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The first stage (*sravaka*) deals with the idea of not-self in the person; there is a lack of a single, permanent, identifying self. The idea of 'self' is the source of suffering. And it is the interaction of 'self' and all else ('other') that breeds desire and emotion. Its truths are the relative (world as we know it) and the absolute (skandhas are not self). The *sravaka* dream example describes suffering induced by being eaten by a tiger in a dream. While it seemed real at the time, the dream-person's suffering arose as a manifestation dependent on the unawareness that it was actually a dream. Similarly, a person does not have an independent, lasting self on his own.

The second stage (*cittamatra*) includes the idea of the outside world as part of the 'mind', rather than only considering the 'self' and taking the world for granted. The mind is of the same substance as the world. Its truths are the non-ultimate absolute (self-aware mind) and Absolute (truly existent nature). The *cittamatra* dream example asks what the difference is between the dreaming world and the waking world, concluding that there is no characteristic from a dream that distinguishes it from being awake. It describes dreams through *alayavijñāna*: waves collapsing back into the consciousness. There is no real difference between a waking and dream experience. Similarly, there are no separate 'perceiver' and 'perceived entities'. It builds on *sravaka* by noting that in addition to the *sravaka* lack of self, there is also the lack of self-nature.

The third stage (*svatantrika*) builds on the last two; the true nature of the mind is emptiness -- no separate, independent, lasting nature. Its truths are relative (as things appear to the non-critical ordinary mind) and the absolute (ultimate analysis by a rational mind). Dharmas (phenomena) are also empty. The *svatantrika* dream example notes that the ultimate nature of

manifestations in a dream is emptiness because they are not real. A dream-fire does not have the self-nature of fire. Things exist conventionally according to characteristics, but they have no self-nature. All dharmas are emptiness. In addition to analysing consciousness and finding neither self nor self-nature, it finds that neither consciousness nor its objects have self-nature.

The fourth stage (*prasangika*) differs from that of *svatantrika* regarding the use of logic and conventional truth; it provides a path to recognising the ultimate nature of reality through a non-conceptual way. The *prasangika* dream example notes that in *svatantrika*, there is a need to distinguish between a real emptiness and an unreal fire; there is a subtle conceptual difference between absolute and relative truth. Using *reductio ad absurdum* techniques, this essentialist perspective is shown to have contradictions; as such, the nature of the dream fire must be realised without establishing emptiness. If there is no concept of ‘self-nature’ then there is no ‘absence of self-nature’. It builds on *svatantrika* by requiring a non-conceptual understanding of emptiness, which is harder to obtain if one does not previously have an established notion of emptiness. *Prasangika* therefore removes the *svatantric* notion of separation of the two truths.

The *shentong* dream example goes further than the previous illusory allegories of the previous stages. Dreams can manifest when the mind is both unaware and aware (lucid); so too is the Wisdom Mind the basis for both *samsara* and *nirvana*. If this is not recognised, then manifestations comprising an outer world interacting with inner minds are created. *Shentong* is the most abstruse stage; stating that consciousness is without self-nature, it concludes that the experience of self-illuminating awareness is not a consciousness; rather, it is Absolute Reality (the *cittamatra* approach of vijñāna is then made the relative truth). As the true nature of beings cannot be conceptualised as either existent, non-existent, both or neither, then the Absolute Reality is the realisation that there is no difference between inner and outer objects, building off both *cittamatra*’s absolute truth and the *rangtong* notion that that phenomena are empty of ‘self’.