

## **Notes and Quotes for June 19, 2022 Dharma Reflections:**

### **Self / no-self**

“When we talk about the ego, it is important to be precise, because it’s a word with many shades of meaning. The ego-I can be defined as the sense of oneself as an isolated being set apart from other selves—in other words, the unshakeable belief that ‘I am here and the world stands outside me.’ But this notion of oneself as a discreet individual is a fiction produced by our senses and our bifurcating intellect.

“...In fact, all of our self-limiting activities grow out of this false picture of ourselves. As a result of this false picture, we postulate a dualistic world of self and other, of things separated and isolated, of pain and struggle, birth and death, killing and being killed. This picture is untrue because it barely scratches the surface.... For if we could see beyond the ever-changing forms into the underlying reality, we would realize that fundamentally there is nothing but harmony and unity and that this perfection is no different from the phenomenal world of incessant change and transformation. But our vision is limited and our intuitions weak.” p. 22

“The net result is that we begin to think and act as though we were separate entities confronted by a world external to us. In the unconscious, the idea of I, or selfhood, becomes fixed, and from this arises such thought patterns as ‘I hate this, I love that; I need this, I don’t want that; this is mine, that’s yours.’ Nourished by this fodder, the ego-I comes to dominate the personality, attacking whatever threatens its position and grasping at anything which will enlarge its power. Antagonism, greed, and alienation, culminating in suffering, are the inevitable consequences of this circular process. The ego-I, or small self, can be compared to a tumor: in one sense it is foreign to the body; in another, it was produced by it.

“...In spite of all this, the ego, this wily creature, is not to be despised: for when his machinations become unbearably painful, there arises within us an irresistible longing for freedom from the restriction and pain, and a desire to transcend these sufferings so as to attain inward peace and wisdom.

“Ego performs yet another valuable function. Behind all creative endeavors—whether it be designing a spacecraft, creating a work of art, or uncovering an unknown law of nature—lies the desire, conscious and unconscious, for Self-knowledge. And the propelling force behind this desire is ego—the wish of the self to undertake these activities. We can also say with Ernest Becker that ego represents a natural urge by the life force itself toward and expansion of experience, toward more life.

“For those of the highest spiritual attainment the ego is transmuted into a selfless-I. Because the body still exists, however, the pull toward reinvigoration of the ego-I continues. For this reason even spiritual masters must be on guard against falling into habit patterns that favor the reassertion of ego.” p. 28

“...If life is a sequence of moments linked in a chain of causation, the moment beyond death is the next link in the chain. As there has been a sense of continuity and yet no continuous self, there is nothing surprising in that sense of continuity’s extending beyond the moment of death. Life is a series of events or happenings, and death takes its place in the series of events, giving rise to the next event. Thus there is no self that is reborn; there is an ongoing continuity of ‘again-becoming.’ In each moment of life the individual is born and dies, yet he continues. The same is true of the moment of death.

“So rebirth, or better, ‘again-becoming,’ does not involve the transfer of a substance but is better described as the continuation of the process which occurs every moment of consciousness, continuing to operate to both affect and effect our rebirth.

“We can’t then, say that the being that has just been reborn is your grandmother, nor can we say that it is *not*. The karma energy of the last thought of this life is the precipitating cause of our next life. The present life provides the basis for the quality of our death, which in turn conditions the nature of our next life.

“What *is* it, then, that is reborn? To give it a name is to twist the truth to suit ourselves. An enlightened master said simply, ‘Not he, yet not another.’ Buddhaghosa, another sage, said, ‘It is a mere material and immaterial state, arising when it has obtained its conditions. . . it is not a lasting being, not a soul.’” pp. 185-86

- *The Zen of Living and Dying—A Practical and Spiritual Guide*, Roshi Philip Kapeau, Shambhala, 1998.

“The cycle of suffering seems to be very real. However, if one examines it closely, one can see that it is only the magical display of emptiness. It appears although it is without reality, like the dream images seen when one is asleep [or] the hairs [seen] by a person with cataracts, etc. The Exalted One’s [*Discourse of the Awakening Mind*] says:

Empty phenomena produce empty phenomena.  
Agent, action, and experienced result  
Are superficial [reality].  
This, in brief, is what the Victorious One taught.

Further:

Emotions and evolutionary actions create superficial reality;  
Actions are instigated by the mind.  
Mind is the sum of all instincts;  
Freedom from instinctual patterns is happiness.  
A happy mind is quietude itself;  
A quiet mind is not obscured.  
The unobstructed [mind] knows reality;  
To know reality is to attain freedom.

“In his first cycle of teachings, the Buddha taught that the root of cyclic existence is self-habit, and that the cause of suffering is attachment. In the middle cycle, he taught that the root of cyclic life is the fabrication of grasping identifiable characteristics (i.e., habitual adherence to subject and object). In the last cycle, he taught that the root of cyclic life is fundamental consciousness itself.

“The father tantras of the highest Secret Mantra [teach that] the bases for the origin of existence are the sets of the four emptinesses and the four elements. The mother tantras assert that cyclic life arises from the indestructible vital essence or mundane innate [bliss].”

- *The Treasury of Knowledge—Myriad Worlds*, Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Taye, Kalu Rinpoche Translation Group, Snow Lion, 2003, p. 197.

[(Four emptinesses):

- 1a. Existence is empty of existence: *bhāvo bhāvena śūnyah*,...
- 2a. Non-existence is empty of non-existence: *abhāvo 'bhāvena śūnyah*,...
- 3a. Existence in itself is empty of existence in itself: *svahāvaḥ svabhāvena śūnyah*,...
- 4a. Other existence is empty of other existence: *parabhāvah parabhāvena śūnyah*,...

- From <https://www.wisdomlib.org/buddhism/book/maha-prajnaparamita-sastra/d/doc226014.html> ]

“Many of us were brought up with this idea of a soul, or a real self. The view of a true soul may be very comforting to some people. Someone who is afraid of death may comfort himself by thinking, ‘There’s something that’s me that doesn’t die. I am just transported out of this body and will go to heaven.’ Although the person may find this soothing, according to the Buddha such an unchanging soul doesn’t exist. For this reason, it is called a negated object, and the concept that grasps it is called a misconception. This isn’t our only false conception of the self, but it is the grossest. If we search to find such an unchanging, unitary, autonomous self, we can’t find it.

“...the next level of negated object, the self-sufficient, substantially existent self or person.... (which) deals with the relationship between the self, person, or ‘I,’ on the one hand, and the aggregates—the body and mind—on the other.... In the...analogy, the self resembles a shepherd that takes charge and bosses the aggregates around, which, like sheep, follow along. The ‘I’ is the shepherd that takes charge and guides the body and mind. Just as the sheep depend on the shepherd, who is a separate agent, to move, the body and mind depend on the ‘I,’ which is something separate from them, to control them. Do we feel that there is a real ‘I’ somewhere that is the boss or leader in charge of the body and mind?”

“Another analogy regarding the relationship between the aggregates and the self is that the aggregates are like salespeople and the self is like the head salesperson. The salespeople depend on the head salesperson, (who) is their leader, but isn’t totally separate from them.... Similarly, the ‘I’ is chief and is the boss of the aggregates, but it’s not completely different from the body and mind.... The mental consciousness is the ‘I’ that bosses the aggregates around.... (and) is itself an aggregate, but it’s still the head of aggregates.

“...A further level of misconception is grasping at an inherently existing self, sometimes called a truly existent self. This is the ignorance that is the root of cycling existence according to the Prasangika tenet system, the Middle Way Consequence school, which is said to be the most accurate philosophical view. The negated object, an inherently existent self, appears to be mixed with the body and mind but also has its own nature. It doesn’t appear as separate from body and mind, but it doesn’t appear to be one with the body or mind either. It is somehow independent but it’s also mixed in. We feel that there is an ‘I’ in here, a self or real person somewhere in the body.

“...There is the feeling of a real ‘me,’ as in ‘Don’t tell *me* what to do!’ and a real ‘my,’ as in ‘*My* reputation is at stake!’ How does the ‘I’ that doesn’t want to be told what to do appear to exist? It seems to exist under its own power. It doesn’t depend on anything. ‘Don’t boss *me* around!’ That ‘I’ doesn’t appear to depend on the body or the mind. It doesn’t appear to depend on causes and conditions, or on parts, or on the mind that conceives it, or on the label that the mind gives it. That ‘me’ is there under its own power, it is the lord ruler of the universe. So don’t tell the ruler of the universe what to do! We feel, ‘How dumb others are! They try to tell *me* what to do. Don’t they know better? *I* know what’s best. Everyone should do things *my* way.’ Such a strong feeling of ‘I’ is the ignorance grasping at an inherently existent ‘I.’ The ‘I’ that is grasped at is the negated object.

“...If someone tried to point out to us that we should question the existence of the ‘me’ in ‘Don’t tell *me* what to do!’ we’d tell him that we exist and that he should stop telling us what to do! We not only misconceive how the ‘I’ exists, but we also think that misconception is accurate. We don’t even realize the level of ignorance and misapprehension we have. That’s why problems and confusion abound in our lives. We have no idea how much ignorance pervades our mind.” pp. 188-190

[after devoting five pages, 191-195, to “searching for the negated object” by explaining that if a car (or a self) can inherently exist, it should be found in one of seven ways,:

1. Is the car inherently one with its parts?
2. Is the car inherently separate, or different, from its parts?
3. Does the car inherently possess its parts?
4. Does the car inherently depend upon its parts?
5. Do the parts inherently depend upon the car?
6. Is the car the collection of the parts?
7. Is the car the arrangement of the parts?

it is found that “we can’t find a truly existent car in relationship to its parts no matter how we look at it.”]

“Since we cannot find a car after searching for it with ultimate analysis, does that mean the car does not exist? No. The car exists, but not inherently. We get in the car and drive somewhere every day, so the car must exist. Neither the car nor its parts exist inherently, but both exist conventionally. The car is merely labeled in dependence upon its parts.

“...When we say ‘merely labeled’ in means there’s nothing findable there when we analyze and search for a real thing that it is. It means that aside from the label that is given to these parts, we can’t find something that is a car.” p. 196

“In the same way that there is not an inherently existent car, there is not an inherently existent person that can be found when analytically sought.

“...Does that mean that we don’t exist? Clearly not; I wrote these words and you are reading them. Both of us exist. However, we don’t exist as a solid soul or Self that is the ‘essence of me.’ Instead, we exist dependently. The ‘I’ exists by being merely labeled in dependence upon the body and the mind.

“...the basis in dependence upon which we label ‘I’ is constantly changing. We have many different consciousnesses—grosser levels of consciousness, subtle levels of consciousness, sense consciousnesses, mental consciousness. Whatever is prominent at a particular moment becomes the basis in dependence upon which we impute ‘I,’ although it is not the ‘I.’ No fixed or permanent person is there.

“...Seeing this, we will no longer be weighed down by hating someone who doesn’t exist. A tremendous feeling of freedom comes from realizing that there is no solid person here who is shameful and unworthy. Seeing this, our hearts will be light and joyful. The more we see ‘I’ as empty, the more we understand that we can become Buddhas and the more we progress on the path to Buddhahood.” pp. 196-200

“Because there isn’t a fixed, inherent me, I can change. A baby can become an adult; a human being can become a Buddha; rebirth happens; actions bring results; a seed grows into a sprout. All these things are possible because they’re empty of an inherent nature, of an independent essence that makes them ‘them.’ Therefore, because things are empty, they exist and function. Because they are empty of inherent existence, they arise dependently.” p. 210

“As Je Tsongkhapa said in *The Three Principal Aspects of the Path*:

One who sees the infallible cause and effect of all phenomena in cyclic existence and beyond and destroys all false perceptions of their inherent existence has entered the path that pleases the Buddha.

Appearances are infallible dependent arisings; emptiness is free of assertions of inherent existence or non-existence. As long as these two understandings are seen as separate, one has not yet realized the intent of the Buddha.

When these two realizations are simultaneous and concurrent, from the mere sight of infallible dependent arising comes definite knowledge that completely destroys all modes of mental grasping. At that time, the analysis of the profound view is complete.

In addition, appearances clear away the extreme of inherent existence; emptiness clears away the extreme of non-existence. When you understand the arising of cause and effect from the viewpoint of emptiness, you are not captivated by either extreme view.

The concluding verse of that text reads:

In this way, when you have realized the exact points of the three principal aspects of the path, by depending on solitude, generate the power of joyful effort and quickly accomplish the final goal, my spiritual child!

“Here Je Rinpoche encourages us to practice. After we have gained the correct understanding of the unity of emptiness and dependent arising by hearing and contemplating the teachings, we should deeply meditate in a solitary place that is free from distractions. In this way, we will be able to cleanse our mindstreams completely from all defilements and develop our good qualities to their fullest extent.” pp. 216-217

- *How to Free Your Mind—The Practice of Tara the Liberator*, Thubten Chodron, Snow Lion, 2005.

“To sum up therefore, belief in selfhood is the root of samsaric existence. As long as this is not eliminated, no matter what practices one undertakes, whether austerities or meditation, one cannot get beyond samsara. Consequently, it has been said that those graced with good fortune who wish for liberation should constantly make their practice a remedy to self-clinging.”

- *The Nectar of Manjushri's Speech—A Detailed Commentary on Shantideva's Way of the Bodhisattva*, Kunzang Pelden, Translated by the Padmakara Translation Group, Shambhala, 2007, p. 357.

“Your mind does not solidly exist, yet it is active, producing thought after thought without effort. Mind is empty and what arises from mind is empty. This means thought is empty too. But when this is not recognized, when you believe your thoughts are real and true, it is known as duality. When you are experiencing duality it is inevitable that you will speak and act on behalf of your thoughts. Dualistic thoughts, words, and deeds pile up, all kinds of divisions and boundaries, such as ‘self’ and ‘other,’ ‘mine and ‘yours,’ are created and defended. Mind becomes turbulent and negative emotions erupt—many uncomfortable and even painful things internally and externally can occur. The teachings call these ‘nightmare visions.’ These nightmare visions are the result of waves upon waves of fabrication and deceit connected to ego, or ‘I.’ All of this emanates from emptiness mind: not a single component of this has a basis in reality. However, when emptiness mind is not understood, the nightmare visions seem real and are experienced in very real ways. Thus it is called a ‘magical display.’

“...If you truly want to put an end to duality and its deceptions once and for all, it is necessary to discover the nature of your mind. Look into your mind and reach a final conclusion. For this reason, in ancient times Dzogchen masters said to their students, ‘Go out, find your mind, and bring it back to me.’ The masters sent their students out into the world or the wilderness for a few days or weeks, or even for as long as a month, to search for their minds. Then, once they discovered their minds, the students would return to their masters and tell them what they found. This practice works similar to a Zen koan. Therefore look at you own mind—search out and discover its nature. Come to a resolution. This is what you need to do in order to put duality to rest for good.”

- *The Nature of Mind—The Dzogchen Instructions of Aro Yeshe Jungne*, Patrul Rinpoche, Commentary by Khenchen Palden Sherab & Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal, Snow Lion, 2016, pp 57-58.

“The ‘personal self,’ or ego, is the name given to what is assumed to be our inherently existing person; the ‘phenomenal self’ is what is assumed to be the inherently existing phenomenon. These are the conceived objects apprehended in the two kinds of self-clinging. In the example of the rope mistakenly apprehended as a snake, they correspond to the snake. They are as nonexistent as a rabbit’s horns, even on the relative level.”

- *Treasury of Precious Qualities*, Book One: Sutra Teachings, Jigme Lingpa, Translated by Padmakara Translation Group, Revised Edition 2010, Shambhala, p. 421.

## Possible Discussion Starting Points

1. In