Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness

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On the Advantages and Benefits of Teaching and Studying the Profound Emptiness and Selflessness

There is great merit when a teacher who knows profound emptiness well teaches a suitable student.

From the Compendium of the Sūtras:

Through devoted interest in the profound dharma, you accumulate all the merit. In this way, until you attain enlightenment you will accomplish all the excellent mundane and supramundane qualities.

From the Kyeu Rinpoche Sūtra:

Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī, the merit of someone who listens to this profound dharma [teachings on emptiness] with doubt is so much greater than someone who is not skilled in methods but practices the six pāramitās for 100,000 kalpas—not to mention the merit of someone who listens without doubt.

And it is said:

Someone who transcribes the teachings, gives reading transmissions, and collects texts [accumulates great merit by doing so]—not to mention someone who teaches others extensively and thoroughly.

From the Diamond Sūtra:

The Bhagavān said: “Subhūti, what do you think? If there were as many Ganges rivers as the number of grains of sand in the Ganges, would you say that the number of grains of sand in all those Ganges rivers would be very many?”

Subhūti answered: “Very many indeed, Bhagavān, if the number of Ganges rivers was that large, not to mention the number of grains of sand in all those Ganges rivers.”

The Bhagavān answered: “Subhūti, I will teach you. You should contemplate: If a man or a woman filled this world with the seven treasures for each grain of sand in all those
Ganges rivers and made an offering to the Tathāgata and gave it all away out of compassion, would this man or woman not accumulate great merit?”

Subhūti replied: “Indeed, it would be a lot of merit, Bhagavān.”

The Bhagavān then said: “Subhūti, if from all these emptiness teachings, you memorize the four lines [i.e., form is emptiness, emptiness is form, emptiness is no other than form, form is no other than emptiness], and if you teach them to others, that merit would be far greater than that offering.”

From the Treasury of the Tathāgata:

If one enters the dharma of selflessness while still being endowed with the ten great nonvirtuous actions, but has faith that all phenomena from the outset are pure, such a devoted being will not go to the lower realms.

And from the chapter on taming maras:

Bhikṣu, someone who knows how to completely pacify all phenomena and who understands that wrongdoings from the beginning are without intrinsic nature—such a person has cleared away the regret that evil deeds arise. [To that person,] evil deeds will not be solid, and that way even the karmic deeds of immediate retribution are subdued—not to mention small mistakes in ritual ceremonies and discipline.

From the King Ajatasatru Sūtra:

Someone who has committed the five acts with immediate retribution, who then hears this profound, excellent dharma of profound emptiness and has the interest to enter the dharma—I will not say that such a person’s karma will be [experienced as] karmic obscuration.
Introduction
Selflessness of the Person

If we think about the temporary and ultimate hopes and desires of ourselves and other sentient beings, we all want physical and mental happiness and well-being and want to abandon or renounce suffering and the causes of suffering.

Most sentient beings, like ourselves, do not know how to really create happiness and well-being because we do not understand what the causes of happiness and well-being are and because we mistake things that are not the causes of happiness as the causes of happiness.

Even though we do not want suffering, because we do not understand the causes of suffering, we lose the happiness we want and get the suffering we do not long for.

Is there a method by which we can gain happiness and abandon suffering? If there is such a method, you may ask what it is.

First, we need to understand what the causes of happiness and suffering are, and we should unmistakenly know what to accept and reject and what to adopt and abandon. Realizing that, we should with certainty contemplate the dharma and what is taught by listening, contemplating, and meditating, because liberation will not happen by itself.

Because the teacher, the Bhagavān, was omniscient, he turned the wheel of dharma three times for the beings of higher, middling, and lower capacity. Among those, the dharma for the beings of higher capacity was experienced and realized by the noble ones of India and Tibet, and it has been elegantly and marvelously taught immeasurable times.

This text is based on Progression of Views, the Quintessence of Definitive Meaning by the Vajrayāna yogi and Mahāsiddha Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche.

Since this gradual meditation on emptiness is an extraordinary key instruction (upadeśa), I will give a condensed commentary on these teachings by Khenpo Rinpoche.

It is said that the ultimate view is to be explained gradually.

Why is the view of selflessness important?
The root of saṃsāra is the clinging to a self.

Religious traditions have used the term saṃsāra (or Jambudvīpa) for this world. According to the Buddhist view, the result of karma and mental afflictions is the skandhas, or collections of suffering. Due to karma and kleśas, beings are choicelessly born again and again as one of the six types of beings in the three realms. That is called the cyclic existence, or saṃsāra.
In general, in order to abandon saṃsāra, we need to recognize what the main cause of saṃsāra is. It is taught that the main reason that we wander in saṃsāra is the ignorance of clinging to a self.

**The root of karma and mental afflictions**

*Clinging to a self is the root of karma and mental afflictions.*

Mental afflictions make the mind completely restless. And the root or cause of those mental afflictions—like desire, hatred, ignorance, pride, jealousy, wrong view, and so on—is the ignorance of clinging to a self.

**The root of suffering**

*The root of suffering is also the clinging to a self.*

Warfare, killing, robbery, distraction, depression, oppression, and so forth—there are all types of unfortunate circumstances and obstacles, the temporary shortcomings of our worldly realm.

Likewise, each of the six types of being has their own suffering. For example, human beings encounter the suffering of birth, old age, sickness, and death; the suffering of not finding what we desire and encountering what we do not wish for; the suffering of meeting our enemies and having to separate from our friends.

The root or cause of all this suffering is the ignorance of clinging to a self.

**What are the basic needs or necessities of human wanderers?**

In general, we need to know what we human wanderers or beings basically really need and what we do not need.

We humans have the great sickness of poverty mentality. However much wealth, possessions, and so forth we have, we are never satisfied, and we believe it is not sufficient.

The things we lack, we need them right now. We need more. We need everything.

We need them right now even if they are neither ultimately or temporarily of any use, nor directly or indirectly of any benefit. The mind which thinks we need more and more is the state of mind that is the strongest form of poverty mentality.

That is why we are rarely ever satisfied or content, and we don’t think “It’s okay” or “It is enough.”
Let us do an exercise:

Sit down and contemplate: “What do I need?” Then your mind will say, “I need this, I need that.” Make a list and write all these things down. Then later, go back and look at that list. You will likely find many things on the list of things you thought you needed that you actually do not need.

Next, contemplate: “What do I not need?”—like maybe “I don’t need a teacher.” Make a list and write everything down. Later, when you look at that list again, among all the things you thought you did not need, you will likely find things that you actually need or that you might need.

Therefore, to recognize what we fundamentally really need and what we do not need is a sign of mental maturity. With regard to our age, we are grown up; with regard to our body, we are grown up—but mentally, we are not grown up. We are like children.

In sum, for all sentient beings, no matter if we are of higher or lower status, from the moment we are born we keep busy, and however much we try to dispel our suffering, we are unable to get rid of suffering. Because we do not recognize the real causes of suffering, suffering continues to arise.

The clinging to a self, the view of a self, the attachment to a self—these are the roots or causes of all the shortcomings, misfortunes, and obstacles we experience.

The antidote for the clinging to a self is the wisdom that realizes selflessness

Stabilize the certainty in selflessness, the antidote.

As for the antidote to the clinging to a self, it is the light of wisdom that recognizes selflessness.

To give birth to such wisdom in our mind, we need to study, contemplate, and meditate on the sūtras and treatises. Then, we will come to understand the meaning of selflessness, and we will gain certainty that is free of doubt.

First, to generate what has not yet arisen, we need to listen and study.
Second, to stabilize firmly what has arisen, we need to contemplate.
Third, for this certainty to dawn as wisdom, we need to meditate.
These three are extremely important.

From the sūtras:

Not knowing emptiness, peace, and non-arising, beings wander in samsāra. Those possessing compassion, with many different methods and types of reasoning, make those beings enter into the path.
From the glorious Chandrakirti in his *Entrance to the Middle Way*:

Seeing with intelligence that all mental afflictions and faults
arise from the view of transitory collection
And realizing that the self is the object of such view,
yogis and yoginis refute the self.

And:

Ordinary beings are bound by concepts.
Yogins free of concepts are liberated.
What reverses concepts?
The learned ones teach that it is the result of thorough analysis.

And from the *Uttaratantra Shastra*:

*Karma and mental afflictions are firmly based on mistaken mental engagement.*

**Changing our mental attitude is changing our life**

Whatever dharma we practice, it should be done based on correcting our motivation and mental attitude at the beginning. The ability to follow authentically the Buddhist path is also determined by our motivation and mental attitude. Changing our mental attitude is therefore changing our life.

There are five ways to change our mental attitude:

1. **Good habitual patterns, good habits, and a good mental attitude are important for a good intention.**
   
The intention guides our physical and verbal actions and movements. And those activities form our habitual patterns.
   
   Our habitual patterns are very powerful phenomena. We all become powerless sentient beings who are just following our habitual patterns.

2. **Beings who criticize less and see more of the positive qualities are the noble ones.**
   
   We human beings have the bad habit of seeing and talking about the faults of both others and ourselves.
   
   The difference between ordinary beings and noble ones obviously depends on if we see more of the faults or the good qualities.
   
   May I become someone who does not find the faults in others and talks about them but rather sees others’ positive qualities and recognizes their kindness!
3. Trust and faith are the doors to success.
   Whatever bad circumstances you may encounter, never allow yourself to lose trust and faith. Especially never allow yourself to lose faith in yourself!
   Losing faith in yourself is losing the meaning in your life. We ourselves are a better protection than the Three Jewels. We need to understand that we ourselves are our own best friend and our greatest wealth.

4. A vast, open, and flexible mind is the best health.
   In order to relax our heavy and tired body or our mental sorrow and suffering, we need a vast, open, and flexible mind, and we need to let go of our seriousness. Whatever we experience in our mind—happiness or suffering—we need to apply methods to relax our body and mind.
   The supreme method to relax body and mind is to sing songs of realization.

5. The perfect Buddha is born from the mind to benefit others.
   Benefiting others is everyone’s responsibility.
Part 1
Selflessness of Person: The Tradition of the Hearers

The Buddha taught limitless gateways into the dharma in accordance with the character, interests, and wishes of the students. All are gathered in the three vehicles, or the three turnings of the dharma. First is the vehicle of the hearers.

In Sanskrit, the hearers are called Śrāvakas, which includes both hearing and listening. They are also called the ones proclaiming what they have heard because they rely on a master and then proclaim or resound the dharma which they have heard from that teacher to others.

As for the vehicle of the hearers, it includes the view, meditation, conduct, and fruition.

The view of the hearers: The selflessness of the person

From the sūtras:

The object of self-clinging is without nature.
The mind clinging to a self is also without nature.
The earlier and later self is like a river.
Therefore, stabilize the certainty in the abiding reality, selflessness.

In order to give rise to certainty about the view of selflessness, we first need to have a good understanding of what the basis of the self is.

Without knowing the proper terminology of existent and nonexistent, the wishful thinking that everything is without a self is nothing other than increasing ignorance.

Generally, we need to understand that there are two types of phenomena: afflicted phenomena, or phenomena that are gathered into the five skandhas or aggregates, and the completely pure phenomena.

First, the afflicted phenomena have 53 different aspects. The Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra lists them as follows:

Five skandhas
1. form, 2. feeling, 3. perception, 4. formation, 5. consciousness

Six sense faculties
6. eye sense faculty, 7. ear sense faculty, 8. nose sense faculty, 9. tongue sense faculty, 10. body sense faculty, 11. mental faculty
Six consciousnesses based on the sense faculties
12. eye consciousness, 13. ear consciousness, 14. nose consciousness, 15. tongue consciousness, 16. body consciousness, 17. mental consciousness

Six objects

Six contacts
24. contact associated with eyes, 25. contact associated with ears, 26. contact associated with nose, 27. contact associated with tongue, 28. contact associated with body, 29. contact associated with mind

Six feelings (sensations)
30. sensation arising from contact associated with eyes, 31. sensation arising from contact associated with ears, 32. sensation arising from contact associated with nose, 33. sensation arising from contact associated with tongue, 34. sensation arising from contact associated with body, 35. sensation arising from contact associated with mind

Six elements
36. earth, 37. water, 38. fire, 39. wind, 40. space, 41. consciousness

Twelve links of interdependent origination
42. ignorance, 43. formation, 44. consciousness, 45. name and form, 46. sources (āyatanas), 47. contact, 48. feeling (sensation), 49. craving, 50. grasping, 51. becoming, 52. birth, 53. old age and death.

These 53 phenomena, which are included in the five skandhas, are the objects of self-clinging.

The mind that observes the basis of the self (the phenomena that are gathered in the five aggregates) and clings to it as single and independent is not aligned with the characteristics of the five skandhas. That mind is called clinging to the self of the person.

This clinging to the self of the person is divided into the innate clinging to a self and the imputed clinging to a self.

**The innate clinging to the self (of the person)**

As for the innate clinging to a self, sentient beings from beginningless time have regarded the “I” or “self” as valuable and important.

The I or self appears to the mind as the boss; the body and mind appear to be like a load or burden. Or one could say that the I or self appears to the mind as the experincer, and the outer and inner phenomena appear to be what is experienced.
The self appears to the mind as the boss and appears to be the controller of the load or burden, which is the skandhas. The mind believes that the boss or self is autonomous and independent from the load or skandhas.

Such a mind is not in accord with how things really are; it is mistaken about reality. It is a mistaken mind. That kind of clinging is called innate self-clinging.

**The imputed clinging to the self (of the person)**

Because of mistaken reasoning, we cling to the self as

- a. singular—as not being connected to any other phenomena, as something having no associate, and as something alone and solitary that does not consist of parts;
- b. permanent—as something without birth and cessation; and
- c. independent—as something not depending on others.

The clinging to I or the self as singular, permanent, and independent is called the imputed clinging to the self.

**Selflessness as the antidote**

In order to explain the selflessness of the person, an illustrating example is given, followed by an explanation of the meaning of the example.

**The illustrating example**

The sūtras say:

> The so-called self is the Mara-mind which has become your perspective.
> The skandha of formation is empty of that; in this skandha there is no sentient being.
> Something that is just the collection of parts is called a chariot.
> In the same way, based on the skandhas, we call them relative beings.

As for the meaning of this quotation:

If you believe that a chariot really exists, you should analyze if the relationship between a chariot and its parts are one of these seven:

1. same (Is the chariot the same as the parts?)
2. different (Is the chariot different from the parts?)
3. support (Is the chariot the support?)
4. supported (Is the chariot the supported?)
5. part (Is the chariot a part?)
6. whole (Is the whole thing the chariot?)

7. shape (Is the shape of the parts the chariot?)

If you analyze through logical reasoning if a chariot exists or not in any of these seven ways, you cannot establish a chariot in any of them. Therefore, what is called a chariot is a mere label. If you look for the actual thing, there is nothing to be found. And this is the same for the self and the skandhas.

The explanation of the meaning of this example

There are a few steps to analyzing the skandhas. First, we analyze on a coarse level without differentiating between the individual skandhas, analyzing only to see if the self and the skandhas are the same, or if the self is other than the skandhas. Next, we go deeper and analyze each of the five skandhas individually, which will finally lead us to understand that beings appear in the manner of an illusion.

In general, whatever we look at, we cannot go beyond two things being either the same or different or either singular or many. There is no third option.

If you come to resolve that they are either the same or different, then it follows necessarily that any truly established phenomenon is either the same or different.

Then, if the self or the person is truly existent, it also must be either the same as or different from the five skandhas. We should analyze if a truly existent self and the skandhas are the same or different.

The analysis of the self and skandhas being one

First, what kinds of faults are there if we establish the self and the skandhas as being one by nature? Yogis and yoginis should examine what the faults might be if the self and skandhas are one.

There are three faults:

1. It would be pointless to call it a self.

2. There would be a multitude of selves.

3. The self would arise and perish.

As for the first point: If we assert the self and the skandhas as being one by nature, then the belief in a self would be pointless because “self” would just be a synonym for “skandhas” in the same way “moon” and “the one with the rabbit” are synonyms.

The Mūlamadhyamakakārikā (Root Verses on the Middle Way) in chapter 27 says:

\[
\text{If there is no self apart from the skandhas} \\
\text{and if the skandhas are the self,} \\
\text{then your self does not exist.}
\]
As for the second point: If the self and the skandhas were of the same nature, it would mean that since one person consists of several skandhas, there would be a multitude of selves. And if there were only one self, then there would also be only one skandha.

From the *Entrance to the Middle Way*:

> If the skandhas were the self:
> As there are several skandhas,
> then also the self would be a multitude of selves.

As for the third point, the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* in chapter 18 says:

> If the skandhas were the self
> it would become of the nature of [being] born and ceasing.

And chapter 27 says:

> The skandhas are not the self
> Because the skandhas arise and cease.

**The analysis of the self and skandhas being different**

Next, examine if the self and the skandhas are different by nature. If you assert the self and the skandhas as being different by nature, investigate what the fault would be.

If the self is established as different from the skandhas, the defining characteristics of skandhas would change so that they do not arise, abide, and cease. This is similar to a horse existing as something separate from an ox; the horse has no characteristics of an ox.

If the self does not have the defining characteristics of being born, abiding, and ceasing, it is permanent. Permanent means without change, so the self would not be useful, and it would become a mere label that has no function.

If there is a self that is separate from the skandhas, then we should be able to apprehend it. But we are not able to apprehend it; therefore, it does not exist as a separate phenomenon.

We now come to the analysis of the individual skandhas.

**The form skandha is not the self**

> We cling to the body as the self
> But there is no body as a whole.
> It is just many parts.
> If we analyze this logically, we find no self.
Ordinary beings, based on incorrect logic, view the form skandha, or the body—which is a collection of many parts—as I or the self. We view the body as the self and cherish the body.

For example, if our knee hurts, we say, “I hurt.” If we have a headache or our body feels uncomfortable, we say, “I am sick.” And if someone hits our head, we say, “I was hit, (s)he hurt me.” If we have beautiful eyes, we think, “I am beautiful.” If our body is small, we say, “I am small.”

The body appears to our mind as I or the self. Not knowing that the body is just a body, we mistake the body as the self. This kind of confused view is called the clinging to a self.

In order to correct this mistaken clinging to a self, smart yogis and yoginis recognize that if there were a truly established self, then it must be one or many, the same or different. If we diligently investigate this, we do not find anything.

In general, we apprehend our body, or form, without ever analyzing if it is parts or a whole, support or supported, and so forth.

If we look closely with the eyes of wisdom, then what is called the body is just a collection of parts, and the self is a mere imputation. Since we can differentiate countless particular parts, then the self should also be limitless in number. How could the form skandhas then be the self?

The individual parts of the body are not the self. The body as a whole is also not the self.

From Lord Nāgārjuna’s *Precious Garland of the Middle Way*:

A distant form is seen clearly by those who are near—

If a mirage were really water,

Then why can those nearby not see it?

If the form skandha is the self, why do those close not see it?

The feeling skandha is not the self

Ordinary beings see the feelings of body and mind as I or the self. For example, if we encounter abundant conducive conditions and are free from adverse conditions, we experience good physical feelings and think, “I am doing well.”

Likewise, if based on various conditions, our mind gets disturbed and we experience agitation, we think, “I am not well.”

We see such feelings as the self. If we analyze diligently with the eyes of wisdom, we recognize that those feelings we cherish and hold as important are just like a dream, like an illusion, like a watermoon.
When feelings arise, they don’t last long. They are impermanent, unstable, changing. Their nature is changing from moment to moment.

If those feelings were established as the self, this would not make sense. For example, are the happy feelings the self, or are the suffering feelings the self? If the happy feelings were the self, then when we experienced intense suffering, the happiness would be interrupted and therefore the self would also be interrupted. Therefore, the happy feelings are not the self.

Likewise, if the suffering feelings were the self, then when we had a strong experience of happy feelings, the suffering would be interrupted and then the self would also be interrupted.

If we examine this closely with the eyes of wisdom, we will see and understand clearly that the feelings are not the self. If the feelings are the self, why can those close not see it?

If happy feelings were the self,
Then if great suffering arises, the self would cease.

If sad feelings were the self,
Then in times of great happiness the self would cease.

If we analyze this well, we understand that feelings are not the self.

The skandha of consciousness is not the self

Here is why the skandha of consciousness is not the self:

Since there are many different forms of consciousness—like perceptions, concepts, mental factors, sense consciousnesses, mental consciousnesses, and so on—if we examine and analyze if any of them could be the self, then we can clearly see that consciousness cannot be the self.

It is clear that consciousness is not the self. For example, when we fall asleep, the sense consciousnesses do not perform functions, therefore the self also would not perform a function. Similarly, perceptions are limitless in number, change from moment to moment, and depend on the three times; therefore, it is clear that consciousness is not the self.

If the consciousness skandha were the self, how come it cannot be seen by those near? If we analyze diligently with the eyes of wisdom if consciousness is the self, we cannot find anything.

If we search with a lot of reasoning for the self in the skandhas, which are the collection of body and mind, we do not find anything.

Since we do not find anything when we point our finger, we should train until we reach
a firm conviction that a mind clinging to a self is confused.  

If we do not achieve a clear conviction that a mind clinging to the skandhas as the self is mistaken, then even if we resolve that the self is not truly established, that is just a position we hold, but we don’t gain the view.  

**How to meditate on selflessness**

Without analyzing, sit on a comfortable meditation cushion and take a good body posture. Your body posture should be open, relaxed, and comfortable.  

Slowly and gently breathe in and out. With each in- and out-breath, relax the muscles of your body more and more. Direct your attention to each individual part of your body and let it relax.  

Let the mind also be relaxed and spacious, and let it settle for short periods of time. In that state, let go of all mental chatter and settle in resting meditation. Then, begin with analytical meditation. At the beginning, ask yourself the following questions:  

**First questions**  
- What is obstructing me from seeing and realizing the true abiding nature?  
- What is obstructing the realization of buddha nature?  
- What prevents me from seeing the true abiding nature?  
- What are the hindrances?  
- What are the adverse conditions?  

**Second questions**  
- Who am I?  
- What am I?  

**Third questions**  
- What is the fault if the skandhas are one with the self?  
- What is the fault in the self being different from the skandhas?  
- Form is not the self. Feelings are not the self. Perceptions are not the self. Formations are not the self. Consciousness is not the self. The skandhas are not the self. If the skandhas are the self, why do the ones who are close not see it?  

In that way, gain resolution and certainty that the skandhas are not the self. Rest free from mentally thinking “This is not the self” or “This is empty of a self.”  

The object—selflessness—cannot be identified as existent, nonexistent, and so forth. Rest free of grasping and uncorrupted by thoughts.
**Conduct of no-self**

The appearances of an illusion-like horse or ox are perceived by the eye consciousness, but there is no horse or ox in accordance with that appearance.

At the same time, the mental consciousness ascertains the nonexistence of horses and oxen as they appear. Based on that, the certainty arises that they are illusory and unreal.

Similarly, phenomena such as a person, etc., appear undeniable to the conventional mind, but through a logical mind you gain certainty that the very person is empty of being truly established.

Based on these two, the appearance of the person is like an illusion, and that appearance is free of a self. The existence of appearances is not established by the logical mind.

At the same time, the emptiness of appearances cannot be established by conventional valid cognition. Therefore, we should not mix up these two types of consciousness: the conventional and the logical, analytical mind. The logical mind searches to see if the true nature is there or not, and the conventional mind apprehends form and so forth.

Even though by nature there is no self, the appearances of form cannot be stopped. That is called appearances without a self.

Likewise, whether we perform spiritual actions like prostration, circumambulation, mantra recitation, and so on, or worldly actions, like taking care of friends and conquering enemies, we should first gain certainty in selflessness through analyzing if the self is truly established.

Once we have determined this with certainty, we should train in the action of subsequent attainment, or postmeditation.

If we understand these vital points, we can meditate easily on space-like selflessness and thereby become a master who in postmeditation sees everything as illusion-like without attachment or grasping.

While holding the view of being a nobody, we need to fulfill our duties and responsibilities. We all are temporary actors and perform on various stages. Each actor has their individual duties. In order to fulfill our duties and responsibilities, we should be without hypocrisy and be authentic.

No matter if we engage in spiritual or worldly activities, if we perform them while letting go of “I” and “me,” they will be of great benefit.

For example, when we have a wound on one part of our body, like a finger, and then the mind arises thinking, “I am sick,” then we experience mental suffering. When the
finger does not feel well, the finger hurts, and from the feelings that arise from that experience, we think, “I am sick.” There is no suffering aside from the mind that experiences “I am sick.”

As for the difference between a spiritual person and a worldly person, it will show in the usage of “I” and “me.”

Analyze yourself by asking these questions:

1. What is most valuable to you?
2. What obstructs you from seeing the underlying reality or abiding nature?
3. What are the defining characteristics of liberation?
4. How free are you? How independent are you?
5. What faults are there in clinging to a self?
6. Why is believing in a self incorrect mental engagement?
7. The supreme antidote to the clinging to a self is ______________.
   Choose a) merit, b) positive karma, c) hardship, or d) pleasing gods, nagas, local spirits, etc., by making offerings.
8. What are the five skandhas?
9. The form skandha is not the self because ____________.
10. The feeling skandha is not the self because ____________.
11. The consciousness skandha is not the self because ____________.
12. What is the fault if the form skandha were the self?
13. Do we see form with the eyes of wisdom? Does logical reasoning find a self?
14. What is the reason that we all are actors?

The results of the familiarization with the selflessness of the person are that the clinging to a self and the view of a self should be diminished. The signs for this are:

1. The clinging to the view of myself as “I have no friends” and “I am alone, isolated” should decrease.
2. Thoughts of protecting myself, concerns about myself, and the fear of loss should decrease.
3. Thoughts attached to time (like planning) should decrease.
Part 2
Selflessness of Phenomena: Mind Only School

To give a brief explanation of the Cittamātra or Mind Only school, I will present four sections: the sources, view, meditation, and conduct.

Sources

In general, there are many different ways of identifying textual sources—the textual sources from the noble land of India, from snowy Tibet, and from modern-day scholars. Here I am going to explain the Cittamātra school according to the *Treasury of Knowledge* by Jamgön Kongtrül Lodrö Thaye, a master of the rime or nonsectarian movement.

The *Avataṃsaka Sūtra* says:

The mind is like a painter,
Mind creates the skandhas.
Whatever manifests in this planet,
It is all painted by mind.

And from the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra in 8,000 Verses*:

Khye! Sons of the Victorious Ones,
All these three realms are just mind!

And from the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*:

Since beginningless time polluted by intellect
The mind is like a reflection—
It appears as various objects,
But ultimately there is no object as we see it.

There are many similar quotes from Buddha’s words, from the *Mahāyānasamāgraha*, and from Asanga’s *Five Divisions of Yogācāra Bhūmi*.

View

First, the Cittamātrins do not assert anything separate from mind; and second, they assert that ultimate reality, dharmatā, is beyond object and subject or beyond duality.

As for the meaning of “Mind Only”: All experiences—coarse phenomena, such as mountains, houses, trees, and the outer world; subtle phenomena, like causality as well as the beings of the six realms; the appearances arising based on habitual tendencies; happiness and suffering, good and bad, enemies and friends—all of these
are not even the slightest bit separate or different from mind. Rather, these experiences are like the appearances in a dream. If you assert this, that is called “Mind Only.”

The power of mind
This human body is precious, important, and valuable. We should ask ourselves: What makes the human birth and the human body so precious?

The human mind is more powerful than the mind of other beings. For example, the human mind is the only mind which can make plans. And the human mind is powerful in creating both good and bad things.

A sutra says accordingly:

*If our mind is contaminated by kleśas like desire, that is saṃsāra.*
*If it is free of that, that is the end of saṃsāra.*

Mind is the most precious among all things. It is a wish-fulfilling jewel. Through thoroughly training or purifying this mind, the jewels like the precious buddhas and everything that is most precious arise from that. If we do not train or purify this mind, because we are obscured by the habitual tendencies of kleśas like attachment and so on, beings wander in the cyclic existence of saṃsāra.

An Indian master said:

*Every unpleasant and fearful phenomenon is mind alone.*

The same master also said:

*Every pleasant and valuable phenomenon is also mind alone.*

A self-confident mind is the most precious thing in our life. If we lack self-confidence and feel incompetent, then we lose the preciousness of our life. Lack of self-confidence becomes the greatest hindrance on our spiritual path and in our daily life.

What obscures the seeing of the nondual present mind?
Dualistic thoughts are the root of saṃsāra, the cause of suffering and the conditions that give rise to the mental afflictions.

Let us take a look at the connection between these two, the apprehended object and the apprehending mind, that is, the perceived object, or matter, and the perceiving subject, or consciousness.

Many scholars are doing research about the connection and the difference between matter and consciousness. Some scholars say that matter is the cause and consciousness is the result and thus that consciousness arises from matter. For
example, from the cause, the brain, arises the result, consciousness.

Other scholars say that consciousness is the cause and matter is the result. For example, a creator god created all phenomena. Others say that matter and consciousness are not cause and result; they are totally different types. The final basis or cause of matter is an atom, and the final basis or cause of consciousness is a momentary partless consciousness.

According to the Mind Only tradition, consciousness does not arise from matter, and neither does matter arise from consciousness. Matter and consciousness are also not different in entity or type. Then what are they like?

Cittamātrins say that all things merely appear or dawn to the consciousness due to habitual tendencies; other than that, there is nothing truly established by essence or nature.

Everything is mind—Mind is everything

Because the various types of beings experience different appearances, all appearances are mere mind.

When different beings look together at the same river, what humans and fish see is different.

Because the six types of beings have six ways of seeing, everything is mistaken appearances due to habitual tendencies.

In general, proponents of Cittamātra determine by way of analogy or reasoning that all phenomena, appearances, and experiences are mere mind.

There are well-known examples: first, the example of a dream; second, the example of a yogin meditating on ugliness and for whom everything appears as skeletons; and third, the example of the six types of beings who have different ways of seeing things due to the power of their different karma.

The example of the dream is easy to understand.

As for the yogin meditating on ugliness and for whom everything appears as skeletons: a person with great desire meditates on the yoga of ugliness and sees all places filled with skeletons.

As for the example of the six types of beings who have different ways of seeing things due to the power of their different karma, this becomes clear in Asanga’s Mahāyānasamgraha.

When six different beings look at one river, due to the power of their varied karma, different things appear for them. For gods appears dutsi (nectar), for humans water, for hungry ghosts pus and blood, for animals like fish an abode, for hell beings molten
lava, and for a Vajrayāna yogin appears Mamaki, a dakini.

Similarly, due to our modern technology we have limitless examples that show that everything is mind so that we all can understand it. My common example is that a pen is seen very differently by sentient beings. For example, humans see a pen as something to write with, dogs see it as something to chew, cats see it as a toy, and so forth. From this, it is clear that everything arises based on habitual tendencies.

You may wonder then how houses, mountains, trees, and so on appear. All these outer things have no real essence and are mere appearances based on or due to habitual tendencies. Examples are like those described above: the appearances in a dream, an eye disease where we see falling hairs, or the appearances seen by a yogin who meditates on ugliness and for whom everything appears like skeletons.

Is a wall obstructive or not? For those who have the karma and habitual pattern of seeing it as obstructive, the wall appears as obstructive. For those who do not have the karma or tendency to see it as obstructive, the wall will not appear as obstructive.

Similarly, for those who have the karma and habits to see fire as hot and burning, it will appear as hot and burning. For those who do not have the karma and habitual tendencies to perceive fire as hot and burning, it will not appear as hot and burning.

The body that we cherish so much is mere mind

_Our body is seen in different ways by our friends and enemies,
by insects, tigers, leopards, and so forth.
This is obvious and therefore it is asserted that the body
is also confused appearance based on habitual tendencies._

Because the individual body that we cherish so much is seen in different ways by different beings, that body is not truly established as something on the outside. For example, for our enemies, that body appears as something unpleasant, as an object of hatred, and as an object to separate from. For friends, that body appears as an object of attachment, as pleasant, and as an object that we want to meet and we wish to be close with. For beings like tigers, leopards, and insects, that body appears as something to eat and to enjoy.

If we analyze and search for which one is the truth, then there is nothing to be found.

Happiness and suffering are only mind

In this world, only a few can recognize suffering as suffering, and only a few can recognize happiness as happiness. We mistake happiness to be suffering and suffering to be happiness. Some suffer their whole life in order to gain happiness. Some enjoy happiness and well-being their entire life within this ocean of saṃsāra.
filled with suffering.

In this unbalanced and everlasting world of samsāra, we wish for happiness and do not want suffering. Under the influence of wanting and not wanting, we have no time to set our feet on the ground or time to look at a wall. You say “happy, happy” and “enjoy, enjoy,” and for that happiness and enjoyment everybody runs around day and night.

In fact, how many people really live their life happily? If we want to gain abundant happiness and marvelous joy, we need to change our way of thinking. Our own mind is the main source of both happiness and suffering.

Therefore, Khenpo Rinpoche said:

- If in a dream an arrow is shot at us or we are given a flower,
  From the nature of the object, there is no difference.
  But from the subject side, there is a difference.
  Therefore we assert that all happiness and suffering are only mind.

Happiness and suffering are both said to be mere mind. All feelings, like suffering and so forth, are not truly established as something from their own side. For example, the pain that we experience when in a dream someone shoots an arrow at our body and the pleasant feeling when another person in a dream gives us a flower, from the side of our body there is no difference, but in our mind they create different feelings. Therefore, it is taught that both happiness and suffering are not established as something from their own side but as mere mind.

- Enemy and friend are merely mind

  Even if friends and companions are attractive to us,
  When anger arises, they become unattractive.
  Enemies we do not like,
  But when they turn into friends, we like them.
  Therefore I assert that both enemies and friends are merely mind.

In general, humans are strongly bound by the shackles of concepts. That is why we crave and hope to meet friends and companions and have doubt and fear about meeting enemies and strangers. Therefore, we completely exert ourselves day and night in subduing enemies and protecting friends.

The intense suffering that we humans experience from subduing enemies and protecting friends comes from the confused mind that thinks of friends and enemies as something truly established externally.

Let us do an exercise. Bring to mind a) a friend you really like, b) an enemy that you don’t like, and c) a stranger. Are they truly objectively established? Are they mental
constructs?

Nobody is born as an enemy from the outset, and nobody is born as a friend from the outset. Contemplate the reason that one person could appear as a friend, as an enemy, or as neutral.

The cause for happiness is merely mind

The purpose of our life is to strive to attain happiness. Sentient beings all have the right to live our lives. When we say “live,” we are talking about the wish to be healthy and happy. This is the reason that sentient beings strive to survive.

We rely on hope and trust for our survival, and that hope is something positive. Due to this positive hope and happy feelings, the condition of our body is also healthy.

Most sentient beings believe that material wealth or outer objects are the cause of happiness, but Khenpo Rinpoche teaches in his root verse that the cause of happiness is mind:

Beings might believe that wealth is the cause for happiness,  
But those like the lord of beings Milarepa and others  
who are free of attachment are happy.  
Therefore, I assert that the cause of happiness is mind.

There are many noble beings like the king of yogins Milarepa who even though they do not possess material wealth are extremely happy. Therefore, it is clear that mind is the cause of happiness.

The six types of beings are mind only

Khenpo Rinpoche teaches:

Various religions believe  
there are certain places for the higher realms’ beings, the variety of pure realms,  
And accordingly as the destination for the lower realms’ beings,  
there is a variety of hell realms. All these heavens and hells are merely mind.  
The experience of the hell of molten iron and so on  
is taught to be a mistaken appearance based on habitual tendencies.  
Therefore, it is necessary to gain certainty  
that the suffering of the three lower realms also is only mind.  
The worlds of the higher gods, the lapis lazuli pure realm,  
and the various precious residences  
are the mistaken appearances of virtuous mind.
The reasoning of definite simultaneous observation

Among the many reasonings that refute the assertion of subject and object as separate or substantially different, Khenpo Rinpoche explicitly teaches the reasoning of definite simultaneous observation (Skt. *sahopalambhāniyama* or *sahasamvittiniyama*):

*In a dream, it is not that between object and consciousness one is earlier and one later.*

*We are confused and think that the object is first.*

*But because object and consciousness are co-emergent,*

*I assert that all phenomena are just mind.*

This verse teaches the reasoning of definite simultaneous observation. As for the meaning: Everything is simultaneously observed, therefore it must be that object and consciousness are not substantially separate or different like the ear, the ear consciousness, and sound, or like a blue object and the eye consciousness perceiving blue, and so forth.

The proponents of Mind Only refute the assertion that subject and object are substantially different by the logic of the reasoning of definite simultaneous observation. For example, a blue object and the eye consciousness perceiving blue are simultaneously observed by valid cognition, and it is not that one of them is sometimes there and sometimes not. The subject, the blue object, and the eye consciousness perceiving blue are not separate or substantially different because they are definitely observed simultaneously.

“Simultaneously observed” means coexisting or simultaneously existing. When phenomena exist simultaneously, then it is impossible that one arises first and the other one later, or that one ceases first and the other one later. “Definitely” means that there is not a single instance or moment when they do not exist simultaneously. If they exist simultaneously, they always exist simultaneously.

The example traditionally given to illustrate the reasoning of definite simultaneous observation is that if you squint your eyes, you may observe two moons instead of one. The double moon is the perceived object, and the perceiving consciousness of that double moon logically cannot be substantially different from the moon.

Contemplate: If the two—the double moon and the perceiving consciousness—would not be definitely simultaneously observed, which one of them would arise first? Which would cease first? Maybe you say the perceiving mind arises first, but if there is no moon, does the consciousness perceiving a moon arise? No. Or maybe you say the moon exists first. But does the moon exist without a perceiving mind? It is the same with ceasing: Does the moon cease first and the perceiving subject later? What would the consciousness perceive if the moon has already ceased?
We use the example of seeing a double moon when we squint our eyes because it can make it easier to understand definite simultaneous observation. If we instead take the example of just normally seeing one moon, we have the strong habit of thinking that the moon is always there. If we squint our eyes to see things double, it is clear that the double moon and the perceiving consciousness arise simultaneously. They always arise and cease at the same time, not only sometimes.

Definite simultaneous observation means they always arise and cease at the same time. And this proves, according to the Mind Only school, that they are not substantially different or separate.

If object and subject are definitely simultaneously existent, why can't they be substantially different? Some phenomena can be substantially different and can be sometimes observed simultaneously, but they are not included in definite simultaneous observation, i.e., they are not necessarily always observed simultaneously.

As for blue and the eye consciousness observing blue, it is impossible that one of them exists alone without the other existing. If these two were substantially different, it is possible that each would sometimes be observed separately.

In short, whatever appears to mind is not separate or different from mind.

**Nondual present mind**

Khenpo Rinpoche says:

* Nondual dharmatā is the ultimate—
* Therefore meditate on nondual dharmatā.

Emptiness, dharmatā, ultimate truth, thoroughly established nature, and suchness are synonyms. In general, all dualistic appearances, such as subject and object and apprehender and apprehended, are relative truth.

What is ultimate truth? It is emptiness. What is it empty of? It is empty of all dualistic phenomena, such as apprehender and apprehended, parts and whole, support and supported.

It is suchness, never changing into something else. It is signlessness, totally free of all elaborations. It is the domain of genuine wisdom; therefore it is the ultimate truth.

What is nondual dharmatā? It is the nature of mind, the secret of mind. What is the nature or secret of mind? The momentary present mind is the secret of mind, the nature of mind, or the real mind.

This nondual, momentary present mind is the ultimate truth of the Cittamātrins. This is first introduced, then sustained and stabilized, and finally actualized. This present mind transcends form and matter; it is unstained and unobscured by kleśas, such as desire,
and conceptual thoughts, such as good and bad; and being without center and edge, it is like space.

This nondual, momentary present mind is endowed with three main qualities:

1. It transcends matter.
2. It is not stained by faults.
3. It is without center and edge.

This is the meaning of natural clarity.

Because this nondual, momentary present mind is endowed with inherent positive qualities, such as love, compassion, loving-kindness, wisdom, and so forth, it has the defining characteristics of the perfected nature. And since this nondual, momentary present mind is experienced by itself and since that awareness is without subject and object, it is by essence self-awareness.

**Meditation**

There are three stages of meditation:

1. Look at the present mind free from the duality of subject and object.
2. Cut through the mistaken appearances of objects.
3. Dissolve the mistaken appearance of the subject.

As for the first point, Khenpo Rinpoche teaches:

*Nondual dharmatā is the ultimate—
Therefore meditate on nondual dharmatā.*

First, in order to look at the present mind, sit in a comfortable physical posture. Close your eyes slightly and visualize your present mind as a white circle (*tigle, bindu*) at the place of your third eye between your eyebrows. Focus undistracted by anything else and rest. Relax your body, and let it settle. Relax your speech, and let it settle. Relax your mind, and let it settle.

Second, to cut through the mistaken appearances of objects, Khenpo Rinpoche teaches:

*Since they are the mistaken appearances of our habitual tendencies, apprehended objects do not exist.*

The daytime appearances of form, sound, smell, taste, touch, as well as earth, water, fire, wind, space, and so on, are all just mistaken appearances, which are not truly established other than being mind. All these appear merely based on karma and habitual tendencies. They are like a dream, like an illusion, like a watermoon.
Contemplate and recite this again and again.

Likewise, the daytime appearances of friends, enemies, strangers, happiness, and suffering, as well as good and bad, are merely the mistaken appearances of mind, which are not truly established other than being mind. All these appear merely based on karma and habitual tendencies. They are like a dream, like an illusion, like a watermoon. Contemplate and recite this again and again.

All appearances and experiences in a dream are just mistaken appearances, which are not truly established other than being mind. All these appear merely based on karma and habitual tendencies. They are like a dream, like an illusion, like a watermoon. Contemplate and recite this again and again.

All appearances and experiences in the bardo are just mistaken appearances, which are not truly established other than being mind. All these appear merely based on karma and habitual tendencies. They are like a dream, like an illusion, like a watermoon. Contemplate and recite this again and again.

All appearances in the three lower realms, like the hell realms, and all the experiences of suffering and fear, as well as all the appearances of the three higher realms, like the god realms, and all the experiences of happiness are just mistaken appearances, which are not truly established other than being mind. All these appear merely based on karma and habitual tendencies. They are like a dream, like an illusion, like a watermoon. Contemplate and recite this again and again.

Third, to dissolve the mistaken appearance of the subject, Khenpo Rinpoche teaches:

Therefore, the grasping mind also does not exist.

The subject, the grasping mind, also is not truly established, because it is just a mistaken appearance based on karma and habitual tendencies. Since the object is not established by nature, the subject is also not truly established—because the subject depends on the object. Therefore, the subject is not truly established. Contemplate and recite this again and again.

Conduct

Like a dream, like an illusion, like a watermoon—seeing or understanding that all dualistic appearances of good, bad, neutral, and so forth, and all experiences like happiness and suffering arise due to habitual tendencies, we engage in the activities of eating, sleeping, going, and sitting.

Do not allow your own mind to fall under the power of outer appearances. Do not fall under the influence of inner thoughts. Do not fall under the power of past and future. Do not fall under the power of others’ ideas and opinions.
When we create a calm, stable, supple, pliable, flexible mind, then our life becomes beautiful and pleasant. Our mind will be in control, and our life will be meaningful.

Find your freedom and live fully!

All-base consciousness

Tibetan has various words for “mind,” including mind (Tib. sems, Skt. citta), intellect (Tib. blo, Skt. buddhi), mentation (Tib. yid, Skt. manas), and consciousness (Tib. ram mshes, Skt. vijñāna).

The Mind Only school divides the mind of sentient beings into the all-base consciousness (Tib. kun gzhi ram mshes), the kleśa mind (Tib. nyon yid ram mshes), and the sixfold collection of consciousnesses (Tib. ram mshes tshogs drug), which includes the mental consciousness (Tib. yid kyi ram mshes).

The all-base consciousness is explained in many ways in sūtras and tantras. To summarize it here, we can look at five aspects: its essence, focal object, quality, always being present, and continuity.

First, its essence: Since it does not obstruct liberation and omniscience, it is unobstructed. Its essence is not specified as either virtuous or nonvirtuous. Why? The all-base consciousness is the storehouse for all virtuous, nonvirtuous, and neutral habitual tendencies. Therefore, it must be neutral. If it were virtuous, nonvirtuous habitual tendencies would not be suitable to be stored in it. If it were nonvirtuous, then it would not be suitable to store virtuous habitual tendencies.

Second, its focal object: The all-base consciousness has a broad focus. The objects of the all-base consciousness are the outer five forms (form, sound, smell, taste, touch) and the inner five forms (eye faculty, ear faculty, nose faculty, tongue faculty, body faculty). These are the habitual tendencies created through the three gates.

Third, its quality: The all-base consciousness’s quality is unclear. The objects that appear to it, like form and so forth, do not appear as clearly as they do to the sense consciousnesses.

Fourth, always being present: The all-base consciousness is not like the other consciousnesses. Among the 51 mental factors that accompany it, there are 5 omnipresent: feeling, perception, consciousness, contact, and mental fabrication.

Fifth, its continuity: The continuum of the all-base consciousness is present until the end of the tenth bhūmi, in deep sleep, when we are unconscious or when we die, and even in meditative absorption; therefore it is a stable continuum. It has many names. Since it is the basis for all confusion in the three realms and the cause for all sentient beings, the all-base consciousness is called the “supporting consciousness.” Since it is the ground that stores all habitual tendencies and karma, it is called the “ground
consciousness.”

Kleśa mind

Since the kleśa mind focuses on the all-base consciousness, there is always the subtle thought of “I.” When we differentiate this further, we can distinguish the immediately preceding mind and the kleśa mind.

The immediately preceding mind (which is a subcategory of the kleśa mind) is the immediately preceding condition for the six consciousnesses. For example, the immediately preceding mind serves as the immediately preceding condition for both the arising and ceasing of a single eye consciousness.

Not only that, the immediately preceding mind serves as the immediately preceding condition that pollutes our consciousnesses through kleśas and also stores the habitual tendencies and karma in the all-base consciousness.

The essence of the kleśa mind is obscuration, but it is neutral.

Since the consciousnesses are taught in Lorik, there is no need to explain them here in detail.

The seventh consciousness, kleśa mind, is always accompanied by the five omnipresent mental factors and four kleśas: desire, ignorance, pride, and view of self. Since this kleśa mind is always mistaken, it serves as the condition that gives rise to all wrong views. And since it is the root of all kleśas and of the imputed nature, it is also called “incorrect conceptualization.”

The obvious kleśas exist until we reach the bhūmis. The subtle and latent kleśas exist until we reach the tenth bhūmi, when the all-base consciousness ceases.