

Recognizing the False I

*Compiled and Translated by
Lama Zopa Rinpoche*

Edited by Ven. Aílsa Cameron

FPMT



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Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition, Inc.
1632 SE 11th Avenue
Portland, OR 97214 USA
www.fpmt.org

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Recognizing the False I

The shortest meditation on emptiness is the analyses of the four vital points:

1. The vital point of recognizing the object to be refuted,
2. The vital point of understanding the pervasion,
3. The vital point of understanding not being one,
4. The vital point of definite ascertainment of not existing separately.

The vital point of recognizing the object to be refuted

This is the most important analysis. Once you recognize this, all the rest of the analyses are easy and make sense. Otherwise, of the two extremes—eternalism and nihilism—there’s a great danger of falling into nihilism. This means that, even though you went through the analysis, you did it incorrectly. You fall into either eternalism or nihilism.

It’s like wanting to milk your cow (or whatever else you want to do with it), but looking for the cow on the eastern side of the mountain, where there’s no cow. Since your cow is on the southern side of the mountain, if you look for it in the east, you cannot find it.

Or it’s like wanting to shoot your enemy, all the time, day and night, but you are regarding your enemy as your best friend. And instead you shoot another person, someone who is guarding you, protecting you, and giving you sincere advice. You see that person as your enemy and shoot them, but the situation is the total opposite of what you believe.

If you don't recognize the real thief but think of them as your closest friend, you are cheated all the time. You think that the real thief is something outside, something other than that. This is what you do. Actually, there is no thief separate from that person you regard as your best friend, the one that you love and cherish most, the one that is kind and always your best helper. But it is all hallucination.

You think your enemy is your best friend, your best helper, someone who never harms you, and that the real enemy is outside. In reality, it doesn't exist. That wrong thought totally cheats you.

Like that, recognizing the object to be refuted is so important. If you don't recognize this false I, the object to be refuted, if you have power, you then become a strong dictator by believing in the real I as it appears. Historically, as we can remember, it has happened several times in the world that this has resulted in the killing of millions of people. Not recognizing this false I is not only your problem—it can become the largest problem. It can destroy the world.

Of course, even people who don't believe in reincarnation and karma can see that one person who has power can destroy the world. Then, of course, if you talk about suffering from life to life, not recognizing that this false I has caused you to experience the oceans of samsaric suffering from beginningless rebirths: the oceans of suffering of the hell beings, hungry ghosts, animals, human beings, asuras, suras, and intermediate state beings. And if you are unable to actualize emptiness by recognizing as false, the real I that appears to your hallucinated mind and that you hold on to as one hundred percent true, then again you will continuously experience that suffering in the future, without end.

Now, here you can see how important it is to realize emptiness and even to understand it intellectually, studying it as much as possible. You need to understand the first of the vital points if

you don't want suffering, if you want to be free from the suffering of samsara, the problems of samsara. Therefore, you can see how those Tibetans, and even Westerners, who have the karma to learn Madhyamaka philosophy, taught in so much detail by Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, the Nalanda pandits, and so forth, as well as by Tibetan lamas such as Lama Tsongkhapa, are very fortunate. The more you study, the more you leave positive imprints on your mind to soon actualize emptiness, the truth, even if you have not yet realized emptiness.

Now, this is something that you need to realize right away, without even a second's delay. Without the realization of emptiness there is no other way to be free forever from suffering, from depression, anorexia, bulimia, and all the other problems in the West that are difficult to cure. This is the suffering of pain: the sufferings of rebirth, old age, sickness, and death. One important suffering that you have to recognize is dissatisfaction. This the worst problem: there is dissatisfaction for the beggar and dissatisfaction for the rich. Millionaires and billionaires have more mental suffering; even though they already have so much, they still have dissatisfaction. Beggars also have suffering.

The suffering of change is all the temporary samsaric happiness. For Westerners, this includes eating, drinking alcohol, sex, music, and sports such as soccer. You do all these things with attachment, to get satisfaction, but you don't get satisfaction from them. Dharma happiness can be continued and can be developed, but samsaric pleasures can't be continued and can't be developed. That is, by following desire you never get satisfaction.

Buddha, Destroyer Qualified Gone Beyond One, said in *Heaps of Teachings*:

If you wish all happiness,
 Completely abandon all desire.
 If you abandon all desire,
 You will achieve supreme bliss.

As long as you follow desire,
 You won't get satisfaction.
 You will get satisfaction with wisdom,
 Which stops desire.

You never get satisfaction from following desire.
 Being satisfied with wisdom is a happy life.
 Human beings satisfied with wisdom
 Do not go under the control of samsara.¹

From the holy mouth of great Kadampa Geshe Shawo Gampa:

The cause of all our suffering of this life and of future lives is the desire of this life. Therefore, you should cast away regarding the desire of this life as what is to be achieved. When the attainments of this life become greater, the mind is not happy. When there is no understanding of where the mind runs, negative karma, suffering, and bad talk, all three, happen at the same time. Therefore, the many and varied thoughts of desire (of this life) should be dispelled. When you are able to dispel thoughts of desire, happiness then begins. [Dharma happiness then begins.]

Therefore, to accomplish the happiness of this life and of all future lives, as a good sign, there should be nothing you desire in your heart and nothing to collect. Not desiring to find material things is the supreme finding. Not desiring reputation is the supreme reputation. Not desiring fame is the supreme fame. Not desiring surrounding [people] is the supreme surrounding.

If you practice Dharma from the heart, then your mind has to rely on the beggar. The end of the beggar is being able to die. (When death happens, you're able to die very happily, going to a pure land or receiving a perfect human rebirth. Or at

least you're able to die with no worry about being born in the lower realms.) When you're able to generate such a thought, devas, spirits, and human beings, all three, definitely cannot make you exhausted [cannot cause you harm].

But isn't renouncing this life, giving up this life, abandoning the happiness of this life? Yes, it's true. The happiness of this life is not experienced. By desiring great happiness, you have no fortune to experience happiness. By desiring higher happiness, you then fall down the precipice. Therefore, if you want your life to be happy and comfortable, happiness won't arise in that way. When it's not arising, the person him- or herself can understand. And when you're thinking there's no need, happiness then arises. The great sound of buddhahood, total cessation of obscurations and development of realizations,² is there with the thought of avoiding desire. Isn't that said?

Great yogi Tsangpa Gyare said:

At the door of the house of experience, there is a happy man lying down; but those who desire delicious food don't feel that. At the door of the house of remedy, there is a person who has renounced the world [the eight worldly dharmas] lying down; but those who have anger and attachment don't feel that. At the door of the house of totally cut off (desire), there is a person with a happy, satisfied mind lying down; but those who love expectation [the desires of this life] don't feel that. At the door of the house of satisfaction, there's a rich person lying down; but those with desire don't feel that.

Also, from the holy mouth of Togden Samten Pal:

The desire to be happy in this life is suffering. But if you send it away on the wind, then happiness will arise forever.

In the Madhyamaka text *Four Hundred Stanzas*, Aryadeva said:

One who sees this world but who finds it difficult to give up this life is more foolish than others. Those who follow that will be cheated for so long.

So, that is what is said. It means that if you renounce this world [if you practice Dharma well], you become much happier than those [such as billionaires, trillionaires, zillionaires: the rich and famous] who don't give up this life, who cling to this life. Not realizing even that is foolish. It defeats you and others. Therefore, by practicing Dharma well, you reach the state of happiness. It's extremely important, it is said.

Master Aryadeva also said:

By receiving any sublime Dharma without distraction, you receive a higher happiness that you never experienced in the past. There is no degeneration ever from that happiness. You achieve the unceasing sublime happiness of a completed bodhisattva and also the perfect unequaled state of buddhahood.

At the beginning of *Compendium of Advice*,³ Shantideva says:

Therefore, it is so difficult to see the depths of this Dharma of giving up this life and for it to be realized by all. This is a peerless, extremely secret, profound Dharma. Other than this there's no method to achieve peace and happiness. Also, this Dharma is profound and more extraordinary than other Dharmas. Therefore, by this, you are able to achieve the happiness of this life, the happiness of future lives, and enlightenment, all three, without difficulties.

The suffering of pain and the suffering of change arise from the third suffering, pervasive compounding suffering. In relation to *pervasive*, His Holiness always says that the five aggregates we have

are under the control of delusion and karma, so they're pervaded by delusion and karma. That's why they are suffering in nature; they're pervaded by suffering. Also, these aggregates are contaminated with the seed of delusion and karma. From this seed, suffering and delusion arise or are compounded. That's why these aggregates caused by delusion and karma are suffering in nature. You can see that they came from delusion and karma, the cause of suffering, not from bodhichitta and the wisdom of right view, and not independently.

Of course, if the aggregates arose independently, it means they would not only be permanent but exist by themselves. Then you couldn't do anything; you couldn't change anything. You couldn't cease that suffering with your mind. No matter how much you prayed to God, nothing could change.

Panchen Losang Chokyi Gyaltzen, the author of *Gelug Kagyu Mahamudra*, *Lama Chopra*, and many other sutra and tantra teachings, said:

There are many ways of reflecting on the hundreds of shortcomings of samsara. Even animals are afraid of the suffering of pain and desire liberation from that.

His Holiness says that if you wield a stick at a dog, the dog runs away because it knows it will suffer. Or if a dog is hungry, it will look for food. It desires liberation from that suffering of pain.

And even outer beings [non-Buddhists] have renunciation of the happiness from contaminated feelings. Therefore, these aggregates, causative in nature and closely received, are the container of actualized suffering and suffering to be obtained, just like barley, rice, and other grains. If you meditate by thinking in that way, you move away from sinking [from death].

So, this means that when Chandrakirti and Panchen Losang Chokyi Gyaltzen say to meditate on the four noble truths, suffering is the main thing to meditate on and the main thing to renounce. The idea to be free from samsara then comes.

By being free forever from that third suffering, pervasive compounding suffering, you can be free forever from the two other sufferings. To be totally free from pervasive compounding suffering, you need to totally eliminate the root of suffering, the ignorance that holds the I as truly existent, as existing from its own side, as real. To be able to totally eliminate the root of samsara, the entire suffering of all six realms, you have to recognize as false, the I that ignorance holds as truly existent, existing from its own side or real.

Ignorance, the root of the six realm sufferings, holds the I as truly existent, as existing from its own side, as real. Now, you have to recognize that I is false. Once you do that, it's just a minute to see that the I exists in mere name. With just a little thinking, a little awareness, you quickly see that the I exists in mere name. You quickly lose that I—lose means to see that it is empty, as it is empty. You see it is nonexistent just there. That false I, that ignorance, doesn't go out through the door or window. It doesn't go anywhere. It's just not there. From where you see it as existing from its own side, as real, it is just not there. That is false. Once you recognize it is false, then it's not there. You see that it is totally empty—not even an atom of that exists there.

Of course, I myself do not have that realization, but I definitely see that it only happens when you have great devotion to your guru, looking at them as a buddha. It happens only by receiving the blessings of the guru. What Manjushri advised to Lama Tsongkhapa is billions of times true. There are four things involved—purification, collecting merit, requesting, and receiving blessings—and then the actual meditation.

Of course, you need continuity in the development of the wisdom realizing emptiness, so that you achieve great insight unified with shamatha. From there, you can then develop the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness and achieve the right-seeing path. You then cease the seeds of delusion and karma by actualizing the right-seeing path and the path of meditation. By totally ceasing all the different levels of delusions, the cause of samsara, from gross to subtle and then extremely subtle, you're totally liberated from the oceans of suffering of samsara, from all three sufferings, and achieve the blissful state of peace for yourself. This is what people in the West really need to experience, but they don't know that there is such a thing. Individually they try many different things, which are only of the nature of suffering, but can't find the happiness that they're looking for, that they're trying to achieve.

Next, you need to practice the Great Vehicle teachings. Otherwise, generating great compassion for the numberless sentient beings doesn't happen, and nor does generating bodhichitta and then you can't achieve enlightenment for them. You then can't liberate the numberless sentient beings and bring them to the peerless happiness of buddhahood. You can't fulfill all your responsibility. All your past, present, and future happiness is received from each sentient being. Not only that, but every one of them has been your mother and most unbelievably kind from beginningless time. So, you're responsible for liberating them from the oceans of samsaric suffering and bringing them to the peerless happiness of buddhahood. You can't wait even a second without freeing them from samsara and bringing them to buddhahood. That's the reality.

Now, with bodhichitta you collect the most unbelievable, unbelievable, unbelievable merit—skies of merit. That helps you to achieve the wisdom directly realizing emptiness, and the subtle obscurations can be ceased only by this wisdom. You can then achieve buddhahood, the total cessation of obscurations and completion of realizations, for sentient beings. There are numberless

sentient beings in each realm, and you're then capable of manifesting to every one of them according to their karma and of guiding them with whatever method fits that being. You then bring them to enlightenment. That is just amazing! That is the amazing capacity, or power, of your mind that can be developed by listening to, reflecting, and meditating on the Dharma.

First you analyze in this way. Then comes the actual meditation. From the very beginning focus your mind on the aggregates and on how your mind makes up the label "I." Concentrate on that. Now think, "I" is merely imputed by the mind, by the side of the mind. Concentrate on that; analyze that. Try to discover that, to realize that.

You can now see that the I that exists is most unbelievably subtle. Think and concentrate as much as you can, trying to realize that, to see that. (In one way you can see that the aggregates themselves are also like that. The mind is in that base, then that mind merely imputed "aggregates" from the side of the mind. So, it all goes on like that. That analysis might also help.)

The first second, "I" is merely imputed by the mind. The next second, in reality, the I that you have merely imputed by the side of the mind, the I that is existing in mere name, should appear back to you. It appears like that to the Omniscient One as the subtle negative impressions left by ignorance have been totally purified. Since there's no dualistic mind, there's no dualistic view, no truly existent view, no real view, no real I. And the arya beings, who haven't achieved enlightenment but have the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, when they are in equipoise meditation on emptiness don't have dualistic view. They don't see a truly existent I, a real I, at that time. But after the attainment, during the post-meditation time, they still have the appearance of a truly existent, or real, I from its own side, but they have no belief in that. It's just like crossing hot sand and seeing a mirage. After you have crossed

the sand, where you realize there is no water, when you look back and have a vision of water, you know there's no water there. Also, it's like a magician who conjures a jewel palace, a golden elephant, a beautiful man or woman, and all other kinds of things. All those things appear to the magician, but he has no belief that they exist.

For us, the I that our mind has just now labeled appears back to us, but in a way that is totally opposite to the reality. Just now the I was merely imputed from the side of our mind, but the next second when it appears to us, we have an extremely gross view of the I as permanent (not changing due to cause and conditions); existing alone, without depending on its parts; existing with its own freedom, without depending on the aggregates. Even during the Buddha's time, none of the four schools of Buddhist philosophy—Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Madhyamaka, which has two divisions: Svatantrika and Prasangika—accepted that, except for one of the eighteen Vaibhashika schools, *ne ma pu bi de pa*. That school's view is a little different. They believe that the I is neither permanent nor impermanent. In a similar way, they believe that the I is neither existing alone nor not existing alone, and neither independent nor not independent.

So, the way the I appears to us is extremely gross. And with that, there's also the view of self-sufficiency, which is like thinking that a king exists from his own side without depending on the populace.

Then, Chittamatrins believe that things exist through an imprint left on the seventh consciousness, the basis of all samsara and nirvana, manifesting out as the subject and object together. For example, the knowing phenomenon (*yul chen*) that holds the color blue and the object, the blue color, manifest from imprints left on the seventh consciousness. So, the view that the I totally exists without depending on the imprint left on the seventh consciousness being experienced out as the subject, the knowing phenomenon, and its object, what it is holding, is there. So, the I also appears to us in that totally wrong way.

Then, the object to be refuted according to the Svatantrika Madhyamaka school, the view of the I totally existing from its own side without the mind labeling it, is also there.

The correct view according to the Svatantrika school is that the I exists from its own side but it's also labeled by the mind. But, in the Prasangika Madhyamaka view, that is totally wrong. That I that is not merely labeled by the mind, that has some existence from its own side, is the *gag ja*, the object to be refuted, according to the Prasangika school. That is a false I. That I is totally false; it does not exist just there, in reality. There is not even an atom of that existence from its own side. There's *nothing* there. You need a very clear, intensive understanding of this. It's not that you are seeing that there's no I, but it appears like that.

From beginningless rebirth up to now, your mind has experienced that real I as something to hold on to, but suddenly it's lost. There's nothing there—not even an atom of it. When you train your mind in that wisdom, gradually the experience comes. There is existence of the I, but it exists in mere name. The first one is realization of absolute truth; the second one is realization of conventional truth, or truth for the all-obscuring mind. This is how you come to realize the two truths.

Now, here, you have to understand this. If, at the beginning, your understanding of emptiness is correct and you're recognizing the false I, the real I, as the object to be refuted, then even during the realization, when it looks like there's no I, when it totally appears like that, you come to the correct understanding, the correct goal, which is that the I exists in mere name. That understanding comes strongly, naturally.

But if, at the beginning, what you think is realizing emptiness is wrong, and you are not recognizing the *gag ja*, the false I, but just the labeled I, then at the end, seeing the I in mere name, understanding the truth for the all-obscuring mind, won't happen. It becomes an obstacle to that. That means that your understanding of emptiness is wrong. You have fallen into nihilism.

In *Middle Lam Rim* Lama Tsongkhapa mentions:

You look for the vase. You check for the vase from the top of the vase down through its belly to the small base. At the end, since there is nothing to point out, “This is the vase,” you think there is no vase and then fall into nihilism, destroying the dependent arising. Appearance and the object to be refuted are not differentiated.

This is extremely important quotation. You have to keep what Lama Tsongkhapa said in mind. It is said,

It is a mistake not to have differentiated the appearance and dependent arising.

So, it is same with the I. You look for the I from the top of your head down to your toes, but you don’t look for the truly existent I, the I that exists by nature, the real I. You never touch that. You look for just the I itself, but never touch what you are supposed to look for. At the end, when you don’t find the I, you fall into nihilism. You then wonder why you need to meditate on emptiness since there’s no I, no creator of samsara and no creator of liberation. There’s no I who strives for liberation and enlightenment. There’s no samsara and nirvana. There’s no body and no mind. There’s nothing. There’s no you, so why meditate? Just leave it. Why are you concerned about meditation? In the same way, why do you practice Dharma? Why do you renounce worldly life? Why do you marry? Why find a husband or wife? Why have kids? There are no parents. There’s no money, so why do you need an education from kindergarten up to university?

In *Root Wisdom*, Nagarjuna says:

If you see the dependent arising, ignorance won’t arise.
Therefore, put all your effort into realizing only this.

From Nagarjuna's holy mouth:

Dependent arising is a profound, cherished treasure of the holy speech of the buddhas, the Victorious Ones. If you see this completely, you will then see the sublime ultimate nature of the buddha.

That which is labeled exists because there's a valid base to be labeled. That's the only reason. Why there's an I that is labeled is because there's a valid base, the aggregates. That's all. That's it. You can label "I" on your hair, your tongue, your blood, your skin, your kaka, and peepee, but then people will think you're crazy and you'll have to go into a mental institution. You can cut up a lot of newspaper and call it "dollars," but if you take it to a bank or a shop, you will get nothing for it. People will think you're crazy, and then you'll go to prison. If you do that, in your next life you will also be in a mental institution or a prison instead of in a pure land or enlightened. Pieces of newspaper are not valid bases. You can label them "money," but they are not a valid base for that label. People can make a false base for money, counterfeit money. But when the government finds this false money, even if it has been made well, since it has not been made by the government, they put the people responsible for it in prison. They don't regard that counterfeit currency as money, as dollars.

Now, going back to the I. The first second, the mind focuses on the valid base, the aggregates, and makes up, or merely imputes, the label "I." The next second, what was labeled "I" then appears back to us as not merely labeled by the mind, not merely labeled from the side of the mind. (It is like this until we become enlightened except for when we are an arya being, with the direct perception of emptiness, in equipoise meditation on emptiness.) So, that is the very subtle object to be refuted according to the Prasangika school. We have to recognize that and just meditate on that.

After that, look at your aggregates as well. They also appear that way, as not merely imputed from the side of the mind. This is the subtle object of refutation according to the Prasangika school. It's a total hallucination.

Now look at your home. How does your home appear to you? Look at your family. It is exactly the same. They appear to be not merely imputed from the side of the mind, which is a total hallucination. Spend some time on recognizing this; spend some time meditating on this. Don't just say the words—try to recognize this.

Then look at your country. How does it appear to you? It's the same. It appears to you to be not merely imputed from the side of your mind. Meditate on that to recognize it.

Now look at the whole world. Then look at the whole of existence, the whole of samsara and nirvana. They appear as not merely imputed by the mind. So, this is the Prasangika school's subtle object to be refuted. It's a total hallucination. Meditate well, trying to recognize this. Stop each time to meditate.

The I appears as not merely labeled by mind. You believe this total hallucination to be real, then from that concept, that ignorance, arise other types of ignorance, anger, and attachment, believing in real bad objects and real beautiful, desirable objects. Then, if you are a person who has power, you can kill millions of people, even children, that you don't like. They appear to you as undesirable objects that are not merely labeled by your mind. You cause all this unbelievable suffering to others, and you yourself create unbelievable negative karma, causing you to spend eons in the lower realms and, even in the higher realms, as a human being, to experience so much suffering. You can see that all this is a total hallucination. There is no reason at all to do it.

If you realize emptiness, the very urgent point that should come is not to create negative karma and to create good karma. It should come to that point. You see that as most important and that's what you emphasize to others. If the emphasis doesn't come

on this, then what you think is realizing emptiness is wrong—it’s probably nihilism.

So, start with this example I gave of what the false I is. The most important thing is to recognize this false I.

oooOooo

After this, there is another meditation you can do while you’re eating, walking, working, playing music, or jogging (so that this real I, which is not there, will live long and not die). Suddenly ask yourself, “What am I doing?” You answer, “I’m jogging.” Then ask yourself, “Why do I say I’m jogging?” You ask the question, then slowly check your feeling of your I, your view of your I.

There’s no other reason at all to say that you are jogging except that the valid aggregates are doing the action of jogging. That’s all. Continuously look at your view of the I. Take your time; go slowly. When you put this reason, you see that there’s no real I there doing the jogging. Normally you don’t see that. That’s the reality, that’s the truth, and now you start to see it.

Do this meditation many times, with your different actions. First there is the real I, the false I, and this meditation can help you to see more and more clearly what is false. After you apply this reason, you start to see the truth more and more.

This is another simple and very good meditation to do, not only while you are sitting down on your high cushion with your eyes closed, but while you are playing football, cooking, working as a secretary, and doing any other activity. It’s very good.

oooOooo

After this, meditate on what the I is. As I’ve already mentioned, there’s a merely labeled I, which exists, and a truly existent I, a real I, which is a false I. But for us ordinary beings, this is the I that exists. That’s the problem. The real I appears to you and you believe

one hundred percent that it exists. But the I is *nontruly existent* because it is a dependent arising. There is a valid base, the aggregates, which can receive the label “I.”

After the introduction to the object to be refuted, particularly according to the Prasangika, you now remember that the I is not truly existent, so spend time meditating on this, on how this is, as I described before. Then put the reason, “I is a dependent arising.”

The valid base, the aggregates, receives the label “I.” The label “I” is merely imputed from the side of the mind to that labeled base. Meditate on that. All these three points are extremely important: there is the I, this I is not truly existent, and this I is merely labeled from the side of the mind. The mind focuses on the aggregates and then merely imputes “I” from the side of the mind. Meditate on the meaning of this. There’s much to meditate on in relation to each word. There don’t have to be many words, but it’s very important to meditate precisely on the words.

oooOooo

The next meditation is similar to the meditation to recognize the false I and the I that exists, the I that is merely imputed by the mind.

There’s no real I meditating. There is a merely labeled I meditating. A merely labeled I exists, and that merely labeled I is doing the merely labeled action of meditating. The I is meditating because the valid base, the aggregates, and particularly the aggregate of mind, is doing the action of meditating.

The merely labeled I is doing the merely labeled action of meditating, which is most subtle, most fine. It is not that they don’t exist, but they exist in an unbelievably subtle way.

Do a little bit of meditation on that.

oooOooo

Repeat the meditation with eating. There's no real I eating. There is a merely labeled I eating. A merely labeled I exists, and that merely labeled I is doing the merely labeled action of eating. The I is eating, because the valid base, the aggregates, and particularly the physical aggregate, the body, is doing the action of eating.

The merely labeled I is doing the merely labeled action of eating, which is most subtle, most fine. It is not that they don't exist, but they exist in an unbelievably subtle way.

Meditate a little bit on how eating is most subtle. Meditate on that dependent arising.

Do a similar meditation with getting up, washing, dressing, having breakfast, working, and sleeping. Include the main actions that you do in one day, and then what you do in your whole life.

Like that, in everyday life, you see how the I that exists is unbelievably subtle. It is never the way it appears to you and you believe it to exist. It is never that way for even one second.

You can do similar meditations with all the activities of this life: being born, going to kindergarten, being a child, and so forth. There's no real I that is born.

From the Guhyasamaja root text:

From no birth, all are born.

There's no birth except mere birth.

From "no birth," which means the "merely labeled birth," all are born. This means there's no real birth.

Analyze going to kindergarten, primary school, and college in the same way, as well as getting married.

If you don't know how to live your life with bodhichitta, for the benefit of sentient beings, what happens is that the problems in your life multiply. After your wedding, you then have children. You think, "I have a wife (or husband)," "I have children," "I have wealth (whether it's one dollar or a billion dollars)."

In *Heaps of Teachings*, Buddha says:

“I have a son. I have wealth,” children think.
 Since even the I does not exist,
 How can a son and wealth exist?⁴

Here “children” doesn’t mean physical children as the world thinks of them. It refers to those who believe there’s a real I existing from there and trust in that. So, “children” are those who don’t see the truth of the I, the ultimate nature of the I.

Use the same meditation with “I’m dying.” There’s no real I that is dying.

Buddha also said:

Even with the birth and death that are going to happen,
 There’s no birth, as well as there’s no death.
 For those who realize this, concentration is not difficult to find.
 It is like that from beginningless rebirth up to enlightenment
 Or during endless samsara.
 [If Dharma is not practiced, there is endless samsara.]

oooOooo

Look at past, present, and future: all are empty. There’s no real I. Concentrate on that awareness for a little while.

There’s no real I existing from its own side or truly existing or existing by nature. Not even an atom of that exists. The I that exists is what is merely imputed by the valid mind to the valid base. There’s nothing more than that. Anything slightly more than that is the Prasangika Madhyamaka view of the subtle object to be refuted. Concentrate on that.

oooOooo

Also think of the aggregates. What appears as existing from there, what we trust in as being real aggregates, is a total hallucination. It's not there. The aggregates are merely labeled by the mind. "Aggregates" is merely imputed by our mind right now to the gathering of the group of our five aggregates. Each aggregate—form, feeling, recognition, compounding aggregates or consciousness—appears to be a real one and we trust in that, but it's all a hallucination. What is there is what is merely labeled by our mind—"aggregate of form," "aggregate of feeling," and so forth—in dependence upon the existence of the group of the parts.

In more detail, it is like that down to the atoms of form. There's no real atom. What is existing there is what is merely imputed to the particles of the atom. It is extremely subtle. The atom exists. There is an atom, but the way it exists is unbelievably subtle. So, down to the particles of the atoms, everything exists in mere name.

Do the same research, go down in the same way with the aggregates of feeling, recognition, compounding aggregates, and consciousness. Go down, down, down. Each second of consciousness depends on a past and a future second of consciousness. Then the split seconds of consciousness depend on past and future split seconds.

The conclusion is that everything exists in mere name. Do the same meditation, the same analysis, with each of the aggregates.



Another meditation is: starting from the I and the aggregates, everything appears as real from there and we totally trust that it's true. But all that is not there—not even the size of an atom is there. Nothing of that is there in reality. Meditate on this a little while to get deeper insight into this. It leads to stable realization.

It is good to watch yourself with that mindfulness while you're doing actions: while you're eating, even while you're breathing. It's fantastic! It's a billion, trillion, zillion times better. With this you destroy the root of samsara, of all the suffering. You quickly eliminate ignorance, not only achieving liberation but ceasing the subtle defilements and going to enlightenment, to buddhahood. It's numberless times better than having a holiday at the beach or dancing in a night club, acting any way you want. There you over-hallucinate the body, with the inside of the body not yet showing on the outside.

oooOooo

One meditation is: while you are walking, ask yourself, "What am I doing now?" You reply, "I'm walking." (This means that the real I is walking.) "Why do I say 'I'm walking'?" There is no other reason at all except that the body is walking."

Meditate on that, concentrate on that. Practice this mindfulness.

While you are eating, ask yourself, "What am I doing now?" You reply, "I'm eating." (This means that the real I is eating.) "Why do I say 'I'm eating'?" There is no other reason at all except that the body is eating."

You can do that meditation with any of your actions. It's just to get the idea in your mind.

When you are meditating, there's no other reason at all to say that you are meditating except that your mind is meditating.

So, you find that now the previous real I is not there. There's an I doing the action but it's extremely subtle. The real I is not there now. You will see more and more clearly the I that exists and the I that doesn't exist.

oooOooo

Another meditation is from Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland*:

The person is not earth, not water,
 Not fire, not wind, not space, not consciousness,
 And not all of them.
 Other than that, there's no person.⁵

Like that, each element is not the person. Even all the elements together are not the person.

Meditate on that. Later on, the conclusion is that the person still exists. They exist in mere name because the base, the aggregates, exist; or the six elements—earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness—exist.



Bodhisattva Thogme Zangpo said:

The various sufferings are like a son dying in a dream.
 Holding hallucinated appearances as true makes you weary.
 Therefore, when you meet disharmonious conditions,
 Looking at them as hallucinations is the practice of the
 bodhisattva.⁶

This means that your mind has created all the heavy sufferings, all the worries, and fears. You have to meditate by feeling this. Take your time. Think about it; meditate on it.

If you have some heavy problem, such as your husband or wife leaving you, it's very good, very effective, to relate this meditation to the problem. It transforms your mind into a state of peace.



The Seventh Dalai Lama, Kelsang Gyatso, said:

Every single existence of samsara and nirvana (the gone beyond state, including enlightenment) is an illusion created by your own conception. Holding it as absolute cheats you. Therefore, don't cling to the hallucinated appearance—look at it as empty.

That means looking at everything as totally empty from there, which is opposite to the hallucinated appearance.



The Fifth Dalai Lama said:

In the defective view, with the total gloom of ignorance, the way the body and mind appears is like the multicolored coiled rope that, with terrifying fear, you see as a poisonous snake. In a similar way, by believing this is I, you experience the great fear of the three sufferings.

Colophon:

Compiled and translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Kopan Monastery and Pokhara, Nepal, and in Bendigo, Australia, in March–May and December, 2018. Dictated to and edited by Ven. Ailsa Cameron.

Notes

- 1 The *Tibetan Dhammapada*, chap. 2, vv. 12–14. An alternative translation of the final line is “Don’t fall beneath the power of craving.”
- 2 *Sang gyä*, in Tibetan.
- 3 *Lab Du*, in Tibetan.
- 4 The *Tibetan Dhammapada*, chap. 1, v. 20.
- 5 *Precious Garland*, v. 80.
- 6 The twenty-fourth practice in *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*.

Care of Dharma Materials



Dharma materials contain the teachings of the Buddha and thus protect against lower rebirth and reveal the path to enlightenment. Therefore, they should be treated with respect.

Printed Dharma materials, as well as phones, tablets, laptops, and hard drives containing Dharma, should be kept off the floor, beds, chairs, meditation cushions, and all other places where people sit or walk. Dharma materials should not be stepped over or put in places where the feet or buttocks will point at them. They should be covered or protected for transporting and kept in a high, clean place separate from more mundane materials. Other objects, including statues, stupas, ritual implements, malas, reading glasses, and so forth, should not be placed on top of Dharma books and devices containing Dharma materials. Avoid licking the fingers to turn the pages of Dharma texts.

If it is necessary to dispose of printed Dharma materials, they should be burned rather than thrown in the trash. When burning Dharma texts, visualize that the letters transform into an A (ॐ) and the A absorbs into your heart. Imagine burning blank paper. As the paper burns, recite OM ĀḤ HŪḤ or the *Heart Sutra*, while meditating on emptiness.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends that images of holy beings, deities, and holy objects not be burned. Ideally, if undamaged, they should be put in a stupa. Otherwise, put them high up in a tree inside a well-sealed structure, something like a bird house, so that the images are protected from the weather and do not end up on the ground.



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