

# HOW TO LOSE YOURSELF

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# HOW TO LOSE YOURSELF



An Ancient Guide to Letting Go

The Buddha and His Followers

Selected, translated, and introduced by  
Jay L. Garfield, Maria Heim,  
and Robert H. Sharf

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## INTRODUCTION

*Jay L. Garfield, Maria Heim, Robert H. Sharf*

Finding yourself. Self-consciousness. Self-promotion. Self-discovery. Self-help. Self-awareness. Self-actualization. Self-realization. Self-centeredness. Self-importance. Self-regard. Self-interest. Self-sufficiency. Self-indulgence. Self-delusion. We would seem to be self-obsessed!

Two and a half millennia ago, the Buddha took all this preoccupation with self to be a huge mistake. For one thing, when we try to figure out what the self is, we find that it is elusive, changing, and unstable. When we turn inward, it is hard to put a finger on the single unchanging thing that is the self. To be sure, we are *persons*, individuals identifiable to ourselves and to others (as long the “self” in “ourselves” is lowercase and indicates a conventional idea of a person rather than a metaphysical reality). Indeed, the mistake comes from thinking that features of language—the reflexive pronoun “self” and the ubiquitous use of the words “I,”

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## INTRODUCTION

“me,” and “mine”—refer to something ultimately real and essential. When the Buddha analyzed human experience down to its component parts—the parts that make up consciousness, feelings, perceptions, habitual traits, and the physical body, he found no unchanging essence or substrate underlying the constantly changing person. In other words, no self.

What is more, he found that our preoccupation with self, our constant efforts to invent and shore up a self, our obsessions with our identities, and our unrelenting egoism, are a principal if not *the* principal source of pain and suffering in human life. Our modern world encourages self-obsession, and we often imagine that “finding oneself” is the key to happiness. We carefully curate a unique identity on social media, we encourage one another to assert ourselves, and we think a healthy existence requires a robust sense of ego and self-worth. We are urged to become independent, to stand on our own two feet, to think for ourselves. Successful job applicants are experts in self-promotion and children are told to cultivate self-esteem. We soul-search.

Behind this frenetic activity to cultivate and promote a self is a basic insecurity driven by fear and desire. We long for a fixed identity and autonomous essence that rides out the vicissitudes and changes of human life. We imagine that we have a basic core



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of selfhood that can be cordoned off from others, independent and untouched by the world. We long for an autonomous selfhood that presides over the rest of our experience. And so we labor to construct, fashion, and curate a self.

Better to lose yourself! The Buddha thought that letting go of the self allows us to see more clearly the innumerable causes and conditions that come together to create our experience and that make us who we are. **Instead of a single unchanging core remaining through the changes in our bodies and emotions, our personhood is itself constructed by and composed of those very changes.** When we allow our fantasies of self to dissolve, we discover instead the radically interdependent nature of our existence. As human beings, we turn out to be much richer and more complex because who we are is shaped constantly and dynamically by others and the world. We are recognizable as persons through the relatively continuous stream of events that constitute us over time; there is no self to be found in that stream.

A more refined attention to the causes and conditions of our lives permits us to **identify the sources of our suffering—the Buddha took these to be chiefly desire, aversion, and delusion**—and learn how to uproot them. If self is a delusion held together by attachment to ego and abhorrence of

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## INTRODUCTION

anything that threatens it, then dismantling the self becomes a key project for moral development and spiritual freedom. Intriguingly, it is by losing the self that we let go of anxiety, fear, greed, and hatred, and this, according to the Buddha, leads to the end of all suffering.

The Buddha knew that his teachings cut against the grain. People in ancient India, much like people today, had a strong intuition of a self that we refer to when we say “I.” We have a remarkably robust sense that the same “I” endures over time, such that the “I” present at your birthday party the day you turned five is the same “I” that reads these sentences, years or even decades later. But the Buddha argued that close introspection would bear him out. That five-year-old had a different stock of memories—and experienced different emotions, conceptions, modes of awareness, and so on—from the person you are at this precise moment. Still, the continuity feels real. So the Buddha had to make sense of the intuition we have about the continuity of personhood, even while insisting that that sense of continuity alone is not evidence of an unchanging, eternal, metaphysical essence.

To this end, he was understood by subsequent Buddhist thinkers as making use of **two registers of language—conventional and ultimate**. When speaking conventionally, we doubtless need to use words

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like “I” and “me” and our usual notions of being the “same” (more or less) person over time. But when we want to step back and ask what is *ultimately* real, and when we need to free ourselves from the anxieties stemming from the conceit of the self, we can deploy analytical techniques and therapies to dismantle the self. In the “absolute” linguistic register, Buddhists speak of the self as “empty,” by which they mean that the word “self” doesn’t ultimately refer to anything real.

To deny that the self is ultimately real is to say that the person is radically interdependent. We are constituted by complex and ever-changing bodily and mental phenomena that themselves shape and mutually constitute one another in dynamic ways. To discover that the person is empty of an autonomous essence is simultaneously to be open to and aware of the myriad of phenomena that we, in fact, are.

The readings in this book are drawn from diverse Buddhist traditions across the huge and heterogeneous tradition we call “Buddhism.” Buddhism spread from its birthplace in north India 2,500 years ago across most of Asia, and is still evolving and changing today in its increasingly global reach. Everywhere in different languages, intellectual traditions, and diverse Asian cultures, the teachings of no-self fascinated Buddhist thinkers. We draw from

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three such languages and traditions—though we could have looked at many, many more—to introduce readers to the range of different ways these teachings were explored. We have organized these texts not chronologically, but thematically. We begin with Indian sources that provide the most fundamental teachings on selflessness. We then introduce teachings from the Indian “Great Vehicle” tradition, with some Tibetan commentaries that build directly on that foundation. Last, we present some texts that show how these ideas are inflected by the Chan tradition in China.

We begin in part I with the Buddhist teachings in one of the early canonical traditions, those preserved in the ancient Indian language known as Pali. The Pali canon is the most complete surviving collection in an Indian language of the “words of the Buddha,” as they were handed down over the centuries (although it is important to note that the Buddha himself did not write down these teachings; Buddhists, like other religious traditions at the time, transmitted their teachings orally). These became the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism, preserved in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia, and increasingly known all over the world. We include as well small excerpts from two later works in the Theravada tradition that helpfully refine our understanding of no-self teachings and how we can talk about them.

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Part II takes up some of Buddhism's most philosophically rigorous defenses of the no-self teachings, those flourishing in India from roughly the second century CE (as they were recorded by the Tibetans, who later embraced and expanded their philosophical traditions). The Indian philosopher Nagarjuna engaged in logical disputation and spirited debate with non-Buddhist detractors to demonstrate the emptiness of persons and indeed the lack of essence in all things. His teachings became the foundation of centuries of commentary and further discussion in India, Tibet, and East Asia. We include two commentators: the sixth-century Indian Candrakirti, and the fourteenth-century Tibetan Tsongkhapa. All of the texts in this section are translated from the Tibetan.

We move, in part III, to texts from the early Chan tradition composed in Chinese. The Chan (Japanese: Zen) tradition focused on meditation (the term "Chan" comes from the Chinese pronunciation of the Sanskrit word for "meditation"), and Chan practice was aimed at the personal realization and embodiment of the ultimate. Chan teachings were influenced by an Indian Buddhist tradition known as "Mind Only" that taught a kind of philosophical idealism. Philosophers in the Mind Only tradition held that the world we experience is made up entirely of mental representations, and any idea we

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may have of a “real world” that exists apart from our conception of it is just another idea. One possible interpretation of these teachings is that while the self is empty, the mind is real. But the authors of the two texts presented in part III reject this—they fear that “mind” simply becomes a stand-in for the self—another object of attachment. The point, they insist, is to abandon any and all concepts about both the self and the world. To stop thinking and simply look. For these Chan writers, losing the self means not only letting go of ego, but letting go of anything one would put in its place.

Together, our three sections give readers a taste of some of the different approaches Buddhist philosophers have taken to articulating the powerfully therapeutic effects of losing your self. The early teachings in Pali show the basic ways we can be disaggregated and analyzed to reveal the changing phenomena that make up our lives—and that these phenomena, though analyzed in multiple ways, never reveal an unchanging, eternal self. The philosophical developments in later India and Tibet vigorously prosecute these ideas in a context of philosophical debate of a very high order, and emerge with a logical demonstration of the lack of self in all things. Last, the Chan teachings bring the discussion back down to earth to move us away

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from *thinking* about the absence of self, into actually *seeing* it.

All of these texts are dialogical, with real or imagined conversation partners asking questions or raising objections, generating a spirited give and take. We invite you to join in these dialogues, and to read in the spirit of creative inquiry. When we lose the self, and indeed all of the illusions manufactured by the mind, we are awakened to the presence of all things as they truly are.

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# HOW TO LOSE YOURSELF

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# Part I

## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

We begin with selections taken from the early Buddhist scriptures as they were recorded in the corpus of teachings preserved by the Theravada branch of Buddhism in a language called Pali. These teachings must be placed within the larger philosophical context of ancient India, where philosophers debated the nature and existence of the “self” (*atman*), a metaphysical core of the person that is the unitary and unchanging witness underneath the fluctuations of ordinary experience. Unlike the early Hindu texts known as the Upanishads, which posited and developed this idea, the Buddha emphatically rejected any notion of an unchanging self or essence to a person. The Buddha also rejected the notion of a soul, such as that posited by the Jain tradition. It is clear that the matter was hotly contested in ancient India.

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

The early scriptural passages describe how the Buddha, in dialogues with his monastic disciples at various locales in his teaching career, denied that there is any enduring self or soul that exists apart from the ever-changing flow of phenomena that we experience and that constitute what it is to be a person. To be sure, humans experience a great deal of continuity, and the intuition of that continuity as being more or less stable is what gives rise to a sense of selfhood in the first place. But when the flow of experience is actually analyzed into its constituent parts, we find only changing and conditioned phenomena, not permanent and unchanging essences or cores. As our first selection puts it in an exchange of the Buddha with his close disciple, Ananda, our sensory experience of the world is “empty” of essence: neither the eyes with which we see, nor their visual objects, nor the act of visual contact between them has an unchanging essence or selfhood. None of our sensory experience is essential and enduring because it is highly conditioned by myriad factors that themselves come and go. In this sense, the world of our experience—that is, the only world we know—is empty of essences.

There are other ways to examine human experience besides analysis of sensory experience. Another classic Buddhist analysis disaggregates the human person into five “clusters” of phenomena, momentary phenomena that can themselves be

## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

further analyzed. Where Descartes divided persons into mind and body, Buddhists have found the five-cluster analysis to be more nuanced and metaphysically plausible, and therefore more useful. The five analytical categories are *bodily experience* (that is, how we experience the physical world), *perceptions* (which include sensation and naming what we experience), *feelings* (the hedonic valences of experience), *habitual traits* (the many ways our thoughts, dispositions, personalities, memories, motivations, and so on get put together), and *consciousness* (the fact of being aware).

The Buddha claims that close empirical examination will show that there is no permanent self over and above these collections of phenomena, and that none of them constitutes the self since none contains anything permanent and unchanging either. None of these changing clusters of phenomena examined separately is what we mean when we speak of “I,” “mine,” or “myself,” and together they account for the entirety of human experience. The next several passages included here suggest that when wise people similarly explore and analyze their experience as it occurs in these different modalities, they will agree with the Buddha that no essential core or self exists.

We find the five clusters vividly evoked in similes. Moment-by-moment bodily experience and feelings are like lumps of foam and water bubbles

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

in their hollow and fleeting insubstantiality. A moment of perception is like a mirage in the desert, rising up one moment and fading the next. The habitual traits that make up our dispositions, thoughts, personalities, imaginations, memories, and ways of constructing reality are like the tightly packed sheaths of leaves that coil around one another to make the stem of the plantain plant, a stem that looks like a tree trunk but has no central core of heartwood. And any moment of consciousness is like a magician's trick or illusion, producing a partial and fleeting cognizance that appears to grasp reality, but that changes in the next moment.

Given that any notion of a permanent unchanging essence of a person dissolves under analysis, the Buddha then had to explain why it is that we have such a strong sense of "I," and a robust intuition of a stable self. He argues that such a notion of self is a construct, what he calls "constructing an 'I,' constructing 'mine,' and a tendency toward conceit." Built into language itself is this construct of "I" and "mine," pronouns that are probably needed at some level to get by day-to-day, but that are "conceits" that mask the myriad changing phenomena that constitute us.

Our final selection in this first section suggests that these constructs cause us anxiety as we grasp onto the things of the world, things that are inevi-

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tably impermanent and contingent on other things, and thus not lastingly attainable. Such external things, if conceived as ultimate enduring entities, do not actually exist. We are bound to lose them and feel loss and disappointment. In addition, we grasp onto states internal to us as if they will endure even after death, though all empirical evidence suggests that these are as unstable as anything else. Better to unshackle oneself from our obsessions of enduring selfhood in the first place, and free oneself of the anxiety and misery that attachment to such constructs entails. Disenchantment with the illusions we create leads to freedom from suffering and anxiety, and when such freedom is perfectly realized, the person achieves “nirvana,” complete liberation from all greed, hatred, delusion, and suffering.

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Atha kho āyasmā ānando ... pe ... bhagavantam  
etadavoca—suñño loko, suñño loko ti, bhante,  
vuccati. Kittāvatā nu kho, bhante, suñño lokoti  
vuccatīti? Yasmā ca kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā  
attaniyena vā tasmā suñño lokoti vuccati. Kiñca,  
ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā? Cakkhu  
kho, ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā. Rūpā  
suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā, cakkhuviññāṇaṃ  
suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā, cakkhusamphasso  
suñño attena vā attaniyena vā... pe ... yampidaṃ  
manosamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ  
sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi  
suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā. Yasmā ca kho,  
ānanda, suññaṃ attena vā attaniyena vā, tasmā  
suñño lokoti vuccatīti. (*Samyutta* iv.54)

Sāvattthinidānaṃ. Taṃ kiṃ maññatha, bhikkhave,  
rūpaṃ etaṃ mama, esoham asmi, eso me attāti  
samanupassathāti? No hetuṃ, bhante. Sādhu,  
bhikkhave! Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, netaṃ mama,



## THE WORLD IS EMPTY

### Discourses of the Buddha

#### THE WORLD IS EMPTY

Then Venerable Ananda approached the Buddha and said: “Sir, it is said that ‘the world is empty, the world is empty.’ In what respect, sir, is it said that the world is empty?”

“Ananda, it is said that the world is empty because it is empty of self or anything belonging to a self. What, Ananda, is empty of self or anything belonging to a self? The eye is empty of self or anything belonging to a self. Ananda, a visual object is empty of self or anything belonging to a self; visual awareness is empty of self or anything belonging to a self; and visual contact is empty of self or anything belonging to a self. Moreover, whatever is experienced, whether pleasant, painful, or neither pleasant nor painful, arises by means of contact with the mind and is empty of self or anything belonging to a self. Ananda, because it is empty of self or anything belonging to a self, the world is said to be empty.”

This occurred at Savatthi. “Monks, what do you think: do you consider bodily experience in this way: ‘This is mine, this is what I am, this is my self’?”

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

nesohamasmi, na meso attā ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ. Vedanaṃ... saññāṃ... saṅkhāre ... viññāṇaṃ ‘etaṃ mama, esohamasmi, eso me attāti samanupassathāti?’ “No hetuṃ, bhante. Sādhū, bhikkhave! Viññāṇaṃ, bhikkhave, netuṃ mama, nesohamasmi, na meso attā’ti evametaṃ yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya daṭṭhabbaṃ... pe ... evaṃ passaṃ... pe ... kataṃ karaṇīyaṃ, nāparaṃ itthattāyāti pajānātīti.  
(*Saṃyutta* iii.165–166)

Sāvatthinidānaṃ. Nāhaṃ, bhikkhave, lokena vivadāmi, lokova mayā vivadati. Na, bhikkhave, dhammavādī kenaci lokasmiṃ vivadati. Yaṃ, bhikkhave, natthisammatāṃ loka paṇḍitānaṃ, ahampi taṃ natthīti vadāmi. Yaṃ, bhikkhave, atthisammatāṃ loka paṇḍitānaṃ, ahampi taṃ atthīti vadāmi.

Kiñca, bhikkhave, natthisammatāṃ loka paṇḍitānaṃ, yamahaṃ natthīti vadāmi?  
Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, niccaṃ dhuvaṃ sassataṃ

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“No, sir.”

“Very good, monks! Bodily experience should not be considered in this way: ‘This is mine, this is what I am, this is my self,’ and instead it should be seen with correct understanding as it really is. What about perception, feelings, habitual traits, and consciousness? Do you regard them in this way: ‘This is mine, this is what I am, this is my self?’”

“No, sir.”

“Very good, monks! Consciousness should be seen with correct understanding as it really is: ‘This is not mine, this not what I am, this is not my self.’ Seeing in this way, what must be done is done, and one understands that existence has nothing further.”

## THE WISE AGREE

This occurred at **Savatthi**. “Monks, I do not quarrel with the world. It is the world that quarrels with me. Monks, one professing the Teaching does not quarrel with anyone in the world. When the wise agree that something does not exist in the world, I too assert that it does not exist. And when the wise agree that something exists in the world, then I too assert that it exists.

“And what, monks, do the wise in the world agree does not exist, that I also assert does not exist?”

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

avipariṇāmadhammaṃ natthisammatam loke paṇḍitānaṃ; ahampi taṃ natthīti vadāmi. Vedanā... saññā... saṅkhārā... viññāṇaṃ niccaṃ dhuvam sassataṃ avipariṇāmadhammaṃ natthisammatam loke paṇḍitānaṃ; ahampi taṃ natthīti vadāmi. Idam kho, bhikkhave, natthisammatam loke paṇḍitānaṃ; ahampi taṃ natthīti vadāmi.

Kiñca, bhikkhave, atthisammatam loke paṇḍitānaṃ, yamaṃ atthīti vadāmi? Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ atthisammatam loke paṇḍitānaṃ; ahampi taṃ atthīti vadāmi. Vedanā aniccā... pe ... viññāṇaṃ aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ atthisammatam loke paṇḍitānaṃ; ahampi taṃ atthīti vadāmi. Idam kho, bhikkhave, atthisammatam loke paṇḍitānaṃ; ahampi taṃ atthīti vadāmi.

Atthi, bhikkhave, loke lokadhammo, taṃ tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti; abhisambujjhitaṃ abhisametaṃ taṃ ācikkhati deseti paññāpeti paṭṭhapeti vivarati vibhajati uttānīkaroti.

Kiñca, bhikkhave, loke lokadhammo, taṃ tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti, abhisambujjhitaṃ abhisametaṃ ācikkhati deseti paññāpeti paṭṭhapeti vivarati vibhajati uttānīkaroti? Rūpaṃ, bhikkhave, loke lokadhammo taṃ tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti. Abhisambujjhitaṃ abhisametaṃ ācikkhati deseti paññāpeti paṭṭhapeti vivarati vibhajati uttānīkaroti.

## THE WISE AGREE

Monks, the wise in the world agree that **bodily experience that is permanent, stable, eternal, and not subject to change does not exist**, and I too assert that it does not exist. So too the wise in the world agree that feeling, perception, habitual traits, and consciousness that are permanent, stable, eternal, and not subject to change do not exist, and I too assert that these do not exist. Monks, the wise in the world agree that this does not exist, and I too assert that it does not exist.

“And what, monks, do the wise in the world agree does exist, that I also assert exists? **Monks, the wise in the world agree that bodily experience that is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change exists, and I too assert that it exists.** So too the wise in the world agree that feeling and the rest, up through consciousness, that are impermanent, suffering, and subject to change exist, and I too assert that they exist. Monks, the wise in the world agree that this exists, and I too assert that it exists.

“Monks, in the world there occurs a mundane phenomenon. The Buddha realizes and understands it. Having realized and understood it, he describes, teaches, defines, points out, reveals, analyzes, and explains it.

“And what mundane phenomenon occurs in the world that the Buddha realizes and understands, and having realized and understood, describes,

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Yo, bhikkhave, tathāgatena evaṃ ācikkhiyamāne  
desiyamāne paññāpiyamāne paṭṭhapiyamāne vivari-  
yamāne vibhajiyamāne uttānikariyamāne na jānāti  
na passati tamahaṃ, bhikkhave, bālaṃ puthujjanaṃ  
andhaṃ acakkhukaṃ ajānantam apassantam kinti  
karomi! Vedanā, bhikkhave, loke lokadhammo ...  
pe ... saññā, bhikkhave ... saṅkhārā, bhikkhave ...  
viññāṇaṃ, bhikkhave, loke lokadhammo taṃ  
tathāgato abhisambujjhati abhisameti. Abhisambuj-  
hitvā abhisametvā ācikkhati deseti paññāpeti  
paṭṭhāpeti vivarati vibhajati uttānikaroti. (*Samyutta*  
iii.138–140)

Ekam samayaṃ bhagavā ayujjhāyaṃ viharati gaṅgā-  
yanadiyā tīre. Tatra kho bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi—

Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, ayaṃ gaṅgā nadī mahan-  
taṃ pheṇapiṇḍaṃ āvaheyya. Tameṇaṃ cakkhumā  
puriso passeyya nijjhāyeyya yoniso upaparikkheyya.  
Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato  
rittakaññeva khāyeyya, tucchakaññeva khāyeyya,

## A LUMP OF FOAM

teaches, defines, points out, reveals, analyzes, and explains? Bodily experience, monks, is a mundane phenomenon in the world that the Buddha realizes and understands, and having realized and understood, describes, teaches, defines, points out, reveals, analyzes, and explains.

“Monks, while the Buddha is describing, teaching, defining, pointing out, revealing, analyzing, and explaining in this way, whoever does not know and does not see is a foolish ordinary person, blind, sightless, unseeing, and unknowing. What have I to do with them? And so it is too, in the cases of feeling as a mundane phenomenon in the world, as well as perception, habitual traits, and consciousness. The Buddha realizes and understands these, and having realized and understood, describes, teaches, defines, points out, reveals, analyzes, and explains them.”

## A LUMP OF FOAM

On one occasion, the Buddha was staying at Ayujjha on the banks of the river Ganges. There he said to the monks:

“Monks, suppose this river Ganges was carrying along a large lump of foam and a man with good eyesight were to see it, reflect on it, and thoroughly investigate it. Seeing it, reflecting on it,

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

asārakaññeva khāyeyya. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, pheṇapiṇḍe sāro? Evameva kho, bhikkhave, yaṃ kiñci rūpaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppannaṃ... pe ... yaṃ dūre santike vā taṃ bhikkhu passati nijjhāyati yoniso upaparikkhati. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññeva khāyati, tucchakaññeva khāyati, asārakaññeva khāyati. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, rūpe sāro?

Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, saradasamaye thullaphusitake deve vassante udake udakabubbulaṃ uppajjati ceva nirujjhati ca. Tameva cakkhumā puriso passeyya nijjhāyeyya yoniso upaparikkheyya. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññeva khāyeyya, tucchakaññeva khāyeyya, asārakaññeva khāyeyya. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, udakabubbule sāro? Evameva kho, bhikkhave, yā kāci vedanā atītānāgatapaccuppannā... pe ... yā dūre santike vā taṃ bhikkhu passati nijjhāyati yoniso upaparikkhati. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññeva khāyati, tucchakaññeva khāyati, asārakaññeva khāyati. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, vedanāya sāro?

Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, gimhānaṃ pacchime māse ṭhite majjhanhike kāle marīcikā phandati. Tameva cakkhumā puriso passeyya nijjhāyeyya yoniso upaparikkheyya. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññeva khāyeyya, tucchakaññeva khāyeyya ... pe ... kiñhi



## A LUMP OF FOAM

and thoroughly investigating it, it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, and without essential substance. For what substance could there be in a lump of foam, monks? Similarly, any bodily experience that a monk sees, reflects upon, and thoroughly investigates, whether past, present, or future, far or near, and so on, will appear to him, having seen it, reflected on it, and thoroughly investigated it, to be empty, hollow, and without substance. For what essential substance can there be in bodily experience?

“Monks, suppose that in autumn when it is raining and big drops of rain are falling, a water bubble appears on the water and then dissolves. A man with good eyesight would see it, reflect on it, and thoroughly investigate it. Seeing it, reflecting on it, and thoroughly investigating it, it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, and without essential substance. For what substance could there be in a water bubble, monks? Similarly, any feeling that a monk sees, reflects upon, and thoroughly investigates, whether past, present, or future, far or near, and so on, will appear to him, having seen it, reflected on it, and thoroughly investigated it, to be empty, hollow, and without substance. For what essential substance can there be in a feeling?

“Monks, suppose that in the last month of summer at the time of the midday hour, a shimmering

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

siyā, bhikkhave, marīcikāya sāro? Evameva kho, bhikkhave, yā kāci saññā... pe ....

Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, puriso sārattthiko sāragesī sārapiyesanaṃ caramāno tiṇhaṃ kuṭhāriṃ ādāya vanaṃ paviseyya. So tattha passeyya mahan-taṃ kadalikkhandhaṃ ujum navaṃ akukkukajātaṃ. Tameṇaṃ mūle chindeyya; mūle chetvā agge chindeyya, agge chetvā pattavaṭṭiṃ vinibbhujeyya. So tassa pattavaṭṭiṃ vinibbhujanto pheggumpi nādhigaccheyya, kuto sāraṃ. Tameṇaṃ cakkhumā puriso passeyya nijjhāyeyya yoniso upaparikkheyya. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññeva khāyeyya, tucchakaññeva khāyeyya, asārakaññeva khāyeyya. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, kadalikkhandhe sāro? Evameva kho, bhikkhave, ye keci saṅkhārā atītānāgatapaccuppannā... pe ... ye dūre santike vā taṃ bhikkhu passati nijjhāyati yoniso upaparikkhati. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññeva khāyati, tucchakaññeva khāyati, asārakaññeva khāyati. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, saṅkhāresu sāro?

Seyyathāpi, bhikkhave, māyākāro vā māyākārantevāsī vā catumahāpathe māyaṃ vidamseyya. Tameṇaṃ cakkhumā puriso passeyya nijjhāyeyya yoniso upaparikkheyya. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparikkhato rittakaññeva khāyeyya, tucchakaññeva khāyeyya, asārakaññeva

## A LUMP OF FOAM

**mirage** appears. A man with good eyesight would see it, reflect on it, and thoroughly investigate it. Seeing it, reflecting on it, and thoroughly investigating it, it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, and without essential substance. **And so it is with perception,** monks. For what essential substance can there be in a perception?

“Monks, suppose a man wandering around seeking heartwood, desiring heartwood, and searching for heartwood would take up an ax and enter a forest. There he would see a large straight and young plantain trunk without shoots. He would chop it down at the root, and having cut it at the root, would lop off the top. Lopping off the top, he would separate the leaf sheaths. Continuing to separate the sheath of leaves, he would never find sapwood, to say nothing of heartwood. A man with good eyesight would see this, reflect on it, and thoroughly investigate it. Seeing this, reflecting on it, and thoroughly investigating it, it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, and without essential substance. **For what substance could there be in a plantain trunk, monks? Similarly, any habitual traits that a monk sees,** reflects upon, and thoroughly investigates, whether past, present, or future, far or near, and so on, will appear to him, having seen it, reflected on it, and thoroughly investigated it, to be

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

khāyeyya. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave, māyāya sāro?  
Evameva kho, bhikkhave, yaṃ kiñci viññāṇaṃ  
atītānāgata-paccuppannaṃ... pe ... yaṃ dūre santike  
vā, taṃ bhikkhu passati nijjhāyati yoniso upaparik-  
khati. Tassa taṃ passato nijjhāyato yoniso upaparik-  
khato rittakaññeva khāyati, tucchakaññeva khāyati,  
asārakaññeva khāyati. Kiñhi siyā, bhikkhave,  
viññāṇe sāro?

Evaṃ passaṃ, bhikkhave, sutavā ariyasāvako  
rūpasmimpi nibbindati, vedanāyapi ... saññāyapi ...  
saṅkhāresupi ... viññāṇasmimpi nibbindati. Nib-  
bindaṃ virajjati; virāgā vimuccati. (*Samyutta*  
iii.140–141)

Sāvattihinidānaṃ. Atha kho āyasmā rāhulo yena  
bhagavā tenupasaṅkami; upasaṅkamitvā... pe ...  
ekamantaṃ nisinno kho āyasmā rāhulo bhagavan-

## HOW TO KNOW AND SEE

empty, hollow, and without substance. For what essential substance can there be in habitual traits?

“Monks, suppose a magician or a magician’s apprentice were to perform an illusion at a crossroads, and a man with good eyesight were to see it, reflect on it, and thoroughly investigate it. Seeing it, reflecting on it, and thoroughly investigating it, it would appear to him to be empty, hollow, and without essential substance. For what substance could there be in an illusion, monks? Similarly, any moment of consciousness that a monk sees, reflects upon, and thoroughly investigates, whether past, present, or future, far or near, and so on, will appear to him, having seen it, reflected on it, and thoroughly investigated it, to be empty, hollow, and without substance. For what essential substance can there be in consciousness?

“Seeing in this way, monks, a learned and worthy disciple grows disenchanted with bodily experience, feeling, perception, habitual traits, and consciousness. Being disenchanted, he becomes dispassionate, and rid of passion, he is freed.”

## HOW TO KNOW AND SEE

This occurred at Savatthi. The Venerable Rahula approached the Buddha, honored him, sat down to one side, and asked him this: “Sir, how should one

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

taṃ etadavoca—kathaṃ nu kho, bhante, jānato  
kathaṃ passato imasmiṃca saviññāṇake kāye  
bahiddhā ca sabbanimittesu ahaṅkāramamaṅkāra-  
mānānusayā na hontīti?

Yaṃ kiñci, rāhula, rūpaṃ atītānāgatapaccuppan-  
naṃ ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā oḷārikaṃ vā sukhu-  
maṃ vā hīnaṃ vā paṇītaṃ vā yaṃ dūre santike vā,  
sabbam rūpaṃ netam mama, nesohamasmi, na  
meso attā’ti evametam yathābhūtaṃ sammapa-  
paññāya passati. Yā kāci vedanā ... yā kāci saññā... ye  
keci saṅkhārā... yaṃ kiñci viññāṇaṃ atītānāgatapac-  
cuppannaṃ ajjhataṃ vā bahiddhā vā... pe ... sabbam  
viññāṇaṃ ‘netam mama, nesohamasmi, na meso  
attāti evametam yathābhūtaṃ sammappaññāya  
passati. Evaṃ kho, rāhula, jānato evaṃ passato  
imasmiṃca saviññāṇake kāye bahiddhā ca sabbani-  
mittesu ahaṅkāramamaṅkāramānānusayā na hontīti.  
(*Samyutta* iii.135–136)

Evaṃ vutte, aññataro bhikkhu bhagavantaṃ  
etadavoca—siyā nu kho, bhante, bahiddhā asati  
paritassanā”ti? Siyā, bhikkhūti—bhagavā avoca. Idha

## LETTING GO OF ANXIETY

know and how should one see both this body with its consciousness and all external appearances, so that constructing an ‘I,’ constructing ‘mine,’ and the tendency toward conceit do not occur?”

“Rahula, one sees with correct understanding, as it really is, bodily experience of any kind—whether past, present, or future, internal or external, gross or subtle, base or exalted, far or near—that is, all bodily experience, in this way: ‘This is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self.’ And one sees with correct understanding as it really is any kind of feeling, any kind of perception, any kind of habitual traits, and any kind of consciousness, whether past, present, or future, internal or external, and so on, indeed, all consciousness as: ‘This is not mine, this is not what I am, this is not my self.’ In this way, Rahula, one knows and sees both this body with its consciousness and all external appearances in such a way that constructing an ‘I,’ constructing ‘mine,’ and the tendency to conceit do not occur.”

## LETTING GO OF ANXIETY

A certain monk asked the Buddha this: “Sir, can there be anxiety about something external that does not actually exist?”

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

bhikkhu ekaccassa evaṃ hoti—ahu vata me, taṃ vata me natthi; siyā vata me, taṃ vatāhaṃ na labhāmīti. So socati kilamati paridevati urattāliṃ kandati sammohaṃ āpajjati. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhu, bahiddhā asati paritassanā hotīti.

Siyā pana, bhante, bahiddhā asati aparitassanāti? Siyā, bhikkhūti—bhagavā avoca. Idha bhikkhu ekaccassa na evaṃ hoti—ahu vata me, taṃ vata me natthi; siyā vata me, taṃ vatāhaṃ na labhāmīti. So na socati na kilamati na paridevati na urattāliṃ kandati na sammohaṃ āpajjati. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhu, bahiddhā asati aparitassanā hotīti.

Siyā nu kho, bhante, ajjhattaṃ asati paritassanāti? “Siyā, bhikkhūti—bhagavā avoca. Idha, bhikkhu, ekaccassa evaṃ diṭṭhi hoti—so loko so attā, so pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato avipariṇāmadhammo, sassatisamaṃ tatheva ṭhassāmīti. So suṇāti tathāgatassa vā tathāgatasāvakassa vā sabbesaṃ diṭṭhiṭṭhānādhitṭhānapariyutṭhānābhinivesānu-sayānaṃ samugghātāya sabbasaṅkhārasamathāya sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggāya taṇhākkhayāya virāgāya nirodhāya nibbānāya dhammaṃ desentassa. Tassa evaṃ hoti—ucchiṇṇissāmi nāmassu, vinassissāmi nāmassu, nassu nāma bhavissāmīti. So socati kilamati paridevati urattāliṃ kandati sammohaṃ āpajjati. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhu, ajjhattaṃ asati paritassanā hotīti.



## LETTING GO OF ANXIETY

“There can be, monk,” replied the Buddha. “In such a case, one thinks, ‘Oh, I had it! Oh, I don’t have it! Oh, it might be mine! Oh, I am not getting it!’ One then sorrows, feels distress, wails, beats one’s breast, cries, and falls into confusion. **In this way, monk, there is anxiety about something external that does not really exist.**”

“Then can there be a lack of anxiety, sir, about something external that does not actually exist?”

“There can be, monk,” replied the Buddha. “In such a case, one does not think, ‘Oh, I had it! Oh, I don’t have it! Oh, it might be mine! Oh, I am not getting it!’ And so one does not sorrow, feel distress, wail, beat one’s breast, cry, or fall into confusion. In this way, monk, there is a lack of anxiety about something external that does not really exist.”

**“Sir, can there be anxiety about something internal that does not actually exist?”**

**“There can be, monk.** In this case, one holds the view: ‘That which is the self is the world. After death I will be permanent, stable, eternal, and not subject to change, and I will remain so forever and ever.’ This one listens to the Buddha or a disciple of the Buddha teaching the Teaching for the removal of all speculative positions, standpoints, obsessions, convictions, and tendencies, for the ceasing of all habitual traits, for giving up all attachments, for

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Siyā pana, bhante, ajjhataṃ asati aparitassanāti?  
Siyā, bhikkhūti bhagavā avoca. Idha, bhikkhu,  
ekaccassa na evaṃ diṭṭhi hoti—so loko so attā, so  
pecca bhavissāmi nicco dhuvo sassato avipa-  
riṇāmadhammo, sassatisamaṃ tatheva ṭhassāmīti.  
So suṇāti tathāgatassa vā tathāgatasāvakassa vā  
sabbesaṃ diṭṭhiṭṭhānādhīṭṭhānapariyuṭṭhānābhini-  
vesānusayānaṃ samugghātāya sabbasaṅkhārasamat-  
hāya sabbūpadhipaṭinissaggāya taṇhākkhayāya  
virāgāya nirodhāya nibbānāya dhammaṃ desen-  
tassa. Tassa na evaṃ hoti—ucchijjissāmi nāmassu,  
vinassissāmi nāmassu, nassu nāma bhavissāmīti. So  
na socati na kilamati na paridevati na urattāliṃ  
kandati na sammohaṃ āpajjati. Evaṃ kho, bhikkhu,  
ajjhataṃ asati aparitassanā hoti. (*Majjhima*  
i.136–137)

## LETTING GO OF ANXIETY

eliminating all craving, and for the sake of dispassion, ceasing, and nirvana. And this occurs to them: 'So I will be cut down, I will be destroyed, I will cease to exist!' One then sorrows, feels distress, wails, beats one's breast, cries, and falls into confusion. In this way, monk, there is anxiety about something internal that does not really exist."

"Then can there be a lack of anxiety, sir, about something internal that does not actually exist?"

"There can be, monk," replied the Buddha. "In such a case, one does not hold the view that 'That which is the self is the world. After death I will be permanent, stable, eternal, and not subject to change, and I will remain so forever and ever.' This one listens to the Buddha or a disciple of the Buddha teaching the Teaching for the removal of all speculative positions, standpoints, obsessions, convictions, and tendencies, for the ceasing of all habitual traits, for giving up all attachments, for eliminating all craving, for the sake of dispassion, ceasing, and nirvana. And it does not occur to them that 'I will be cut down, I will be destroyed, I will cease to exist!' One then does not sorrow, feel distress, wail, beat one's breast, cry, and fall into confusion. In this way, monk, there is no anxiety about something that does not exist internally."

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

### Related Commentaries

#### WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

Although the following selection is **not considered by most Theravada Buddhist traditions to be a canonical text**, it is among the very best known Buddhist passages in the world. The celebrated *Questions of Milinda* and the chariot metaphor it contains are widely cited in introductory textbooks on Buddhism and philosophical texts everywhere. The dating of the text is uncertain, but scholars think it came together in the **early centuries of the Common Era**. The text depicts a dialogue between a Bactrian Greek king, Milinda (thought to be Menander, a king ruling over a province in the wake of Alexander the Great's advance into the northwestern region of the Indian subcontinent), and a Buddhist monk, Nagasena. While scholars are not certain that the text is based on an actual historical event, the legend of the debate has traveled far and wide and evokes the fascinating possibility of an ancient encounter between West and East.

King Milinda comes to the discussion as a skeptic. In the classic Indian model of a philosophically curious and learned king, he has initiated a debate with the wise monk Nagasena in his quest for wisdom. Our selection takes up the moment when the

## WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

debate is first joined. Nagasena introduces himself by denying himself. That is, he notes that his name is Nagasena, but that “Nagasena” is just a name, and underneath there is no “person” to be found, where “person” here means an enduring selfhood. Milinda is taken aback. How can there be no person present? What accounts for the sense of personhood on which everyday interactions rely? How can there be any sense of moral responsibility if there is no continuous moral agent? And why would a monk like Nagasena engage in religious practice and development if there is no underlying self that he is developing?

Nagasena replies with the famous chariot metaphor, whereby he shows how a person is like a chariot in that it can be broken down into its component parts without finding a substantial, enduring essence or self. None of the parts has an essential self, and a chariot is just a collection of parts arranged in a certain way, to which we affix the conventional label “chariot.” That we give this name to this arrangement does not entail that it has an enduring essence. Like a chariot, a person is a collection of five clusters, the bodily experiences, perceptions, feelings, habitual traits, and consciousness that we have been considering, and the name we give to any particular collection of these is just a conventional label.

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Atha kho Milindo rājā yenāyasmā Nāgaseno tenupa-  
sankami, upasankamitvā āyasmatā Nāgasenena  
saddhiṃ sammodi, sammodanīyaṃ kathaṃ sārāṇi-  
yaṃ vītisāretvā ekamantaṃ nisīdi. Āyasmā pi kho  
Nāgaseno paṭisammodi, yeneva rañño Milindassa  
cittaṃ ārādhesi. Atha kho Milindo rājā āyasmantaṃ  
Nāgasenaṃ etad-avoca: Kathaṃ bhadanto ñāyati,  
kinnāmo si bhante ti. Nāgaseno ti kho ahaṃ mahā-  
rāja ñāyāmi, Nāgaseno ti maṃ mahārāja sabrah-  
macārī samudācaranti, api ca mātāpitāro nāmaṃ  
karonti Nāgaseno ti vā Sūraseno ti vā Vīraseno ti vā  
Sīhaseno ti vā, api ca kho mahārāja sankhā samañña

## WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

We include a few additional pages from this text that describe the human person as a continuous line of development from a tender baby to an old person, ever changing within a single causal sequence of events over time, but lacking a single enduring essence underlying the changes. Nagasena makes use of other analogies: just as a lamp flame glowing all night is neither the same nor different over time, a person over time is neither the same nor entirely different. Much as milk turns to curds, curds to butter, and butter to ghee, an individual human life is a constant stream of causally connected changes, neither the same nor entirely different over time.



Then King Milinda approached Venerable Nagasena, and drawing near, addressed him cordially, exchanged polite and friendly greetings, and sat down to one side. Nagasena pleased King Milinda with his cordial greetings in reply. Then King Milinda asked: “How are you known, sir, what is your name?”

“I am known as Nagasena, great king, and my fellow monks call me Nagasena. Parents give names like Nagasena, Surasena, Virasena, or Sihasena, and yet this ‘Nagasena’ is just a word, an appellation, a designation, a common usage—that is, it is a mere name and no person is found here.”

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

paññatti vohāro nāmamattaṃ yadidaṃ Nāgaseno ti,  
na hettha puggalo upalabbhatīti. Atha kho Milindo  
rājā evamāha: Suṇantu me bhonto pañcasatā Yonakā  
asīti sahaṣṣā ca bhikkhū, ayaṃ Nāgaseno evamāha:  
na hettha puggalo upalabbhatīti, kallaṇ-  
nu kho tadabhinanditun-ti. Atha kho Milindo rājā āyas-  
mantaṃ Nāgasenaṃ etadavoca: Sace bhante  
Nāgasena puggalo nūpalabbhati, ko carahi tumhākaṃ  
cīvara-piṇḍapāta-senāsanagilānapaccayabhesajja-  
parikkhāraṃ deti, ko taṃ paribhuñjati, ko sīlaṃ  
rakkhati, ko bhāvanam-anuyuñjati, ko magga-  
phala-nibbānāni sacchikaroti, ko paṇaṃ hanati, ko  
adinnaṃ ādiyati, ko kāmesu micchā carati, ko musā  
bhaṇati, ko majjaṃ pivati, ko pañcānantariyakam-  
maṃ karoti; tasmā natthi kusalaṃ, natthi akusalaṃ,  
natthi kusalākusalānaṃ kammānaṃ kattā vā kāretā  
vā, natthi sukaṭadukkaṭānaṃ kammānaṃ phalaṃ  
vipāko, sace bhante Nāgasena yo tumhe māreti  
natthi tassāpi pāṇātipāto, tumhākaṃpi bhante  
Nāgasena natthi ācariyo natthi upajjhāyo na-tthi  
upasampadā; Nāgaseno ti maṃ mahārāja sabrah-  
macārī samudācarantīti yaṃ vadesi, katamo ettha  
Nāgaseno, kinnu kho bhante kesā Nāgaseno ti. Na hi  
mahārājāti. Lomā Nāgaseno ti. Na hi mahārājāti.  
Nakhā-pe-dantā taco maṃsaṃ nahāru aṭṭhī aṭṭhi-  
miñjā vakkamā hadayaṃ yakanaṃ kilomakaṃ  
pihakaṃ papphāsaṃ antaṃ antaṅgaṃ udariyaṃ



## WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

At this King Milinda spoke: “Now listen to me, all five hundred Greeks and eighty thousand monks. This Nagasena just told me that no person is found here. Can this be right?”

King Milinda turned again to Venerable Nagasena: “If, sir, there is no person, then who exactly is it that gives you a robe, alms bowl, lodging, and medicines and remedies for illness? And who uses these? Who protects moral discipline? Who practices meditation? Who realizes the path, its fruits, and nirvana? Who is it that destroys life, takes what is not given, behaves with desire and lust, tells lies, drinks alcohol, or commits the five actions that bring about immediate retribution? If this is so, there cannot be anything good or bad, or anyone who does good and bad actions or causes others to do so, and no fruit or result of virtuous or immoral actions. And, Nagasena, if someone were to kill you, his act would not be considered murder. And how could you have a teacher, master, or ordination? You said, ‘Great king, my fellow monks call me Nagasena,’ but what here is Nagasena? What, is the hair on your head Nagasena?”

“No, great king.”

“Is the hair on your body Nagasena?” “No, great king.” “The nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, pleura, spleen, lungs,

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

karīsaṃ pittaṃ semhaṃ pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo  
assu vasā kheḷo singhāṇikā lasikā muttaṃ matthake  
matthalungaṃ Nāgaseno ti. Na hi mahārājāti. Kinnu  
kho bhante rūpaṃ Nāgaseno ti. Na hi mahārājāti.  
Vedanā Nāgaseno ti. Na hi mahārājāti. Saññā  
Nāgaseno ti. Na hi mahārājāti. Sankhārā Nāgaseno  
ti. Na hi mahārājāti. Viññāṇaṃ Nāgaseno ti. Na hi  
mahārājāti. Kimpana bhante rūpa-vedanā-saññā-  
sankhāra-viññāṇaṃ Nāgaseno ti. Na hi mahārājāti.  
Kim-pana bhante aññatra rūpa-vedanā-saññā-  
sankhāra-viññāṇaṃ Nāgaseno ti. Na hi mahārājāti.  
Tam-ahaṃ bhante pucchanto pucchanto na passāmi  
Nāgasenaṃ, saddo yeva nu kho bhante Nāgaseno,  
ko panettha Nāgaseno, alikaṃ tvaṃ bhante bhāsasi  
musāvādaṃ, natthi Nāgaseno ti. Atha kho āyasmā  
Nāgaseno Milindaṃ rājānaṃ etadavoca: Tvaṃ kho  
si mahārāja khattiyasukhumālo accantasukhumālo,  
tassa te mahārāja majjhantikasamayaṃ tattāya  
bhūmiyā unhāya vālikāya kharā sakkhara-kaṭhala-  
vālikā madditvā pādena gacchantassa pādā rujanti,  
kāyo kilamati, cittaṃ upahaññati, dukkhasahagataṃ  
kāyaviññāṇaṃ uppajjati, kinnu tvaṃ pādenāgato si  
udāhu vāhanenāti. Nāhaṃ bhante pāden āgacchami,  
rathenaṃ āgatosmīti. Sace tvaṃ mahārāja rat-  
henāgato si rathaṃ me ārocehi, kinnu kho mahārāja  
isā ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti. Akkho ratho ti. Na  
hi bhante ti. Cakkāni ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti.

## WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

small intestine, large intestine, stomach, excrement, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, serum, saliva, mucus, synovial fluid, urine, or the brain matter in your skull—are any of these Nagasena?” “No, great king.”

“What is it then, sir? Is your bodily experience Nagasena?” “No, great king.” “Is your feeling Nagasena?” “No.” “Is your perception Nagasena?” “No.” “Are your habitual traits Nagasena?” “No.” “Is your consciousness Nagasena?” “No, great king.” “Well then, is Nagasena bodily experience, feeling, perception, habitual traits, *and* consciousness?” “No.” “Then is Nagasena something *other than* bodily experience, feeling, perception, habitual traits, and consciousness?” “No, great king.”

“Sir, though questioning you again and again, I do not see Nagasena! So is Nagasena merely a sound? What here is Nagasena? You have spoken a falsehood, a lie, for there is no Nagasena.”

In response, Venerable Nagasena turned to the king: “Great king, you have been delicately brought up as a noble and are exceedingly delicate. If you were to set out on foot at midday on the hot ground on the scorching sand, treading on the sharp gravel, stones, and sand, your feet would hurt, your body would ache, your mind would be flustered, and there would arise a painful awareness of your body.

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Rathapañjaraṃ ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti. Rathadaṇḍako ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti. Yugaṃ ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti. Rasmiyo ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti. Patodalaṭṭhi ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti. Kinnu kho mahārāja īsā-akkha-cakka-rathapañjara-rathadaṇḍa-yuga-rasmi-patodaṃ ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti. Kim-pana mahārāja aññatra īsā-akkha-cakka-rathapañjara-rathadaṇḍa-yuga-rasmi-patodaṃ ratho ti. Na hi bhante ti. Tam-ahaṃ mahārāja pucchanto pucchanto na passāmi rathaṃ, saddo yeva nu kho mahārāja ratho, ko panettha ratho, alikaṃ tvaṃ mahārāja bhāsasi musāvādaṃ, natthi ratho, tvaṃ si mahārāja sakala-Jambudīpe aggarājā, kassa pana tvaṃ bhāyivā musā bhāsasi, suṇantu me bhonto pañcasatā Yonakā asītisahassā ca bhikkhū, ayaṃ Milindo rājā evam-āha: rathenāhaṃ āgato smīti: sace tvaṃ mahārāja rathenāgato si rathaṃ me ārocehīti vutto samāno rathaṃ na sampādeti, kallaṇu kho tad-abhinanditunti. Evaṃ vutte pañcasatā Yonakā āyasmato Nāgasenassa sādhu-kāraṃ datvā Milindaṃ rājānaṃ etadavocum: Idāni kho tvaṃ mahārāja sakkonto bhāsassūti. Atha kho Milindo rājā āyasmantaṃ Nāgasenaṃ etadavoca: Nāhaṃ bhante Nāgasena musā bhaṇāmi, īsaṇ-ca paṭicca akkhaṇca paṭicca cakkāni ca paṭicca rathapañjaraṇca paṭicca rathadaṇḍakaṇca paṭicca ratho ti sankhā samañña paññatti vohāro nāmaṃ pavattatīti. Sādhu

## WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

Surely you did not come on foot, but instead by vehicle?”

“I did not come by foot, but rather, I came by chariot.”

“If you came by chariot, then tell me about the chariot. Is the pole the chariot, great king?” “No, sir.” “Is the axle the chariot?” “No, sir.” “Are the wheels the chariot?” “No.” “Is the frame the chariot?” “No.” “Is the flagstaff the chariot?” “No.” “Is the yoke the chariot?” “No.” “Are the reins the chariot?” “No.” “Is the goad the chariot?” “No.” “Then are the pole, axle, wheels, frame, flagstaff, yoke, reins, and goad the chariot?” “No, sir.”

“Then, great king, though questioning you again and again, I do not see a chariot! So is the chariot merely a sound?”

“No, sir.”

“What then, is the chariot? You have spoken a falsehood, a lie, for there is no chariot. You are the chief king in all of India. Of whom are you frightened that you would utter a falsehood? Please listen to me, all five hundred Greeks and eighty thousand monks. This King Milinda declared ‘I came by chariot.’ But when asked, ‘If, great king, you came by chariot, then show me the chariot,’ he does not produce the chariot. Can this be right?”

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

kho tvam mahārāja ratham jānāsi, evameva kho mahārāja mayhampi kese ca paṭicca lome ca paṭicca-pe-atthalungaṇca paṭicca rūpaṇca paṭicca vedanaṇca paṭicca saññaṇca paṭicca sankhāre ca paṭicca viññāṇaṇca paṭicca Nāgaseno ti sankhā samaññā paññatti vohāro nāmamattaṃ pavattati, paramatt-hato panettha puggalo nūpalabbhati. Bhāsitampe-taṃ mahārāja Vajirāya bhikkhuniyā Bhagavato sammukhā: Yathā hi angasambhārā hoti saddo ratho iti, evaṃ khandhesu santesu hoti satto ti sammutīti. Acchariyaṃ bhante Nāgasena, abbhutaṃ bhante Nāgasena, aticitrāni pañhapaṭibhānāni vissajjitāni, yadi Buddho tiṭṭheyya sādhu-kāraṃ dadeyya, sādhu sādhu Nāgasena, aticitrāni pañhapaṭibhānāni vissajjitāni. (*Milindapañho* 25–28)

## WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

Addressed in this way, the five hundred Greeks applauded Venerable Nagasena and said to King Milinda: “Now, great king, are you able to reply?”

At this, the king turned to Nagasena: “Nagasena, I am not telling a falsehood, **since it is because of a pole, because of an axle, because of the wheels, because of the frame, and because of the flagstaff, that there comes to be the ‘chariot,’ which is just a word, an appellation, a designation, a common usage, a mere name.**”

“Well done, great king. You understand the chariot. It is the same with me. It is because of head hair, body hair, and so on all the way up to the brain matter in the skull, and it is because of bodily experience, feeling, perception, habitual traits, and consciousness, that there comes to be ‘Nagasena,’ which is just a word, an appellation, a designation, a common usage, a mere name. But in the ultimate sense, there is no person found here. In reference to this very point, the nun **Vajira** said in the presence of the Buddha: ‘**Just as *chariot* is a word used when there is an assemblage of parts, so too, it is conventional to say that there is a *being* when there is only a collection of clusters.**’”

“Wonderful, Nagasena! Marvelous, Nagasena! The answers in reply to my questions are brilliant, and if the Buddha were standing here he would

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Rājā āha: Bhante Nāgasena, yo uppajjati so eva so udāhu añño ti. Thero āha: Na ca so na ca añño ti. Opammaṃ karohīti. Taṃ kimmaññasi mahārāja: yadā tvaṃ daharo taruṇo mando uttānaseyyako ahosi so yeva tvaṃ etarahi mahanto ti. Na hi bhante, añño so daharo taruṇo mando uttānaseyyako ahosi, añño ahaṃ etarahi mahanto ti. Evaṃ sante kho mahārāja mātā ti pi na bhavissati, pitā ti pi na bhavissati, ācariyo ti pi na bhavissati, sippavā ti pi na bhavissati, sīlavā ti pi na bhavissati, paññāvā ti pi na bhavissati, kinnu kho mahārāja añña eva kalalassa mātā, añña abbudassa mātā, añña pesiyā mātā, añña ghanassa mātā, añña khuddakassa mātā, añña mahantassa mātā, añño sippaṃ sikkhati, añño sikkhito bhavati, añño pāpakammaṃ karoti, aññassa hatthapādā chijjantīti. Na hi bhante, tvaṃ pana bhante evaṃ vutte kiṃ vadeyyāsīti. Thero āha: Ahaññeva kho mahārāja daharo ahosiṃ taruṇo mando uttānaseyyako, ahaññeva etarahi mahanto, imaññeva kāyaṃ nissāya sabbe te ekasangahītā ti. Opammaṃ karohīti. Yathā mahārāja kocid-eva puriso padīpaṃ padīpeyya, kiṃ so sabbarattim dīpeyyāti. Āma bhante, sabbarattim dīpeyyāti. Kinnu kho mahārāja yā purime yāme acci sā



## WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

surely give his approval. Excellent, Nagasena, are these brilliant answers in reply to the questioning.”

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The king said: “Nagasena, sir, does the person who is reborn become the same person or someone else?”

The elder replied: “Neither the same nor someone else.”

“Please give an analogy.”

“What do you think, great king? Once you were a tiny infant lying on your back, tender and naïve. Is he the same as you are now, all grown up?”

“No, sir, now that I am an adult, I am different from that tiny infant lying on his back, tender and naïve.”

“Does this mean, great king, that you have no mother, no father, or teacher? And if without them, that you are not instructed in the arts, morality, or understanding? Is the mother a different person in each of the first four weeks of pregnancy? And is she another person still when her child is small? And then another when the child has grown up? What about the person who is becoming educated and the person who is educated? Are they different? Or the person who has committed a crime. Is he different from the one who is punished by getting his hands or feet cut off?”

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

majjhime yāme accīti. Na hi bhante ti. Yā majjhime yāme acci sā pacchime yāme accīti. Na hi bhante ti. Kinnu kho mahārāja añño so ahosi purime yāme padīpo, añño majjhime yāme padīpo, añño pacchime yāme padīpo ti. Na hi bhante, taṃ yeva nissāya sabbarattiṃ padipito ti. Evameva kho mahārāja dhammasantati sandahati, añño uppajjati añño nirujjhati, apubbaṃ acarimaṃ viya sandahati, tena na ca so na ca añño pacchimaviññāṇasangahaṃ gacchatīti. Bhiyyo opammaṃ karohīti. Yathā mahārājakhīraṃ duyhamānaṃ kālantarena dadhi parivatteyya, dadhito navanītaṃ, navanītato ghaṭaṃ parivatteyya, yo nu kho mahārāja evaṃ vadeyya: yaṃ yeva khīraṃ taṃ yeva dadhi taṃ yeva navanītaṃ taṃ yeva ghatanti, sammā nu kho so mahārāja vadamāno vadeyyāti. Na hi bhante, taṃ yeva nissāya sambhūṭanti. Evameva kho mahārāja dhammasantati sandahati, añño uppajjati añño nirujjhati, apubbaṃ acarimaṃ viya sandahati, tena na ca so na ca añño pacchimaviññāṇasangahaṃ gacchatīti. Kallo si bhante Nāgasenāti. (*Milindapañho* 40–41)

## WHY A PERSON IS LIKE A CHARIOT

“No, certainly not. But what would you say about this?”

“I would say that there is an ‘I’ in relation to the tiny infant lying on his back, tender and naïve, and the ‘I’ of the adult now. **There is a single continuity to it all in relation to the body,**” the elder replied.

“Please give an analogy.”

“Think of a person who lights a lamp, great king. Does it burn all night?”

“Yes, it could burn all night.”

“Is the flame the same flame in the beginning of the night as in the middle of the night? And is it the same in the middle of the night as at the end?”

“Neither, sir.” “All right, but then is the lamp different in the beginning, the middle, and the end of the night?” “No, because relying on it, the light shines all night.”

“In the same way, great king, the continuity of phenomenal states is connected: this arises, that ceases; the next thing arises practically simultaneously. Therefore, it is neither this nor something entirely different that goes along as the continuity from the previous moment of consciousness.”

“Give another analogy, please.”

“Just as, great king, fresh milk in a little while turns to curds, and from curds into butter, and from butter into ghee. What if someone were to say that

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

the milk, the curds, the butter, and the ghee are the same? Would it be correct to say this?”

“No, because each is produced relying on the other.”

“In the same way, the continuity of phenomenal states is connected: this arises, that ceases; the next thing is connected practically simultaneously. Therefore, it is neither this nor something entirely different that goes along as the continuity from the previous moment of consciousness.”

“You are wise, Nagasena.”

## CONVENTIONAL AND ULTIMATE WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT THIS

Our final selection from the Pali sources is taken from the commentarial literature, a body of lore that may have developed alongside the scriptures perhaps from the beginning, but was put into its present form largely by the fifth-century CE scholar Buddhaghosa. This short passage picks up on the idea we have just seen that conventional labels for chariots and people are a necessary part of how we communicate with others, even while they do not indicate ultimately existing essential entities. Buddhaghosa suggests that the Buddha used language pragmatically, and was able to shift registers depending on the context and purpose at hand. In

## WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT THIS

many contexts, using conventional notions of “persons” is appropriate. In other contexts, particularly when doing important analytical work to dismantle our fixed and essentialist constructs, an “ultimate” or “furthest-sense” language is more apt.

When speaking about shame, morality, love, justice, moral action, and other such topics, the Buddha used the conventional language of “persons,” in which the continuity of individuals over time is appropriate and intuitive. We speak of women, men, Kshatriyas (the noble class), Brahmans (the priestly class), gods, and Mara (a type of god that fosters delusion) in everyday life (or at least we would if we lived in ancient India), and the Buddha had no wish to “discard worldly conventions.” But when he wanted to dissolve the notion of an enduring metaphysical self and our fantasies about it, he used a technical register of analysis of the sort we have been considering in the previous passages. Abstract, technical terms such as “no-self,” “clusters,” “elements” (referring to the ways we experience the variety of impacts of the material world), and “sensory experience” (the senses, their objects, and their interactions) are analytically useful exercises that describe a person in a way that does not make any reference to an enduring self. This passage affirms that many ordinary intuitions about what a person is are perfectly useful,

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

while retaining the resources for deploying a specialized use of language and thought that can dismantle a fixed conception of a metaphysical self.

This distinction may be particularly relevant when we consider, as Buddhists do, past and future lives. According to Buddhist teachings, we have multiple lives shaped by karma (moral action). Unless we break the cycle of rebirth—for that is what nirvana is, as all negative experience and conditions cease and we will no longer be reborn—our karmic actions condition our present and future states. But there is no self traveling across lives. As we saw in the previous selection, one lamp lights the next without it being identical, and milk turns to curds, curds turn to butter, and butter turns to ghee, without there being a single unchanging element in these processes. So too with the human being across a single lifetime, and across many lifetimes—there is no single unchanging substratum. But as the text here puts it, as we consider previous lives we might want to do so in a more conventional manner where, intuitively, “I” inherit the effects of “my” actions in previous life, though I am neither the same nor different as the being in that past life. Conventional language supports intuitions we have about moral accountability.

Last, what is notable about this particular formulation of the conventional and ultimate distinction

## WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT THIS

(we will see other formulations of the distinction in the pages ahead), is that for the Theravada tradition, the two registers of language are not two different *levels* of truth or reality, but rather two equally useful uses of *language*. Since they refer to the Buddha's teachings, and since the Buddha's teachings cannot be conceived to be in any way short on truth (at least for Buddhaghosa), both are equally true ways of expressing ideas, much like the use of two different languages, Tamil and the language spoken in Andhra, by a teacher skillful in languages.

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Puggaloti sammutikathā, na paramatthakathā.  
Buddhassa hi bhagavato duvidhā desanā—  
sammutidesanā, paramatthadesanā cāti. Tattha  
puggalo satto itthi puriso khattiyo brāhmaṇo devo  
māroti evarūpā sammutidesanā, aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ  
anattā khandhā dhātū āyatanāni satipaṭṭhānāni  
evarūpā paramatthadesanā. Tattha bhagavā ye  
sammutivasena desanaṃ sutvā atthaṃ paṭivijjhivā  
mohaṃ pahāya visesaṃ adhigantaṃ samatthā,  
tesaṃ sammutidesanaṃ deseti. Ye pana paramattha-  
vasena desanaṃ sutvā atthaṃ paṭivijjhivā mohaṃ  
pahāya visesamadhigantaṃ samatthā, tesaṃ para-  
matthadesanaṃ deseti.

Tatrāyaṃ upamā—yathā hi desabhāsākusalo  
tiṇṇaṃ vedānaṃ atthasaṃvaṇṇanako ācariyo ye  
damaḷabhāsāya vutte atthaṃ jānanti, tesaṃ damaḷab-  
hāsāya ācikkhati. Ye andhabhāsādisu aññatarāya  
bhāsāya, tesaṃ tāya tāya bhāsāya. Evaṃ te māṇavakā  
chekaṃ byattaṃ ācariyamāgama khippameva  
sippaṃ uggaṇhanti. Tattha ācariyo viya buddho  
bhagavā, tayo vedā viya kathetabbabhāve ʘhitāni tīpi  
piṭakāni, desabhāsākosallamiva sammutiparamatt-  
hakosallaṃ, nānādesabhāsā māṇavakā viya sammu-  
tiparamatthavasena paṭivijjhanasamatthā veneyya-  
sattā, ācariyassa damaḷabhāsādiācikkhanaṃ viya



## WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT THIS

“Person” is conventional usage, not ultimate usage. There are two kinds of teaching of the Blessed Buddha: conventional teaching and teaching in an ultimate sense. Here, “a person, a being, a woman, a man, a Kshatriya, a Brahman, a god, a Mara” are conventional teachings, while “impermanence, suffering, no-self, clusters, elements, sense experience, foundations of mindfulness” are ultimate teachings. If someone is able to make progress abandoning confusion and comprehending the meaning when hearing a conventional teaching, then he teaches them a conventional teaching. If someone is able to make progress abandoning confusion and comprehending the meaning when hearing an ultimate teaching, then he teaches them an ultimate teaching.

There is this analogy: when a teacher skilled in regional languages and commenting on the meaning of the three Vedas ascertains that people understand the meaning when addressed in the Tamil language, he explains it in Tamil. In the case of other languages such as Andhra, he speaks to them in this or that language. In this way, the Brahman students, having access to a skilled and experienced teacher, learn their subjects very quickly. The Blessed Buddha is like this teacher, the three established baskets of teaching are like the three Vedas in their being something needing explanation, one skillful in the

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

bhagavato sammutiparamatthavasena desanā  
veditabbā. Āha cettha—

Duve saccāni akkhāsi, sambuddho vadatam  
varo;

Sammutiṃ paramatthañca, tatiyaṃ  
nupalabbhati.

Saṅketavacanam saccam, lokasammutikāraṇā;  
Paramatthavacanam saccam, dhammānam  
bhūtakāraṇā.

Tasmā vohāraḥ kusalassa, lokanāthassa  
satthuno;

Sammutiṃ voharantassa, musāvādo na jāyatīti.

Apica aṭṭhahi kāraṇehi bhagavā puggalakatthaṃ  
katheti—hirottappadīpanatthaṃ, kammassa-  
katādīpanatthaṃ, paccattapurisakāradīpanatthaṃ,  
ānantariyadīpanatthaṃ, brahmavihāradīpanatthaṃ,  
pubbenivāsadīpanatthaṃ, dakkhiṇāvisuddhidīpa-  
natthaṃ, lokasammutiyā appahānatthañcāti.

Khandhadhātuāyatanāni hiriṃ yanti ottappantīti hi  
vutte mahājano na jānāti, sammohamāpajjati,  
paṭisattu hoti “kimidaṃ khandhadhātuāyatanāni  
hiriṃ yanti ottappanti nāmāti? Itthi hiriṃ yati ottappati,  
puriso khattiyo brāhmaṇo devo māroti vutte pana  
jānāti, na sammohamāpajjati, na paṭisattu hoti.

Tasmā bhagavā hirottappadīpanatthaṃ puggalakat-  
thaṃ katheti.

## WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT THIS

conventional and the ultimate is like one skillful in regional languages, and those receptive to the teaching and capable of comprehending the meaning through either the conventional or ultimate are like the Brahman students who know various languages. The Buddha's teachings, whether conventional or ultimate, are to be understood like the teacher's explanation in Tamil or another language. And to this point, it is said:

The Perfectly Awakened One, the best of speakers, taught that there are two truths: conventional and ultimate. A third is not found.

An agreed-upon statement is true because it is the means of worldly convention; an ultimate statement is true because it is the means for showing the arising of phenomena.

Therefore, there is no false speech of the Teacher, who is the leader of the world and skilled in the common use of language when he makes use of the conventional.

Moreover, there are eight reasons why the Buddha explains something using talk of "person": for the sake of showing shame and apprehension, for showing that one has responsibility for one's actions, for showing people as separate agents, for showing actions that have immediate results, for showing the sublime states of love, for showing previous lives,

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Khandhā kammassakā, dhātuyo āyatanānīti  
vuttepi eseṇa nayo. Tasmā bhagavā kammassa-  
katādīpanatthaṃ puggalakathaṃ katheti.

Veḷuvanādayo mahāvihārā khandhehi kārāpitā,  
dhātūhi āyatanehīti vuttepi eseṇa nayo. Tasmā  
bhagavā paccattapurisakāradīpanatthaṃ puggalakat-  
haṃ katheti.

Khandhā mātaraṃ jīvītā voropenti, pitaraṃ,  
arahantaṃ, ruhiruppādakammaṃ, saṅghabheda-  
kammaṃ karonti, dhātuyo āyatanānīti vuttepi eseṇa  
nayo. Tasmā bhagavā ānantariyadīpanatthaṃ  
puggalakathaṃ katheti.

Khandhā mettāyanti, dhātuyo āyatanānīti vuttepi  
eseṇa nayo. Tasmā bhagavā brahmavihārādīpanatt-  
haṃ puggalakathaṃ katheti.

Khandhā pubbenivāsamanussaranti, dhātuyo  
āyatanānīti vuttepi eseṇa nayo. Tasmā bhagavā  
pubbenivāsadīpanatthaṃ puggalakathaṃ katheti.

Khandhā dānaṃ paṭiggaṇhanti, dhātuyo āyatan-  
ānīti vuttepi mahājano na jānāti, sammohaṃ āpajjati,  
paṭisattu hoti kimidaṃ khandhadhātuāyatanānī  
paṭiggaṇhanti nāmāti? Puggalā paṭiggaṇhanti  
silavanto kalyāṇadhammoti vutte pana jānāti,  
na sammohaṃ āpajjati, na paṭisattu hoti. Tasmā  
bhagavā dakkhiṇāvisuddhidīpanatthaṃ puggalakat-  
haṃ katheti.

## WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT THIS

for showing the purity of almsgiving, and so as not to discard worldly conventions. Because when someone says, “Clusters, elements, and sensory experience feel shame or feel apprehension,” most people do not understand and they fall into confusion and get hostile: “What is this? How can clusters, elements, sensory experiences feel shame or feel apprehension?” But when someone says, “A woman feels shame, a woman feels apprehension, or a man, Kshatriya, Brahman, god, or Mara,” then one understands, does not fall into confusion, and does not get hostile. Therefore, the Buddha uses talk of “person” for the sake of showing shame and apprehension.

It is the same thing when someone says “clusters, elements, sensory experiences have responsibility for actions.” Therefore, the Buddha talks of a person for the sake of showing responsibility for actions.

It is the same thing when someone says, “great monasteries like Veluvana were built by clusters, elements, and sensory experience.” Therefore, the Buddha talks of a person for the sake of showing people as separate agents.

It is the same thing when someone says, “clusters, elements, sensory experiences take the life of one’s mother, father, or an awakened person, or cause the Buddha’s blood to flow, or cause a schism

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## EARLY BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

Lokasammutiñca buddhā bhagavanto nap-  
pajahanti, lokasamaññāya lokaniruttiyā lokābhiḷāpe  
ṭhitāyeva dhammaṃ desenti. Tasmā bhagavā  
lokasammutiyā appahānatthampi puggalakathaṃ  
katheti. (*Aṅguttara-aṭṭhakathā* I.94–95)

## WAYS OF TALKING ABOUT THIS

in the monastic community.” Therefore, the Buddha talks of persons for the sake of showing actions that have immediate results.

It is the same thing when someone says, “clusters, elements, sensory experiences feel lovingkindness.” Therefore, the Buddha talks of persons for the sake of showing the sublime states of love.

It is the same thing when someone says, “clusters, elements, sensory experiences remember their previous lives.” Therefore, the Buddha talks of persons for the sake of showing previous lives.

It is the same thing when someone says “clusters, elements, sensory experiences receive alms.” Most people do not understand, fall into confusion, and get hostile. “What is this? How can clusters, elements, and sensory experiences receive anything?” But when one says, “People who are virtuous and have a beautiful practice receive,” then they understand, do not fall into confusion, and do not get hostile. Therefore, the Buddha talks of persons for the sake of showing the purity of almsgiving.

The Blessed Buddha does not discard worldly conventions. He teaches the Teaching with words used by the world, with ways of speaking used by the world, and for the sake of remaining with expressions used in the world. Therefore, the Buddha talks of persons so as not to discard worldly conventions.

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## Part II

### MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

The rise of the Mahayana, or Great Vehicle, movement around the turn of the first millennium generated new approaches to the two truths, to emptiness, and so to new arguments for and analyses of the selflessness of persons. In some respects, these developments are continuous with ideas in early Buddhism, including the insistence that there are no selves, even though there are persons. But the understanding of the two truths is very different: a distinction in the earlier Buddhist tradition between a conventional and an ultimate way of speaking is transformed into a distinction between two levels of reality.

Indian Mahayana comprises two broad schools of thought: Madhyamaka (Middle Way) and Yogacara (Mind Only). The earliest to emerge is the Middle Way school, inaugurated by the Perfection

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

of Wisdom sutras and the work of the South Indian Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna (ca. second century CE). This school emphasizes the ultimate emptiness of all phenomena of any intrinsic identity, and their conventional reality as dependently arisen—things that depend for their existence on causes and conditions, on the parts they comprise, and on the wholes in which they figure, and that depend for their identities on our interests—that nonetheless appear to ordinary consciousness as independent, substantial entities. This is the school from which the texts we present here are drawn.

The Madhyamaka analysis in terms of emptiness and the two truths is a way of explaining the claim that persons are empty of selves—that we have no substantial core or intrinsic identity. Instead, we are conceptual constructions: our identity depends both on the psychophysical clusters identified in earlier Buddhist traditions as well as on our entire network of social and linguistic practices. Our existence is nominal and constructed, not a basic fact about the universe that we discover. Nonetheless, we appear to introspection and others appear in perception as selves, as substantial entities that stand behind the five clusters as independent subjects and agents. This appearance is the work of primal confusion and the root of suffering.

## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

Here, we present two excerpts on the self and the person from important texts in the Madhyamaka tradition, each a verse text with a prose commentary, a common format for Indian philosophical texts. In each case, the “root text” is composed in concise, metered verse and is designed for memorization. Memorizing these texts enables monastic scholars to have a library in their heads, useful in monastic debate, in teaching, and in meditative practice. These root texts typically initiate a commentarial literature, often beginning with the author’s own commentary on the verses. This commentarial literature provides the context for much Indian and Tibetan Buddhist philosophy, and is the locus of significant philosophical debates.

The first text in this section is the ninth chapter of Nagarjuna’s *Fundamental Verses of the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), which we present with most of the fifteenth- to sixteenth-century Tibetan scholar Tsongkhapa’s commentary on that chapter. This is by far the most challenging and technical of these texts, developing an argument against the intrinsic reality of the self by considering its possible relations to the psychophysical clusters or basic constituents of the person, and arguing that only a conventionally real person can be found when we seek the self.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

The second text is taken from the seventh-century philosopher Candrakirti's *Introduction to the Middle Way and Its Autocommentary* (*Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya* / *dBu ma la 'jug pa'i rang gral*). Candrakirti is one of the most influential commentators on Nagarjuna, and his interpretation of Nagarjuna's Madhyamaka philosophy is the inspiration for much of Tibetan philosophy. In this text, Candrakirti adopts the simile of the chariot deployed in the *Questions of Milinda*, and develops it in a Madhyamaka context. We present this text with much of Candrakirti's own commentary. Together, these texts present a picture of Indian Madhyamaka thought about the emptiness of persons in the context of their conventional reality.

## WHAT AM I?

### What Am I?

Nagarjuna probably lived in the second half of the second century CE in the Lower Krishna River valley in what is now Andhra Pradesh in South India. He was apparently an abbot of a monastery and an advisor to the local king. He is the single most influential philosopher in the Mahayana world, and the progenitor of the Madhyamaka, or Middle Way school of Buddhist philosophy. While he wrote a great deal, by far the most important of his texts is *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*), from which this excerpt is drawn. That text comprises 440 verses in 27 chapters and systematically argues for the emptiness of all phenomena and for the identity of emptiness and conventional reality.

The chapter we present here addresses the self and the person. Here, Nagarjuna argues that while persons exist conventionally, the fact that they are empty of intrinsic identity means that they are selfless, and that the self we instinctively posit as our identity does not exist at all. Nagarjuna arrives at this conclusion by analyzing the relationship of the self or the person to the sense faculties, arguing that because we cannot understand the person independently of the sense faculties, or vice versa, we must understand ourselves as dependently originated,

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

empty, persons; but because we must accept the reality of those sense faculties and of persons, this analysis in terms of emptiness does not entail that we are nonexistent, but instead that we are conventionally real.

Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) is one of the giants of Tibetan philosophy. After studying extensively with masters of many Tibetan schools, Tsongkhapa forged his own philosophical system based on his distinctive reading of the thought of Candrakirti. Tsongkhapa insisted on taking conventional truth seriously, emphasizing that the object of negation (or the target) of Madhyamaka reasoning is not *actual* existence, but *intrinsic* existence. That is, he argued, Buddhist analysis does not reveal *merely apparent* things to be *non-existent*, but instead reveals *actual* things to exist only *conventionally*. He also insists on the importance of the rigorous analysis of the conventional as the means of making progress on what he saw as a gradual path to awakening.

## WHAT AM I?

Here, we present Nagarjuna's verses from chapter IX with most of Tsongkhapa's commentary in *Ocean of Reasoning*. *Ocean of Reasoning* is an extensive commentary on *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way*. In this chapter, he reads Nagarjuna as defending the conventional reality of persons while denying the existence of the self, hence arguing that persons are real, but empty of any self.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

རབ་བྱེད་དག་པ། སྤྲོལ་ནས་གནས་པ་བརྟག་པ།  
 རྟེན་གཉིས་པ་གང་ཟག་གི་བདག་མེད་བཤད་པ་ལ་གཉིས། གང་ཟག་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་  
 གྲུབ་པ་དགག་གང་ཟག་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པའི་སྦྱབ་བྱེད་དགག་པ་འོ།  
 དང་པོ་(གང་ཟག་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་དགག་པ་ལ་)གསུམ། རབ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་གཞུང་  
 བཤད་པ། དེས་དོན་གྱི་ལུང་དང་ཐུར་བ། དོན་བཟུས་ཏེ་མཚན་བཟུན་པ་འོ།  
 དང་པོ་(རབ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་གཞུང་བཤད་པ་ལ་གཉིས་) ལ་གཉིས། རྟེན་གསུམ་སྤྲོལ་བཞེད་པ་  
 དང་། དེ་སྟན་དབུང་བའོ།  
 དང་པོ་(རྟེན་གསུམ་སྤྲོལ་བཞེད་པ་) རྟེན་ “དེ་བཞིན་ཉེར་ལེན་ཤེས་པར་བྱ། ལས་དང་  
 བྱེད་པོ་གསལ་ཕྱིར་རོ།” ཞེས་སྤྲོལ་བ་དེ་ནི་མི་རིགས་ཏེ།

ཙ་བ། ལྟ་དང་ཉན་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་།  
 ཚོར་སོགས་དང་ཡང་དབང་བྱས་པ།  
 གང་གི་ཡིན་པ་དེ་དག་གི།  
 སྤྲོལ་དེ་ཡོད་ཁ་ཅིག་སྟེ། ༡

རྒྱ་མཚན་ནི་ནོར་གྱི་སྤྲོལ་ལ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡོད་པས་ནོར་སོག་གི་མོ་གཤམ་གྱི་བྱས་མ་  
 ཡིན་པ་བཞིན་དུ།

ཙ་བ། དངོས་པོ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ན།  
 ལྟ་བ་ལ་སོགས་ཇི་ལྟར་འགྱུར།  
 དེ་ཕྱིར་དེ་དག་སྤྲོལ་ན།  
 དངོས་པོ་གནས་པ་དེ་ཡོད་དོ། ༢

དངོས་པོ་སྟེ་གང་ཟག་སྤྲོལ་བ་ལྟ་བུ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཀ་ལྟ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་གང་ཟག་གིས་ཉེ་བར་  
 ལེན་པར་ཇི་ལྟར་འགྱུར་ཏེ་མི་འགྱུར་རོ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་ལྟ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དེ་དག་གི་སྤྲོལ་བ་  
 དངོས་པོ་སྟེ་འདི་ཉེ་བར་ལེན་བྱེད་ཀྱི་གང་ཟག་གནས་པ་དེ་ཡོད་དོ་ཞེས་འཛེར་དོ།



## WHAT AM I?

### EXAMINATION OF THE PRIOR ENTITY

This chapter is the first part of the discussion of the selflessness of the person. It is the refutation of the essential existence of the person. We begin by presenting the opponent's position.

Some say that since such things as  
Vision, hearing, and feeling exist,  
It follows that the one who uses them  
Must exist first.

If nothing like that existed, they ask,  
How could such things as vision even occur?  
Therefore, they conclude, some enduring  
thing  
Must exist as the basis of our sensory  
experience.

Here is what these opponents mean: someone must exist before they can accumulate wealth, and their existence is part of the explanation of why they can accumulate wealth; no son of a barren woman can

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

“སོགས་ཕྱ་མས་ནས་ནི་དབང་པོ་ལྷག་མ་བཞི་དང་ཕྱི་མས་ནི་རྟེན་པ་དང་ཡིད་བྱེད་ལ་  
 མོགས་པའི་སེམས་བྱུང་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་བསྟུན།། དང་ནི་སྤྲུལ་པའི་ཉླ་བ་དང་ཉན་པ་  
 དང་ཚེར་བ་གསུམ་དང་མ་སྤྲུལ་པའི་དབང་པོ་དང་སེམས་སེམས་བྱུང་ལྷག་མ་ཁྱེད་བསྟུ་བའི་  
 དོན་དང་། ཡང་ནི་ལྷག་མ་བསྟུས་པ་དག་ཀྱང་འདྲིར་གཏོགས་པར་ཡིད་ཆེས་པར་བྱ་བའི་  
 དོན་དང་། དབང་བྱས་པ་ཞེས་པའི་སྤྲི་རྒྱུ་ལ་དང་པོ་གཉིས་པོ་འདྲི་དབང་པོ་དང་སེམས་  
 སེམས་བྱུང་ཐམས་ཅད་བསྟུ་བའི་དབང་བྱ་བྱས་པས་དེ་ལ་འཇུག་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་ནོ”ཞེས་  
 ཤེས་རབ་སྒྲོན་མ་དང་དེའི་འགྲེལ་བཤད་ལས་བཤད་དོ།།

གནས་མ་བྱ་པ་དང་བཟང་པོའི་ལས་པ་དང་ཀུན་གྱིས་བཀྱར་བ་དང་སྒྲུ་མ་པ་དང་ཆོས་  
 སྤྲུལ་པ་ལྲས་གང་ཟག་རྒྱས་སུ་ཡོད་པར་སྤྲ་བར་རྟོག་གི་འབར་བ་ལས་བཤད་དོ།

གཉིས་པ་ (དེ་ལྟར་དབྱེད་བ་) ལ་གསུམ། ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་པོ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པ་  
 དགག་ དེས་ཉེ་བར་སྤང་བ་ཡང་

ངོ་བོས་ཡོད་པ་ཞེགས་པར་བསྟན། ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་པོ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མེད་པ་ལ་ཚད་  
 པ་སྤང་བའོ།།

དང་པོ་ (ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་པོ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པ་དགག་པ་) ལ་གཉིས། གཞན་གྱིས་  
 བརྟགས་པའི་བདག་དགག་ རང་གི་ཐ་སྲད་དུ་གང་ཟག་འཛིག་པའི་རྩལ་ལོ།།

དང་པོ་ (གཞན་གྱིས་བརྟགས་པའི་བདག་དགག་པ་) ལ་གསུམ། ལེན་པ་པོ་སྤང་བྱ་  
 ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤྲ་ལོ་ལྟོད་པ་དགག་ སྤང་བྱ་རེ་རེའི་སྤྲ་ལོ་ལྟོད་པ་དགག་ སྤང་བྱ་  
 ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤྲ་ལོ་ལྟོད་པའི་སྤྲ་བ་བྱེད་དགག་པའོ།།

དང་པོ་ (ལེན་པ་པོ་སྤང་བྱ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤྲ་ལོ་ལྟོད་པ་ལ་དགག་པ་) ལ་གཉིས།  
 སྤང་བྱ་ལས་སྤྲ་ལོ་ལེན་པ་པོར་གདགས་པའི་རྩལ་ལོ་ལྟོད་པས་དགག་ ལེན་པོ་པོ་སྤྲ་ལོ་སྤང་བྱ་ལ་  
 གནས་པའི་རྟོག་མེད་པས་དགག་པའོ།།

དང་པོ་ (སྤང་བྱ་ལས་སྤྲ་ལོ་ལེན་པ་པོར་གདགས་པའི་རྩལ་ལོ་ལྟོད་པས་དགག་པ་) ཞི།  
 གཤམ་ཏེ་ལེན་པ་པོ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་ན་སྤང་བྱ་ལས་སྤྲ་ལོ་ལྟོད་པ་ལས་མཉམ་པ་གསུམ་ལས་  
 མི་འདད་ལ་ཕྱི་མ་གཉིས་འོག་ནས་འགོག་པས་འདྲིར་སྤང་བྱ་ལས་སྤྲ་བ་འགོག་པ་ནི།

## WHAT AM I?

get rich! By analogy, if the person did not exist prior to them, how could those things that the person takes to be its own processes—such as vision—exist? They could not! Therefore, they say, the person who possesses those faculties must exist before those faculties as their basis.

Let's now refute this position. We will first refute the existence of the self that our opponents take to exist, and then we will explain how we understand the conventional existence of the person. The refutation itself has three parts: the refutation of a pre-existing owner of all of the faculties; the refutation of a distinct pre-existing owner of each of the faculties; and the refutation of the general argument that there has to be an owner prior to the existence of that which is owned.

There are two parts to the refutation of the pre-existing owner: first, we will show that there is no way to conceive of it independently of what it owns; second, we will show that even if it existed, there would be no reason to call it an owner.

We now begin the first refutation. If there were an intrinsically real owner of the sense faculties, it would have to exist prior to, simultaneous with, or after the faculties it owns. Here, we consider the first alternative. We will discuss the other two later.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཙ་བ། ལྷ་དང་ཉན་ལ་སྟགས་པ་དང་།  
 ཚོར་བ་ལ་སྟགས་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ནི།  
 སྤྱོད་ལ་དངོས་པོ་གང་གནས་པ།  
 དེ་ནི་གང་གིས་གདགས་པར་བྱ།

3

ལྷ་བ་དང་ཉན་པ་ལ་སྟགས་པ་དང་ཚོར་བ་ལ་སྟགས་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ནི་སྤྱོད་ལ་གང་གནས་  
 པའི་དངོས་པོ་གང་ཟག་དེ་ནི་གང་གིས་གདགས་པར་བྱ་བའི་རྒྱ་མེད་པས་སྤྱིར་གང་ཟག་དང་  
 བྱེ་བྲག་དུ་ལྷ་བ་པོ་ལ་སྟགས་པར་གཞག་དུ་མེད་པར་འབྱུང་རྟེ།

འདི་ལྟར་གང་ཟག་དུ་ཐ་སྟངས་གདགས་པའི་རྒྱ་ནི་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སྟགས་པ་ཡིན་ན་གང་ཟག་དེ་  
 དེ་དག་ལས་སྤྱོད་ནི། དེའི་ཆེ་བས་སྤྱོད་བཞིན་དུ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སྟགས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་པ་མེད་པར་  
 འབྱུང་ལ། གང་ཞིག་རང་གི་རྒྱ་ལ་མི་ལྟོས་པ་དེ་ནི་རྒྱ་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ཏེ། མོར་ལ་སྟགས་པ་ལ་  
 མི་ལྟོས་པའི་མོར་ཅན་ལྟར་མེད་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། འདིར་དུས་སྤྱིར་ཡོད་ན་སྤྱོད་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་  
 པ་མི་རུང་ཞེས་པ་མིན་ཏེ། རང་ལུགས་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་རྒྱ་འབྲས་ཐམས་ཅད་ཕན་ཚུན་ལྟོས་པར་  
 བཞེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

དེས་ན་གང་ཟག་ལྷ་བ་པོ་ལ་སྟགས་པར་འཛོག་པ་ལ་ནི་ལྷ་བ་ལ་ལྟོས་པས་ཁྱབ་ལ།  
 ལེན་པ་པོ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སྟགས་པ་ལ་ལྟོས་པ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་ཡིན་ན་དུས་ནས་ཡང་ལྟོས་  
 དགོས་པས་ལེན་པ་པོའི་དུས་ན་ལྟོས་ས་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སྟགས་པ་མེད་པས་དེ་ལ་ལྟོས་པ་མེད་པའི་  
 ཕྱིར་ལྟོས་པ་གང་འགོག་རྣམས་སོ།

གཉིས་པ་(ལེན་པ་པོ་སྤྱོད་རྒྱུ་དང་བྱ་ལ་གནས་པའི་རྟེན་མེད་པས་དགག་པ་)ནི།

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## WHAT AM I?

If something existed prior to  
Such things as  
Vision, hearing, and feeling,  
How could you even talk about it?

Since there is no ground for calling anything—including a person—an owner of something such as a sense faculty before that thing even exists, nothing that exists before these things can be called a seer, a hearer, or even a person. After all, we call something a person because it can see, hear, and do other such things. If it existed as a person prior to being able to do such things, it would be independent of those faculties, just like some random pot, or piece of cloth. This would be like talking about a rich man independent of his wealth, which makes no sense at all.

This isn't to say that when things occur in sequence, the earlier one can't depend on the later one; after all, we maintain that all causes and effects are mutually dependent. So the person who is a seer or a hearer is a seer or a hearer by virtue of the fact that they see and hear. But if it were part of the intrinsic nature of the owner of these faculties to be their owner, that owner would always have to be dependent for its existence on them. And then, if it were deprived of that on which it depends—such as vision or hearing—it would cease to exist.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཙ་བ། ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དཔར་ཡང་།  
གལ་ཏེ་དེ་ནི་གནས་ཀྱི་ན།  
དེ་མེད་པར་ཡང་དེ་དག་ནི།  
ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་བར་ཐོཾ་མེད་།

ུ

གལ་ཏེ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དཔར་ཡང་ལྷ་དེ་དག་གི་སྤྱོད་ལ་གནས་པར་གྱུར་པའི་གང་  
ཟག་དེས་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ལེན་པར་བྱེད་དོ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་སྤྱོད་ལ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་གཞན་འདི་ཡང་ཡོད་  
དེ་དེ་ལྷ་ན་ནི་ཞོར་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་སྤྱོད་ལ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་ཞོར་ལས་ཐ་དད་པར་གནས་ནས་  
ཞོར་དོན་གཞན་གསོག་པ་བཞིན་དུ། ལེན་པ་པོ་ལ་གང་ཟག་དེ་མེད་པར་ཡང་ལྷ་དེ་ལས་  
དོན་གཞན་དུ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་དཔར་ནི་ལོགས་ཤིག་ན་ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་བར་ཐོཾ་མེད་  
དོ། དེ་འདྲི་དཔར་ནི་མི་རྩལ་ཏེ།

ཙ་བ། ཅི་ཡིས་གང་ཞིག་གསལ་བར་བྱེད།  
གང་གིས་ཅི་ཞིག་གསལ་བར་བྱེད།

གང་ཟག་འདི་ནི་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་འདི་ཉེར་ལེན་པ་པོའི་ཞེས་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ། ཉེ་བར་  
སྤྱོད་བྱ་ཅི་ཞིག་པ་ཡིས་ལེན་པ་པོའི་བདག་གང་ཞིག་པོ་གསལ་བ་དང་མངོན་པ་དང་ཤེས་  
པར་བྱེད་ཅིང་། མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་འདི་ནི་གང་ཟག་འདི་ཉེ་བར་སྤྱོད་བྱའོ། ཞེས་ལེན་པ་  
པོའི་བདག་གང་ཞིག་གིས་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཉེ་བར་སྤྱོད་བྱ་ཅི་ཞིག་པོ་གསལ་བར་བྱེད་དོ།

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## WHAT AM I?

This fact refutes any such intrinsic existence. Now we will show that even if the person could exist without the sense faculties, there would be no reason to call such a person an owner:

If it could continue to exist  
Without such things as seeing,  
Then, without a doubt they also  
Could exist without it.

This verse raises another problem for the position that the person exists prior to and independent of its faculties: If this made sense, then it would also make sense for someone to be a rich person before they become rich—to have accumulated wealth in a way that it was unrelated to them—which makes no sense. By analogy, it would have to be possible for a person and their faculties to exist but yet not be connected to one another. But you can't say this, as the next verse makes clear:

By what is someone disclosed?  
By whom is something disclosed?  
Without something how can someone exist?  
Without someone how can something exist?

Just as we can say that this person owns these eyes, one can ask, "How do you know that someone owns them?" And just as you can say that these eyes are the organs of this person, you can ask,

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཙ་བ། ཅི་མེད་གང་ཞིག་ག་ལ་ཡོད།

གང་མེད་ཅི་ཞིག་ག་ལ་ཡོད།

ཡ

དེའི་ཚེ་སྤང་བྱ་ཅི་ཞིག་པོ་ལ་ལྟོས་པ་མེད་པར་ལེན་པ་པོ་གང་ཞིག་པོ་ག་ལ་ཡོད་དེ་མེད་ལ།  
ལེན་པ་པོ་ལ་ཡང་ལྟོས་པ་མེད་པར་སྤང་བྱ་ཅི་ཞིག་པོ་ག་ལ་ཡོད་དེ་མེད་པས་དེ་གཉིས་པན་  
ཚུན་ལྟོས་ནས་གྲུབ་བོ།

གང་གི་ཆེ་ལེན་པ་པོ་མེད་པར་ལོགས་གིག་དུ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཁས་ལེན་པའི་ཆེ་ནི་  
མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྟེན་མེད་པས་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་མེད་དོ། འདི་ཡང་ཐུར་བཤད་པ་ལྷ་ར་ངོ་  
བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཐ་དད་ན་ལྟོས་པ་མི་རུང་བའི་རིགས་པའོ།

བྱང་རྩ་ལྷ་ལི་དུ་ལས་ “དེ་ནི་གང་གིས་གདགས་པར་བྱ་” ཞེས་པའི་ལན་དུ་ “ལྷ་བ་  
ལ་སོགས་པ་མེད་པར་ཡང་རང་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་རབ་དུ་གྲུབ་བོ” ཞེས་ལྷ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཞེས་པའི་  
ཁང་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་དོན་སྤྲུལ་པ་ན། “དེ་ལྷ་ན་གང་ཟག་དེ་མེད་པར་ཡང་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་  
རང་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་རབ་དུ་གྲུབ་པར་གྲེ་ཆོས་མེད་དོ” ཞེས་བསྟན་པ་ལ། “དེ་ལྷ་ཡིན་ན་སྦྱོར་ཅི་  
ཡོད་ཅེས་དྲིས་པའི་ལན་དུ་ཅི་ཡིས་” ཞེས་པའི་ཁང་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱིས་དེ་གཉིས་པན་ཚུན་དུ་  
གསལ་བར་བྱེད་པར་བསྟན་ནས་རྒྱ་མཚན་དེས་ན་དེ་གཉིས་གཅིག་མེད་པར་ཅིག་ཤོས་མེད་  
ཅས་ཁང་པ་ཕྱི་མ་གཉིས་འཆད་དོ།

དེ་དག་གིས་ནི་ལེན་པ་པོར་གདགས་པའི་རྒྱ་དང་སྤང་བྱ་གནས་པའི་རྟེན་མེད་པས་ལྷ་  
བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལས་ཐ་དད་པར་ལེན་པ་པོ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གནས་པ་མེད་པར་བཤད་དོ།

གཉིས་པ་(སྤང་བྱ་རེ་རེའི་སྤང་ལྟོད་པ་དགག་པ་) ལ་གཉིས། ཕྱོགས་ཐུམ་  
བརྗོད་པ་དང་། དེ་སྟན་དབུང་བའོ།

དང་པོ་(ཕྱོགས་ཐུམ་བརྗོད་པ་) རྟེན། གལ་ཏེ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤང་ལྟོད་  
ན་གང་ཟག་དེ་ཡོད་པར་ཁས་སྤངས་ན་སྦྱོར་དེ་དག་ཡོད་ཁྱང་།

ཙ་བ། ལྷ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི།

སྤང་ལྟོད་གང་ཞིག་ཡོད་པ་མིན།

ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤང་ལྟོད་ལེན་པ་པོ་གང་ཞིག་པོ་དེ་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ཀྱི་རེ་རེའི་  
སྤང་ལྟོད་ཡོད་དོ།



## WHAT AM I?

“Who is this person who experiences the vision?”  
And how could the person who is the owner or the  
seer exist independently of the eyes and the vision?  
It could not! And the eyes and the vision can’t exist  
without the person either. Thus, the person and  
their faculties are mutually dependent; one can’t  
exist without the other. . . .

We now turn to the refutation of a distinct pre-  
existing owner of each of the faculties. We begin  
with the opponent’s view, and then will turn to its  
refutation. Here is the opponent’s position:

Nothing exists prior to  
*All* of the faculties such as vision.  
Instead, each faculty such as vision  
Discloses a distinct person at a distinct time.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཙུ་བ། ལྷ་སོགས་ནང་ནས་གཞན་ཞིག་གིས།

གཞན་གྱི་ཚེ་ན་གསལ་བར་བྱེད།

ལ

དེའི་ཕྱིར་སྤང་བྱ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ནང་ནས་ལྷ་བའི་དབང་པོས་གང་ཟག་དེ་གསལ་བར་  
བྱེད་པའི་དུས་ན་དེ་ལས་གཞན་པའི་དབང་པོ་ཞིག་གིས་དུས་དེ་ལས་གཞན་གྱི་ཚེ་ན་གསལ་  
བར་བྱེད་ཀྱི་དུས་དེའི་ཚེ་ན་གསལ་བར་མི་བྱེད་དོ།

ལྷ་བ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་འདོགས་པའི་ཚེ་ཉན་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་མི་འདོགས་པས་རང་གི་སྤང་  
བྱའི་སྤོང་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད་ཡང་། གང་ཟག་དུ་གདགས་འི་རྒྱ་མེད་པའི་སྦྱོན་ཡང་མེད་དེ་ཞུས་  
ཟེར་རོ། ། འདིས་སྤང་ཡང་རང་གི་སྤང་བྱའི་སྤོང་ལྷ་ལ་ཉན་ཅེས་སྤྲོས་པ་མ་གཏོགས་པ་ལྷ་  
བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤོང་ལྷ་ལ་ཉན་ཅེས་མ་སྤྲོས་ལ། དེ་ལ་གང་ཟག་དུ་གདགས་  
པའི་རྒྱ་མེད་པར་ཐལ་བའི་སྦྱོན་མེད་དེ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤོང་ལྷ་ལ་ཉན་ཅེས་པར་མི་འདོད་པའི་  
ཕྱིར་སྤོང་བྱ་བསམས་སོ།

འོ་ན་གང་ཟག་གིས་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལེན་ཞུས་པའི་དོན་ཅི་ཡིན་ཞེ་ན། གང་ཟག་དེ་  
གཟུགས་ལ་ལྷ་བ་པོར་སོང་བའི་བྱེད་པ་མིག་གི་དབང་པོ་སོང་བ་ན་དེས་དེ་ན་སྤངས་པ་ཡིན་  
ལ། དེའི་ཚེ་ལྷ་བའི་དབང་པོ་དང་དུས་མཉམ་དུ་ཡོད་ལ་ཉན་པའི་དབང་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་  
སྤོང་ལྷ་ལ་ཉན་ཅེས་པར་འདོད་དེ་དེས་གཞན་ཡང་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།

## WHAT AM I?

The opponent concedes that our refutation of a single owner prior to all of the faculties is successful, but they argue that there is an owner prior to *each faculty*. They argue that while a sense faculty—such as vision—discloses the existence of a person at one time, *another* sense faculty discloses a distinct person at another time. So, the person designated on the basis of vision is not designated on the basis of hearing; the person designated on the basis of hearing is not designated on the basis of vision. Thus, each person still exists before the faculty that it is taken to own. Therefore, they claim, it is not wrong to say that there is no ground for the designation of the person prior to the operation of the sense faculty.

So, when it is said that the owner exists prior to what is owned, this does not mean that it exists prior to everything that it owns, or to all of the sense faculties. Therefore, the opponent says, we don't have to accept the absurd consequence that a person is designated with no ground whatsoever, because we are not committed to the person existing independently of *all* of the faculties. This also refutes the claim that the present person is the owner and that all of their organs and faculties are owned by them.

... They maintain that when the person comes to see a material object and the visual faculty comes

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

གཉིས་པ་ (དེ་ལྟར་དབྱེད་པ་) ཀྱི།

ཙུ་བ། ལྷ་ལ་སྟོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི།  
ལྷ་ལ་གཏུག་ཏུ་ཡོད་མིན་ན།  
ལྷ་ལ་སྟོན་པ་འདི་ཡི།  
ལྷ་ལ་དེ་ནི་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད། ॥

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གཏུག་ལྷ་ལ་སྟོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་ན་བདག་དེ་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ན་ལྷ་ལ་སྟོན་པ་འདི་ཡི་ལྷ་ལ་ན་བདག་དེ་ནི་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད་པ་མ་སྟོན་པ་ཀྱི།

དཔེར་ན་ཤིང་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་ན་བདག་མེད་པའི་ཆེ་རེ་དེ་ལྷ་ལ་ན་ཡང་མེད་པ་དང་། བྱེ་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་ཏིལ་མར་འབྱེན་པའི་རྩམ་པ་མེད་ན་འདི་ལ་ཡང་མེད་པ་བཞིན་ནོ།

གཞན་ཡང་འདི་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད་པར་སྟོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་ན་ཡང་ཡོད་པར་ཁས་སྤྲངས་པར་འགྱུར་དུ། འདི་ལྷ་ལ་གཏུགས་པར་ཐམས་ཅད་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། འདི་དཔེར་ན་དེར་ཡོད་པའི་མི་འདི་ལ་སྟོན་ནས་ལྷ་ག་མ་མ་ལུས་པ་ན་དེར་ཡོད་པའི་མི་ཐམས་ཅད་ལ་སྟོན་པ་ཡིན་པ་བཞིན་དུ། གང་ཟག་དེ་ལྷ་ལ་སྟོན་པ་འདི་ལྷ་ལ་སྟོན་པ་མ་ལུས་པར་འདི་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད་པ་ཞིག་བྱུང་ན་མཐར་ལྷ་ལ་སྟོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད་པ་ཞིག་སྟོན་པ་རུ་སོ།

གཏུག་དུས་རིམ་ཅན་གྱིས་འདི་ལྷ་ལ་བཞག་པའི་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད་པ་ཡིན་ཡང་། ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད་པའི་དུས་སུ་ལྷ་ག་མ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་གཅིག་གི་ཆེ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ལྷ་ལ་ལྷ་ལ་ཡོད་པར་མི་འདོད་པས་མི་འགལ་ལོའོ།

## WHAT AM I?

to be the instrument of that seeing, that faculty comes to be owned by the person, and that these two exist simultaneously, but prior, for instance, to the auditory faculty and to the other sense faculties.

We refute this position as follows:

If it doesn't exist

Prior to *all* of such things as vision,

How could it exist

Prior to *each* of such things as vision?

If the person does not exist prior to *all* of the sense faculties, how could they exist prior to *each* of them? This would make no sense. Consider, by analogy, a forest. Not only does it not exist prior to *all* of the trees that constitute it, that very forest does not exist prior to *each* of them, either. And just as you can't get mustard oil from a pile of sand, you can't get it from the individual grains, either.

Moreover, if you say that the person exists prior to each of the sense faculties, you would have to say that it exists prior to all of them, because there is no totality independent of each of them. Suppose, for example, that you speak to each person in a group, without leaving anyone out. Then you have spoken to all of them. By analogy, if the person exists prior to each sense faculty, then they exist prior to all of them.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ལེན་པ་པོ་དང་སྒྲུང་བྱ་ལོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་འགོག་པའི་སྐབས་ཡིན་པས་སྦྱོན་མེད་དོ།  
 རིགས་པ་འདིས་ཀྱང་རེ་རེའི་ཐུ་རྩོལ་ན་ཡོད་པར་མི་རིགས་ཏེ། འདི་ལྟར་གང་ཟག་གཅིག་  
 ལྟ་བུ་ལ་སོགས་པ་རེ་རེའི་ཐུ་རྩོལ་ཡོད་པར་འགྱུར་བ་ལ།

ཙ་བ། ལྟ་བོ་དེ་ཉིད་ཉན་པོ་དེ།  
 གལ་ཏེ་ཚར་པོ་འད་དེ་ཉིད་ན།  
 རེ་རེའི་ཐུ་རྩོལ་ཡོད་ལྟར་ན།  
 དེ་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་མི་རིགས་སོ། །

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གལ་ཏེ་ལྟ་བོ་དེ་ཉིད་ཉན་པ་པོ་ཡིན་ཡང་ཚར་བ་པོ་འད་དེ་ཉིད་ཡིན་པ་ཞིག་དགོས་ན། དེ་ནི་  
 མི་རིགས་ཏེ་ལྟ་བུ་བའད་བའད་བའད་ཉན་པ་པོ་ཡང་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་དང་། ཉན་པའི་བྱ་བ་དང་  
 བྲལ་བའི་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་ཡང་ཉན་པ་པོར་འགྱུར་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། བྱ་བ་སོ་སོ་ལ་བྱེད་པ་པོ་ཐ་དད་  
 པའི་ཕྱིར་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་ཉིད་ཉན་པ་པོ་ཡང་དེ་ཉིད་དེ་ཞེས་པ་དེ་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་ཡིན་པར་མི་རིགས་སོ།  
 ལྟ་བུ་གྱིན་གཅིག་རིམ་གྱིས་མི་བཅུའི་ཐུ་རྩོལ་དུ་གནས་པ་ཐ་སྐད་དུ་འདོད་དགོས་མོད་  
 ཀྱང་མི་དང་པོའི་ཐུ་རྩོལ་ན་བཅུད་པའི་ལྟ་བུ་གྱིན་དེ་ཉིད་མི་གཉིས་པའི་ཐུ་རྩོལ་ན་ཡང་སྦྱོད་  
 པར་འདོད་ན། ལྟ་བུ་གཟུགས་ལྟ་བུ་ཀྱི་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་དེ་ཉིད་ཕྱིས་སྦྱ་ཉན་དུས་ཀྱི་ཉན་པ་པོ་དེར་  
 ཁས་སྒྲུང་དགོས་སོ། དེ་ལྟར་དགོས་མོད་ཀྱང་ཡ་རྩོལ་པོས་དེ་ལྟར་ཁས་སྒྲུང་པ་མེད་པས་  
 སུན་འབྱེན་འདི་ཇི་ལྟར་རིགས་སྐྱུ་ན།

སྦྱིར་གནས་མ་བྱ་བ་ལ། རྣམ་འགྲེལ་ལས། “གང་གི་རང་བཞིན་འཇིག་མེད་པ། དེ་  
 ལ་མཁས་རྣམས་ཉག་ཅས་བཞེད། དེ་ནས་ངོ་ཚད་ལྟ་བུ་འདི། སྤངས་ལ་དེ་ནི་རྣག་པར་  
 སྒྲོས་།” ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་བཞིན་དུ་ལྟར་མིག་གི་ཐུ་རྩོལ་ན་གནས་པའི་གང་ཟག་དེ་ཉིད་ཕྱིས་  
 རྣ་བའི་དབང་པོའི་ཐུ་རྩོལ་ན་གནས་པའི་ཆ་ཡང་མ་ཞིག་པར་འདོད་པས། དེ་ལྟར་ཁས་

## WHAT AM I?

Our opponent might reply like this: The person does exist prior to all of the faculties when you put them in temporal order. But we don't maintain that when it exists prior to a particular faculty, such as vision, at a particular time, that it exists prior to all of the rest. So, we are not inconsistent. We respond as follows:

If the seer itself is the hearer itself.  
As well as the feeler, then  
For it to exist prior to each of these faculties  
Would make no sense.

Our refutation stands. Our argument shows that it makes no sense for the person to exist prior to the exercise of each of its faculties for the following reason: for a single person to be prior to the exercise of each of the sense faculties, that single person would have to be the seer, hearer, feeler, and so on. But this would not make any sense, because a hearer who isn't seeing would still have to be a seer, and a seer who isn't hearing would still have to be a hearer. Since each action requires a distinct agent, to say that the person who hears is the same as the person who sees makes no sense.

To be sure, *conventionally* one can say that somebody sits in front of ten people in order. But if you were to say that the very person who sits in front of the first person also sits in front of the second

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

སྒྲུངས་པའི་སྒྲོན་མེ་ལྟར་བཞུགས་པའི་ཡུང་། འདིར་ནི་གང་ཟག་དོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་  
གྲུབ་ན་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་དང་ཉན་པ་པོ་གཉིས་དོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གཅིག་པ་དང་ཐ་དད་པ་ལས་མི་འདུ་  
ལ། ཐ་དད་འོག་ནས་འགོག་པས་གཅིག་ཡིན་ན་སྤར་ཆོས་གཅིག་གི་སྤར་ཆོས་ཀྱིས་པ་དེ་  
ཉིད་ཕྱིས་ཆོས་གཉིས་པའི་སྤར་ཆོས་དུ་ཡང་བསྐྱེད་དགོས་པས། རིམ་གྱིས་མེ་ལྟར་སྤར་ཆོས་  
ཡོད་པར་འདོད་པ་ལ་ཡང་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་དེ་ཉིད་ཅེས་པའི་སྒྲོན་མེ་བཞུགས་པའི་སྒྲོན་མེ་  
འོན་ཏེ་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་དེ་ཉིད་ཉན་པ་པོ་ཡང་དེ་ཉིད་དུ་འདོད་ན་སྤར་བཤད་པའི་སྒྲོན་མེ་  
བར་མཐོན་ནས།

རྩ་བ།   གལ་ཏེ་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་གཞན་ཉིད་ལ།  
          ཉན་པ་པོ་གཞན་ཆོར་གཞན་ན།

གལ་ཏེ་ལྟ་བུ་པོ་དང་ཉན་པ་པོ་དང་ཆོར་བ་པོ་རྣམས་དོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གཞན་དུ་འདོད་ན།

རྩ་བ།   ལྟ་བུ་པོ་ཡོད་ཆེ་ཉན་པོར་འབྱུར།

ལྟ་བུ་པོ་ཡོད་པའི་ཆེན་ཡང་ཅིག་ཅར་དུ་ཉན་པ་པོ་ཡོད་པར་འབྱུར་ན་དེ་ལྟར་ནི་མི་འདོད་  
པས་དོ་བོ་ཉིད་

          ཀྱིས་གཞན་དུ་མེད་དོ།

རྩ་བ།   བདག་ཀྱང་མང་པོ་ཉིད་དུ་འབྱུར།

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## WHAT AM I?

person, then you would have to say that the very person who sees a material object at one time and hears a sound at a later time are literally identical. . . .

The point is that if the person exists *intrinsically*, there are only two possible relations between the seer and the hearer: they would have to be intrinsically identical or intrinsically different. In a moment, we will consider the case of their being intrinsically different. Verse 8 shows that they can only be identical if the very phenomenon that existed earlier continues to exist later, and so is a critique of the view that one and the same person exists prior to each sensory experience. We now turn to the case of these persons being intrinsically different from one another.

But if the seer is distinct,  
The hearer is distinct and the feeler is  
distinct,  
Then when there is a seer there would also  
be a hearer,  
And there would have to be many persons.

You might concede that this critique is successful against the position that the seer and hearer are intrinsically identical, and respond by saying that they are intrinsically different. In that case, one would have to maintain that the seer and the hearer

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

གཞན་ཡང་ཐར་ལྷར་འདོད་ན་སྤྲེ་བྲག་ཅིག་ལ་བདག་ཀྱང་མང་པོ་ཡོད་པ་ཉད་དུ་འབྱུར་ཏེ་  
ལྷ་བ་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ནམས་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གཞན་དུ་ཡོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།།

གསུམ་པ་(སྤང་བྱ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤོང་ལྷ་ཡོད་པའི་སྤྲེ་བྲག་གི་ཞེ)ནི། གལ་ཏེ་  
བདག་ནི་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་སྤོང་ལྷ་ཡོད་དོ།། འོན་ཀྱང་བདག་དུ་གདགས་  
པའི་རྒྱ་མེད་པའི་སྤྲོན་མེད་དེ་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤོང་ལྷ་ཡོད་མིང་དང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་གནས་  
སྐབས་ན། མིང་དང་གཟུགས་ཀྱི་རྒྱུན་ཀྱིས་སྤྲེ་མཆེད་དུ་གཤོམས་གསུངས་པའི་ལྷ་བ་དང་  
ཉན་པ་སོགས་འབྱུར་བར་འབྱུར་བའི་རྒྱ་འབྱུང་བ་བཞི་ཡོད་དོ།། དེས་ན་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་  
པའི་སྤོང་ལྷ་འབྱུང་བ་བཞིའི་ཉེ་བར་ལོན་པ་ཅན་ཀྱི་བདག་ཡོད་དོ་ནི་ན།

ཅ་བ། ལྷ་དང་ཉན་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་།  
ཚོར་བ་དག་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་།  
གང་ལས་འབྱུར་བའི་འབྱུང་དེ་ལའང་།  
དེ་ནི་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།།

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ལྷ་བ་དང་ཉན་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་ཚོར་བ་དག་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་གང་ལས་འབྱུང་བར་  
འབྱུར་བའི་འབྱུང་བ་བཞི་པོ་དེ་ལའང་བདག་དེ་ནི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།།

གལ་ཏེ་བདག་དེ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་ན་འབྱུང་བ་ལས་ཕྱི་བ་དང་དུས་མཉམ་པས་  
འབྱུང་བ་ཉེ་བར་ལོན་པ་མི་འཐད་པས་འབྱུང་བའི་སྤོང་ལྷ་ཡོད་པར་འབྱུར་རོ།། དེ་ལྷ་ན་  
བདག་དུ་གདགས་པའི་རྒྱ་མེད་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྤྲོན་ཐར་བཤད་པ་བཞིན་འཇུག་པས་  
འདིར་སྤྲེ་ཡང་སྤྲོན་བཞེད་མ་མཛད་དོ།།

## WHAT AM I?

could exist at the same time. But since they cannot, they cannot be intrinsically distinct. Moreover, if you said this, then one person would have many identities, because each seer and each hearer would exist as a distinct entity.

We now turn to the final refutation, the refutation of the general argument that there has to be an owner prior to the existence of that which is owned. The opponent might continue to press his point, arguing as follows: The person exists prior to every sense faculty. But this does not entail that it exists without any ground. For it arises dependent on the psychophysical clusters. This is because they, as well as the four elements, constitute the basis of the six sense faculties. Therefore, the person exists prior to the senses faculties that are constituted by the four elements. We reply:

Such things as vision, hearing,  
And feeling,  
And the elements from which they are  
arisen,  
Do not exist.

The person does not exist intrinsically either in the sense faculties such as seeing, hearing, and feeling, nor in the elements that constitute them. If the person existed intrinsically, then it would make sense to say that it is the owner of the elements, since it

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

གཉིས་པ་(རང་གི་ཐ་སྙད་དུ་གང་ཟག་འཛོག་པའི་ཚུལ་) ལ་གཉིས། བདག་གི་འཛོག་  
ཚུལ་དང་། དེ་ལ་ཚད་པ་སྤང་བའོ།།

དང་པོ་(བདག་གི་འཛོག་ཚུལ་)ནི། གལ་ཏེ་དེ་ལྟར་གང་ཟག་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པ་  
འགོག་ན་མཐོང་བ་དང་ཐོས་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་གང་ཟག་གི་ཐ་སྙད་འདི་མི་འཐད་པར་མི་  
འལུར་རམ་སྤུལ་ན། མཐོང་ཐོས་ལ་སོགས་པ་བྱེད་པའི་གང་ཟག་ནི་སྤུལ་ཀྱང་བསྟོན་དུ་མེད་  
པས་དེ་གཏན་མེད་པ་ནི་མི་རུང་ངོ།།

ཚེར་བ་དག་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་།།

གང་གི་ཡིན་པ་གལ་ཏེ་མེད།།

དེ་དག་ཀྱང་ནི་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན།།

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གལ་ཏེ་ལྟ་བུ་དང་ཉན་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་ཚེར་བ་དག་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་ལེན་པ་པོ་གང་གི་  
སྤང་བ་བྱ་ཡིན་པའི་ལེན་པ་པོ་དངོས་པོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མེད་པར་བསྟན་པ་དེ་ཡི་ཆོ། དེར་མ་ཟད་ལྟ་  
བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དེ་དག་ཀྱང་ནི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།

ཞེས་གསལ་བ་བསྟན་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནས་དེའི་ཕྱིར་ལྟ་བུ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཉེ་བར་སྤང་བ་བྱེད་པོ་  
ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མེད་པས་ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་པོའི་བདག་ཀྱང་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མེད་པོ།།འདི་ལ་གཞན་  
ལྟེས་མཐོང་བ་སོགས་ཀྱི་གང་ཟག་ནི་གཤོན་མི་ན་བར་ཁས་སྤངས་དགོས་ལ། འོན་ཀྱང་སྤང་  
པོ་དང་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་པ་མི་རུང་བར་མཐོན་ནས། སྤང་པོ་ལས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དད་པའི་གང་ཟག་གི་  
བདག་འདོད་པར་བྱེད་དོ།།

རང་གི་ཕྱེ་པ་གཞན་གྱིས་ནི་ལས་གསོག་པ་སོགས་ཀྱི་གང་ཟག་ ཅམ་ཞིག་ནི་གཞག་  
དགོས་པར་མཐོང་ཞིང་། སྤང་པོ་ལས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དད་པའི་བདག་ཡོད་པ་ལ་གཞོད་བྱེད་མཐོང་  
ནས་སྤང་པོ་ཚོགས་རྒྱན་དང་ལུས་འདོར་ལེན་བྱེད་པའི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཉིད་བདག་གས་གང་ཟག་  
དུ་སྦྲ་བར་བྱེད་དོ།།

## WHAT AM I?

would either exist simultaneously with or subsequent to them. But this would make it groundless, as the previous arguments show.

One might well ask at this point, “If the intrinsic existence of the person has been refuted, how could our conventions of talking about persons hearing and seeing make any sense?” We now turn to how we understand the person conventionally. We will first present our understanding and then we will rebut refutations of that position.

If that to which they belong does not exist,  
Such things as vision, hearing,  
And feeling  
Do not exist either.

You would have to be insane to deny the existence of persons who hear, see, and do other things; to say that the person is utterly non-existent makes no sense. All philosophical schools accept such a person. But, since they see that it makes no sense for the person to be identical to the psychophysical clusters, members of *non-Buddhist schools* conclude that it is an entity distinct from those clusters.

Members of *other Buddhist schools* agree that there must be a *mere* person who accumulates karma. They see that it would be wrong to take the person to be an entity distinct from the clusters. Some of them assert that the continuum of the

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

རང་གི་ལུགས་ནི་ངར་འཛིན་ལྟ་སྤྲུལ་གྱིས་གང་ལ་དམིགས་པའི་གཞི་དམིགས་པ་ནི་ང་  
 དང་བདག་དང་གང་ཟག་ཏུ་གཞུགས་པའི་ཕྱི་རོལ་པས་ཀྱན་བརྟགས་པ་ལྟར་གྱི་གང་  
 ཟག་ཡོད་པར་མི་འཛིན་པའི་དུང་འགོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལ་ཡང་ང་དང་ང་ཡི་བར་འཛིན་པའི་  
 འཇིག་རྫ་འཇུག་པས། སྤང་པོ་ལས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དད་པའི་བདག་ནི་ངར་འཛིན་ལྟ་སྤྲུལ་གྱི་  
 དམིགས་པའི་གཞིར་ཡང་མི་རུང་ལ། དེ་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཙམ་དུ་ཡང་མེད་པར་འདོད་དེ།  
 འཇུག་པ་ལས། “འདི་ནི་ངར་འཛིན་རྟེན་དུ་འང་མི་རིགས་ལ།། འདི་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་  
 ཡང་ཡོད་མི་འདོད།།” ཅེས་དང་། “འཇིག་རྟེན་ངར་འཛིན་སྟོ་ཡི་རྟེན་དུ་ཡང་།། མི་འདོད་  
 དེ་རིག་མིན་པ་འང་བདག་ལྟོ་ལྟོར།།” ཞེས་སོ།།

འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཐ་སྲད་ལ་ནི་ངའི་གཟུགས་དང་ངའི་སེམས་ཞེས་བདག་ནི་སྤང་པོའི་རྗེ་བོ་  
 དང་སྤང་པོ་ནི་དེའི་ཁོལ་ལྟར་འཛིན་པས། བདག་གི་མཆན་གཞིར་སྤང་པོའི་རྟེན་ཙམ་  
 ཚོགས་པ་འཕམ་ལ་གྱལ་རྣམས་འཇོག་པ་ནི་གཏན་མི་རུང་ངོ་།། འཕམགས་པའི་གཞུང་དུ་ཡང་  
 དེ་ཁོར་ལྟར་འཆད་དེ། རབ་བྱེད་འདིར་ནི་རྩ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་ཅི་ཞིག་པོ་རྣམས་གྱིས་གང་  
 ཞིག་པོའི་བདག་གསལ་བར་བྱེད་པར་བཤད་པས། གསལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་པ་དང་ལ་གྱལ་  
 གང་ཡང་གསལ་བྱར་འགལ་བའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། རབ་བྱེད་བརྟུ་པར་སྤང་པོ་དང་བདག་གཅིག་  
 ཐ་དད་ཀྱི་རྩལ་མེ་དང་བྱེད་ཤིང་དང་འདྲ་བར་གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་།

## WHAT AM I?

collection of the clusters is the person; some assert that the consciousness that either claims or abandons the body is the person.

In *our* system, the object of innate self-grasping is the “I,” or the self. Even animals, who have no view that persons—even as they are understood by non-Buddhist schools—exist, view themselves as “I,” and grasp other phenomena as “mine.” Therefore, a self that is different from the clusters cannot be the object of innate self-grasping; as Candrakīrti says in *Introduction to the Middle Way* [6.122cd], such a thing does not even exist conventionally.

Moreover, it could not be the basis of self-grasping. It is not even conventionally real.

He makes a similar point later [at 6.124cd].

Nor could it be the basis of self-grasping, since even those who do not know these theories grasp a self.

But the self we grasp cannot be identical to the clusters, either. In everyday speech, everyone says things like “my body” or “my mind.” Ordinary people take the self to be the master and the clusters to be its servants. Therefore, it makes no sense to say that the continuum of the clusters or any part of it is a *self*. . . .

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

རབ་བྱེད་ཐ་མར་ཡང་། “ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་མ་གཏོགས་པར།། བདག་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན་བྱས་  
པའི་ཆེ།། ཉེ་བར་ལེན་ཉིད་བདག་ཡིན་ན།། ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་བདག་ནི་མེད་པ་ཡིན།།” ཞེས་  
གསུངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།།

གཉིས་པ་(དེ་ལ་ཚད་པ་སྤང་བ་) ནི། བདག་དང་ཕུང་པོ་ཐུག་ལྷུང་འཛིན་ན་དེ་  
གཉིས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དད་པར་འཛིན་པར་མི་འགྱུར་རམ་སྟེ།

དེ་གཉིས་རྩལ་གཞན་དུ་འཛིན་པ་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཐ་སྤང་ལ་མེད་དེ། གཞན་དུ་ན་ལྷས་  
བྱིན་གྱི་ལག་པ་ན་བ་དང་གསོས་པ་ལ་ལྷས་བྱིན་ན་བ་དང་གསོས་པར་མི་འཇོག་པར་འགྱུར་  
དེ། ཉེར་སྤྲུལ་ན་བ་དང་གསོས་པས་བྱམས་པ་ན་བ་དང་གསོས་པར་ཐ་སྤང་མི་བྱེད་པ་  
བཞིན་ནོ།།

རིགས་པ་དེ་ནི། “གང་ཕྱིར་འཇིག་རྟེན་ས་བོན་ཙམ་བཏབ་ནས།། བདག་གིས་བྱ་འདི་  
བསྐྱེད་ཅེས་སྒྲ་བྱེད་ཅིང་།། ཤིང་ཡང་བཙུགས་སོ་སྟེ་ཐ་དེས་ན།། གཞན་ལས་སྐྱེ་བ་  
འཇིག་རྟེན་ལས་ཀྱང་མེད།།” ཅེས་གསུངས་པའི་འདོན་པ་བསྒྱུར་བ་ཡིན་དེ། “གང་ཕྱིར་  
འཇིག་རྟེན་ལག་པ་ན་བ་ལ།། བདག་ནི་ཚདོ་སྟེ་ཐ་དེས་ན།། དེ་གཉིས་རྩལ་གཞན་  
འཇིག་རྟེན་ལས་ཀྱང་མེད།།” ཅེས་པའོ།།

དེས་ན་བདག་གས་གང་ཟག་ནི་མིང་དུ་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་མ་གཏོགས་པ་བདག་གི་ཐ་  
སྤང་གང་ལ་འཇུག་པའི་གཞི་བརྟེན་བ་ན། ཕུང་པོ་ལས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དད་པ་དང་ངོ་བོ་གཅིག་པ་  
སོགས་མི་རྟེན་པས་ཕུང་པོ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ང་དང་བདག་དུ་བཏགས་པ་ཙམ་མོ།།

ལག་པ་ན་བ་དང་གསོས་པས་གང་ཟག་དེ་ན་བ་དང་གསོས་པར་ཐ་སྤང་བྱེད་ཅིང་།  
ངའི་ལག་པ་ན་བ་དང་གསོས་སོ་ཞེས་ཀྱང་ཐ་སྤང་བྱེད་པས་ལག་པ་གཅིག་ཉིད་དང་ང་ལི་  
བ་གཉིས་ཀར་འཇོག་པ་མིན་ནམ་སྟེ།

དེ་ནི་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཐ་སྤང་གྱི་དོན་མ་རྟོགས་པ་ཡིན་དེ། དེའི་དོན་ནི་ལག་པ་ན་བ་དང་  
གསོས་པས་བདག་དེ་ན་བ་དང་གསོས་པར་འཇོག་པའི་དོན་ཡིན་གྱི་ལག་པ་བདག་དུ་འཇོག་  
པ་མིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་དེ། ལག་པ་ལ་ངའོ་སྟེ་མི་འཛིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།།

ལྷས་བྱིན་གྱིས་དུས་ལྟེན་བདག་སོ་སོར་མ་ཕྱེ་བར་ངའོ་སྟེ་མི་འཛིན་པའི་དམིགས་  
པ་གཞིར་གྱུར་པའི་བདག་ནི་ཐོག་མ་མེད་པ་ནས་ཞུགས་པའི་ང་ཙམ་ཡིན་པས། ལྷ་ལ་སོགས་  
པའི་ལུས་སྤངས་དུས་ཀྱི་འགྲོ་བ་སོ་སོ་བའི་བདག་རྣམས་ནི་ལྷ་མའི་བྱེ་བྱག་པའོ།།



## WHAT AM I?

We now turn to the task of rebutting possible refutations of this position. Someone might ask, “If the self and the clusters are understood in terms of master and servant, wouldn’t that be to grasp them as two different entities?”

In everyday thought and speech, the self and the clusters are not conceived as substantially distinct. If they were, then when one says that somebody’s hand is injured and then cured, one would not say that they themselves were injured and then cured. When one person is hurt and then cured, we don’t say that some other person is hurt and then cured. . . . But when we search for the basis of designation of the self or the person, and look for something that is not simply nominally imputed, we do not find anything either distinct from or identical to the clusters. So, we merely designate the person in dependence on the clusters.

Someone might then argue as follows: When someone’s hand is hurt and then cured, we do say that the person is hurt and then cured, and that person would say “my hand was hurt and then cured.” In this case, isn’t the same hand taken both to be “I” and “mine”?

This question arises because one does not understand the meaning of *mundane convention*. Here is what this means: When the hand is hurt and then

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ལྷན་བྱིན་གྱིས་སྒྲེ་བ་སོ་སོར་ཕྱེ་བའི་བདག་ལ་ངའོ་སྟམ་དུ་བཟུང་བའི་བདག་ནི་ཆོ་རེ་  
ཟེའི་བདག་ཕྱོགས་རེ་བ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཡུལ་གྱི་བདག་བཞིན་དུ་ཡུལ་ཅན་གྱི་ངར་འཛིན་ཡང་སོ་  
སོར་ཕྱེ་བ་དང་མ་ཕྱེ་བའི་འཛིན་སྒྲངས་ཅན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།།

དེ་འདྲ་བའི་བདག་ཐ་སྙད་བདགས་པ་ཙམ་མིན་པའི་བདགས་དོན་བཅའ་བ་ན་གང་དུ་  
ཡང་མི་རྟེན་པས་ལས་གསོག་པ་དང་འབྲས་བུ་ཕྱོང་བ་སོགས་སྟུ་མི་རུང་ངོ་ཞེ་ན།

དེ་ལྟ་ན་གཟུགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱང་ཐ་སྙད་བདགས་པ་ཙམ་མིན་པའི་བདགས་  
དོན་བཅའ་བ་ན། བདག་དང་འདྲ་བར་རང་གི་ཆ་ཤས་རྣམས་ལས་ངོ་བོ་ཐ་དད་པ་དང་  
གཅིག་པ་སོགས་གང་དུ་ཡང་མི་རྟེན་པས་བྱ་བ་བྱེད་ཀྱས་པ་མི་སྲིད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།།

དེ་ལྟར་བཅའ་བ་ན་མི་རྟེན་པར་བདག་བདགས་ཡོད་དང་རྒྱས་ཡོད་གཉིས་ཀྱི་མཆོངས་  
མོད་ཀྱང་མ་རྟེན་པས་བདག་གཉིས་ཁོགས་མི་ཁོགས་མི་མཆོངས་ཏེ། རྒྱས་ཡོད་རིགས་པ་  
དབྱེད་བཟོད་ཡིན་ལ་བདགས་ཡོད་དེ་ལྟར་མིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།།

གཉིས་པ་(དེས་ཉེ་བར་སྤང་བྱ་ཡང་ངོ་བོས་ཡོད་པ་ཁོགས་པར་བཟུན་པ་)ནི། གལ་ཏེ་  
ཡང་དེ་ལྟར་བདག་བཀག་མོད་གྱི་འོན་ཀྱང་ལྷ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ནི་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོད་དེ་མ་  
བཀག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།། དེ་དག་ཡོད་ན་བདག་གི་ངོ་བོ་ཅན་མིན་པའི་བུམ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ལྷ་  
བ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་མེད་པས་དེ་དག་གང་དང་འབྲེལ་བའི་བདག་ཀྱང་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་  
གྱིས་ཡོད་དོ་ཞེ་ན།

## WHAT AM I?

cured, the self is regarded as hurt and then cured, but this does not mean that the hand is regarded as the self, because nobody would say, “the hand is me.”

The person that is the basis of one’s saying “I am”—when one does not distinguish between temporal slices of oneself—is the mere person with which one is involved from beginningless time. . . . A self that is not merely nominally imputed cannot be found at all when one seeks it. . . . So, the imputed person and the substantially existent self are similar in that when one searches for them analytically, one cannot find them. But they are *dissimilar* in that when the substantially existent self is not found it is thereby eliminated, and when the merely imputed person is not found it is not eliminated. This is because a substantially existent self would have to withstand rational analysis, and an imputed person does not need to do so.

We now turn to showing that the intrinsic existence of that which is owned is also refuted. One might argue that while the self has been refuted by these arguments, since we have not refuted the

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# MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཅུ་བ། གང་ཞིག་ལྟ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡི།  
 སྤ་ཚེལ་ད་ལྟ་ཕྱིན་མེད།  
 དེ་ལ་ཡོད་དོ་མེད་དོ་ཞེས།  
 རྟོག་པ་དག་ནི་ལྟ་པར་འབྱུར།

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གསུམ་པ་(ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་པོ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མེད་པ་ལ་ཚད་པ་སྤང་བ་) རྟེ། འདིར་ལ་  
 རོལ་པོས་གང་ཟག་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མེད་པ་དེ་དག་གི་བྱ་དེ་རྣམ་པར་བཅད་པ་ཙམ་མིན་པའི་  
 མ་ཡིན་དག་གི་དུ་བསྐྱབས་སོ་སྐྱམ་ནས་ཅི་བདག་མེད་དོ་སྐྱམ་དུ་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་ངེས་སམ་ཞེས་  
 འདྲིའོ། དེ་སྐད་དུ་སྐྱུ་སྐྱུས། ལྟ་པ་ལ་སོགས་པ་མེད་པས་བདག་ཀྱང་མེད་དོ་ཞེས་གཏམ་མ་  
 གག་དུ་མ་སྐྱུས་སམ་ཞེ་ན།

དེ་སྐད་དུ་སྐྱུ་སྐྱུ་མོད་ཀྱི་འདྲིའི་དོན་ནི་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་བཟུང་བ་ལྟར་ཁོ་བོ་ཅག་མི་འདོད་དོ།  
 འདི་ལྟར་བདག་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་དོ་ཞེས་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་བརྟགས་པ་ཡིན་ལ། བདག་གིས་ཀྱང་  
 འཛིན་པ་དེའི་གཉེན་པོར་བདག་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ནོ་ཞེས་དེ་རྒྱུག་པའི་ཆོག་དག་གི་  
 བྱ་རྣམ་པར་བཅད་པ་ཙམ་སྐྱུས་པ་ཡིན་གྱི། དག་གི་བྱ་བཅད་ཙམ་ལས་གཞན་པ་བདག་  
 འདྲིའི་རང་བཞིན་མེད་པ་རིགས་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཡུལ་དུ་བརྟགས་པ་མིན་ཏེ། དངོས་པོ་དང་དངོས་  
 མེད་ལ་ཞེན་པ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་སྤང་དགོས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།

འདི་ལྟར་བྱའི་རིགས་རྣམས་ནི་མེད་དག་གི་དང་མ་ཡིན་དག་གི་ཁྱེད་པར་འབྱེད་པ་ཡིན་  
 ལ་གཏམ་འབྱུར་བའི་ཁྱེད་ཆོས་ཀྱང་མིན་ཏེ་སྤར་མང་དུ་བཤད་ཟིན་ཏོ།

དེས་ན་གང་ཟག་ནི་བརྟུ་བ་ལས། “ཁྱེད་ཀྱི་བདག་གི་དང་ལོ་བདག་མི། དེས་དེ་  
 བདག་མིན་མ་ངེས་ཕྱིར། དངོས་པོ་མི་རྟག་པ་རྣམས་ལ། རྟོག་པ་སྐྱེ་བར་འབྱུར་མིན་  
 རྣམ།” ཞེས་གསུངས་པ་ལྟར་བྱུ་བར་འདོད་པར་བྱའོ།

དེའི་དོན་ནི་བདག་དེ་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་ཡོད་ན་གང་ཟག་གཅིག་གིས་དེ་ལ་ངའོ་སྐྱུ་དུ་  
 འཛིན་པ་བཞིན་དུ། གསལ་ཅད་ཀྱིས་ཀྱང་འཛིན་པའི་ངེས་པ་དགོས་པ་ལས་ཁྱེད་ཀྱིས་ངར་  
 འཛིན་སྐྱེ་བའི་བདག་དེ་ལ་ང་ལ་ངར་འཛིན་མི་སྐྱེ་བའི་ཕྱིར། རིགས་པ་དེས་བདག་དེ་ངོ་བོ་  
 ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ་མིན་ཏེ་གསལ་ཅད་ངར་འཛིན་སྐྱེ་བར་མ་ངེས་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། བདག་མེད་  
 རྟེ་ངར་འཛིན་པ་འདི་གང་ལ་འབྱུར་སྐྱུ་ན།

## WHAT AM I?

existence of the sense faculties such as vision, they might exist intrinsically. . . .

When one understands that that which does  
not exist prior to,  
Simultaneous with, or after vision does not  
exist,  
Conceptions expressed by “it exists” or  
“it does not exist”  
Will cease.

When it was shown that the owner of the sense faculties such as seeing, hearing, and feeling do not exist intrinsically, doesn't this show that the faculties that it is supposed to possess do not exist intrinsically as well? . . .

We now conclude by considering and rebutting an argument against the intrinsic nonexistence of the person. Our opponent might think that when we refute the intrinsic existence of a person, this is not merely to eliminate the object of negation, but to establish an implicative negation, a negation that presupposes the existence of something else, but denies that it has some particular property. They then might ask, “Have you really shown that there is no ‘I’?”

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཡུང་པོ་མི་རྟག་པ་ལས་དོན་གཞན་དུ་ངར་འཛིན་གྱི་དམིགས་པ་མེད་ཅིང་ཡུང་པོ་ཉིད་  
ཀྱང་དེར་མི་འཐད་པས་ཡུང་པོ་མི་རྟག་པ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་བདགས་པའི་བདག་ལ་ངའོ་སྟེ་  
པའི་རྟོག་པས་བཟུང་བ་འབའ་ཞིག་གོ། དེ་ལྟར་བདག་རང་གི་ངོ་བོས་ཡོད་པ་མིན་ལ་  
བརྟེན་ནས་བདགས་པ་ཙམ་མེད་པ་མིན་པའི་དོན་འདི་གང་ཞིག་ལྟ་ལ་ཞེས་སྟགས་གྱིས་  
ཀྱང་སྟོན་ནོ།།

བདག་གང་ཞིག་ཡོངས་སུ་བརྟགས་ན་ལྟ་བུ་ལ་སྟགས་པའི་སྔ་རོལ་ན་མེད་དེ་གང་  
ཟག་ཏུ་གངགས་པའི་རྒྱ་མེད་པར་འགྱུར་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། དེ་ལྟར་ཏེ་ལྟ་བུ་ལ་སྟགས་པ་དང་  
ལྟན་ཅིག་ཏུ་ཡང་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མེད་དོ་སྟོན་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་སྟགས་པ་ལ་ལྟན་ཅིག་པ་  
ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པ་སྟེ་མཐོང་བའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། སྟོན་པའི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་སྟགས་པ་ན་བདག་  
དང་ཉེ་བར་སྤང་བ་གཉིས་པན་ཚུན་ལྟེ་ལྟེ་མེད་ཏུ་གྱུར་པས་སྟོན་པའི་ཡང་མི་འཐད་  
པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།།

དེ་ལྟར་མེད་པ་དེའི་ཆོ་བདག་དེ་ལ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་དོ་ཞེས་པའི་རྟོག་པ་དག་ནི་ལྟོག་  
པར་འགྱུར་ལ། ལྟ་བུ་ལ་སྟགས་པས་གསལ་བར་བྱེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་གང་ཟག་དེ་མེད་དོ་ཞེས་  
པའི་རྟོག་པ་དག་ཀྱང་ལྟོག་པར་འགྱུར་རོ།།

གཉིས་པ་(ངེས་དོན་གྱི་ལུང་དང་སྤྱར་བ་)ནི། དེ་ལྟར་གང་ཟག་ཉེ་བར་ལེན་པ་པོ་དང་  
དེ་སྤང་བྱ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མེད་པར་གཏན་ལ་ཕབ་པ་དེ་ཉིད་ཟབ་མེད་ལུང་གིས་གྲུབ་པར་  
བསྟན་པ་དང་། དེ་ལྟར་བཤད་པའི་གསུང་རབ་ཐམས་ཅད་རབ་བྱེད་འདིས་བཤད་པར་བྱ་  
བར་བསྟན་པའི་ཕྱིར་དུ་ངེས་དོན་གྱི་ལུང་དང་སྤྱར་བ་ནི། འགྲོ་འོང་བརྟག་པའི་རབ་བྱེད་  
ལུང་དང་སྤྱར་བ་ཉིད་ལ་བཤད་པས་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ཤེས་པར་བྱའོ།།

གསུམ་པ་(དོན་བཅུས་ཏེ་མཚན་བསྟན་པ་)ནི། ལུས་དེའི་ལེན་པ་པོ་ནི་གང་ཟག་  
འདིའོ་ཞེས་པ་དང་གང་ཟག་འདི་ཡི་སྤང་བྱ་ནི་ཆོས་འདི་དག་གོ་ཞེས་པ་རྣམས་ལ་ཐ་སྟངས་ཀྱི་  
དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་མིན་པར་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པར་འཛིན་པའི་བཟུང་བ་ལྟར་གཞན་ན།  
སྤང་བྱ་དང་ལེན་པ་པོའི་ཐ་སྟངས་གང་ཡང་བྱུང་མེད་པར་ངེས་པ་བསྟེན་ནས་མིང་དུ་བདགས་  
པ་ཙམ་གྱི་རྟེན་འབྱུང་ལ་དེ་གཉིས་ཤིན་ཏུ་འཐད་པའི་རྒྱལ་རྣམས་བསམས་པར་བྱའོ།།

སྔ་རོལ་ན་གནས་པ་བརྟགས་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཆོགས་སུ་བཅད་པ་བཅུ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་བདག་  
ཉིད་རབ་དུ་བྱེད་པ་དགུ་པའི་རྣམ་པར་བཤད་པའོ།།

## WHAT AM I?

Who would say such a thing? Didn't we just say that since there is no such thing as "seeing" that there is no such thing as a "self"? We did say this, and this objection misunderstands this point. The opponent imagines that if the person is real, it must exist intrinsically. As an antidote to self-grasping, we have argued that there is no *intrinsically existent self*, and this phrase is meant merely to eliminate the object of negation and to undo that grasping. . . . This means that if the self existed intrinsically, just as one person grasps it when they say "I," others should certainly grasp it as well. . . . This argument shows that *that* self does not exist intrinsically.

One might then ask, if there is no self, what is the object of self-grasping? There is no object of self-grasping apart from the impermanent clusters. But this does not mean that it makes sense to say that the object of self-grasping *just is* the clusters. Therefore, by *I am* one grasps a self that is imputed on the basis of the clusters. Hence this teaches both that there is no inherently existent self and that there is mere dependent designation. . . .

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

### Another Ride in the Chariot

Candrakirti (600–650 CE) taught at Nalanda University, located in present-day Bihar in India (not to be confused with its namesake university, also in Bihar). He composed many commentaries and several independent treatises. Candrakirti argued that since followers of the Middle Way do not believe that there is any fundamental nature of reality, they advance no theses regarding the nature of reality, and since they do not share interpretations of philosophical terms with their opponents, they cannot advance philosophical arguments using those terms. Therefore, he argued, the proper Middle Way philosophical method is to demonstrate the absurd consequences of their opponents' positions, and to advance no theses of their own.

Candrakirti is notoriously difficult to interpret. This is because he is not always consistent in his use of language, and he is often figurative or hyperbolic. Some read him as an extreme realist; some read him as an extreme nihilist. Some see him as a skeptic; others see him as defending a clear philosophical position. A great deal hinges on which passages of his work one takes to be his literal position, and which need to be interpreted in light of those. Depending on where one begins, various interpretations make sense.



## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

Candrakīrti seems not to have been a major influence in subsequent Indian Madhyamaka: Śāntideva (eighth century) is the only major figure in that tradition who seems to rely on his work. But he became the dominant Madhyamaka figure in Tibet. Nearly every Tibetan scholar writing after the eleventh century took Candrakīrti to be the authoritative exponent of Middle Way philosophy. Nonetheless, they disagreed dramatically among themselves regarding just what that position amounted to, and philosophical disputes often were pursued as disputes in Candrakīrti interpretation. These disputes structure a great deal of the Tibetan philosophical landscape from the twelfth century to the present day.

*Introduction to the Middle Way and Its Auto-commentary* (*Madhyamakāvatāra-bhāṣya*) is structured by the bodhisattva path—the map of practice for one who resolves to achieve awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings. Each of its ten chapters is devoted to one of the ten stages on that path, explaining the qualities to be achieved on that stage, and nature of practice on that stage. The sixth chapter, from which the present excerpt is drawn, comprises about two-thirds of the entire text. It is devoted to the stage at which the bodhisattva cultivates wisdom, and articulates the content of that wisdom, an account that draws on Nāgārjuna's

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཉོན་མོངས་སྒྲིན་རྣམས་མ་ལུས་འཇིག་ཚེགས་ལ།  
ལྷ་ལས་བྱང་བར་སྒོ་ཡིས་མཐོང་གྱར་ཅིང་།  
བདག་ནི་འདི་ཡི་ཡུལ་དུ་རྟོགས་བྱས་ནས།  
རྣལ་འབྱོར་པ་ཡིས་བདག་ནི་འགོག་པར་བྱེད།

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དེ་ལ་འཇིག་ཚེགས་ལ་ལྷ་བ་ནི་ང་དང་ངའི་སྐྱམ་པ་དེ་ལྷ་བུའི་རྣམ་པར་ཞུགས་པ་ཤེས་  
རབ་ཉོན་མོངས་ཅན་ནོ།  
དེ་ལས་བྱང་བ་རྣ་འཇིག་ཚེགས་ལ་ལྷ་བ་ལས་བྱང་བའོ། དེ་དག་ཀྱང་གང་དག་ཅེན།  
ཉོན་མོངས་པ་རྣམས་སྒྲིན་རྣམས་སོ།  
དེ་ལ་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་རྣམས་ནི་འདོད་ཆགས་ལ་སོགས་པ་རྣམས་སོ། སྒྲིན་རྣམས་ནི་སྒྲེ་  
བ་དང་ཁ་བ་དང་ན་བ་དང་འཆི་བ་དང་  
ལྷ་དང་ལ་སོགས་པ་དག་གོ། དེ་དག་ནི་མ་ལུས་པར་འཇིག་ཚེགས་ལ་ལྷ་བ་ལས་འབྱང་  
སྒྲེ། ཉོན་མོངས་པ་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི་མདོ་  
ལས། འཇིག་ཚེགས་ལ་ལྷ་བའི་རྩ་བ་ཅན་འཇིག་ཚེགས་ལ་ལྷ་བའི་རྩ་བ་ཅན། འཇིག་  
ཚེགས་ལ་ལྷ་བའི་ཀྱང་འབྱང་བ་ཅན་དག་གོ།

## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

own analysis of emptiness. A great deal of that discussion is devoted to how to understand the selflessness of persons. Candrakirti argues that while the self is an illusion, persons are conventionally real, thus showing how to understand our own existence through the rubric of the two truths developed by Nagarjuna.

The present translation is drawn from the Tibetan text of *Introduction to the Middle Way and Its Autocommentary*. We have deleted verses and sections of the autocommentary that follow tangents that would be of less interest to contemporary readers.

Having seen that all psychopathology and all  
vice are generated by seeing the con-  
stantly changing collection of clusters as  
possessing identity,

And having understood that the self is the  
object of these views, a serious practition-  
er engages in the refutation of the reality  
of the self.

In this context, the constantly changing collec-  
tion of clusters is taken by ordinary people to be an  
intrinsically existent “I” associated with that which  
is “mine.” . . . All psychopathology is generated  
from these views. . . . The idea of the self is their

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཞེས་འཇིག་ཚོགས་ལ་ལྟ་བའི་རྒྱ་ཅན་དུ་གསུངས་ལ། འཇིག་ཚོགས་ལ་ལྟ་བམ་སྤངས་  
པ་ནམས་ལ་འདུ་བྱེད་མངོན་པར་

འབྲུབ་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། སྦྲེ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་སྦྱག་བཟུལ་འབྱུང་བའི་ཕྱིར་ན། མ་ལུས་  
པ་འཇིག་ཚོགས་ལ་ལྟ་བའི་རྒྱ་ཅན་ཡིན་ནོ།

དེ་ལ་གྲངས་ཅན་པ་དག་ནི།

རྩ་བའི་རང་བཞིན་རྣམ་པར་འབྱུར་མིན་ལ།

ཆེན་པོ་སོགས་བདུན་རང་བཞིན་རྣམས་འབྱུར་ཞིང་།

བརྩ་དུག་པོ་ནི་རྣམ་པར་འབྱུར་བ་སྟེ།

སྦྲེས་བྱ་རང་བཞིན་མ་ཡིན་རྣམས་འབྱུར་མིན།

༡༢༡

མོ་གཤམ་བྱ་ལྟར་སྦྲེ་བ་དང་བྲལ་ཕྱིར།

དེ་ལྟར་ལྱུར་པའི་བདག་ནི་ཡོད་མིན་ཞིང་།

འདི་ནི་ངར་འཛིན་རྟེན་དུ་འང་མི་རིགས་ལ།

འདི་ནི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་དུ་ཡང་ཡོད་མི་འདོད།

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གང་ཕྱིར་བསྟན་བཅོས་བསྟན་བཅོས་ལས་དེའི་ཁྱད།

སྦྲེ་གས་རྣམས་ཀྱིས་གང་བསྟན་དེ་ཀུན་ལ།

རང་གསལ་མ་སྦྲེས་གཏན་ཚིགས་ཀྱིས་གཞོད་པ།

དེ་ཕྱིར་དེ་ཁྱད་ཀུན་ཁྱད་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན།

༡༢༣

དེའི་ཕྱིར་ཕུང་པོ་ལས་གཞན་བདག་མེད་དེ།

ཕུང་པོ་མ་གཏོགས་དེ་འཛིན་མ་གྲུབ་ཕྱིར།

འཇིག་རྟེན་ངར་འཛིན་སྒྲོ་ཡི་བརྟན་དུ་ཡང་།

མི་འདོད་དེ་རིག་མིན་པའང་བདག་ལྟའི་ཕྱིར།

༡༢༤

## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

basis. This is because habitual self-grasping has the self as its object.

Philosophers from other schools conceive of the self as permanent, inert, without qualities, a subject but not an agent. Their systems attribute a variety of properties to this self.

No such self exists, though. Like the son of a barren woman, nothing could produce it. Moreover, it could not be the basis of self-grasping. It is not even conventionally real.

All of the attributes that those other schools attribute to the self are refuted by the argument that the self is unarisen. Since even they accept this, it makes no sense to attribute those attributes to it.

Therefore, there is no self distinct from the clusters, since there is no experience of a self apart from the clusters.

Nor could it be the basis of self-grasping, since even those who do not know these theories grasp a self.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

གང་དག་དུད་འགྱོར་བསྐལ་མང་བསྐལ་གྱུར་བ།

དེས་ཀྱང་མ་སྦྱེས་རྟག་འདི་མ་མཐོང་ལ།

ངར་འཛིན་དེ་དག་ལ་ཡང་འཇུག་མཐོང་སྟེ།

དེས་ན་ཕུང་པོ་ལས་གཞན་བདག་འགའ་མེད།

༡༢༥

ཕུང་པོ་ལས་གཞན་བདག་གྲུབ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར།

བདག་ལྟའི་དམིགས་པ་ཕུང་པོ་ཁོ་ན་ལོ།

ཁ་ཅིག་བདག་ལྟའི་རྟོན་དུ་ཕུང་པོ་ནི།

ལྡར་ཆར་ཡང་འདོད་ཁ་ཅིག་སེམས་ཤིག་འདོད།

༡༢༦

གང་གི་ཕྱིར་ཇི་སྐད་བཤད་པའི་རིགས་པས་ཕུང་པོ་ལས་ཐ་དད་པའི་བདག་མ་གྲུབ་པ་  
དེའི་ཕྱིར། ཕུང་པོ་དག་ལས་གཞན་པའི་བདག་གྲུབ་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར། འཇིག་ཚོགས་ལ་ལྷ་  
བའི་དམིགས་པ་ནི་ཕུང་པོ་དག་ཁོ་ན་ཡིན་ནོ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་བདག་ནི་ཕུང་པོ་ཙམ་ཁོ་ན་ཡིན་ནོ།  
ཟེར་རོ། ཕྱོགས་འདི་ནི་རང་གི་སྤྲེ་པ་མང་པོས་བཀྱར་བ་པ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ཡིན་ནོ། དེ་ལས་ཀྱང་།

གལ་ཏེ་ཕུང་པོ་བདག་ནི་དེ་ཕྱིར་དེ།

མང་བས་བདག་དེ་དག་ཀྱང་མང་པོར་འགྱུར།

བདག་ནི་རྗེས་སུ་འགྱུར་ཞིང་དེར་ལྷ་བ།

རྗེས་ལ་འཇུག་པས་ཕྱིན་ཅི་ལོག་མི་འགྱུར།

༡༢༧

དེ་ལ་ཕུང་པོ་རྣམས་བདག་ཡིན་ནོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱོགས་གང་གི་ཡིན་པ་དེའི་ལྷར་ན་ཕུང་  
པོ་རྣམས་མང་བའི་ཕྱིར་བདག་ཀྱང་མང་པོར་འགྱུར་རོ། གང་གི་ལྷར་ན་སེམས་བདག་ཡིན་  
པ་དེའི་ལྷར་ན་ཡང་མིག་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་དབྱེ་བས་སམ། སྐད་ཅིག་རེ་རེ་  
ལ་རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་སྦྱེ་བ་དང་འགག་པས་མེད་པའི་ཕྱིར་བདག་ཀྱང་མང་པོར་འགྱུར་རོ།

## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

Even those who have been reborn as animals for eons do not perceive such an unarisen permanent self.

Nonetheless, they, too, grasp an “I.” So, there is no self distinct from the clusters.

Some say that because there is no self different from the clusters, the object of self-grasping is the clusters themselves.

Some of these claim that all of the clusters together are the basis of self-grasping, and some that the mind alone is the basis.

They say that because no arguments can prove that there is a self that is distinct from the psychophysical clusters, the clusters themselves are the object of mistaken views about the self. Thus, they conclude, the self is just the set of clusters.

If the self were the collection of clusters, the self would be multiple, since there are many clusters.

In that case, the self would also be substantial, and there would be no problem with viewing it as a substance.

Now, if we were to accept the position that the clusters were the self, it would follow that the self is multiple, because there are many clusters. And even if one thought that only the cluster of conscious

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

མྱ་ངན་འདས་ཆོངས་པར་བདག་ཆད་འགྱུར།།  
མྱ་ངན་འདས་སྒྲོན་སྒྲོན་ཅིག་དག་ལ་ནི།།  
སྒྲེ་འཇིག་བྱེད་པོ་མེད་པས་དེ་འབྲས་མེད།།  
གཞན་གྱིས་བསགས་ལ་གཞན་གྱིས་བ་བར་འགྱུར།།

༡༢༤

གལ་ཏེ་བདག་ཕུང་པོའི་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་ཡིན་ན་མྱ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པའི་ཆོ་ཕུང་པོ་ཁྱ་  
ཆར་ཡང་རྒྱན་འཆད་པས་བདག་ཆད་པར་འགྱུར་རོ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་ཆད་པའི་མཐར་འཇིག་པས་  
ལྟ་བར་ཐལ་བར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། གང་གི་ཕྱིར་ཁྱེད་ཅག་གིས་ནི་བདག་དང་བདག་གི་བའི་ནྟེན་པ་  
ཅན་འཇིག་ཚོགས་ལ་ལྟ་བས་བདག་ཉིད་དུ་གང་ག་བྱུང་བ་དེ་ཉིད་ལ་རྟག་པ་དང་ཆད་པར་  
འཇིག་པས་མཐར་འཇིག་པར་ལྟ་བར་གཞག་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་བདག་ནི་མྱ་ངན་ལས་  
འདས་པའི་དུས་སུ་ཡང་རྒྱན་ཆད་པར་ཁས་བླང་བར་མི་བྱ་སྟེ། མཐར་འཇིག་པར་ལྟ་བར་  
ཐལ་བར་འགྱུར་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་བདག་ནི་ཕུང་པོའི་བདག་ཉིད་ཅན་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།  
ང་རྒྱལ་པོང་ལ་རུ་ཞེས་བྱ་བར་ཟུར་ཏོ། ཞེས་བྱ་བ་འདི་ཡང་གསུང་བར་མི་འགྱུར་ཏེ།  
དེའི་ཆོ་བདག་ཀྱང་ལུས་ལྟར་ཞིག་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་། འདིར་གཞན་ཉིད་སྒྲེ་བར་ཁས་བླངས་  
པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ།།



## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

states is the self, the self would still be multiple, because consciousness is multiple. This is because there are many kinds of consciousness, such as the visual consciousness and others like it, and because episodes of consciousness occur and cease at each moment. . . .

They would have to accept that the self is substantial. This is because they regard the psychophysical clusters as substances with different attributes such as pastness. . . . And this would imply that the constantly changing collection of clusters is substantial.

But such a self would come into and fall out of existence at every moment and would cease to exist at nirvana.

Since the agent would cease to exist, another would experience the result of his actions.

If the self were the clusters, it would come to an end with nirvana, since the continuum of these clusters ends at nirvana. . . . And just as they cease at the time of nirvana, the clusters come into and pass out of existence moment by moment. So, if the self was the clusters, the self would also come into and pass out of existence. . . . And if the self is constantly arising and ceasing, it would not be an agent. . . . Moreover, the consequences of actions performed by one person would be experienced by another.

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# MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

དེ་ཉིད་དུ་རྒྱུད་ཡོད་ན་སྦྱོན་མེད་ན།།

ཐུར་རྣམས་དཔུང་ཆེ་རྒྱུད་ལ་ཉེས་བཤད་ཟིན།།

དེའི་ཕྱིར་ཕུང་པོ་དང་སེམས་བདག་མི་རིགས།།

འཇིག་རྟེན་མཐའ་ལྡན་ལ་སོགས་མེད་ཕྱིར་རོ།།

༡༢༩

ཁྱོད་ཀྱི་རྣལ་འབྱོར་བདག་མེད་མཐོང་བ་ལ།།

དེ་ཆོ་ངེས་པར་དངོས་རྣམས་མེད་པར་འབྱུར།།

རྣལ་བདག་སྤོང་ན་དེ་ཆོ་དེ་ཡི་ཕྱིར།།

ཁྱོད་ཀྱིས་སེམས་སམ་ཕུང་པོ་བདག་མི་འབྱུར།།

༡༣༠

ཕུང་པོ་རྣམས་ལ་ཡང་འདི་འདྲུག་པ་སྤྱིད་ཏེ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནི་ཞེས་བཞུན་ཟིན་ཏེ།  
དེའི་ཕྱིར་གཤེད་ཆོས་ཐམས་ཅད་ནི་བདག་མེད་པའོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་འདིར་བདག་གི་སྤྲུང་པོ་  
རྣམས་ལ་འཇུག་པར་མི་འདོད་ན་གཞན་དུ་ཡང་མི་འདོད་པར་བྱ་དགོས་སོ། ཅི་  
ཐེ་གཞན་དུ་ཕུང་པོས་ལ་འཇུག་པར་འདོད་ན་ནིད་འདིར་ཡང་དགོས་སོ། གཞན་ཡང་

ཕུང་པོ་བདག་ཅེས་བཞེད་ཆེ་ཕུང་རྣམས་ཀྱི།།

ཆོགས་པ་ཡིན་གྱི་ཕུང་པོའི་ངོ་བོ་མིན།།

དེའི་ཕྱིར་ཆོགས་པ་ནི་ཅི་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་ཕྱིར།།

མགོན་མིན་འདུལ་བའམ་དཔང་པོ་ཉིད་ཀྱང་མིན།།

དེ་མེད་ཕྱིར་དེ་ཆོགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།།

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## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

Some might say that this is not a problem because the moments form a continuum. But we have shown that this position is fallacious.

So, neither the clusters together nor the mind can be the self, just as the world does not come to an end.

Moreover, when a meditator realizes no-self, you would have to admit that he would see himself to be nonexistent.

So, while the permanent self has been refuted, you cannot accept either that the clusters or the mind constitute the self.

Consider a meditator who understands the truth of suffering in terms of selflessness, and thinks, “all phenomena are selfless.” If either the clusters or just consciousness were the self, then when that meditator perceives selflessness, he would also perceive the nonexistence of the clusters. But nobody believes this. So, the clusters are not the self.

You might say that the clusters are the self in the sense that the whole collection, not the individual clusters, constitute the self.

But the collection could never serve as the protector, the one to be pacified, or the witness. So, the self is not the collection.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

དཔེར་ན་ཤིང་ནམས་ནི་ནགས་ཚལ་ལོ་ཞེས་བཞེད་པ་ནི་ཤིང་གི་ཚོགས་པ་ནགས་ཚལ་  
ཡིན་གྱི། ཤིང་རེ་རེ་དག་ལ་ཡང་ནགས་སུ་ཐལ་བར་འགྱུར་བའི་ཕྱིར། ཤིང་གི་ངོ་བོ་ནི་མ་  
ཡིན་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ་ཕུང་པོ་ཚོགས་པ་ཉིད་བདག་དུ་འགྱུར་རོ།

དེ་ཚོ་དེ་ཡི་ཡན་ལག་ཚོགས་གནས་ནམས།  
ཤིང་རྩ་ཉིད་འགྱུར་ཤིང་རྩ་བདག་མཚུངས།  
མདོ་ལས་ཕུང་པོ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཡིན་གསུངས་པ།  
དེ་ཕྱིར་ཕུང་པོ་འདུཅུམ་ཙམ་བདག་ས་ཡིན།  
ལེན་པོ་རང་ཉིད་ལེན་གཅིག་རིགས་དངོས་མིན།  
དེ་ལྟ་ན་ལས་བྱེད་པོ་གཅིག་ཉིད་འགྱུར།

१३५

གང་ཞིག་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་གང་བདགས་པ་དེ་ནི་བདགས་བ་ཉི་བར་ལེན་ཡན་ལག་ཚོགས་  
པ་ཙམ་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། བརྟེན་ནས་བདགས་པའི་ཕྱིར་འབྱུང་བ་ལས་གྱུར་པ་བཞིན་ནོ། ཇི་  
ལྟར་འབྱུང་བ་དག་གྱུར་བྱས་ནས་འབྱུང་བ་ལས་གྱུར་པ་ཐོན་པོ་སོགས་པ་དང་མིག་ལ་  
སོགས་པ་བརྟགས་མེད་ཀྱི། དེ་གཉིས་འབྱུང་བ་འདུས་པ་ཙམ་ཉིད་ནི་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། དེ་  
བཞིན་དུ་བདག་ཕུང་པོ་གྱུར་བྱས་ནས་བདགས་པའི་རན་བཞིན་ཅན་ཡང་ཕུང་པོ་ཚོགས་པ་  
ཙམ་ཡིན་པར་མི་རུང་ངོ།

བྱེད་པོ་མེད་ལས་ཡོད་སྐྱམ་སྟོ་ཡིན་ན།  
མ་ཡིན་གང་ཕྱིར་བྱེད་པོ་མེད་ལས་མེད།  
གང་ཕྱིར་ཐུབ་པས་བདག་དེས་ཁུ་མེ།  
རྒྱུང་དང་རྣམ་ཤེས་ནས་མཁའ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ།

१३८

## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

For example, when we call a forest *trees*, we mean that the forest is constituted by the collection of trees, but not that the forest has the same substantial nature as a tree, because then each tree would be a forest. By analogy, one might say that the self is the collection of the clusters. . . . But, because mere collections do not exist substantially, it would make no sense to say that the self is the protector, the controller, or the witness. So, the collection cannot be the self.

If the self were the collection, then since the self is like a chariot, a mere collection of chariot parts would be a chariot.

The texts say that the self is *dependent* upon the clusters, not that it is identical to their totality.

In the case of something that is designated in dependence on something else, the designation is not identical to the mere set of parts that belong to the composite entity. This is because the composite is dependently designated, just like things that are broadly dependent on the elements. . . . For example, macroscopic phenomena—such as the color blue, or the eyes—are designated on the basis of causal processes in underlying elements. But those higher-level phenomena are not literally identical with those elements. By analogy, although the self

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཁམས་བླག་དང་ནི་མིག་སོགས་རེག་པ་ཡི།  
རྟེན་བླག་དག་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཉེར་བརྟན་ཞིང།

१२५

སེམས་དང་སེམས་བྱུང་ཚེས་རྣམས་ཉེར་བཟུང་ནས།  
དེས་གསུངས་དེ་ཕྱིར་དེ་ནི་དེ་རྣམས་དང་།  
དེ་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་ཚོགས་ཙམ་ཉིད་མིན་ཏེ།  
དེ་ཕྱིར་ངར་འཛིན་སྟོང་རྣམས་ལ་མིན།

१३८

གང་གི་ཕྱིར་ཁམས་ལ་སོགས་པ་དེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་སྐོན་ནས་བདག་དུ་གདགས་སོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བར་  
གསུངས་པ་དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་ནི་དེ་རྣམས་དང་དེ་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། གཞན་མ་ཉིད་མ་ཡིན་ནི་ཞེས་  
བྱ་བའི་དོན་ཏེ། དེ་ཚོགས་པ་ཙམ་ཉིད་དུ་ཡང་རིགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ། གང་གི་ཕྱིར་ཇི་སྟངས་  
བཤད་པའི་ཚེས་དེ་རྣམས་བདག་ཉིད་དུ་མི་རུང་བ་དེའི་ཕྱིར་ན་ཚེས་དེ་རྣམས་ལ་ངར་འཛིན་  
པའི་སྟོམ་རིགས་སོ། གང་གི་ཚད་ལྡན་མུང་པོ་རྣམས་ངར་འཛིན་བའི་ཡུལ་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་ལ།

## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

is designated on the basis of the causal processes in the clusters, it is not literally identical with the clusters.

It makes no sense for the that which *has* parts and the *parts that it has* to be the same, for this would be to identify agent and object.

And you can't say that there is an action but no agent, for every action has an agent.

The Buddha taught that the self depends upon the six elements: earth, water, fire, wind, consciousness, and space,  
And also on the six faculties that enable contact, such as vision.

Moreover, he says that the self is posited on the basis of mental episodes and processes.

So, the self is neither identical to any of the phenomena, nor to them collected together. This is why they are not what is grasped as "I."

Because it is said that the self is designated on the basis of the elements and other such things, it is not simply identical to them. . . . But nor does it make sense to say that it is simply identical with the collection of them. Because these things cannot be a

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཕུང་པོ་ལས་ཐ་དང་པ་ཡང་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་དེའི་ཕྱིར། ངར་འཛིན་པའི་ཡུལ་ཉིད་ཡོད་པ་  
མ་ཡིན་པས། རྣལ་འབྱོར་བ་བདག་མ་དམིགས་པ་ལས་བདག་གི་བ་ཡང་སྤྱིང་པོ་དང་ལྗན་  
པ་མ་ཡིན་པ་ཉིད་དུ་ཡོངས་སུ་ཤེས་ཤིང་། འདས་བྱས་མཐའ་དག་བསལ་ནས་ཉེ་བར་ལེན་  
པ་མེད་པར་མྱ་ངན་ལས་འདའ་བར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་རྣམ་པར་དབྱེད་པ་འདི་ཚོས་  
མཛེས་སོ།།

བདག་མེད་རྟོགས་ཚེ་རྟག་པའི་བདག་སྤོང་ཞིང་།།  
འདི་ནི་ངར་འཛིན་རྟེན་དུ་འང་མི་འདོད་པ།།  
དེའི་ཕྱིར་བདག་མེད་ཤེས་པས་བདག་ལྟ་བུ།།  
ཅེས་ཀྱང་འབྱེན་ཞེས་སྤྲི་བ་ཤིན་དུ་མཛེར།།

༡༥༠

རང་བྱིམ་ཅིག་ཕྱག་སྐྱུལ་གནས་མཐོང་བཞིན་དུ།།  
འདི་ན་གླང་ཆེན་མེད་ཅེས་དོགས་བསལ་ཏེ།།  
སྐྱུལ་གྱི་འཇིགས་པ་འད་སྤོང་བར་བྱེད་པ་ནི།།  
ཀྱུ་མ་གཞན་གྱི་གནས་པོར་གྱུར་ཉིད་དོ།།

༡༥༡

ཕུང་པོ་བདག་ཡོད་མ་ཡིན་བདག་ལ་ཡང་།།  
ཕུང་པོ་དེ་རྣམས་ཡོད་མིན་གང་ཕྱིར་འདིར།།  
གཞན་ཉིད་ཡོད་ན་རྟོག་པ་འདིར་འགྱུར་ན།།  
གཞན་ཉིད་དེ་མང་དེ་ཕྱིར་འདི་རྟོག་པ་འོ།།

༡༥༢



## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

real self, it would be irrational to say that the “I” is grasped as being identical with them or somehow contained in them. Therefore, since the psycho-physical clusters are not the object of grasping the “I,” and there is nothing apart from the clusters that is the object of such grasping, we do not grasp any real object when we grasp the “I.” For this reason, serious meditators should not reify the self, and should realize that persons are essenceless. Having discarded what is merely fabricated, they will become free from taking the clusters to be owned by a self and will transcend suffering.

You might say that when one realizes  
no-self, they negate the permanent  
self, although this is not the basis of  
grasping “I.”

If so, your claim that the realization of  
no-self eliminates the view that there is a  
self would be bizarre.

This would be just like a man who, having  
seen a snake in the wall of his house,  
dispels his fear by confirming that there is  
no elephant in the house.

Everyone would be right to ridicule him!

The self is not in the clusters, nor are the  
clusters in the self.

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III

## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

གཞན་ཉིད་ཡོད་ན་ནི་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་དངོས་པོར་རིགས་པར་འགྱུར་ཏེ། དཔེར་ན་  
འཁར་གཞིང་ན་ཞོ་ཡོད་དོ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལྟ་བུ་ལྟོ། འཁར་གཞིང་དང་ཞོ་གཉིས་ནི་འཇིག་རྟེན་  
གཞན་ཉིད་ཡིན་པ་ན་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་དངོས་པོར་མ་བོང་ངོ་། སྤང་པོ་རྣམས་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་  
བདག་ལས་ཐ་དད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ལ་བདག་ཀྱང་སྤང་པོ་རྣམས་ལས་ཐ་དད་པ་ཡིན་པས་དེ་  
གཉིས་ལ་རྟེན་དང་བརྟེན་པའི་དངོས་པོ་ཡོད་པ་མ་ཡིན་ནོ།།

ཁ་ཅིག་དེ་ཉིད་གཞན་ཉིད་རྟག་མི་རྟག།  
ལ་སོགས་བརྗོད་མེད་གང་ཟག་རྣམས་ཡོད་འདོད་དང།  
རྣམ་ཤེས་བྱག་གི་ཤེས་བྱར་དེ་འདོད་ཅིང་།།  
དེ་ནི་ངར་འཇིན་གཞིར་ཡང་འདོད་པ་ཡིན།།

༡༥༤

དེ་ལ་རེ་ཞིག་སྤང་པོ་མ་གཏོགས་དེ་འཇིན་མ་གྱུབ་ཕྱིར། གང་ཟག་སྤང་པོ་དག་ལས་  
གཞན་དུ་ནི་མི་འགྱུར་རོ། སྤང་པོའི་རང་བཞིན་ཅན་ཡང་མ་ཡིན་ཏེ། སྤྱི་བ་དང་འཇིག་པ་  
དང་ལྡན་པ་ཉིད་དུ་ཐལ་བར་འགྱུར་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་དེ་ལྟར་ན་སྤང་པོ་དག་ལས་དེ་  
ཉིད་དང་གཞན་ཉིད་དུ་བརྗོད་དུ་མེད་དོ་ཇི་ལྟར་དེ་ཉིད་དང་གཞན་ཉིད་དུ་མི་ཡིན་པ་དེ་  
བཞིན་དུ་རྟག་པ་དང་མི་རྟག་པ་ཉིད་དུ་ཡང་བརྗོད་དུ་མེད་དོ། རྣམ་པར་ཤེས་པ་བྱག་གི་  
ཤེས་པ་ཡང་ཡིན་ནོ། གང་ཟག་དེ་ནི་རྣམས་སུ་ཡོད་པ་ཉིད་དུ་ཡང་རིགས་ཏེ། དེ་ལ་བྱེད་པ་  
པོ་ཉིད་དང་ཟ་བ་པོ་ཉིད་དུ་བརྗོད་པའི་ཕྱིར་དང་འཁོར་བ་དང་མྱ་ངན་ལས་འདས་པ་དང་།

## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

If the self and the clusters were different, it would make sense to reify it; since they are not, to do so would be pointless.

If they were really different, we could say that one is the container and the other its content, like yogurt in a bowl; *these* are different, and one is the container and the other its content. But since the psychophysical clusters and the self are not different from one another in this sense, it is not the case that one is the container and the other the content.

Some say that the self is substantially real but that its relation to the clusters is inexpressible—that one can say nothing of it, for instance, whether it is permanent or impermanent.

They also say that it is an object of knowledge of the six kinds of consciousness and that it is the basis of self-grasping.

Some in the Sammitiya school argue as follows: Since there is no person apart from the psychophysical clusters, the person cannot be different from the clusters. But nor can the person be identical to the clusters, because then it would constantly come into and pass out of existence. Therefore, they say, the relation of the person to the clusters is inexpressible in terms of identity and difference. And

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

བཅིངས་པ་དང་ཐར་པ་དང་འབྲེལ་བ་ཅན་ཉིད་ཡིན་པའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། དེ་ནི་བདག་ཏུ་འཛིན་  
པའི་ཡུལ་ཉིད་ཏུ་ཡང་འདོད་དོ། སྒྲ་བ་འདི་ཡང་མ་རིགས་པ་ཉིད་བཤད་པ།

གང་ཕྱིར་གཟུགས་ལས་སེམས་བཞེད་མེད་མི་རྟོགས།  
དངོས་ཡོད་བཞེད་མེད་རྟོགས་པ་མ་ཡིན་ཉིད།  
གལ་ཏེ་བདག་འགའ་དངོས་པོར་གྲུབ་འབྱུར་ན།  
སེམས་ལྟར་གྲུབ་དངོས་བཞེད་ཏུ་མེད་མི་འབྱུར།

༡༤༧

དེ་ཕྱིར་ངར་འཛིན་རྟོན་ནི་དངོས་པོ་མིན།  
ཕུང་ལས་གཞན་མིན་ཕུང་པོའི་ངོ་བོ་མིན།  
ཕུང་པོ་རྟོན་མིན་འདོན་ནི་དེ་ལྟར་མིན།  
འདི་ནི་ཕུང་པོ་རྣམས་བརྟེན་གྲུབ་པར་འབྱུར།

༡༤༨

ཞེས་བྱ་བའོ། ཇི་ལྟར་འདི་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་འདི་འབྲུང་ཞེས་བྱ་བའི་དེ་ཙམ་ཞིག་ཀྱང་རྫོང་  
གི་བདེན་པའི་རྣམ་པར་གཞག་པ་མ་ཆད་པར་བྱ་བའི་ཕྱིར་ཁས་ལེན་གྱི་རྒྱ་མེད་ལ་སྟགས་པ་  
དག་ལས་སྦྱེ་བ་མ་ཡིན་པ་དེ་བཞིན་དུ། འདིར་ཡང་རྟོན་ནས་གདགས་པ་ལ་ཡང་དག་པར་  
བརྟེན་པ་ནི་རྒྱུད་བཤད་པའི་སྟོན་དང་ལྟར་ཕན་པའི་རྣམ་པ་བསལ་ནས་ཕུང་པོ་རྣམས་ལས་  
བརྟེན་ནས་གདགས་པ་ཞེས་པ་འདི་ཙམ་ཞིག་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྱི་ཐ་སྙད་རྣམ་པར་གནས་པར་བྱ་  
བའི་ཕྱིར་ཁས་བླང་བར་བྱ་སྟེ། བདག་ཏུ་ཐ་སྙད་བདགས་པ་མཐོང་བའི་ཕྱིར་རོ། བདག་  
བདགས་པ་ཙམ་ཏུ་གྲུབ་པར་བྱ་བའི་དོན་དུ་རྒྱུད་བཤད་པའི་དོན་ཉིད་གསལ་བར་བྱ་བའི་  
ཕྱིར་ཕྱི་རོལ་གྱི་དཔེ་སྟན་ཞིང་བཤད་པ།

## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

just as the person is neither identical to nor different from the clusters, we can neither say that it is permanent nor that it is impermanent. Nonetheless, they argue, this person is known through the six kinds of consciousness. And it exists substantially, because it is a real agent and a real subject, and is involved in cyclic existence, the cessation of suffering, bondage, and liberation. It is this person that is the object of self-grasping.

But the relation between the mind and the body is not considered inexpressible, and no real thing is taken to be inexpressible. If the self existed, then it would be just as expressible as the mind.

Therefore, the basis for grasping “I” is not a real thing. It is not different from the clusters, nor does it have the nature of the clusters.

It does not contain the clusters, nor does it possess them; instead, it exists in dependence on the clusters.

We accept the statement “this arises in dependence on that” so as not to be at odds with the framework of mundane convention. But when we do so, we do not accept extreme views about arising, such as causeless arising. By analogy, we accept that the self

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

ཤིང་རྩ་རང་ཡན་ལག་ལས་གཞན་འདོད་མིན།  
གཞན་མིན་མ་ཡིན་དེ་ལྟ་ཡང་མིན་ཞིང་།  
ཡན་ལག་ལ་མིན་ཡན་ལག་དག་དེར་མིན།  
འདུས་པ་ཙམ་མིན་དབྱིབས་མིན་ཇི་བཞིན་ནོ།

ཉལ་༩

གལ་ཏེ་ཚོགས་ཙམ་ཤིང་རྩ་འགྱུར་ན་ནི།  
མིལ་བུར་གནས་ལ་ཤིང་རྩ་ཉིད་ཡོད་གྱུར།  
གང་ཕྱིར་ཡན་ལག་ཙམ་མེད་ཡན་ལག་དག།  
མེད་པས་དབྱིབས་ཙམ་ཤིང་རྩ་རིགས་པ་འང་མིན།

ཉལ་༢

དེ་ནི་དེ་ཉིད་དུའས་འཇིག་རྟེན་དུ།  
རྣམ་པ་བདུན་གྱིས་འགྲུབ་འགྱུར་མིན་མོད་གྱི།  
རྣམ་དཔྱད་མེད་པར་འཇིག་རྟེན་ཉིད་ལས་འདི།  
རང་གི་ཡན་ལག་བརྟེན་རྣམས་འདོགས་པ་ཡིན།

ཉལ་༤

ཤིང་རྩ་རང་ཡན་ལག་ལས་གཞན་འདོད་མིན། ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྒྱལ་འདིས་དེ་  
རྣམ་པ་བདུན་དུ་བཙལ་བ་ན་དོན་དམ་པ་དང་ཀླན་རྩིས་དུ་ཤིང་རྩ་འགྲུབ་པར་མི་འགྱུར་མོད་  
གྱི། དེ་ལྟ་ན་ཡང་འདི་ནི་རྣམ་པར་དཔྱད་པ་སྤངས་ཏེ་ཐོན་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་དང་ཚོར་བ་ལ་

## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

is merely designated on the basis of the clusters, and we follow the everyday conventions for the use of the word “self.” But we do not accept fallacious views about it.

A chariot is neither identical to its parts,  
nor different from its parts, nor does it  
possess its parts.

It is not in its parts, nor are its parts in it.  
Nor is it a collection of its parts, nor is it  
identical to the parts arranged in some  
way.

If the chariot were simply the collection of  
parts, it would exist even when it is taken  
apart.

Since without a possessor of parts there are  
not parts, it doesn’t make sense to say that  
arranged parts are the chariot, either.

Even though the chariot does not exist in  
any of the seven possible ways, either in  
ultimate reality or in the ordinary world,

Following ordinary convention, we design-  
ate the chariot in dependence on its  
parts, and with no analysis.

When we seek the chariot in these seven ways,  
we find that there is no chariot, either ultimately  
or conventionally. Nonetheless, if we set analysis

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

སོགས་པ་ལྟར་འཇིག་རྟེན་ཉིད་ལས་འཕང་ལོ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡན་ལག་རྣམས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་  
འདོགས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། དེའི་ཕྱིར་རྟེན་ཅིང་འབྲེལ་བར་འབྱུང་བ་ཞུང་ཉིད་འདི་པ་ཙམ་ཁས་  
སྤངས་པ་ལྟར་བརྟེན་ནས་བརྟགས་པ་ཁས་སྤངས་པའི་ཕྱིར་ཁོ་པོ་ཅག་གི་ཕྱོགས་ལ་འཇིག་  
རྟེན་གྱི་ཐ་སྙད་ཆད་པར་ཐལ་བར་མི་འགྱུར་ལ། ས་རོལ་པོས་ཀྱང་འདི་ཉིད་ཁས་སྤང་བར་  
འོས་པ་ཡིན་ནོ། ཕྱོགས་འདིར་འཇིག་རྟེན་ལ་གྲགས་པའི་སྟོན་མཁའ་རྣམས་ཐ་སྙད་འདོགས་  
པ་ཆེས་གསལ་བར་གྲུབ་པ་འབའ་ཞིག་དུ་མ་ཟད་ཀྱི། འདིའི་མིང་གི་ཁྱད་པར་གང་དག་  
ཡིན་པ་དེ་དག་ཀྱང་རྣམ་པར་དབྱུང་པ་མེད་པར་འཇིག་རྟེན་ལ་གྲགས་པའི་སྟོན་མཁས་སྤང་  
བར་བུལ། འདི་ལྟ་སྟེ།

དེ་ཉིད་ཡན་ལག་ཅན་དེ་ཆ་ཤས་ཅན།  
ཤིང་རྩ་དེ་ཉིད་བྱེད་པོ་ཞེས་འགྱུར་བསྟན།  
སྟེ་པོ་རྣམས་ལ་ལེན་པོ་ཉིད་དུ་འགྲུབ།  
འཇིག་རྟེན་གྲགས་པའི་ཀུན་རྫོབ་མ་བརྟག་ཅིག།

༡༥༠

དེ་བཞིན་འཇིག་རྟེན་གྲགས་པས་ཕུང་པོ་དང་།  
ཁམས་དང་དེ་བཞིན་སྟེ་མཆོད་རྒྱག་བརྟེན་ནས།  
བདག་ཀྱང་ཉ་བར་ལེན་པོ་ཉིད་དུ་འདོད་དང་།  
རྟེན་ལེན་ལས་ཡིན་འདི་ནི་བྱེད་པོ་འང་ཡིན།

༡༥༡

དངོས་ཡོད་མིན་ཕྱིར་འདི་ནི་བརྟེན་མིན་ཞིང་།  
མི་བརྟེན་ཉིད་མིན་འདི་ནི་སྟེ་འཇིག་མིན།  
འདི་ལ་རྟག་པ་ཉིད་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཡང་།  
ཡོད་མིན་དེ་ཉིད་དང་ནི་གཞན་ཉིད་མེད།

༡༥༢



## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

aside, the chariot is designated on the basis of its parts. . . . Therefore, because we accept dependent origination and dependent designation, we followers of the Middle Way do not reject mundane conventions. . . . In this context, not only do we accept the use of the word “chariot” just as it is used by ordinary people, but we accept all terms as ordinary people use them, just so their meanings are not analytically examined.

That chariot is the possessor of its parts and is constituted by them. It is also the agent of traveling.

Ordinary folk even think of it as the that which has taken on those parts. We do not reject these mundane conventions.

By analogy, because it is taken for granted in everyday practice, the self is regarded as that which, in dependence on the clusters, takes up as its own the elements, and the sensory spheres.

What is taken up as one’s own is considered its object, and it is considered an agent.

But because it does not exist substantially, it is neither changing nor unchanging; it neither comes into existence nor passes out of existence.

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## MIDDLE WAY TEACHINGS

གང་ལ་རྟག་ཏུ་འགོ་རྣམས་ངར་འཛིན་སྟོ།  
རབ་ཏུ་འབྱུང་ཞིང་དེ་ཡི་གང་ཡིན་དེར།  
ང་ཡི་འཛིན་སྟོ་འབྱུང་བའི་བདག་དེ་ནི།  
མ་རྟགས་གྲགས་པར་གཏི་མུག་ལས་ཡིན་ནོ།

༡༤༥

གང་ཕྱིར་བྱེད་པོ་མེད་ཅན་ལས་མེད་པ།  
དེ་ཕྱིར་བདག་གི་བདག་མེད་པར་ཡོད་མིན།  
དེ་ཕྱིར་བདག་དང་བདག་གི་སྟོང་ལྟ་ཞིང་།  
རྣལ་འབྱོར་པ་དེ་རྣམ་པར་གྲོལ་བར་འགྱུར།

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## ANOTHER RIDE IN THE CHARIOT

It has no characteristics such as permanence or impermanence, no identity, and no difference.

This is the basis on which beings constantly grasp the “I,” and by association, they grasp things as “mine.”

The self that is grasped that way exists only as an illusion.

Because there is no object of action without an agent, there can be no “mine” without an “I.” Therefore, by seeing both “I” and “mine” to be empty, a practitioner attains liberation.

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## Part III

### CHAN TEACHINGS

In part I, we looked at the early Buddhist tradition as represented in Pali sources. We learned that there is no abiding soul or enduring essence to our being. We are a collection of parts that exist only momentarily and interact with one another in complex ways. The notion of the “self” is merely a convenient way of referring to this collectivity; like the notion of “chariot,” it is an expedient shorthand used to refer to what is, in fact, an assemblage of individual parts (wheels, axle, carriage, and so on).

The idea that the Buddhist self is an illusion that is created through the complex interaction of individual components is a bit like the contemporary theory, advanced by physical reductionists, that consciousness doesn’t exist apart from our brains. To put it simply, reductionists hold that mind can be explained (or explained away) solely in terms of

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

our neural states. But there is a difference between early Buddhist reductionism and modern physicalism. Modern reductionists believe that the components out of which we are made are all of the same sort—the universe is composed entirely of physical matter. The early Buddhists, on the other hand, believed that the parts of which we are composed include both material *and* immaterial components.

In part II, we turned to followers of the Madhyamaka tradition, who were dissatisfied with this picture. They argue that the individual components that work together to create the illusion of a self are, in the final analysis, just as “empty” as is the self. This is because the components turn out to be the products of our conceptual thinking, and language and thinking are inadequate to the task of grasping the world *as it really is*. Even to claim that there *is*, or alternatively *is not*, a world that exists independent of our thinking about it is ultimately pointless.

There were, however, Buddhist philosophers—those in the Mind Only school—who were dissatisfied with both Abhidharma reductionism and Madhyamaka deconstruction. They felt that there was something unsatisfying and incomplete (and perhaps even morally pernicious) in the Madhyamaka analysis of emptiness, as it didn’t account for our lived experience of the world and didn’t pro-

## CHAN TEACHINGS

vide a detailed guide for practice and liberation. They believed that a robust analysis of the workings of mind, consciousness, and mental representation was required to account for how the illusion of selfhood arises, and, by extension, how the illusion can be overcome.

Writers in the Mind Only tradition sometimes explain the relationship of mind and world through the analogy of a mirror. The world of our lived experience—the world that appears to our sense faculties—is akin to images that appear on the surface of a mirror. The sights and sounds and feelings that arise may *seem* real, but they are in fact mere “mental representations” that appear to mind. Mind is likened to the mirror itself, in that it is fundamentally unmoved by the images that appear therein. This doesn’t mean that we don’t react to the images—we have feelings of joy and boredom and sadness and anger and the like, but these too are just fleeting things that arise and pass away in the mind, like the images in a mirror. Liberation comes about through learning not to get caught up in the ephemeral images, but rather to attend to the unmoving mind-mirror itself.

Modern mindfulness training is sometimes understood along similar lines. The student of mindfulness is instructed to pay close attention to what is happening here and now, from moment to moment,

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

without judgment and without reacting to it. One learns to experience the world dispassionately—as transitory and chimerical and as not self, and this leads to detachment from the fleeting images, desires, hopes, and fears that rise and pass away. Instead of identifying with the *content* of experience (the reflections in the mirror), one learns to attend to the experiencing itself. This form of mindfulness training is sometimes called “insight practice” (Pali: *vipassanā-bhāvanā*), as it is intended to bring about insight into the truth of impermanence and no-self, and mitigate attachment and suffering.

The Chan tradition emerged in eighth-century China, at a time when Mind Only ideas were in vogue and a form of mindfulness meditation was becoming popular not only among monastics but among laypersons as well. (The term “Chan” comes from the Chinese transliteration of the Sanskrit word for “meditation.”) Chan was touted, somewhat like modern mindfulness training, as a direct path to liberation that did not demand dramatic changes in one’s lifestyle, a long course of doctrinal study, or engagement in grueling rituals. But this direct approach stirred controversy, and a debate arose among competing Chan masters over whether awakening could indeed be attained quickly—even instantaneously—or whether it necessitated a long



## CHAN TEACHINGS

path of physical, moral, and mental preparation. This came to be known as the Sudden-Gradual controversy.

The Gradualists tended to lean toward Mind Only teachings. These teachers viewed meditation as akin to polishing a mirror; they held that liberation was attained through a process of cultivating moral purity, cleansing the mind of its attachments, and deepening one's meditative insight. But not everyone agreed. The Suddenists felt that talk of things like "mind," "purity," "insight," "liberation," and "attainment" simply gave students of Buddhism something else to hold onto. For these teachers, holding to *any* goal, however lofty or spiritual, perpetuates the problem of attachment. One must let go of *everything*, including even the teachings of the Buddha. One celebrated ninth-century Chan master, Linji Yixuan (d. 866), is credited with the saying, "If you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha," by which he meant that one must let go not only of the notion of a self but also the notion of a spiritual path to be followed and a goal to be attained.

The Sudden position is difficult to get your mind around, as it seems to hold that liberation necessitates abandoning even the effort to achieve liberation. It is exemplified in the famous story of the first transmission of Chan teachings from India to

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

China. According to legend, the meditation master Bodhidharma made the long journey from India to China to transmit Chan teachings. After a brief audience with the Chinese emperor, Bodhidharma retreated to a remote cave in northern China. A young Chinese seeker, Huike, heard of the Indian master, and managed to track him down. Bodhidharma was sitting silently in his cave facing a wall. Huike remained outside, patiently waiting for Bodhidharma to take notice, but Bodhidharma didn't budge. It was winter, and the snow began to pile up around Huike, but still Bodhidharma remained unmoved. Finally, Huike took out a knife, cut off his arm, and placed it in front of Bodhidharma. This succeeded in gaining Bodhidharma's attention and led to the following famous exchange.

Huike said, "My mind is not at peace. I beg the master to put my mind at peace."

Bodhidharma said, "Give me your mind and I'll put it at peace for you."

Huike said, "I have searched exhaustively for my mind, but in the end I can't get hold of it."

Bodhidharma said, "There, I have put your mind at peace."

Huike's problem was his clinging to a notion that there was *something* that stands in need of libera-

## CHAN TEACHINGS

tion; we might not have a permanent soul or self, but surely there is a mind that experiences things, including suffering. How can one suffer without a mind, and what is Buddhism if not a means of bringing peace to this mind? Bodhidharma's response is that mind is just another empty concept, and when Huike understood this he was freed. Indeed, he became the second patriarch of Chinese Chan.

This notion that mind or consciousness is not real ranks as one of the most radical and counter-intuitive teachings of the early Chan tradition. It is also a difficult position to argue or defend, since argument means engaging with ideas and concepts, and Chan teachers insist that it is precisely our engagement with ideas and concepts that sustains the illusion of being a minded self. So instead of arguing for their view, the Chan texts we present in this chapter, which represent the Sudden Awakening position, try to get you to *see* it. They insist that you stop *thinking* about the world and simply *look*. If you can do this, they believe, the apparent dichotomy of mind and world collapses. Not only are the images in the mirror illusory, so too is the mirror.

In other words, most of us go about our lives assuming that, as sentient creatures, we possess minds that disclose the world to us—that there is

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

an “outside,” which consists largely of physical stuff, and an “inside,” which is the world of subjective experience. Even if you don’t think much about philosophical issues, the distinction between inner and outer is fundamental to the way we view and navigate the world. Consider death, for example. Many secular folks believe that upon their own death their inner experiential world will cease to exist, while those who believe in an afterlife assume that their subjective self is transported to some other place. In either case, the material world we knew when we were alive will, it is believed, continue on without us.

But according to Chan, this duality of inner and outer, or self and other, or mind and world, is an illusion. It is not something given to us in the immediacy of experience but is rather an imaginative projection. We might give an evolutionary, biological, sociological, or psychological account of how this projection came to be. But according to Chan, this projection is not merely an illusion but also the very source of human suffering.

The Chan texts presented here each claim that we have no minds. Their goal is to help us overcome the deeply familiar but ultimately misguided distinction we make between subject and object, experiencer and experienced, mind and world. Of

## CHAN TEACHINGS

course, the claim that we have no minds leads to a host of questions: How can someone who is mindless engage in a dialogue about mindlessness? Is claiming that we are without minds tantamount to claiming that we are insentient? Does that mean we are no different from rocks or trees? And if we are mindless, and intentionality is not what we think it is, what are the consequences for the way we think of morality and ethics? All these questions are duly addressed in these early Chan writings.

\* \* \*

We present selections from two texts here: the *Treatise on No Mind* and the *Treatise on the Cessation of Discernment*. Both texts were apocryphally attributed to Bodhidharma, the legendary first patriarch of Chinese Chan who supposedly arrived in China in the late fifth or early sixth century CE. But scholars believe that both texts were composed much later, most likely in the latter half of the eighth century, by a writer or writers associated with the Oxhead lineage of Chan. This lineage takes its name from a monastery on Oxhead Mountain (in present-day Jiangsu province), where the putative founder of the tradition, Niutou Farong (594–657), resided. The Oxhead lineage was influential in the early growth of Chan, particularly in the development of

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

the Sudden Awakening position, but its writings were largely lost to history until they were rediscovered at the beginning of the twentieth century in a cave at Mogao, a medieval Buddhist cave site near the town of Dunhuang in western China.

Both texts take the form of an imagined dialogue between a Chan master and a student. The texts don't begin with the master giving an exposition of the truth, or with the master expressing his view of Buddhism, precisely because there is no "truth" and the master has no "view." This is what makes him a master! The master can only respond to the student's questions, and in responding, the master is not interested in eliciting intellectual agreement, but rather in bringing about a change in perspective. Once this change in perspective is gained, the questions fall away.

The later Chan tradition will go on to develop innovative literary genres that use language in complex and creative ways. The genre of "public cases" (Chinese: *gong'an*, Japanese: *kōan*), for example, delights in literary allusion, puns and word play, contradiction and paradox, all in order to explore the limits of language and thought. By comparison, the early Chan texts presented here are artless and plain, and the language simple. At

## CHAN TEACHINGS

times, the exchanges between master and student are terse and cryptic, and our translation is, of necessity, rather free. The words are supposed to function as mere pointers, revealing something hidden in plain sight.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

夫至理無言、要假言而顯理。大道無相、為接麤而見形。今且  
假立二人共談無心之論矣

弟子問和尚曰、有心無心。

答曰、無心。

問曰、既云無心、誰能見聞覺知。誰知無心。

答曰、還是無心既見聞覺知。還是無心能知無心。

問曰、既若無心、即合無有見聞覺知。云何得有見聞覺知。

答曰、我雖無心能見能聞能覺能知。

問曰、既能見聞覺知、即是有心。那得稱無。

答曰、只是見聞覺知、即是無心。何處更離見聞覺知別有無  
心。我今恐汝不解、一一為汝解說、令汝得悟真理。



## THERE IS NO MIND

### There Is No Mind

Ultimate truth is without words; to disclose the truth one must take recourse in language. The Great Way has no attributes; to reveal its character one must partake in the mundane. Accordingly, I have created a dialogue between two people to discuss the non-existence of mind.

The student asked the master: "Is there a mind or not?"

The teacher replied: "There is no mind."

Q: You claim that there is no mind, but then who is it that is able to see, hear, feel, and know things? Who is it that knows there is no mind?

A: It is precisely because there is no mind that there is seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing. It is precisely because there is no mind that one can know that there is no mind.

Q: But if there is no mind, then it must follow that there is no seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing! How can you conclude from this that there is seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing?

A: Although I don't have a mind, I am still able to see, able to hear, able to feel, and able know.

Q: But to be able to see, hear, feel, and know is precisely what it means to have a mind! How can you insist otherwise?

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

假如見、終日見由為無見、見亦無心。聞終日聞由為無聞、聞亦無心。覺終日覺由為無覺、覺亦無心。知終日知由為無知、知亦無心。終日造作、作亦無作、作亦無心。故云見聞覺知總是無心。

問曰、若為能得知是無心。

答曰、汝但子細推求看。心作何相貌。其心復可得、是心不是心。為復在內為復在外為復在中間。如是三處推求覓心了不可得、乃至於一切處求覓亦不可得。當知即是無心。

## THERE IS NO MIND

A: By no mind, I refer precisely to this very seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing. Apart from seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing, where else could one locate the absence of mind? But I fear you don't understand, so let me explain it to you one step at a time to help you realize the truth.

Take seeing for example. You are seeing all day long, yet there is no conception of seeing, so this seeing is without a mind. And so with hearing: you are hearing all day long, yet there is no conception of hearing, so hearing is without mind. And with feeling: you are feeling all day long, yet there is no conception of feeling, so feeling is also without mind. And with knowing: you are knowing all day long, yet there is no conception of knowing, so knowing too is without mind. Throughout the day, you are doing things, yet it is done without any conception of doing things, so the doing is also without mind. That is why I declare that seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing are all without mind.

Q: Given that there is no mind, how is one able to *know* that there is no mind?

A: Simply pay very close attention as you attempt to observe it. What appearance does mind have? And if a mind can be ascertained, then is it really

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、和尚既云一切處總是無心、即合無有罪福。何故眾生輪迴六聚生死不斷。

答曰、眾生迷妄、於無心中而妄生心。造種種業、妄執為有、足可致使輪迴六趣生死不斷。譬有人於暗中見杙為鬼、見繩為蛇便生恐怖。眾生妄執亦復如是。於無心中妄執有心、造種種業、而實無不輪迴六趣。如是眾生若遇大善知識教令坐禪覺悟無心、一切業障盡皆銷滅生死即斷。譬如暗中日光一照而暗皆盡。若悟無心、一切罪滅亦復如是。

## THERE IS NO MIND

mind or not? Is the mind inside or outside or is it somewhere in between? Clearly, if you look for the mind in any of these three places it cannot be found. It follows that a mind can't be found anywhere, and that is why we know there is no mind.

Q: Since the master has said that a mind cannot be located anywhere, it should follow that there are no such things as good or evil actions. In that case, why do living beings continue to transmigrate among the six realms of rebirth (hell beings, ghosts, animals, humans, spirits, and gods), being reborn and dying without end?

A: People are bewildered and imagine there is a mind where there is none. Engaging in all kinds of activity, they ignorantly cling to the existence of mind and thus end up transmigrating among the six realms, being reborn and dying without cease. It is like someone who, in the dark, mistakes a stump for a ghost or a rope for a snake; they are immediately filled with dread. The imaginative constructions of people are the same. People ignorantly cling to the existence of a mind where there is none and, engaging in all sorts of activity, they cannot avoid transmigrating through the six realms. Should such a person encounter a spiritual mentor who teaches them how to practice seated meditation and realize

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、弟子愚昧心猶未了審。一切處六根所用者、應答曰語、  
種種施為煩惱菩提生死涅槃定無心否。

答曰、定是無心。只為眾生妄執有心即有一切煩惱生死菩提  
涅槃。若覺無心即無一切煩惱生死涅槃。是故如來為有  
心者說有生死。菩提對煩惱得名、涅槃者對生死得名。  
此皆對治之法。若無心可得、即煩惱菩提亦不可得。乃  
至生死涅槃亦不可得。

## THERE IS NO MIND

their mindlessness, all of their past wrongful actions are eliminated, and the cycle of birth and death comes to an end. Like shining a ray of light into a dark place—the darkness immediately vanishes. In the same way, if you realize that there is no mind, then your past transgressions are immediately eliminated.

Q: I suppose I am just stupid, as I still don't get it. As for someone who functions in the world using their six senses, who speaks in response to questions, who engages in all kinds of activities, who is deemed to be either deluded or awakened, who is subject to transmigration through life and death or is liberated—does such a person really not have a mind at all?

A: Such a person really does not have a mind! It is only because living beings **imagine themselves as having minds** that they are said to be deluded and subject to life and death, or awakened and liberated. If one realizes that there is in fact no mind, then there is no such thing as delusion, life and death, or liberation. Therefore, for the benefit of those who hold to the existence of a mind, the Buddha spoke of life and death as if they were real. **"Awakening" only has meaning in contradistinction to "delusion," and "liberation" only has meaning in contradistinction to "life and death."** Such teachings are mere

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、菩提涅槃既不可得、過去諸佛皆得菩提、此謂可乎。

答曰、但以世諦文字之言得。於真諦實無可得。故維摩經云、菩提者不可以身得不可以心得。又金剛經云、無有少法可得。諸佛如來但以不可得而得。當知有心即一切有無心一切無。

問曰、和尚既云於一切處盡皆無心。木石亦無心。豈不同於木石乎。

答曰。而我無心心不同木石。何以故。譬如天鼓、雖復無心自然出種種妙法教化。又如如意珠、雖復無心自然能作種種變現。而我無心亦復如是。雖復無心善能覺了諸法實相具真般若三身自在應用無妨。故寶積經云、以無心意



## THERE IS NO MIND

antidotes intended for a specific disease; once you grasp the absence of mind, then neither delusion nor awakening can be found. And the same holds for life and death and liberation—they too are ungraspable.

Q: If awakening and liberation cannot be attained, then what is meant by the claim that the Buddhas of the past all attained awakening?

A: From the standpoint of worldly convention and language, they have indeed attained awakening. But from the standpoint of ultimate truth, there is nothing to be attained. As it says in the *Scripture on the Teachings of Vimalakirti*, “Awakening is not something that can be attained with either body or mind.” And the *Diamond Scripture* says, “There is not the slightest thing to be attained.” The attainment of all Buddhas lies in their realization that there is nothing to be attained. Hence, we know that, should you posit a mind, then all exists, but with no mind there is nothing at all.

Q: The Reverend has claimed that everything without exception is without mind. But trees and rocks are also without minds. Surely, you cannot mean that living beings are the same as trees and rocks?

A: My mind that is without mind is not identical with trees or rocks. Why so? We can compare

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

而現行。豈同木石乎。夫無心者即真心也。真心者即無心也。

問曰、今於心中作、若為修行。

答曰、但於一切事上覺了。無心即是修行、更不別有修行。

故知無心即一切、寂滅即無心也。

弟子於是忽然大悟、始知心外無物物外無心。舉止動用皆得自在、斷諸疑網更無罣礙。

## THERE IS NO MIND

it to a **celestial drum** that, although it also lacks a mind, spontaneously emits various marvelous teachings that instruct living beings. Or it can be likened to a **wish-fulfilling gem** that, although it also lacks a mind, is able to spontaneously produce various apparitions. My own lack of a mind is the same; although I am without a mind, I am perfectly able to apprehend the true form of all things, and, endowed with wisdom, in all my manifestations I respond freely to stimuli without any hindrance. Therefore, the *Heap of Jewels Scripture* says: “Lacking any mental intention, yet manifestly active.” How could this be the same as trees and rocks? Indeed, the absence of mind is precisely true mind. And true mind is precisely the absence of mind.

Q: How should I practice, given that even now my mind remains active?

A: Simply remain fully aware with respect to whatever is going on. The absence of mind is precisely one’s practice; there is no practice besides this one. Hence, know that no mind is precisely the world around you, and that calm stillness is precisely no mind.

**At that moment, the student suddenly got it, realizing for the first time that apart from mind there is nothing and apart from things there is no mind.**

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

The student was completely free in conduct and activity, and cutting through the net of doubts, all obstructions vanished.

### Nothing to Be Attained

Like the *Treatise on No Mind* presented earlier, the *Treatise on the Cessation of Discernment* is an attempt to bring the reader to an understanding that mind is an illusion. It does, however, respond to the interlocutor's objections in somewhat greater detail. Some of the objections will now be familiar: Does the absence of mind mean that we are no different from insentient objects such as trees and rocks? Does it mean that our actions have no moral consequences? Does it undermine the need for spiritual practice? And if nobody has a mind, what is the difference between someone who understands this (a sage or Buddha), and someone who doesn't? In responding, the text delves headlong into the conundrum that lies at the very heart of Chan: any attempt at bettering oneself through spiritual practice seems counterproductive, since it ends up reinforcing the illusion that there is someone who stands in need of liberation. Indeed, intentionally doing *anything* keeps the illusion rolling along. The only solution, it would seem, is to cease doing anything at all.

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

The text even repudiates the practice of meditation. It explicitly instructs the interlocutor not to engage in *nian* 念, translated below as “contemplation,” but which can also mean to “think” or “consider.” More to the point, *nian* is the standard Chinese rendering of the Sanskrit word *smṛti* (Pali: *sati*), commonly translated as “mindfulness.” Whether one approaches meditation as the contemplation of some higher truth, or the recollection of doctrine, or the practice of mindfulness, our author insists that it will only serve to reinforce attachment to self.

The very title of this text—literally, *Treatise on the Cessation of Discernment*—unambiguously declares its antinomian leanings. The term translated as “discernment” (*guan* 觀) is used by Chinese Buddhists to translate the Sanskrit *vipaśyanā*, often rendered into English as “insight.” Discerning insight is usually understood to be the point of Buddhist practice; it is insight that brings about awakening and the cessation of suffering. Hence, the declaration that one should cease from both meditative endeavor and discerning insight is intended to be striking. The point is to show that any kind of goal-directed practice simply reinforces the illusion of an agent or self or (in the language of this text) a “doer.”

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

云何名心、云何安心。

答曰、汝不須立心、亦不須強安。可謂安矣。

問曰、若無有心、云何學道。

答曰、道非心念、何在於心也。

問曰、若非心念、當何以念。

答曰、有念即有心、有心即乖道。無念即無心、無心即真道。

問曰、一切眾生實有心不。

答曰、若眾生實有心、即顛倒。只為於無心中而立心、  
乃生妄想。

問曰、無心有何物。

答曰、無心即無物、無物即天真、天真即大道。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

The dialogue opens with Master Verity sitting silently and unmoving. The student, Threshold, interrupts the silence with the following question:

Q: What is mind? How can I put my mind at peace?

A: You must neither postulate a mind, nor try to compel a state of peace. That is what is called peace.

Q: If there is no mind, how does one practice the Way?

A: The Way is not something to be contemplated by the mind. How could the Way be in the mind?

Q: If the Way is not something to be contemplated by the mind, then how should one contemplate it?

A: If there is contemplation, then there is mental activity, and mental activity of any kind runs counter to the Way. When there is no contemplation, there is no mind, and no mind is the True Way.

Q: Do all living beings really have minds or not?

A: To believe that living beings have minds is to get things backward. It is precisely because people contrive a mind where there is none that they engender delusion.

Q: What sort of thing is this absence of mind?

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、眾生妄想、云何得滅。

答曰、若見妄想、及見滅者、不離妄想。

問曰、不遣滅者、得合道理否。

答曰、若言合與不合、亦不離妄想。問曰、若為時是。

答曰、不為時是。

緣門問曰、夫言聖人者、當斷何法、當得何法、而云聖也。

入理曰、一法不斷、一法不得、即為聖也。

問曰、若不斷不得、與凡何異。

答曰、不同。何以故、一切凡夫妄有所斷、妄有所得。



## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

A: No mind is precisely the absence of anything at all. The absence of things is the natural order, and the natural order is precisely the Great Way.

Q: How then can the delusions of living beings be extinguished?

A: If you conceive of either delusion or the extinction of delusion, you are not yet free of delusion.

Q: If one does not end delusion, can one still come into accord with the Way?

A: One who talks of “being in accord” or “not being in accord” is still not free of delusion.

Q: Then what is one to do?

A: The point is not to do anything!

Threshold asked: You speak of a sage. What is it that one needs to eliminate or needs to attain to be deemed a sage?

Master Verity replied: **A sage is precisely someone who doesn't eliminate a single thing or attain a single thing.**

Q: If a sage hasn't eliminated or attained anything, then what differentiates the sage from an ordinary person?

A: They are not the same for the following reason: ordinary people, unlike the sage, foolishly believe that there is something to be eliminated and something to be attained.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、今言凡有所得、聖無所得。然得與不得、有何異。

答曰、凡有所得、即有虛妄。聖無所得、即無虛妄。有虛妄故、  
即論同與不同。無虛妄故、即無異無不異。

問曰、若無異者、聖名何立。

答曰、凡夫之與聖人、二俱是名。名中無二即無差別。如  
說龜毛兔角。

問曰、若聖人同龜毛兔角者、應是畢竟無。令人學何物。

答曰、我說龜毛無、不說龜亦無。汝何以設此難也。

問曰、無毛喻何物、龜喻何物。

答曰、龜喻於道、毛喻於我。故聖人無我而有道。但彼凡夫而  
有我有名者、如橫執有龜毛兔角也。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Q: But just now you conceded that the ordinary person holds that there is something to be attained, while the sage does not. So, when it comes to *that* attainment and non-attainment, what is the difference?

A: The ordinary person's belief in something to be attained is itself a delusion. The sage, in understanding that there is nothing to be attained, is free from delusion. When there is delusion, one can debate about whether they are the same or not. But when there is no delusion, there is neither difference nor sameness.

Q: If there is no difference, then on what basis is someone called a sage?

A: Both "ordinary person" and "sage" are just names. Insofar as they are mere names, they are not two things, and thus there is no real difference between them. It is like talking about the fur of a tortoise and the horns of a rabbit.

Q: If a sage is the same as the fur of a tortoise or the horns of a hare, then ultimately the sage must be nothing at all! Then what is the point of encouraging people to practice?

A: I said the fur of a tortoise doesn't exist; I didn't say that the tortoise doesn't exist. What is the basis for your objection?

Q: What does the absence of fur represent, and what does the tortoise represent?

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、若如此者、道應是有、我應是無。若是有無、豈非有無之見。

答曰、道非是有、我非是無。何以故、龜非先無今有、故不言有。毛非先有今無、故不言無。道之與我、譬類可知。

問曰、凡夫有身、亦見聞覺知、聖人有身、亦見聞覺知。中有何異。

答曰、凡夫眼見耳聞身覺意知。聖人即不爾。見非眼見、乃至知非意知。何以故、過根量故也。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

A: The tortoise stands for the Way, and the fur stands for the self. Thus, the sage has no self but does have the Way. As for ordinary people who take self and names as existent, it is akin to grasping at the existence of the fur of a tortoise or the horns of a hare.

Q: If this is the case, then the Way must be existent and the self non-existent. Isn't this tantamount to the false views of eternalism and nihilism?

A: It is not that the Way is existent and the self non-existent. Why so? The tortoise is not something that initially did not exist and now exists. Hence, one cannot properly predicate "existence" to the tortoise. The tortoise fur is not something that once existed and now doesn't exist. Hence, you cannot predicate "non-existence" to the fur. The Way and the self can be understood analogously.

\* \* \*

Q: The ordinary person has a body, and sees, hears, feels, and knows. The sage also has a body and sees, hears, feels, and knows. What, then, is the difference between them?

A: Ordinary people see with their eyes, hear with their ears, feel with their bodies, and know with their minds. This is not the case for the sage. Their seeing is not the seeing of the eye, and the

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、何故經中復說聖人無見聞覺知者、何。

答曰、聖人無凡夫見聞覺知、非無聖境界。非有無所攝、離分別故也。

問曰、凡夫實有凡境界耶。

答曰、實無妄有、本來寂滅。但被虛妄計著、即生顛倒也。

問曰、我不解、若為聖見非眼見、聖知非意知。

答曰、法體難見、譬況可知。如彼玄光鑒物、如照所照、非有能照之眼。又如陰陽候物、似知所知、非有能知之意也。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

same goes for the other senses including knowing, which is not the knowing of the mind. Why so? It is because the sage has passed beyond registering things through the sense faculties.

Q: If that is the case, then why do the scriptures speak of the sage as *lacking* seeing, hearing, feeling, and knowing?

A: The sage may not see, hear, feel, and know like ordinary people, but that doesn't mean that there is no perceptual field for a sage. It is, rather, that you can't characterize what it encompasses as existent or non-existent, since it transcends such distinctions.

Q: As for ordinary people, is what appears to them real?

A: It has no real existence, but it does have an illusory existence. Originally things are calm and quiescent, but delusion and rumination flip things upside down.

Q: I don't understand: how is it that the sage sees but not with the eyes, and that the sage knows but not with the mind?

A: It is difficult to perceive the nature of things, but it can be known through analogy. It is like a mirror reflecting things—it seems as if the mirror is illuminating something, but there is no eye doing the illumination. Or it is like the

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

緣門起問曰、道究竟屬誰。

答曰、究竟無所屬、如空無所依。道若有繫屬、即有遮有開、有主有寄也。

問曰、云何為道本、云何為法用。

答曰、虛空為道本、參羅為法用也。

問曰、於中誰為造作。

答曰、於中實無作者、法界性自然。

問曰、可不是眾生業力所為耶。

答曰、夫受業者、而為業繫所纏、自因無由。何暇繫海積山、安天置地。

緣門問曰、道者為獨在於形靈之中耶、亦在於草木之中耶。

入理曰、道無所不遍也。

問曰、道若遍者、何故煞人有罪、煞草木無罪。



## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

way omens and portents predict things—it seems as if the portents *know* something, but there is no intentionality behind the knowing.

Threshold asked: Who then possesses the Way?

A: Ultimately, nothing possesses the Way. Like space, it has no foundation. Were it possible for something to possess the Way, then the Way could be blocked or open; there would be host and guest.

Q: What then is the origin of the Way, and what is its phenomenal activity?

A: Empty space is the origin of the Way, and the manifest world is its phenomenal activity.

Q: Who then functions as the creator in all this?

A: There really is no creator. The domain of reality functions naturally by itself.

Q: But doesn't the karmic force of living beings function as a creator?

A: Those who are subject to karma are bound by the afflictions of karma and cannot escape its causal consequences. How could they find the time to carve out the seas, pile up the mountains, and establish heaven and earth?

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Threshold asked: Is the Way found only in sentient beings, or does it abide in grasses and trees as well?

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

答曰、夫言罪不罪、皆是就情約事、非正道也。但為世人不達道理、妄立我身。煞即有心、心結於業、即云罪也。草木無情、本來合道、理無我故、煞者不計、即不論罪與非罪。夫無我合道者、視形如草木、被斫如樹林。

緣門問曰、如是畢竟空理、當於何証。

入理曰、當於一切色中求、當於自語中証。

問曰、云何當於一切色中求、當於自語中証。云何色中求、云何語中証。

答曰、空色一合、語証不二也。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Master Verity replied: The Way pervades everywhere.

Q: If the Way pervades everywhere, why is it a crime to kill a person, whereas it is not a crime to kill grasses and trees?

A: Talk of whether it is a crime or not is a matter related to sentience and is thus not the true Way. But worldly folk who have not realized the truth imagine there is a personal self. The notion of killing implies mental intent, and intent entails karma, and thus we speak of killing people as a crime. Grasses and trees have no sentience and are fundamentally in accord with the Way. As they are free of a self, we don't regard it as killing, and thus we don't argue over whether it is a crime or not.

Now, those who are free of a self and in accord with the Way regard their own bodies as they regard grasses and trees. They treat the cutting of their own limbs like the cutting of trees in a forest.

\* \* \*

Threshold asked: As for this ultimate truth of emptiness, how can it be realized?

Master Verity replied: It should be sought among all material forms and realized in one's own speech.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、若一切法空、何為聖通凡壅。

答曰、妄動故壅、真靜故通。

問曰、既實空者、何為受薰。若既受薰、豈成空也。

答曰、夫言妄者、不覺忽而起、不覺忽而動。其實空體中、  
無有一法而受薰。

問曰、若實空者、一切眾生、即不修道。何以故、自然性是故。

答曰、一切眾生、若解空理、實亦不假修道、只為於空不空、  
生於有感。

問曰、若如此者、應離惑有道。云何言一切非道。

答曰、不然。非惑即是道、非離惑是道。何以故、如人醉時非  
醒、醒時非醉。然不離醉有醒、亦非醉即是醒也。

問曰、若人醒時、致醉何在。

答曰、如手翻覆。若手翻時、不應更問手何在。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Q: What do you mean by seeking it among all material forms and realizing it in one's own speech? How do you seek it among forms and realize it in speech?

A: Emptiness and form are one. Speech and realization are not two.

Q: If all things are empty, why is a sage able to pass through but an ordinary person is stymied?

A: When delusion is active, one is impeded. With the stillness of truth, one passes through.

Q: As for true emptiness, how does it come to be tainted, and once tainted, how can the taints be removed?

A: It happens the moment one speaks from delusion—one is immediately unawakened and one's actions are unawakened as well. In true emptiness, there is not a single thing that could be tainted.

Q: But if everything is truly empty, there should be no need for living beings to practice the Way, since emptiness is their natural state.

A: Should living beings understand the truth of emptiness, then indeed they need not practice the Way. It is only because they don't recognize emptiness in emptiness that they engender delusions of existence.

Q: If that is the case, then one must free oneself from delusion to gain the Way. How then can

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

緣門問曰、若人不達此理、得說法化眾生不。  
入理曰、不得。何以故、自眼未明、焉治他目。  
問曰、隨其智力、方便化之。豈不得耶。  
答曰、若達道理者、可名智力。若不達道理、名為無明力。  
何以故、助己煩惱作氣力故也。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

you say that doing anything at all is not the Way?

A: You have it wrong. It is true that delusion is not the Way, but freedom from delusion is also not the Way. Why so? When someone is drunk, they are not sober, and when sober, they are not drunk. However, while the notion of sobriety is predicated on the notion of drunkenness, this doesn't mean that sobriety is *identical* with drunkenness.

Q: When one is sober, where does the drunkenness go?

A: It is like turning over the palm of your hand. When you turn it over, you don't then ask where your hand went!

Threshold asked: If someone has not yet grasped this truth, are they still able to explain the teachings and provide instruction to others?

Master Verity replied: This is not possible. How can one whose own eyes are clouded treat the eyes of others?

Q: Couldn't they still, drawing on the power of whatever understanding they possess, use skillful means to instruct others?

A: For one who has realized the truth of the Way, it is legitimate to speak of the power of their understanding. But for one who has not realized

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、雖然不能如理化人、且教眾生行十善五戒、安處人天。  
豈不益哉。

答曰、至理無益、更招二損。何以故、自陷陷他故。自陷者、  
所謂自妨於道。陷他者、所謂不免輪迴六趣也。

問\_、聖人豈不說五乘有差別耶。

答曰、聖人無心說差別法、但彼眾生自心悞望現。故經云、  
若彼心滅盡、無乘及乘者。無有乘建立、我說為一乘也。



## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

the truth of the Way, one can only speak of the power of their ignorance. Why so? It is because such power serves only to reinforce their own afflictions.

Q: Although one may not be able to instruct others in a manner that accords with the Truth, would it not still be of some benefit to instruct living beings in the practice of morality, such as the ten virtues and five precepts, thereby securing them a place in the next life among the humans and gods?

A: Ultimate truth has nothing to do with benefits. Moreover, this would bring about harm to both parties, ensnaring oneself while ensnaring others. As for ensnaring oneself, it becomes an impediment to the Way. As for ensnaring others, it keeps them bound to rebirth in the six destines.

Q: But doesn't the sage teach the five vehicles, each of which is distinct?

A: The sage has no intention of teaching different methods. They merely appear in accord with the personal aspirations of living beings. Therefore, the scripture says: "If their minds are extinguished, there are neither vehicles nor passengers. I teach the single vehicle, which is based precisely on the absence of any vehicles."

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

緣門問曰、何為真學道人、不為他所知、不為他所識。

何為也。

答曰、奇珍非為貧窮之所識、真人非為群邪偽人之所知。

問曰、世有偽人、不閑正理。外現威儀、專精事業、多為男女  
親近者、何也。

答曰、如姪女招群男、鼻穴來眾蠅。此為名相之所致也。

緣門問曰、云何菩薩行於非道、為通達仏道。

答曰、善惡無分別也。

問曰、何謂無分別。

答曰、於法不生心也。

問曰、可無作者乎。

答曰、非有無作者也。

問曰、不覺知乎。

答曰、雖知無我也。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Threshold asked: How is it that a person who truly practices the Way is neither known nor recognized by others? How does this happen?

A: Just as paupers are not in a position to recognize a rare treasure, charlatans are not able to recognize a person of truth.

Q: There are charlatans around who are not bound by the truth. Outwardly, they seem dignified and impressive and committed to proper practice. Why are so many men and women drawn to them?

A: Just as a promiscuous woman has men flocking to her, and just as rotting meat attracts swarms of flies, so it is with the attractions of fame and outward appearance.

Threshold asked: How is it that the bodhisattvas can engage in profane activities yet still reach the Way of the Buddhas?

A: It is because they do not discriminate between good and evil.

Q: What do you mean by not discriminating?

A: Whatever is happening, they don't engender a mind.

Q: Can it be that there is no doer at all?

A: Don't posit the existence or non-existence of a doer.

Q: Is there then no awareness?

A: Although there is awareness, there is no self.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、無我、何有知。

答曰、知亦自無性。

問曰、道我、有何妨。

答曰、知名亦不妨。只恐心中有事。

問曰、有事、有何妨。

答曰、無妨即無事。無事、問何妨。

緣門起問曰、若不存身見、云何行住坐臥也。

答曰、但行住坐臥、何須立身見。

問曰、既不存者、得思惟義理不。

答曰、若計有心、不思惟亦有。若了無心、設思惟亦無。

何以故、譬如禪師淨坐而興慮、猛風亂動而無心也。

緣門問曰、若有初學道人、忽遇因緣、他欲來害、云何對治而合道乎。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Q: How can there be awareness without a self?

A: Awareness itself is without any abiding nature.

Q: What is the problem with the term “I”?

A: There is no problem in merely knowing the term; the fear is simply that one construes it as a something.

Q: Why is construing it as something a hindrance?

A: The absence of hindrances is the same as the absence of things. If there are no things, then what hindrance could there be?

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Threshold rose and asked: If one is free of the notion of a self, how does one go about walking, standing, sitting, and lying?

A: Just walk, stand, sit, lie down. What need is there for a notion of a self?

Q: Can one who is free of the notion of a self still think and reason?

A: If you believe that there is a mind, then it is there even when you are not thinking. If you understand that there is no mind, then even when you are thinking, there is no mind. Why so? It is like a Chan master who sits quietly, even as thoughts arise. Even in the chaotic tumult of a raging gale, there is still no mind.

Threshold asked: For people who are just setting out on the practice of the Way, if they are

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

答曰、一箇不須對治。何以故、可避避之、不可避任之、可忍忍之。不可忍哭之。

問曰、若哭、與他有我見人何別。

答曰、如杵扣鐘、其聲自然出也。何必即有我乎。汝若強死捉心、嚙齒嚙忍、此乃存大大我。

問曰、人之哀哭、中有情動。豈同鐘響。

答曰、言同與不同者、但是汝多事。妄想思量作是問。若無心分別者、道躰自然。

問曰、吾聞聖人兵不傷、苦不枉、色不受、心不動。此何謂也。

答曰、若了一切法即無我、聲與不聲、動與不動、俱合道理、無妨碍。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

suddenly threatened by someone wishing to harm them, how should they react while remaining one with the Way?

A: They should not react at all. Why so? If it can be avoided, they will avoid it. If it cannot be avoided, they will endure it. If it is bearable, they will bear it. If it is unbearable, they will cry out in pain.

Q: If they cry out in pain, how are they any different from those who hold the view of a self?

A: If you hit a bell with a mallet, the sound naturally emanates. Why is it necessary to posit a self? If you try to seize control of your mind while dying—resolutely clenching your teeth and silently enduring the ordeal—you end up stuck in an even bigger self.

Q: Someone who cries out in pain must be feeling *something*. How can this be like the reverberation of a bell?

A: Your talk of it being the same or not the same is just more prattle, produced from your deluded rumination. If there is no mind or discrimination, the Way functions of itself.

Q: I have heard that the sage is not harmed by weapons, is not bothered by pain, is not compelled by forms, and is not moved by mind. What would you say to this?

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、如是滅見大士、何人能識、何人能知也。

答曰、証者乃知、行者能識。

問曰、如此大士、亦能化生不。

答曰、何有日月不照、灯舉不明。

問曰、作何方便。

答曰、正直無方便。

問曰、若無方便、云何利益。

答曰、物來而名、事至而応。無心計校、有預算之緣。



## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

A: If you understand that everything lacks a self, then irrespective of whether you are making a sound or remaining silent, moving or still, you are always at one with the truth of the Way without any hindrance.

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Q: As for the bodhisattva who has put an end to views, who is able to recognize him and know him?

A: One who realized it will know him. One who practices it is able to recognize him.

Q: Is this bodhisattva also able to instruct others or not?

A: Could there be a sun or moon that doesn't shine, or a lamp that, when held up, doesn't illuminate?

Q: What skillful means does the bodhisattva employ?

A: He is direct, and doesn't employ any skillful means.

Q: But without skillful means, how can he be said to benefit anyone?

A: When something comes along, he names it; when circumstances warrant it, he responds, but it is all without mental calculation or premeditation.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、我聞如來七日思惟、起乎方便。云何而言無有計校之心。

答曰、諸仏境界、非思量覺觀所知。

問曰、仏豈妄語耶。

答曰、真實非虛妄。

問曰、云何經說思惟、今言不思惟。

答曰、化門方便也。

問曰、諸仏方便從何而生。

答曰、諸仏不生、但從心生。緣化万有、法本無名。

緣門問曰、我不知、云何名為仏、云何名為道、云何名變化、云何名常住。

入理答曰、覺了無物、謂之仏、通彼一切、謂之道。法界出生為變化、究竟寂滅為常住。

問曰、云何名一切法悉是仏法。

答曰、非法非非法、是一切仏法也。

問曰、何名為法、何名非法、何名非法非非法也。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Q: But I have heard that after the Buddha's awakening, he spent seven days in deliberation and then arose and used his skillful means. How can you still claim that he does not possess a mind that reasons?

A: The perceptual field of the Buddhas is not something that can be known through reflection or thought.

Q: Did the Buddha ever lie?

A: The truth does not deceive.

Q: Why, then, do the scriptures depict the Buddha deliberating, and yet now you claim he did not deliberate?

A: That is skillful means intended to instruct.

Q: Where do the skillful means of the Buddhas come from?

A: They do not come from the Buddhas, but only come from the mind. There are myriad ways of instructing people, but reality itself is fundamentally unnameable.

Threshold asked: I don't understand. What do you mean by "Buddha," and "the Way," and "transformation," and "permanence"?

Master Verity replied: To realize that there is nothing is called Buddha. To penetrate everything is called the Way. To take birth in the domain of reality is transformation, and ultimate quiescence is permanence.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

答曰、是法名是法、非法名非法。是非非所量、故名非法非非法。

問曰、此說誰証。

答曰、此說非誰、云何言証。

問曰、無誰何說。

答曰、無誰無說、即是正說。

問曰、何名邪說。

答曰、計有說者。

問曰、是誰之計、云何無計。

答曰、計者但語。語中無語、計者亦無。

問曰、若此說者、即一切眾生本來解脫。

答曰、尚無繫縛、何有解脫人。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Q: What does it mean to say that everything is the Buddha's teaching?

A: Not a thing, and not not a thing—this is the meaning of everything is the Buddha's teaching.

Q: What is a thing and what is not a thing? And what is neither a thing nor not a thing?

A: To affirm something is to designate it a thing. To negate something is to designate it a non-thing. Something that cannot be ascertained through either assertion or negation is designated neither a thing nor not a thing.

Q: On whose authority is this taught?

A: This teaching repudiates any “who,” so how can you talk about authority?

Q: If there is no who, then how is it taught?

A: That there is no who and also no teaching is the true teaching.

Q: Then what is false teaching?

A: Conceiving that there is something to teach.

Q: But if there is the conception of a “who,” how can you claim there is no conceiver?

A: A “conceiver” is just a figure of speech. In speech there is no speaker, hence there is also no “conceiver.”

Q: According to this explanation, all living beings should be liberated from the very beginning.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、此法何名。

答曰、尚無有法、何況有名。

問曰、若此說者、我軫不解。

答曰、實無解法、汝勿求解。

問曰、云何究竟。

答曰、無始終。

問曰、可無因果耶。

答曰、無本即無末。

問曰、云何說証。

答曰、真實無証說。

問曰、云何知見。

答曰、知一切法如、見一切法等。

問曰、何心之知、何目之見。

答曰、無知之知、無見之見。

問曰、誰說是言。

答曰、如我所問。

問曰、云何如我所問。

答曰、汝自觀問、答亦可知。

於是緣門再思再審、寂然無言也。

入理先生乃問曰、汝何以不言。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

A: Since there are no restraints, how could there be anyone who is liberated from them?

Q: What do you call this teaching?

A: As there is no teaching, how could it have a name?

Q: But if this is the teaching, I still don't understand it.

A: There really is nothing to understand, so you should not seek understanding.

Q: What is left?

A: No beginning or end.

Q: Is there then no cause and effect?

A: Without roots there are no branches.

Q: How can you prove this?

A: Truth is not something to be proven.

Q: Then how can I know it directly?

A: Know all things as they are, and see all things as equal.

Q: What mind knows this and what eye sees this?

A: It is known by not knowing, and seen by not seeing.

Q: Then who is speaking these words?

A: Whose question is this?

Q: What do you mean by "Whose question is this?"

A: If you can discern who is asking these questions, you will know the answer.

Thereupon, Threshold pondered it some more, quietly without speaking.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

緣門答曰、我不見一法如微塵許而可對說。

爾時入理先生即語緣門曰、汝今似見真實理也。

緣門問曰、云何似見、非正見乎。

入理答曰、汝今所見、無有一法者、如彼外道。雖學隱形、而未能滅影亡跡。

緣門問曰、云何得形影俱滅也。

入理答曰、本無心境、汝莫起生滅之見。

問曰、凡夫所以問、聖人所以說。

答曰、有疑故問、為決疑故說也。

問曰、吾聞聖人無問而自說。何決也。是有法可說耶。為是玄見他疑耶。

答曰、皆是對病施藥也。如天雷聲動、必有所応。

問曰、大聖如來、既無有心生。緣何現世。

答曰、夫太平之世、瑞草緣生。



## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Master Verity then asked: Why don't you say something?

Threshold replied: I don't perceive a single thing, even one as small as a dust mote, to which I might respond.

Then Master Verity said: Now it seems as if you have perceived the true principle.

Threshold asked: Why does it only *seem* that I perceive it? Isn't my perception correct?

Master Verity replied: The absence of a single thing that you have just perceived is like that of the non-Buddhist yogis. Although they may train in the art of making themselves invisible, they are not yet able to eliminate their shadows or erase their tracks.

Threshold asked: How can I eliminate both my form and my shadow?

Master Verity said: Originally, there is neither mind nor object. You must not engender any view of arising or passing.

Q: How is the ordinary person to ask questions, and how is the sage to teach?

A: When there are doubts, the ordinary person asks, and in order to resolve those doubts the sage teaches.

Q: But I have heard that sages teach on their own without being questioned. What is then resolved? Is there something to be taught? Or is

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、如來既非命盡、云何現滅。

答曰、飢荒之世、五穀緣滅也。

問曰、吾聞聖人哀從定起、悲化群生。無導大通、豈同瑞草也。

答曰、定謂法身、報身四大穴身也。分別前境起謂化身。

法無因繫、化無緣留。出沒虛通、故曰無導也。

問曰、云何言悲。

答曰、但以化身無慮、體合真空、仁物無心、彼強謂之悲。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

it that the sage preternaturally perceives the doubts of others?

A: In both cases, the sage administers medicine to treat a particular illness. It is like an echo following the sound of thunder.

Q: The great sage—the Buddha—had no intention to be born, so what is the cause of his appearance in the world?

A: In an age of Great Peace, conditions are such that auspicious grasses appear.

Q: Since the Buddha is not fated to die, why does he appear to pass away?

A: In an age of famine and starvation, conditions are such that five cereals perish.

Q: I have heard that the sage emerges from his meditative quiescence out of concern for others, and teaches his flock out of compassion. Can you really compare the great power of the sage's freedom from obstructions to that of auspicious grasses?

A: The sage's meditative quiescence is the real body. The reward body is the physical body composed of the four elements. And that which arises in response to the conceptual discrimination of objects in one's perceptual field is called the transformation body. The real body is without causal constraints, and the transformation body is not bound by conditions. As the sage appears and disappears freely, it is called unobstructed.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

問曰、眾生何時修道得似如來。

答曰、若不了者、於恒沙劫修道、轉轉不及。初若了者、  
眾生當身、即是如來。何論得似不似。

問曰、若如說者、如來即是易得。云何言三大劫修。

答曰、甚難也。

問曰、若不轉即身是、云何名難。

答曰、起心易、滅心難。是身易、非身難。有作易、無作難。

故知玄功難會、妙理難合。不動即真、三聖希及。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Q: What, then, is compassion?

A: It is simply that the transformation body, which is free of thought and embodies true emptiness, responds benevolently to things without mental intent. This is what others insist on calling “compassion.”

Q: When will living beings who cultivate the Way appear as Buddhas?

A: If you lack understanding, then you can practice the Way for eons as numerous as the sands of the Ganges River, yet still continue to transmigrate without reaching it. But if you understand from the get-go that your own human body is that of a Buddha, then what is there to discuss about attaining the appearance of a Buddha?

Q: If it is as you say, then it should be easy to attain buddhahood. Why then is there talk of practicing for three great eons?

A: Because it is really hard!

Q: But if it is already present in this very body, without the need for being reborn, how can you call it hard?

A: Giving rise to mind is easy, but effacing it is hard. Affirming the body is easy but negating it is difficult. Doing is easy but not doing is hard. Therefore, know that it is hard to comprehend mysterious potency and hard to accord with the astonishing truth. Non-action is truth. Even the three sages rarely reach it.

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## CHAN TEACHINGS

於是緣門長歎、聲滿十方。忽然無音、豁然大悟。玄光淨智、返照無疑。始知學道奇難、徒興夢慮。而即高聲歎曰、善哉善哉、如先生無說而說、我實無聞而聞。聞說一合、即寂寞無說。不知先生向來問答、名誰何法。

於是入理先生、身安不動、目擊無言、顧視四方。呵呵唧唧而謂緣門曰、夫至理幽微、無有文字。汝向來所問、皆是量起心生。夢謂多端、覺已無物。汝欲流通於世、寄問假名。請若收蹤、故名絕觀論也。

## NOTHING TO BE ATTAINED

Thereupon, Threshold let out a long shout, and the sound filled the ten directions. Then, in the silence that followed, there was a vivid and profound realization—a radiant understanding that restored clarity and dispelled doubt. For the first time, Threshold understood the extraordinary difficulty of the practice of the Way, and all his previous travails seemed like a dream. Then he exclaimed aloud: “Wonderful! Wonderful! As the Master instructs without instructing, I truly hear without hearing. When hearing and instructing are one, there is only silent quiescence. As for the dialogue we just had, what shall I call it?”

All this time, Master Verity remained still and unmoving, silently taking it all in, peering out in the four directions. Laughing, he addressed Threshold: “The supreme truth is mysterious and subtle and has nothing to do with language. These questions you have been asking arise from mental discrimination. In a dream, one talks of many things that vanish upon awakening. You now want our conversation to circulate in the world and request that I give it a title. In order to efface your own traces, I ask that you call it the *Treatise on the Cessation of Discernment*.”

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## NOTES ON SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

### Part I

Unlike Tibetan and Chinese, Pali is not associated with a single script, but rather is known in several scripts, including Sinhala, Burmese, Khmer, Thai, and, in the modern period, Roman. Following modern conventions, we reproduce the text here in Roman. Translations in the section “Discourses of the Buddha” use the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana editions of the Vipassana Research Institute, Igaṭṭpuri, 1995. Citation conventions follow those of the Pali Text Society. Further reading of Pali scriptures on no-self and other Buddhist teachings can be found in Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *In the Buddha’s Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pali Canon*, Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2015.

“Why a Person Is Like a Chariot” is from the *Questions of Milinda* (*Milindapañha* 25–28; 40–41), using V. Trenckner’s edition, *The Milindapañho: Being Dialogues between King Milinda and the*

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## SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

*Buddhist Sage Nāgasena*, London: Pali Text Society, 1890 (input by the Dhammakaya Foundation, Thailand, 1989–1996). For a complete translation of *The Questions of Milinda*, see Maria Heim, trans., *The Questions of Milinda*, Murty Classical Library of India, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, forthcoming.

“Conventional and Ultimate Ways of Talking about This” is a commentarial passage by Buddhaghosa on the *Āṅuttara Nikāya* (*Āṅuttara-aṭṭhakathā* i.94–95), from the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana edition of the Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, 1995.

### Part II

The translation of chapter 9 of Nāgārjuna’s *Fundamental Verses on the Middle Way* and of Tsongkhapa’s commentary are from *rTsa she tik chen rigs pa’i rgya mtsho*. Sarnath: Gelugpa Student Welfare Committee, 2008.

The translation from Candrakīrti’s *Introduction to the Middle Way* and its autocommentary is from *dBu ma la ’jug pa’i rang gral*. Sarnath: Kagyu Relief and Protection Society, 1992.

### FURTHER READING

Garfield, J. *Buddhist Ethics: A Philosophical Exploration*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2021.

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- Tsongkhapa. *Ocean of Reasoning: A Great Commentary on Nāgārjuna's Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Williams, P. *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations*. London: Routledge, 2008.

### Part III

The dialogue between Bodhidharma and Huike is found in the *Gateless Gate* (*Wumen guan* 無門關) case 41; Taishō canon no. 2005, vol. 48, page 298a16–18.

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## SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

Only one manuscript of the *Treatise on No Mind* (*Wuxin lun* 無心論) has been found, namely Stein no. 5619, housed in the British Library. An edition of the Stein ms. was included in volume 85 of the Taishō canon (no. 2831), which we have reproduced here with only minor changes (including repunctuation). Slightly revised editions can be found in Suzuki Daisetsu, *Suzuki Daisetsu zenshū*, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1968), 216–219; and Urs App, “*Mushinron*—Tonkō shutsudo no ichi tekisuto 無心論: 敦煌出土の一テキスト,” *Zenbunka kenkyūjo kiyō*, 21 (1995): 1–69. App’s study includes an English translation as well.

There are six known manuscript versions of the *Treatise on the Cessation of Discernment* (*Jueguan lun* 絕觀論), all of which were recovered from the Dunhuang library cave. Four are now in Paris (Pelliot nos. 2045, 2074, 2885, and 2732, housed in the Bibliothèque nationale), one in Beijing (Peking Jun-84), and one in Japan (the “Ishii” ms., in a private collection). The Chinese text presented here follows the edition found in Gishin Tokiwa 常盤義伸 and Seizan Yanagida 柳田聖山, *Zekkanron: Eibun yakuchū, gembun kōtei, kokuyaku* 絕觀論: 英文譯注・原文校定・國譯 (Kyoto: Zenbunka kenkyūjo, 1976), 87–99, with only minor changes to the punctuation. Full textual details, as well as an English rendering, can be found in Tokiwa and Yanagida’s comprehensive study.

## SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

For more on the Oxhead school of Chan, see John Robert McRae, “The Ox-head School of Chinese Ch’an Buddhism: From Early Ch’an to the Golden Age,” in Robert Gimello and Peter Gregory, eds., *Studies in Ch’an and Hua-yen* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2021), 169–252; and Shun’ei Hirai, “The School of Mount Niu-t’ou and the School of the Pao-T’ang Monastery,” trans. Silvio Vita, *East and West* 37, no. 1/4 (1987): 337–372.

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