

The Two Truths

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe



KHENPO NGAWANG DHAMCHOE

The Two Truths

Copyright © 2023 by Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise without written permission from the publisher. It is illegal to copy this book, post it to a website, or distribute it by any other means without permission.

First edition

This book was professionally typeset on Reedsy.

Find out more at reedsy.com

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	iv
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
Introduction	1
The right motivation for studying the Two Truths	1
Benefits of contemplating the Two Truths	2
Temporary benefits	3
Ultimate benefit	4
Definition of the Two Truths	5
Conventional Truth	5
Absolute Truth	7
Divisions of the Two Truths	9
Basis of the Division of the Two Truths	10
Meaning of the Division of the Two Truths	11
Division Based on the Mind	12
Division Based on the Person	16
Are Conventional and Absolute Truth one – or separate?	19
Why are there only Two Truths – not more?	21
Absolute view - Cittamatra and Prasangika Perspectives	22
Guidelines for Meditating on Emptiness	31
Preliminary	31
Main	34
Conclusion	36

Preface



The Two Truths is one of four booklets that serve as readings for the second year of The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course. They concern another of the main traditions of Buddhism, the Mahayana tradition. The Mahayana accepts the main teachings of the Theravada tradition, but in addition, proposes the path of the bodhisattva striving to become a fully awakened Buddha for the sake of all sentient beings. There are four booklets in The Mahayana series – *Buddha Nature*, *Parting From the Four Attachments*, *The Two Truths* and *The Six Paramitas*.

These booklets are based on the recorded teachings of Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe is one of the most highly qualified Tibetan Buddhist Sakya lamas in Australia. He is highly respected in Australia and internationally for his profound knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism, the clarity and inspirational qualities of his teachings, and his understanding of the western mind.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe has been a monk since 1971. At the age of nine, he entered the Sakya Monastery in Bir, India, and remained there for 10 years. When Khenpo was 19, the principal of Sakya College in Dehradun, His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche, asked the Sakya Monastery to send senior monks to join the Sakya College. Sakya College is one of the most famous Tibetan philosophical institutes in India. It was established by His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin and His Eminence Khenchen Appey Rinpoche.

Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe was chosen to join the Sakya College. He studied there for just over 10 years, from 1979 to 1990. In his sixth year he was nominated as the Discipline Master. This was a challenging role, as some of the monks, including his peers, were older than him. In Khenpo's seventh year he was appointed a Teacher's Assistant, and in the eighth year he studied for the degree of Kacho Pa – the equivalent of a Bachelor of Arts, requiring intensive study. In Khenpo's ninth and tenth years he studied for the degree of Loppon, equivalent to a PhD degree. At the same time, he taught and conducted examinations at the college.

In 1994 His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin appointed Khenpo as Resident Teacher at Sakya Tharpa Ling, a Buddhist centre in Sydney, following the passing of the 14th Gyalsay Tulku Rinpoche. In 2002, His Holiness bestowed on him the title of 'khenpo', or abbot, in recognition of his teaching ability. The bestowal of the term 'khenpo' recognises something considered rare and precious. His Holiness the 41st Sakya Trizin recognised Khenpo's special qualities and deep understanding of Buddhist philosophies, both in sutra and tantra, and held an Enthronement Ceremony in the Bir Monastery Northern India, promoting Khenpo from the term Loppon to Khenpo in March 2002.

The term 'khenpo' has at least three meanings in Tibetan Buddhism: a scholar who has completed an extensive course of study in sutra and tantra,

a senior lama who can give ordinations, and the head of a monastery. The khenpos have been the main channels for keeping the purity of Buddha's teachings alive from generation to generation within the Tibetan monastic tradition.

Since 2017 Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe has lived and taught at Kamalashila Tibetan Buddhist Centre near Tilba on the South Coast of New South Wales, although he travels to many countries to spread the Dharma.

From 2017 to 2019, Khenpo taught the first component of the Seven Year Complete Path for senior students which was coordinated by the International Buddhist Academy in Kathmandu under the strict guidance of, and within the program developed by, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin.

In 2019, Khenpo began to develop The Autumn Buddhist Philosophy Course, a three-year program teaching the main concepts and practices of the three main traditions of Buddhism – Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana. The inaugural program began in 2022.

There are many to thank for *The Mahayana Booklets* but first and foremost we would like to thank Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe for his precious teachings which he has given so generously and diligently to his students over so many years. They have greatly helped his students to understand and to apply the Dharma in their lives to such good effect. These Booklets were prepared over three years and with many hours of work by transcribers and editors. The best gift of appreciation we can give our teacher in return is to try these methods and to practise the Dharma.

*May the precious Dharma continue down through the ages
to guide countless beings on the Path.*

*Carole Kayrooz Emeritus Professor and Lael Morrissey,
November 2022*

Acknowledgements

We have many to thank for their work on *The Mahayana Booklets*, a series based on teachings by Khenpo Ngawang Dhamchoe.

The Two Truths is one of the booklets in the series. It was prepared over several years and with many hours of work by transcribers and editors. *The Two Truths* was transcribed by Jane Bodle, Zoe Carrigan, Peter Richter and edited by Carole Kayrooz, Penny Moody, Lael Morrissey, Robert Garran, Luiz Ribeiro and Peter Green.

Lael Morrissey and Ulladulla Printing and Signage prepared the layout and design.

Introduction

Effective practice of the Dharma comes through study and contemplation. There are benefits if we put effort into studying and contemplating the Dharma. One benefit is that when you study every day, you learn something about the Dharma. When you learn something about the Dharma, you actually improve yourself. It's a little like upgrading your computer. If you can replace the software of your computer with a better version, you can get much better performance. Learning about the Dharma is like having an upgrade to your mind. Learning about the Dharma improves your mind in the best possible way.

Another benefit of study and contemplation is that you gain the right knowledge to meditate properly and correctly. It's not enough to have a mere wish to meditate properly and correctly; you need to study and contemplate to truly understand the knowledge contained in the Dharma. Study and contemplation are the right tools for an understanding of the Dharma. If you lack understanding of the Dharma, you will not be able to do proper and correct meditation.

The right motivation for studying the Two Truths

When you study, your intention is so important. The wrong intention is to study the Two Truths with the wish that 'I want to be famous, I want to be better than everyone else'. This kind of study can lead you to become more arrogant, which, in turn, leads to further ignorance. It's important to recognise that this intention will not help you. It's best to abandon this kind

of intention.

The right motivation is to practice the Dharma to tame one's mind. This is the right intention. Although great knowledge will be needed to practice the richness of the Dharma, we should not compete with others in gaining this great knowledge. It's best to practice the Dharma by competing only with ourselves, to have the intent only to make ourselves better and better. The purpose of this self-competition is to uproot our ignorant and deluded mind. This is the right motivation and intention for practice.

We need to study the sutras and shastras to understand the meaning of the Two Truths – both conventional and absolute. The sutras are the scriptures, many of which are the Buddha's oral teachings, and the shastras are the commentaries written on those teachings by masters since the Buddha. Even though the sutras or shastras may be very clearly written and accessible, if we do not have knowledge of them, we are not going to understand their meaning. Only study helps you to easily understand the depth and vastness of the Dharma.

Studying the Two Truths and the sutras and shastras is mutually reinforcing. It is very difficult to understand conventional and absolute truth if we do not study, contemplate and understand the sutras and shastras that comprise the Dharma. If we do not understand these Two Truths, then one is not going to understand the profound meaning of the sutras and the shastras. We need to approach the Two Truths and the sutras and shastras together to fully understand.

Benefits of contemplating the Two Truths

It is important to recognise the benefits of contemplating the Two Truths, and I will take a little time to explain these. There are two benefits: temporary and ultimate.

Temporary benefits

Benefits in this life

When one has gained wisdom, one will have confidence in whatever one does. Confidence comes from wisdom. There is nothing to fear; fear stops one from doing many things. Fear is lack of confidence, and the cause of lack of confidence is ignorance. The more wisdom one has, the less fear one has. When people ask one questions on the Dharma, one will have confidence in answering them. When teaching the Dharma, correct wisdom protects you from making mistakes. The more wisdom one has, the more independent one will be. One will be mentally comfortable and emotionally joyous. Comfort and joy in the dharmic context are different from in the worldly context. The cause of comfort one feels is not objects or circumstances but the satisfied mind. One always needs to know how to be comfortable, how to be joyous; in order to know how to be comfortable and joyous, one needs wisdom. When one has wisdom, one does not need to advertise it; the way one speaks or the way one guides others naturally shows one's wisdom.

Benefits in future lives

No matter where you take rebirth, you will have wisdom. From the Buddhist point of view, there is no result without cause. If someone is born with a sharp mind, it is a result of a cause that had been created previously. The cause of wisdom is wisdom. Dharma is limitless. In order to attain wisdom mind, you need to create the cause, and the cause is to study the Dharma. You understand something new as a result of studying yesterday. So, whenever there is opportunity, listen to the Dharma a little, study it a little and discuss it a little. These will give you tremendous benefit. Wisdom rescues your mind from trouble, from diluted mind. Unlike material objects, whatever you learn in this life will not be wasted.

Wisdom helps you realise both the conventional nature and absolute nature of all things. Realisation of conventional truth helps you better respect the law of karma; when you respect the law of karma, you will not commit non-virtues. You will know how to lead a meaningful life; you will be able to guide others to lead a meaningful life. Wisdom takes you beyond the three realms

(desire, form, formless) in future life.

Wisdom protects you from a mistaken Path. There are all kinds of meditation around us which will not solve your problem. Wisdom will not allow you to follow wrong teachers or do wrong meditation. It protects you from all wrong things.

For study of the Two Truths, there are two texts: *Abhidharmakośa* for studying conventional truth, and *Madhyamakāvātāra* for absolute truth. If you study both, you will have a good understanding of what is conventional truth and what is absolute truth.

Ultimate benefit

The ultimate benefit of perfecting wisdom is that one can attain buddhahood. By wisdom, the Buddha meant that we can understand the nature of things for ourselves in our experience. By perfecting wisdom, we mean that one can gain insight into the empty nature of all phenomena when both wisdom and compassion come together. This is a perfected way of seeing the nature of all reality.

Once you have attained buddhahood, you are omniscient. Omniscience means nothing is lacking to turn the Wheel of the Dharma. One of the great qualities of the Buddha's speech is that no matter where one is, close or distant, one can hear it; also, all beings can hear it in their own languages.

Right now, we are preparing for buddhahood by studying wisdom. Wisdom has no boundary; boundaries are created by our deluded mind. This is one of the many ultimate benefits of the Perfection of Wisdom.

Definition of the Two Truths

Buddhists believe that these Two Truths differentiate between two levels of reality. There is the truth of worldly convention, and the truth of absolute reality.

Conventional Truth

Conventional truth is everything which appears to a mind deluded by ignorance, wrote Khenchen Appey Rinpoche in his commentary on *Clarifying the Sage's Intent*, (p.113). *Clarifying the Sage's Intent* is an important text which describes the stages of the bodhisattva path, right up to full and complete enlightenment.

Conventionally, we accept that everything exists as we perceive it. This is conventional perception; that everything is good, bad, helpful, harmful, kind, and unkind. If it works for you at a practical level, it's the truth. It's relevant because when you see something nice it makes you happy, when you see something unpleasant it makes you unhappy, so anything that works for your mind is the truth. If it's not conventionally true, it's not going to work for your mind. This is the conventional truth according to Śāntideva.

According to Sakya Pandita, anything that exists in our mind without analysis is conventional truth. When you look at a plant, or when you look at a flower, these exist in this mind, and this is conventional truth. However, when you analyse the plant or flower, 'Is this really a plant?' or 'Is this really a flower?', you are not going to find that a plant exists there absolutely, or that a flower exists there absolutely. They are not permanent or substantial. They

THE TWO TRUTHS

are always changing and lack substance.

The Buddhist view is that conventional reality is a manifestation of our karma. Whatever karma that we have, according to that, objects manifest to us. This is the reason different beings have different karma, different karma perceives this object in a different way. There are not 10 different objects but there are 10 different karmas perceiving in 10 different ways. This is conventional truth.

To summarise, anything that exists in your mind without analysis is conventional truth.

Conventional truth is the idea itself, not the thing itself. It is essentially a construction or fabrication. In the Madhyamaka tradition, there is only the subjective aspect, as there's no objective aspect of truth. When you analyse objects, you find things do not exist as you perceive them. Everything about conventional truth is created by mind.

In this way, this idea of *lo* (Tibetan for dualistic mind, which can also be translated as 'idea') is conventional truth. The reason it is conventional truth is that you only temporarily perceive things. The more you analyse 'objective reality', the more you will find things do not exist in the way you perceive them. Conventionally, when we investigate, we're not going to find objectivity.

Chandrakirti (600-c650) was a great Buddhist scholar of the Madhyamaka school. He wrote commentaries on the works of the original Indian master of Madhyamaka, Nagarjuna (c150-c.250CE). Chandrakirti stated in his *Madhyamakāvatāra*, when you discuss conventional truth, you should not investigate it. If you investigate conventional truth, you are not going to find anything, so there's nothing to talk about, nothing to do, and you can become very lost. Without this instruction, we can investigate too much, then we don't find what we are looking for. The problem is we don't have a method for how to cultivate the mind, or the wisdom to understand absolute truth. We can become crazy - thinking 'What's the point in studying Dharma if everything is emptiness, what's the point in meditating if everything is emptiness, what's the point of offering anything'. We can become very lost.

Absolute Truth

Śāntideva said that absolute truth was not the object of an ordinary mind (Chapter 9 of the *Bodhicaryāvatāra*). The object of an ordinary mind was conventional truth. Khenchen Appey Rinpoche said absolute truth may be defined as that which is seen by an undeluded mind. When you analyse what exists in your mind, then you will not find any substance or any permanence.

The main source of our understanding about absolute truth and conventional truth is the *Prasangika Madhyamaka*, a school of the *Madhyamaka* associated with Chandrakirti.

From the *Prasangika Madhyamaka* point of view, the absolute truth is that all objects, including the self, and other phenomena, are empty of inherent nature.

The *Madhyamaka* perspective characterises absolute truth as free from four possibilities.

The four possibilities, also known as the ‘four extremes’:

- The object is existent, and the result is that you grasp at it as existent.
- The object is non-existent, and the result is that you grasp at it as non-existent.
- The object is both existent and non-existent, and as a result, you grasp at it being both existent and not existent.
- The object is neither existent nor non-existent, and you grasp at it as being neither existent nor non-existent.

If you really search, there is no position other than these four possibilities. If you detect, examine and analyse the four possibilities in a detailed way, you will not find anything to grasp that is permanent or substantial. So that means there is nothing objectively to grasp. You can’t grasp any object out there, meaning the object is not there.

When the object is not there, and you’re still grasping at it as if it were an object, you will wonder if this is the right view or if it is an incorrect view? It is important to ask this question.

THE TWO TRUTHS

The view of an object actually out there is an incorrect view. There's nothing there, but still you're grasping. Absolutely, it's free from existence. At the same time, we don't say it's non-existent, because this in itself is one of the four extremes. We need to be free from all four extremes, so when we are free from all four extremes, there is no object, so that is what we call absolute truth. In this way, absolute truth is not an object of the mind.

Whatever approach you use to familiarise yourself with mind, you are going to grasp at the familiar, but that familiarised mind is not representative of the entire mind. Many of us are brought up in a materialistic education system where everything is something tangible, something you can find, something that is there. We bring this habit of mind into the Dharma, 'I need to find out what is emptiness', or 'I need to see what is emptiness'. But when you don't see it, you are lost. The permanent and solid thing you are searching for cannot be found, and little do you know that not finding what you are searching for actually means you have found it.

There is nothing to think, nothing to perceive. This is what we call the absolute truth.

Sometimes when translating into English, the Tibetan word 'lo' means 'idea'. When you have some idea, that idea is actually dualistic mind. I have this idea or you have a smart idea, all these ideas are dualistic mind.

In Tibetan, idea means mind. If there's no mind, how are you going to have an idea? If there's no mind to have an idea, then one cannot have an idea of what to do, so idea is a reflection of mind, planning something, expecting something, wanting something - that's the mind.

If this absolute is not an object of that idea, the idea is not going to find absolute truth. This is the absolute truth.

Divisions of the Two Truths

We may wonder why we need to study this complicated and philosophical topic, but studying and contemplating has many purposes, some existing in the present and some in the future. The present purpose has a simple, immediate benefit. Our mind never stops, it is always wandering, unstoppable, much bigger than a huge flood. How can we stop it? If you really put effort into listening or studying, whether you understand what you are listening to or not, at that very moment your mind is very actively concentrating, but that activity of the mind is not wasted at that moment. This active mind is not creating unnecessary, negative or harmful thoughts, so at this moment it creates a barricade for the flood. If you look at it from this point of view, it is tremendously beneficial in the short term.

But ultimately, it's important to have a big ambition. It's important to realise that you are not always going to be an ordinary sentient being, you are not always going to be a student, and one day you are going to be a teacher, one day you are going to be a buddha. What makes a buddha is knowledge and experience. If you don't have knowledge and experience, nothing can make you a teacher, nothing can make you a buddha, so this is the reason you create these causes and conditions. Each and every little thing builds the bridge towards enlightenment, it builds the bridge towards the teacher.

Think of all the previous great masters, when they first started to hear the Dharma they had no idea of what they were listening to, they were full of confusion, but they never gave up the Dharma, they kept learning, and then one day, that very person who thought 'I'm not going to listen to the Dharma' became a great scholar. If you believe in cause and effect, right now we are

creating the cause, so that sooner or later there will definitely be a result.

If you don't create the cause, we may wait, thinking 'one day something is going to happen' but that day is never going to come. You are just deceiving yourself. So in this way, we don't just think 'Oh this is not relevant to me' or 'It's too confusing'. It's best to think, 'this is what the previous buddhas, bodhisattvas and masters went through and I am going to take the same steps. The struggle will not last forever, but it will take time'.

Basis of the Division of the Two Truths

The ground of our division is to examine why we make the division between the Two Truths. What is the basis for making the division between the conventional truth and the absolute truth? When we talk about the basis or the ground of our division of conventional and absolute truth, we mean that truth itself is the ground. In reality, even thinking that this is the basis or ground of our division is conventional truth, because in the absolute sense, there is no truth. We need this conventional truth, as the conventional is the environment that allows us to have dialogue, to learn, to engage. We need a functional environment to explore the division between conventional and absolute truth. Within that functional environment, we talk about this truth - conventional or absolute - but these are not the absolute state. So truth is the ground, and there are two types of truth, conventional truth and absolute truth.

Sometimes, scholars argue that there is no common ground between the conventional and absolute truths. Yet how do you have the grounds to make the division? It is important to know which view the scholar is adopting. If something exists beside the mind, then you have the right to say there is no common ground between the conventional and absolute truth. They are two totally different things; conventional is one thing, absolute another, and there is no common ground.

From the Madhyamaka point of view, conventional and absolute truth only exists in conceptual mind. When we come to explain the mind, the Tibetan word *sem sel* mean 'removing others'. This Tibetan notion of 'removing

others' refers to conceptual mind. With conceptual mind, when you think of an object; at that very moment, it is impossible to think of others. It's more like single pointedness; conceptual mind is very much single pointed. It can only think one thing at a time. Sometimes we think we have so many thoughts at the same time, but it is impossible to have ten thoughts at the same time. You can have a thought after another thought, but you cannot have two thoughts at the same moment. Because they are so fast, it appears like there are many thoughts at the same time, but the reality is one at a time. When you're thinking about one object, at that very moment, it removes other thoughts. Other objects don't exist.

In that mind there is the truth. This very truth is the ground on which we make the division into the Two Truths - conventional and absolute. So truth only exists in the conventional discursive state of mind. Besides that, there is no truth. This means, the truth is made up from the thoughts, and beside thoughts, there is no truth. It is very simple, the creator of truth is the mind, not just mind, but conceptual mind.

Non-conceptual mind cannot create the truth. Truth is something we believe, and non-conceptual mind hasn't got the mind to believe anything, it just perceives. Belief comes from the conceptual mind. In that state, there is a common belief as to what is truth. This common belief is the ground to make the division into conventional and absolute truth.

Absolute and conventional - they have different characteristics, different definitions, so there is no common ground externally but mentally there is common ground.

What is the basis for making the division? Conventional truth is the ground to make the division.

Meaning of the Division of the Two Truths

The discussion of the Two Truths is divided into three parts, that is, the meaning of the division of the Two Truths is divided into three parts:

1. Based on the mind, we talk about absolute and conventional truth.

2. Based on the person, we talk about absolute and conventional truth.
3. Are conventional and absolute truth one or separate?

Division Based on the Mind

What sort of mind constitutes the conventional and absolute truth? One of the Acharya Yeshe in the Two Truths Shastra said,

‘Whatever we are perceiving right now, everything is conventional truth.’
Something that is beyond perception is what we call absolute truth.

Perception mind is dualistic mind, because you have a subject and an object. Non-perception mind is primordial wisdom. Primordial wisdom is not consciousness, it is very subtle. There is absolute truth consciousness aspect, there is absolute truth non-consciousness state, so with this we are touching the very subtle aspect of absolute truth.

Everything that we are perceiving is conventional truth, so perception mind is the creator of conventional truth. Non-perception mind means there is no object, so objectlessness mind is what we call absolute truth.

In this way, every perception is conventional truth, so this very object we are perceiving, when you analyse with the logical mind, you’re not going to find it as we perceive. This object does not exist as good, it does not exist as bad, as attractive or unattractive, it’s not there. This something ‘unfindable’ is the nature of primordial reality and is what we call absolute truth.

Selfless primordial wisdom-mind is only ever realising absolute truth, and perception- mind, whatever it’s perceiving, is perceiving conventional truth.

So that’s how we differentiate different minds: one is perception mind which is conventional truth, the other is selflessness wisdom mind, which is absolute truth.

Now, to further differentiate, within conventional truth there is accurate conventional truth and false conventional truth. In correct conventional truth, the ordinary conventional consciousness makes valid inferences from perception.

Characteristics of Conventional Truth

Three characteristics are needed for correct conventional truth.

The **first is collective karma**. Collective karma does not mean universal power, or that we are all one, or global energy. Collective karma refers to you and I doing similar things, so that this then creates similar karma in our mind state. When we have a similar type of karma operating, then with this 'collectiveness' we see the same things out there. We are human, and when we look at the moon, we all have the same idea about the moon, but other beings see the moon as a different idea, so for this reason, light and darkness are conventional not absolute. If light is true, then light helps humans to see but this light is blinding to some other beings. For nocturnal creatures, this light is darkness for them, their darkness in the daytime is for us light.

Is it the light that comes from the sun that makes light and dark, or our mind karma that makes light and dark? Buddhist science says it's the mind not the object. So scientifically I'm not sure what type of eye the nocturnal creature has to see at night time, but it's a karmic thing. We both have eyes, but one works in this condition, and the other doesn't. This is individual karma.

Second, there are karmic functions which help to know the characteristics of the correct conventional truth. We all have collective karma. We look at the sky in full moonlight, or a waning moon, and we see the moon, just one moon. When we look at the moon, this moon is functional, this moon has a few benefits. In the summer time the reflected light from the sun on the moon helps you cool down. The reflected light of the moon also helps some flowers blossom at night time.

Some say the moon is helpful for your eyesight, and the sun is bad for your eyes. If you look at the sun for a long time it blinds you, but the moon does not hurt your eyes if you look at it in the night time.

In this way there are karmic functions that help establish the characteristics of correct conventional truth.

Third, Madhyamaka logic says if you analyse, then the conventional does not exist; it is free from existence but when you don't examine it deeply, it is existing.

When you have these three characteristics, this is what we call the correct conventional truth.

THE TWO TRUTHS

False or incorrect conventional truth is different

Individually, you may not be able to apprehend the truth conventionally. For example, your eye consciousness may have some damage and you may see double. Instead of seeing one moon, you see two moons. So this is not collective karma, it is individual.

Further, these moons that you see are not going to function as moons because they are mistaken. This illusory state of moons you do not need to analyse; they do not even exist conventionally.

In this way we need to distinguish between conventional truth where everyone agrees, and where others do not agree. Where everyone agrees about what they apprehend, this is correct conventional truth, but if you believe, and no one agrees with you, this is false conventional truth.

The Madhyamakāvātāra says that in order to understand absolute truth you need to understand conventional truth. This conventional truth refers to the correct conventional truth, not the false conventional truth.

This means that to understand absolute truth, we should not have this enormous illusion mind, filled with imagination. This is a crazy mind, which will not help you understand absolute truth.

We need to be normal, not mad, to understand absolute truth.

The reason is that when you come into the spiritual world, people think it's simple but actually, within the spiritual environment there are many crazy people - 'I have this vision, I have this experience' so full of illusions.

When you live full of illusion, it is unfortunate, and you will not have the best foundation to practise Dharma. Then some people with a similar type of karma are attracted to those with illusions, which in turn, creates more delusion.

It's important not to judge others. First we need to look into our minds to recognise which is correct conventional truth, and which mind is perceiving false conventional truth.

Once you're aware of these things, you should not rely on false conventional truth, you should rely on correct conventional truth, because this is the cause to help you understand absolute truth.

Some scholars distinguish this correct and false conventional truth by its

consequence. Correct conventional truth is anything that causes you higher rebirth, and false conventional truth is anything that causes lower rebirth.

Sakya Pandita says this is just silly nonsense. It's not true. It's just people's opinion. His view is to allow them to talk about their view, but we need to skilfully help free them from this illusory view.

Sometimes in a Buddhist environment, people are very controlling, saying 'Oh, you should not say it this way. That's not good'. People just say whatever they like, but you should try to help correct them. For example, when you go to see the doctor in great pain, just imagine if the doctor says 'Shut up'. Everyone would say that's not nice, that person is really in pain, you should let them express their pain, and based on that, you give treatment. It's not right to make them keep quiet and suppress their pain while you give the treatment.

It's the same in the Dharmic environment. People will express their issues because we all have issues, but the only time you should be quiet is when you've helped a hundred times and still there's not much improvement, then there's not much you can do about it.

The Madhyamakāvātāra says when we see the moon in the sky and the moon in the water, both are perceptions.

Beings are like the moon in rippling water;

Fitful, fleeting, empty in their nature.

—One, Perfect Joy, verse 4

Why do we say the moon's reflection in rippling water is false and the moon itself in the sky is the truth, when we perceive both; one in the water, one in the sky? In conventional truth, these two have vast differences. The moon that reflects in the water will not function the same as the moon in the sky; it's not going to help the flower open, it's not going to enable your eye consciousness to look at the flower, because the moon reflected in the water is just a reflection, it's not real.

It's just the same as when you contrast someone's picture with seeing them as a real person. You are seeing the same person, but there are vast differences between the picture of the person and the real person. The person that you see in the picture cannot talk to you, the real person can talk to you. There

are vast differences between the picture you can perceive and the real person. This is similar to the differences between the moon in the sky and its reflection in the water.

The moon in the sky and the real person in front of you are both functional; the reflected light of the moon in the water and the picture of the person are not functional. Anything which is functional is correct conventional truth and anything that is not functional is false conventional truth.

We often enjoy imaginary things, not practical things, but there are different imaginations, one is constructive imagination, the other is not; one is achievable, the other is not. For example – fantasy like ‘I want to be the king of the whole world’ is useless, it is false conventional truth. For this reason it is always important to examine your imagination, is it true conventional truth or false conventional truth? If it’s true conventional truth, it means it is achievable; you can work with that.

This is how we distinguish false conventional truth and correct conventional truth. False truth does not exist in either the conventional or absolute; correct conventional truth exists in the conventional.

So what we refer to here is based on the mind. The next division is based on the person.

Division Based on the Person

From the Theravada/Shravakayana perspective, an ordinary being’s mind is conventional truth, whereas the aryas or enlightened beings’ meditative mind is absolute truth.

When you have been in the Dharma for some time, you know that when you talk of Enlightenment, what kind of state of mind this is, but for the average person, they think an ordinary person can be an enlightened person.

When we say *pagpa* it has a very specific meaning. It means extraordinary mind. So what is ordinary mind? Ordinary mind means dualistic mind, extraordinary mind means non-dualistic mind, so beings that have reached this non-dualistic state is what we call the *pagpa*, extraordinary beings.

There are three types of *aryas*, or extraordinary or enlightened beings –

shravakabuddha, pratyekabuddha and the bodhisattva. The meditative state of mind of these three enlightened beings, is what we call the absolute truth.

When you study Madhyamakāvatāra or Mūlamadhyamakakārikā there come very subtle points on this topic. Others just touch base, not really talking in detail. For instance, when in the first bhumi meditative state, mind is without objective. This mind without objective is what we call the Truth of Path.

It is really difficult to draw the line. This we call the absolute truth, but are you talking about absolute truth? Where is the mind when you meditate on the emptiness state, just without grasping anything, are you calling that non-conceptual mind absolute truth?

Normally we call that subjective truth, but, in reality, absolute truth is uncreated, but when you talk about this Truth of Path, it is sort of created, so in this way, it is not an easy topic. This is the reason that in Buddhism we need to do a lot of debate based on that, lots of dialogue to really dig out all these things, and lots of mental exercise is required to find the subtle aspect when you talk about this mind.

As explained previously, the meditative state of mind of these three enlightened beings is the absolute truth. When we say absolute truth, it is always a comparison. When in that state you are not grasping, so compared to that, it is absolute truth. But when you compare this state of mind with the buddha state, the Dharmakaya state, if you have not reached this, it is still conventional, rather than the absolute state.

In the non-dualistic state, there is no grasping, so no disturbance. That aspect we call absolute, but you are not completely inseparable from the Dharmakaya state and wisdom. The reason that it is not inseparable is because there are still subtle obscurations. If there are no such obscurations, then there is no meditative state and post-meditative state.

When you reach the buddha state, there is no meditative or post-meditative state because there are no subtle obstacles, so no differences between mind and absolute truth. But with bodhisattvas, still there are subtle obstacles. You can stay a certain length of time in this non-dual state, but then subtle defilements arise and can separate you again, so in this way, it is difficult to

THE TWO TRUTHS

describe exactly what is absolute truth. But compared to a gross mind like ours, that mind is the absolute truth.

The three types of extraordinary or enlightened beings – shravakabuddhas, pratyekabuddhas and the bodhisattvas – have absolute truth. In the post-meditative state, they are coming out and studying more from the teacher or, when coming out, if they are a Theravada arhat they go on alms rounds for food. Bodhisattvas go out to practice the six paramitas so at that time, all the minds are conventional truth.

When we say conventional truth, again there are two things, mere conventional truth and conventional truth.

When you reach the first bhumi onwards, this person sees a bowl but they don't see the bowl as real the way we see things, so seeing the bowl itself is mere conventional truth, but it is not conventional truth, because they don't have a perception of conventional truth, therefore they don't have attachment to the bowl. We see the bowl as real, as truth, therefore we have attachment, we have clinging. Our perception of this bowl is conventional truth.

An enlightened being perceiving this bowl is mere conventional truth, not the conventional truth. For the aryas in the post-meditative state, all the objects of mind are conventional truth. In meditative state, the objects of the mind are absolute truth.

When we say nirvana, it is just a label. No substance exists, so nirvana is truth of cessation. Truth of cessation means absence of suffering and the absence of the origin of suffering - absence of these two is nirvana. When people think that nirvana is something obtainable, they are spiritually materialistic. Nirvana is no baggage, there is no nirvana baggage. Nirvana is when you become free from these two, the truth of suffering and truth of origin of suffering, that aspect we call truth of cessation or nirvana.

So in order to explain, we say, 'I'm practising to obtain nirvana' but really what we obtain is absence of these two. Besides this, there is nothing to obtain. This is really important otherwise people think one day I'll obtain nirvana then they don't know what this is going to look like. So nirvana is merely cessation. When you exhaust it, you part from it, this is nirvana. This is the absolute truth of cessation.

Are Conventional and Absolute Truth one – or separate?

There are different points of view as to whether conventional and absolute truth are one or separate.

Sakya Pandita says these Two Truths, the conventional truth and absolute truth are not one.

The reason for this view is that ordinary beings perceive the conventional truth, but don't have any idea of what is absolute truth. If the Two Truths are one, then ordinary beings must know the absolute truth because they know the conventional truth.

But neither does Sakya Pandita think the conventional truth and absolute truth are separate. If the Two Truths are separate, then you would find out the nature of absolute truth separate from conventional truth, in the same way you would find out the nature of a cup is quite separate from that cup.

This would be true of the nature of any object you are searching for. If conventional and absolute truth were separate, you would need to find the nature somewhere else from the object, but you are not going to find that particular nature separate from the object, so therefore it is not separate.

So, Sakya Pandita's view is that conventional and absolute truth are neither one nor separate.

Some people have the idea that the Two Truths are one, and some people have the view that they are separate. Sakya Pandita says that anyone who sees these Two Truths as one, or separate, is mistaken.

You can explain whether conventional and absolute truth are one or separate according to the notion of cause and result. If conventional and absolute truth are one, that is, if cause and result are one, they are permanent. This becomes eternalism because when the cause creates the result, it is one and the same and therefore permanent. This is one extreme.

If conventional and absolute truth are separate, when the result comes, then the cause ceases, so it is nihilism. When you don't investigate, you may say cause and result are separate – from an un-analytical point of view, it may seem reasonable to say that they are separate, but when you analyse they are neither one (eternalism) nor separate (nihilism). Therefore, when you

THE TWO TRUTHS

analyse, cause and result are neither one nor separate.

Conventional and absolute are the same thing. Conventional truth is the cause and absolute truth is the result. If it's one, then enlightened beings when they realise absolute truth, at that stage they should have conventional truth because they are one. If conventional truth is still there then how can you say this person has gained nirvana, there is still samsara there?

If you use logic then you may get some idea why Madhyamaka says not one nor separate. This logic is important for sharpening our mind. This is talking from the ultimate point of view - not one, not separate.

In the conventional state, or the conceptual mental state, or conceptual mind, which in Tibetan means 'remove others'. 'Remove others' means that when your conceptual mind is thinking of one particular object, at that very moment in that mind there exists no other phenomena. Thinking of one object has removed all other objects.

So in that conceptual state of mind, you may view these Two Truths as being of inseparable nature, but with two aspects. This means your mind allows you anything you want, there are no restrictions, but this is your mind.

But then, when you want to prove something you have in your mind, it is not good enough for others to believe what you believe. As an individual, you have the right to create any view you like, but that's not going to be the right view to discuss with others, so the right view to persuade others is formed with reason and logic.

Once the other person agrees and accepts the reason and logic, then you will both have a common view. When we commonly establish the view, this is what we call the right view.

Of course, we will never get all sentient beings to agree on a view, otherwise the Buddha would not be enlightened. For a view to be right view, it doesn't depend on all sentient beings accepting that view. There are eight billion human beings in this world; how many are going to agree that what the Buddha achieved was the right one? The majority are not going to accept this. We are talking about a very intelligent mind, a person who is going to accept logic and reason. For this type of mind, the view the Buddha achieved is the perfect view.

DIVISIONS OF THE TWO TRUTHS

When you do practice, you need to have feeling, but not just feeling by itself. There are two types of feeling. One is without analysing anything, just going with the feeling. There are more chances to make mistakes, as you're not sure if it's the right feeling or not.

If you analyse, and you find the right view, then put it into feeling, that feeling is much better. They are still feelings but they are different. One is the result of you realising what is right and accurate, and based on that, you develop the feeling. With the other, you are not analysing, you just go with your intuition, you go with your delusion mind, and this usually makes mistakes. For this reason, it is good to not just go with what you feel, whether that be good or bad.

If you just go with the feeling, then it is very much the mundane approach, it is not the Dharmic way to establish the right view. Conventionally, what we are saying is these Two Truths are inexpressible, not one nor separate. Absolutely, they are not one nor separate.

Why are there only Two Truths – not more?

Why are there only Two Truths? Again, there are so many explanations for why this is so, but the prime reason is there are two minds, one is illusion mind, or delusion mind, and the other is non-delusion mind.

There is no third mind, both delusion and non-delusion, neither is there a fourth mind in the absence of these.

So there are only Two Truths – delusion mind and non-delusion mind. Anything perceived in delusion mind is conventional truth. Anything perceived in non-delusion mind is absolute truth. Besides that, there is no third or fourth mind. There is no requirement for more than two and less than two is not enough.

Absolute view - Cittamatra and Prasangika Perspectives

I mainly want to tell you about the Prasangika Madhyamika view of absolute truth, but I think it's important to place this in a context of the development of Buddhist thinking over the centuries. The point I am making is that there were precursors in relation to Madhyamaka thinking about absolute truth. We will look at the Sravakayana school, and second, the Cittamatra school.

Sravakayana (Therevada) schools

There are two intellectual Sravaka or Theravadin schools. In Tibetan, we have two lines to describe them: the first line refers to the intellectual fundamentalist Theravada school; and the second line refers to the practising Theravadins on the Path. Here we are not refuting the second, genuinely practising Theravadins; we are refuting the intellectual school. The intellectual Theravada has two schools: Vaibhasika and Sautrantika. Both accept that consciousness exists at the absolute level, that is, it is truly existent.

The difference between them is that Vaibhasika holds that gross physical phenomena exist at both the conventional and absolute level, while for Sautrantika, physical phenomena exist only as subtle [partless] atoms or particles at the absolute level. Partless means that you can't divide it up any further. So, with consciousness, both schools believe that phenomena exist, with one believing in gross existence, and the other in subtle existence.

The reason they are called wrong views is because they say consciousness exists at the absolute level, and physical phenomena – at gross or subtle level – also exist at the absolute level. When one grasps something as existent at

the absolute level, that very state of mind cannot realise emptiness. With the lack of realisation of emptiness, one cannot attain even the Theravada or arhat state. So, the intellectual fundamentalist Theravadins are not on the Path; they are intellectual. But the Theravadas who practise and are on the Path do not have that View; they have the realisation of emptiness of self and emptiness of the five aggregates. They have the right View, and therefore they can attain arhat state or pratyekabuddha state. This is a brief explanation of the intellectual schools of Theravada.

Mahayana schools

There are two Mahayana schools: Yogachara or Cittamatra, which in English is called 'mind only' school; and Madhyamika or the 'middle way' school.

First, we discuss the Yogachara/Cittamatra, which is Mahayana, but has a problem with the ultimate view. The Cittamatra School believes that nothing in the external phenomena exists – everything is created by the mind. The basis of their belief is one of the sutras in which the Buddha stated that in the entire three realms (desire, form and formless) the only thing that exists is the mind.

The Buddha taught the Dharma in interpretive and definitive ways, and that it is a mistake to take the interpretive as the definitive. When he said that only the mind exists in the three realms, it was interpretive. But Cittamatra takes this interpretive teaching as definitive, that is, the mind is absolute; they say that physical objects do not exist, and the mind that perceives physical objects also does not exist, but the mere clarity awareness, that is free from the subject and object, exists. The awareness itself exists as absolute. If you hold that view, you cannot gain buddhahood, even if you have bodhicitta, loving-kindness and compassion.

The Cittamatra or Mind only School offered an alternative explanation of absolute truth. All appearances are simply appearances of one's mind. They are mere appearances of the mind only. Mere appearances have two aspects.

The first aspect is the pure 'dependent on other' which means that subjects and objects are not intrinsically existing. Both the meditative state of wisdom and post-meditative state of wisdom are realized as pure, dependent on each

other. They are absolute truth.

The second aspect, is ultimate accomplishment. This refers to absence of imputation dependent on other. This is dependent on self. Empty non-dual experience has been stripped of duality. So the pure dependent on other is the absence of this imputation on other or the absolute truth.

The Cittamatra view of absolute truth is that it is something existent (phenomena) – and is referring to the mind. But this isn't right. As we have previously seen, if anything exists absolutely, it is a logical inconsistency or contradiction, which means there is no absolute truth.

Now I will discuss the Prasangika school which is one of two Madhyamaka schools: Svatantrika and Prasangika. The difference between them is very subtle. They both accept the position that is free from the four extremes: 1. existent; 2. non-existent; 3. both; and 4. neither. The difference manifests when describing the View. When debating with other schools on the absolute truth, Svatantrika accepts absolute truth as a common ground for debate. Prasangika school, on the other hand, never has a common ground when debating; whenever they debate, they expose the opponent's own contradictions while not holding any ground themselves. They are completely free from the four extremes, so Prasangika View is the highest View in Mahayana.

Prasangika says the three arya's meditative state – that is, the meditative state of the three types of extraordinary, or enlightened beings – shravakabuddha, pratyekabuddha and the bodhisattva – is absolute truth and nirvana is only absolute truth.

When it is said that nirvana is only absolute truth, it is explaining only the empty aspect, however the Prasangika does not say that absolute truth is only the empty aspect.

In saying only nirvana is absolute truth, nirvana must be referring to the buddha state. When you are referring to the buddha state, nirvana is only absolute truth, nirvana is talking about the truth of cessation.

Sakya Pandita's comment on the Prasangika view

In distinguishing and emphasising only the empty aspect of nirvana, this is the conceptual mind. The conceptual mind differentiates the empty and

wisdom aspects, however in the buddha state there is no empty or wisdom aspect, so this is a mistake.

Sakya Pandita's ultimate view

Whether there is a buddha state or sentient being state, anything that appears in your mind, all is conventional truth. The nature of that appearance is emptiness, so explaining what is conventional, or what is absolute, when you are holding either of these individually, you do not have the right view.

With the right view, what is required is inseparability of appearance and emptiness. It means appearance is not devoid of emptiness, and emptiness is not devoid of appearance, so for this reason, in the Heart Sutra, form is emptiness, emptiness is form. You are not saying they are dualistically existent but they are inseparable. It has the flavour of both method and wisdom, so if you are lacking one of them, it is not absolute view.

Svatantrika viewpoint

There is also another viewpoint – that of the svatantrika. The svatantrika's view of absolute truth posits that when you reach the buddha state, there are Two Truths, that is: that a buddha sees Two Truths.

However, Sakya Pandita says, logically, there is no separateness such as conventional mind and absolute mind in the buddha state, so how could you say that in the buddha state there are Two Truths?

Anything that exists in the buddha state is going to be absolute, but the Svatantrika does not say they have the view of these things as absolutely existent, just that a buddha sees these Two Truths.

The Prasangika also rejects this as not the right view because still you are accepting things exist up and until you reach buddhahood.

Sakya Pandita further says that from the Buddha's point of view there is no conventional truth and /or absolute truth. However, from the sentient being's point of view it appears that the Buddha perceives conventional truth and perceives absolute truth. This is just the way sentient beings perceive the Buddha, but the Buddha is free from the view of absolute truth and conventional truth. So thinking the Buddha perceives the Two Truths is a mistake.

Summary of the various schools

Every religion has its explanation of external phenomena. Christians believe that God created them; intellectual Sravakayana say that atoms created all phenomena; Cittamatra say that the mind created it. According to Madhyamaka, all phenomena come from interdependent origination. You need to use your own wisdom mind to decide which is the right path to follow. And once you find a right path, there is no need to have negative views on the others. Just follow the path.

The next question is: 'Are the external phenomena existent, or non-existent?' The answer 'existent' leads you to eternalism; the answer "non-existent" leads to nihilism. Neither can get you out of samsara; you need to refute both views. But merely believing in 'interdependent origination' is not good enough. One must understand it logically. Interdependent origination means that, when we perceive things, a number of conditions are required: we need to be human, which is a karmic condition; we need to have the mind to perceive them; we also need the objects to perceive. We can only perceive an object when all these conditions come together. But these conditions do not exist independently; they must be caused by, and are dependent on, their own causes and conditions. So, no phenomenon exists independently. This is the logical explanation for selflessness of phenomena. If you lack the understanding of the two selflessness, of perceiving self and phenomena, and meditate on emptiness, it will not be the Buddhist meditation of emptiness. If you do not understand the emptiness of self, your meditation is the same as Hindu meditation. If you do not have the knowledge of the emptiness of phenomena, your meditation is a Theravada meditation. To do a Mahayana meditation, one needs to realise the emptiness of both self and phenomena.

For the proper understanding of the two selflessness, two things are required: one is careful study of the Buddha's explanation on selflessness and clarifying it with shastras, especially Nagarjuna's texts; and two, contemplating, analysing and examining to make sure you have the perfect understanding of their meaning. Realisation of the two selflessness is the only base for wisdom meditation, without which you will not be able to become enlightened. Once you are free from all doubts and have a clear understanding of emptiness, this is the very object you need to meditate on.

Understanding the correct wisdom

The correct wisdom means absence of obscurations. The prerequisite for cultivating correct wisdom is to study, and live as ethically as possible: whatever you do, say or think, do not harm others. In Mahayana, even some negative actions like lying can be positive if used to help others. Being ethical detoxifies one's mind, with this kind of healthy mind one can hear teachings clearly. Start with learning dependent origination – cause and condition – then you are preparing the condition to understand the Dharma.

When studying the Dharma, make sure that what you study comes from the Buddha's words (sutras) or the valid masters' comments (shastras). The more you hear the Dharma, the more it purifies your mental continuum and tames your mind, making it humble. When studying the Dharma, do not bring expectations to hear certain things, but be open-minded. The best texts for study of emptiness are:

1. Sutra: *Prajnaparamita-sutra* (3 versions 100,000; 24,000; 8,000 verses)
2. Shastra: Nagarjuna's commentary on *Prajnaparamita-sutra*, *Mūlamadhyamakā-kārikā*
3. Compendium (short, condensed writing): Chapter 9 of *Bodhicaryāvatāra* by Śāntideva

When studying, one should focus on the benefits, not on the difficulty in understanding. Laziness is our best friend who keeps telling us 'it's too hard for you!' Whether these texts are difficult or easy depends on our state of mind, not the texts themselves; a deluded mind will find them very difficult, while a clearer mind will find them less difficult.

If your mind is not ready to understand these texts, it is important for you to find the right teacher. Today, many people claim to be spiritual. But being spiritual does not make one a special person. If you are not seriously pursuing the Dharma, but just want to relax, Dharma is not your cup of tea. A Dharma practitioner is someone who can see the present and the future in a big picture. If you are not interested in this expanded view, but just want peace in mind, all religions are the same, although different religions have

different points of view: for example, each has its own version of loving-kindness. The difference for you is whether or not one religion takes you to the destination you want to reach, or how far it takes you towards the destination. This life is not going to last; we may be dead tomorrow. But our mind will last beyond this life, so it is important to find a good teacher who can put you on the right Path. To avoid wrong paths as discussed above, you need wisdom. Wisdom comes with logical thinking, and logical thinking requires intelligence. An intelligent mind knows, for example, that harming others will not lead you to happiness.

The more you study sutras or shastras, or listen to the Dharma from your teacher, the more unnecessary things are removed, such as wrong view and a lot of ignorance. If you do not study, you are not creating the condition for increasing your wisdom. When one has the Dharma, wisdom, one has everything. One can share one's relative Dharma or conventional Dharma with others. The best thing one can do is to share the Dharma – the merit of teaching others is far greater than offering all precious objects – but make sure to teach with loving-kindness, not arrogance. Conventional Dharma is the cause to attain the absolute Dharma. The absolute Dharma is the ultimate realisation.

Theory and practice are different but complementary

When we try to intellectually understand concepts such as the Two Truths, we may feel unsure of our own understanding. From the practitioner's point of view, if we practise with not too much intellectualisation, but just using the necessary investigation, and practise without falling into either eternalism or nihilism, there is no Cittamatra school, no Svatantrika school or Prasangika school. There is just the Middle Way. The practitioner is based on the path and result, not on schools. For the Mahayana practitioner, there is no Cittamatra etc., and for the Vajrayana practitioner, there is no Sakya practitioner, no Gelug practitioner etc. – just Vajrayana taught by the Buddha. The divisions only came into existence in the eighth century, so we should not be caught up in differences between schools. Knowledge is important in order to help other beings with different views, but if we are too attached to these differences, we will lose the essence.

Understanding the Two Truths is the ground for realisation, that is, seeing the reality of conventional truth and the reality of absolute truth without imputation. When one realises the reality of these truths, that is the nature of truth. What separates one's view from others' views is individual thought. Conventional truth is to realise how things exist in their own imputed reality, and absolute truth is also to realise how things actually exist in their own reality. This is the ground of realisation; the ground is object, and the mind is subject.

This mind requires two things: wisdom and method. If one is lacking in wisdom and method, one will not be able to recognise the complete nature of phenomena. The ultimate result is two kayas – dharmakaya and rupakaya – and they are inexpressible. But we still need to understand them, and in order to understand we use conventional truth as method because nothing else can express it. So, conventional truth is a tool and absolute truth is a result. Of the six perfections, generosity, ethical discipline and patience are method aspects; contemplation is the wisdom aspect, and diligence is both method and wisdom. In other words, we need all the five perfections to see absolute truth: wisdom needs all the other perfections to see absolute truth. Wisdom is the energy for the method.

In Tibetan, it is called *nyamlen* meaning that one needs to feel when practising. When you think of the method aspect, you feel warmth; when you see the wisdom aspect, you feel excited because you see the destination. If you really feel these when you practise, you would not want to give up practice. Common social norms discourage one from being emotional; an emotional person is often labelled as weak. Dharma practitioners are emotional, but not in negative way. This is what *nyamlen* means; it is the right attitude in practising the Dharma, to have the energy of both method and wisdom. This is the Path of Madhyamaka, the Middle Way.

During meditation, you should exercise wisdom; in the post-meditative state, you should exercise method. But do not totally devote your efforts to either; keep the momentum of both, and you will never be away from the Path. Practice is not only about sitting on the cushion. Think how you can live your life with those two. Think about it all the time, and it becomes your

THE TWO TRUTHS

nature. Then you will enjoy it. When you actually feel the joy, you are on the Path. There is no one to drive or push you.

Guidelines for Meditating on Emptiness

Preliminary

First, in order to meditate, physically, we need a quiet secluded place where no-one can disturb you. A quiet, secluded place without interruption is so important. In ancient times, if you visit holy sites, all the great Indian Masters meditated in such deserted areas with no one about. For this reason, with no disturbance of mind, they were so accomplished.

Then when you go to Tibet, all the yogis live in places no-one wants to go, this is the best place as no-one disturbs them and they discover incredible wisdom. Nowadays we want this wisdom while living in this chaotic world, but it is difficult to attain as there are so many obstacles.

Once in a secluded place, don't over-intellectualize your thinking e.g. 'what is the absolute truth', 'what is conventional truth'. It's best to practise in a simple way to grasp this idea. Don't just go word by word from the texts, then you will lose it – just simplify in a quiet place. This will give deeper meaning than just hearing the teaching. This gives you a tool to contemplate, but the real tool is your mind; searching yourself, this is more effective.

Now second, your body preparation. Normally we talk about the 7-point Vairocana posture, crossed legs in the vajra posture, hands in the meditation mudra, straight back, relaxed shoulders, chin slightly lowered, eyes restful and gazing past tip of nose, and the tip of the tongue on the upper palate. Once you have the correct physical and environmental things in place, it is good to have a picture of the Buddha. This really helps you; it reminds you.

THE TWO TRUTHS

However, it's important to keep in mind that the Buddha is not a religious god. The Buddha is the reminder of our inner awakened mind – it is a picture of our awakened mind. In front of the Buddha, you don't need to worry about traditional things like buying silver bowls, or any Tibetan ritualistic items. Just put whatever is precious for you, a wild flower, a special rock. The best offering is what you like the most.

There is a story of the Buddha being very happy with a very simple offering from the heart. The Buddha and Ananda passed by some children playing with sand. One of the boys offered his sand as grains of rice. The Buddha was so pleased he told Ananda to include the simple offering amongst all his offerings and the Buddha then sat down and told the children a story about generosity.

It is important to remember that offerings from the heart should not be dictated by culture or propriety. You may think a simple offering is not right, or that it is rude. But anything offered from the heart is the right offering, it doesn't need to be expensive or traditional.

It is good to make offerings before you meditate. Even if there is no picture of the Buddha, because everything is created by the mind, you can put one stone there and imagine it is the Buddha. It will be the same thing.

There is another story of an old woman whose son would travel to Bodhgaya for business trips. She asked repeatedly if he would bring back a sacred object as a focus for her meditations. He forgot every time, until she said if he did not do it, she would kill herself. He remembered only on the journey back, and seeing the desiccated head of a dead dog, he plucked a tooth from the jaw and presented it to her when he returned home as the Buddha's tooth. She venerated the tooth as if it was the Buddha's tooth itself and attained great spiritual awareness.

You don't need to go to Nepal and spend hundreds of dollars on statues. If you have a pure mind, just a simple rock can be the Buddha himself.

Setting up the environment and preparing your body are both preparation. This preparation enables mind cleansing, mind purifying. It is not just the ritual part. Ritual is method, the method that cleanses your mind. Any ritual you do, if it is cleansing your mind, it is the right ritual. If it is not cleansing

your mind, if it is feeding your desire mind, then it is not right ritual. It is actually worldly practice. So it is good to set up a nice shrine and then make offerings. If you haven't got anything, just imagine it in front of you, all sorts of offerings. There are two different types of altar, a physical altar and a mental altar. If you have a mental altar, you can visualize a beautiful buddha in front of you with lots of offerings. If you have a mental altar, it's not necessary to have physical things.

Once you have set up the environment and your body, you start with the refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. All practice must start from the refuge in the Triple Gem.

When you do take refuge it is good to take refuge from the perspective of the uncommon Mahayana refuge. This means to take refuge from a cause point of view, and the cause of taking refuge is compassion.

The purpose of taking refuge is for the sake of all sentient beings. The time for doing this is until you reach full enlightenment.

The object of the refuge is the Buddha's three kayas or bodies or modes of being, the dharmakaya, samboghakaya and nirmanakaya.

The dharmakaya is the truth body, the supreme state of absolute knowledge and enlightenment; the samboghakaya is the body of enjoyment, the heavenly mode of bliss and clear light; and the nirmanakaya is the body of transformation, the earthly mode which manifests in time and space.

The Dharma is the Mahayana teachings; the sangha are those bodhisattvas on the first to the tenth bhumis. These three are the unique Mahayana objects of refuge.

You are not going to find one single buddha or bodhisattva who has not done this refuge. All of them attained enlightenment doing this practice. This is not a new version, all the past buddhas and bodhisattvas have taken this refuge. So if you really want to attain enlightenment you have to do the same thing. The path is not some new discovery, the path is already discovered. This discovered path was used by the past buddhas, used by the present buddhas and will be used by the future buddhas. There is no new version, like an upgraded version of an iPhone!

After taking refuge, practising bodhicitta is important. It is important not

to take bodhicitta in an intellectual way. The feeling is really important here, as you need to feel connected with all sentient beings. All these sentient beings are suffering, and the cause of suffering is ignorance, nothing else.

The best remedy for ignorance is wisdom. The perfect wisdom can be gained upon reaching buddhahood. This is the reason we need to attain buddhahood, to have this perfect wisdom to cure all sentient being's suffering. You practice meditating on bodhicitta with this purpose. The reason you meditate is to attain buddhahood for the purpose of helping all sentient beings.

You can help sentient beings in various ways, but the complete benefit for others will come when you reach buddhahood. When you reach buddhahood, you have all the wisdom, you have all the kindness, you have all the capacity to bring sentient beings into your state. This is the best gift. No-one can give you better than that, so in this way, I am preparing this present for all sentient beings.

It is a little like organising a birthday party for someone, or a wedding party for someone you really love and care for. For this person, you will do your very best, you will buy the best present, best wrapping, and put it in the best presentation. You do this because you get so much enjoyment giving this to someone you love. Practicing Dharma is a present that can be given to all sentient beings. If you look at it like this it is very joyful to practice Dharma. How can you say 'I find it really hard to practise Dharma'? You have to tune your mind to see the value in what you are doing. If you see the value, then it brings tremendous joy. This is bodhicitta mind; it creates a sense of great joy.

Main

We talk about emptiness, but this is extraordinary emptiness or supreme emptiness or excellent emptiness. When we say supreme, excellent emptiness, this refers to cutting off the shravaka perspective of emptiness, the pratyeka perspective of emptiness.

They are absolute truth but they are not supreme. The Mahayana perspective of emptiness is supreme emptiness, excellent emptiness. Why

we call it supreme, what makes it supreme? Not one thing. Many things are required.

From a gross point of view, a shravaka sees samsara is full of suffering and develops renunciation and wants to be free from that state. It is a supreme motivation from the self point of view, but it is not a supreme point of view for the sake of others, because so much (and so many) are excluded. Mahayana is not just seeing that suffering for oneself and wanting to be free from it, but seeing that all sentient beings need to be free. This is a vast motivation. This adds a greater richness and depth to your meditation on emptiness.

The Mahayana meditation on emptiness is further distinguished from the shravakayana emptiness because it focuses on the six paramitas – generosity, ethics, patience, joyful effort, concentration and wisdom. These do not exist in the shravakayana emptiness.

The Mahayana meditation on emptiness includes the two selflessnesses – the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. The shravaka only realise the selflessness of persons from the five aggregates point of view. Within the selflessness of persons, there are no differences in the shravakayana realization of selflessness of person and bodhisattva realization of selflessness of person, from a name point of view.

However, from a realisation point of view there are vast differences. The shravaka realization is free from only one of the extremes – that the ‘person is existent’ realization of emptiness - not the other three realisations that the person is non-existent, the person is existent and non-existent, and the person is neither existent nor non-existent.

The bodhisattva realisation is free of all four extremes, thus it is much broader, more complete.

Then, from the selflessness of phenomena point of view, shravakas only realize the selflessness of persons through the five aggregates, nothing else. The bodhisattva realization is the five aggregates, as well as all the subject and object of entire phenomena, so it is much broader and bigger.

When we talk of emptiness, we talk of these two selflessnesses. This selflessness of both person and phenomena also must be the perfection of wisdom. This is important.

If you really look at the entire picture, a shravaka's realization of emptiness is only a small percentage, and the Mahayana is a larger percentage. That makes it very rich. So we call this the supreme emptiness, that is, the object upon which we are meditating.

What makes the perfection of wisdom is not just the mere realising of emptiness. The definition of the perfection of wisdom is realising absolute truth, reality as it is.

In conjunction with the preliminary, the bodhicitta, the main part is the six paramitas, and the conclusion is the dedication, so it is very rich.

All the methods are there, all the wisdom is there, so this we call the perfection of wisdom.

This perfection of wisdom is the object that we meditate on. When you meditate on this, the meditation sums up everything - everything is there. The sutras say that when you do one Dharma practice that covers everything, this is compassion.

So similarly here, just do one meditation. This includes the entire meditation, this is the perfection of wisdom. When you do the perfection of wisdom meditation, nothing is excluded.

There are hundreds and thousands of types of meditation, but when you do individual meditations many things are excluded. When you do perfection of wisdom meditation, nothing is excluded. Everything is there so this we call The King of Samadhi – the King of Meditation.

This is just an outline. To really know, you need to do lots of study. This is why all the great masters studied for decades and decades because it is so profound. You won't get it in a few hours.

Conclusion

However short or long the meditation, we always finish with the dedication. Dedicate means offering the virtue you have attained through your meditation for the good of all sentient beings. The most powerful virtue is gained when you meditate on emptiness. But what do we mean by virtue?

Virtue means honesty. The greatest honesty is emptiness, there is no greater

honesty than that. When you live in that really honest state of mind you create enormous virtue. Meditating for one minute and really understanding emptiness is a far more powerful virtue than making truckloads of offerings to the Buddha.

We overestimate the value of external things, but we underestimate the value of the mind.

When you study Dharma you come to realise that the value of your mind is more important than anything else. This mind can make you a buddha, or this mind can make you a samsaric being.

Offering truckloads of offerings is not going to make you a buddha, and not offering is not going to make you a samsaric being. It is not up to offering or not offering. It is the mind.

The most powerful virtue is when you are dwelling in the emptiness state of meditation. Virtues are the cause of happiness. The greatest happiness arises from the meditation on emptiness. No other phenomena can produce happiness as much as emptiness can.

If you are really seeking ultimate happiness then we must meditate on emptiness. This is the only cause to create this inconceivable happiness. No-one can measure the happiness of the Buddha. The cause of that is many eons of meditating on emptiness, nothing else.

So this emptiness, as I mentioned earlier – make sure you don't think it is only the empty aspect, otherwise you make a mistake, and you are losing half of it. It is emptiness and method combined together, this is emptiness. This is so important, method and wisdom together.

Whatever virtues you gain, may they be the cause to attain buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings. That's the only real cause to attain buddhahood. There is no other way one can go towards attaining buddhahood.

If you meditate on emptiness alone, you are not going to reach buddhahood. If you practise method alone, you are not going to reach Buddhahood – to attain buddhahood you must have both, wisdom and method.

When we say that we will attain buddhahood, there is nothing to gain. The method and wisdom are likened to a cleansing, these two are the most powerful substances to cleanse your mind. Once there are no obscurations

THE TWO TRUTHS

or residues, that very mind is the Buddha, nothing else. So the most powerful thing for cleansing your mind is this meditation on emptiness, which is method and wisdom. These are inseparable.