



MEDITATIONS ON EMPTINESS

CLASS FOUR: THE DIFFERENT FLAVORS OF EMPTINESS

The following are six different "flavors" of emptiness that are taught openly by the different schools of classical Indian Buddhism. They are culled from different texts in the lineage of Tsongkapa the Great (1357-1419). Please note that not all of them would be called true "emptiness," but rather "selflessness" in different classical schools.

I. Emptiness, Flavor #1

The lack of a self which is unchanging, whole, and independent.

[According to the Independent group of the Middle-Way School, this is the gross lack of a self to the person.]

Worldview #1—This too will pass.

Things are empty of any self-nature of being unchanging.

II. Emptiness, Flavor #2

The lack of a self which is self-standing and substantial.

["Substantial" can mean a lot of different things; here it refers to the lack of a "driver" or "director" of the five heaps over the five heaps. According to the Mind-Only School, this is the lack of a self to the person. According to the Independent group, this is the subtle lack of a self to the person.]

Worldview #2—I cannot control this in the present moment.

Things are empty of any self-nature of being independent.



III. Emptiness, Flavor #3

The fact that a visible object and the valid perception which grasps the visible object are devoid of any separate substance.

["Devoid of any separate substance" means: "It is not true that they come from a separate karmic seed; rather, they both arise from the same karmic seed." According to the Mind-Only School, this is the lack of a self to things. According to the Independent group, this is the gross lack of a self to things.]

Worldview #3—I have put this and myself here.

What is seen, and what sees it, are empty of coming from separate karmic causes.

IV. Emptiness, Flavor #4

The fact that the fact that any particular thing is called what it is is something which is devoid of existing by definition.

[Put simply: The fact that things are called what they are is not something which is automatic. According to the Mind-Only School, this is also the lack of a self to things.]

Worldview #4—There is somebody who would find this pleasant.

Things are empty of automatically being the thing that is called their name.

V. Emptiness, Flavor #5

The fact that objects are devoid of existing from their own side through any unique identity of their own, rather than existing simply by virtue of having appeared to an unaffected state of mind.

[According to the Independent group, this is the subtle lack of a self to things, or real emptiness.]

Worldview #5—I can use this problem as a path.

Things are empty of having any unique way of being from their own side, rather than simply being established by virtue of their appearing to an unaffected state of mind.



VI. Emptiness, Flavor #6

The fact that objects are void of existing from their own side through their own identity, rather than existing simply through names [words] and terms [thoughts].

[According to the Consequence group of the Middle-Way School, this—and only this—is emptiness, and there are no separate degrees of emptiness (although emptiness can be divided according to the object that has it: the person or "things," meaning the person's parts). This interpretation is the ultimate one accepted by Lord Buddha; the realized being Nagarjuna; Je Tsongkapa; Khen Rinpoche; for all of tantra; and moreover by anyone who has seen emptiness directly.]

Worldview #6—We must be as gardeners.

*Things are empty of any existence from their own side; rather, they exist only as parts of things that I group together and apply a name or mental image of the thing, forced to do so depending on **whether I have, every day, taken care of others or not.***

The Mahamudra Meditation on the Six Flavors

This meditation takes us through six different wrong views of the world around us and, one by one, establishes that these views cannot be true, that what these views profess is, in fact, impossible. By this we arrive at the six flavors of emptiness. However, according to the highest school of Buddhism, only the last one is really emptiness. But each of these wrong views is a view we hold constantly in our daily lives, and each step of eliminating them gets us closer to a pure understanding of emptiness itself.

Six Wrong Views and Their Antidotes

1. Wrong view: Things stay the same for a while
Antidote: Things are constantly changing every second
2. Wrong view: I own this; I control its fate
Antidote: Absolutely nothing in the present moment is in my control
3. Wrong view: I am at the mercy of things randomly happening to me
Antidote: One past deed caused both the object and myself who perceives it at that moment



4. Wrong view: Things are exactly how I see them and no other way
Antidote: I am imposing judgment on things; they could be different
5. Wrong view: Things are coming from their own side completely
Antidote: Things come half from their own side, and half from my perceptions
6. Wrong view: There is some part of the object that comes from its own side
Antidote: It's only my perception

Applying the Six Flavors of Emptiness to Your Own Mind

This meditation takes these same previous six wrong views and their antidotes and applies them to a new object: one's own mind. There are many different features of the mind – discrimination, raw awareness, etc. – but it is advised for this meditation to focus on the mental function of feeling. Feelings are easy to access, and they also tend to cause us a lot of trouble when we see them as self-existent, leading us to do bad things in order to avoid what we dislike and attain what we like.

Six Wrong Views and Their Antidotes Applied to Mental Feelings

1. Wrong view: I will feel this same way for a while
Antidote: My feelings are constantly shifting, moment to moment
2. Wrong view: I control how I feel
Antidote: I have no control of my feelings in the present moment
3. Wrong view: I am at the mercy of my random feelings
Antidote: One of my past actions caused both this feeling and myself perceiving it
4. Wrong view: This feeling is definitely good or bad
Antidote: I am imposing a judgment on the feeling that is not inherently part of that feeling and could be different
5. Wrong view: Outside forces are completely responsible for how I feel
Antidote: Outside forces combined with my perceptions compose how I feel
6. Wrong view: There is some outside factor affecting how I feel
Antidote: How I feel is entirely a projection



Example of a Mahamudra Meditation

1. I think this feeling of unhappiness will last for a while. But really, the rise and fall of a moment of emotion is just like the rising and fading sounds of a plane passing overhead – it comes and goes quickly, and even in the space of its short existence it is constantly changing by degrees, from softer to louder to softer, etc.
2. I think I can control my feelings. Actually the thoughts and feelings come into my mind completely unbidden – I never invite this unhappiness to come and disturb my mind.
3. I feel like I'm being bombarded by this random feeling of unhappiness. But to be sure, nothing is random. I have been brought to this moment, and the feeling of unhappiness has been brought to this moment, by the same karma—the fact that in the past I caused someone else to be unhappy. I am fully responsible.
4. I think this feeling of unhappiness is really lousy! But does it really have an inherent badness about it? I could look at this feeling of unhappiness as a great motivation for me to practice even harder, so I can get out of this stupid cycle of pain and then bring others out of it. Then I'd have to say that the unhappiness is a good thing.
5. I am sure my feeling of unhappiness relies entirely on things outside of me: the bad weather, lack of sleep, the start of a cold. I think if those things were different, I'd be happy. But really, come on, then we could all just work on manipulating our outside situations so we'd always be perfectly happy. We could all move to Florida or something. That doesn't work. Even if everything outside goes perfectly, there are still unhappy feelings left. That part must be coming from inside of me. So outside circumstances can only play a part in how I feel, and my own mind provides the rest.
6. These outside circumstances must play some part in how I am feeling, right? It really seems like when I get a nice surprise gift from someone I feel happier than if the gift never came. But there are times when I'm so sad nothing can make me feel better. And times when I'm so happy nothing can faze me. These feelings actually have nothing to do with any outside circumstances I thought were affecting them. It is *all* a projection forced on me by my past actions. And that means that if I plant the right seeds now, I can create a future of total joy every moment of the day.