

Selections from De Lam, “The Path to Bliss”

**Composed by His Holiness the First Panchen Lama, Lobsang
Chukyi Gyeltsen (1570-1662)**

**Translated from the Tibetan by Geshe Michael Roach and Lama
Christie McNally**

TEACHING ONE: THE ROAD TO FREEDOM

Herein contained is *The Path to Bliss*, a Dissection Text on the Steps of the Path to Enlightenment, to be used for Traveling to Omniscience. . . .

Here we will present the profound steps of the path to enlightenment – a true means, for those who possess enough goodness, to travel to the land of enlightenment. We proceed in two stages: an explanation of how to rely on a spiritual Guide, which is the very root of the path; and a presentation of the steps for training one’s mind, once you have come to rely upon this Guide. . . .

How They Come in the Darkest of Days

This brings us to the actual practice, which has two parts: the instructions for relying upon our spiritual Guide in our thoughts, and the instructions for relying upon them in our actions. The first of these has two sections of its own—these are developing an attitude of faith, which is the very root of the practice; and learning to respect our Lama, a feeling which comes in us through remembering all the kindness they have showered upon us. . . .

Here next is the second part from before: learning to rely upon our spiritual Guide in our actions. . . . “I swear that I will give away my body, my life, and all the things I own—everything there is—for these my

spiritual Guides. Most especially I will please them with the offering of carrying out what they ask me to do.

Our One Opportunity

Next comes our second general subject: a description of the steps that we use to train our minds. We will proceed in two parts: some urgent advice that we should try to get the very essence out of our spiritual opportunities and resources; and then an explanation of the method for getting the essence out of these opportunities and resources. . . .

Here . . . is what we do during the actual session. This has two steps: a contemplation of how important our spiritual opportunities and resources are; and a contemplation of how difficult they are to find. . . .

Death the Enemy Will Surely Come

Here next is the second general topic from before: the instructions on how to get the very essence from our spiritual opportunities and resources. There are three different sections to this point: training our minds in the steps of the path which are shared with people of lesser scope; training our minds in the steps of the path which are shared with people of medium scope; and training our minds in the steps of the path for people of greater scope.

Here . . . is how the actual session [dealing with steps of the path which are shared with people of lesser scope] goes. This has four parts: the contemplation on our impermanence, our coming death; the contemplation on the sufferings of the lower realms; practicing coming for shelter to the Three Jewels; and developing faith, based on reasoning, in the laws of karma and its consequences.

The Cycle of Pain

Here now is the second main section: training our minds in the steps of the path which are shared with people of medium spiritual capacity. We proceed in two steps: learning to develop an aspiration for freedom, and

then establishing just what the path for traveling to this freedom is like. . . .

This brings us to the actual meditation. Here there are two steps: a contemplation upon the pain of the cycle in general; and then a contemplation upon the various specific sufferings of each form of life. Here is the first. . . .

If I manage to train myself properly in that form of ethical living where I give up the ten negative deeds, then it's true that I will attain the high state of one of the better rebirths, so far beyond the pain of the three lower births.

But the fact is that—unless I can go further and reach that freedom where I have eliminated all suffering from its very root—then I will never enjoy a single instant of happiness. . . .

Enemies for example turn to friends, and friends turn to enemies: nothing is sure about those who help us, and those who hurt us.

No matter what kinds of pleasant things we manage to get here in this cycle, we can never reach some final point of satisfaction. Not only that, but these good things actually only increase in us our feelings of desire—and so in the end they only lead more suffering to our door.

No matter how beautiful or strong a body we may have been born with, we must still give it up—as we have countless times before. And so nothing is sure about the body we've been born with.

For time with no beginning then we have been dragged across the border from death to another suffering life; and so there is no end in sight to the births we will still have to take.

Whatever small good thing we happen to get here in the cycle of pain, we must in the end lose it; and so there is nothing sure about any of the good things that come to us.

When we pass then on to our next life, we must do so alone—no one can go with us. And so there is nothing sure about those who are with us now.

Given that all this is true, I will do whatever I can to use this time, these moments where I've attained the various spiritual opportunities and resources—things that are incredibly difficult to find; things that, once found, are of such extraordinary potential. . . .

Here next is the second meditation step from before; that is, a contemplation upon the various specific sufferings of each form of life in the cycle. Begin, again, in meditation with your Lama Angel atop your head. And then lead yourself through the following train of thought:

Once we have taken on these impure parts of a person, then we never experience anything other than pain.

The pain of the three lower realms needn't even be mentioned. But from the very moment that we even step into a human body and mind like these, then we begin to experience hunger and thirst; and the inexorable decay of the body; and being separated from what we like, those we love; and meeting up with what we don't like, those we hate.

We try to get the things we want, but we can't; and things that we don't want strike us suddenly, at any unexpected moment. And then there are always the four of being forced to take this birth, and to get old, and to fall sick, to die—and all the rest. . . .

In short, any impure body and mind that we ever take on can only provide us a place where in that same life we re subjected to sufferings like taking birth, and aging, getting sick, and dying. Even worse, they act in that life and the lives beyond it to bring us both the suffering of outright pain, and the suffering of change.

And the simple start of an impure body and mind like this is enough to insure that we will live in a body and mind whose very nature is to collapse, completely at the mercy of the karma and mental afflictions that we had before. . . .

The Chain of Events

Here next is the second step from the beginning of this section: establishing just what the path for traveling to freedom is like. . . .

In and of itself, the mind is simply neutral. But then it begins to go through a certain process: first it looks upon either me or what is mine, and an idea develops that these exist through some nature of their own.

And then, all because it is grasping onto some self-nature, the mind starts to pass through a whole range of seeing things the wrong way: it begins to have feelings of liking for the people and things I consider to be on my side; and feelings of dislike for those I consider to belong to some other side; feelings of pride where I consider myself better than anyone else, and so on.

All because of this, the mind begins to develop wrong views and all kinds of doubts about the Teacher who has explained how things have no self; and about the principles of karma and its consequences which this Teacher has also enunciated; about the four higher truths; and about the Three Jewels and so on, refusing to believe in any of these.

And all because of this, then all the other mental afflictions begin to grow and spread. Because of all this, we start to collect karma. And then, despite the fact that we don't at all want to, we begin to undergo this experience of a huge variety of sufferings, here in the cycle of pain.

Every single form of pain that exists then can be traced back, ultimately, to ignorance at its very root. . . .

And. . . so, I will practice—in the proper way—the path of the three precious trainings.

Most especially, I will properly observe the ethical way of life, in whatever forms I have committed myself to follow, and never abandon it—even at the cost of my life. And this is because it is of such tremendous benefit if I observe these commitments properly, and equally such a tremendous wrongness if I fail to do so.

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TEACHING TWO: THE WISH BEHIND ALL OTHER WISHES

First, Equanimity

Here then begins the third major category of the steps of the path: Training our minds in the steps that belong to the path of people of the highest spiritual capacity. These steps are presented in two stages—how to develop the Wish for enlightenment, and how to train oneself in the activities of a bodhisattva, once you have developed this Wish.

The first of these comes in two parts of its own: the actual practices for developing the Wish, and then how to commit oneself to the Wish in a formal ritual.

There are two separate sets of instructions for gaining the Wish: developing it through the advices on seven steps of cause and effect; and developing it through treating oneself and others the same, and exchanging oneself and others. Here we begin with the first.

In the first of these two methods, before anything we try to develop a sense of equanimity towards every living being. And then after that we take ourselves through the various steps, from recognizing that all beings are our mother up to the Wish for enlightenment itself. . . .

[V]isualize sitting before you a person towards whom you feel neutral—someone who has neither helped you nor harmed you.

Practice then a sense of equanimity towards them, free of that attitude where you either like them because they are close to you, or dislike them because they are not so close to you. . . . Once you have achieved equanimity towards this neutral person, then begin to visualize sitting before you someone that you know, who is appealing to you. Practice this feeling of equanimity towards them too. . . . Once you have reached a state of equanimity toward this appealing person, then begin to visualize in front of you someone that you know, whom you find unappealing, and start to practice equanimity towards them. . . .

They Really Have Been Our Mother

Here then is how we meditate upon all the steps from recognizing that every living being is our mother, all the way to the Wish for enlightenment—now that we have completed the necessary preliminary of equanimity. . . .

Now just how is it that we can say that every single living being is family to me? Well if I really think about it, this self-perpetuating cycle of pain has been going on for time with no beginning; which means as well that there was never any first birth that I ever took in this cycle. And then I have gone on in a flow, from birth to birth—so there is not a single country or place that I can point to and say that I was never born in.

In fact, I've been born in each one of them more times than numbers can possibly count. And there's not a single form of life that exists which I can point to and say, "I have never taken on *this* kind of body." The fact is that I have worn every kind of body there is, for times that are again beyond all number.

So too there is not a single living creature that I can point to and say, "This one has never been my mother." Each one of them has been my mother for more times than numbers can count. . . .

Paying Back Their Kindness

Once you have gained some fluency in the meditation on recognizing that every living being is your mother, then go on to the next step, which is

thinking about all the care and kindness that they have shown to us. The way to do this is as follows. . . .

My mother here has been my mother not only in this life, but for times beyond any counting in the beginningless string of all my lives. And she has paid me such infinite kindness Once you are fluent at this particular meditation, then expand it to thinking about the kindness which every living being has paid you.

After we have completed the contemplation upon our mothers' kindness as described above, then we go on to the next step, of working to repay that kindness. . . .

Here then are all these living beings, my own mothers, who for time with no beginning have showered me with such kindness. And now the great demon of the mental afflictions has ravaged their minds, to the point where now they are actually insane, and have lost all control over what their own minds are thinking. . . .

They walk now blind, inexorably, to the edge of a terrifying chasm which drops in general to the entire cycle of pain, and more specifically to the three lower realms. If I were to abandon them now, in this darkest hour, there would be no greater act of shame. And so now I will take the chance to repay all the kindness they have bestowed upon me: I will liberate them from the pain of the cycle, and deliver them to the happiness of freedom.

To Give Happiness Which is True

Next comes the meditation on love, which you do as follows. . . . First visualize a person sitting in front of you. . . . Then take yourself through this train of thought:

How could this person in front of me have any pure happiness at all? They don't even have any happiness of the impure kind.

All the things that in their deluded state of mind they hold to be happiness always end up causing them pain. They want to be happy—they work at it, all the time; they exhaust themselves seeking it, over and

over—but all they manage to do is prepare the causes that later on will bring them the suffering of the lower realms.

Even in this life the only result they get from all these efforts is to wear themselves down, until all their energy is gone—all they accomplish is to hurt themselves.

So how wonderful it would be if this person sitting here in front of me could come to have every kind of happiness, and all the things that cause happiness.

The Way to Develop Compassion

Here next is how to do the meditation on compassion. . . .

All these people have fought and struggled for their entire lives, trying to care for those they love and hurt the ones they hate. And yet all it got them was the pain of outright pain, and the pain of things that change. In fact, they have never even experienced a few moments of genuine happiness.

And because they were rushing around their whole life doing these negative deeds, they didn't have time to develop any virtuous attitudes at all. And this means that, as soon as they die, they will be forced to go through and infinite variety of savage pain, for time beyond imagining. . . .

The Exquisite Sense of Personal Responsibility

Once your mind has become totally fluent in these attitudes of love and compassion, then you should continue on to the meditation upon personal responsibility. Here's how you do that. . . .

Look at all these living beings—every one of them tortured by pain, every one of them without any happiness at all. I myself now will see to it that they are freed from this pain, and from the things that cause the pain. I myself will see to it that they come to have happiness, and all the things that cause happiness.

And most especially of all, I myself will see to it that every living being—every one of them my own mother—comes to attain that high state of a totally enlightened Buddha

The Step That is the Place

Here next is how we perform the meditation upon the Wish for enlightenment itself. . . . Begin by saying to yourself, “Let’s be honest. At this moment, right now, do you have any capacity at all to take all the suffering beings in this entire universe and lead them to the high state of a totally enlightened Buddha? The fact is that I don’t even have the capacity to bring a single suffering living being to this state. . . .

Who then does possess this capacity? A completely enlightened Buddha has it. . . . And so—if I have any hope at all of providing some ultimate benefit to both myself and others—then I must certainly attain that same high state, of a Buddha who is like this. I decide then, now, that no matter what I will attain the precious state of a fully enlightened Buddha, and do so as quickly as I can, for the sake of every suffering living being. Upon my holy form I wear the three exquisite, golden robes. My body is made of pure crystal light, adorned with the traditional signs and marks of an Enlightened Being. I sit with my legs in the diamond posture, amidst a mass of shining light which radiates from my own body.]

Looking Out for Others

Here is the second section from above: how to cultivate the Wish for enlightenment through the dual practice of treating oneself and others the same; and then exchanging oneself and others. . . .

[T]urn your thoughts to your own mind, and examine it. Think to yourself, Who is it that I cherish—myself or others? And who is it that I ignore? You will find that feelings of cherishing yourself, and ignoring others, automatically rise up in your mind.

At this point you should think to yourself as follows. It’s not right that I cherish myself, and ignore others; for both I and everyone else are completely equal, in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering.

And so I must cherish others just as I cherish myself. When I know that others cherish me, I feel a sense of joy. Now, when they know that I cherish them, then others will feel the same joy.

And that's not all. For time with no beginning here in the cycle of pain, I have cherished only myself, seeking the best of things only for myself. But doing so hasn't accomplished anything for me or for others. On the contrary; it has forced us to undergo an endless variety of sufferings.

Now I realize that taking care only of myself is the source of all the different troubles of life: the source for the cycle of pain in general, and for the sufferings of the three lower realms, and for everything of the like. Now then I will never allow any new thoughts of looking out for myself to grow in my heart; and I will put an end to any such thoughts that may have grown there before.

Looking out for others, on the other hand, is the source of every good quality that a person can have. And so now I will see that those thoughts of looking out for others which have not yet grown in my heart do; and those which have already grown there increase, higher and higher. . . .

To put it briefly, the Lords of the Able Ones ignored themselves, and cherished others. They worked only for others, and this is what brought them to the state of total enlightenment. If I had managed to do the same thing, then I would have reached my own enlightenment too—long, long ago. But I couldn't cherish others, and so I have wandered, to this day, in the cycle of pain. . . .

So from now on, I won't allow a single thought to come where I watch out only for myself and ignore the needs of others. Instead I will now ignore what I want, and devote myself to others.

I will be the one to do it: I myself will see to it that others—that every other living being—is freed from pain, and reaches perfect happiness. And I will accomplish this by taking all the suffering and bad deeds of others upon my own heart; and by giving away all of my happiness and good deeds to them.

The fact is, though, that at the present moment I have no ability to do this. Who then does? A fully enlightened being can do all these things.

And so I will, myself, attain the state of a perfectly enlightened being, for the sake of all these living creatures, every one my mother.

Taking the Vows of a Warrior

Here second is our description of committing oneself to the Wish for enlightenment through a formal ceremony. . . .

Think to yourself, “Now, for the sake of every living being—each one my own mother—I will quickly attain the state of a perfectly enlightened Buddha. In order to do so, I will take the vows of a child of the Victors, and train myself in the powerful deeds of a bodhisattva—from this moment until the day that I reach the inner heart of enlightenment. For every living being, I will become a Buddha.” Think to yourself that you will keep this intention itself, all the way up to enlightenment.

Imagine then that you are repeating the following words after your Lama, the Lord of the Able Ones:

I ask you to hear me, All Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

Those in the past
Who have Gone to Bliss
First gained the Wish for Buddhahood
And then they traveled
And gradually reached
One by one, the things
That a bodhisattva must learn.

To help all living beings,
I swear
I will do the same.
I will gain the Wish for Buddhahood
And I will learn
One by one, the things
That a bodhisattva must learn.

Repeat this three times, and then feel strongly that you have received the vows of a bodhisattva.

Continue next with the following:

Now finally
My life has some meaning;
Born as a mortal,
Today I have joined
The family of Buddhas:
I am a child of the Buddhas.

And now, no matter what,
I will undertake those things
That fit the family I've found.
I will never disgrace
My pure and noble family.

With these words, then, take joy.

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TEACHING THREE: LIVING THE GOOD LIFE

Beginning the Deeds of the Warrior Saint

Here then is our second part from above, which is how to train oneself in the actions of a bodhisattva, once we have attained the Wish. Here there are two parts: how to train oneself in the general activities of a child of the Victors; and how to train oneself, more particularly, in the last two of the perfections. . . .

Here we cover practice relating to those actions which serve to ripen ones own mental continuum—the six perfections; and then practice relating to the actions which ripen the minds of others—that is, the four methods of gathering disciples. . . .

I will now train myself, properly, in the practice of the three different types of giving. I will make the gift of the Dharma by teaching others, to the very best of my ability. I will present that highest Dharma to any living being who lacks it, without regard to any considerations such as gain, honor, or fame.

I will offer the gift of protecting others from fear, by helping all those living beings who are threatened by either humans or other types of beings, or even by negative spirits.

And I will give the gift of material assistance to living beings who are poor and in need, by giving away any object which might fit their needs, without any trace of stinginess—giving up all hope of getting anything from them in return, or any karmic reward.

In sum, I will attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, for the sake of every mother living being, with all possible speed. And to do this, I will give away my own body, and all the things I own, and every good karma I have ever collected, to every being in the universe—without the slightest hesitation at all. . . .

Next comes the practice of leading an ethical life. . . . I will strictly avoid any negative action: anything which is against the vows that I have taken—whether they relate to the ten non-virtues, or anything else of the kind. I will undertake as well to develop within myself all those pure virtues which I have yet to develop: things such as the six perfections of giving and the rest, and leading a good life. I will as well now develop to an even higher degree those virtues which I have already managed to attain.

So too I shall guide every living being to the path that will both ripen and liberate them: I will see to it that they apply themselves to every pure good deed, including the ethical life and the rest. . . .

Here next is the practice of patience. . . . I will complete within myself, and within every other living being, all the high qualities of a Buddha: those of perfection of patience and all the rest. To attain this patience, I will never allow myself a single moment of anger at others—even if every living being that there is should suddenly rise up against me, as my enemy. For every harm they do to me, I will return some helpful good to them.

And suppose that things suddenly befall me that I don't want to happen at all: things like not having enough food to eat, or money, or even a place to sleep—or sickness or anything of the sort. At such moments I will recall that there is no reason why I should be unhappy; on the contrary, I will reflect that undergoing each of these sufferings is a karmic result from something that I have done to others in the past—and

that the very ripening of these results is also using up massive amounts of my own negative karma.

Most especially, the fact is that—if I can develop an ability to endure any kind of suffering for the sake of my Dharma practice—then it will bring me closer and closer to the path of an all-knowing being. As such, I will take up these pains happily, so that I can cut off the stream of suffering which both myself and others are experiencing; here in the cycle in general, and more specifically in the three lower realms. . . .

This brings us to the practice of joyful effort. . . And I will take joy in this task—I will never for a moment relinquish in my effort—even if reaching the state of enlightenment requires that I remain in the lowest of all the hell realms for billions upon billions of years, in order to acquire any single one of qualities of a Buddha, like the marks and signs of their holy body; or to succeed in any one of the deeds of a bodhisattva, such as the perfection of giving.

With this unshakeable joy, I will gather within myself all the virtuous power of both the profound and the far-reaching sides of the teaching. And I will guide others to the path of goodness, and thus bring them to unsurpassed enlightenment as well. . . .

Next is the practice of meditative concentration. . . . I will now train myself in all the different forms of that meditative concentration which the children of the Victors practice. These different types of meditation can be divided, as far as their essence, into the two types of meditative concentration for goals of the world; and meditative concentration for goals that transcend the world.

As far as their form, they can be divided into meditative concentration in the form of stillness, or *shamatha*; meditative concentration in the form of the high vision of emptiness, or *vipashyana*; and meditative concentration in the form of stillness and vision combined.

As far as their function, they can be divided into meditative concentration which leads to comfort in body and mind; meditative concentration which provides the foundation for all high spiritual qualities; and meditative concentration which is used to serve all living beings. . . .

Here finally is the practice of wisdom. . .

For the sake of every living being—every one of them my own mother—I will now attain the state of a fully enlightened Buddha, as quickly as possible.

In order to do this, I will now train myself in all the different forms of wisdom which are practiced by the children of the Victors. I will master the wisdom which perceives ultimate reality—which knows how things really are; the wisdom which perceives deceptive reality . . .

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TEACHING FOUR: MEDITATIONS ON HOW THINGS REALLY ARE

The Light of a Rainbow

Here secondly is how we train ourselves, more particularly, in the final two perfections. This comes in two steps: how to train ourselves in stillness (*shamatha*), which is the very essence of meditative concentration; and how to train ourselves in vision (*vipashyana*), which is the very essence of wisdom. . . .

Here is the first. . .

Find a place to practice which is both conducive to your own frame of mind and quite isolated—a good place with good friends. Take special care to maintain a high level of morality. Avoid associating with a great many people, or seeing others so frequently that it becomes a distraction. Let go of all the gross concerns that come with being attracted to the objects of the senses. Remain in a state of living simply and being satisfied with what you have.

Find yourself a comfortable meditation seat. Sit upon it with a straight back, and with your legs folded in the lotus posture. Place your hands in the meditation gesture. Do all the practices that help bring on stillness: things like bringing your breath down. All of these are preliminary to the actual practice of meditation.

Now as for the actual session, a great many meditation objects for developing stillness are described in the teachings. For the most part though the practice of bringing to mind the Buddha is the highest. It also has many other purposes, such as helping you become a worthy vessel for the Yoga of the Angel in the secret way. As such, it is best to focus your meditation upon the holy form of a divine being. . . .

Continue then with the mind placed single-pointedly upon the object of your meditation. Try just to get to where you are not losing this object completely—where you can keep it in mind even in some cursory way, and maintain some continuity of the visualization. All this is a perfect method for a beginner. . . .

Two Meditations on Emptiness

Here secondly is the explanation of how we train ourselves in vision, which is the essence of wisdom. . . .

There are two steps to the actual session: how to meditate by establishing what the lack of a self to the person is like; and then how to meditate by establishing what the lack of a self to things is like. Here is the first.

An infinite number of different proofs for establishing what the lack of a self is have been stated in those highest teachings of the victorious Buddhas. People who are just starting out though will find that establishing this object by means of the four crucial points is easier to bring up clearly in the mind.

Here is how we do that. People like you and me have an extremely strong tendency, seated deep at the bottom of our hearts, to think in terms of “*Me, Me,*” during everything we do, from the deepest state of sleep on up to all our other activities. This tendency is what we refer to as the “inborn” tendency of grasping to “me.”

We see this come up when someone appears and accuses us of something that in fact we haven’t done at all: “You did such and such a bad thing!” In the moment we get this overwhelming feeling, deep in our hearts, of *me, me: I didn’t do anything at all, and yet they’re accusing me of this thing!*

At times like this, the way our inborn tendency holds to some “me” is the most obvious. Take the opportunity to let a little corner of your mind examine just what kind of “me” the main part of your mind is holding on to; and how it’s holding on to it.

Now it may happen that the second part of the mind may get too strong; and then the first part of it will just disappear into thin air. If this happens you won’t get anywhere, just some sensation of something lost. It’s crucial therefore that you maintain this little side section of you mind to observe what’s going on, even in the face of that constant stream of the part of your mind which is thinking *me, me*, at its deepest levels.

As you observe your mind, look into *what kind of “me”* it is that this inborn tendency of grasping to a “me” is holding on to. It’s certainly not holding on to something that is *other* than the five heaps or parts that make me up; it’s not holding on to something that is *other* than the two of my own body and mind. But neither can I find “me” in just any *one* of the five parts to me; nor in just *either* my body *or* my mind.

But neither does “me” seem to me to be just an idea applied to the whole package of the five parts of me, or two the two of my body and my mind taken together. I grasp, rather, to some solid “me” that has existed on its own, since the very beginning. That’s then how the inborn grasping to a “me” holds on to its “me.”

The “me” that this state of mind is taking as the object it thinks it sees is the object that we deny: the object that we have to work to deny. We have to strive to actually see the way this tendency works, face-to-face, inside of our own minds—and not just through some general understanding that we glean from what someone else has told us, or through trying to imagine what the words for it mean. This entire process then is the first of the four crucial points: we call it “the crucial point of actually seeing how the very thing we deny appears within our mind.”

The second crucial point is “seeing that the possibilities are covered.” Again, we have that incredibly strong tendency, deep down within us, to think of *me, me*. Now suppose we decide that the “me” which this tendency is holding on to exists somewhere in the five heaps or parts that

make us up. “Me” then must either be *the same* as the five parts, or *something different from* these parts.

It’s completely impossible that there can be some “me” which exists in a third way—in a way which is not covered by these two possible ways of being. Every single object which exists in the entire universe must be manifesting either as a single entity or as multiple entities. Decide then in your own mind that it has to be either one way or the other: it’s simply not possible that anything could be something other than these two.

Emptiness

Here next is the third crucial point, which is coming to a definite understanding that the object is not one “real” thing. Suppose now that you think to yourself, “The me that I am holding on to the way we spoke about before [with my inborn tendency to grasp to ‘me’] is one with my five parts.”

If that were the case, then there would have to be five different, discrete selves to me—since this one person has five different parts. Or else the five parts to me would have to be one indivisible thing.

Reach thus to a place where you think to yourself, “So many problems like this come up when I think that ‘me’ is one with my five parts. It just can’t be that the ‘me’ I’m holding on to, as we described it before, is like this.”

Suppose still that the “me” I hold on to the way we spoke of before were one with my five different parts—the five heaps. This “me” that exists the way I so strongly hold it to be—this very solid, self-standing “me”—would then have to be something that was in a continual state of growing and decaying, just as the five parts themselves are in this same state.

And if “me” were in this same state, then I’d have to ask myself a question: “Let me think about the successive instants of this ‘me’—this me that is in a continual state of growing and decaying. Do these instants amount to one thing, or to separate things?”

If they amount to one thing, then the me of my last life, and the me of my next life, and the me in this life right now—these three—are all a single, indivisible thing.

And suppose those successive instants amounted to separate things. Now in general, it's not the case that if things are simply separate from each other then they are necessarily separate from, and totally unrelated to, each other. It *is* the case though that—if anything were separate from another thing and also existed through some nature of its own—then the two things would have to be separate in a way that could never allow for any relationship between them at all.

As such, the me of my last life, and the me of my next life, and the me in this life right now—these same three—would then have to be separate in a way that could never allow for any relationship between them at all.

If this were the case though a lot of other problems would come up. I would for example have to meet with experiences that did not result from something I myself had done in the past. Or else karma I had committed in the past would have to simply go away, without my experiencing any result. The fact is then that the successive instants of the kind of “me” we’re talking about here cannot amount to separate things.

Decide then to yourself that no “me” which exists in the way that the tendency we’ve described above holds that it does could ever be one with the five parts of yourself.

And suppose once more that the “me” which we hold on to that way *were* one with the five parts to yourself. It would then have to be a single thing which existed in reality. And then it would have to be one from every possible point of view.

But in this case, still more problems would arise. For example, “me” or “myself” could never then be the one that took on these five parts at birth; nor could the same five parts be what “me” or “myself” took on at birth. Decide to yourself once more, therefore, that the “me” which we hold on to as described above could never be one with the five parts to ourselves.

Here finally is the fourth of the crucial points: coming to a definite understanding that the object is not multiple “real” things.

Suppose that you think to yourself, “Now even though the ‘me’ which I hold on to that way doesn’t exist as a single thing within the five parts to me, it *does* exist within these same five parts as separate things.”

But think about these five parts, or heaps. These are things that you can break out individually into the heap of form and so on, and then identify individually as well in wording like “the heap of consciousness.”

If things were as we’ve said, then after you broke the various heaps of form and the rest out individually, you’d have to be able to identify them separately, in wording like “this heap is what that ‘me’ is.” But in fact we don’t do this. As such, you must decide to yourself that the “me” which we hold on to as described before cannot be something which is separate from the five parts to yourself.

Take yourself thus through the examination which utilizes the four crucial points. You’ll come to the definite conclusion that there doesn’t even exist any “me” that could be the way that our inborn tendency to grasp to “me” believes it to be.

Work then to maintain this exact same certainty single-pointedly in deep meditation, without any dullness or distraction at all.

Now it may happen that you begin to slip a bit from this clear decision about how things are. If you’re fairly new to these things, then you should take yourself through the four crucial points again, and bring back this certainty about how things cannot be “real.” . . .

In the period after you come out of deep meditation, keep up a continuous practice where you see everything there is—including this “me”—as being a play of illusion. The way you do this is that you build up a stronger and stronger certainty, during your deep meditations, of how things cannot be “real.”

The End of Emptiness

Here is the second section from before: how to meditate by establishing what the lack of a self to things is like. We proceed in two steps of explaining how to meditate by establishing the lack of any self-nature to caused things; and then how to meditate by establishing the lack of any such nature to uncaused things. . . .

To sum, there doesn't exist even a single atom of anything that exists from its own side—there is not a single thing in the world of pain, and not a single thing beyond this world of pain, which is anything more than a simple projection: whether your talking about you, or your parts, or the great mountain at the center of the world, or just the house you live in. Come to a state of certainty about this fact, and then maintain a meditation where you stay single-pointed upon it. This is what we call “the yoga of the empty sky.”

During the periods that follow these deep meditations, remain aware that there is no reality to things—that their nature is deceptive: every object, everything that appears to us, is something that occurs through a certain collection of causes and factors. This is what we call the “subsequent perception,” the “yoga of illusion.” Maintain these two yogas perfectly.

You will find yourself in a balanced meditation which is imbued with the physical and mental bliss of practiced ease—something which is brought on by the force of your analysis. This itself is what we would call a definitive form of “vision.”

You Must Now Enter

Once you have prepared your mind with the shared path, as we've just described it, then you absolutely *must now enter* the way of the diamond. . . .

Becoming a true master of these steps to the path—transforming your entire mind with them—is very simply the highest way to do something meaningful with this precious opportunity, this precious human life.