

CONTEMPLATING REALITY

Ten Week Course Curriculum

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Buddhist groups can purchase copies of *Contemplating Reality: A Practitioner's Guide to the View in Indo-Tibetan Buddhism* at volume discounts (minimum order \$200 retail value before the discount). Copies can be ordered at a 50% discount from Megan Fischer at Shambhala Publications, phone: 617 424-0030 x 248 (prepaid by credit card and non-returnable). Or, they can be ordered from Random House, phone: 800-733-3000, with a slightly lower discount (30 day payment, returnable)

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Introduction

WHY CONTEMPLATION?

The teachings don't penetrate without reflection.

The goal of the Buddhist path is to transform ourselves into what we have always been. This process of transformation does not occur through acquiring lots of knowledge or perfecting sophisticated meditation techniques. It occurs through seeing through delusion and letting go of fixation. Contemplation and investigation play essential roles in this process, ones that are easily overlooked. They join together intellect and insight, study and meditation. To bring all our resources to bear on the journey, we need to study, contemplate and meditate.

Contemplation is the way to mix the teachings with our experience. It is a method for bringing out our inquisitiveness, and creating a bridge between study and practice; it can transform our attitude about the path from dutiful to joyful. While there will always be difficult stretches and frustrations on the path, inquisitiveness transforms an arduous journey into a voyage of discovery.

A good way to work with contemplation in a class setting is the three-fold method developed at Ponlop Rinpoche's Nitartha Institute:

- First, everyone reads a section of text out loud together and contemplates.
- After a few minutes, the leader reads the section again to the group.
- After another few minutes, everyone reads the section together again out loud.
- Depending on the material, after one, two or sometimes three sections are contemplated, people discuss their understanding and experience of the contemplation.

This whole process can be repeated several times, but don't try to do too much. People will lose their focus and might get irritable. If you are doing a ninety-minute class, then thirty to forty-five minutes of contemplation, interspersed with discussion, is reasonable.

THE TWO TRUTHS

The six stages of the view (*CR* Appendix 2) describe the relationship of apparent reality to genuine reality, and indicate how to investigate these two realities. There are two ways of seeing everything. Our usual way of experiencing is obscured by concepts and projections. This leads to grasping and attachment, which leads to suffering. Clear seeing sees things just as they are. This leads to realization, and freedom from hope and fear, which leads to liberation. Another way of saying this is that confused seeing sees the cocoon of our habitual patterns and fixations, while clear seeing sees ultimate reality.

WORKING WITH THE STAGES OF THE VIEW

In approaching the logic of the views, especially those of the Mahayana schools, it is helpful to keep several things in mind. First, the views of all Buddhist schools are counter-intuitive. They challenge our normal ways of seeing things. That is their value. They show us that the way we

conceive of things is not the way they actually are. The intention of Nagarjuna, Asanga, Chandrakirti, and the others is to present us with methods that break open our conceptual shells. They set up challenges that show us that our conceptions of reality are faulty.

Contemplation encourages students to tackle these issues head on rather than glossing over them. But students also need some positive intention; it is important to avoid getting caught up in just the logical/conceptual side of the material. The purpose is to show us something about our own minds, and so we have to keep looking back at how our minds actually work, rather than only looking at the reasonings abstractly, as if they were no more than an academic subject that we are trying to prove or dispute.

As Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche explains, the point of working with the views is not to try to find *one correct view*, but to sharpen our prajna. It is an investigation. We are not being asked to accept any particular view, rather we are being invited to use the methods provided at each stage to conduct our own investigation and make our own journey.

Students might feel that they have to understand all of the material at once. This can be a big obstacle. Before long they begin to feel as if their heads are going to explode, and they want to give up the whole thing. The best approach is to pick one of the views that speaks to you, and work with that for an extended period—weeks or even months—until it becomes completely internalized and you understand it and use it in daily life. After a while, another view might strike you, and you work with that for a while. It's like being given a big box of tools. If you try using all of them at once you could make a mess. Instead, if you have some things that need to be fastened together, you might take out the screwdriver and use that. Later you discover that when things need to be cut, you can work with the saw.

Students should pick things that speak to them, that they are interested in investigating and concentrate on that. All of these views are useful, so if you understand any one of them, it becomes a powerful tool to use again and again until you truly assimilate it. That makes the view very personal for you, not just remembering something you learned by rote.

Class 1: Ropes and Snakes

Main Point: Our principle difficulty is caused by seeing incorrectly, not seeing things as they really are. The snake that is only a rope is a classical Buddhist illustration of this mistakenness. Ignorance is the root of samsara, the suffering of cyclic existence. Because we don't know the true nature of our existence, we suffer. Simply put, the core of our ignorance is that we don't know that 'I' and 'mine' don't truly exist—they are like illusions and dreams. Because we take 'I' and 'mine' as real, even though they are illusions, we ride an emotional roller coaster.

The two truths point to a difference between apparent reality and genuine reality—the way things appear is different from the way they actually are. Taking apparent reality to be real, we mistake what is not a self to be a self, and we mistake our projections to be real objects. You could say that sorting out this confusion is the central koan of this course.

Overcoming Ignorance Through Listening, Contemplating and Mediating

The Method: The way to overcome unawareness, or not knowing, is through awareness or knowing. What we need to develop is the intelligence or insight that sees through the mistake or the illusion. This intelligence or insight is called prajna.

To do this, we need to use three activities or methods: listening, contemplating and mediating. Sometimes we talk of three types of prajna that arise from these three activities.

What one strives for is nirvana, a place without death.
This will not arise without prajna, the remedy for eliminating ignorance....
Jamgön Kongtrul

Listening to the dharma engenders contemplation and contemplation gives rise to the meditation experience—this is the sequence.
Jamgön Kongtrul

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do we overcome ignorance?
- The methods for transformation are listening to what? Reflecting on, or contemplating how? Meditating why?
- What does prajna realize?
- Discuss the maps of the journey: the three turnings, the progressive stages of investigating emptiness, investigation of the two truths.
- What do ropes and snakes have to do with each of the four noble truths?
- What leads to cessation?
- How do we overcome ignorance, or not knowing?
- What is the prajna that develops through listening?
- Why is practicing any one or two of the methods—listening, contemplating and meditating—weaker than practicing all three?
- What concepts strongly bind you?
- How do those concepts cause suffering?
- What is ego's game?

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Preface; Chapter 1. Ropes and Snakes; Chapter 2. Making the Journey

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness: Introduction

Class 2: Contemplating Selflessness

Main Point: The main thing we get wrong is conceiving, and believing, that there is a *self*; so the main investigation is looking for this self. We need to investigate if this self really exists in the way we conceive it. One way to do that is to ask some simple questions.

The initial examination is to identify what our concept of the self is. What do I take to be myself? You could begin by discussing the four characteristics of a self, that: it appears to be one thing, it appears to be independent, it appears to be lasting, and it appears to be important. Is this the way people experience it? Can we identify other characteristics?

While it seems completely obvious that there is such a thing as the self, when we try to pin down what the self is, the whole thing becomes completely elusive. (*CR* p. 32) When the meditator addresses himself to what or who this self is, he cannot find it. Then gradually, very gradually, it dawns on him that the reason he cannot find it is that it is not there and never was. There is tremendous emotional resistance to this realization, so it takes a long time to break through, but when it does, there is an immediate release of tension and suffering.

Starting to Contemplate

Review and discuss the role and method of contemplation (including the need to alternate investigating with resting) and how it will be used in this course. You could use the group contemplation method with the following examples:

When there is a self, one believes there is other,
From these images of self and other come attachment and aversion
As a result of getting wrapped up in these,
All possible faults arise.

Dharmakirti

When there is no self, what can be known as other?
Therefore there is no attachment or aversion.
By becoming familiar with this,
Peace arises.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is contemplation different from studying?
- Is contemplation easier or more difficult than studying or meditating?
- This kind of analysis can become irritating. What insights and what questions prompt us to continue?
- Is there any benefit from contemplation?

CONTEMPLATIONS

We have taken what is not a self to be a self.

First thinking of “me,” they cling to self,
Then, thinking, “this is mine” attachment to things develops.
Beings are powerless, like buckets rambling in a well—
I bow to compassion for these wanderers.

Chandrakirti

This self, if permanent,
Is certainly impassible like space itself.
And should it meet with other factors,
How should they affect it, since it is unchanging?

If, when things occur, it stays unchanged and as before,
What influence has action had on it?
They say that this affects the Self,
But what connection could there be between them?

Shantideva

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the self like?
- What might selflessness be like?
- Is the self the body or is it the mind? Is it both, or is it neither?
- How could the self be both material and immaterial?
- How could the entity of mind emerge from the body, with which it shares no common properties?
- Can the self be something that is neither body nor mind? If such a self really existed, it should be observable in some way. Can you find such a self?
- How would such a self possess both a material body and an immaterial self?

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 3. Starting to Contemplate; Chapter 4. Selflessness 101

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness: Stage One. The Sravaka Meditation on Not-self

Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy: Section 1. Hinayana

Class 3: Taking Things Apart

Main Point: We need to start to look at actual moments of experience, rather than our conception of experience. This leads to recognizing nowness, fresh mind, free of any imputation or elaboration.

The method is to look closely and precisely at experience and cut through habitual ways of seeing; to take apart things held together only by concept. When we look at our actual experience we see it is made up of moments.

Examining experience microscopically, the Vaibhashika method is to recognize the subtle level of impermanence:

Gross impermanence is the impermanence of the continuum

Examples: people aging and things wearing out (CR pp. 42-43)

Subtle impermanence is that nothing lasts a second moment.

Examples: each moment the river and candle flame is new (CR pp. 43-44)

Reasonings for deconstructing collections

Example: A forest is not one thing because it is made of many trees; a forest is not many things because there is no entity that contains the many trees as one thing; each tree is also a collection

Is the self one thing or many things? Four characteristics of a self

Singular

Lasting (permanent)

Independent

Important

General investigation for a self:

What is the doer like?

The experiencer?

The thinker?

Is the self the mind or the body?

The body is material

Mind is not material

We can apply the same method to deconstructing thoughts and the continuum of mind.

Example: "I would like to have lunch." (CR p. 45)

CONTEMPLATIONS

"At first, to be fully convinced of impermanence makes you take up the Dharma; in the middle it whips up your diligence; and in the end it brings you to the radiant dharmakaya." (CR pp. 95-96)

We think we are great, broadly significant, and that we cover a whole large area. We see ourselves as having a history and a future, and here we are in our big-deal present. But if we look at ourselves clearly in this very moment, we see we are just grains of sand—just little people concerned only with this little dot which is called nowness. (CR p. 45)

Chögyam Trungpa

According to the Buddhist tradition, the spiritual path is the process of cutting through our confusion, of uncovering the awakened state of mind. . . . The heart of the confusion is that man has a sense of self which seems to him to be continuous and solid. When a thought or emotion or event occurs, there is a sense of someone being conscious of what is happening. You sense that *you* are reading these words. This sense of self is actually a transitory, discontinuous event, which in our confusion seems to be quite solid and continuous. Since we take our confused view as being real, we struggle to maintain and enhance this solid self. (*CR* p. 46)

Chögyam Trungpa

In just this way, if this hesitant questioning is supplanted... (*CR* pp. 51-52)

Khenchen Kunzang Palden

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the purpose of the Vaibhashika method?
- Is consciousness one thing or many things?
- Is there any consciousness that is not the consciousness of a particular object?
- What is conceptualized experience? Moment to moment experience?
- How does the Vaibhashika method sort through experience using time? Using skandhas?

Jamgön Kongtrul says the two truths for Vaibhashikas are:

If something is physically destroyed or mentally broken down,
The mental state that apprehends it does not engage it any more.
Something like a vase or water [that is in it] exists seemingly
While what exists genuinely is something other.

In other words, when something is destroyed physically or analytically, mind no longer apprehends it. When a hammer strikes and breaks a vase, mind no longer apprehends the vase, nor the water it contained. Similarly when phenomena have been taken apart by mind, it is only their momentary appearances that remain.

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 5. Vaibhashika: Taking Things Apart

Class 4: Perception and Conception: What Really Comes to Mind?

The Main Point: Distinguishing between conception and perception. Contrasting the brilliance of perception with the murkiness of conception.

Here, what is genuinely able to perform a function
Is what genuinely exists.
Everything else is seemingly existent.
These are explained as specifically characterized and generally characterized phenomena

Dharmakirti

We might be tempted to think of the views and methods of the hinayana schools—the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika—as being simplistic or inferior. However, if we can learn to distinguish between the generally characterized and the specifically characterized in our own mind streams, i.e. direct experience versus conceptual experience—this is the ground for eventually experiencing mahamudra.

If you doubt this, just consider how often we practice meditation with some generally characterized phenomena right before us, and fail to recognize it for what it actually is: mere conceptuality with no substance at all. It may stir up passion or aggression, attachment or revulsion, without our recognizing that, at that moment, it is just a concept appearing to mind that we have taken to be a truly existing object. This method of distinguishing phenomena is very simple, but very powerful. Most of our delusions come from the confusion between our direct experience and our conceptual experience.

CONTEMPLATIONS

First, bring to mind an object of desire: a person or thing you want to possess. It could be someone you would like to get closer to, or a car you would like to own, something else you would like to buy, or some special status you would like to receive. Think about the object a little until your desire becomes vivid. At this point, let go of the discursive thoughts about the object and see if you can locate the object itself. Ask yourself, “Does the object of desire have specific characteristics or only general ones?” and “Is it like seeing the ‘actual’ object of desire or only an abstract image of that object?”

Next, think of someone who has hurt your feelings: a colleague, friend, child, or parent. This object will probably become vivid very quickly. Don’t let it carry you away. You might need to spend a little time acknowledging painful feelings before going on with the investigation. You don’t have to get rid of the pain, just acknowledge it and let it be. Then look to see what the object is like. Again ask yourself, “Does the object that caused me harm have specific characteristics or only general ones?” and “Is it like seeing the ‘actual’ object that caused me harm or only an abstract image of that object?”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the difference between perception and conception, for example, when looking at your reflection in the mirror?
- Why is it helpful to separate these two, perception and conception?
- Why is it risky to be unaware of distinctions between them?

- We encounter two types of “appearing objects”, specifically characterized phenomena and generally characterized phenomena. What do they have to do with suffering? Is one more powerful than the other?

Dharmakirti says the two truths for Svatantrika are:

Here, what is genuinely able to perform a function

Is what genuinely exists.

Everything else is seemingly existent.

These are explained as specifically characterized and generally characterized phenomena.

Dharmakirti

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 6. Sautrantika: What Really Comes to Mind?

Class 5: Introduction of Mahayana and Chittamatra

Main Point: The great vehicle, the Mahayana, cuts through ignorance completely, seeing the selflessness of all phenomena as well as of the individual. Challenging our habitual assumption that appearances are based on things existing from their own side, the Mind Only view is that perceived objects and perceiving subjects' duality is relative, and consciousness that is empty of duality is genuine.

EXCERPTS FROM CONTEMPLATING REALITY

"Why is all of this important? It is important because we are so attached to the appearances of this life." (CR p. 95)

"As we have seen in previous chapters, both Vaibhashikas and Sautrantikas understand that apparent reality (particularly the self) is fabricated by mind.... On the other hand, both of these schools believe that there is a material basis for genuine reality. Because of this, they are sometimes referred to as the "proponents of truly existent things". (CR pp. 69-70)

"We only know about objects because they are experienced. We can theorize that physical objects are the basis for our experience, but how can we ever know them directly?" (CR p. 75)

"Yogacarins [proponents of Chittamatra] see that all phenomena are nothing other than mind. They see that all conceptions are mind, and all perceptions are also mind. Our worlds are made up of mind the same way that dream worlds are made of mind.... It is important to acknowledge any doubts you might have about the Mind Only view right at the beginning. If you don't, ego might end up paying lip service to this view to avoid letting it really penetrate." (CR pp. 82-83)

CONTEMPLATIONS

"There is no way to demonstrate the existence of something that has not appeared to our mind. There is no way to demonstrate the existence of something without its appearing to mind. Therefore, external phenomena and internal mind are inseparable.... How could you prove that there is anything behind appearance itself?" (CR pp. 86-87)

"What is the knowing quality of mind like?" (CR p. 77)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How can you ever know objects directly?
- Is experience always mental, as in dreams?
- Is it made of mind or is it made of matter?
- Are perceived objects mental experience?
- Is anything not a mental experience?
- Are there examples that are obviously mental experience? Where does that stop?
- Is there any aspect of the world that is separable from mind?
- Is there any way to prove that there is anything behind appearance itself?

Jamgön Kongtrul says the two truths for Chittamatra are:

Perceived objects and perceiving subjects' duality is relative.
Consciousness that is empty of duality is genuine.
This is the presentation of the mind-only school.

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 7. Mahayana 101; Chapter 8. Chittamatra: There Is Only Mind

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness: Stage Two. Cittamatra Approach

Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy: Chapter 6. Chittamatra

Class 6: Distinguishing Appearance, Imagination, and the Genuine

Main Point: Both the Chittamatra and the Middle Way distinguish what we imagine, from what actually appears. The two use different methods for doing this. The Middle Way goes further by presenting reality free from conceptual extremes about existence and nonexistence.

EXCERPTS FROM CONTEMPLATING REALITY

“To see things just as they are—what does that really mean? It means to see without delusion; to see clearly, without confusion. ... The Chittamatra school has a subtle and elegant way of explaining the delusion that prevents us from seeing things just as they are and the process of freeing ourselves from that delusion.” (CR p. 97)

“Whatever qualities you can think of... when we investigate, we find that they are just like long and short. They are all merely dependent imputations.” (CR p. 109)

“To free ourselves from clinging to existence and nonexistence, we need to free ourselves from all views.... ‘All views’ includes not only philosophical, scientific, theistic, and Buddhist views, but also all conventional ‘common-sense’ concepts that we unquestioningly call upon throughout our daily lives, things that seem so basic that it almost seems silly to call them ‘views’ at all. However, it is these views that make up the vast fabric of conceptuality that binds us.” (CR pp. 110-111)

“The problem with believing that consciousness truly exists is that we then take it to be a substantial basis for phenomena and cling to it as a self. Since much of our belief in the self is connected to clinging to ‘my mind’, it is important to recognize that my mind too, is empty.” (CR pp. 114-115)

Moreover, this conviction will not come through an external inspiration or advocacy. It will be gained not through reliance on others or the effect of some outside influence, but through the strength of one’s own reasoning. (CR p. 113)

Mipham

Gyamtso

CONTEMPLATIONS

“We can explore this in meditation. Whatever practice you do can serve as a basis for this investigation as long as you balance the resting aspect of the practice with the looking aspect. When these aspects get out of balance, we get excited or depressed, heady or drowsy, and it is difficult to see anything clearly.... When you start to recognize the imaginary nature of these situations, they will start to lose their power over you, so this is a particularly important investigation.” (CR pp. 102-103)

“Usually we meditate like dogs, chasing after thoughts. Instead, meditate like a lion, look right at the thinker.” (CR p. 106)

“There is really no technique or method for letting go into nonconceptuality and the unconditioned. Any technique would be artificial. The way to practice this is to realize that whenever there is a little break in the flow of conceptuality, the perfectly existent nature is there.” (CR p. 106)

“All thoughts are based on existence and nonexistence. Thinking something is ‘this’ automatically means that it is not ‘that’. We cling to its existence as ‘this’ and its nonexistence as ‘that’. If *this* is a cow, it is not a horse, a monkey, a tree, a boat, or anything other than a cow.” (CR p. 110)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What are the dependent, imaginary, and perfectly existent natures?
- According to this way or sorting, where does confusion lie?
- Apply the three natures to different types of experience. Encountering someone you know. Suffering. Anger. Desire. Thoughts. Memory.
- What is meant by “emptiness”? Empty of what?
- Thinking of the characteristics of things, are there any that are not “merely dependent imputations”?
- How do the ideas of existence and nonexistence link to duality itself, self and other, this and that, this and not-this?
- Is “Buddhist logic” just “logic”?
- What happens when you look right at the thinker?
- Are there little breaks in the flow of conceptuality?

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 9. Three Natures; Chapter 10. The Middle

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness: Stage Three. Svatantrika Approach

Class 7: True Nature and Conventional Truth

Main Point: The conventional truth is both valid and obscuring. It describes relationships and patterns, such as cause and effect. It also obscures the true nature.

EXCERPTS FROM CONTEMPLATING REALITY

There are lots of disagreements about which schools are right and which are wrong, which are best and which are worst, which are good and which are bad.... I think the most helpful way to look at the Middle Way schools is to see how they emphasize different aspects of practice and different stages of realization. (*CR* p. 119)

You can see that these reasonings have a similar structure. They basically argue that if things existed the way we conceive them to exist, then logically they would have to exist/arise/result in certain ways, and since that is not the case, they do not exist as we conceive.... This opens a space for us to see the genuine nature of phenomena. (*CR* p. 129)

When you are having difficulty with a contemplation, it sometimes helps to ask yourself what you are imagining that contradicts the logic of the reasoning. (*CR* p. 131)

CONTEMPLATIONS

A thesis, what ever it may be, is the creation of the intellect, and the intellect is a conventional, mistaken cognition. Therefore, for Prasangikas, there are no independently verifiable [autonomous] theses or assertions. (*CR* p. 126, Jamgön Kongtrul explaining the Prasangika method)

“All phenomena, such as this desk, do not truly exist, because they are neither one thing nor many things, just like a desk in a dream.”

“All phenomena, such as a beach, do not truly exist, because they are neither one thing nor many things, just like a reflection of a beach in a mirror.”

“All phenomena, such as a piece of music, do not truly exist, because they are neither one thing nor many things, just like an echo in an empty valley.”

“All phenomena, such as friends and enemies, do not truly exist, because they are neither one thing nor many things, just like friends and enemies in a movie.”

“All phenomena, such as suffering, do not truly exist, because they are neither one thing nor many things, just like suffering in a dream.”
(*CR* pp. 132-135)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does relatively true, or true according to the common consensus, mean?
- Why spend time understanding and contemplating each of the schools and theories progressively?
- What is the basic difference between the Middle Way and the previous approaches?
- What are the three stages of analysis?
- How is logical analysis like ordering the executioner to kill himself: using concepts to kill concept?

Jamgön Kongtrul says the two truths for Svatantrika are:

Appearances exist relatively, they are like illusions.
In genuine reality, nothing exists—it is like space.
This is the position of the Autonomy school.

Jamgön Kongtrul says the two truths for Prasangika are:

Apparent Reality is whatever mind imagines, it is asserted following worldly tradition.
Genuine reality is beyond fabrications—inexpressible and inconceivable.
This is the Consequence school's tradition.

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 11. Svatantrikas and Prasangikas; Chapter 12. Great Reasonings of the Middle Way

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness: Stage Four. Prasangika Approach

Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy: Chapter 7. An Overview of Madhyamaka

Class 8: Movies, Dreams, Reflections: Testing Logic and Experience

Main Point: The challenge is to express your experience, and the questions that come up when you utilize the reasonings of the Middle Way, rather than merely intellectualizing the whole thing. Concentrate on the first and fifth reasonings.

CONTEMPLATIONS

“A simple way to understand that phenomena arise dependently is to see that their arising always depends on a perceiver. You can think that there is something that isn’t being perceived, but such a thing can never be found.” (CR p. 151)

“Furthermore, phenomena are dependent in terms of their origin because they depend on causes and conditions to arise. ... These causes and conditions in turn depend on other causes and conditions. This network of dependence is limitless. Phenomena cannot be traced back to anything independent. Therefore, no truly existent cause for them can be found, and so they do not truly exist.” (CR p. 151)

“If emptiness is possible, then everything is possible, but if emptiness is impossible, then nothing else is possible either.” (Nagarjuna, CR p. 153)

“Individual egolessness is something we need to contemplate again and again, so repeating this is definitely worthwhile. Simply contemplate how you experience ego: See if you can find anything, anywhere, that corresponds with the following: a personality, a perceiver, an experiencer, a soul, a doer, an ego. Look inside and look outside. What is the self like? Is self something altogether inexpressible?” (CR p. 157)

The view of the transitory collection describes various ways the skandhas are taken to be a self. There are four main ways this is done: We are the phenomena; we possess the phenomena; we are supported by the phenomena; the phenomena are supported by us. A few examples of each of these are found on page 161 of the text. The examples of each of the four could be contemplated separately, and in discussion, a few more examples can be named.

Wandering beings constantly cling to some basis as being “me”,
And then conceive of other things as being “mine”.
The self that they have imagined and that is renowned in the world
Exists only when there is no analysis; the thought of it arises from bewilderment. (CR p. 166)

Chandrakirti

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The self is like a watermoon—How do we perceive it that way?
- Can you apply the analogies of a movie, a dream, or a reflection to phenomena which extend in space
- What about phenomena that extend in time, such as music, friends and enemies, suffering, and time itself?
- Is the nature of appearances questionable, mysterious, empty?
- If characteristics and descriptions of collections are stripped away, are phenomena just names?

- Why is it said that whatever is dependently arisen is emptiness?
- Arisen dependently on what?
- Are causes and conditions also emptiness?
- Is there a difference between inner and outer phenomena?
- After tearing down conceptual existence, how is not-nonexistence logical?
- How is the experience of self different from the experience of awareness or being?
- Is the experience of self conceptually one, but experientially many?
- How does egolessness of the individual produce liberation from suffering?
- Is the sense of self dependently arisen? Dependent on what?
- How does awareness of emptiness generate compassion?

READING

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 13. No Arising; Chapter 14. Further Reasonings; Chapter 15. The Analysis of the Automobile

Class 9: Wisdom

Main Point: Wisdom is recognized by not fixating on either perception or conception. It is the personal experience of knowing, beyond content.

EXCERPTS FROM CONTEMPLATING REALITY

The purpose of teaching the Tathagata-garbha is to give the meditator confidence that he already has Buddha Nature. Without such confidence it is very difficult to fully rest the mind free from all conceptual contrivance, because there is always a subtle tendency to try to remove or achieve something. (Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso, *CR* p. 170)

As you can see from this discussion of buddha nature, we have arrived at the outer limit of what can be contemplated: it's all meditation from here. ... It is often said that the Middle Way teachings of Nagarjuna's tradition are most important at the time of training in the view, because they provide extensive methods for analyzing and investigating. The teachings of Maitreya's tradition are most important at the time of meditating on the nature of mind, because they point out the fruition. Both are necessary. (*CR* p. 178)

CONTEMPLATIONS

Choose some verses from the *Uttaratantra Shastra* (*CR* pp. 170-171) that look at buddha nature and compare it to an inexhaustible treasure. The verses on pp. 172-173 talk about the qualities of buddha nature and make particularly good contemplations.

The verse on page 179 from the 7th Karmapa shows that the traditions of Svatantrika and Prasangika complement each other and that their fruitions do not differ.

Milarepa's song "Looking Nakedly, Resting Still" (*CR* pp. 181-182) is a contemplation of the fruition.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why does the Shentong school say that wisdom is beyond existence and nonexistence?
- Why are the third turning teachings and practices necessary?
- How do students on the path experience wisdom?
- What is the wisdom that is our basic being?
- How are obscurations removed?
- how can too much analysis, including correct analysis, create obstacles?
- Shentong literally means "empty of other", what is the "other"?
- What is the Shentong presentation of the three natures?
- How does that view differ from the Cittamatrin view?
- What are the Shentong presentations of the three existences, the three emptinesses, and the three inherent absences?
- What is the final intention of the Mahayana?
- What is the dead-end that Shentong avoids?

Jamgön Kongtrul says the two truths for Shentong are:

The imaginary and dependent aspects are apparent reality.

The perfectly existent nature, self-aware, original wisdom is genuine.

This is the Empty-of-Other presentation.

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 16. Shentong Madhyamaka

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness: Stage Five. The Emptiness-of-Other (Shentong) Approach

Frameworks of Buddhist Philosophy: Chapter 11. Shentong-Madhyamaka

Class 10: Meditation and Action

Main Point: The Buddha's prescription for undoing ego's deception is the "threefold training", which overcomes delusion and thoroughly reveals egolessness. The first part of the threefold training is developing the *prajna* that understands the view of egolessness. The second part—*samadhi*, or meditation—transforms this view into direct experience. The third part, *shila*—a Sanskrit term translated variously as "conduct", "discipline", "ethics", or "action"—shines the light of view and meditation into the dark corners of our daily lives. The threefold training in *prajna*, *samadhi*, and *shila* is most effective when practiced as a unity. (CR p. 191)

CONTEMPLATIONS

In *Contemplating Reality's* Conclusion, each of the six views, or schools, or progressive stages is used as a practice for the *samadhi* of illusion. "All of these methods involve recollecting the view of genuine reality in order to counteract our attachment to apparent reality. However you go about it, the *samadhi* of illusion is a good way to put these teachings into practice throughout your daily life." (CR p. 200)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do faith in the dharma, aspiration to be a good practitioner, and exertion help?
- Vipashyana means "clear seeing" and combines analysis with resting meditation. "Directly looking" is a key instruction, what is the experience of looking directly at self, at thoughts, and at outer phenomena?
- What is the "precious motivation of the Mahayana"?
- What is "taking ordinary life as the path"?
- What is "the practice of the *samadhi* of illusion"?

READINGS

Contemplating Reality: Chapter 17, Meditation; Chapter 18, Action; Conclusion

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Progressive Stages of Meditation on Emptiness: Conclusion