



THE ASIAN CLASSICS  
INSTITUTE

6

THE DIAMOND-CUTTER SUTRA  
Level One of Middle-Way Philosophy (*Madhyamika*)

DHARMA ESSENTIALS





The Asian Classics Institute  
Dharma Essentials Course VI: The Diamond-Cutter Sutra

Class One Outline

- I. Introduction to the Dharma Essentials Series and to this Course
- II. Introduction and Importance of the Text
  - A. Meaning of the name (Sanskrit, *Vajra Chedika*; Tibetan, *Dorje Chupa*)
  - B. Commentaries by Masters Vasubandhu (350 A.D.), Kamalashila (750 A.D.), and Choney Drakpa Shedrup (1675-1748)
- III. Emptiness and the Three Meanings of “Diamond”
  - A. The meaning of “cutter” in the title
- IV. Subhuti’s Opening Question
  - A. The definitions of a “bodhisattva” and “bodhicitta”
  - B. The deceptive and ultimate forms of the wish for enlightenment
- V. Emptiness and the Object We Deny
  - A. The existence of things through names and labels only
- VI. Meditation Assignment

For fifteen minutes each day, think about whether a pen exists a) in any one or some of its parts; b) is something outside of or apart from its parts; or c) is the collection of its parts (a whole pen) apart from the concept and label “pen” that is imposed on top of that collection.

## Class Two Outline

- I. The Four Bodies of a Buddha
  - A. The Emanation and Enjoyment Bodies
  - B. The Wisdom and Essence Bodies
  
- II. How to Obtain the Bodies of a Buddha
  - A. The Six Perfections
    1. Giving
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    3. Patience
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    5. Meditative Concentration
    6. Wisdom
  
- III. The Marks of a Buddha's Body
  
- IV. The Two Types of Teachings of a Buddha
  - A. Physical Dharma
  - B. Dharma of Realizations
  
- V. The Emptiness of Karma
  
- VI. The Three Spheres of a Good Deed
  
- VII. Meditation Assignment

For fifteen minutes each day, reflect on what it would be like to be a Buddha.

## Class Three Outline

- I. The Two Kinds of Beings in the Universe
- II. Overview of the Five Paths
- III. The Path of Accumulation: What Renunciation Is
- IV. The Path of Preparation and the Intellectual Understanding of Emptiness
  - A. Quality and characteristic
  - B. The “highest dharma”
- V. The Path of Seeing
  - A. “Non-duality” and the Direct Perception of Emptiness
  - B. “Subsequent Wisdom” and the Four Arya Truths
    - 1. The truth of suffering
    - 2. The truth of the origin of suffering
    - 3. The truth of the cessation of suffering
    - 4. The truth of the path to the end of suffering
  - C. The Cessations Obtained by the Direct Perception of Emptiness
- VI. The Path of Habituation and the Meaning of “Illusion”
- VII. Meditation Assignment

For fifteen minutes each day, reflect on the difference between the *quality* “car” and the *characteristic* “this car.”

## Class Four Outline

- I. The Bodhisattva Levels
- II. Creating a Buddha Paradise
- III. Purifying Karma
  - A. The four forces
    1. The force of foundation
    2. The force of destruction
    3. The force of restraining from the bad deed
    4. The force of applying an antidote.
- IV. The Four Kinds of Perfection of Wisdom
  - A. Natural perfection of wisdom
  - B. Textual perfection of wisdom
  - C. Path perfection of wisdom
  - D. Result perfection of wisdom
- V. The Two Extremes and the Middle Way
  - A. The extremes of existence and non-existence
  - B. The four “great facts”
    1. Nothing exists naturally
    2. But that doesn’t mean nothing exists at all
    3. Everything exists merely by convention
    4. But everything exists without existing naturally
- VI. How Empty Things Still Function
- VII. Meditation Assignment

## Dharma Essentials Course VI: The Diamond-Cutter Sutra

For fifteen minutes each day, do the four forces on one or another of your misdeeds. Spend a few minutes each day reflecting on emptiness as your antidote force.



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Dharma Essentials Course VI: The Diamond-Cutter Sutra

Reading One:  
About the Sutra; Emptiness and the Wish for Enlightenment

The following selections are taken from *Sunlight on the Path to Freedom*, written by Choney Lama Drakpa Shedrup (1675-1748) of Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery. The original root text of the sutra by Lord Buddha is included in darker type.

**In the language of India, this teaching is called the *Arya Vajra Chedaka Nama Prajnya Paramita Mahayana Sutra*. In the language of Tibet, it is called the *Pakpa Sherab Kyi Paroltu Chinpa Dorje Chupa Shejawa Tekpa Chenpoy Do*. [In the English language, it is called *An Exalted Sutra of the Greater Way on the Perfection of Wisdom, entitled "The Diamond-Cutter."*] ...**

Here is the significance of the name. The worldly god named Hundred Gifts, or Indra, wields a diamond bolt, which no physical object in the entire world can destroy. A mere touch of this bolt though can reduce mountains of stone and other such entities to piles of dust. The subject of this work is the actual perfection of wisdom; that is, the wisdom with which one perceives emptiness. The point of the title is that the antithesis of this wisdom can never affect it in the least; and that the wisdom, on the other hand, cuts from the root everything involved with the mental afflictions, and each and every suffering.

**I bow down to all Buddhas and bodhisattvas. ...**

**These words once I heard. The Conqueror was residing at Shravasti, in the park of Anapindada at the gardens of Prince Jetavan. In convocation with him were a great gathering of 1,250 monks who were listeners, as well as an immense number of bodhisattvas who were great beings...**

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In the morning then the Conqueror donned his monk's robes and outer shawl, took up his sage's bowl, and then entered the great city of Shravasti for requesting his meal. When he had collected the food, he returned from the city and then partook of it. When he had finished eating he put away his bowl and shawl, for he was a person who had given up the later meal. He washed his feet and then seated himself on a cushion that had been set forth for him. He crossed his legs in the full lotus position, straightened his back, and placed his thoughts into a state of contemplation. ...

And then a great number of monks advanced towards the Conqueror and, when they had reached his side, bowed and touched their heads to his feet. They circled him in respect three times, and then seated themselves to one way. At this point the junior monk Subhuti was with the same group of disciples, and took his seat with them. ...

And then the junior monk Subhuti rose from his cushion, and dropped the corner of his higher robe from one shoulder in a gesture of respect, and knelt with his right knee to the ground. He faced the Conqueror, joined his palms at his heart, and bowed. Then he beseeched the Conqueror in the following words: ...

O Conqueror, what of those who have entered well into the way of the bodhisattva? How shall they live? How shall they practice? How should they keep their thoughts? ...

This did Subhuti ask, and then ... the Conqueror bespoke the following words, in reply to Subhuti's question:

O Subhuti, it is good, it is good. O Subhuti, thus it is, and thus is it: the One Thus Gone has indeed done benefit to the bodhisattvas who are great beings, by granting them beneficial instruction. The One Thus Gone has indeed given clear direction to the bodhisattvas who are great beings, by granting them the clearest of instruction ...

And since it is so, o Subhuti, listen now to what I speak, and be sure that it stays firmly in your heart, for I shall reveal to you how it is that those who have entered well into the way of the bodhisattva should live, and how they should practice, and how they should keep their thoughts.

"Thus shall it be," replied the junior monk Subhuti, and he sat to listen as instructed by the Conqueror. The Conqueror too then began, with the following words ...

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This Subhuti, by the way, is only posing as a disciple: in reality he would appear to be an emanation of Manjushri himself. When the Teacher spoke the sutras on the Mother of the Buddhas, it was none other than Subhuti that he would appoint to give the opening presentations—and there is a special significance to why he did so ...

**Subhuti, this is how those who have entered well into the way of the bodhisattva must think to themselves as they feel the Wish to achieve enlightenment:**

**I will bring to nirvana the total amount of living beings, every single one numbered among the ranks of living kind: those who were born from eggs, those who were born from a womb, those who were born through warmth and moisture, those who were born miraculously, those who have a physical form, those with none, those with conceptions, those with none, and those with neither conceptions nor no conceptions. However many living beings there are, in whatever realms there may be—anyone at all labeled with the name of "living being"—all these will I bring to total nirvana, to the sphere beyond all grief, where none of the parts of the person are left at all. Yet even if I do manage to bring this limitless number of living beings to total nirvana, there will be no living being at all who was brought to total nirvana.**

What the root text is saying is: **"Subhuti, this is how those who have entered the way of the bodhisattva must think to themselves first as they feel the Wish to achieve enlightenment ...**

The point, in short, is that I speak of all living beings: of **anyone at all labeled with the name of "living being."** All these will I bring to total nirvana, to the sphere beyond all grief, where one no longer remains in either of the extremes—and **where none of the two kinds of obstacles, and none of the suffering heaps of parts to the person, are left at all.**

To summarize, these bodhisattvas develop the Wish for the sake of bringing all these different living beings to the state of that nirvana where one no longer remains in either of the extremes; to bring them to the dharma body, the essence body, of the Buddha. The reference here is either to someone who is feeling the

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Wish for the first time, or to someone who has already been able to develop it. The first of these two has been practicing the emotion of great compassion, where one wishes to protect all living beings from any of the three different kinds of suffering they may be experiencing. This has made him ready for his first experience of the state of mind where he intends to lead all sentient kind to the ultimate nirvana. The latter of the two, the one who has already developed the Wish, is re-focusing his mind on his mission, and thus increasing the intensity of his Wish...

The above description applies to the way in which a person thinks as he or she feels what we call the "deceptive" Wish for enlightenment. It refers both to the Wish in the form of a prayer and to the Wish in the form of actual activities. I would say as well that Lord Buddha's intention at this point is to refer primarily to the Wish as it occurs at the paths of accumulation and of preparation.

For a person to feel a Wish for enlightenment which is complete in every necessary characteristic, it is not sufficient simply to intend to lead all other sentient beings to the state of Buddhahood. Rather, you must have the desire that you yourself reach this state as well. This is exactly why Maitreya stated that "The Wish for enlightenment consists of the intention to reach total enlightenment for the sake of others." The part about "the sake of others" is meant to indicate that you must intend to lead other beings to nirvana, whereas the part about the "intention to reach total enlightenment" means that you must intend to reach perfect Buddhahood yourself.

Lord Buddha wants us to understand that this Wish for enlightenment must be imbued with that correct view wherein you perceive that nothing has a self-nature. This is why He states that we must develop a Wish for enlightenment where we intend to lead **this limitless number** of living beings to the nirvana beyond both extremes, but where at the same time we realize that, **even if we do manage to bring them to this total nirvana, there will be no living being at all** who achieved it, and who also existed ultimately.

The Tibetan term for "nirvana" means "passing beyond sorrow." The "sorrow" mentioned here refers to the pair of karma and mental afflictions, as well as to suffering. The nirvana to which you wish to bring beings then refers to a state of escaping from the combination of karma and bad thoughts, along with suffering: it means to go beyond them. This is why the unusual Tibetan verb here refers not only to nirvana, but to the act of *bringing* someone to nirvana as well. The root text at this point is meant to indicate that ordinary beings can possess something that approximates the ultimate Wish for enlightenment. It is also indicating the

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existence of the actual ultimate Wish for enlightenment, which only realized beings possess.

At this juncture in his commentary, Master Kamalashila presents a great deal of explanation concerning the correct view of reality. He does so because he realizes that this background is very important for a proper understanding of the remainder of the root text, which is all spoken relative to the correct view of emptiness. If I did the same here in my own commentary I fear it would become too long for the reader, and so I will cover some of these points now, but only in the very briefest way, just to give you a taste.

Now each and every existing object, be it part of the afflicted part of existence or part of the pure side, is established as existing only by virtue of terms. If one performs an analysis with reasoning which examines an object in an ultimate sense, no object can bear such examination, and we fail to locate what we gave our label. Here the thing we deny is easier to deny if we can identify it clearly. As such I will speak a bit about what this thing we deny is like.

Generally speaking there are a great number of different positions that exist about what the object we deny exactly is. Here though I will give my explanation according to the position of the Consequence section of the Middle Way school...

There is a metaphor used to describe how all existing things are labeled with our concepts. When you put a rope with a checkered pattern on it in a dark corner, some people might get the impression that it's a snake. The truth at this point though is that nothing about the rope is a snake: neither the rope as a whole, nor the parts of the rope. Nonetheless the person thinks of the rope as a snake, and this snake is an example of something which only makes its appearance as something labeled with a concept.

In the same way, the heaps of parts that make us up serve as a basis for us to get the impression "This is me." There is nothing at all about these heaps as a whole, nor their continuation over time, nor their separate components, that we could establish as being an actual representation of "me." At the same time though there is nothing else, nothing essentially separate from these heaps of parts to ourselves, that we could consider an actual representation of "me" either. As such, this "me" is merely something labeled upon the heaps of parts that make us up; there is nothing which exists by its own essence...

A water pitcher is something labeled on its spout and base and other parts; the spout and base and such in turn are labeled on their parts and whole; and so

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on—the same pattern applies to all physical objects. Mental things too are labeled on mental events of successive moments, and through the objects towards which they function, and so on. Even uncaused phenomena are labeled upon the respective bases that take their labels. All this I have covered before, in other writings.

Given the above, there does not exist anything which does not occur in dependence, or which is not labeled through a dependent relationship. Therefore the point at which we can say something is the object denied by our search for a hypothetical self-existent thing would be any time that thing existed without having been labeled through a dependent relationship. ...

In short, when you search for the thing given the name of "self" or "me" you will never find anything; despite this, the fact that things can do something is completely right and proper, in the sense of an illusion, or magic. And this fact applies to each and every existing thing there is. ...

All this is true as well for objects like the perfection of giving and so on: they exist only through being labeled with a term, and are empty of any natural existence. Seeking to make us realize how necessary it is to understand this fact, Lord Buddha makes statements like "Perform the act of giving without believing in any object at all."

This is the most important thing for us to learn: so long as we are still not free of the chains of grasping to things as truly existing, and so long as we have yet to grasp the meaning of emptiness, then we will never be able to achieve freedom, even if the Buddha should appear himself and try to lead us there. ...

**Why is it so? Because, Subhuti, if a bodhisattva were to conceive of someone as a living being, then we could never call him a "bodhisattva."**

Here we return to where we left off in the root text. One may ask, "**Why is it so?** What reason is there for saying that we should develop a Wish for enlightenment, while still understanding that there is no truly existing sentient being at all who ever achieves it?" Lord Buddha first calls **Subhuti** by name, and then explains that **we could never call** any particular bodhisattva a "**bodhisattva** who had realized the meaning of no-self-nature" **if this bodhisattva were to conceive of** any living being **as a living being** who existed truly.

Reading Two:

Emptiness and the Bodies of a Buddha; Emptiness and Karma

The following selections are taken from *Sunlight on the Path to Freedom*, written by Choney Lama Drakpa Shedrup (1675-1748) of Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery. The original root text of the sutra by Lord Buddha is included in darker type.

**Why is that? Think, o Subhuti, of the mountains of merit collected by any bodhisattva who performs the act of giving without staying. This merit, o Subhuti, is not something that you could easily ever measure.**

One would have to admit that a person locked in the chains of grasping to some true existence can collect a great amount of merit through acts of giving and the like. But suppose a person is able to practice giving and the rest after he has freed himself from these same chains. His merit then is certain to be ever much greater. And it is to emphasize this point that the Buddha says,

**Why is that? Think, o Subhuti, of the mountains of merit collected by any bodhisattva who performs the act of giving without staying. This merit is not something whose limit you could easily ever measure;** in fact, it would be quite difficult to measure.

**O Subhuti, what do you think? Would it be easy to measure the space to the east of us?**

And Subhuti replied,

**O Conqueror, it would not.**

The Conqueror bespoke:

**And just so, would it be easy to measure the space to the south of us, or to the north of us, or above us, or below us, or in any of the ordinal directions from us? Would it be easy to measure the space to any of the ten directions from where we now stand?**

And Subhuti replied,

**O Conqueror, it would not.**

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The Conqueror bespoke:

And just so, o Subhuti, it would be no easy thing to measure the mountains of merit collected by any bodhisattva who performs the act of giving without staying ...

O Subhuti, what do you think? Should we consider someone to be the One Thus Gone because he possesses the totally exquisite marks on a Buddha's body?

And Subhuti replied,

O Conqueror, we should not. We should not consider someone the One Thus Gone because he possesses the totally exquisite marks on a Buddha's body. And why not? Because when the One Thus Gone himself described the totally exquisite marks on a Buddha's body, he stated at the same time that they were impossible.

And then the Conqueror spoke to the junior monk Subhuti again, as follows:

The merit of acts such as giving and the rest bring us the physical body of a Buddha, and this physical body is adorned with various marks and signs. The words "**Subhuti, what do you think?**" mean "Subhuti, turn your mind to this subject, and think about how it could be—contemplate upon it."

The Buddha then asks Subhuti, "Assume for a minute that **someone possessed the totally exquisite marks** and signs, or the two physical bodies, of the One Thus Gone. Would that in itself **require us to consider him**—that is, assert that he is—**the One Thus Gone?** What do you think?"

**Subhuti replies** to the Buddha with the words starting off from, "**We should not** consider him so." At this point we have to draw a slight distinction. One should not necessarily consider someone the One Thus Gone simply **because he possesses the totally exquisite marks** and signs. "**And why not?**" says Subhuti. He answers himself by saying, "**Because when the One Thus Gone himself described the totally exquisite marks and signs on a Buddha's body, he stated at the same time that they** existed deceptively, in the way of an illusion. Signs and marks of this kind that existed ultimately, however, would be a complete **impossibility.**"

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**O Subhuti, what do you think? The totally exquisite marks on a Buddha's body, as such, are deceptive. The totally exquisite marks on a Buddha's body are also not deceptive, but only insofar as they do not exist. Thus you should see the One Thus Gone as having no marks, no marks at all.**

**Thus did the Conqueror speak. And then the junior monk Subhuti replied to the Conqueror, as follows:**

The marks and signs on the physical body of the Buddha are like an image drawn on a piece of paper: they are not the real thing—they exist in a deceptive manner, as things that occur when all of their causes have gathered together. They do not exist as something with a true nature. To indicate this fact, Lord Buddha says to Subhuti, "Insofar as **the totally exquisite marks on a Buddha's body exist, as such they are deceptive.**

"Just what," you may ask, "is meant by the word **deceptive?**" **The totally exquisite marks and signs on a Buddha's body are also not deceptive, and true, but only insofar as they do not exist truly. Thus you should see the One Thus Gone as having no marks, no marks to indicate his nature, at all.**

The section here helps to prevent us from falling into either one of the two extremes. The physical body of the Buddha and its various marks and signs do exist—albeit in a deceptive way, in a false or empty way—and this fact keeps us from the extreme of denying the existence of something which actually does exist.

The text though also states that there exist no marks, and no marks that would indicate any nature, which also exist truly. This fact keeps us from the extreme of asserting the existence of something which actually does not exist. The former of these two [marks] is referring to the physical body of a Buddha. The latter is referring to the dharma body, and chiefly to the essence body...

**The Conqueror bespoke:**

**O Subhuti, what do you think? Suppose some son or daughter of noble family were to take all the planets of this great world system, a system with a thousand of a thousand of a thousand planets, and fill them all up**

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**with the seven kinds of precious substances, and offer them to someone. Would that son or daughter of noble family create many great mountains of merit from such a deed?**

With this next section of the sutra, Lord Buddha wishes to demonstrate a certain fact. In the sections above we have spoken about the act of becoming enlightened, and of teaching the dharma, and so on. Neither these, nor any other object in the universe, exists ultimately. Nonetheless, they do exist nominally. As such, one would have to admit that anyone who performs an act of giving does acquire great merit thereby. Yet anyone who carries out the process of learning, or contemplating, or meditating upon this teaching acquires infinitely greater merit...

**And Subhuti replied,**

**O Conqueror, many would it be. O Conqueror, it would be many. This son or daughter of noble family would indeed create many great mountains of merit from such a deed. And why so? Because, o Conqueror, these same great mountains of merit are great mountains of merit that could never exist. And for this very reason do the Ones Thus Gone speak of "great mountains of merit, great mountains of merit."**

In response, **Subhuti replies:**

**It would be many** great mountains of merit—and these great mountains of merit are mountains of merit that we could establish as existing only in name, only in the way that a dream or an illusion exists: **these same great mountains of merit though could never exist** as mountains that existed ultimately. **The Ones Thus Gone** as well **speak** in a nominal sense of **"great mountains of merit, great mountains of merit"**—applying the name to them.

This section is meant to demonstrate a number of different points. Black and white deeds that you have committed before now, and which you are going to commit later, are such that the ones in the past have stopped, and the ones in the future are yet to come. Therefore they are non-existent, but we have to agree that, generally speaking, they exist. We also have to agree that they are connected to

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the mind stream of the person who committed them, and that they produce their appropriate consequences for this person. These and other difficult issues are raised in the words above.

**And the Conqueror bespoke:**

**O Subhuti, suppose some son or daughter of noble family were to take all the planets of this great world system, a system with a thousand of a thousand of a thousand planets, and fill them all up with the seven kinds of precious substances, and offer them to someone. Suppose on the other hand that one of them held but a single verse of four lines from this particular dharma, and explained it to others, and taught it correctly. By doing the latter, this person would create many more great mountains of merit than with the former: they would be countless, and beyond all estimation...**

**Why is it so? Because, Subhuti, this is where the matchless and totally perfect enlightenment of the Ones Thus Gone, the Destroyers of the Foe, the Totally Enlightened Buddhas, comes from. It is from this as well that the Buddhas, the Conquerors, are born.**

The reason for this is as follows. The act of giving someone the dharma is of much more benefit than the act of giving material things. Not only that, but **the enlightenment of the totally enlightened Buddhas comes from**—is achieved through—the perfection of wisdom: the realization of emptiness which forms the subject matter of this text. **It is from putting this into practice as well that the Buddhas, the Conquerors, are born...**

Reading Three:

Emptiness and the Destruction of Mental Afflictions: Emptiness  
and Paradise; Emptiness and Purification

The following selections are taken from *Sunlight on the Path to Freedom*, written by Choney Lama Drakpa Shedrup (1675-1748) of Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery. The original root text of the sutra by Lord Buddha is included in darker type.

**O Conqueror, I declare that the Ones Thus Gone—those Destroyers of the Foe who are the Totally Enlightened Buddhas—reside in the highest of all those states that are free of the mental afflictions. I am, o Conqueror, a person who is free of desire; I am a foe destroyer.**

But I do not, o Conqueror, think to myself, "I am a foe destroyer." For suppose, o Conqueror, that I did think to myself, "I have attained this very state, the state of a foe destroyer." If I did think this way, then the One Thus Gone could never have given me the final prediction: he could never have said: "O son of noble family, o Subhuti, you will reach the highest of all those states that are free of the mental afflictions. Because you stay in no state at all, you have reached the state free of mental afflictions; you have reached what we call the 'state free of mental afflictions.'

Then Subhuti explains, "I am, nominally speaking, a foe destroyer. But it is also true that I do not, while grasping to some true existence, think to myself, "I am a foe destroyer." If I did grasp to it this way then I would start to have mental afflictions, and then I would stop being a foe destroyer. I am a foe destroyer, and the Conqueror has given me the final prediction: he has told me, "Nominally speaking Subhuti, son of noble family, you will reach the highest of all those states that are free of the mental afflictions." In an ultimate sense though, because I stay in no state at all, he could never have given me the final prediction, he could never have said, "O son of noble family, o Subhuti, you will reach the state free of mental afflictions." This is because, ultimately speaking, there does not even exist any place to stay, no thing to make one stay there, nor even anyone who stays there. All this is consistent with the position of the

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Consequence school, which says that grasping to some true existence is a mental affliction. ...

**Why is it so? Because, o Subhuti, there was a time when the King of Kalingka was cutting off the larger limbs, and smaller appendages, of my body. At that moment there came into my mind no conception of a self, nor of a sentient being, nor of a living being, nor of a person—I had no conception at all. But neither did I not have any conception. ...**

**At that moment** I practiced patience, keeping my mind on an understanding of the lack of true existence to each of the three elements to the act of patience. As I focussed on the "me" which exists nominally, **there came into my mind no conception** where I held any belief in some truly existing "me": and so I had no conception of anything from a truly existing "self" up to a truly existing "person."

At that moment I **had no conception at all** of any such conception that something was existing truly. At the same time though it was **neither** as if I **had no** other, nominal **conceptions** at all. What Subhuti is saying here is the following. I did have the thought that I would have to keep my patience: I did have the thought to take the pain on willingly, and not to be upset about the harm being done to me. And I did have the kind of conception where I reconfirmed my knowledge of how I had perceived that no existing object has any true existence.

**Why is it so? Suppose, o Subhuti, that at that moment any conception of a self had come into my mind. Then the thought to harm someone would have come into my mind as well.**

**The conception of some sentient being, and the conception of some living being, and the conception of person, would have come into my mind. And because of that, the thought to harm someone would have come into my mind as well.**

Here is the reason **why it is so. Suppose that at that moment any conception of a self**, where I thought of "me" as existing in an ultimate way, **had come into my mind**. Or suppose any of the other conceptions mentioned had come into my mind. **Then the thought to harm someone would have come into my mind as well;** but the fact is that it did not. ...

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**O Subhuti, any son or daughter of noble family who takes up a sutra like this, or who holds it, or reads it, or comprehends it fully, will suffer. They will suffer intensely.**

Here in a statement over and above the one before, Lord Buddha says,

**O Subhuti, consider any son or daughter of noble family who takes up this sutra,** who holds it in their hands, and so on—any living being who does these things and then puts the meaning of the sutra into practice. It is entirely possible that such a person could experience some pain, that they could **suffer, and suffer intensely**, through various kinds of illness, or conflict with others, or being criticized, or chained, or beaten, or anything of the like. It could happen, but it would be no great problem, because...

**Why is it so? Because, o Subhuti, such beings are purifying non-virtuous karma from the entire string of their previous lives, karma that would have taken them to the three lower realms. As they purify this karma, it causes them to suffer here in this life. As such they will succeed in cleaning away the karma of these non-virtuous deeds of their previous lifetimes, and they will as well achieve the enlightenment of a Buddha.**

For what reason is it so? **Because such beings are purifying great non-virtuous karma** that they have committed both in this life and in their lifetimes past—karma so serious that **it would normally have taken them to the three lower realms.** As such, the results of all these deeds are ripening here **in this very life.** Thus one is **suffering** pain, and by force of this suffering he or she is "**cleaning away**"—that is, purifying—all of this non-virtuous **karma.** As such, one will quickly **achieve the enlightenment of a Buddha.**

The force of an antidote action consisting of making great efforts in the perfection of wisdom is destroying the grasping to some self-existence, the very root of all non-virtuous deeds. This is why the text goes on to say that one will achieve freedom and the state of omniscience. And since the text does say this, then needless to say one could destroy the karma that is leading you to a birth in the lower realms. ...

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Suppose for example that a seed is planted, but is then deprived completely of water, or fertilizer, or warmth, or the rest. Then it would never sprout.

Here the case is the same. If you are able to eliminate grasping to some self-nature, then none of the karmas you have collected, regardless of how many there are, can ever ripen forth. This is because their companion, the mental afflictions, are absent...

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Reading Four:

Emptiness and the Perfection of Wisdom; How They Prevent the Two Extremes; How Empty Things Still Work; The Verse of Impermanence and Emptiness

The root text is found in bold in the translation. The commentary is by Choney Lama Drakpa Shedrup (1675-1748) of Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery.

**The junior monk Subhuti spoke the following words, with great respect, to the Conqueror:**

**O Conqueror, what is the name of this particular kind of Dharma? How are we to consider it?**

**And the Conqueror bespoke the following to the junior monk Subhuti:**

**O Subhuti, this particular kind of Dharma is known as the "perfection of wisdom," and that is how you should consider it. ...**

Here the name of the perfection of wisdom is meant to represent all the other perfections as well.

**Why is it so? Because, o Subhuti, that same perfection of wisdom spoken by the Ones Thus Gone is a perfection of wisdom that doesn't even exist. And this is why we call it the "perfection of wisdom."**

That same perfection of wisdom spoken by the Ones Thus Gone to be the "perfection of wisdom" is a perfection of wisdom that doesn't even exist as a perfection of wisdom in an ultimate sense. And this is why we can, in a nominal sense, label it the "perfection of wisdom." All these kinds of explanations, where they state that things do not exist ultimately but do exist nominally, illustrate the path of the middle way, wherein the two truths are accepted as an inseparable unity, which functions to prevent completely the two extremes. They illustrate, in short, how the quality of being empty of any natural existence, and the quality of existing nominally, coexist with each other as simultaneous attributes of any single object.

Here is a bit on the literal meaning of the expression "perfection," or "gone to the other side." This term connotes either that thing which takes you to the other side

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of the ocean of cyclic life, or else the state of having already reached that other side. Taken the former way, the expression refers the perfection of wisdom as it exists on the paths of those who are still learning [that is, non-Buddhas]. Taken the latter way, it refers to the perfection of wisdom which exists at the level of a Buddha, and is equivalent to the knowledge of all objects.

If we go beyond its strictest sense, there are many different usages of the term "perfection of wisdom": it can refer to the "natural," or the "textual," or the "path," or the "resulting" perfection of wisdom. It's important to be able to distinguish between all these, but it would be beyond the scope of this commentary for me to discuss them here. To put it briefly, what was **spoken** of as the "**perfection of wisdom**" refers to that knowledge which is imbued with the wish to attain enlightenment, and which perceives emptiness. **It is this same perfection of wisdom** which acts as an extraordinary kind of method for taking the first five perfections—those of giving and the rest—and leading them up to the point of enlightenment. I will speak further of this later. ...

The following selection is from the 18th Chapter of the *Commentary on the Three Principal Paths*, written by Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941).

**XVIII. A Unique Teaching of the "Implication" School**

The fifth and final section in our explanation of correct view concerns a unique teaching followed by the "Implication" group of the Middle Way school. This instruction is contained in the following verse of the root text.

(13)

**In addition, the appearance prevents the existence  
extreme; Emptiness that of non-existence, and if You see  
how emptiness shows in cause and effect You'll never be  
stolen off by extreme views.**

Now all the schools except for the members of the "Implication" group hold that an understanding of the appearance of things prevents you from falling into what we call the "extreme of thinking things do not exist," while an understanding of emptiness prevents you from falling into what is known as the "extreme of thinking things do exist."

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The position of the Implication group though is that no particular object you can choose has any true existence, aside from merely appearing this way; and understanding this prevents you from going to the extreme of thinking things exist—that is, exist in an ultimate way. And because this mere appearance itself cannot exist on its own, an understanding of emptiness prevents your falling into the extreme of thinking things do not exist—that is, do not exist in a conventional way.

Once something is interdependent there is no possibility for it to be anything else but something which does not exist naturally—something which cannot stand on its own. This is because it must then occur in dependence on the collection of parts which serve as the basis that receives our label. Look at the example of some feeble old man, unable to rise from his chair by himself, who must seek some other support to get up—he cannot stand on his own. Here it's a similar case: no object can stand on its own, no object can exist just naturally, so long as it must depend on any other factor.

Generally speaking, there are a great number of logical proofs that can be used when you want to establish the meaning of no self-nature. There is one though which is like the king of them all, and this is it: the "proof through interdependence." Let's say we put forth this argument to someone, and we say:

Consider a sprout.  
It cannot exist truly,  
For it is interdependent.

Members of certain non-Buddhist schools will answer "I disagree with your reason," which is to say, "Sprouts are not interdependent." This they must say because they believe that every object in the universe is a manifestation of some primeval One.

The majority of the earlier Tibetan Buddhists fell into the extreme that we call "thinking things have stopped," for they would say that if something did not exist truly it could not exist at all. The schools from the Mind-Only on down, the group of schools known collectively as the "Functionalists," all fall into the extreme of "thinking things are permanent," for they cannot explain interdependence if they accept that nothing exists naturally. Members of the "Independent" group within the Middle Way school accept the idea of interdependence, but do not agree that if something is interdependent it cannot "exist by definition." This too is tantamount to the extreme of thinking things are permanent.

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The real sages of the Middle Way school make a fourfold distinction: they say that nothing exists naturally, but not that nothing exists at all; everything exists merely by convention, but everything exists without existing naturally. The point of error for the Functionalists and those other schools is their failure to distinguish between these four: two kinds of "nothing exists" and two kinds of "everything exists."

According to the Implication system, both extremes--thinking things are permanent and thinking things have stopped--can be prevented with a single logical statement: "It cannot exist truly, because it is interdependent." The first part of the statement keeps us from the extreme of thinking things are permanent; the second, from the extreme of thinking things have stopped.

My own precious teacher, Choney Lama, was always saying that both parts of the statement *each* prevent *both* of the extremes--permanence and stopping. He would explain this as follows: the literal sense of the statement's first part, "It cannot exist truly," serves to prevent the extreme of thinking things are permanent. The implication of saying that something cannot exist "truly" though is to say that, more generally, it is not non-existent; this then disallows the extreme of thinking that things have stopped. And this description, he would say, was enough for us to figure out for ourselves the process for the second part of the statement: "... because it is interdependent."

With this understanding we can see why the glorious Chandrakirti stated:

Therefore this proof employing interdependence  
Cuts the net of every mistaken view.

So we've shown that no object in the universe exists truly; we've given "because it's interdependent" as our reason for saying so; and we've demonstrated that these two facts can prevent one from falling into either extreme. This too is why we see statements like the following, from *Root Wisdom*:

Everything is right for any thing  
For which the state of emptiness is right.

Or the well-known sutra lines:

Form is emptiness,  
Emptiness form.

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These last lines by the way are stated to show that interdependence is itself empty, and emptiness itself interdependent. It helps your understanding of this point if you take the same pattern and read it as

I am emptiness,  
Emptiness me.

In short, concluded our Lama, the laws of cause and effect are all totally proper for any entity which is empty of any natural existence. If you can just keep yourself from falling into the two extremes, you will make no great other blunders in your effort to develop correct view. ...

The following selections are taken from *Sunlight on the Path to Freedom*, written by Choney Lama Drakpa Shedrup (1675-1748) of Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery. The original root text of the sutra by Lord Buddha is included in darker type.

**It is thus. Any living beings who receive an explanation of this sutra and who are not made afraid, and are not frightened, and who do not become frightened, are truly wondrous.**

Here is the reason. In future days, **certain living beings will receive**, they will listen to, **an explanation** of the meaning of the words of **this sutra**. And yet **they will not be made afraid, and they will not be frightened, and they will not become** extremely **frightened**, by any such thought as: "If this is so, and if nothing at all exists in a true way, then all the ways in which things like karma and its consequences work cannot be right, and so really nothing at all can work."

Rather they will find a greater belief, an even greater faith, in all these objects. And beings like this will be **truly wondrous**.

If things did exist in a true way, then it would be improper to say that they ever changed. And then it would be improper, it would never be right, to describe all the workings of things like karma and its consequences.

The way in which all things work, and nirvana itself, and everything else are all quite proper. And none of these objects has any true existence, none of them has any nature of their own. How all this can be is described by Lord Tsongkapa in his *Praise from Interdependence*:

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Reaching the state of nirvana could never occur,  
And elaborations too could never be stopped,  
If objects had any nature of their own, because  
A nature could not be stopped, You stated.

He also says,

Since things are empty of any nature  
And the way things work is right,  
There is no contradiction between them.  
Those who see things the opposite  
Think nothing can work with emptiness...

**Why is it so? Because, o Subhuti, the One Thus Gone now speaks to you the holy perfection of wisdom; and the holy perfection which the One Thus Gone now speaks to you is the same perfection of wisdom which Conquering Buddhas beyond any number to count have spoken as well. And this is why we can call it the "holy perfection of wisdom."**

Here is the reason **why** it will be so wondrous. **The holy**, or highest, **perfection of wisdom** – a work which teaches how no object exists through any nature of its own – **is now being spoken to you** by myself, **by the One Thus Gone**. And **this is the same perfection of wisdom which has been spoken** in the past by **Conquering Buddhas** who are **beyond any number to count**.

Lord Buddha makes this statement because he wants his listeners to consider what he has just said above as something authoritative. What he has just said, remember, is that nothing involved with cause and effect has any nature of its own. **And this reason is why we can call it the "holy perfection of wisdom."**...

**See anything  
Brought about by causes  
As like a star,  
An obstruction of the eye,  
A lamp, an illusion,  
The dew, or a bubble;**

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**A dream, or lightning,  
Or else a cloud.**

Next comes a concluding summary, which shows how all **things brought about by causes** are empty of any nature of their own, and are also impermanent. All this is contained in the verse about the "star, an obstruction of the eye, a lamp," and the rest.

We could take for example the five heaps—physical form and the rest—or any such objects. All these can be described in the following metaphors.

Stars appear at night, and then by day they no longer appear. The parts to a person and other things brought about by causes are just the same. If a person's mind is full of the darkness of ignorance, then they appear to exist in an ultimate sense. [Correcting an error in Tibetan text, *stong* for *snang*.] Suppose though that the sun rises—the sun of the wisdom which perceives that nothing exists truly. Then these objects no longer appear in an ultimate sense. As such we should see these things **as being like a star**.

Suppose your **eyes** are blocked by some **obstruction** in them—by particles of dust or something of the like. The thing that you're trying to look at then doesn't look the way it really is; rather, you see it some other way. It's just the same with the eye of the mind when it's blocked by the obstruction of ignorance. Things brought about by causes then appear to this mind as something other than what they are.

The flame of a butter **lamp**, supported by a thin plant wick, flares and then quickly dies out. Caused things, each supported their various causes and conditions, also go through a continuous process of rising and quickly dying out.

**An illusion** is something that looks different than what is actually there. Things brought about by causes also appear to exist truly, to a mistaken state of mind.

**Dew** vanishes quickly; things with causes are the same—they die away speedily, without lasting even into the second instant of their existence.

**Bubbles** pop up at random, because some water is stirred up or something of the like, and then they burst and disappear just as suddenly. Caused things work the same way: when the various conditions all come together, they pop up suddenly, and then they die out just as suddenly.

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**Dreams** are an example of a misperception, which is due to the affects of sleep on the mind. Things brought about by causes as well are misapprehended, they seem to exist truly, to the mind which is affected by ignorance.

**Lightning** flashes and dies out quickly. Caused things too rise and die out quickly, depending on the conditions that assemble to bring them about.

**Clouds** are something that gather and fade in the sky, depending on the wishes of the serpent-beings and such. Things brought about by causes are the same; depending on the influence of karma which is either communal or not, they rise or die out.

Each of the metaphors above is also meant to represent how no object brought about by causes has any true existence.

The explanation given here applies to things brought about by causes as an entire group. A more restricted application is quoted from sutra by Master Nagarjuna:

The physical form is like a bubble that forms,  
And the feelings resemble the froth of a wave;  
Discrimination is just a mirage,  
And the other factors like empty cane;  
Awareness is similar to an illusion—  
Thus did the Cousin of the Sun speak.

Master Kamalashila relates the final three metaphors to the three times; this is a little different from the explanation here, but the two are in no way contradictory.

To put it briefly, Lord Buddha is telling us that we should "See that each and every thing brought about by causes is impermanent, and is empty of any nature of its own, all just like the nine examples given above." We should also consider these lines as indicating both the lack of self to the person, and the lack of self to phenomena.