merit gathered here with so much care,
In a way that's free of focal referent,
Some day bring me to teach the emptiness
To all those lost in what they focus on.

[: Because they are not real, they are not empty;
Because there is no thing, there is no non-thing;
Free of speculation in pure being,
Just rest relaxed without a reference point.:]

*From Shantideva's Bodhicaryavatara (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life), Refrain by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche
Translated and arranged by Jim Scott, Halscheid, Germany, 1992*

TWO VERSES ON THE SAMADHI OF ILLUSION FROM
THE JEWEL ORNAMENT OF LIBERATION

14. 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!

15. From *The King of Samadhi Sutra*

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

Under the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, translated by Ari Goldfield, August 15, 1999. Translation copyright 2012, Ari Goldfield.

16. 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.

17. From Chandrakirti's *Entrance to the Middle Way*

There are two ways of seeing every thing,
The perfect way and the false way,
So each and every thing that can ever be found
Holds two natures within.
And what does perfect seeing see?
It sees the suchness of all things.
And false seeing sees the relative truth—
This is what the perfect Buddha said.

18. Looking and Finding

Not only did the three times' buddhas not find these,
Neither did the highly accomplished masters!
They neither found a self nor real phenomena,

So rest relaxed where none of this is found...
Don't get discouraged if you don't find these either;
Not finding these -- the best thing you could find.

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

19. Auspiciousness that Lights Up the Universe

Namo Guru Hasa Vajra Ye!

You see that everything in samsara and nirvana
Is merely dependently arisen
You see the dharmata, the true being
That is the essence of all dependent arising
The power of your great insight
Fills the universe with auspicious light
Oh mighty Shepa Dorje
Please rise up now from within my heart.

Ground's basic nature transcends conceptuality
And like watermoons, appearances arise dependently
May everyone realize that this is true
And dispel the darkness cast by doubt and wrong view
And may their realization's auspiciousness
Light up the whole universe!

The vision of Your wisdom is amazing
You see just how things are, You see everything
As parents love their children, so You love all beings
You bring us benefit and happiness
Your power makes disciples out of Your enemies—
May Your auspiciousness light up the universe!

For samsara's cause, clinging to "I" and "me,"
The Dharma realizing selflessness is the greatest remedy
May all beings use it to pacify
Their confused belief that there is an "I"
And by the power of this great happening
May auspiciousness light up the universe!

The ways of ordinary beings, you have left behind—
Noble ones who realize reality, the true nature of mind
May you lead all ordinary beings
Who have not yet entered, to the path of peace
And by this may auspiciousness
Light up the whole universe!

May the yidams who bestow the siddhis
And the protectors who clear obstacles away
Eliminate all harmful conditions—
Everything adverse to the path
And by this may auspiciousness
Light up the whole universe!

May the noble path of non-violence
Flourish in all the worlds there are
When beings meet and interact
May the connections they make be filled with love
And by this may auspiciousness
Light up the whole universe!

During this twenty-first century
That is one of such prosperity
May struggle over wealth and gain
Disappear and not be seen again
Free from strife and violence
May all enjoy great abundance
And by this may auspiciousness
Light up the whole universe!

During this twenty-first century
Science is advancing incredibly
Amazing and wondrous, these new machines
That have brought the gods' enjoyments to human beings
May they be used with skill supreme
To end violence and cause peace to reign
And by this may auspiciousness
Light up the whole universe!

May the sciences that explore outside

Be joined with the inner science of the mind
To excellently put an end
To mistaken views and confusion
And by this may auspiciousness
Light up the whole universe!

The source of all this auspiciousness
Is the true nature of mind, so luminous!
So may realization of mind, just as it is
Set the universe ablaze with auspicious excellence!

Through all of this auspiciousness
Wherever its light may be seen
With the love and the compassion
That make bodhichitta mind supreme
May this thought arise in everyone:
“Other beings’ happiness is as important as my own”
And may excellent virtue and auspiciousness
Always increase, never diminish!

On December 28, 1997, in the Garden of Translation near the Great Stupa of Boudhanath, Nepal, this was spoken extemporaneously by the one only called “Khenpo”, Tsultrim Gyamtso. Translated by Ari Goldfield. Translation copyright 2012, Ari Goldfield.

20. Eight Kinds of Mastery

Not separating appearance and emptiness
This is view as mastered as it can be

Not seeing dreams and day as differing
This is as meditation as it can be

Not bliss and emptiness seen as differing
This is conduct as mastered as it can be

Not seeing the here and hereafter as differing
This is their nature as mastered as it can be

Not seeing mind and space as differing
This is as dharmakaya as it can be

When pleasure and pain are not two different things
This is instruction as mastered as it can be

Not seeing affliction and wisdom as differing
This is as full as realization can be

Not seeing your mind and buddha as differing
This is as full a fruition as it can be

Translated and arranged by Jim Scott, Tibetan page 391

21. Nagarjuna's Dedication

May we excellently ride the horse of excellence
And guide it with the bridle of aspiration prayer
And by urging it along with the whip of diligence
May we travel to the land of liberation.

*Under the guidance of Drubpon Khenpo Lodro Namgyal
Translated and arranged by Jim Scott*

22. 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 bhūmīs and the paths.

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

23. 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.

24. Friends

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

Friends are empty forms, just 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

25. 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*

26. 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 unequalled 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*

27. Long Life Prayer of Amassed Blessing Clouds for Jim Scott

Great Amitayus, who leads us from samsara,
saving those suffering without protection,
Vanquisher of all untimely death,
we bow to the Buddha of Boundless Life.

Long mantra:

*Om namo bhagawate / aparamita ayurjana subinitsita tedzo radzaya / tathagataya / arhate
samyak sambudhaya / teyatha / Om punye punye mahapunye / aparimita punye / aparimita
punye jana sambharo patsite / Om sawa samskara parishuddha dharmate gagana samudgate
sobhawa bishuddhe mahanaya paiware svaha*

Brief mantra:

Om a mahrani dziwentiye svaha Recite as much as possible, then:

We supplicate to the Protector Amitayus,
who bestows the siddhi of longevity:
Please grant your blessings for Jim's good steady life,
master of two tongues, eyes bright with insight.

Giver of life, eyes wide with compassion, goddess White Tara,
wish-fulfilling wheel, we pray to you:
Grant a kalpa's worth of life to Lotsawa,
who propagates the teachings.

Wisdom goddess who bestows supreme life,
we pray at your feet, victorious Namgyalma:

Please bless the speaker of Dharma in two tongues,
source of benefit and joy, Vajra essence.

With faithful minds of longing, we supplicate
the refuge of the Three Jewels and Vast Three Roots:
We welcome treasure of Dharma like the dawn
and ask for Lotsawa to stay healthy and firm.

By the blessings of refuge, ocean of compassion,
by the power of unchanging truth of pure being,
and by the power of our pure motivation;
may these aspirations without fail be quickly fulfilled.

Upon request by the students of the Rigpe Dorje Institute to write a long-life prayer for the revered senior translator Jim Scott, these supplication prayers and words of aspiration adorning the three deities of longevity were composed with virtue on February 27, 2011 by Lodrö Namgyal, who bears the title Khenpo in name only.

THE ANALYSIS

HOW TO LOOK FOR THE HEART OF COMPASSION

Examination of the Two Kinds of Selflessness

as presented in **The Lamp of Wisdom**

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)

All phenomena outside and inside have no essence
Because they transcend the extremes of one and many,
Because they do not arise from any of the four extremes,
And because they are merely dependently arisen, dependently existent appearances—
See them to be like dreams, watermoons, and rainbows. (3)

As for the reason of not being one or many:
In what is perceived, partless particles do not exist
And indivisible moments of consciousness do not exist.
Therefore, since one does not exist, how could many?
Phenomena are empty of self-nature, like watermoons. (4)

As for the reason that things do not arise from themselves:
If they did, arising would be both meaningless and endless.
As for the reason that things do not arise from other:
If they did, causes and non-causes would be equivalent.
As for the reason that things do not arise from both self and other:
Both the reasons just expressed take care of that one!
The notion that things arise without cause is incredibly wrong,

For if they did, they would either always exist or never exist
And all effort in the world would be in vain. (5)

Since samsara and nirvana exist dependently,
Since entity and nonentity exist dependently,
And since existence, nonexistence, and so forth exist dependently,
All phenomena are appearance-emptiness undifferentiable, like watermoons. (6)

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)

And why meditate on phenomena's selflessness?
Clinging to things as being real, clinging to characteristics,
Dualistic appearances, and so forth—all the obscurations to omniscience—
Are conquered by their opponent, phenomena's selflessness. (8)

If you meditate on the two types of selflessness like that
But do not mix in the compassionate mind of bodhichitta,
It is not the Mahayana path.
So cause your relative bodhichitta to increase like the waxing moon! (9)

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.

Examination of Self and Phenomena

as presented in the **Eighteenth Chapter** of
Nagarjuna's Knowledge Fundamental to the Middle Way

If it were such that self were the aggregates
It would be prone to birth and disintegration;
And were it something else than the aggregates
It then would lack the aggregates' characteristics.

And if there is no actual "I" existing,
How could there then be any "mine" existing?
Since "I" and "mine" are totally at peace,
The conceiver of "I" and "mine" does not exist.

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.

When the supposition, "I is the internal
And 'mine' is the external," has been dropped,
Then that which is adopted with compulsion
Will end and with it birth will end as well.

Karma and kleshas gone is liberation;
Karmic acts and kleshas come from thoughts;
These come from fabrication; fabrication
Completely comes to an end through emptiness.

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.

In being beyond what can be signified

And beyond the scope of mental operations,
Pure being, the dharmata, has no arising
And does not end, precisely like nirvana.

All are taught as valid, then invalid;
And then are taught as valid and invalid;
And then as neither valid nor invalid;
These are adjustments just as the Buddha taught.

Unknowable through others; it is peace;
Cannot be complicated through fabrication;
Is not a thought; and has no differing factors;
These are the traits of the nature so unique.

When something occurs depending on something else,
Because the one is not precisely the other
And yet is not completely other either,
There is neither annihilation nor permanence.

In the amrita of the teachings of the buddhas
In the message of the guardians of the world
Factors are not the same nor different,
There is neither annihilation nor permanence.

Even when no buddha manifests
And sravakas are no more to be found,
The wisdom that the pratyekabuddhas bear
Develops well, although there is no guide.

The Ornament for the Thought of the Master Nagarjuna which Clarifies the True Nature

Commentary by Ju Mipham

A commentary on this subject is found in the sutras in such words as, “Form is empty of ‘I’ and ‘mine’...”

Our commentary on this subject is as follows:

If the performer of karmic actions as well as the experiencer of afflicted states of mind (kleshas) and so on, which appear to immature beings, are as false as cities of gandharvas and so on, in not being of the actual nature of things, in what does the actual nature then consist and how is it to be approached? By not taking outer and inner things to be objectively existent as focal referents, associating the idea of “I” and “mine” with these in any form is [gradually] exhausted. This [freedom from “I” and “mine”] is the actual nature. It is arrived at by knowing that all faults and imperfections derive from the views related to the transitory collection [views which are destructible in that they are mistaken].

The examination of this topic includes two main points: the text as such and the title of this chapter. The first of these has three parts:

- 1) the steps involved in gaining entrance to this nature;
- 2) a presentation of its defining characteristics;
- 3) and the results of training in it.

The first of these has three parts:

- a) a refutation of “I” and “mine;”
- b) the way in which liberation is attained through exhausting fixation;
- c) eliminating [apparent] contradictions in the textual transmission.

1) The Steps Involved in Gaining Entrance to This Nature

a) A refutation of “I” and “mine”

Buddhapalita also taught that the actual nature as presented in this eighteenth chapter could be called the very heart of this entire text. 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?

In the chapters called The Examination of the Tatagatha, The Examination of Fire and Firewood and so on, our textual analysis proceeded along five lines, but here we will condense these into their essential meaning and examine the subject matter here from two angles.

The first is stated as follows: if it were such that the self were the cluster consisting in the five aggregates (skandhas), the self would also be subject to birth and disintegration; there would be many of them; and there would be no compelling force driving [the self] to take on [the skandhas], because the skandhas and their essence would be inseparable.

And if the self were something other than the skandhas, it would then also be lacking in the skandhas' three characteristics of arising, staying for some time 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.

[The second of the two angles mentioned above]:

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 "mine," have never existed as objects of observation because they are totally at peace by nature, their observer, the conceiver of "I" and "mine," is negated and is [thus demonstrated to be] nonexistent.

b) The way in which liberation is achieved 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 is: the one for whom there is no "I" and "mine", namely the yogi who sees that these do not exist, has no existence either as someone whose nature would be that of a self, because a self other than the self and skandhas just examined would not be possible; hence, the very yogi who sees existence lacking for the "I" and "mine" conceived does not see a self either.

Therefore, one could say that a yogi for whom there is no conception of "I" and "mine" taking place who was seeing something as existing with an actual essence would not see the actual nature itself and would not be able to relinquish views regarding the transitory collection.

Afflicted states of mind all contain within them the root of the views regarding the transitory collection; but since the latter have no valid application, the compulsion to adopt afflicted states can be completely exhausted; when this has been accomplished, there is no further accumulation of karma and, because of that, no further birth taken.

And why is that? It is because karma and kleshas and the rest derive from thoughts and therefore do not inherently exist, since such afflicted states of mind are mere byproducts of erroneous thoughts which mistakenly interpret what is pleasant and unpleasant.

The thoughts constituting this incorrect mental activity 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.

This proceeds just as it would in the case of the daughter of a barren woman. Because she does not exist, fabricating the idea, “This is a girl,” does not occur. And without that, there would be no mistaken mental activity objectifying her as being of an attractive nature or as being clean and pleasant and so on. Without that, no passion for her would develop, and where there is none of that no actions like touching her and so on would be performed.

One is involved in the supposition that the internal animate skandhas are “I” and the external inanimate skandhas are “mine.” [This constitutes what is called] the views regarding the transitory collection. 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 conditioned existence will end as well.

The cause of this type of birth is karma and kleshas. When these are both gone, that is what is referred to as liberation. Karmic acts and kleshas come from thoughts which are forms of incorrect mental activity. The thoughts themselves come from the fabrication of labels, which in turn constitute the whole variety of conventions. As for this process of fabrication, it will come to an end through actually seeing the emptiness of “I” and “mine” and everything that goes with them. Here one is no longer taking the labels associated with objects, which themselves lack substantial nature, as having any objective relevance.

If one does not eliminate all forms of fabrication involving association of labels, even though one may not be taking any phenomenon as truly existent, one will not have radically altered thoughts which apply determinative labels. And therefore, one may have penetrated the lack of true existence of dualistic phenomena in the meditative equipoise of a noble being, but if this is a non-conceptual wisdom which merely refrains from conceptualizing the three branches of an operation as truly existent, even though such non-conceptual wisdom does not think in terms of

true existence, it has not stopped labeling phenomena as void of self-entity, as being inner or outer, as constituting an environment or its inhabitants and so on, so how could this be a complete pacification of fabrication? The only level of fabrication that has been eliminated is the fabrication of true existence; but the other dimension here, the fabrication of lack of existence, has not been eliminated. This is like thinking of all phenomena as merely not having rabbit horns.

There is no true existence, but by clinging to this label [whose intention is] to cut through the idea of true existence, one is involved in fabricating the lack of true existence. In effect, one will not have eliminated fabricating any phenomenon, outer or inner, including vases and so on and so forth.

For this reason, non-conceptual wisdom is not involved in any way in fabricating labels and is therefore totally free of fabrication.

[Let us consider more closely the fact that] this is not merely freedom from fabrication of true existence. As long as there is fabrication of anything whatsoever as an object of discursive mind, although there is indeed no perception of its opposite at that point, this does not prevent such fabrication from occurring, and one has therefore not gone beyond fabricating a conception of its lack of true existence.

When there is no fabrication of labels whatsoever, this is what is referred to as non-referentiality, non-conceptual wisdom and freedom from fabrication. And in this same vein, one is not asserting anything whatsoever regarding basic being, nor is one turning it into a referent to be focused on.

Whatever attempt one might make at this point to refute or establish anything about the ultimate, to remove anything from it or add anything to it, one would still be involved in making assertions, because one would not have gotten beyond producing fabrications.

Therefore fabrications, which include the fabrication of labels and the fabrication of true existence as its subdivisions, are the objects of a mistaken intelligence, and it is important to understand the great difference between lack of true existence and freedom from labeling. Determinative labels are the cause of our focusing on phenomena as existent. When these have been established as empty, one has established the emptiness of thoughts like clean and unclean and one will no longer be fixated on such phenomena as if they had essential components. When that has been established, one will no longer be caught up in seeking to adopt one kind of phenomena and reject another. It is for these reasons that this point is so important.

c) Eliminating [apparent] contradictions in the scriptures

One might raise the objection: if there is no “I” on the inside and no “mine” on the outside as explained, is this not in contradiction to such statements of the Buddha as the following, “[Your attitude should be], ‘I myself am my own protector; but others, whom could they protect?’ By taming themselves well, the wise will gain the higher realms.”

In reply, the Bhagwan said, “Here there is no self or sentient being; and as for all these phenomena, they have a cause.” He also said, “The self is not a form...” Let us investigate what he meant by these statements.

Not only did the Buddha on some occasions say, “There is a self,” indicating that it exists in order to guide materialists and others to the next step, he also sometimes taught that there is no self in order to refute 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. To these advanced students, who are able to fathom the depths of the most profound point contained in those scriptures of the Mighty One which relate to freedom from passion, the Buddha also demonstrated the absence of both the self and also of the absence of self which was provided as a means of cutting through the former.

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 he 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.”

The Ratnamala [by Nagarjuna] 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 [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 without merit

he corrected; 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 skillful.”

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 what you call ‘the existence of self,’ you are not experiencing transcendental knowledge. And the same goes for non-self. And the same goes for calling the skandhas empty.”

You might say, “All right, if the buddhas do not teach either that there is a self or a lack of self, what do they teach?” They do not teach anything at all here, because even if they were to formulate genuine reality in a particular way in an attempt to teach it, it would in any case not fall under the scope of the words used.

You might ask why it cannot be expressed through words. If it were some object that fell under the scope of mental operations, words would apply to it, but it is not. If you ask why it is not an object encountered through mental operations that is because it is free of both the extremes of arising and ceasing.

That is how it is in reality, but, on the relative level, the victor is skilled in the use of effective methods and uses them to guide us to pure being, which is beyond our comprehension. If he did not, no one would be able to actualize it.

Therefore, in the beginning his teaching accords with [how one sees things in] the world. At this point, he provides a thorough classification of the aggregates, the potentials for experience (dhatu) and the doors of perception (ayatanas) which together constitute the environment and its inhabitants along with their cause-effect relationship. Since all of this seems to exist objectively with someone focusing attention on it and something being focused on, he first teaches that this is valid, in accordance with how it seems. At a later point, he teaches that all of this is invalid; and to some, namely to those who have relied on each of these and habituated themselves to each in turn and who therefore have only a very slight remnant of obscuration to give up, he demonstrates that neither of the former applies. This he does to enable them to penetrate the very nature itself. For those that have relinquished all obscuration without exception, there is no need to teach anything.

Genuine reality is thus beyond what can be signified or taught and is therefore not taught or expressed in words, because it is beyond the scope of mental operations, which have reasoning as their framework.

If you ask why it goes beyond these, it is because pure being, the dharmata, the very nature of all phenomena from the outset, has no arising and does not end, precisely like nirvana, which is not an object of thought and does not fall under the scope of terminology.

You might then ask, how is this nature presented in a worldly context?

In the beginning, to lead those of untrained faculties onto the path, all the aggregates and so on are taught as validly real. Later, to enable them to let go of their attachment to that, they are taught that these are invalid. To enable them to relinquish both of the former, those of medium capacity are taught that these are both valid in a conventional sense and invalid with respect to the actual nature. To enable those of highest capacity to eliminate all the extremes which accompany fabrication, they are taught that these are neither valid nor invalid, in other words, that they are from the very beginning free of the process of fabrication that produces all extremes.

These are adjustments, that is to say, a gradual progression of teachings which the Buddha adapted to the specific mentality of each level of beings to be trained. In this way, the whole series of these teachings serve as skillful means for realizing the final nature.

2) The 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. One's way of seeing it in that case would not be a seeing of what it actually is. 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 realize the object of realization in this fashion; one would merely understand that one's way of seeing was mistaken. If the eye disease is eliminated, however, through medical procedures able to remove it, proper vision will directly emerge.

Along the same lines, noble ones indeed teach about the actual nature using superimpositions; nevertheless, it cannot be known as it is through the terms, examples and reasons presented by others.

[Another of its defining characteristics is that] it is peace, meaning that within it the temperament characterizing the four extremes has been absent from the very outset.

It cannot be complicated through the fabrications of speech by calling it “a this” or “a that.”

It is in no way a thought serving as an observer of a particular angle being focused on; as has been taught, it is that which is devoid of any movement of mental operations whatsoever, not to mention [the formation of] letters.

And because there are no differing factors or diverse referents within it, its character is one of equality.

These five are the traits of the nature so unique, the nature uniquely manifests for noble ones. Each subsequent trait here further elucidates each preceding.

As an approximation of the unique nature on a strictly conventional worldly level, whatever occurs in dependence upon some phenomenon, because the one, for example, a sprout, is not precisely the other, namely the seed, and yet is not something completely other in makeup either, there is neither annihilation nor permanence.

In the amrita, which is the teachings of the buddhas and which decisively cuts one free of aging and death, in profound reality, the actual nature which is the message of the guardians of the world, there are no factors which are the same nor are there any which are different; there is no annihilation and no permanence, it is supremely free of all extremes.

To consider this more closely, the seed and sprout are not the same; if they were, the consequence, among others, would be that the producer and what it produced would be the same. And therefore, the seed has no permanent duration in the sense of actually moving over into the sprout. Nor are they totally other, since the consequence, among others, would be that the sprout could exist without the seed. Hence the absurdity is avoided of the seed totally vanishing and its continuity being cut, that is, annihilated.

The point is that within peace, which is comparable to space, the inseparability of the two truths is like the center of space as is the case in the meditative equipoise of noble beings; and the point

of their post-meditation is that all phenomena are interdependent illusions which have no permanence and are not annihilated.

3) The Fruition Accruing to One in the Process of Learning the Actual Nature

Bodhisattvas in contact with the reality of the actual nature and who are in the process of bringing the paths and levels to final perfection will reach dynamic nirvana [also called non-abiding nirvana in that does not come to a standstill in samsara or nirvana].

But those who have the kind of potential that belong to sravaka and pratyekabuddha families strive to achieve only their own benefit in the state of pacification, and for this reason pursue the precise nature of absence of personal self as this has been explained here, and in so doing achieve that nirvana which decisively conquers aging and death, which is all this path affords.

What we could add here is that as long as the roots in the form of one's virtuous endeavors have not yet borne fruit, one will not attain liberation in this life; nevertheless, through the power of habituation developed during this life as the cause, it is taught that one will definitely attain liberation in a later life.

If you think, "There is nothing certain about that. It's possible I will not meet with all the necessary causes [in a later life] such as a spiritual friend who can teach the actual nature and so on;" [the answer is] habituation to pure being gets you out of conditioned existence. There is never any uncertainty about that and it will never deceive you. Even when no buddha manifests and sravakas have disappeared and no more are to be found, the wisdom that the pratyekabuddhas bear due to previous habituation develops well, although there is no guide in the form of another. In other words, that wisdom develops although there is no contingent condition in the form of a spiritual friend and so on, one could seek out as the support on which to rely.

As this indicates, the actual nature has great power and due to it one will discover this nectar and definitely attain nirvana, of this there is no doubt. Therefore, one should seek the ultimate nature even at the cost of one's life... [as previous bodhisattvas have demonstrated].

For sravakas the actual nature is of great importance and for bodhisattvas it is like a guide for those blind from birth. As for the nature discovered through examining dependently originating phenomena, through that one will attain buddhahood step by step and it is completely certain that no one could prevent it.

As for the way pratyekabuddhas attain the ultimate nature, it is through the above examination of self by which they exhaust their suppositions with respect to “I” and “mine”; although this [is not a complete] description of their path.

This chapter can thus be said to capture the essential points of meditation on the two forms of absence of self in a succinct fashion. The lines down to the word “[liberation](#)” cover the step of this progression dealing with meditation on the absence of personal self, which is shared in common [by all Buddhist schools]. From here down to the line, “[There is neither annihilation nor permanence](#)” treats of the absence of self-entity within phenomena, which is not common to all.

The second point: this has been the eighteenth chapter, called The Examination of Self and Phenomena.

*Commentary by Ju Mipham on the eighteenth chapter of Nagarjuna's Knowledge Fundamental to the Middle Way
With the guidance of Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche
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Translated by Jim Scott
In conjunction with the Pullahari winter program of teaching, 1998*

Clips of Rinpoche's Explanations

- **The Reasoning for Past and Future Lives**
(<http://ktgr.dscloud.me/moodle/course/view.php?id=438>)
- **The Importance of Compassion**
(<http://ktgr.dscloud.me/moodle/course/view.php?id=441>)
- **The Main Reasoning Employed by Svatantrika, the Autonomy Middle Way**
(<http://ktgr.dscloud.me/moodle/course/view.php?id=445>)

A Guide to the Middle Way

Here, The Autonomy Middle Way Approach

Generally stated, the tenet shared by all Middle Way Schools, the two Rangtong schools, Svatantrika or The Autonomy Middle Way and Prasangika or Consequence Middle Way as well as by Shentong or The Empty of Other Middle Way is as follows:

Regarding apparent reality: All phenomena are mere appearances produced by their interdependently connected causes and conditions, like illusions.

Genuine reality for each middle way school is basically freedom, also referred to as emptiness of a true existence of the appearances.

Specifically stated, each school has its own formulation of both truths with crucial differences distinguishing them.

Svatantrikamadhyamaka, The Autonomy Middle Way

In addition to the above shared assertion, phenomena are asserted by this school to exist relatively by virtue of their autonomously existing defining characteristics but to be empty ultimately, like space.

Their assertion of an autonomous existence of defining characteristics is equivalent to saying phenomena are things existing substantially. They thus define a “thing” as “that which performs a function”. So, there is a direct equivalence between the defining traits and the function performed.

For example, fire is defined as “hot and burning,” which means that fire has its own (autonomous or automatic) ability to heat and burn, and these are the functions fire performs. So, for this school, the relative truth is true in the sense that there is an autonomous existence and functionality of things.

They also say correct reasoning automatically establishes what ultimate reality is. In other words, they assert that correct reasoning proves the emptiness which is the ultimate nature of things.

This also of course means: the emptiness thus established by this school is initially a concept.

But, just as their explanation allows a substantial existence of things, it also allows emptiness to be a concept. And that’s wonderful. Perfect for us at this stage on the path, because this

corresponds to the way we think about “things,” and it’s a way to understand emptiness that’s possible for us to practice as long as we have not reached “the level of the meditative equipoise of a noble being” where emptiness is experienced directly without conceptuality. Until then, our understanding of emptiness is initially conceptual.

This is a truly great kindness shown us by the Autonomist approach, because we are able to think, and we can learn to think correctly, and that’s what this set of instructions helps us do.

For this reason, the Autonomy School’s approach is particularly valuable for practitioners on the path, because it enables us to take a step we are able to actually take. We are able to get a picture of the emptiness, a thought of what it is, and once we have that, we can rest in it during meditation. We’re experts in producing thoughts and we can manage to not get distracted from a particular thought for some time. No problem!

But for us to have the direct non-conceptual emptiness samadhi of a realized being?
Well, maybe not yet!

So, out of great compassion, the Autonomy School provides us with this practical solution! To develop an understanding of emptiness based on correct reasoning is thus WITHIN OUR REACH. It is something we can do.

The analytical method taught by the Svatantrika provides this kind of understanding, and with it one rests during meditation in what this school calls “nominal genuine reality”. This means “what is being called emptiness”. It’s not a mistaken understanding of emptiness. It’s not yet the actual emptiness either. It’s a conceptual fabrication of emptiness, but it’s what we can do at this stage in the practice. And it’s a gigantic step forward from thinking everything is truly existent!!!

A central point of The Progressive Stages of Emptiness is that we are provided with a progression of steps. To develop an understanding of emptiness as presented by The Autonomists is one of the crucial steps. So, how do we do that?

The method here:

1) Apply the reasoning that analyzes for one and many

Look at any appearance that presents itself; for example, a flower. To start with, there’s the thought: this is a flower, i.e., one thing. But which one of the things you are seeing is the one thing you are calling “the flower”? Is it the petals on the side visible to you? If those are the flower, the petals on the side you can’t see are not the flower. Is it the stem? Then none of the petals is the flower. And so on.

You can apply the same analysis to a table or whatever. There are always parts and the analysis unfolds from there.

For the thing, a flower or whatever, to be “one,” it could not be the parts, because those are many. Since the parts are not one, yet you believe the thing itself to be one, the flower would have to be something that is not the parts. But it would have to possess the parts or there would be no connection between them.

So, we’re in the strange position of saying the part-possessor has to exist separately from the parts. But then, which of them is the flower? Is the flower the parts you are seeing or the possessor of those parts? If the part-possessor is the one thing that is the flower, it would have to exist somewhere else, since it is not the parts. It could maybe exist next to the parts. But such a thing existing separately from its parts is never observed. And indeed, would make no sense!

Hence, the necessary conclusion: what is being observed is not one. It transcends being one. Or we can say, it is “beyond being one.”

So, we’re back to the many parts. Do these exhibit singularity or multiplicity?

We might here bring up the point that, when we say the many parts make one whole, we mean the collection of parts.

AH! Thank you. You just helped prove the point. The mistaken idea we’re holding on to is the concept that substantially existing parts make up a substantially existing whole. But there is no substantial existence of the collection of parts. Such a collection is a generalization of the many parts into one. But that is a concept. The collection exists only conceptually. No substantially existing oneness is found among the parts themselves, as in the example of a lawn. Conceptually, we think of it as one lawn, but when you look, you only find many blades of grass “out there”.

If you then say, “Well, at least the individual blades of grass are single. Oops! Which single part of the blade is the one blade of grass you’re referring to? We’re back to the first part of the analysis, but that’s where oneness has been refuted.

When examined, no substantially existing oneness is found anywhere in the universe. Even the word “universe,” which roughly translated means “one world,” is only applicable as a convention, a handy way of referring to the many parts. There is actually no such thing as “the one world”.

Since we’re now clear that oneness is just a concept, not a thing as such, let’s go back to the many parts.

When we then take any of the parts and ask, is it one or many, since the chosen part itself has parts, the same analysis brings us again to the same conclusion. We don’t find a single thing in any of the parts that is simply one. And for this reason, there are not many. There is no unit to build them out of.

One and many are just appearances empty of what they appear to be. When not examined carefully, these appearances seem to be substantially existing. When examined, phenomena are found to be “beyond both one and many.”

Another way the Autonomists say this is: phenomena are empty of an actual essence or essential content.

So, the contradiction is complete. Relatively, they say, things have substantial existence, but when analyzed, they are found to be empty of any substance, like space. Space is the perfect example of a phenomenon empty of one and many and thus empty of substantial content.

Who is making the mistake of thinking things are one and many? We are. We are the ones who think things are real; that they exist substantially, that they exist with their own defining characteristics and therefore perform real functions and have an essential content out of which the parts are made. The Autonomist position simply formulates this position very clearly [which we usually don't!!!]

Up to this point, we have been analyzing for one and many in a general way. In the context of listening, reflection, and meditation, this is what is referred to as reflection. Here, our attention is turned outwards towards flowers and tables and universes. This exposes the fault in our confused way of thinking, enabling us to gradually overcome our confused experience of the world.

This is called “the knowledge deriving from reflection.”

2) That brings us to the next step comprising the method, namely, the meditation.

This has two parts: the analytical and the resting meditation.

a) The Analytical Meditation

Here, we are applying the analysis not just in an outward turned general way as we do during reflection. We now turn our attention inwards, meaning towards our own personal experience of things. For example, our experience of the body (one's own or someone else's). To analyze bodily experience, ask yourself, is this body one or many? When you look, you see parts. Which one part is the body?

Since no single part is the body, you never actually see “the body.” Apply the same kind of detailed examination of body as was explained in relation to things like flowers, and you may see that, in fact, no one has ever seen a body -- their own or anyone else's. Only parts. The parts are

then generalized into “one,” but this is not the body. It’s a concept, a thought. Conceptual mind sees its concept of the body as one, but the visual consciousness never sees one, only many parts.

This analytical meditation gives rise to the certainty that the body itself is empty of any constituting substantial essence, like space.

Pause here and do this analytical meditation.

If some kind of bodily suffering is being experienced, apply the same analysis to it until certainty arises that the suffering is empty of any substantial constituent, like space.

b) The Resting Meditation

Once this certainty arises, do not continue analyzing. Simply rest relaxed in that space-like expanse without further analysis.

Pause and Meditate.

By resting like this, the experience of emptiness gradually and naturally becomes less and less conceptual, bringing mind to direct glimpses of natural emptiness. This is mind naturally progressing from nominal genuine reality to actual genuine reality. This is the practitioner gradually finding the Heart of Compassion.

Have a nice journey.

