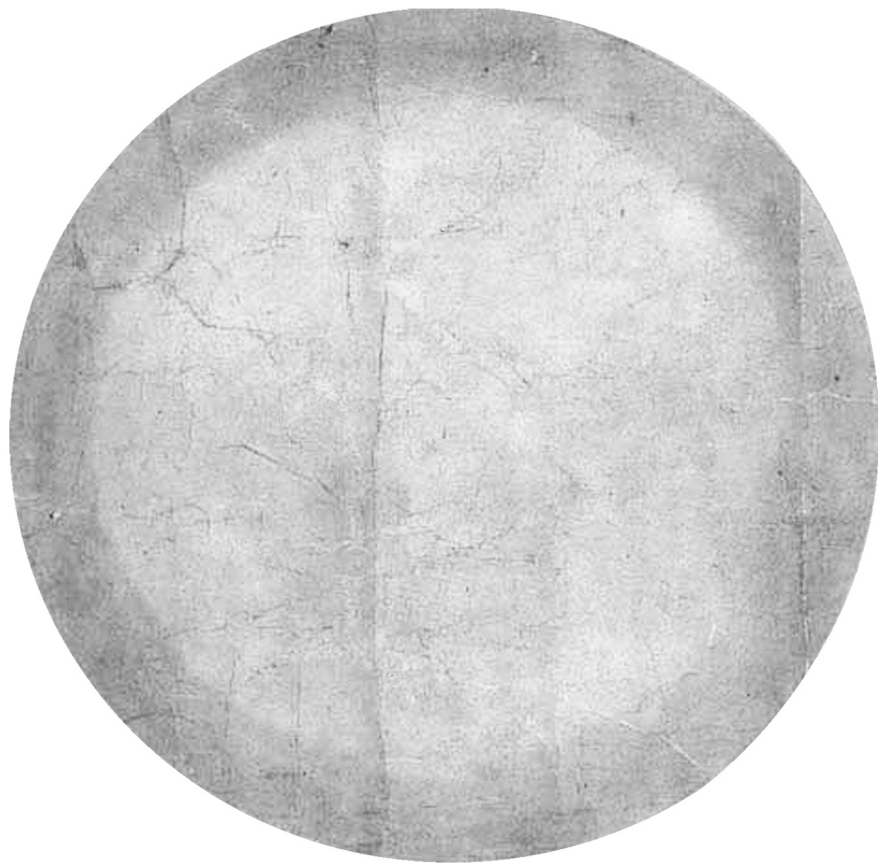


Emptiness

Panacea



Philosophy
& Experience

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

Emptiness *Panacea*

Philosophy and Experience

WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

Originally published by Wim van den Dungen as *Emptiness Panacea* (2008), *Ultimate Logic* (2009) and *Guided Insight Meditations on Emptiness* (2014) at www.bodhi.sofiatopia.org

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Contents

Preface	xiv
Introduction	1
PART I : Philosophy of Emptiness	15
1 The <i>Dharma</i> and <i>Yāna</i> of the Buddha	17
2 The First Turning : the Basics	30
1 The Four Signs and the Four Thoughts	48
2 Recognizing the Three Sufferings	56
3 Not Putting Up With It	58
4 Ceasing Suffering : the Two Truths	60
5 The Three Higher Trainings	67
3 Perception and Sensation	72
1 Naked and Natural Perception	76
2 Conditioned Perception	80
3 Establishing Sensate Objects	83
4 The Argument of Illusion	89
5 The Body/Mind Problem	95
4 The Seven Stages of Cognition	129
1 Mythical Thought	138
2 Pre-Rational Thought	142
3 Proto-Rational Thought	145

4 Formal (Rational) Thought	149
5 Critical Thought	152
6 Creative Thought	157
7 Nondual Thought	159
5 Conceptual Knowledge	163
1 Definition of Mind	163
2 The Base of Designation	178
3 The Mind as Designator	182
4 The Object of Designation	185
6 The Conditions of Conventional Truth	190
1 The Object of Knowledge	192
2 The Subject of Knowledge	194
3 Conventional Truth and Coherence	196
4 Methodological Realism and Idealism	198
5 Conventional Truth and Metaphysical Speculation	200
7 The Second Turning : Compassion	202
1 Ending the Mind of Self-Cherishing	204
2 The Three Motivations : Small, Middling, Large	211
3 Calm Abiding and Jhāna Yoga	215
4 Insight Meditation	239
5 The Itinerary	243

8 The Second Turning : Emptiness	249
1 Conventional versus Ultimate Analysis	254
2 Imputational, Dependent and Perfect Functions	257
3 Self-Grasping : the Logic of Reification	265
4 The Four Profundities	268
a) The Profundity of the Ultimate	269
b) The Profundity of the Conventional	269
c) The Profundity of the Two Truths being the Same Entity	270
d) The Profundity of the Two Truths being Distinct	272
5 The Diamond Slivers	275
6 The Sevenfold Analysis	277
7 The Four Essential Points	281
a) The First Point : The Proper Negation	281
b) The Second Point : Sameness ? No	283
c) The Third Point : Difference ? No	284
d) The Fourth Point : Objects Lack Inherent Existence	285
8 The Six Instantiations	288
9 Emptiness of Persons	296
10 Emptiness of Phenomena	297
11 Conventional Truth : Overall Interdependence	298
12 Ultimate Truth : Absence of Inherent Existence	299
13 Reality : One Entity with Two Isolates	301
14 Dependent Origination	306
15 The Five Paths	312

Part II : Ultimate Logic	323
Preamble	325
1 The Primitives	337
1 The Quantors	337
2 The Objects	339
3 The Logical Operators	340
4 The Instantiations	340
5 Miscellaneous	340
2 The Instantiations	341
1 What is Analysed ?	341
2 The Six Instantiations	345
3 Object A	346
3 Logical Instantiation L_A	361
4 Functional Instantiation F_A	363
5 Conventional Instantiation C_A	367
6 Substantial Instantiation $\exists! \exists A$	384
7 Absolute Instantiation $\sim \exists! \exists A$	388
8 Existential Instantiation	390
9 The Fallacy of Substantial Persons	393
10 The Fallacy of Substantial Phenomena	401

11 Two Middle Way Logics	405
12 Proximate Emptiness	412
13 Ultimate Logic in Thirty Steps	423
PART III : Experiencing Emptiness	435
1 Deepening the Right View	448
1 Meditations by Way of the Tenets Ladder	450
a) Preliminary Practices	452
b) Vaibhāṣika – Sarvāstivāda : Great Exposition School	463
c) Sautrāntika : Sūtra School	473
d) Cittamātra : Mind-Only School	479
e) Madhyamaka : Middle Way School	497
f) Mahāmadyamaka	510
e) Comparative Table	516
2 Preparing Prāsaṅgika Meditation	519
a) The Non-Affirmative Negation	520
b) The Object of Negation	523
c) The Mind of Superior Seeing	527
2 Insight Meditation	529
1 Universal Selflessness	532
2 The Right View	537
3 Dependent Origination	540

PART IV : Other-Emptiness	541
1 The Third Turning	543
1 Turning towards the Nature of Mind	547
2 Bodhi Potential or Buddha Within ?	550
3 Direct Yogic Perceivers	559
4 The Jonangpa Order	563
5 Mahāmudrā	571
6 Mahāsandhi, Ati-Yoga and Dzogchen	581
2 The Harmony of the Two Emptinesses	588
3 Emptiness as Supreme Antidote	601
Epilogue	606
Glossary	615
Notes	631
Bibliography	652
About the Author	681
Index	682

List of Illustrations

Figure 1 : *Buddha Śākyamuni*, thangka, private collection

Figure 2 : *Protector Mañjusrī*, thangka, private collection

Figure 3 : *Buddhapada*, limetone slab from the Great Stupa of Amaravati, 2st century BCE, British Museum (1880,0709.57)

Figure 4 : *Aṣṭamaṅgala* or sacred suite of Eight Auspicious Signs : conch, endless knot, fish, lotus, parasol, vase, wheel and victory banner, here represented in one symbol

Figure 5 : *Egg Diagram of the Psyche* (Assagioli), adapted

Figure 6 : *Lama Je Tsongkhapa*, thangka, private collection

Figure 7 : *Sword of Wisdom*, private collection

Figure 8 : *Avalokiteśvara*, thangka, private collection

Figure 9 : *Maṇi Banner*, private collection

Figure 10 : *Vajrasattva and Vajrasattvatmika*, thangka, private collection

Figure 11 : *Padmasambhāva*, thangka, private collection

Figure 12 : *Samantabhadra*, thangka, private collection

Figure 13 : *The Medicine Buddha*, thangka, pigment and gold on cotton, 104 x 82.7 cm (41 x 32,5 inch), The Art Institute of Chicago, Central Tibet, 14th century (Kate S.Buckingham Fund, 1996.29)

‘For whom emptiness is possible,
Everything is possible.
For whom emptiness is not possible,
Nothing is possible.’

Nāgārjuna, *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*, XXIV:14

‘All of these practices were taught
By the Mighty One for the sake of wisdom.
Therefore those who wish to pacify suffering
Should generate this wisdom.’

Śāntideva, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*, IX:1

Preface

This book may be condensed into four words : ‘no substance, only process’. If understood, quench the fire driving you to read it.

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is the heart of the Buddhayāna, the ‘vehicle’ (*yāna*) of the Buddha. *Śūnyatā* is the noun form of the adjective *śūnya*, meaning ‘void, zero, nothing and empty’, from the root *śvi*, or ‘hollow’. But emptiness does not mean ‘nothing’, and instead refers to the *absence* of something, to the fact an object has been negated, is deemed *not* to be present and nowhere to be found. So, the ‘zero’ is not mathematical, as if emptiness would be nothingness, but stands for a second order, pointing to what is *not* there amongst what is given. What is found wanting ? A certain common way of existence entertained by most of us ...

Subjectively, any enduring, settled sense of ‘I’ or ‘me’ in lacking. ‘I-am-ness’ (*asmitā*), giving rise to what Buddhist yogis call ‘self-love’ (*ātmasneha*), is the root of all possible ‘foes’ or mental and affective disturbances. When the base of the mind is turned (*āśraya-parāvṛtti*), a *liberated* state ensues. This mind no longer attends the aggregates (*skandhas*) as permanent, but as impermanent ; not fixating or holding on to anything (the liberation of the Arhat).

Objectively, emptiness refers to the absence of inherent existence, to the fact no independent, self-existent and permanent stuff can be found anywhere. The Bodhisattva may fully awake to this ultimate property of all existing things called ‘emptiness’, thus entering what is the case (*tathātā*) or Buddhahood.

At Bodh Gaya, Siddhārtha Gautama, the ‘prince’ of the clan of the Śākya's, completely realized, without any sense of ‘I’ or ‘mine’, the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena and entered *nirvāṇa* as Buddha Śākyamuni, the Awakened One (*bodhi*). Not long after, his extraordinary *dharma* about selflessness (*anātman*) –because of its salvic effect– touched all walks of Indian life, moved beyond the social system (of casts), appealed to both poor and rich, causing a social revolution, a new monastic system and a strictly nominalist mindset. This contrasted starkly with Hindu substantialism.

After creatively interacting with Hinduism for many centuries, the bloody violence of an invading Islam would force Buddhism out of India, influencing countless nations and finally the world at large.

In Theravāda, *anātman* is the realization a self-sufficient, fixed self does not exist, *in casu* the non-existence of the Hindu *ātman* or *puruṣa*. This contrasts with the Mahāyāna intent to realize the absence of any permanency, to identify an *impossible way for things to exist*. In the West, Madhyamaka literature expounding universal emptiness is largely based on Indo-Tibetan logic, epistemology and Buddhology, on the potent tenet-approach, and on the insistence Nāgārjuna's view is definitive, and so the best philosophical view (*prajñā*). Suppose Western-based epistemology, linguistics, neurophilosophy were used to explain text and practice ...

In Tibet, absence of 'self', subjective as well as objective, or self-emptiness, is the view of Tsongkhapa's Gelugpas ; '*rangtong*' (self-emptiness). They are strong on logic, epistemology and reason. But at best, they realize a contrived, fabricated, proximate ultimate. This top class understanding does not generate a *continuous* quasi unconscious (automatic) operator busy with ongoingly zeroing the reification of concepts in the cognizing mindstream. Mainly during Emptiness Meditation is the emptiness of this-or-that object realized. While extraordinary, it is still the mind fooling the mind.

Yogis maintain a contrasting view, called '*shentong*' or other-emptiness. This outlook is held by prominent members of various Tibetan monastic orders, like the Nyingmapas, Kagyupas and Jonangpas, adhering to *mahāmadyamaka*, accepting the claim Nāgārjuna's view is definitive, but introducing a fully enlightened Inner Buddha (*tathāgatagarbha*).

To avoid sectarianism, the approach of the non-partisan *rimé*-movement is helpful. While Rangtong proves to be the best philosophical approach (*prajñā* as *sophia*), Shentong is the best yogic take (*jñāna* as *gnosis*), explaining the path of direct, naked cognition (prehension), practicing mindfulness in every moment (the root *jñā*, to know, is the same as the root *gno* in *gnosis*). At worst, Shentong produces bad philosophy and Rangtong a weak practice. Beyond wanting to explain the Tibetan Prāsaṅgika by also contrasting it with its oppo-

nents, the case Rangtong is definitive and Shentong provisional (interpretative) is very strong, if not finally settled. But those who recognize the Inner Buddha, no doubt experience *gnosis* and are able to irreversibly end all self-grasping.

This book gives body to my intent to help understand emptiness, so its *salvic power* may benefit as many as possible. This is related to the fact common Emptiness Meditation clears emotional and mental afflictions, whereas 'seeing' emptiness is a nondual state of mind, fostering nondual perception, nondual thought and nondual action. These aspects of the awake mind lack substance-obsession, heal the obscurations, and end the conflicts resulting from a lack of actions uprooting suffering. This is compassion in each and every moment, doing what Buddhas do.

It was a daunting task to try to find Ariadne's thread in a significant selection from the *corpus* of English texts on the subject published in the last 50 years by this large assembly of Rinpoches, scholars, yogis, students and devotees of the five schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

I thank them from the bottom of my heart, in particular H.H. the XIVth Dalai Lama. By mentioning him, I mention them all.

No doubt this book is provisional, incomplete and depending on the many limitations of my mind. I apologize for the mistakes and always remain open to learn.

I dedicate the merits of this effort to the Field of Merit. I pray all sentient beings may benefit and recognize their Buddha Within and thus find *true* peace.

Wim van den Dungen
Brasschaat
September 2017



Fig. 1 Buddha Śākyamuni

OM MUNI MUNI MAHĀMUNI ŚĀKYAMUNI SVĀHĀ

Introduction

Over two and a half millennia ago, Indian thought was a *mélange* of spiritual teachings, mostly rooted in the *Vedas*. Philosophy, an integral part of spiritual inquiry, and ontology in particular, sought to understand how phenomena (persons, things, events) existed. Have they something in common ? Or something they all share ? What is the ultimate reality of how they exist ? Answers (or views) served the path towards the fruit of salvation, the liberation (*mokṣa*) from cyclic existence (*saṃsāra*).

In many ways, Buddha's teachings conformed to and developed from these orthodox Brahmin teachings. Brahmanism was the religion of the orthodox. Various religious groups rose in relation to and reaction against Vedic thought. Around 700 BCE if not earlier, Brahmins, Jains, non-vedic renunciants and a variety of sects shared views concerning karmic law, cyclic existence and liberation. They trained in countless ethical guidelines and yogic practices and exchanged these with others. The Buddhadharma was part of this mix. What was its outstanding feature ?

Buddha Śākyamuni's message is simple : we all search for happiness and fail to find it because we are looking for it in the wrong way. To end this defect, an understanding of the nature of reality different than the habitual one is called for. His contemporaries either rejected the idea all existents share a common, ultimate property, rooting their understanding in nihilism⁽¹⁾, or they vehemently affirmed ultimate reality to be eternal and existing by its own power. Avoiding the extremes of luxury and abject mortification, Buddha proposed a Middle Way, later reformulated as steering away from both a self-sufficient ultimate reality (eternalism) and the total absence of common ground (annihilationism). The Middle Way is an expedient to enlightenment Buddha realized *after* his life as prince, traditional yogi and ascetic ! The wisdom of the Buddha is not speculative, for the need to realize *how reality ultimately exists* is driven by salvic necessity ! Without this, our ignorance never stops. Given delusion, craving and hatred cannot be eradicated and happiness remains elusive. Without the wisdom realizing the ultimate nature of what exists, freedom is impossible. All depends on eliminating reification of self and of others.

Born of delusion and natural law (*karma*), all sentient beings are caught up in cyclic existence. Without insight into how reality truly exists, we are powerless to break away from this vicious farce. Buddha's worldview is soteriological, not merely an understanding of the world. He seeks to *deliver* all sentient beings, *irreversibly* ending their suffering (*duḥkha*). This he shares with other Indian spiritual teachers, but the way he goes about doing it is wholly different and unorthodox.

The cause of our ignorance is an ongoing *misapprehension*, misconceiving the true way things exist. Instinctively and intellectually, we are *trapped* in an ignorance *ascribing existence to something which has none*. We are mostly not even aware of this misknowledge.

Buddha was being revolutionary when he affirmed sentient beings to have 'no self' (*anātman*), i.e. that they lacked fixed, permanent, unchanging, solid, uncaused existence. In the Vedic context, such an assertion was outrageous, for all other spiritual teachers upheld the idea a transcendent, eternal essence existed. Realizing this soul or self (*ātman*), this 'great man' (*puruṣa*) was the only way to be freed from the chains of cyclic existence and its ongoing suffering. For Buddha, absence of inherent existence is the pivotal property on which all of *saṃsāra* hangs on. Failing to see this, is the cause of it all. From this basic mental obscuration, two branches spring: on the one hand, craving, exaggerated attachment or attraction, and, on the other, hatred, exaggerated aversion or rejection. These two reactive tendencies of the mind, triggering affirmation and negation, acceptance and rejection, pulling in and driving out, give birth to a vast array of emotional afflictions.

'All desire, hatred, enmity, jealousy, and so forth are seen as relying on a false estimation of the nature of oneself, other persons, and other phenomena; therefore, *penetration of reality is at the heart of the practice of purification* in that realization of the actual nature of things serves to undermine all afflictive emotions. The aim is to emerge as a source of help and happiness for other beings, who are viewed as close friends wandering in a prison of cyclic repetition of birth, aging, sickness and death.' – Hopkins, *Emptiness Yoga*, 1995, p.37, my italics.

The most important hurdle is to *understand* what is at hand. The Eightfold Path leading to the cessation of suffering begins with the Right View. So to end our predicament, we have to *truly know reality the best way we rationally can*. This Right View has, over the course of the millennia, been interpreted in many different and conflicting ways, giving rise to Buddhist logic and philosophy. Given the numerous disputes, a complex literature unfolded, clouding a clean-cut exposition of the heart of the Buddhadharma.

This book brings into evidence that the correct elucidation of the Right View is given by the Middle Way School (Madhyamaka) founded by Nāgārjuna. In his *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* or *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*, written in the second century of the common era, he lay the groundwork for Madhyamaka ontology, conventional and ultimate. In this work, he refutes *svabhāva*, essence, quiddity or own-nature. Emptiness, the central topic of the present text, refers back to this view of emptiness as lack of independent, inherent, essential or substantial existence.

Some commentators wrongly accused Nāgārjuna of nihilism, claiming he identified emptiness or absence of inherent existence with non-existence. Fact is that vacating substance unconceals process, the dependent-arising of all what exists. Emptiness is not nothingness or non-existence. The less substance-obsession is active, the clearer the interdependent network of events, and the better equipped one is to benefit (oneself and others).

Without the overlay of non-existent delusions, one runs into how dependent origination organizes the universal interconnectedness between all possible phenomena, the sea of interexistent actual occasions.

'The declarations that Nāgārjuna has no views, no thesis or position certainly sound like assertions that he knows nothing at all about how things actually are. Understood in this way, emptiness would be a remedy (*niḥsaraṇam*) for views about how things actually are. Emptiness would mean, then, that Nāgārjuna states that *he has no knowledge of entities in their real nature*. Emptiness would be the emptiness of all knowledge-claims concerning how things really are.' – Burton, *Emptiness Appraised*, 1999, p.31, my italics.

To bring this intention to fruition, contrary to so many great Eastern teachers who extensively and profoundly taught on emptiness in accord with traditional procedures⁽²⁾, Western strict nominalism (Ockham, Kant, Wittgenstein, Whitehead and criticism at large)⁽³⁾ and neurophilosophy⁽⁴⁾ are made part of the present attempt at understanding the ultimate nature of phenomena in terms of the crucial points of the Middle Way School approach, and in tune with contemporary epistemology and general science.

An attempt is made to harmonize transcendental logic and critical epistemology (cf. *Regulae*, 2016) with the decisive teachings regarding how to develop the wisdom realizing the ultimate nature of what exists, namely emptiness. This wisdom is twofold : conceptual (*vikalpa*) and nondual (*nirvikalpa*). While yogic practice (Yogācāra) is key and so integrated, the logic used is derived from Middle Way philosophy in general, and Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka, the Critical Middle Way, in particular.

Emptiness does not mean non-existence.⁽⁵⁾ The wisdom conceptually realizing emptiness (*prajñā*) understands that all phenomena lack permanent, essential properties. When the cognitive error, causing the superimposition of permanency on what is impermanent, completely stops, dependent origination, in other words, the universal interconnectedness of all existents dawns ; this is interexistence fully prehended.

Where can things eternally fixed in their being be found ? With *anātman*, Buddha Śākyamuni merely vacates substantial existence, i.e. existence from one's own side (*svart̥pa-siddhi*), with own-nature, (*svabhāva*) or self-subsisting self (*ātman*, *puruṣa*) ; an existence by way of one's own character (*svalakṣaṇa-siddhi*). Under ultimate analysis, such existence cannot be found. Even to perfect yogis it is non-existent. That's what emptiness is all about. All possible things, whatever they are called and whatever they do, are not substance-based, but process-based. It is that simple.

Because phenomena are empty, they can only exist as relations, they are other-powered. Emptiness is the motor of process, of creative advance in togetherness. The opposite view, attributing substantial form, precludes change, transformation and relation.

When phenomena are not reified, their conventional and ultimate properties appear together and the dependent origination of their names and functions is perfectly understood (*prajñāpāramitā*).

Phenomena can only perfectly interconnect if they are empty, i.e. possess nothing from their own side. To connect, interaction, togetherness and interpenetration must be possible. What is substantial, is eternal. Fixed, it cannot change. Devoid of impermanence, it cannot transform into anything else.

Emptiness is not a noun, but an adjective, a *property* of every phenomenon. When this is realized by reason, the apprehended object, the apprehended knowledge and the apprehender are cognized as impermanent, i.e. changing from moment to moment. This happens precisely because they are in no way fixed or eternalized, totally devoid of substantial form, empty of self. This momentary simultaneity of appearance and its emptiness is the proximate ultimate, for still mediated by the generic idea of emptiness (cf. *infra*). Logic and philosophy, bound to concepts (*vikalpa*), can do no more.

Emptiness is also the direct experience of the yogis, recognizing the supramundane properties of Bodhi-mind, the awake mind, affirming it to be empty of everything other than itself ; just existing. Of this 'seeing emptiness' (*jñāna*) nothing can be said (*nirvikalpa*).

With the Old Translation School (Tib. *snga 'gyur*), as early as the 8th century CE, the stage was set for Tibet to become the storehouse of Indian Buddhism. This school produced the first grand synthesis of all available teachings, pioneering a ninefold vehicle. Thus, Himalayan Buddhadharma was naturally protected from the violent repression striking the subcontinent.

With the New Translation School (Tib. *gsar ma*), emerging in the 11th century, a vast monastic and scholastic tradition took root, remaining relatively undisturbed until 1959, when the XIVth Dalai Lama fled to India, trying to rebuild the institutions outside Tibet.

Since then, the Dharma has been propagated on all continents. Monasteries have been built, and Tibetan Buddhist teachings propagated. The time has come to understand the teachings from a Western perspective.

Tibetan scholasticism integrated the early stages of Indian Buddhism (Lesser Vehicle), as well as Sūtra and Tantra (Vajrayāna). It adopted its own specific categories, like *prāsaṅgika* versus *śvāntarika*, Rangtong versus Shentong, etc. Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya, Jonang and Gelug schools each profess specific practices, both in terms of study, reflection and meditation.⁽⁶⁾

When the iron bird flies, and horses run on wheels, the Tibetan people will be scattered like ants across the world, and the Dharma will come to the land of the Red Man.
– attributed to Padmasambhāva

In terms of philosophy, I accept the definitive nature of the view on emptiness given by Nāgārjuna and his Middle Way Consequence School, the so-called Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka, known in Tibet as Rangtong, ‘self-emptiness’. But in terms of meditative experience, the view of the Great Middle Way School (Shentong, ‘other-emptiness’ or Mahāmadyamaka) is not lost out of sight. The yogis walk the path of devotion and direct experience, and are no longer pre-occupied with preparation and dereification of conceptual operations. In this book, focus lies on understanding the Right View. The following texts identify this as the non-affirmative negation of inherent existence :

- Nāgārjuna (2th CE) : *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (*Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*), *Vigrahavyāvartani* (*The Dispeller of Disputes*) and *Śūyatāsaptatikārikānāma* (*The Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*) ;
- Āryadeva (2th – 3th CE) : *Catuḥśataka* (*Four Hundred Stanzas*) ;
- Candrakīrti (ca. 600 – 650) : *Mādhyamakāvatāra* (*Entering the Middle Way*) ;
- Śāntideva (8th CE) : *Bodhicharyāvatāra* (*A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*) ;
- Atīśa (980 – 1054) : *Satya-dvayāvatā* (*Intro to the Two Truths*) ;
- Tsongkhapa (1357 – 1419) : *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, *The Ocean of Reasoning*, *The Essence of True Eloquence*, *Praise for Dependent Relativity* and *Illumination of Thought* ;
- Wangchuk Dorje (1556 – 1603) : *Feast for the Fortunate*.

Je Tsongkhapa (1357 – 1419), or ‘Man from the Onion Valley’, was a renowned Tibetan Buddhist spiritual reformer, scholar, yogi and tantric. Taking layman's vows at the age of three, he was ordained as ‘Lobsang Drakpa’ (‘Sumati Kīrti’ or ‘Perceptive Mind’), but simply called ‘Je Rinpoche’. He is said to be a manifestation of Mañjuśrī. Founder of the doctrinal and influential Gelug school of Tibetan Buddhism, his direct inspiration came from the Kadam school, initiated by Atiśa (985 – 1054), as well as the Sakya school. He also had Dzogchen teachers.

‘After I pass away,
And my pure doctrine is absent,
You will appear as an ordinary being,
Performing the deeds of a Buddha,
And establishing the Joyful Land,
The Great Protector,
In the Land of the Snows.’
Mañjuśrī-mūla-tantra

Based on Tsongkhapa's teachings, his ‘Yellow Hats’ of the Gelug School have two outstanding characteristics, namely an emphasis on the moral code of discipline and the unity of the paths of Sūtra and Tantra. When he was born in Amdo (northeast Tibet), the grand final compilation of the *Canon* of Tibetan Buddhism (*Kangyur* or *Translated Words* and *Tengyur* or *Translated Treatises*) had just been finished by Bustön (1290 – 1364). Tsongkhapa worked through these teachings thoroughly.

His work fills eighteen volumes, used as textbooks by succeeding generations. Mastery resulted from (a) the study of the Buddhist teachings (through hearing and reading), (b) their critical, reflective examination and (c) their meditative realization. The major results of this important systematic and complete organization of the Buddhadharma (comparable to the *Summa Theologica* of Thomas Aquinas) were presented in the *Lamrim Chenmo* (*Great Discourse on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*) and the *Ngagrim Chenmo* (*Great Discourse on Secret Mantra*).

The influence of these writings of Tsongkhapa, both available in English, was and is enormous, decisive and lasting. The great monasteries of Tibet, such as Sera, Ganden and Drepung, saw the light because of him. In 1409, Tsongkhapa also initiated the Great Prayer Festival (*Monlam Chemno*).

As a Buddhist scholar, Tsongkhapa applied formal logic to the system of the Middle Way founded by Nāgārjuna, *in casu* the Prāsaṅgika-Madhyamaka school, and was therefore a skilful teacher of emptiness. His interpretation is 'critical' Madhyamaka, for its central preoccupations are (a) drawing the line between proper and improper objects of negation defining emptiness and (b) doing so without rejecting conventionality and the need for compassionate action. Tradition is not the ultimate authority, but supportive. The final arbiter is reason, in particular the coherence of the structure of the itinerary of the spiritual path (Tib. *lamrim*). Conceptual thought is not rejected, but integrated.

In Gelug practice, eliminating the sense of inherent existence or own-form (*svabhāva*) or self, is the central cognitive task on the path to awakening, the way to the fruit. The Right View is the absolute absence of inherent existence. The path is the body of practices leading-up to the realization of this view. The fruit is the direct experience of the Right View in the mind of a Buddha.

Wisdom is three-fold. The first level involves 'worldly' wisdom, referring to a supreme form of conventional truth. It is not salvic (does not cease suffering).

The second level is the wisdom realizing emptiness by way of concepts. This is the best possible rational understanding (*prajñā*). It approximates the direct experience of emptiness, and because it is not direct, it is contrived, fabricated and somewhat artificial, but does end self-cherishing and nearly halts all acquired, intellectual grasping at inherent existence.

The third and final level of wisdom is the direct 'seeing' of emptiness, i.e. the nondual yogic experience of the absence of inherent existence. The latter involves special knowledge (*gnosis*), intuition,

exceptional yogic perception or *jñāna* which, when trained on the Path of Meditation, leads up to Buddhahood.

Prajñā is knowledge (*jñā*) prefixed by *pra-*, cognate to ‘pro-’ in English, found in loanwords from Latin, and indicative of ‘forward movement’, ‘moving towards’. This is practical knowledge facilitating the concrete, effective breakdown of the obscurations (affective and mental), and represents the movement from ignorance to understanding emptiness.

In the Buddhadharmā, *prajñā* refers to four types of activities.

- (1) analytical scrutiny : focusing on an object and breaking it logically down into functions ;
- (2) establishing, validating and using valid ways of knowledge : the rules of logic and epistemology are at hand, demarcating valid from invalid knowledge or unacceptable claims ;
- (3) clear and efficacious articulation and understanding of the view of the Buddhadharmā : this is not just a view, perspective or imposition of limits in terms of a certain object, but the manner by which views constitute one's orientation to and comprehension of what the world is about ;
- (4) clear and penetrating insight : this insight into the ultimate nature of an object is the best possible conceptual insight facilitating any activity. This is the aim of Madhyamaka.

This best possible knowledge is a conceptual, rational type of precise understanding. It is a ‘know-how’, for this knowledge has only meaning unless it can be demonstrated. This wisdom is rational in the sense it always calls for concepts and reason. Hence, *prajñā* does not point to a wisdom ‘seeing’ emptiness, but to a wisdom realizing emptiness in a contrived, indirect, approximate way. This is a crucial distinction. Only *jñāna* has *direct* access to the absolute, *prajñā* remains indirect, conventional and relative. It is the basis for establishing Buddhist logic and philosophy (the most excellent conventional truth possible), while *jñāna* is the foundation for all direct, gnostic experiences of the ultimate.

So, *prajñā* is a means for acquiring ultimate understanding, rather than the end-product itself (*jñāna*).

If the fruit, viewed as the end of the path, is called *jñāna*, then the fruit itself, when savored, is *prajñā-jñāna*.

A consciousness paying attention to wisdom (as conceptual *prajñā* or non-conceptual *jñāna*) is a supreme virtuous phenomenon and heals all difficulties (is a *panacea*). Once fully realized (as *jñāna* on the highest levels of Bodhisattva training), there is no longer any need for the path. No More Learning or Buddhahood is at hand.

The approach of Tsongkhapa is outstandingly balanced. His criticism reminded me of Kant, who also tries to bring critical truth and goodness together. Defining emptiness as an absolute lack of substantiality, absence of own-form, want of essence (Gr. *eidōs* or substantial form) or non-existence of substance (Gr. *ousia*, Lat. *substantia*), Tsongkhapa, reminding us of Candrakīrti, finds *dependent origination* and so *compassion*. Conventional truth, valid or invalid, is always mistaken, for it conceals ultimate truth. Emptiness is the ultimate property of any phenomenon. If conventionality has some validity, then virtue is possible. In the mind of a Buddha, all is emptiness, but conventionality rises simultaneously.

The heart of emptiness is togetherness.

For certain crucial topics, like the status of conventionality (the seeming, relative world) or the state of existence of a Buddha, the view of the above authors, in particular the Gelug approach, will be mainly contrasted with :

- the 'idealist' Madhyamaka of Gorampa (1429 – 1489), assimilating elements from the Mind-Only School, the so-called 'Yogācāra-Madhyamaka' and
- the *other-emptiness* view (Shentong) found in the *Mountain Doctrine* of Dolpopa (1292 – 1391) and in *The Essence of Other-Emptiness and Twenty-one Differences Regarding the Profound Meaning of Tāranātha* (1576 – 1634).

Yogācāra-Madhyamaka focuses on ultimate truth. It claims there is only 'One Truth', thereby downgrading conventional truth. An ontological rift exists between, on the one hand, the saṃsāric world, contaminated, compounded and conventional, and, on the other hand, the nirvāṇic realm of the primordially pure and luminously aware. The latter truly exists, all the rest not.

Conventional truth must therefore be *invalid*, demoting the necessity of mundane virtue and the cultivation of compassion to attain Buddhahood. Conventional truth is basically non-existent.

'... ultimate knowledge is not an object of knowledge in the sense that it can become known to its cognizing consciousness. It is simply an utter absence of anything empirical.' – Thakchoe, *The Two Truths Debate*, 2007, p.120.

Shentong's focus on the Buddha Within is based on yogic perceivers and the training of the nondual jñānic mind. The latter is non-conceptual, whereas Rangtong (Tibetan Prāsaṅgika) offers the best of the rational mind. When Shentong develops its view in a philosophical way (by using conceptual elaboration), contradictions are unavoidable, while the definitive *prāsaṅgika* view is deemed superseded. But what can be said about the nondual mind, and how? Prāsaṅgikas do not posit a fully awakened Buddha Within. They ask: What mind is Bodhi-mind? To these rationalists, Buddha-nature is merely the self-emptiness of the mind.

Being foremost epistemological, Rangtong understands ultimate truth to exist conventionally (pansacralism). Both truths operate the same object, but yield different knowledge. Both truths reinforce each other, explaining dependent-arising and compassion. Because nothing substantially exists, all things may transform into other things, backing impermanence and so ongoing universal change. While conventional reality conceals the ultimate, always appearing different than things ultimately are, this functional illusion does not invalidate conventional truth as such and allows for valid conventional truths insofar as conventional reality goes. Compassion is the best conventional method to end self-cherishing and prepare the mind to end substance-obsession, no longer superimposing something eternal on the transient. The ultimate and eternal are to be

found in the relative and temporal. Without compassion, the mind is never calm, pliant and supple enough to do extensive meditations on emptiness. Emotional afflictions need to be silenced before one can successfully probe the nature of reality.

This book has four parts.

In Part I, the philosophy of emptiness is at hand, approached by the didactical device of the Three Turnings invented by the Early Yogācāra. With the Second Turning, after foundational teachings and practices bear fruit, emptiness and compassion enter stage.

Chapter 1 advances the specifics of the *dharma* and the *yāna* of the Buddha. What distinguishes the Buddhadharma from other spiritual points of view (*darśanas*) ? How does this original core give rise to specific vehicles (of practice) ?

In Chapter 2, the First Turning lays down the foundations : the Four Noble Truths, the Two Truths and the Eightfold Path, the higher trainings of ethics, meditation and wisdom.

In Chapters 3 to 6, a neuro-philosophical epistemology is sketched, integrating *dharmic* epistemology with novel information drawn from Western criticism, genetic epistemology and neurology. These rather difficult chapters move away from the traditional account and launch alternative concepts to understand absence of inherent existence in ways consistent with Western nominalism.

Chapters 7 and 8 present the Second Turning. To make the mind calm and supple, ready to investigate reality, compassion is necessary. Next the *prāsaṅgika* view on emptiness is elaborated upon.

In Part II, ultimate logic repeats what has been covered in terms of the Consequentialist view, but formalizes this so the heart of the matter may become clear. It also reveals the preconditions of the *prāsaṅgika* view, namely an implicit acceptance of the three axioms of classical formal logic : identity, non-contradiction and excluded third. A new formal approach is made known, one identifying the correct object of negation and its consequences with regard to six exhaustive instantiations of existence. By formalizing the issue at hand, the argument becomes more streamlined.

In these chapters, ultimate analysis is formalized and this alternative way to realize self-emptiness of persons and others is put forward. This involves a set of six instantiations (or typical set of phenomena), covering all possible existence, contaminated (*saṃsāra*) or uncontaminated (*nirvāṇa*) and the logic of each. The pivotal logical difference lies between the actualizing and the essentializing quantor. The former merely posits an object using name and function, the latter adds substantial existence.

Part III studies how to actually meditate on emptiness and brings its experience to the fore. It is made clear that study and reflection do not suffice. Meditation is paramount. Common and uncommon Analytical Meditations, Insight Meditation and Emptiness Meditation are discerned, as well as the mind of superior seeing. The end result is the realization of the proximate ultimate, the best intellectual apprehension (*prajñā*) of the emptiness of sensate and mental objects under scrutiny during Emptiness Meditation. Tools are given to deepen the Right View. This by contrasting the *prāsaṅgika* with other great schools : Great Exposition, Sūtra, Mind-Only and two variations on the Middle Way theme (Autonomists and Other-Emptiness).

Part IV investigates the Third Turning, in particular how to harmonize what yogic perceivers evidence as uninterrupted, non-conceptual intuition (*jñāna* or *gnosis*), with what the best, interrupted conceptual mind understands (*prajñā* or *sophia*). Other-emptiness, Buddha-nature, the Jonangpas, the status of yogic perceivers, Mahāmudrā and Dzogchen are briefly discussed.

The idea is to balance the path of the scholar, training in the view, and the path of the yogi, meditating on the nature of mind. Hence, in a non-partisan mode, self-emptiness and other-emptiness are integrated. This is however possible if and only if the meditator has been able to recognize the 'original face' of the mind.

In the final chapter, emptiness is disclosed as the best possible antidote ; a *panacea*, universal cure or sovereign remedy, allowing the mind to heal and end suffering and the causes of suffering.