

# The Buddhist View

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Without past, present, future; empty awake mind.

**The crux of the matter.** In the Mahayana Buddhist view of *Madhyamaka Prasangika*—the Middle Way Consequence School of Nagarjuna (2nd century), Chandrakirti (8th century) and Tsonghapa (14th century)—even the Ultimate Truth that is fundamental great emptiness (*mahashunyata, dharmakaya*) is not a frozen absolute, that is, it is not an essentialist, metaphysical logocentric idol or “false absolute” existing unconditioned and *independently* as an unknowable “other” transcendent creator God, metaphysical essence, or some vast substrate, entity, being or thing. Emptiness is not a transcendent, deeper reality prior to arising appearing form. Rather, emptiness is a non-essential *relativized* absolute, abiding ontologically *interdependently*, as “dependent arising” or “interbeing,” a timeless infinitely vast causal nexus of arising interconnected causes and conditions (*vasana*/quantum “qubits”). This Buddhist View is non-essentialist. There is no *essential* reality at all. Reality is merely the relative-conventional dependent arising of spacetime mental and physical forms. H.H. The Dalai Lama terms this seeming paradox the “emptiness of emptiness.”

It is important for us to avoid the misapprehension that emptiness is an absolute reality from which the illusory world emerges... it's not some kind of [entity] out there somewhere... emptiness must be understood as 'emptiness of intrinsic or independent existence'... form's ultimate nature... (It) does not imply non-existence of phenomena but the emptiness of phenomena... its ultimate mode of being... the basis that allows form [to] arise as emptiness.

—H. H. The Dalai Lama, *Buddhadharma Quarterly*, Fall, 2002

*How then does emptiness exist? Emptiness is established conceptually, by our relative conventional minds. Therefore emptiness does not exist ultimately. Again, it exists merely conventionally, as the reified, conceptually imputed dependent arising of form. Emptiness is not some deeper reality but merely the ultimate nature of conventional, intersubjective reality of the relative spacetime things that appear. Emptiness (shunyata) does not mean nihilistic nothingness or non-existence, as we shall see.*

**The forms of emptiness.** There is then a seminal relationship of the Buddha's Dependent Arising (*pratitya samutpada/tendrel*) of forms and their emptiness matrix base. “Form is emptiness, emptiness is form.” Shakyamuni Buddha taught three aspects of this interdependence of form and emptiness: *causal*, all phenomena and processes depend upon prior causes and conditions; *mereological*, wholes are dependent on their parts and parts are dependent on their wholes; *conceptual imputation*, all arising phenomena and processes are real only by relative-conventional interobjective and intersubjective attribution and designation with no *inherently* real or absolute existence. Therefore all arising physical and mental forms are merely the

products of our social interobjective and cultural intersubjective deep background linguistic categories of understanding. With this view of ontological relativity Bohr, Quine, Kuhn and the Neo-Pragmatists would agree. Therefore, according to H. H. The Dalai Lama:

First, all conditional things and events in the world come into being only as a result of the interaction of causes and conditions. They don't just arise from nowhere, fully formed. Second, there is mutual dependence between parts and the whole: without parts there can be no whole, without a whole it makes no sense to speak of parts... Third, anything that exists and has an identity does so only within the total network of everything that has a possible or potential relation to it. No phenomenon exists with an independent or intrinsic identity. (H. H. The Dalai Lama, 2005, p. 64)

Therefore, all phenomena arise in dependence upon prior causes and conditions; phenomena arise in mutual interdependence of parts and wholes within the vast unbounded whole (*mahabindu*); phenomena are absent any separate, essential intrinsic existence because they exist only in dependence on all other related causes and conditions. And this *absence* of inherent existence or selflessness is emptiness. All emptiness is emptiness of something. No form, no emptiness. No emptiness, no form. Paradoxically, phenomena really do exist relatively, but not absolutely. And again, all phenomena are dependently and conceptually designated, that is, they exist only by way of relative-conventionally reified perceptual, conceptual and linguistic attribution, imputation and designation. The relative world of form and formless form arises from our concept/belief "categories of understanding," all in the vast interdependent causal nexus of the ultimate, basal emptiness ground. Kant and Quine would agree.

Moreover, emptiness is selflessness, the absence or nonexistence of an intrinsically existing nature or self. Buddhist *Prasangika Madhymaka* teaches of the "two selflessnesses," the selflessness of the person (*rangtong*), and the selflessness of phenomena perceived by persons (*shentong*). The stabilized mind realizing emptiness—the union of *shamatha* and *vipashyanā*—is the realization of the utter absence of self-nature in all arising phenomena, both "self" and "other." This is the liberating realization of the wisdom of emptiness that is the union of relative-conventional mind with its basal ultimate emptiness ground or source. And this *Madhyamaka* Middle Way emptiness is none other than the Buddha Nature of the *Yogachara* school. According to his holiness the Dalai Lama there is no *essential* difference between these "two wisdoms"—that is to say, between emptiness (*shunyata*) and Buddha Nature (*tatagatagarbha*). "Realizing emptiness we realize our intrinsic Buddha Nature. Realizing our Buddha Nature we realize emptiness".

The Buddha's great foundational teaching of no-self (*anatman*), impermanence (*anitya*) and interdependent arising (dependent origination/*pratitya samutpada*) are unified, then realized in these two wisdoms. And this realization is the ultimate happiness that cannot be lost (*mahasuka/paramananda/beatitudo*). Ignorance (*avidya/marigpa/ajnana*) that is Attraction (desire, greed, pride) and Aversion (fear/anger, aggression) is the non-recognition and failure of realization of these three that is the root cause of human suffering and human evil. This ignorance

that is suffering then is a *conceptual* (*vikalpa*) superimposition or projection (*vikshepa*) onto our direct perceptual experience. Thus we “miss the mark” (*hamartia/sin*) of the timeless nondual perfection of the indwelling presence (*vidya/rigpa*) of impermanent, selfless, empty, interdependent outshining (*abhasa*) Reality Itself. The possibility of release from this ignorance that is suffering is, of course, the practice of the Buddha’s Eightfold Path, as we shall see.

Cause and effect—the Principle of Causality—and its subset, karma, is possible only in a *kosmos* whose phenomena is interdependently arisen and therefore empty of intrinsic existence. The Buddha’s *Heart Sutra* (*Prajnaparamita-hridaya-sutra*) expresses the “fourfold profundity” thusly: “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form; emptiness is not other than form, form is not other than emptiness.” Emptiness (selflessness/impermanence) and the interdependent arising of mental and physical form are nondual, a prior unity.

Impermanence (*anitya*)—*gross* (long term change) and *subtle* (continuous moment to moment change)—is the truth that timeless motion or change is the only constant. We are not stable, permanent objects or entities, but inherently and radiantly empty causal processes, selfless quantum event moments (*vasana*), forever changing relative continua in the infinitely vast continuum that is ultimate Reality Itself. Experience is continuous change. From this vast primordial matrix ground we—and our mind created relative spacetime reality—aggregate, arise, dwell, disaggregate and return. Full *bodhi*, full awakening is not realizing some “other” transcendent ultimate truth, being or creator godhead, abiding beyond or beneath the world of form, but seeing and knowing this interdependent, impermanent, empty, relative conventional spacetime reality exactly “*as it is*,” in the primal purity of each perception, before we think about it. This primordial awareness wisdom of emptiness is always present. It is who we actually are. The realization of this is the cause of our release from, not adversity, but our emotional response to adversity that is suffering. And this freeing is the cause of both our relative and ultimate human happiness.

Subtle impermanence is difficult to grasp. It is cloaked in a cloud of unknowing ignorance (*avidya*) that is our fear and denial of death (“We cannot overcome our death anxiety, but we can meet it with courage.” —Paul Tillich.) We can meet it with the luminous clarity of clearlight mind.) And from this fear comes the preconscious Attraction and Aversion that cause the negative afflictive emotions (fear, anger, greed, pride) that cause terrible suffering to beings. Through mindfulness and the practice of the Path we remember again and again, and finally moment to moment that “samsara and nirvana are one (*samatajnana*).” We hold this awareness that our constantly changing mental life—the patter of the stream of consciousness that is the untamed “wild horse of the mind”—is the beautiful process of our intrinsic impermanence, and this need not be denied and repressed through conceptual superimposition of a false permanency. This awareness is our mindfulness. It is the powerful antidote to our fear of death. As our attachment to that illusory sense of self permanence is liberated, the primordial fearful self-contraction from the flow of being in time is released and we fully engage the adversity and diversity of the otherness of our lives. We come to relate with this “other” and with others, not as objects, but as if this all were actually us, which it is. This is the awakening to the Buddhist *wisdom of emptiness* that is our actual identity, our already awake Buddha na-

ture. From this spontaneously arises the wisdom of kindness in compassionate lifeworld activity.

The *bardos* (intervals) of life and death are then, a continuous unified process. Emptiness and its dependently arising phenomena—our concepts of the Two Truths, Absolute Truth and Relative Truth—are one and the same (*samata*) non-discursive unbroken whole, the transpersonal, transconceptual, discursively ineffable but not contemplatively ineffable, utterly nondual one truth. This is the truth that transcends yet embraces all our cognitive operations, body, mind and spirit.

Thus, impermanent, relative phenomena arise only interdependently from the infinite vast expanse of their prior causal nexus, the infinite potential of their emptiness base (*gzhi*) or primordial sourceground (*cittata, cittadhatu*). This Supreme Source (*cittadhatu*) is Ultimate Truth (*paramartha satya*) that is Reality Itself (*dharmata/chos nyid*). This is, broadly construed, the ultimate mode of being for all the interdependent things and beings of the spacetime dimension of Relative Truth (*samvriti satya*). Independently existing permanent phenomena, arising *ex nihilo*, from nothing, independent of prior causes and conditions is not logically or empirically possible, therefore quite unbelievable. A bit of a problem for Western and Eastern monotheism, and Big Bang cosmology. If phenomena were really separate and independent, how could one thing effect or interact with another? This is the intractable “interaction problem” of epistemological dualism in both the East and West.

Thus, matter and Spirit, Science and Spirituality—these two seemingly incommensurable paradigms—participate together in a dialectic that is one luminous unbroken whole. And herein abides the diaphanous beauty (*awaré*) of impermanent, empty, selfless, continuous change. When you really look, you can see it—the great outshining beauty of it. This is the basis of the sublime in human experience.

So, if the objective and subjective phenomena of reality do not ultimately exist and are *ultimately* “unfindable” after 2,500 years of philosophical, scientific and *noetic* (mind/spirit) analysis, we must ask how it is that phenomena *appear* to exist.

The question is not *whether* they exist but *how* they exist. They exist, but not in the manner in which we perceive them. They lack any discrete, intrinsic reality. This absence, or emptiness, of inherent existence is their ultimate nature... It is critical to understand that *Madhyamaka* does not say that things are absent of inherent existence mainly because they cannot be found when sought through critical analysis. This is not the full argument. Things and events are said to be absent of inherent or intrinsic existence because *they exist only in dependence on other factors*... In other words, anything that depends on other factors is devoid of its own independent nature, and this absence of an independent nature is emptiness... Nagarjuna says that things and events, which are dependently originated, are empty, and thus are also dependently designated... [He] concludes there is nothing that is not empty, for there is nothing that is not dependently originat-

ed. Here we see the equation between dependent origination and emptiness...the path of the Middle Way, which transcends the extremes of absolutism and nihilism.

—H. H. the Dalai Lama, *Buddhadharma*, Winter 2004, p. 20

How then do phenomena exist? The world is real, not from its own side, but merely nominally, by perceptual and conceptual relative interobjective and intersubjective conventional imputation and designation, the cognitive acts of sentient perceptual and conceptual living nervous systems. Kant, Wittgenstein, Quine, Gödel, Habermas, Kuhn, Wallace and Wilber have translated this wisdom of ontological relativity for the West.

Such intersubjectivity is the essence of the Buddhist view. Buddhist soteriology sees the individual not as an *independent* ego, but as a dependent self-sense self—our relative spacetime bodymind—arising as an *interdependent* being process from a vast bright emptiness, an infinite causal nexus or matrix of prior causes and conditions. In this holistic Middle Way view the ego-I exists, as with all phenomena, not permanently nor absolutely, but only nominally and *relatively*, through its own cognition, namely conceptual imputation and designation. We have hitherto bestowed the epithet “Ontological Relativity” upon this process. *Ultimately* however, all the phenomena of reality are “empty of self-nature,” utterly devoid of any shred of essential or intrinsic existence. So, is arising reality just a nihilistic illusion?

On this middle way Buddhist view there is inherent existence neither in Being Itself, nor in non-being, nor in the spacetime dimension of Becoming. *Madhyamaka* master Nagarjuna’s “tetralemma refutation” refutes 1) reified existence, 2) nihilistic non-existence, 3) both existence and non-existence, and 4) neither existence nor non-existence. How then do the *Prasangika Madhyamikas*—Nagarjuna, Chandrakirti, Tsongkhapa, Mipham—refute the *Svatantrika Madhyamika* and the *Cittamatra* “Mind Only School” charges of nihilism and skepticism? Once again, nihilism is avoided by accomplishing the delicate balance between negating too much of reality (nihilism), and negating too little (absolutism/eternalism/substantialism).

“Existence is the view of realism. Non-existence is the view of nihilism. Therefore the wise abide neither in existence nor non-existence” (Nagajuna/Garfield 1995). *Prasangikas* then, make no assertions as to true or false, valid or invalid, existence or non-existence. They cannot even assert that they make no assertions. For example, to assert non-existence implies an existence to negate. A radical middle way indeed. Philosophers call such arguments “*reductio ad absurdum*,” the process of formal reasoning that derives a contradiction from a set of premises, then concludes that the entire argument is fallacious.

So, dependently arising spacetime phenomena really do exist conventionally—they are established by *interdependent* relative-conventional minds—yet they are devoid of any *independent* intrinsic or absolute existence (Newland 2009). Just so, emptiness itself, the conceptual luminous basal primordial sourceground is likewise empty of inherent existence. It’s not so much that arising form is empty, but that there is only emptiness. It’s emptiness all the way up, and emptiness and all the way down. And this we know, is the “emptiness of emptiness.” Yet, there is this impetuous brightness, this luminous clarity of emptiness, as we shall see.

Thus does Buddhist Middle Way *Prasangika* avoid the skeptics and the deconstructionist charge of “logocentrism,” an absolute logos—theistic creator God, Brahman substrate—the logical contradiction that is a dualistic logocentric creator idol or *eikon* essentially separate from its creations. If God is a transcendent, independent, separate “other,” how does He interact with His creation (the “problem of evil” and the dualist interaction problem)? Therefore, the emptiness nature of nondual Ultimate Reality cannot be primordially signified. Derrida’s clamorous critique of logocentric absolutes obtains. But the *Prasangika* Buddhist view of emptiness is not logocentric. Rather, Ultimate Reality is empty of any shred of primordially signified intrinsic essential existence. Interactions occur only in the relative conventional world of spacetime, the intersubjective perspectival dimension of Relative Truth (*samvriti satya*). His Holiness the Dalai Lama has stated that the *Prasangika* Madhyamaka is the only Buddhist school that does not reify a primordially existent, logocentric, essentially real entity, whether mental/mind or fundamental emptiness itself. Emptiness is itself truly empty and cannot be a logocentric creator producing logocentric spacetime stuff.

**Emptiness objective and subjective.** His Holiness further distinguishes between objective emptiness and subjective emptiness.<sup>1</sup> Objective emptiness or the “objective luminosity” is a “non-affirming negative phenomenon,” the absence or negation of any independent or intrinsic existence, or independent self. But the Buddha’s Great Emptiness (*mahashunyata*) is not ultimately a non-affirming negative (*prasajya*). In the highest or subtlest view of the nondual tantras—the view of *Prasangika*, *Dzogchen* and Highest Yoga Tantra (*Anuttara yoga tantra*)—negated phenomena appearing to a self as relative-conventional reality are replaced by subjective emptiness (*nay lug*), the affirming clarity and luminosity of the clear light (*‘od gsal/prabhasa*), the nondual cognitive-emotive yogic direct perception (*kensho, pratyaksa*) of the experience of the presence (*vidya/rigpa*) of the pure bright clarity of the emptiness of form (H. H. The Dalai Lama, 2000). The activity of this “wisdom realizing emptiness”—with its complementary the *Madhyamaka* Great Compassion (*mahakaruna*)—is the path to liberation from suffering that is Ultimate Happiness Itself (*mahasuka/paramananda/beatitudo*).

So there remains, after the negation of objective and subjective gross and subtle forms encountered through the form and formless mindfulness, quiescence, introspection and insight practices, a subtler outshining luminosity as the vast expanse of the *Madhyamaka* Great Emptiness manifests itself interdependently as form from the “primordial purity” (*kadag*) of the primordial ground or base (*gzhi*). For Tibetan Buddhists, this fundament of clearlight ground luminosity is the ultimate nature of Reality Itself (*cho-nyid/dharmata*), the nature of primordial consciousness, our very awareness essence or Nature of Mind (*sems nyid/buddhi*) in which, or in whom, human consciousness is an instantiation.

Regarding the *Dzogchen* view of this ultimate base, the three Buddha Bodies or the “*Trikaya* of the Base” that is our supreme source (*cittadhatu*): its *Essence* is emptiness (*shunyata*),

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<sup>1</sup> For some finer points of this teaching see *The Nature of Mind, The Buddhist View: Sutra, Tantra and Dzogchen*, ©David Paul Boaz, 2006, [www.davidpaulboaz.org](http://www.davidpaulboaz.org).

its *Nature* is luminosity (luminous clarity/*gsal ba*), its *Energy* emanates continuously as the great *cosmic gift* (*jinlab*) of compassion that is light/motion/form (*tsal/rolba*) arising, and in human conduct as wisdom/compassion (*thugs re*) for the sake of all beings (*Dzogchen, The Great Perfection*). “Within the essence original wakefulness which is primordially pure (*kadag*) manifests the nature, a radiance which is spontaneously present” (*lhundrub*). (Mipham Rinpoche).

Thus, we must negate objective and subjective arising phenomena. But again, as Tsongkhapa reminds us (Newland 2009), we must know and correctly identify the negandum, for if we *negate too much* of this arising, appearing reality we depart the Middle Way and fall into dark nihilism (*ucchedavada*) where our compassionate ethical precepts and conduct have no basis for motivating us on our lifeworld path. Here our choices and actions don’t really matter. If we *negate too little* of this form arising from its emptiness base we fall into the opposite extreme of absolutism, substantialism or eternalism (*sarvastavada*), reifying then clinging to desiremind phenomena and failing to accomplish the liberating nondual wisdom of emptiness. “Keep your view as high as the sky, your deeds as fine as barely flour” (Guru Rinpoche, Padmasambhava).

Our separate self-sense, the narcissistic independently existing ego-I, is at first necessary to develop our view and ethical sense, Kant’s “moral law within us.” This sense of a permanent self at first serves as a vehicle for managing our relative conventional existence and our ostensible development or “progress” on the Path, as we have seen. “We must become somebody before we can be nobody.” It takes some “ego strength” to deconstruct the ego. But this self cannot be an independent, permanently existing entity. It is rather, a dependently arising, impermanent, intersubjectively relative-conventional, merely spacetime existence. Yet it is a real existence. Thus do the *Madhyamaka* schools of the *Mahayana* accomplish a Middle Way between these two destructive extremes that are absolutism and nihilism.

But let us remember, “*madhya*” or “middle” also connotes a negation, so the *Madhyamaka* is the Middle Way path that is no-path. Thus we cannot cling to or defend even this excellent balance that is the Middle Way lest it too become the ideology of a “false idol” of a logocentric absolute. Indeed, we have nothing at all to cling to. Yet, there is here, at the Heart this gentle brightness—mirrored by the spiritual master—a support beyond all concept and belief. It is this presence (*vidya/rigpa*) that protects and sustains the practitioner on the path to the happiness (*mahasuka*) of freedom, our liberation from the ignorance (*avidya*) that is suffering.

Why is this ontological negation of the self-sense of the ego- I—the emptiness or “no-self of the individual”—so important? Because it is our defense of the Attractions and Aversions of Narcissus, this non-essential but all too real self-sense that causes the fearful negative afflictive emotions—anger/aggression/fear, pride/envy, desire/ attachment/greed that is ignorance (*avidya/marigpa*), the root cause of human suffering and unhappiness. “All the evil, fear and suffering of this world is the result of attachment to the self” (Shantideva).

**The Two Truths and the Four Noble Truths.** What then shall we do with this precious life we’ve been given? For liberation from the ignorance that is suffering the Buddha taught the *Four Noble Truths*. 1. *Life is filled with suffering*. There are different kinds of suffering: physi-

cal and emotional pain; the free-floating anxiety that is the preconscious fear of death; general dissatisfaction with the adversity of life; the suffering of change and uncertainty; and the suffering of the negative afflictive emotions. 2. *Suffering has a cause*. This cause of suffering is ignorance (*avidya/marigpa*) of the true nature of things as empty/selfless, impermanent and interdependent. From this arises the ego self-sense that then causes Attraction and Aversion which lead to the destructive negative emotions (fear, anger, greed, pride). 3. *There is release from suffering*. If we liberate ourselves from conscious and preconscious ignorance we liberate ourselves from suffering. 4. *The Eightfold Path* is the medicine, the life practice that accomplishes this awakening liberation that transcends even the flourishing that is relative happiness (*felicitas*, relative *eudaemonia*), and results in the fruition of the perfect Happiness Itself (*mahasuka*, *paramananda*, ultimate *eudaemonia*, *beatitudo*) that is the full *bodhi* of Buddhahood.

In the *Prasannapada*, Chandrakirti's great commentary on Nagarjuna's *Exposition of the Middle Way*, we learn of the natural interrelationship of the Buddha's Two Truths: relative form and ultimate emptiness that is its intrinsic nature, to the Buddha's Four Noble Truths. Chandrakirti reasons that, if we will first postulate the interrelated prior unity of the luminous emptiness base and its arising interdependent phenomenal appearances ("form is emptiness, emptiness is form"), we can then postulate and understand the casual connection, the cause and effect relationship, between the first two Noble Truths—*The Truth of Suffering* and *The Truth of the Cause/Origin of Suffering*. This causal connection is the natural law of karma—thought, intention, action and effect (positive and negative imprints).

Karma is, according to His Holiness the Dalai Lama, a subset of the general scientific law of causality—the Causal Principle—that governs the realm of relative-conventional spacetime reality, the reality dimension of Relative Truth (*samvriti satya*). Thus, from ignorance (*avidya*) arises concept mind (*manovijnana*) and with it the adventitious Attraction and Aversion that causes the egoic negative afflictive emotions—fear, anger, greed and pride—and attachment to the self (*klesha*-desire mind/*klishtamanovijnana*) that results in the causal, karmic mental and emotional imbalances that produce the destructive behavior that causes suffering.

The positive emotions of Buddhism's Four Boundless States (The Four Immesurables)—the positive mindstates of loving kindness, compassion, joy and contemplative equanimity—result in a causal-karmic mental and emotional balance and stability that produce the behavior that causes happiness. We reap what we sow. What we give is what we get. "*What you are is what you have been. What you will be is what you do now*" (Shakyamuni, the Buddha).

Thus, on the accord of Chandrakirti, from an understanding of the prior unity of the selfless emptiness and the dependent (interdependent) arising of form (*pratitya*, *samutpada/tendrel*) we can understand the causal relationship between these First and Second Noble Truths. Then we may consider the possibility of a way to the final cessation of suffering—of its cause or origin—a path or bridge to liberation from this ignorance and imbalance (*avidya/marigpa/ajnana*) that is the root cause of human suffering.

Thus follows the Buddha's Third Noble Truth, *The Truth of the Cessation of Suffering*. And if this cessation is possible—and by the demonstration of the lives of all the buddhas and *mahasiddhas* of our Great Wisdom Tradition, it clearly is possible—we can then postulate and un-



derstand the Fourth Noble Truth, *The Eightfold Path* that is the praxis, the mind training prescription or program of both gradualist dualistic and nondual practice that is the spiritual path.

This path (*marga/lam*) transforms (attentional plasticity) habitual, deep background intersubjective negative mental, emotional and attentional imbalances or mindstates into our indwelling natural innate transcendent wisdom of emptiness, the *Prajnaparamita*, Great Mother of all the buddhas, the “perfection of wisdom” that is the end of this ignorance that is suffering. This is the great truth that realizes and actualizes our primordial source or ground state (*dharmakaya*), and beyond, to the ultimate perfection of buddhahood, perfectly awakened state and activity of being in form that is always already present and fully awake within each one of us from the very beginning. “The child knows the mother.” As H.H. the Dalai Lama told, “Just open the door”.

The result or fruition of the Eightfold Path is the gradual (“brief moments many times”), then sudden permanent non-conceptual realization of the state of this very real transcendental perfection of wisdom (*prajnaparamita*)—the luminous wisdom of emptiness. This state is decidedly not mere conceptual speculation. The weight of our entire contemplative Wisdom Tradition grounds this view and path in some version of the practice of meditative quiescence (*shamatha*), penetrating insight (*vipashyana*) and compassionate (*karuna*) lifeworld conduct under the guidance of, and with great devotion to the spiritual master.

Here the beginning practitioner takes refuge in the *Three Jewels*—the living Vajra Master viewed as the *Buddha*, then the *Dharma* that is the teaching of the Buddha, and finally the *Sangha*, the Buddhist spiritual community, as well as the *rigzin sangha*, the lineage of all enlightened beings of the timeless three times—past, present, future. These three generate the *la*/energy that nourishes, holds and protects the practitioner on this difficult journey to the fruit of enlightenment, the compassionate ultimate happiness that cannot be lost. “The fruit is no different at the pinnacle of enlightenment than it is at the primordial base” (Lama Rinpoche).

According to H. H. The Dalai Lama, all states of consciousness—negative or positive—indeed all phenomena are pervaded by this luminous clear light wisdom of emptiness that is the “wish fulfilling jewel” of Primordial Awareness Wisdom Itself (gnosis/jnana/yeshe) (H. H. The Dalai Lama, 2000). From this ground it all arises, dwells, and into this it all returns, with no *essential* separation at all. The dynamic intrinsic awareness, this “always already” present primordial wisdom heart presence—*vidya/rigpa*—of our “supreme source” (*cittadhatu*) is who we actually are.

All limbs of the Buddha’s teaching have this one purpose—to lead us to the nondual primordial wisdom. It participates in and pervades all views and paths for one who is capable of accessing it... All things flow from emptiness, and return again to emptiness. This is dependent arising...the dynamic display of the mind. This is the true nature of arising phenomena, the very nature of reality itself.

—Lama Rinpoche

It's good to remember, moment to moment, wherever we go, whatever we do, the great truth that this always present wisdom presence is our actual "supreme identity." *Tat Tvam Asi*. That I Am.

**Knowing and feeling: the unity of wisdom and compassion.** The Buddhist *Mahamudra*, *Madhyamaka* and *Dzogchen* traditions agree: nondual realization and perfection of the ultimate truth of the Nature of Mind (*sems nyid*), Ultimate Reality Itself (*chos nyid*), luminous emptiness (*shunyata*), Absolute *Bodhicitta* of the *Trikaya of the Base* can be accomplished neither by the ambulations of common conceptual mind, nor by reflective intellect, nor by the "attentional stability, brilliant clarity and joy" of contemplative quiescence practices, although all of these are requisite aspects or stages of the path.

According to the highest or subtlest *Madhyamaka* and tantric teachings, even realized contemplative quiescence (realized *shamatha*) is not altogether free of conceptual grasping and contrivance (ignorance/*avidya*)—though it is often mistaken to be so. Mind training in reflective conceptual understanding, and also in meditative quiescence and equipoise must be unified with the compassionate heartmind of Relative *Bodhicitta* (both aspirational and active engaged)—the "mind of enlightenment"—and with the parallel wisdom of penetrating insight (*vipashyana*), attained through the noetic contemplative analysis of insight practice under the guidance of a qualified master.

As these "two legs of enlightenment"—wisdom and compassion—are unified, habitual seeking and material and conceptual grasping at happiness, even the Great Happiness of liberation, are liberated. Now realization of the utterly unmediated awareness continuum—dynamic intrinsic awareness wisdom—that is always already present in our everyday "ordinary mind" streaming from the primordial base or ground is effortlessly and spontaneously accomplished. The ultimate perfection of this process is *Buddhahood*. (For extensive documentation see B. Alan Wallace, *Balancing the Mind*, 2005, p. 230, and his *The Attention Revolution*, 2006. For esoteric wholeness fundamentals see Anne C. Klein's *Unbounded Wholeness*, 2006, and for the inseparable relationship of reflective conceptual thought to nondual mystical experience see Anne Klein's *Knowledge and Liberation*, 1998. For transforming the destructive emotions see Lama Tsultrim Allione's *Feeding Your Demons*, 2008. For an excellent translation of Longchenpa's teaching on the three *Dzogchen* instruction cycles see Keith Dowman's *Old Man Basking in the Sun*, 2006).

To "spiritually" recognize, then realize and perfect this vast emptiness Nature of Mind—the clear light of the mind beyond the deep cultural background "web of belief" that is the mind's mere cognitive contents—is to realize the temporal impermanence (*anitya*) of ego-self in time, and the utter absence (*shunya*) of it in space. The on-going failure of realization in the former instance might be termed *objective dualism*, in the latter instance, *subjective dualism*. The normal, unhappy result is the two aspects of ignorance (*avidya*), or "missing the mark" (*hamartia/sin*). These two are *secondary ignorance* or clinging to the sense of self (the ego-I) in space and time, and *primary ignorance*, grasping at reified spacetime phenomena as substantial, permanent, eternal and absolute or ultimate (Boaz, 2004).

Therefore, according to the greater esoteric or nondual "innermost secret" Buddhist View—*Dzogchen*, *Essence Mahamudra*, *Definitive Madhyamaka* and *Saijojo Zen*—this emptiness

residue of self cannot be nihilistic nothingness or utter non-being. Rather, this reality is the prior unity of emptiness and awareness that is the very ground luminosity, the potential of everything that arises. This is “The Bright” of the Upanishads (“Upanishadic Monism,” Atman Self and Brahman are One), the monadic *gnosis*, radiant essential basal clearlight mind nature itself. This then is the *knowing* aspect of liberation. As this basal Primordial Awareness Wisdom (*gnosis, jnana, yeshe*) becomes truly manifest in the lifeworld as the wisdom of kindness, and then the permanent and profound *activity* (not emotion) of loving compassion (*karuna*) for the welfare of all living beings, it becomes, in direct proportion to that, our own ultimate happiness (*beatitudo/mahasukha/paramananda*), Happiness Itself.<sup>2</sup> This is the *feeling* or emotional aspect (*ishta, bhakti*, devotion) of liberation.

The “always already” present, indwelling innate, intrinsic and spontaneous presence (*vidya/rigpa, lhundrub*) of this primordial wisdom happiness is who we are now. It cannot be found outside, in the past, or in the future. This primordial dynamic intrinsic awareness is the ontic prior unity of appearance and emptiness. “Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.” Because this emptiness base (*gzhi*) or sourceground (*cittadhatu*) is utterly untainted and primordially pure, all thought and concept, even our negative emotions are apertures opening into the depth of this all pervasive primordial purity (*kadag*)—if that is, we can surrender these defiling concepts at the instant of their arising. *Indeed, the great paradox (to the relative mind) is that everything that arises from this purity of the Base is already perfectly self-liberated and utterly free of conceptual elaboration and negative emotional corruption—empty in essence, luminous clarity by nature, and spontaneously compassionate in its expression. Thus, “as it is already accomplished” we effortlessly and spontaneously “relax into it,” this very moment (Appendix D). “Rest your weary mind and let it be as it is; all things are perfect exactly as they are” (Shakyamuni Buddha).*

Such is the Buddhist Middle Way *Prasangika* view of the Nature of Mind. And this, according to H. H. the Dalai Lama, is compatible with, even complementary to the *Dzogchen* view, the former offering theoretical, the latter offering practical approaches to liberation. It is this Buddhist view that suggests a centrist middle way between the seeming incommensurable paradigms of existence and non-existence, of objective and subjective, of Science and Spirituality.

These two—luminous knowing and compassionate feeling—pervade the unity of outer, inner, secret and innermost secret (nondual) understanding of the emptiness (*shunyata*), selflessness (*anatman*), impermanence (*anitya*) and interdependence (*pratitya samutpada/tendrel*) of esoteric Buddhism’s gradual yet always “already accomplished” path to liberation from the ignorance that is suffering. Such an understanding is both origin and aim of all our seeking.

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<sup>2</sup> In the Middle Way (*Madhyamaka*) *Mahayana* there are three kinds of compassion: exoteric/outer, esoteric/inner, and greater esoteric or nondual “innermost secret.” The first is relative, directed toward sentient beings. The second, toward the ignorance (*avidya/marigpa*) that causes the suffering of beings. The third is absolute, the equanimity of resting in the dynamic intrinsic awareness of the nondual state of presence (*vidya/rigpa*) of the Supreme Source (*cittadhatu*). This compassion without an object is the innermost esoteric/secret unity of compassion and the wisdom of emptiness. From emptiness, compassion spontaneously arises. Through compassion, emptiness is realized. There is no essential difference. They are the same (*samata*), a prior unity.