

How to See Yourself As You Really Are

Review of Parts 1–6

Part 1: The Need for Insight

- All the trouble in the world is caused by our counterproductive emotions. All counterproductive emotions are based on ignorance of the true nature of things. Practices that teach us how to overcome that ignorance undercut all afflictive emotions. This is the extraordinary gift of insight, a clear understanding of the nature of things.
- To succeed at developing insight, first you need to identify ignorance. Ignorance in this context is not just a lack of knowledge—it is an active misapprehension of the nature of things. It mistakenly assumes that people and things exist in and of themselves, by way of their own nature. By giving people and things around us this exaggerated status, we are

drawn into all sorts of overblown and ultimately hurtful emotions such as lust, hatred, jealousy, belligerence, depression, and so on. These destructive emotions lead to actions contaminated by misperception. These actions (karma) lead to powerless birth and rebirth in cyclic existence and repeated entanglement in trouble. Removing ignorance puts an end to actions contaminated by misperception, thereby ceasing powerless birth and rebirth in cyclic existence. Insight is the way out.

Part 2: How to Undermine Ignorance

- One of the principal means of overcoming the mistaken view that people and things exist independently is to reflect on the fact that all phenomena arise dependently.
- Dependent-arising refers to the fact that all impermanent phenomena—whether physical, mental, or otherwise—come into existence dependent upon certain causes and conditions. Whatever arises dependently is not operating exclusively under its own power.
- Dependent-arising also refers to the fact that all phenomena—impermanent and permanent—exist in dependence upon their own parts. Everything has parts. A pot, for instance, exists in dependence upon its parts, whether we consider coarse parts, such as the lid and handle, or subtle parts, such as molecules. The tiniest particles can be broken down into smaller parts, but even if a physically unbreakable entity was found, it would still

have spatial extent and thus parts. Consciousness doesn't have spatial parts because it is not physical, but it has earlier and later moments in its continuum, and these are parts of a stream of consciousness—no matter how short. Even space has parts, such as the space associated with particular directions, like space in the east and space in the west, or the space inside particular objects.

- Dependent and independent are a dichotomy. Anything that exists is either the one or the other. When something is dependent, it must be empty of being under its own power. Nowhere in the parts of the body and mind that form the basis for the “I” can we find the “I.” Therefore, the “I” is established not under its own power but through the force of other conditions—its causes, its parts, and thought.
- Inherent existence never did, never does, and never will exist. However, we imagine that it does exist and thereby are drawn into distressing emotions. The belief that phenomena inherently exist is an extreme form of exaggeration that leads to the frightfully mistaken view of permanence. The belief that impermanent phenomena cannot perform functions, or act as cause and effect, is an extreme form of denial that leads to the frightfully mistaken view of nihilism. The realization that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence because of being dependent-arising avoids both extremes.
- Because persons and things are dependent-arising, they are empty of inherent existence. Being dependent, they are not

self-instituting. Because persons and things are empty of inherent existence, they *must* be dependent-arisings. If phenomena did exist in their own right, they could not depend on other factors, either causes, their own parts, or thought. Since phenomena are not able to set themselves up, they can transform.

Part 3: Harnessing the Power of Concentration & Insight

- All types of meditation fall into the general categories of analytical meditation and focusing meditation, also called insight meditation and calm abiding meditation. The capacities for knowledge which we all possess can be drawn together and focused on an object we want to understand. Through such focus, all practices are dramatically enhanced, so your progress is much faster and more profound. Buddhism offers many techniques for developing a powerful state of concentration called “calm abiding” in which all distractions have been *calmed* and your mind is—of its own accord—*abiding* continuously, joyously, and flexibly on its chosen internal object with intense clarity and firm stability. By contemplating the advantages of attaining this kind of mental and physical flexibility, we can generate enthusiasm for meditation and counteract laziness.
- For beginners, limiting busy activities and having a quiet place to meditate are helpful. Internally, you need to know

satisfaction, not having strong desires for food, clothing, and so forth, but being satisfied with moderation. Of particular importance is moral behavior, which will bring you realization, peace, and conscientiousness.

- Meditative posture is important, because if you straighten your body, the energy channels within the body will also straighten, allowing the energy flowing in those channels to balance, which in turn will assist in balancing your mind and putting it at your service.
- At the start of a session, it is helpful to remove counterproductive currents of energy, called “airs” or “winds,” from your body. Like getting rid of rubbish, this series of nine inhalations and exhalations helps to clear away impulses toward afflictive emotions you might have had before the session. Following these nine breaths bring your altruistic motivation, your desire to help others, vividly to mind.
- A helpful object of meditation for all personality types is an image of Buddha, or some other religious figure, since concentration on it imbues your mind with virtuous qualities. Look carefully at an image of Buddha, or some other religious figure or symbol, noticing its form, color, and details. Work at causing this image to appear internally to your consciousness, imagining it on the same level as your eyebrows, about five or six feet in front of you, about one to four inches high, and shining brightly. Consider the image to be an actual Buddha—clear, bright, emitting light

—endowed with magnificent qualities of body, speech, and mind.

- You are seeking to develop a meditative mind that itself is intensely clear, where consciousness is bright and alert. You are also seeking the stability of being able to focus single-mindedly on the object. These are the two qualities of mind you need: *intense clarity* and *unwavering stability*. What prevents these from arising? Laxity—the mind’s being too loose—prevents the development of clarity, and excitement—the mind’s being too tight—prevents staying focused on the object. If you are facing interference to concentration from laxity or excitement, try short but frequent meditation sessions. When your performance improves and these problems diminish, make the sessions longer.
- The technique for recognizing whether laxity or excitement is preventing the mind from developing clarity and stability is called “introspection.” When you have placed your mind on the object of meditation, using introspection, from time to time check to see whether your mind remains on the object. The technique for keeping your mind continuously on the object of your meditation is called “mindfulness.” It is the antidote to forgetfulness. When you find that your mind has strayed from the object, using mindfulness, recall the object and put your mind back on it as often as needed. By learning these techniques you will gradually develop the ability to apply them when you notice problems with your quality of attention while meditating.

Part 4: How to End Self-Deception

- Since it is the individual person who undergoes pleasure and pain, makes trouble, and accumulates karma, analysis should begin with yourself. Therefore, it is best to work at understanding your true nature first. After that, this realization can be applied to mind, body, house, car, money, and all other phenomena.
- In Buddhism the term *self* has two meanings that must be differentiated in order to avoid confusion. One meaning of *self* is “person,” or “living being.” This is the being who loves and hates, who performs actions and accumulates good and bad karma, who experiences the fruits of those actions, who is reborn in cyclic existence, who cultivates spiritual paths, and so on. The other meaning of *self* occurs in the term *selflessness*, where it refers to a falsely imagined, over-concretized status of existence called “inherent existence.” The ignorance that adheres to such an exaggeration is indeed the source of ruination, the mother of all wrong attitudes. What is the actual status of a sentient being? Just as a car exists in dependence upon its parts, such as wheels, axles, and so forth, so a sentient being is conventionally set up in dependence upon mind and body. There is no person to be found either separate from mind and body or within mind and body. This is the reason why the “I” and all other phenomena are described in Buddhism as “name-only.” These phenomena do not exist

in and of themselves; the term *name-only* eliminates the possibility that they are established from the object's own side. We need this reminder because the "I" and other phenomena do not appear to be merely set up by name and thought. Quite the contrary.

- There are four major steps toward realizing that you do not exist the way you think you do. *The first step* is to identify the target: the ignorant belief that the "I" seems to exist from its own side, independent of thought. This can be clearly seen at times of stress, such as when someone else criticizes you for something you have not done, or when there is something important you were supposed to do and you discover that you forgot to do it, or when you get upset with your body, or a part of your body, such as your hair. The "I" that is angry seems to have its own being, in and of itself, distinct from the body or mind at which you are angry. *The second step* is to determine that, if the "I" exists the way it seems to be, it must be either one with mind and body or separate from mind and body—there is not another option. *The third step* is to thoroughly contemplate the problems with "I" and the mind-body complex being the same. *The fourth step* is to thoroughly contemplate the problems with "I" and the mind-body complex being inherently different.
- When you have done analysis with respect to yourself, searching for an inherently existent "I," eventually you experience a nonfinding of "I," but is this the emptiness of

inherent existence or something coarser? We call the coarser level a person's "not being substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient" and the subtler level a person's "not being inherently existent." It is possible to mistakenly conclude that you have understood the subtler emptiness when you have actually understood only the coarser one. To tell the difference, first go back to reviewing the four steps to realization; then when the sense that the "I" is self-instituting falls apart, and it vanishes from your mind in a vacuum, switch the topic of your investigation from the "I" to your body, or some part of the body, such as your arm. See whether the sense that your arm inherently exists immediately vanishes due to the previous reasoning. If the previous analysis does not immediately apply to your arm, your understanding is still on a coarser level.

- The need to proceed to this deeper level is why you must keep working at alternating between identifying a more and more subtle sense of how the "I" appears and using reasoning to see if that appearance can bear analysis. Through this persistent process you will gradually deepen your comprehension of both what an exaggerated sense of self is and the shakiness of its foundation.
- The sign that you have truly become impressed with the absence of the concrete, solid existence of the "I" occurs when you consider body or mind and no longer take their appearance to be true. This diminishing of confidence in the truth of appearances is a sign of success, and through

continual meditation it can grow stronger and stronger. You will understand what is meant by searching for inherent existence but not finding it—searching for what is so strongly imagined and not finding it. This nonfinding appears to the mind as emptiness, first weakly and then with more and more clarity. Though initial insights are not the most profound, as you keep at this process, they will get deeper and deeper.

Part 5: How Persons and Things Actually Exist

- The “I” and other phenomena appear to exist inherently, but they are empty of inherent existence, just as an illusion conjured up by a magician does not exist the way it seems. A face in a mirror appears to be a face, but this image is not a real face in any way; it is from all viewpoints empty of being a face. Similarly, all persons and things seem to exist from their own side without depending on causes and conditions, on their parts, and on thought, but they do not. In this way, persons and things are *like* illusions.
- Seeing people and things as existing like illusions helps reduce unfavorable emotions, because lust, hatred, and so forth stem from our superimposing qualities—good or bad—on phenomena beyond what they actually have. Likewise, love and compassion themselves and the persons who are their objects are like illusions in that they appear to exist

solidly in and of themselves but do not. This perspective will deepen both your insight into emptiness and the healthy emotions of love and compassion, so that within such understanding you can engage in effective compassionate activity.

- A coiled rope's speckled color and coiled form are similar to those of a snake, and when the rope is perceived in a dim area, the thought arises, "This is a snake." As for the rope, at that time when it is seen to be a snake, the collection and parts of the rope are not even in the slightest way a snake. Therefore, that snake is merely set up by conceptuality. In the same way, when the thought "I" arises in dependence upon mind and body, nothing within mind and body is in even the slightest way the "I." Also there is not even the slightest something that is a different entity from mind and body that is apprehendable as the "I." Consequently, the "I" is *merely* set up by conceptuality in dependence upon mind and body; it is not established by way of its own entity.
- Phenomena exist only in the presence of conceptual thought. Those things which exist only when conceptuality exists and do not exist when conceptuality does not are without question definitely not established by way of their own nature, like a snake imagined in a coiled rope. Objects, without depending on a consciousness, cannot establish their existence right within themselves. All phenomena—both persons and things—are set up by conceptual thought.

- Effects depend on causes, but causes also, in a subtle sense, depend upon effects. Every cause itself is an effect of its own causes, which preceded it, and therefore arises in dependence upon its respective causes. Here cause and effect are in a temporal sequence, an effect occurring after its cause. This is dependent-arising in the sense of *dependent production*.
- The highest philosophical perspective within Buddhism contains an additional consideration, that something is not a cause in and of itself; it is named a “cause” in relation to its effect, such as when a person is designated “mother” in relation to having a child and a person is designated “child” in relation to having a mother. Here the effect does not occur before its cause, and its cause does not come into being after its effect. This is dependent arising in the sense of *dependent designation*. The designation of something as a cause necessarily depends upon consideration of its effect. There is no self-sufficient cause, which is why we do not find anything in and of itself when we analytically examine a cause, despite its appearance to our everyday mind that each thing has its own self-contained being. This is the route through which we come to realize that this more subtle understanding of dependent-arising as dependent designation is correct.
- If a thing existed in itself, that alone would be sufficient. You could just say, “It is this,” without needing to relate it to anything else. Because it is not established in and of itself,

there is no alternative but to posit it in relation to something else. The dependent-arising of cause and effect confirms the understanding that phenomena are merely nominal, merely imputed, and no more than that. This is why Buddhist scriptures say that the “I” and other phenomena exist only through the power of conceptual thought. Although the “I” is set up in dependence upon mind and body, mind and body are not the “I,” nor is the “I” mind and body. There is nothing in the mind and body that is the “I.” Hence, the “I” depends on conceptual thought. It and all other phenomena are only set up by the mind. The false appearance that persons and things exist in and of themselves is the inherent existence that realization of emptiness is aimed at refuting.

Part 6: Deepening Love with Insight

- It is important to join the practice of love and compassion with the practice of insight. Insight can deepen love through understanding the process by which we suffer. That process can be compared to the way a bucket moves up and down a well. 1) The bucket is bound by a rope; similarly, sentient beings are bound by their afflictive emotions and the actions driven by them. 2) The movement of the bucket up and down the well is run by an operator; similarly, the process of cyclic existence is run by an untamed mind that mistakenly believes a self exists inherently, and then mistakes the nature of “mine.” 3) The bucket travels up and

down the well over and over; similarly, sentient beings wander ceaselessly in the well of cyclic existence, from the highest states of temporary happiness to the lowest states of temporary pain. 4) The bucket requires great exertion to be drawn up but it descends easily; similarly, beings have to expend great effort to draw themselves upward to a happier life but easily descend into painful situations. 5) The bucket does not determine its own movements; similarly, the factors involved in shaping a person's current life are the result of past ignorance, attachment, and grasping, and those same factors continuously create more problems for our future lives. 6) The bucket bumps against the walls of the well as it ascends and descends; similarly, sentient beings are battered day by day by the sufferings of pain and change, caught in processes beyond their control.

- Using this metaphor for cyclic existence provides insight into the process driving this dynamic of recurring problems for yourself and others. However, for your response toward others to be love and compassion, it is not enough just to know how they suffer; you must also have a sense of closeness with them. This feeling of empathy is achieved by recognizing that you and all others—whether friends, enemies, or neutral parties—want happiness and do not want suffering, even if you view happiness and suffering differently.
- One by one, bring to mind individual beings—first friends, then neutral persons, and then enemies, starting with the

least offensive. Reflect on how each of them wants happiness and doesn't want suffering. Practice cultivating three levels of love and compassion for them. First, think how wonderful it would be if each being could be filled with happiness and free from suffering. Second, generate the wish that this may occur for each of them. Third, make the determination to help each of them accomplish this. Cultivate total commitment by realizing cyclic existence is a process driven by ignorance. Since ignorance can be overcome, it is realistic for you to work to achieve enlightenment and to help others do the same. Even if you have to do it alone, commit to freeing all sentient beings from suffering and its causes, and to setting all sentient beings in happiness and its causes. It will take months and years, but the benefit of this practice will be immense.

- Impermanence is a deeper level of insight into the process of cyclic existence. We are under the influence of an illusion of permanence, so we think there is always lots of time remaining. To counteract this tendency, it is important to meditate on impermanence—first on the fact that death might come at any moment, and then on the very momentary nature of our lives. With a strong sense of the imminence of death, you will feel the need to engage in spiritual practice, improving your mind and not wasting your time on various passing distractions.
- The fact that things change from moment to moment opens up the possibility for positive development. If situations did

not change, they would forever retain their aspect of suffering. Once you realize things are always changing, if you are passing through a difficult period you can find comfort in knowing that the situation will not remain that way forever.

- The substances and particles that make up the objects around us disintegrate moment by moment; similarly, the internal consciousness with which we observe those external objects also disintegrates moment by moment. By seeing that the true nature of things is impermanence, you will not be shocked by change when it occurs, not even by death.
- Since our attitudes of permanence and self-cherishing are what ruin all of us, the most fruitful meditations are impermanence and the emptiness of inherent existence on the one hand and love and compassion on the other. This is why the Buddha emphasized that the two wings of the bird flying to enlightenment are compassion and wisdom. The most profound level of love and compassion is made possible by knowledge of the emptiness of inherent existence. We are unnecessarily drawn into suffering by assenting to false appearances, thereby falling prey to lust and hatred and all the actions that stem from them, accumulating karma, and being born over and over again in a cycle of pain. This insight will stimulate profound love and compassion because you will vividly see how unnecessary all these ills are. To gain access to this depth of love and compassion, it is necessary first to understand that

you yourself and other sentient beings are empty of inherent existence.

- Since cyclic existence is rooted in the misapprehension of inherent existence, the only way out of cyclic existence is recognizing this fallacy for what it is. Though there are many factors producing cyclic existence, only at its root—ignorance—can it be severed, for this is the source of all the other causes. Being a human is the best possible basis for achieving liberation from cyclic existence, and for using the three practices of morality, concentrated meditation, and wisdom—also known as the three higher trainings. The practice of morality involves restraining overtly poor behavior of body, speech, and mind. The practice of concentrated meditation of calm abiding suppresses more subtle ill behaviors. The final abandonment of ill deeds is achieved through the practice of training in the wisdom of insight into the emptiness of inherent existence.
- In this way you can achieve liberation from cyclic existence, but even then your own aims will not have been brought to complete fulfillment. Even though ignorance of the true nature of persons and things has itself been overcome, predispositions left by that ignorance lie latent in the mind, keeping it from knowing all that can be known. In terms of your own progress, the process of overcoming obstructions and realizing high states is not yet complete; you are still dwelling in a form of solitary peace. By mainly taking care of yourself, you foster a self-cherishing attitude, and this

attitude is difficult to overcome later, when you train in great love and great compassion. Consequently, it is crucial from the very beginning not to fully invest your strength of mind in your own benefit.

- When you understand that the suffering of others is also induced by ignorance, you realize that it is possible for them to free themselves from all suffering, strengthening your decision to help others. Understanding that all beings are empty of inherent existence, you develop even more profound love and compassion by holistically seeing how they bring suffering upon themselves through ignorance of the nature of people and other phenomena. You call to mind limitless sentient beings who are similar to you in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, who over the course of countless lifetimes have been your closest friends, sustaining you with kindness. From this sense of intimacy combined with knowledge of why they suffer cyclic rounds of pain through rebirth, you call forth powerful concern for their well-being.
- Be willing to familiarize yourself with this attitude, taking on yourself the burden of protecting all sentient beings from all problems; do it repeatedly and with regular analysis. Your empathy will be so great that it will suffuse your entire being. Without any desire for reward, your aim will be solely the development of others, never disheartened or discouraged in your task.