



THE ASIAN CLASSICS
INSTITUTE

15

WHAT THE BUDDHA REALLY MEANT
Level 2 of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajna Paramita*)

DHARMA ESSENTIALS





Class One Outline

- I. Introduction to the Dharma Essentials Series and to this Course
- II. Introduction to the Text
 - A. Primary text: *Essence of Eloquence, a Classical Commentary on Distinguishing between the Figurative and the Literal*, by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419)
 - B. Subject matter: Mind Only and Middle Way Schools of Buddhism
- III. The Literal and Figurative: How to Interpret the Words of the Buddha
 - A. The three levels of literal and figurative
 - B. How the principal of “literal and figurative” can be useful in our daily lives
- IV. The Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma and the Bodhisattva’s Question
- V. The Three Attributes of the Mind Only School
 - A. Constructs
 - B. Dependent things
 - C. Totality
- VI. What the Buddha Meant When He Said “Nothing Has Any Nature of Its Own”
 - A. Lack of any definitive nature
 - B. Lack of growing
 - C. Lack of any nature of being ultimate
- VII. The Three Illustrations for the Three Lacks of a Self Nature

VIII. Meditation Assignment

Fifteen minutes a day on why it is important to know when to take the words of our teachers literally or figuratively, and how we can judge the difference. Review also what the purpose might be for speaking figuratively rather than literally.

Class Two Outline

- I. Review of the Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma and the Bodhisattva's Question
- II. The Second Turning of the Wheel and the Five Statements about Existing Things
 - A. Nothing that exists has any nature of its own
 - B. Nothing that exists ever grows
 - C. Nothing that exists ever stops
 - D. All existing things are extinct, and have been so from the very beginning
 - E. All existing things have, by their very nature, gone completely beyond the state of grief
 - F. How the Mind Only school understands the five statements
- III. How Constructs Relate to Dependent Things
 - A. Dependent things are the "arena" in which the constructing state of mind acts
 - B. Dependent things are the object towards which the attribute of constructs is applied
 - C. Dependent things display the typical features of a factor, or a changing thing
- IV. The Interrelations Between the Three Attributes
- V. Two Ways in Which Something Could Be "Empty" and Emptiness in the Mind Only school
- VI. Meditation Assignment

Fifteen minutes a day on how we can overlay our "constructs" on to "dependent things." Pick a difficult person in your life and meditate on whether your "construct" of that person is, in fact, who he or she really is.

Class Three Outline

- I. The Three Turnings of the Wheel of Dharma
 - A. When, where, for whom, their basic subject matter, and what their view was on whether things have a nature of their own or not
 - B. Which was “literal” and which “figurative” according to the Mind Only and Middle Way schools
- II. What “Lower Way” and “Higher Way” Really Mean
- III. What the Buddha Meant When He Said That Things Have a “Self-Nature”
- IV. The Two Extremes of “Concocting” and “Discounting”
 - A. According to Mind Only school
 - B. According to Middle Way school
- V. Ultimate and Deceptive Reality
 - A. According to Middle Way school
 - B. According to Mind Only school
- VI. The Existence of External Objects and the Meaning of “Mind Only”
- VII. Meditation Assignment

Fifteen minutes a day on what the Middle Way school means by “concocting” and “discounting.” Reflect on what the “middle” is in the name “Middle Way school.”

Class Four Outline

- I. The Three Levels of Selflessness according to the Independent Group of the Middle Way School
- II. The “Gross Lack of a Self”
- III. The Selflessness Realized by Those on the “Listener” Track
- IV. The Selflessness Realized by Those on the “Self-Made Buddha” Track
- V. The Selflessness Realized by Those on the “Bodhisattva” Track
- VI. The Three “Tracks,” Three “Scopes,” and Three “Ways”
- VII. How Things Exist According to the Consequence Section of the Middle Way School
- VIII. Emptiness, Projection, and Ethics
- IX. Emptiness and the Real Goal of Buddhism
- X. Meditation Assignment

Fifteen minutes a day on the example of the three beings and the glass of liquid, reflecting on how karma forces us to see and experience the world the way we do.



The Asian Classics Institute

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Level Two of the Perfection of Wisdom (*Prajna Paramita*)

Reading One:

The readings selected are taken from the *Essence of Eloquence, a Classical Commentary on Distinguishing between the Figurative and the Literal*, by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

...Now the *Sutra Requested by the Realized Being Rashtrapala* says,

Different beings must wander here
Because they have no knowledge
Of the ways of emptiness,
Of peace, and of things that never began.
Those with compassion use skillful means
And millions of different reasonings
To bring them into it.

What these lines are saying is that the real nature of all things is something which is extremely difficult to perceive; and that if one fails to perceive it, one can never be freed from the circle of suffering. Our compassionate Teacher has seen these things clearly, and thus undertakes to bring beings on to a grasp of this real nature, using a great many skillful means, and a great many different types of reasoning.

For this reason, those with the capacity of insight should make great efforts in the various means of coming to a grasp of just what the real nature of things is. This, in turn, depends upon the ability to distinguish between what is figurative and what is literal among that highest of all spoken words—the speech of the victorious Buddhas.

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading One

The distinction between these two is not something that words themselves have the power to draw, saying "This part is figurative, and this part is literal." Otherwise it would have been a useless exercise for the great innovators to compose commentaries exploring the true intent of the teachings, undertaking to make distinctions between what was figurative and what was literal. Neither would there have been spoken, in that highest of spoken words itself, so many conflicting versions of how we decide what is figurative and what is literal.

And look finally at the fact that—even if a scripture does say that "This is this way, and that is that way"—this still does not enable us to decide that it really is. If it is thus the case, throughout the teachings in general, that we cannot draw any unquestionable conclusions from such statements, then why should it be true—in this more particular case—that we can conclusively establish the distinction between the figurative and the literal from any particular reference that says, "This is the one, and this the other"?

Therefore we must go about our search for the true intent of the teachings by following the two great innovators—those who the scriptures foretold would be able to draw the distinction between the figurative and the literal. It is they who have unraveled for us the idea behind the figurative and the literal; it is they who have used true reasoning to establish, in a perfect way, those teachings which are literal—by finding proofs against any attempt to interpret them in some other light; and proofs in support of their being something literal, not something figurative, not something we could say refers to something else. In the end, we must learn to make this distinction through immaculate reasoning alone.

And this is true because anyone who espouses some philosophical system that contradicts reason could never be called a perfectly credible person; and because the very nature of things is, moreover, something that must be established by reason grounded in accurate perception.

Lord Buddha himself saw the truth of this highest form of meaning, and thus spoke the following:

Whether you are a monk or some other thinker,
You must accept my words only after you've finished
A careful examination of them, testing them like gold—
In the fire, by cutting, and using the touchstone too.

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading One

And so it is that we proceed, in our task of distinguishing between the figurative and the literal, in two steps, presenting first the ideas of the side that uses the *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras* to help draw this distinction, and secondly the ideas of the side that uses the *Sutra Taught at the Request of Never-Ending Wisdom* to do so....

We find the following in the *Commentary on the True Intent*:

O Conqueror, you have in many of your presentations made statements that the heaps have some definitive characteristics of their own. You have also spoken of their characteristic of beginning, and their characteristic of being destroyed, and of eliminating and comprehending.

You also stated that the way in which the heaps exist is the same for the doors of sense, and for things that occur through interdependence, and for everything up to the different kinds of sustenance.

The question continues in the same pattern through the truths:

...And you stated that these truths were something that had definitive characteristics of their own, and were something which we should comprehend, and something we should eliminate, and something to bring about, and something to practice. And then you spoke of the categories as having some definitive characteristics of their own, and so too did you speak of the various categories, and the many categories, and of eliminating and comprehending.

The question turns too through the different groups among the 37 qualities of enlightenment:

...You spoke too of these qualities as having some definitive characteristics of their own, and you spoke of their nature of being inconsistent, and of being an antidote, and of the growth of what has not grown, and of the staying of what has grown, and of there being no separation, and of coming back, and of increasing, and of spreading.

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading One

And you said, O Conqueror, that no existing thing could have any nature of its own; you said that no existing thing ever began, or stopped; you said that they were, from the very beginning, in a state of peace; you said that they were, by nature, something that was completely beyond all grief.

What was it, O Conquering One, that you were truly thinking of when you said that no existing thing could have any nature of its own, and said that no existing thing ever began, or stopped; when you said that they were, from the very beginning, in a state of peace; when you said that they were, by nature, something that was completely beyond all grief?

And so this is what I ask of you, O Conquering One: was it really that which the Conqueror had in mind when you said that no existing thing could have any nature of its own, and said that no existing thing ever began, or stopped; when you said that they were, from the very beginning, in a state of peace; when you said that they were, by nature, something that was completely beyond all grief?

The point of this question is as follows. In some sutras, Lord Buddha said that no existing thing had any nature of its own, and so on. In other sutras though he said that the heaps and so on did have their own definitive characteristics, and so on. The bodhisattva knows that—if we take these two types of statements on face value—then they contradict each other; but that it cannot be the case that they do. Therefore he is asking Lord Buddha what he really had in mind when he said that no existing thing could have any nature of its own, and so on. The bodhisattva is, by implication, asking just what Lord Buddha meant by phrases such as "existing by definition" and the like....

Lord Buddha replies by saying that, when he stated that nothing had any nature of its own, he was actually referring to all three lacks of a self nature; as the *True Intent of the Sutras* itself reads,

Listen, Paramartha Samudgata. When I said that no existing object at all had any nature of its own, what I was referring to was three different lacks of a self nature that existing things exhibit. These three are the quality of lacking any definitive nature, the quality of lacking any nature of growing, and the quality of lacking any nature of being ultimate....

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading One

When the bodhisattva asks Lord Buddha what he had in mind when he said that objects had no nature of their own, he is really asking two different things: what Lord Buddha meant by the expression "no-self-nature," and how it is that nothing has any such nature. The answer by Lord Buddha addresses both of these points as well, one after the other. We begin by explaining the first.

Consider all the infinite variety of objects that Lord Buddha was referring to when he said that none of the existing things from physical matter up to the omniscience of an enlightened being had any nature or quality of its own. Lord Buddha grouped them into three different types of things with no nature of their own, for two reasons: first because they are all subsumed by these three types of things with no nature of their own, and secondly because it would then be easier to teach disciples how it was that they lacked any nature of their own. And this is because every existing object, whether it be something of the ultimate kind or the deceptive kind, is included within one of these three types.

Here's another reason why this is true. Lord Buddha stated, in the sutras of the Mother and others as well, that none of the individual members of the following groups had any nature of being a thing: neither the five heaps, nor the eighteen categories, nor the twelve doors of sense. He said none of them had any nature of being a thing, none had any quality of its own, and none had any nature of its own. More specifically, he mentioned by name all the different versions of the ultimate: emptiness, the sphere of being, the way things are, and so on—and then he went on to say that none of them had any nature of its own. What person in their right mind then could ever say that there were no things of the ultimate type among those objects of which Lord Buddha spoke?

Here next is the second step: the expanded explanation. Now you might think to yourself,

Consider all those things that Lord Buddha was talking about when he said that nothing had any nature of its own. Suppose they are all included within the three different types of things that have no nature of their own. What then are these three types of things, and how is it that they lack any nature of their own?

Let's begin by explaining the first type of thing that has no nature of its own. The *Commentary on the True Intent* says,

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading One

Suppose you ask what we mean when we speak of the quality of being a thing that "lacks any definitive nature." Here we are referring to those things that display the attribute of being a construct.

And why do we speak of them as such? It is because of the fact that these things display the attribute of being established through names and terms; they are not things which abide by definition; thus can we say of them that they "lack any definitive nature." ...

Here is what the second lack of a self-nature refers to. The *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras* says:

Suppose you ask what we mean when we speak of the quality of being a thing that "lacks any nature of growing." Here we are referring to those things that display the attribute of being a dependent thing.

And why do we speak of them as such? It is because of the fact that these things have occurred by virtue of other factors, and not all by themselves, that we say of them that they "lack any nature of growing."

Given the phrase about "not all by themselves," the nature of growing that dependent things lack, or their growing through some nature of their own, refers to their growing all by themselves....

There are two different ways of establishing the third lack of a self-nature; here is how we establish the fact that dependent things have no nature of being ultimate: The *Commentary on the True Intent* says:

Suppose you ask what we mean when we say that things "lack any nature of being ultimate." Consider those things which occur through interdependence; those which lack any nature in the sense that they lack any nature of growing. These is as well that which lacks any nature in the sense of lacking any nature of being ultimate.

And why do we speak of it as such? Listen, Paramartha Samudgata. What I have professed so thoroughly is that the "ultimate" refers to the part of things which is the object of [the

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading One

path of] total purity. Because those that display the attribute of being a dependent thing are not the object of [the path of] total purity, we can speak of them as that one that lacks any nature of being ultimate.

It is because dependent things do not exist as things which have any nature of being ultimate that we can speak of that which does not have any nature of being ultimate. The point here is that "ultimate" refers to anything which, when you focus on and meditate upon it, your spiritual obstacles are brought to an end. Dependent things though cannot be described as such, since they do not have the power to help you purify yourself of your spiritual obstacles if you focus on and meditate upon them....

This second way of establishing something as a thing that lacks any nature of being ultimate is, further, described as follows in the *Commentary on the True Intent*:

Moreover, we also refer to that attribute of totality which things have as being their "quality of lacking any nature of being ultimate."

And why do we speak of them as such? Listen, Paramartha Samudgata. We refer to that lack of a self-nature of objects which all things have as being their "lack of a nature of their own." The "ultimate" is delineated by being that simple lack that every existing thing has of any nature of its own; and this is why we can speak of the quality of lacking any nature of being ultimate.

Totality in the sense of the lack of a self-nature of objects which all things exhibit is an object of [the path of] total purity, and is thus on one count something ultimate. But it is also delineated by the lack that things have of any self-nature of the person, by this simple absence of something; and this is why we can speak of all things as "lacking any nature of their own." This too is a reason why we can say that things "lack any nature of being ultimate."...

Here finally is the third step: illustrations for the points covered. These three lacks of a self-nature can be described with three different illustrations. The *Commentary on the True Intent* begins by saying,

You can view the quality of lacking any definitive nature as being like the illustration of a flower that grows in mid-air.

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading One

It is, O Paramartha Samudgata, like this: you can view the quality of not having any nature of growing as being like the illustration of a magic show. And as for the quality of not having any nature of being ultimate, you can view it in yet a different way from those.

It is, O Paramartha Samudgata, like this: you can view this quality as being like the illustration of empty space, which is delineated by being a simple lack of anything with a physical nature, and which extends to all things. The lack of having any nature of being ultimate is the same: this particular quality is, in a way different from those others, delineated by being a lack of any self-nature to objects, and also extends to all things.

Saying that constructs are similar to a flower that grows in mid-air is only meant to illustrate how they exist merely in the imagination; the point is not to give an example of something that doesn't exist in the universe. The way in which dependent things are similar to a magic trick we will explain later on, and the point of the illustration used for totality is clear from the context in which it appears....

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading One

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading Two

Reading Two:

The readings selected are taken from the *Essence of Eloquence, a Classical Commentary on Distinguishing between the Figurative and the Literal*, by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

In this same vein, the *Commentary on the True Intent* says:

I will explain to you my true intent. It may be the case that you believe in things, that you fail to grasp fully the profound and pure way that things really are. And then you will come to believe, firmly, that I only meant exactly what I said about the nature of all things when I said the following:

None of these things at all has any nature of its own; and they are no other way.

None of these things at all ever grows; and they are no other way.

None of them ever stops; and they are no other way.

They are extinct, and have been so from the very beginning; and they are no other way.

They have, by their very nature, gone completely beyond the state of grief; and they are no other way....

One may ask the following question: "If that's what Lord Buddha had in mind when he said that nothing had any nature of its own, then what was it he had in mind when he said 'nothing grows' and the like?"

What Lord Buddha had in mind when he mentioned those was the first and the last of the three kinds of a lack of any nature. The first is mentioned in the *Commentary on the True Intent* as follows:

I did say that nothing that exists ever grows, or stops; that they are all extinct, and have been so from the very beginning; and that they have, by their very nature, gone completely beyond the state of grief. What I had in mind when I said so was the quality of lacking any definitive nature.

Why is that? This is how it works, Paramartha Samudgata. Those things which do not exist by definition are things that never grow.

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading Two

Those things that never grow are things that never stop. Those things that never grow nor stop are things which are extinct, and which have been so from the very beginning. Those things that are extinct, and which have been so from the very beginning, are things that have, by their very nature, gone completely beyond the state of grief. And those things which have, by their very nature, gone completely beyond the state of grief have nothing at all about them which is gone completely beyond the state of grief.

The reason given here for saying that constructs never grow or stop is that they are things which do not exist by definition. The text is thereby also indicating that—if something did exhibit growing or stopping—then it would exist by definition; and that dependent things do exhibit growing and stopping which exist by definition.

Objects of the kind that are bereft of any growing or stopping are un-produced things; and these are not the types of things that can belong to the mentally-afflicted side of things. This is why they are spoken of as "extinct, from the very beginning," and "gone, by their very nature, completely beyond grief"; for the meaning of "grief" here is the mentally-afflicted side of things.

The second of the three lacks treated here is described in the *Commentary on the True Intent* as follows:

And from another point of view did I say that nothing that exists ever grows, or stops; that they are all extinct, and have been so from the very beginning; and that they have, by their very nature, gone completely beyond the state of grief. What I had in mind when I said so was the quality of lacking any nature of being ultimate: that which is delineated by the absence of a self-nature to objects.

Why is that? This is how it works. The quality of lacking any nature of being ultimate that which is delineated by the absence of a self-nature to objects—is something that only continues, in the time of changeless changeless-ness, and in the time of unshaking unshakability. This is that un-produced thing which is the real nature of all existing things, and it is free of everything mentally afflicted.

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading Two

Think about this thing, that real nature of things, an un-produced thing that continues in the time of changeless changeless-ness, and in the time of unshaking unshakability. Because it is an un-produced thing, it neither grows nor stops. And because it is free of any of the mentally afflicted things, then it is also extinct, from the very beginning, and something which is, by its very nature, gone completely beyond the state of grief. . .

The *Great Commentary* explains the expression "time of changeless changeless-ness" as referring to all the time that has gone before, and the expression "time of unshaking unshakability" as meaning all the time that will come afterwards....

The real point of the sutra though is as follows. Dependent things do exhibit growing and stopping, of a kind that exist by definition. Therefore these dependent things are not what Lord Buddha had in mind when he spoke of "never growing" or "never stopping." Moreover, the vast majority of dependent things are taken in by the mentally-afflicted side of things; and so this is why the dependent things are not described as something that Lord Buddha has in mind when he mentions the latter two expressions.

And here is what the *Compendium* is referring to when it says that things never grow the same way they have no nature; and that this is too how they never stop, and how they are extinct from the very beginning, and how they are, by their very nature, completely beyond all grief: the point is that we are to refer, in each case, to that particular nature which each one of the three natures, respectively, is said to lack when we describe it....

"You have said," one may begin, "that the 'lack of a definitive nature' refers to constructs. But just what are these constructs themselves?" Our answer is drawn from the *Commentary on the True Intent*:

Consider that thing which is established through names and terms as either the attribute that relates to the very essence, or the attribute that relates to some particular, when we focus on something which is (1) the arena in which the constructing state of mind acts; 2) the object of the attribute of constructs; and (3) that which exhibits the typical features of a factor; and speak of it as "the heap of physical matter."

Consider as well that thing which is established through names and terms as either the attribute that relates to the very essence, or

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading Two

the attribute that relates to some particular, when we focus on the same thing and speak of "the growing of the heap of physical matter," or its "stopping," or "eliminating" or "grasping" this heap of physical matter.

This thing is what we refer to as "the attribute of constructs."

Now the three numbered items are descriptions of the object towards which a construct is applied. The rest is a description of how the application of the construct is carried out: you either apply a construct about the general essence of an object by saying this is the "heap of physical matter," or you apply a construct about the particulars or features of the same object by saying, "the heap of physical matter is growing," or one of the others. We will be examining this point in further detail.

"And you have said," one may continue, "that the 'lack of a nature of growing' refers to dependent things. But just what are these dependent things?" Again we turn to the *Commentary on the True Intent*:

Consider that thing which is (1) the arena in which the constructing state of mind acts; (2) the object of the attribute of constructs; and (3) that which exhibits the typical features of a factor. This thing is what we refer to as "the attribute of dependent things."

The first term indicates what it is that takes dependent things as its object; the second indicates that dependent things are the basis towards which the constructs are applied; and the third indicates the very nature of dependent things.

"You have finally said," one may conclude, "that the 'lack of a nature of being ultimate' refers to totality. But just what is totality?" Again, the *Commentary on the True Intent* says:

Consider the fact that the thing which is (1) the arena in which the constructing state of mind acts; (2) the object of the attribute of constructs; and (3) that which exhibits the typical features of a factor itself is—in its totality—free of the attribute of constructs. Consider the fact that it is impossible for it to have any nature of having that one specific nature. Consider the fact that it is impossible for it to display any self-nature of objects. And consider

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant

Reading Two

that essential nature which is the object perceived by [the path of] purity. This is what we refer to as "the attribute of totality."

The phrasing around the words "of objects" is saying, "that thing we talk about as the lack of any self-nature of objects, or the essential nature of things." Totality is being identified as that one thing which—if you focus on it and then meditate upon it—your spiritual obstacles are cleaned away.

And what is the lack of a self-nature to objects? It is, as the text says, the fact that it is impossible for these things to have any nature, a nature of having that one specific nature.

One may ask just what kind of a nature it is that these things lack. The "nature of having that one specific nature" is referring to the nature that was just mentioned; that is, that of constructs. The words "that one" are meant to exclude the others, meaning the other two natures. Therefore the point here is not to say that it is impossible for these two to have any nature. The word "totality," the text is saying, refers to that one lack of a nature: the lack of a nature to constructs.

Here is what the words "the thing" that come first refer to. Everything from the words "consider the fact" down to "a factor itself" is meant to indicate that dependent things are the thing which has the emptiness. The words "free of the attribute of constructs" is a very clear statement that totality is something which refers to the fact that these things are empty or devoid of constructs. It is therefore a further contradiction to assert, on the one hand, that the manner in which this sutra teaches emptiness is literal, and then to assert at the same time that totality consists of the fact that the last of the three natures is empty or devoid of the first two.

The emptiness or voidness here, moreover, is not the kind you have when a specific spot is empty or devoid of a water pitcher; not just the denial of some other thing. Dependent things, rather, are empty or devoid of any nature where they exist as the constructs—in the same way that a person does not exist as a substantial thing.

It is for this exact reason that the sutra says that "the thing" is, "in its totality, free of the attribute of constructs."

What are the kinds of constructs that these things are devoid or empty of? The sutra, in these two places where it undertakes to identify the nature of a construct, makes no mention of any other constructs beyond the sole two: those

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant

Reading Two

applied towards the very essence of an object and those applied towards its features. I will explain why the sutra fails to mention the others later on.

We have thus shown how the three attributes can be applied to the heap of physical matter; similar sets of three can be applied as well to the four remaining heaps; to the twelve doors of sense; to the twelve links of dependent origination; to the four types of sustenance; to the six elements; and to the eighteen categories....

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading Three

Reading Three:

The readings selected are taken from the *Essence of Eloquence, a Classical Commentary on Distinguishing between the Figurative and the Literal*, by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

Here ... is our description of how Master Asanga sets forth the meaning of thusness, based on this approach of relying primarily upon the *Commentary on the True Intent*....

The *Levels of the Bodhisattva* makes the following statement:

How then do things exist? They exist in a certain way—in which they are free of the object of a mistaken tendency to concoct things, a tendency directed at something which doesn't in reality exist; and in which they are free of the object of a mistaken tendency to discount things, a tendency directed at things which are in reality pure....

Given all this, concocting things is where you say, "Constructs exist ultimately"; and discounting things is something where you say, "The other two natures do not exist ultimately." This is because the first of the three actually only exists deceptively, whereas the other two exist ultimately.

If we explain discounting things as being the view that something which in actuality does exist ultimately doesn't exist at all, then it would seem that we'd have to explain concocting things as being the converse; that is, as the view that something which in actuality does not exist ultimately, does exist. The position stated at this point though is that concocting things consists of holding that constructs exist by definition—which means holding them to exist ultimately. So although it's not stated clearly in the actual wording, the point of the text here is that—if something exists by definition—then it exists ultimately. Holding that constructs exist ultimately then, according to this view, constitutes the act of concocting things....

The *Compendium* includes a section that says:

Some followers of the greater way, intent on continuing to hold to their errors, make this claim:

In a deceptive way, it is true that all things exist.

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading Three

Ultimately though nothing exists.

These are the followers of the Middle Way, who speak of some distinction between different ways in which all things both do exist and don't exist, saying, "No single existing thing exists ultimately; and every one of them does exist nominally."

And when they say this we reply to them with the following question:

Then we ask you, venerable sirs, what does it mean to be "ultimate"? And what does it mean to be "deceptive"?

And suppose they answer like this—

"Ultimate" refers to that thing which is the lack of a self-nature that every existing object exhibits. "Deceptive" refers to that thing which is the tendency to see all these objects—which in truth have no nature of their own—as having some nature of their own....

Moreover, the *Compendium* says:

You should understand that any tendency where you focus on the nature known as "dependent things" and the nature known as "totality" and imagine them to be the nature known as "constructs" constitutes the extreme view of concocting things.

And the extreme view of discounting things consists of any tendency where you focus on the nature known as "dependent things" and the nature known as "totality"—things that actually do exist—and say that they don't; this is discounting all those things which exist by definition. And so it is that you must come to a grasp of the actual meaning of thusness: by means of avoiding these two extreme views.

The point of this citation is that—when you focus on the first and final two of the three natures, on the two that exist by definition, and say that they do not exist this way—then you are discounting all the actual examples of things that exist by definition. This text and the *Levels of the Bodhisattva* are exactly the same on the question of what the extreme views of concocting things and discounting things consist of, and on how we go about avoiding them....

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading Four

Reading Four:

The following on the position of the Independent group of the Middle-Way school of Buddhism is taken from the *Essence of Eloquence, a Classical Commentary on Distinguishing between the Figurative and the Literal*, by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

Therefore the following is the final form of the idea denied by the reasoning which examines the ultimate:

Anything which existed from its own side with its own unique identity, rather than being simply established as existing by appearing to an unaffected state of mind.

And this is true because the final form of the way in which physical matter and all other existing objects exist deceptively is through their being established as existing by a state of mind which is unaffected by short-term circumstances that would cause it to make an error.

When we describe the state of mind which can establish that physical matter and all other existing objects exist, it is necessarily one which is not affected by some short-term circumstances which would cause it to make an error; it is not the case though that it would have to be a state of mind which was not affected by some long-term circumstances.

And this is because it is not the case that—when physical matter and other such existing objects appear to be things that exist by definition—this appearance is not something which is affected neither by short-term nor by long-term circumstances; and because it involves being affected by the innate form of the tendency to hold things as existing truly.

Here we will explain how this school decides what the two realities are, using some metaphors as well. Two things have to be present with all of these objects: with physical matter and every other existing thing. From the point of view of what appears in the world, they must be established as existing from our side—merely by virtue of their appearing to an unaffected state of mind. From the point of view of emptiness, they must be void of any kind of existence where the object exists from its own side through its own unique identity, rather than by virtue of its appearing to an unaffected state of mind.

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant

Reading Four

And so two things have to come together for a functional thing like a sprout: it must be established as existing by virtue of appearing to an unaffected state of mind; and the sprout should exist from its own side through some identity.

The first is necessary since—if it were not—then a sprout would have to be a sprout even to a person who had never been introduced to the idea that the sprout was called a "sprout."

The latter is necessary since—if it were not—then a sprout would be a sprout in exactly the same way as the horn of a rabbit is the horn of a rabbit: merely because we called it the "horn of a rabbit," or just because we imagined something called the "horn of a rabbit."...

Now there is a metaphor which we can use for the idea that physical matter and all other existing objects are established as existing from our side—merely by virtue of their appearing to an unaffected state of mind, and for the idea that these objects exist through some identity of their own.

Think of a case where a magician makes a stick of wood appear as a horse or cow. Two things have to be present here. First of all, the appearance of a horse or cow there around the stick is something that is established as existing by virtue of the minds of the people whose eyes are affected by the magic words and powder, from their side. Secondly, an appearance must also be something coming from the side of the stick.

The first requirement, being established as existing by virtue of the minds of the people whose eyes are affected by the magic words and powder, is necessary since—if it were not—then those in the audience whose eyes were not affected by the magic words and powder would have to see this appearance, whereas they do not.

In this same situation it is also necessary for the horse or cow to be appearing from the stick's side as well, since—if they were not—then the appearance of a horse or cow would have to occur even in a place where there were no stick; whereas it does not.

Physical matter—and all other existing objects—are similar, in that they are established as existing by an unaffected state of mind; and this is because they are constructed by virtue of an unaffected state of mind and names that fit.

They do not, however, exist from their own side through some unique identity of their own, without being established as existing by virtue of appearing to an unaffected state of mind. This is because—if they were to exist this way—then they would have to be some ultimate nature. And if they were some ultimate

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant

Reading Four

nature, then they would have to be something which is perceived directly by a certain un-mistaken state of mind: that meditative wisdom of a realized being who is not yet a Buddha, and who perceives the real nature of things directly. The fact is though that they are not.

In this situation, where a magician makes a stick appear as a horse or cow, two things apply to the members of the audience whose eyes are affected by the magic words and powder: the stick is appearing as a horse or cow, and they believe that it is.

The only condition that applies to the magician himself is that a horse or cow is appearing to him; he does not believe in them. And those members of the audience who showed up later—those whose eyes were not affected by the magic words or powder—have neither the horse or cow appearing to them, nor any belief in the horse or cow. These same three different permutations apply as well to physical matter and all the other existing objects.

Consider "common" people: those who have not yet had their first experience of the perception of emptiness. Both situations apply to them for physical matter and all other existing objects: these things appear to them to exist truly, and they believe in the way they appear.

Consider now bodhisattvas who have reached one of the pure levels. Even though objects appear to their minds, during what we call the "subsequent period," as something which exists truly, they have no belief in them this way. And this is because neither situation applies to realized beings who are not yet Buddhas and who are perceiving the real nature of things directly; that is, physical matter and other objects do not appear to them as if they existed truly, and they do not believe that these objects exist that way....

The selection below gives a brief but exquisite description of how the concept of emptiness is explained by followers of the Consequence group of the Middle-Way School of Buddhism (the Madhyamika Prasangika). It is taken from the *Overview of the Middle Way (dBu-ma spyi-don)* by Kedrup Tenpa Dargye (1493-1568), an eminent author of textbooks for Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery (ACIP electronic text number S0021, ff. 125a-130a).

Here we will analyze the statement [from *Entering the Middle Way*, by Master Chandrakirti (650 AD)] where it says, "...The mind of a craving spirit as well, which sees a stream of water as pus." One may begin with the following question:

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant
Reading Four

Let's consider the objects of the following states of mind: the visual consciousness of a craving spirit where a river of water looks like pus and blood; the visual consciousness of a person with a kind of cataract where a clean white porcelain basin looks like a hair has fallen into it; and that kind of meditation where you visualize skeletons—where you imagine that the entire surface of the earth is covered with the bones of corpses. Are all these objects completely equivalent, as far as being something that exists or doesn't exist?

In reply we will first set forth a relevant passage, and then we will explain the passage. Here is the first. The text called *The Abbreviation of the Greater Way* says,

Insofar as craving spirits, animals,
Humans, and pleasure beings, each according
To their class, have differing perceptions
Of a single thing, we say it has no reality.

Asvabhava, the holy layman with lifetime vows, has explained the passage. His words include the following:

When they look at a *single thing*, a stream of water, each one sees what the ripening of his particular karma forces him to see. A *craving spirit* sees the river full of pus and blood and the like.

An *animal* or such, on the other hand, thinks of this same water as a place to stay, and makes his home there.

Humans look at the same thing and perceive it as water—sweet, clear, and cool. They drink of it, they wash themselves with it, and they swim in it.

Those pleasure beings who are wrapped in deep meditation at the level we call the "realm of limitless space" see the water as empty space, for their ability to conceptualize physical matter has dissolved altogether....

Here secondly is the section where we establish our own position. Now suppose three different types of beings—a pleasure being, a human, and a craving spirit,

Dharma Essentials Course XV: What the Buddha Really Meant

Reading Four

each with their own karma—sit down together and look upon a glass filled with water, the thing we define as "wet and flowing." The glass of water is not at this point one thing which is simultaneously three different objects. Neither is it necessary in this situation for there to be three identical valid perceptions. And when the glass full of wet and flowing water occurs, it occurs with three different, distinct parts to it.

[Translator's note: When the phrase "wet and flowing" (the definition of the element of water) is used here, it should be understood as emphasizing the more general concept of a liquid, rather than the water which the human perceives.]

It is not though the case that, from the time it first started, the glass of water came with the three different parts, or that they stay with the glass of water until it eventually ends. What happens is that one of the parts of the glass filled with wet and flowing water provides a material cause, and the karma of the craving spirit provides a contributing factor; and then based on both of these the later continuation of one part of the glass of water starts being blood and pus.

Another part of the glass of water again provides a material cause, and the karma of the human provides a contributing factor; and then based on both of these the later continuation of one part of the glass of water starts being water.

Yet another part of the glass of water provides a material cause, and the karma of the pleasure being provides a contributing factor; and then based on both of these the later continuation of one part of the glass of water starts being ambrosia, and so on.

At this point, the glass full of wet and flowing water is something with three different parts. Nonetheless, it is not the case that all three different beings see all three parts. The craving spirit is forced by the bad karma he has collected to see the glass of water as pus and blood; and he doesn't see the other two things. One should understand that a similar case holds with the latter two types of beings.

What we just described as happening is only with reference to where a glass of something wet and flowing is an object shared by the three different beings, as they look at it together. When the craving spirit himself though picks up the glass in his hand and begins to partake of its contents, the glass of liquid is no longer something that exists with three different parts. Since at this point it is something that the craving spirit is experiencing exclusively, its continuation starts being pus and blood....