



# Pure Ore Mounted on Wind



WIM VAN DEN DUNGEN

# *Pure Ore Mounted on Wind*

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*With thanks to the Yogīs and Yoginīs  
of India and Tibet.*



**Vajrasattva with Consort**

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**Plus est en Vous !**

**motto of *van Gruuthuuse*  
a 15<sup>th</sup>-century Flemish noble family**

# Introduction

## Buddhism or Buddhisms ?

### Textual Authenticity

The term 'Buddhism' was invented at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> - century by Count de Volney, an orientalist, historian, and French politician. With it, he identified the pan-Asian religion that he believed was based on a mythical figure called 'Buddha.' While some claim it to be a philosophy, an ethical system, or even a science of mind,<sup>1</sup> the Buddhadharmā is a remarkable nontheist *religion* focused on *salvation*, in this case, liberation from *personal* suffering and, when expanded, awakening for the sake of *all* sentient beings.

However, do the above statements have any objective value ? Do we actually know what the historical Buddha said ? Is what we assert about him more than a story about our mythical hero ? His date of birth is disputed. Archeology is confused. Historical and textual critique tells us that Buddha's teachings remained oral for four centuries ! So, how do you trust the *Pali Canon* ? Older layers have been identified, but nothing proves this is the authentic message. It is merely sound conjecture, traces of his outlook.

The story goes that the Buddha did *not* wish to be remembered through idolized fetiches, such as pictures, statues, or *stūpas*. Is this true ? Did he voice that whoever attends his teachings attends him ? We could go on asking further questions to undermine better the possibility of a so-called objective history of Siddhārtha Gautama. Just like Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed, he wrote nothing. Historical critique devastates those declaring to possess 'sacred' texts telling them who they

are and how they must live their lives to be saved. Buddhist *sūtras* are not sacred, just waymarks on the road. Much later, some monastics would worship their cherished *sūtra*. Even today, in European monasteries, haughty Westerners clad in Tibetan robes rattle off a wondrous text like the *Heart Sūtra* before meals. After a week, this becomes a headache-inducing idiocy devoid of inspirational power.

Abrahamism's soteriology is also primarily text-based. Furthermore, do these tales retain their supposed sacredness as soon as they are unmasked as mere stories of *inventive people* ? Yes. The Buddhadharma is not primarily textual but *experiential* in an existentialist way. Its views are not the outcome of a scientific experiment, as some assume. Science is a *third-person* activity. Buddhist meditation is *first-person* and aims to end one's suffering. To do so, it calms the mind to gain insight into how the latter represents itself and the world. *Blind faith* in what is taught is rejected. Compare this with Paul's faith, which is that *only* he who believes that Jesus died for our sins is saved. What happens to practices copy-compliant with texts deemed sacred while failing to resist historical criticism ? The canon retells this well-known advice of the Buddha.

"Come, Kālāmas, do not go by oral tradition, by a lineage of teaching, by hearsay, by a collection of scriptures, by logical reasoning, by inferential reasoning, by reasoned cogitation, by the acceptance of a view after pondering it, by the seeming competence (of a speaker), or because you think : 'The ascetic is our guru.' But when, Kālāmas, *you know for yourselves* : 'These things are unwholesome ; these things are blameworthy ; these things are censured by the wise ; these things, if accepted and undertaken, lead to harm and suffering,' then you should abandon them."<sup>2</sup>



## Turning Inwards

The Vedic-Brahmanic religion, especially during and after the Upaniṣadic era (starting ca. in the 7<sup>th</sup> -century BCE), turned inwards ((Patañjali's *pratyak-cetanā*) and called for yogic practice. Still, outer rituals like the *Homa*, the recitation of hymns to the Vedic pantheon, etc., remained vital. The Buddhadharma invites one to calm the mind and seek insight into oneself and the world. To do this, only initial *trust* in the possible efficacy of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha) is called for. This is to be like the *confidence* one has in a teacher learning one to swim, nothing more. Disbelief is temporarily suspended. Only the yogi can best judge the attenuation and eventual disappearance of *dis-ease*. No text is needed to sit and watch the arising, abiding, and ceasing of the aggregates of sensation, volition, emotion, (conceptual) thought, and sentience.

While meditation is central, a ritual context may be built around it, but this is unnecessary. Zen kept ritual and textual reverence as soon as it got organized and attracted a larger crowd than a Ch'an teacher with a few students. At best, rituals have no efficacy other than assisting the mind in becoming and remaining calm and ready to win insight. Later, the Diamond Vehicle added its brand of superstition and magick and elaborated ritual practices. Are these Buddhist ways ? Zen is in doubt. Historians point to Shaivism turned 'Buddhist' ... <sup>3</sup>

The East, except perhaps Confucianism, was foremost interested in inner life. The mind is observed to end ignorance. It is deemed the root cause of our existential plight. Any 'objective' analysis of nature (*prakṛti*, *śakti*) served the cessation of the flux caused by her. This *experiential yogic streak* (not to be confused with the objectifying psychologies of the West) makes the Pan-Indian tactic to our predicament radically

different from the Western take. The latter conforms to some supposed outer objective reality to end our pains. Platonism is a good example.

In the Abrahamic traditions, we must follow God's revealed rules, and all will be well, if not here and now, then in the hereafter. Buddhism has no covenant, no brokers. One is called to *be a light unto oneself*. The Buddhadharma is not static and dogmatic but flexible, depending on first-person practices. In the last 2.500 years, there have been millions upon millions of practitioners. Compare this with the internal conflicts within the Abrahamic faiths and the wars between these 'religions of the book.' How can they ever find peace shackled by blind faith in their so-called 'sacred' texts ? Just observe the blatant contradictions between their respective religious superstructures.<sup>4</sup> A Muslim is defined by faith in Jesus as *not* being the son of God. Obligatory blind faith in the *Koran* makes it impossible to change this dogma. The same applies to Paulinian Christianity, focusing on Christ's passion and resurrection. And what about the *Torah* ? When was it redacted ? When will the impact of Ancient Egyptian sapience, such as *The Instruction of Amenemope* on *Proverbs* and other texts, be acknowledged by Jewish orthodoxy ? And what about John of Padmos' *Apocalypse* ? That disputed, psychedelic text justifying the dispensationalist war-mongering horror stories still wrecking civilization to this day.

### **Divisions**

The history of the Buddhadharma shows that Buddha's teachings, as understood by those who dive deep into it through meditation, can be expanded (Mahāyāna) or adapted by adding reconstructed Shaiva methods like visualizations and the manipulation of the subtle channels of the so-called 'Vajra body' (Vajrayāna). Indeed, in its long history, a *variety of*

*approaches* have emerged. Buddha himself is said to adjust his teaching to his listeners. His *pragmatism* prevailed over any attempt to say anything theoretical or philosophical that did not assist in ending woe.

The most straightforward historical division lies between the Lesser (Hīnayāna, Theravāda) and Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna). In the former, Buddhahood cannot be attained in a human physical body ; only Arathood can be achieved. Because of doctrinal differences between the early (18) schools (e.g., some thought that the Arhat could fall back on the path) and the introduction of alternative views (like promoting compassion for all sentient beings instead of personal equanimity, allowing meditation on Buddha's form, etc.), the Great Vehicle slowly emerged, giving rise to diverse takes like Madhyamaka, Yogācāra, *Ch'an* (Zen), Pure Land Buddhism, the Diamond Vehicle (Tantra), *et al.* <sup>5</sup>

After 1959, Tibetan Buddhism slowly percolated in the West, and also fed by Zen, a 'modern' Western form of Buddhism rose. Lamas and Venerables flirted with psychotherapy, depth psychology, cognitive science, and quantum mechanics. The disappointed Western Catholics paid in full to build temples, immersing themselves in exotic and colorful rituals with incomprehensible Tibetan chants, fervently ringing their bell, and trying to worship their Lamas as living Buddhas.

Other, 'more rational' approaches emerged in the West. Were they uneasy with the appellation of Buddhism as a religion ? Basic views like rebirth were cast off in the name of Western materialist science. This cherry-picking brought about a manifold of 'modern' reinterpretations, doctrinal shifts, and 'adapted' forms of Buddhist thinking and meditational practices. Western Buddhism was quick to call itself 'scientific,' so, in the name of science, it vetoed teachings like *karma*, *hylic*

pluralism,<sup>6</sup> subtle anatomies, etc. It lifted practices like mindfulness out of context to psychologize them. How often is this rapprochement between the Buddhadharma and science made by those who do not understand the *frailty of science* ? Apparently, when dignitaries and intellectuals bring the Buddhadharma close to science (to fill their coffers by extolling an allure of contemporary intellectualism ?), an uncritical, positivist, and outdated format of science is used.<sup>7</sup> Do these uncritical potentates consider science and academia to be the modern version of infallible ecclesiastical authorities of old ? Rationalists are called to realize conceptual knowledge's fragility, fallibility, and relativity, as contemporary epistemology has shown.<sup>8</sup> Scientists who do *not* revisit the dogmatic and foundational take on conceptuality humbly keep demarcations (between valid and invalid, science and metaphysics). They embrace deconstructivism. They need to comprehend what is to be gained by bringing Buddhism close to science, especially when one's interpretation of the latter is outdated and thus harms comparison. While the Buddhadharma, like science, focuses on the nature of self and world, it only does so to discover *how to end suffering*, nothing else, so Buddhism cannot be called a science, for its soteriological concerns are paramount.

### **Buddhism**

What about the appellation 'Buddhism,' a word first used by 19<sup>th</sup>-century academia ? As an '-ism,' it approaches the teachings as a doctrine, a set of precepts, a system of logic, a philosophy, an ethical system, etc. So, this word, a child of the early Western take on the Buddha, focused on texts rather than practice. It initiated the attempt to bring Buddha's view as close as possible to science, a try later institutionalized by Western practitioners and the XIVth Dalai Lama alike. However, as an

umbrella term, this word covers a variety of views. Some differ so much that the word 'Buddhisms' seems warranted. E.g., in the Lesser Vehicle, Buddhahood cannot be attained on this plane of existence. In the Great Vehicle, this was dropped. Or consider the divide between the Gelugpa's intellectualism and the Jonangpa's reliance on the mind's fully awakened Buddha nature. Or the rift between those who claim the ore of the mind can never appear when other minds are active (Gelug) and those experiencing the mind's original face irrespective of the presence of other minds (Nyingma). And what should we say about Pure Land Buddhism as compared to Zen, Nichiren Buddhism, and (past) Chinese schools advancing radically different views ?

But how do the Pali texts label the teachings ? Two words : Dharma Vinaya (the most prevalent) and Buddhadharma.

### **Dharma Vinaya**

- The word '*dharma*' is a Sanskrit term with a long history. In the Pan-Indian context, it refers to the cosmic order of existence (in general) and the fundamental nature of the particularized existents (*dharma*s) constituting it. The Dharma is the crucial factor for Buddha, the heart of what he came to teach. With it, he confirmed that all existents are *dependent arisings*, determined by the laws of dependent origination. Simply put, the *Dharma* is the *organized impermanence of existence*. Everything in existence depends on everything else, and there are no exceptions. Something exists because it is 'in relation.' Not the relata are primary. Their relations are. Not being but becoming. No substantial existence can be found, not in mind (*anātman*) nor the world (*nirsvabhāva*). All existents lack self-subsistence. They are empty of it (*śūnyāta*). Their existence depends on others, not on an essence or inherently existing substantial core. Everything is other-powered.

- The word '*vinaya*' is derived from a Sanskrit verb. It means leading, training, taming, guiding, educating, or teaching. Hence, it is commonly associated with *the disciplinary code for training* laid down by the Buddha for monks and nuns to observe, giving rise to the *Vinaya Paṭika*, the first of the three 'baskets,' the canonical code of discipline. But this is a later take. 'Vinaya' can also be translated as 'removal, taking away, separating,' in this sense, refers to those activities that remove the *hindrances to practice*, like a snow thrower removes snow or an icebreaker cuts through thick ice. In this sense, *vinaya* is a set of practices allowing the elimination of what obstructs our path to the cessation of suffering, the end goal. It is the 'practice' side complementing the 'knowledge' side. One has understood why everything is impermanent and arises solely from causes and conditions, not because of some transcendent essence.

Knowledge and practice, *Dharma* and *vinaya*, are the two interdependent rungs of the ladder. Moving up the ladder, both are used in concert. They interact and cause a smoother climb. Knowing the *Dharma* calls into life a practice attuned to this, and practicing deepens one's knowledge of reality. While climbing up, knowledge and training assist and invigorate each other. The composite term 'Dharma Vinaya' thus confers the two central pillars of Buddha's teaching : *knowing* the nature of self and world through meditative *practice*.

### **Buddhadharma**

This tag refers to the *uniqueness* of Buddha's teaching. The Vedic-Brahminical take is left. The reformism of Buddha's view is represented by negating the most important 'discovery' of the Upaniṣadic sages, namely the *ātman*. But to know the teaching is to practice it, leading to renewed insight.

There are historically valid traces of what the Buddha is supposed to have said, but these are not sacred. Moreover, as said, his teachings should also be predicated on practice, the countless meditational experiences and realizations that have undoubtedly occurred. The Pali Canon, the Mahāyāna sūtras, the tantras, and –last but not least– the work of yogis throughout the ages (*Saṅgha*) tentatively précised the Buddhadharma's central ideas.

The Buddhadharma may claim some historical backing, but textual evidence is *not* as definitive as stated. Meditative realizations since the Buddha's *parinirvāṇa* may also assist in determining its central stances. The Dharma Vinaya is not a science, psychology, or philosophy but a nontheist religious practice breaking with the *Vedas*. The absolute exists relatively, not above, beyond, or behind the appearing world. The eternal is found in the flow.

The portrayals below do not aim to build a 'science of mind' or 'spiritual philosophy.' They merely reflect an understanding of what the Buddhadharma found to ease our tragi-comedy, the farce of *saṃsāra*, and eventually, what blows out its fires.

- **Nonself** (*anātman*) : Existence is process-based (other-powered) and without essence (*nirsvabhāva*) ;
- **The Four Noble Truths** : diagnosis, etiology, prognosis, and treatment of our existential condition ;
- **The Eightfold Path** : replacing discomfort with ease ;
- **The Two Truths** : all phenomena simultaneously possessing conventional and ultimate properties ;

• **Sam̐sāra and Nirvāṇa** : Cyclic existence exists insofar full-emptiness is not known nor lived ; an epistemic error brings it to life, each mind with its own mode of captivity. Remove this, and the total cessation of suffering results. Call this salvation, or 'liberation' in Theravāda and 'awakening' in Mahāyāna.

### **The Four Seals**

In due course, Tibetan scholars required criteria for judging texts and determining whether to accept them as Buddhist.<sup>9</sup> These standards would then authenticate any system of thought as 'truly' Buddhist. These 'seals' of approval are :

1. impermanence : all compounded, assembled things or entities-having-parts (a beginning, middle, and end) arise, abide, and cease, i.e., all possible things in existence are impermanent, *constantly changing* ;
2. suffering : every one of these compounded phenomena is contaminated, impure, painful, and unsatisfactory ;
3. emptiness : existents lack inherent existence, i.e., they are all *exclusively* other-powered (part of a fullness) ;
4. *nirvāṇa* : the *ultimate peace* beyond *saṃsāra* exists. In other words, suffering can end.

Turn this around and derive the *non*-Buddhist outlook :

1. permanent combined things exist ;
2. cyclic existence lacks suffering : assembled things can be pleasurable, truly satisfying cravings, ending woe ;
3. things are substance-based : existence is self-powered with subjects and objects possessing their own separate essential, substantial, unchanging nature, a final ground cut off and independent from all other self-powered things ;
4. The end of suffering is part of cyclic existence. We must accept suffering, not try to transcend it to attain peace. There is no ultimate truth, so death is the only way out of woe.



## The (Non) Self

Western Buddhists are prone to bring the Buddhadharma close to science, for are its views, particularly its insistence on strict nominalism (nonself), not rational and empirical ? However, as stated, answering this question depends on epistemology, ruling how conceptual knowledge is possible and expanded. Let it suffice to say that the idea of the Dharma Vinaya as a 'science of mind' (Dalai Lama's *Mind and Life Dialogues*) sounds good and is fashionable and neat but problematic. The main difficulty is accepting outdated epistemologies like positivism, logical positivism, neo-empiricism, and scientism.

The Buddhadharma is frequently branded as and separated from Hinduism and Jainism as a religion advancing the *nonself* (*anātman*), opposing the dominant view (saying yes to a permanent *ātman*). Did the Buddha, with his *anātman*, reject the self ? Is there no such thing ?

In general, Buddhist thought rejects the self as a personal, inner, independent, unchanging, substantial entity or identity bearing or owning properties and acting as an agent and controller of body and mind. In other words, the Buddha reacted against the Vedic-Brahminical view of selfhood, in which the self (*ātman*) *transcends* the impermanent and painful aggregates constituting our physico-mental system.

The Buddha rebuffed this substantialist concept of self but did *not* assert that there is no self. So, does the self exist or not? Yes, it does, but not as the Brahmans think. So how? The sense of self, identity, and subjectivity with a personal narrative are merely designated by the constituents of the physical-mental system. The self is the sense of self and a process of conventionalities. No transcendent personal entity is separated from the aggregates called the 'self.'

But turning to the *sūtras*, variant readings surface : (a) Buddha's view is compatible with the Vedic tradition after all (*pudgalavāda*),<sup>10</sup> (b) if only the aggregates exist, then the self should exist among them, and (c) merely offering a practical method to end suffering, the Buddha throws out the question as speculative, never explicitly affirming nonself. Why ? Suppose he did so, then his listeners, knowing no better in the prevailing Vedic context, would exclaim : see, the Buddha does reaffirm an eternal self ! Suppose he did not, then ignorant folk would accuse him of being a nihilist. Both utterances would hinder their personal evolution. And this he aimed to avoid at all costs. The same route was taken when asked if God exists. To the eternalist, he said no. To the nihilist, he said yes. His retorts depended on *who was asking*. In doing so, he used the word 'I.' The functional sense of self was not targeted.

Let's examine (b).

In the *Discourse on the Characteristics of Nonself* (*Anattalakkhaṇa Sutta*), the implicit assumption is that the five aggregates (form, volition, emotion, thought, and consciousness) are *all there is* ; they are 'the all.' So if the substantial self belongs to these and we know that everything is insubstantial, then claiming there is a Vedic self is inconsistent. Of course, it is not because it does not exist *that there is no self or sense of personal identity whatsoever*.

The 'logic' of the above argument is found in a later text, the *Questions of Milinda* (first century),<sup>11</sup> and the chariot analogy used became canonical. Given the parts of a chariot (pole, axle, wheels, body, nails, etc.), where is the chariot ? Is there something else than these parts ? No. The name 'chariot' is merely *a designation for a collection of elements organized in a certain way*. There is no substantial chariot as such to be found. The term is only a *label* designating *organized parts*.

Four steps bring us to this conclusion.

1. Where is the substantial, inherently existing chariot ?
2. Is it somewhere *in* the parts ? No.
3. Is it somewhere *outside* the parts ? No.
4. *Ergo*, no substantial, permanent chariot is found.

Later, Candrakīrti expanded this logic to seven steps.

To counter, Nyāya philosophers like Vātsyāyana and Uddyotakara argued that a person can't be just a bundle of *impersonal* physical and mental heaps of suffering. Working with causal relationships between these can never bring about something counting as an 'I.' Nonself thus lacks a *principle of identity* and fails to account for personhood, disabling one from *picking out a person*, this apparent first-person *subjectivity*. Hence, they reckon that something must underpin the aggregates to impart unity and coherence to a given series and account for subjectivity. Perceptual binding, object recognition, and the apparent unity of consciousness require a Vedic self (sic) ! The latter is substantial and independent, transcending the aggregates and locus of qualities and actions. For these philosophers, the appearance of unity between the stream of discrete and momentary perceptions and subjective minds can *only* be clarified by assuming the *ātman* as an eternal, unchanging entity.

Again, this isn't accurate.

A principle of coherence (Kant's transcendental unity of perception, the 'I Think') is needed to explain binding and unity, but this does *not* necessarily point to the identity of a substance (*svabhāva*), inherently existing from its own side, eternal and fixed (the Vedic self). Descartes made the same error with his substantial *ego cogitans*.

In *Analytical Buddhism* (2006),<sup>12</sup> Miri Albahari argues that transitory bodily and mental experiences (together forming the five aggregates) create an independent, separate self when we, seeking happiness, identify with them as 'me' and 'mine.' Hence, the sense of 'boundedness' and 'personal ownership' are illusions generated by desire-driven identifications. The self merely appears to exist apart from the sequence of experiences. Removing the craving for 'me' and 'mine' driving identification, the illusion of self is gone, and the inherently selfless or ownerless nature of experience would become apparent. Seeing through the illusion of self brings the sought cognitive shift, causing cessation. So, cessation is the outcome of realizing there is no self.

Do we necessarily need to see the self as independent of the sequence of experiences ? No. Alternative uses of the word 'self' are possible and better equipped to assist our grasp of the self-as-a-process. Is it the case that liberation follows when we realize there is no Vedic self? No.

First, the distinction between a self and a sense of self must be dismantled. The self is not a thing, entity, or personal essence but *self-awareness*, the first-person experience of existing as a subject able to act as an agent. Phenomenology stresses that the self is a *structure of experience* whereby the *experience of oneself as oneself* is possible. This self-awareness can be pre-reflective and reflective. The former calls for every conscious experience to involve *experiencing that very experiencing* (non-intentional). The latter is a reflection on experience (intentional). A return to this pre-reflective awareness is what Zen is about (cf. *infra*).

The self is a *multifaceted construction* without personal essence or independence. It is a process under *constant formation*. It is not the case that the self is an entity transcending the body and the mind ; on the contrary, the self or ego is (also) a body-ego.

The latter exists as a *conventional psychological reality*. As such, it appears, due to our category mistake as sentient beings, *as if* it is independent, possessing its properties independent from others *as if* self-powered. However, when investigated, the sense of self always depends on others. It is other-powered. In *Five Kinds of Self-Knowledge* (1988),<sup>13</sup> Neisser, the 'father of cognitive psychology,' advances five concepts of the self and correlates these with five types of self-knowledge.

1. the ecological self : the experience of existing as a bodily agent at work in the immediate physical milieu. Link this with phenomenology's bodily self-awareness (Merleau-Ponty) ;
2. the interpersonal self : one's relation to others is critical here. This self corresponds with intersubjective self-awareness as advanced by phenomenology ;
3. the private self : the experience of one's first-person inner states defining subjectivity and including pre-reflective and reflective self-awareness ;
4. conceptual self : refers to the experience of a mental representation of the self, used when thinking about oneself, connecting it with reflective self-awareness.

These aspects are not to be understood as a modification of something with independent existence like the Vedic self, but rather that the self is *an ongoing process enacting an 'I.'* The latter is not different from the process. Instead, like swimming is a process enacting a swimming style (like freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke, butterfly, sidestroke, trudgen, etc.) with the latter not being different from the swimming, the self is an *emergent process*, constructed through and designated on bodily (sensation) and mental activities (of volition, affection, thought, and sentience). It cannot be found *somewhere* in the brain, just as the swimming style cannot be found in swimming. It emerges through the act of swimming.

In *No Ego, No Demons* (2022),<sup>14</sup> ego genesis subdivides into stages, as given by Piaget's genetic epistemology. The unfolding activity of the aggregates was also added, as was Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Kohlberg's moral development. A transpersonal perspective<sup>15</sup> divides individuation (Jung) or transpersonal psychosynthesis (Assagioli) into self-actualization and self-realization, advancing the creative self and nondual selflessness.

Ego Genesis				
0 - 2	sensory-motoric cognition	libidinal ego physiology and safety	form	instinct
			action	
2 - 6	pre-operational cognition	tribal ego safety and security	feeling	
7 - 10	concrete operational cognition	imitative ego belongingness	concrete thought	
10 - 13	formal operational cognition	formal ego esteem	abstract thought	reason
14 - 24		critical ego esteem	consciousness	
intuitional cognition		creative self self-actualization		intuition
		nondual selflessness self-realization		

For Buddhas, the self or sense of identity merely exists relatively. For sentient beings, it appears as unchanging,

separate, and a (Cartesian) substance on its own. This appearance is illusory, for the self constantly changes and connects to the mind and body. It is not an illusion, for the self exists, albeit only conventionally. The Vedic self is non-existent and, therefore, a full-blown illusion, a mirage. The process-self, however, is an ongoing construction and exists. Because, to sentient beings, it appears as substantial and static, it is illusory (not a substantialized personal essence).

The Vedic self, like a mirage, is an *illusion*. It does *not exist*. It cannot be found under analysis. The process self *exists*, but as long as ignorance persists, it does not appear as it exists. It is *illusionary*. Because of our ignorant, false ideation of the self (superimposing stability that is not there), the process self appears as something separate and self-identical, i.e., *not* as how it truly exists (namely as a process). This false ideation is our mind's fundamental *fiction*, keeping us bound to cyclic existence. Hence, removing ignorance depends on stopping the mind from adding 'beingness' to name and function, the only two features of any object and subject.<sup>16</sup>

So, we end suffering not by grasping the self as an illusion (something non-existent). Nor does this happen when seeking a non-existent transcendent Vedic self. The self (or sense of self) exists. It needs no removal or reification. Due to reifying ignorance, which turns thoughts into things, we superimpose on it the fiction of it being substantial, somehow transcending the aggregates as something radically different (*totaliter aliter*). Due to this erroneous projection, the self is illusory, appearing but *not* as how it truly exists. Ending this epistemic error unmask the self as insubstantial but existing. How ? As a functional self (or sense of self) depending on the activities of body and mind (the aggregates). This self is a process self, not a Vedic construct of thought and imagination.

So, self-awareness, this sense of self, emerges from and depends on our culturally regulated biological capabilities. It is nothing more and does not transcend the aggregates. The Buddha accepted this process self (strict nominalistic sense of self) but rejected the Vedic self. When he taught, he used the word 'I' in a conventional, practical, context-dependent way. The end of suffering is thus *not* the outcome of seeing the self as non-existent or realizing the non-existing Vedic self by way of *neti, neti*. Call back the superposition of substantiality, end this epistemic error, and the nominalistic process sense of identity remains. The self, sense of self, or self-awareness is not the problem ; only their reification is.

The Vedic self does not exist ; the point of Buddha's *anātman*. The conventional self is a sense of self, ego, and identity designated on the bustle of the body (the 5 sense consciousnesses) and the mind (will, affect, thought, and sentience). It has no separate, intrinsic, independent existence. Salvation results from ending the false ideation of self, others, and the world.

In the Great Vehicle, the *anātman* of the Lesser expands to *śūnyatā*, the (full) emptiness of both knower and known. The intellectual crown of Tibetan Buddhism's<sup>18</sup> tenet ladder<sup>17</sup> was the *Prāsaṅgika Madhyamaka's* objective definition of emptiness as *lacking inherent existence* (Tsongkhapa).<sup>19</sup> To establish anything's ultimate property, remove every sense of it as a separate, permanent entity. The tendency to superimpose such fiction is *acquired* (through education) and *innate* (the unconscious leanings of the subtle mind).



## The Nostalgia for Elsewhere

Most religions, spiritual systems, depth psychologies, psychotherapies, holistic healing practices (like *Ch'i Kung*, *Tai Ch'i*, and *Reiki*), and the like are concerned with alleviating, if not ending suffering, dissatisfaction and discontent, i.e., the anguish, anxiety, and fear the human condition entails. Rich or poor, we are all, by default, affected. Born due to suffering to then ache again, thrown into and conditioned by the herd mentality, offers no *definitive* solution to the problem of suffering except maddening conformity, crying for freedom in an open cage.<sup>20</sup> Has facticity, along the way, convinced us to bear our sorrow, take our pills, and allow ourselves to be pressed deeper into various stultifying fictions ?

Pan-Indian thought points to *ignorance* (*avidyā*) as the *first cause* of our sordid predicament. We are dissatisfied because consciousness (*citta*) and the (material) world (*prakṛti*) are misunderstood. The East firmly rejects to sit idle and tolerate our existential plight. But it seldom finds 'solutions' in the everyday world of dismayed humans. By decisively *turning inwards*, it found ways to calm the mind and investigate existence. Thus, it unearthed a deeper layer of consciousness. One radically beyond any possible inkling of displeasure, the fire of craving being blown out (*nirvāṇa*). So it is said.

In Hinduism, the 'solution' to our plight was apologized by a turn to idealism, refusing to give realism its proper place. Sure, there is the 'real' dance or play of energy (*līlā*), but the target is the flux (*vr̥ti*) of consciousness caused by nature (*prakṛti*). Hence, disunion from this flux (*vi-yoga*) equals union, the aloneness of the seer (*kaivalyam*). More than not, the world of becoming is a *mere show*, a guru on a motorbike, a play of shadows, something non-existent like a *fata morgana*.