

Madhyamaka through Metaphors

An attempt to capture and convey the journey, intricacies, and experiences of cultivating the profound Madhyamaka View through metaphors.

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What does having a madhayamaka view amount to?

- Arriving at an understanding about the mode of existence of all phenomena as free from the two extremes of 'existence' and 'non-existence.'
- Seeing emptiness as reinforcing dependent origination; seeing dependent origination as reinforcing emptiness
- Succeeding in exhaustively refuting any intrinsic nature while comfortably upholding all conventional realities.

Making sense of the conflicting views on the ultimate status of phenomena

- Everything has an absolute base; essentialism/
reductionism/atomism



Making sense of the conflicting views on the ultimate status of phenomena

- Everything is merely mental projections; nothing has external reality; idealism



Making sense of the conflicting views on the ultimate status of phenomena

- Everything is part projection, part objective; partial emptiness/autonomous syllogism wielders



Making sense of the conflicting views on the ultimate status of phenomena

- Everything is mere designation; nothing exists in and of itself; emptiness school/reductio ad absurdum wielders



Making sense of the conflicting views on the ultimate status of phenomena

- Helps us start from where we are and then advance gradually
- Helps us identify ways we might stray from the path of right understanding
- Helps us avoid becoming stuck in wrong or partial understanding of the true nature of emptiness
- Gives us greater appreciation of the profundity of the ultimate standpoint
- Safely preparing us to the task of developing a non-conceptual, direct realization

Why is madhyamika view
essential?

The role of rest of the practices vis-à-vis wisdom

The upholder:
The rest of the
virtues.

The upheld:
Wisdom realizing
emptiness



The role of wisdom vis-à-vis the other spiritual practices

The Guide:
Wisdom realizing
emptiness

Blind people:
The rest of the
virtues.



Without it, there is no way out of samsara

- Either one cares the least about the destructiveness of actions one engages in and suffer the consequences/
- Or one has to be content with only limited success with the positive actions one engages in and reap the limited benefits/
- Either one is born into the lower realms (both in symbolic and literal senses)
- Or one does not go past the higher realms (both in symbolic and literal senses)

Benefits of pursuing a madhayamaka understanding

Benefits

- It provides one with the eyes that see the heart of the path, for both individual liberation seekers and full-enlightenment seekers.



Benefits

- Accumulates all types of merits, both mundane and super-mundane. Even when pursued with doubt.



Benefits

- Merit accumulated on this alone far exceeds those reaped from the rest of the far-reaching practices



Benefits

- Protects one from entering the lower realms even when one is bogged down by the ten non-virtuous actions



Benefits

- Repels the karmic-obstruction layer off of the boundless misdeeds and the act of abandoning dharma.



Tendencies to watch out for when
encountering the topic of emptiness

Tendencies to watch out for

- Total lack of interest and even shuns it



Tendencies to watch out for

- Though enthused over it, but settling for a more simplistic and nihilistic position



Conditions recommended for laying a firm
ground for such an understanding

Conditions for a sound understanding

- pure ethical conduct
- relying on an authentic spiritual mentor
 - purifying defilements
 - accumulating merit and wisdom
 - following definitive scriptures
- using the guidance of great sages as Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, and Chandrakirti
 - study, reflect, and meditate on emptiness.

Important distinctions to be made in arriving
at an unambiguous understanding

Important distinctions

- Two types of existences v/s two types of non-existences

Important distinctions

- Existence by way of conventions v/s existence merely in the face of delusion

Important distinctions

- Centrism free from the two extremes v/s any position free even from the stance of that Centrality

Important distinctions

- A mind not engaged with the two (projected) selfhoods v/s a mind engaged with the two selflessness

Important distinctions

- That something does not withstand ultimate analysis v/s that something is harmed by ultimate analysis

Important distinctions

- That something is unfindable by a ultimate consciousness v/s that something is negated by a ultimate consciousness

Important distinctions

- Everything that exists do so through mere designation v/s not everything that is designated necessarily exists.

Synonyms of the object of negation

- True existence
- Ultimate existence
- Perfect existence
- Inherent existence
- Self-characterized existence
 - Intrinsic existence
- Independent existence*

The risk of misconstruing the meaning
of emptiness: like mishandling a
snake,
and a spell gone awry.



The range of reactions vis-à-vis inherent existence

- Magician beholds, but not believes at the show
- Influenced spectators both behold and believe
- Uninfluenced onlookers do neither



The need to pull up our socks in our search for the 'view'

The only way to dispel the self-grasping ignorance is by exposing its way of apprehension;

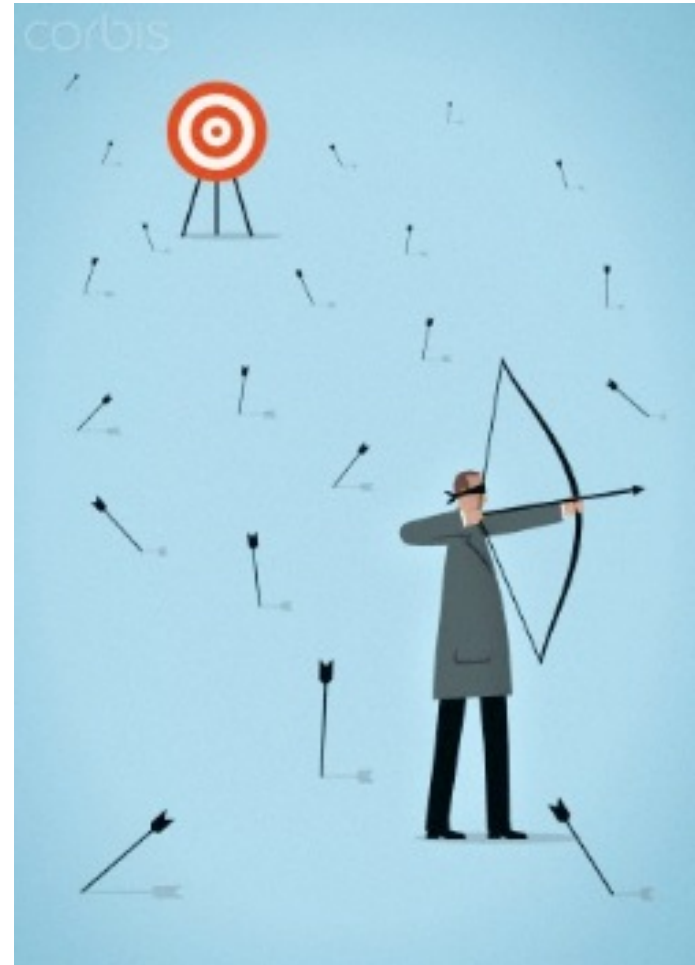
That is, by realizing the lack of inherent existence, nothing less;

Merely letting the mind in proximity to ignorance or withdrawing the mind from it periodically is not enough;

For we have three different modes of mind relating to its objects vis-à-vis the appearance of inherent existence.

Correctly identifying the object of negation—the subjective experience grasping at inherent existence

- Correctly identifying the ignorance is crucial; making all out efforts while failing in this is like shooting arrows without seeing the target.



Identifying the self-grasping attitude within oneself is the whole purpose of the enterprise; don't lose touch with this!

- Or else, it would end up turning into a mission confined to looking for the footprints of the culprit on the lawn while he escapes safely into the forest.



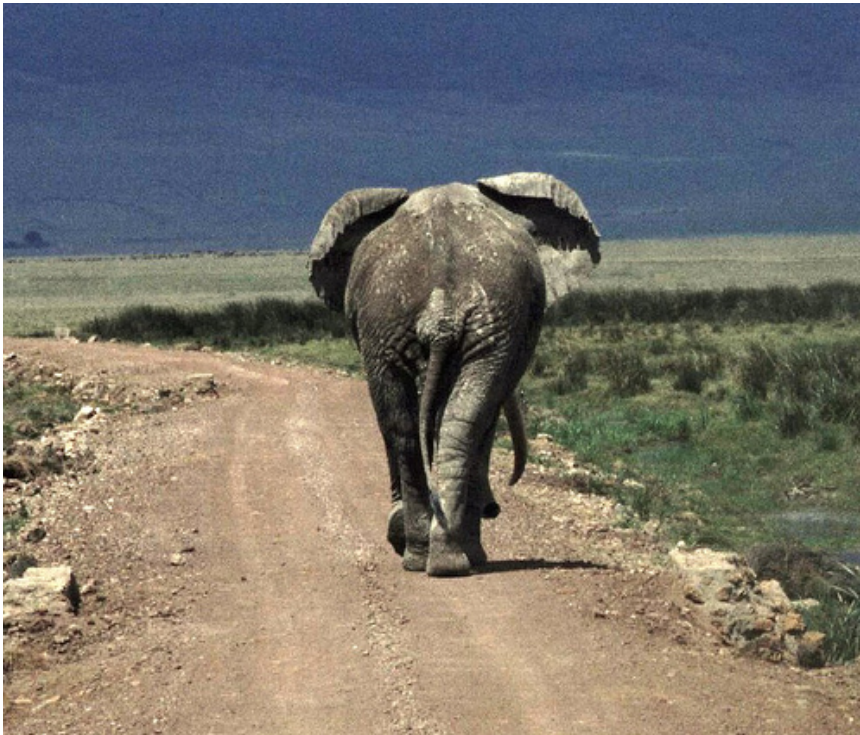
What amounts to grasping at
inherent existence:



Why does it matter what wisdom you specialize on?

Would the knowledge of elephant's absence dispel the danger of a snake strike?

The wisdoms realizing impermanence, subservience, superficial levels of selflessness fall short of directly acting against the innate level of self-grasping.



Relationship
between the self-
grasping attitude
(ISGA)
and rest of the
afflictions (RoA)

Sense of touch = ISGA

Remaining senses= RoA



The three modes of subjective experiences vis-à-vis the reality of emptiness

- Grasping at the notion of inherent existence of its object
- Apprehending the lack of inherent existence of its object
- Apprehending its object without falling into any one of the above modes.

What does it take to render afflictions irreversible? Wisdom or methods?



It is but natural to experience afflictions so long as we harbor the conception of inherent existence

- Like living in the midst of snake nest, we cannot avoid encountering snakes sooner or later, one way or the other.



Does cultivating the wisdom of emptiness entail altering the ground reality at all?

- No addition
- No deletion
- It only enables one to see the fundamental reality as it is.



The actual status of each and every phenomenon

- It has parts in respect to which it is the whole;
- It is not identifiable with any of the parts, nor the collection of those parts;
- Nor is it findable outside of the parts and the collection thereof;
- It is imputed not on the parts, nor on the collection thereof;
- It is imputed in dependence upon the parts or the collection thereof.

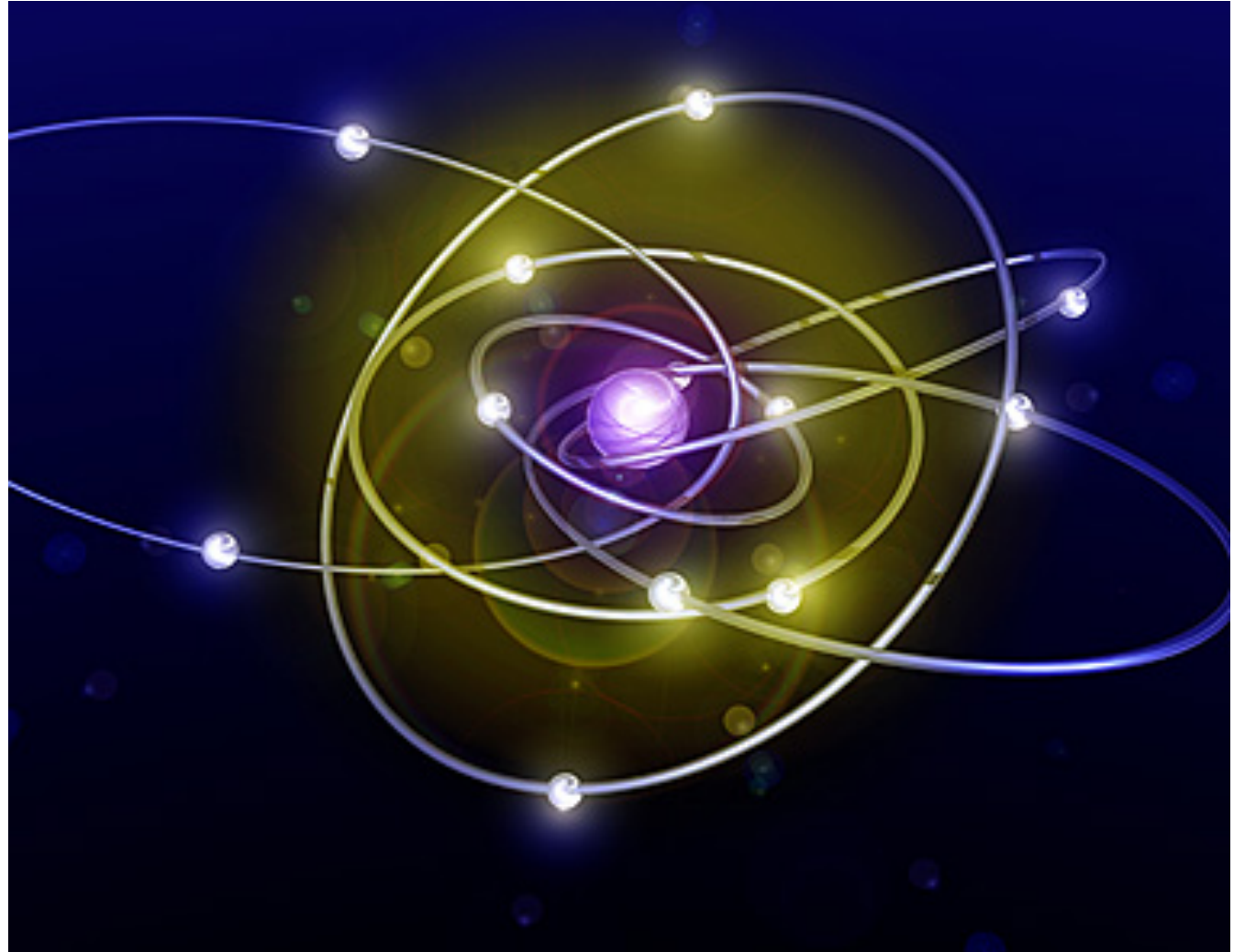
What, in this picture, is the horse-sledge?

- horses?
- cart ?
- runners?
- straps?
- People in it?
- Parts collectively?
- Shape/s of the parts or of the collective?
- Outside of them?



Beyond the mere conventionality of their existence, nothing can withstand analysis in the ultimate sense.

- Just as a horn on a rabbit's head is unfindable,
- Every phenomenon is not findable upon analysis beyond convention;
- Not even a bull's horn is exception; go ahead and search for it in the midst of its sub-atomic particles and beyond.



The balancing act, avoiding the two extremes of absolutism and nihilism

- Hurting the cub with its jaws by over-tightening its grip is likened to hurting ourselves by holding on to absolutes;
- Losing the cub by dropping it on the ground is likened to failing in our virtuous efforts by undermining conventional reality.



A close-up on the meaning of 'extreme' and of falling into them

- The extremes are those into which when someone falls it brings considerable damage
- The issue is not just related to the terms 'existence' and 'non-existence'
- Or else, one would end up having to adjust to the awkward position of neither existence nor non-existence, and would seek to rearrange the wordings of texts like the Heart Sutra, etc.



Is the debate between inherent existence and lack thereof a mere semantic one?

How does this compare with the position of the Mind-only school?

Different interpretations of Self-emptiness v/s Other-emptiness

Self-emptiness:

- The ultimate reality of a phenomenon is that it is empty of itself
- The ultimate reality of a phenomenon is that it is empty of being its own ultimate reality
- The ultimate reality of a phenomenon is that it is empty of existing in and of itself.

Other-emptiness:

- The ultimate reality of a phenomenon is that it is empty, not in and of itself, but of something else
- The ultimate reality of a phenomenon that it is empty, not in and of itself, but of a subject-object duality
- The ultimate reality of a phenomenon exists in and of itself; all the rest do not exist in and of itself

Self-emptiness in perspective

- Every phenomenon is empty by way of being empty of existing in and of itself;
- It is not that any phenomenon is empty by way of being emptied by its own emptiness;
- It is not that any phenomenon is empty of itself; instead, each one is empty of existing by means of its own power.

The paradox of rope/snake

There is no difference, whatsoever, in terms of the measure of imputation;

However, there is a world of difference in terms of whether or not there is actual snake as imputed;

Also, there is a world of difference in terms of whether or not they are capable of performing the functions;

This is because there is difference in terms of which imputation is upheld conventionally;

This is also because there is difference in terms of which imputation faces objection.

Eight examples illustrating the illusory nature of phenomena

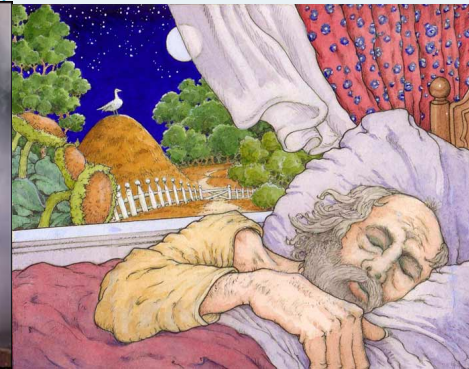
mirage



magical illusions



dream



visual distortions



reflection in the mirror



echo



the moon in the water



rainbow



What marks the culmination of a sound understanding of emptiness

It does not conflict with the workings of causality;

Instead, it sees causality possible only in the light of non-inherent existence;

It sees every phenomenon to be existing by the force of others (i.e. conventions), not by its own power;

Whenever we relate to any phenomenon in our ordinary life, we do so by not searching for it beyond the convention.

What is the measure of ultimate analysis?

Without being content with the conventionality of something, say, a plant, if one persists in the search of its basis of designation.

What type of analysis entails disowning the line of conventionality?

Applying the rationale of ultimate analysis while dealing with the conventional realities will entail disowning the conventions.

General mistakes to watch for in pursuit of an unmissaken understanding?

Too broad an object of negation

Too narrow an object of negation

Partial emptiness

Mentally fabricated emptiness

Unsuitable to be understood

The understanding brings no benefit.

Some points of clarification about Emptiness

- It is not some kind of an absolute strata of reality that underlies our illusory world
- It is not something like a core reality, lying somehow at the heart of the universe
- It does not exist separately and independently of particular phenomena
- It exists only as a quality of a particular phenomenon
- Though not a product of causes and conditions, the emptiness of a phenomenon ceases to exist when that phenomenon ceases to exist.

Ineffability and incomprehensibility of the meaning of emptiness

- Inexpressible as experienced by the untainted
- Incomprehensible as experienced by the untainted
- The experience of the untainted is in accord with the reality



No-seeing is the supreme seeing!

- Is this seeing not seeing at all?
- What it is not seeing is the 'fabricated elaborations'.
- What it is seeing is the 'lack thereof'.
- 'Space' serves as the perfect example.
- Not seen is the 'obstruction', and that which is seen is the 'space', the lack of obstruction.



The fourfold/sixfold emptiness

- Form is emptiness,
- Emptiness is form;
- Emptiness is not other than form,
- Form is not other than emptiness;
- Whatever is form is itself the emptiness,
- Whatever is emptiness it itself the form.

Is Madhyamaka a school of scepticism? If so, which? Pyrrhonian, Academic, Modern, or else.

- Pyrrhonian scepticism holds that sceptical arguments apply to scepticism itself;
- Academic scepticism holds that scepticism itself could be independently justified.
- In the modern sense (beginning with Descartes) scepticism has been understood as the idea that it is impossible to know the existence of the external world.
- What do you think is this Madhyamaka school a part of or not thereof?

Three dimensions of Dependent Origination

- Dependent causation



Three dimensions of Dependent Origination



- Dependent constitution

Three dimensions of Dependent Origination

- Dependent designation



Meditative equipoise into emptiness: what might the experience be like?

The
experience
is called the
Space-like
emptiness
Of the
equipoise



Post-meditative wisdom of emptiness: what might the experience be like?

The experience
is called the
Magical-illusion
-like emptiness
of the post
-equipoise



The transcended wisdom of the Buddha: what the experience might be like.

- Sees both the empty nature and variety nature simultaneously yet discreetly
- Thus, each sight is unaffected by the other; though the two experiences are inextricably blended
- In fact, the sight of the one occurs within the framework of not seeing the other, yet seeing them simultaneously



Perfection of Wisdoms sutras

- The Prajnaparamita sutra in hundred thousand (verses)
- The Prajnaparamita sutra in twenty thousand (verses)
- The Prajnaparamita sutra in eight thousand (verses)
 - The Diamond Sutra)
 - The Heart of Wisdom Sutra
 - The One Letter Prajnaparamita Sutra...

Synonyms of Emptiness

Ultimate object

Ultimate Truth

Reality/ Actuality

Suchness/Thusness

Fundamental nature

Bob Marley's song

- Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery; none but ourselves can free our minds.
- Have no fear for atomic energy because none of them can stop the time.
- Have no doubt for the need to work for liberation and enlightenment because nothing can sever the continuance of consciousness.

Gestalt Principles

- “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” The Gestalt Principles, advocated by theorists such as Max Wertheimer, Wolfgang Kohler, and Kure Koffka.
- In other words, the principle suggests that “the whole (a picture, a car) carried a different and altogether greater meaning than its individual components” (paint, canvas, brush; or tire, paint, metal, respectively).
- In viewing the whole, a cognitive process takes place – the mind makes a leap from comprehending the parts to realizing the whole.

William James

- A great many people think they are thinking when they are merely rearranging their prejudices.

Niels Bohr quotes

Niels Henrik David Bohr was a Danish physicist who made foundational contributions to understanding atomic structure and quantum theory, for which he received the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1922.

- “How wonderful that we have met with a paradox. Now we have some hope of making progress.”
— [Niels Bohr](#)
- “Those who are not shocked when they first come across quantum theory cannot possibly have understood it.”
— [Niels Bohr, *Essays 1932-1957 on Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge*](#)
- “Everything we call real is made of things that cannot be regarded as real.”
— [Niels Bohr](#)

༢༤༣.....༢༤༥ རྩེན་པའི་ཐ་སྐད་ཉམས་མ་ཉམས་
དང་དབྱེད་མ་དབྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚད།

ཤིང་རྩེ་ཡན་ལག་ཚོགས་པ་དེ་ཤིང་རྩེ་ཆ་ཤས་ཡིན་པ་ལས་ཆ་ཅན་

མིན་ཚུལ། ཚོགས་པ་ཤིང་རྩེ་ལས་གང་ཟག་མིན་ཚུལ་ཇི་ལྟར། ༡༧༠་་་

506གཤམ་དུ་ཚོགས་པ་དེ་ཡིན་པར་འགོག་སྐབས་་་་

How do we account for the existence of
the multiplicity of phenomena in the
light of non-inherent existence

The mark of having arrived at an unmistaken understanding of emptiness

སྟོང་ཉིད་གྱི་ལྟ་བའི་གོ་བ་གནད་ཅུ་སོང་བའི་ཐེག་ཆེན་པ་ལ་ནི། གོ་བ་རྣམ་དག་རྣམས་སྐྱེས་ནས་རྒྱ་ཆེ་བའི་སྤྱོད་རྣམས་སྦྱབ་པ་ལ་
གིན་ཏུ་གྲུས་པར་འགྱུར་ལ། ༡༥༩

སྟོང་མི་རུང་གི་སྟོན་གཉིས་སྤངས་ནས་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པའི་སྟོང་ཉིད་གྱི་ལྟ་བའི་བརྟེན་ནས་བྱ་བྱེད་ཐམས་ཅད་ཆེས་འཐད་
པར་རྟོགས་པ་ཞིག་འོང་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། ༡༥༩

རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བ་རྟེན་ཉིད་འདི་པ་ཙམ་གྱི་ཟབ་མིའི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད་མཐོང་། ༡༤༡

དགོངས་པ་རབ་གསལ། ༡༥༥/༢ མ་རིག་པ་དེ་ལྡོག་པ་ལ་སྟོང་པ་རྟེན་འབྱུང་གི་དོན་ཅུ་ཤར་བའི་རྟེན་འབྱུང་ཟབ་མིའི་དོན་རྟོགས་
དགོས་པར་གསུངས་སོ།། རྟེན་འབྱུང་གི་དེ་ཁོ་ན་ཉིད།

What marks the exposure of the innate self-grasping ignorance

དགོངས་པ་རབ་གསལ། ༡༧༥/༢ མ་རིག་པ་དེ་ལྗོན་པ་ལ་སྟོང་པ་རྟེན་འབྱུང་གི་དོན་ལྟ་ཤར་
བའི་རྟེན་འབྱུང་ཟབ་མའི་དོན་རྟོགས་དགོས་པར་གསུངས་སོ།། རྟེན་འབྱུང་གི་དེ་ལོ་ན་ཉིད།

- རྟོན་འབྱུང་སྣོང་པའི་དོན་ཤར་བ་དང་། སྣང་པ་རྟོན་འབྱུང་གི་དོན་ལྷ་ཤར་བ།
- Emptiness understood in terms of dependent origination; dependent origination understood in terms of emptiness.
- Seeing emptiness as implying dependent origination; seeing dependent origination as implying emptiness
- Seeing emptiness as reinforcing dependent origination; seeing dependent origination as reinforcing emptiness

Ludwig Wittgenstein

- “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent.” Ludwig Wittgenstein

Erwin Schrodinger; Richard Slansky; J.S.Bell

- “What we observe as material bodies and forces are nothing but shapes and variations in the structure of space.” Erwin Schrodinger
- “Language is just a sound. How does the word refer beyond the mere word to the total experience?” Richard Slansky
- “What is much more likely is that the new way of seeing things will involve an imaginative leap that will astonish us.” J.S.Bell

The three modes of subjective experiences vis-à-vis the reality of emptiness

བདེན་མེད་དུ་མ་བཟུང་ཡང་བདེན་པར་འཇིན་མི་དགོས་པ་བཞིན་དུ།
བདག་གཉིས་ལ་མ་ལྷགས་ཀྱང་བདག་མེད་གཉིས་ལ་ལྷགས་མི་དགོས་ཏེ།
སྒོ་མུང་པོ་གསུམ་པ་ལ་གནས་པ་མཐའ་ཡས་པ་ཅིག་ཡོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།།

བཏགས་དོན་བཅལ་ནས་མ་རྟེན་པ་ཙམ་གྱིས་ལྟ་བའི་གོ་བ་རྫོགས་པ་མིན་

ཚུལ།

འ་སྐྱུག་གི་དཔེའི་སྒྲིང་ནས་གདགས་གཞི་དང་གདགས་ཚོས་སྒྲོར།

ཡོད་པ་གཉིས་དང་མེད་པ་གཉིས། ༢༧

- བསྐྱབ་བརྟམ་ལས།
- ཇི་ལྟར་ལོ་རྟོག་བཅས་ཁེབས་ན། །ནད་གྱིས་ལྷམ་ཞིང་རྒྱས་མི་འགྱུར། །དེ་ལྟར་སངས་རྒྱས་ལྷ་
གྲ་ཡང་། །ཉོན་མོངས་ཁེབས་ན་རྒྱས་མི་འགྱུར། །

ཇི་ལྟར་སྐྱེས་པོས་ལོ་ལྷན་རྒྱུད། དེ་གི་ཐབས་གཅིག་གིས་བསྐྱོད་

The merit of contemplating and sharing
the gift of the wisdom of emptiness

Subtle points of distinction
surrounding the analytic wisdom

སྟོན་པས་སྤྲུལ་པ་ཞིག་གིས་སྤྲུལ་པ་གཞན་དེས་སྤྲུལ་པ་གཞན་ལ་

འཕྲུལ་

རྟེན་འབྲེལ་གསུམ་གྱི་རྣམ་གཞག་དང་དབྱ་མའི་ལྟ་བ་དང་ཉེ་འཁོར་གི་བྱུང་

པར།

- བརྟེན་ནས་སྐྱེས་པ།
- བརྟེན་ནས་བཞག་པ།
- བརྟེན་ནས་བཏགས་པ།

ཕྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་སློ་སྒྲ་བཞི་བསྐྱོག་པའི་ཚུལ་དང་འབྲེལ་བ།

Is the debate between inherent
existence and lack thereof a mere
semantic one? 304

དབུ་མའི་ལྷ་བའི་དཀའ་ས། 170/para 3

རྟོག་པས་བཞག་པ་དེ་ལ་རང་རང་གི་བྱ་བྱེད་འཐད་པ།

དོན་དམ་པར་མིང་ཚམ་ཡང་མེད། ཐ་སྐད་ཅུ་མིང་གི་ཐ་སྐད་ཀྱི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་ཚམ་མ་
གཏོགས་པ་ཅི་ཡང་མེད་པ།

ཚོས་གང་ཡོད་པར་འཛོག་ནའང་བཏགས་དོན་མ་བཙལ་བར་འཛོག་པ།

སྒྲིང་པ་རྟེན་འབྱུང་གི་དོན་ཅུ་ཤར་བའི་བརྟེན་འབྱེལ་ཟབ་མའི་དོན་རྟོགས་དགོས།