

Meditation for Class One: Does Fire Light Incense?

Begin by focusing on your breath and trying to be in the present moment. Concentrate one-pointedly.

Think about what you think is happening when you light a stick of incense. The flame seems to touch the incense. The stick of incense is then ignited and smoke starts to come from the top of. The flame is the cause of the bringing about the effect of a lit stick of incense.

Then rewind that process. When the flame was burning before it lit the incense, was it at that time the cause of lighting incense? If so, where was the result (the lit stick of incense) of which it was the cause? Did the result somehow already exist at the time of the cause? Was there already a lit stick of incense before the stick of incense was lit? Was a lit stick of incense somehow already inside the flame?

Or do we think that the cause (the flame) somehow came into contact with the incense and thereby brought about its result (the lit stick). But if that were the case, then the cause and the result would have had to touch and for a moment at least become the same thing. Can a cause and an effect exist at the same time? If so, how could you distinguish them?

And if they don't touch, how do they interrelate? How can the flame ignite the stick of incense if they don't come into contact with one another? How can there be a cause and effect relationship between two things that never touch?

Recall to mind how you normally think a stick of incense is lit.

Contemplate on the fact that it is impossible that a flame *really* lights a stick of incense.

It can only do so *apparently*. It is an illusion. When we light a stick of incense in our waking life it is like lighting a stick of incense in a dream.

But the illusion exists. The illusion works. Flames do light sticks of incense.

But not the way we thought.

End the meditation by dedicating your efforts to gaining a deeper understanding of Arya Nagarjuna's text.

Meditation for Class Two: Does My Body Have Parts?

Bring your mind into the room and then into your body. Focus on your breath and hold your attention there unwaveringly. If your mind wanders, gently bring it back to your breath.

Get in touch with how you normally think about your body. What does it mean to say “bring your mind into your body.” Feel what you ordinarily feel when you think about being “embodied.”

Now examine the parts of your body. Start from your head and work your way down. See every one of the parts of your body as parts of a whole, “the body.”

Focus your mind on any one of the parts of your body – your left knee, for example. When your mind is focused on your knee, are you thinking about it as “a knee” or “the left knee of my body”?

If you think of it as “a knee,” is it a part of something else any more?

If you think of it as “the left knee of my body,” can you think of the knee without thinking of it as a part of a larger whole?

Conversely, when you think of your body, can you think of it without the knee? Can you conceptualize your body without its parts?

Reflect a bit here on how the parts of your body and the whole body can only exist interdependently. How could we conceptualize a left knee without first conceptualizing the whole of which it was a part? And how could we conceptualize the body as a whole unless we first conceptualized the left knee and all the other parts that make up the body? Which comes first, the whole or the parts?

Now go back to the left knee. Does this part of the whole which is my body have parts? How many parts does it have? How many do I have to account for before I can say, “This is my left knee”?

Does the knee depend on its parts for it to be a knee? Do we have to account for all the parts of the knee for there to be a knee?

Does the body depend on its parts for it to be a body? How many parts do we have to enumerate before we have a whole body?

Meditate on the fact that we cannot be seeing forms like this. If we were, there would be no end to the process of accounting for the parts that make up any one form. We can perceive whole forms like our body only because we are perceiving an idea of a whole. We cannot be seeing whole forms “out there.” It is an illusion to think so.

What’s left of our body when we stop trying to find it apart from our idea of our body?

Meditation for Class Three: Am I the Same as or Different Than My Parts?

Sit down, relax, let everything go and pull your mind into the present moment. Focus on your breath. Concentrate one-pointedly.

Now get in touch with the strong feeling of a self, a “me,” that exists truly, really, or objectively. Get that feeling of the self as some tangible, palpable, perceptible, solidly existing entity.

Think, if this “me” truly exists, it must exist as **identical to its parts; separate from them; something that “has” or possesses its parts; something that is dependent on the parts, or something the parts depend on.**

Am I identical to or one with my parts? Am I the same as each of my parts, my body (and each of its parts – my head, torso, arms, legs, etc.) and my mind (and each of its parts – my feelings, ability to discriminate, consciousness, etc.)? When I point to each one of my parts, is it “me” I am pointing to: “I am my elbow,” “I am my feeling at this moment”? No, for if that were so then there would be as many “me’s” as there are parts which are me. Or alternatively and impossibly, somehow just as “I” am one so would the multiple parts of this “me” be one.

If I’m not the same as my parts, maybe I am **something other than my parts.** Could there be a “me” that existed apart from the parts of me – the body and mind? If this were possible, if you took away all the parts, there would still be an inherently existing “me” there that you could find and point to. You could locate this “me” here, and then over there you could point to something different that was the mind and body of “me.”

Is there is a me who **possesses my parts?** A “me” who possessed my parts could not truly exist as either the same as or different from the parts I supposedly possess, as we have already established. So although there seems to be a truly existing “I” who “has” parts, that “I” cannot be found (either as one with the parts it supposedly has, or as different from those parts). This room “has” four walls, but where is the room that has four walls?

Perhaps I am **something that depends on my parts.** Like yogurt in a bowl, perhaps this “me” exists within the parts which hold “me” together. But if that were the case, then there would be a “me” (“yogurt”) distinct from what I depend on (“the bowl”), from my parts. A relationship of dependence implies that the two things (“me” and “my parts”) are separate, and we’ve already established that an inherently existing “me” that was truly different than its parts could not exist.

But neither could **my parts be dependent on me,** like a forest (“my parts”) covered in snow (“me”), for the same reason as above – for then “me” and “my parts” would again have to be self-existent different entities, and we’ve seen that they couldn’t be.

Try to get a sense that the self you are trying to find simply cannot be there and hold your mind on the absence. When you lose the sense of the emptiness of the self, review the steps above again.

Meditation for Class Four: Am I in Bondage or Free?

Sit down, with your back straight and head up, and begin by concentrating on your breath.

Get in touch with your sense of yourself as a suffering being, a person with problems, worries, fears, shortcomings, etc. Feel yourself identified with that being and his or her suffering and problems: “This is who I am. I am a suffering sentient being.”

Try to distant your sense of self from the sufferings and problems that you think you have. You are not your problems. You may think you “have” problems, but you are not somehow identical to those problems.

Next, reflect on whether the “problems” and “sufferings” you think you “have” truly exist as such. Review them and consider whether they could be perceived as anything other than how they seem to you at the moment. Could your “problems” be seen, for example, as opportunities for furthering your spiritual development? If so, are they still problems? Reflect on “problems” as **interpretations**. Since “problems” don’t exist as such from their own side, wouldn’t it be more advantageous to interpret them differently?

And where, exactly, is the self who is suffering because of these supposed problems? Is there a findable self – who exists essentially as a suffering self – somewhere either inside of or apart from the mind/body complex that is “you”? If there were, how could it ever become a self that wasn’t suffering?

Look around for that suffering self. And when you “come up empty,” hold your mind on the *absence of a suffering self*.

What are you left with when you stop the projection of “suffering self”? Who are you now? How do you feel when you stop the projection of a self who suffers?