



# PERFECTING WISDOM



How Things Appear  
and How They Truly Are

A commentary on the Wisdom Chapter of  
*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*

*THE* DALAI LAMA

# Perfecting Wisdom

---

*How Things Appear and  
How They Truly Are*

A commentary on the Wisdom Chapter of  
*A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*

The Dalai Lama

TRANSLATED, EDITED, AND ANNOTATED BY

*B. Alan Wallace*



SHAMBHALA

BOULDER

2019

Shambhala Publications, Inc.  
4720 Walnut Street  
Boulder, Colorado 80301  
www.shambhala.com

© 1988, 1994, 2009 by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and B. Alan Wallace

This book was previously published under the title *Transcendent Wisdom*.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

∞ This edition is printed on acid-free paper that meets the American National Standards Institute Z39.48 Standard.

♻️ This book is printed on 30% postconsumer recycled paper. For more information please visit [www.shambhala.com](http://www.shambhala.com).

Shambhala Publications is distributed worldwide by Penguin Random House, Inc., and its subsidiaries.

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, Dalai Lama XIV, 1935– author. | Wallace, B. Alan, translator, editor.

Title: Perfecting wisdom: how things appear and how they truly are / the Dalai Lama; translated, edited, and annotated by B. Alan Wallace.

Other titles: Transcendent wisdom

Description: Boulder: Shambhala, 2019. | Series: Core teachings of the Dalai Lama | "This book was previously published under the title *Transcendent Wisdom*." | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018052883 | ISBN 9781611807349 (pbk.: alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Śāntideva, active 7th century. Bodhicaryāvatāra. Chapter 9. | Mahayana Buddhism—Doctrines. | Wisdom—Religious aspects—Buddhism.

Classification: LCC BQ3147.T73 2019 | DDC 294.3/420423—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018052883>

# CONTENTS

---

<u>Foreword</u>	<u>vii</u>
<u>Acknowledgments</u>	<u>ix</u>
<u>Introduction: The Place of Wisdom in Spiritual Practice</u>	<u>3</u>
<u><i>Part One: The Methods Needed for Cultivating Wisdom</i></u>	<u>5</u>
<u>1. Introduction to the Two Truths that Comprise Reality</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>The Classification of the Two Truths</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>People Who Ascertain the Two Truths</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Qualms Concerning the Lack of Intrinsic Existence</u>	<u>11</u>
<u>2. Critique of the Idealist View</u>	<u>17</u>
<u>3. The Necessity of the Centrist Path</u>	<u>27</u>
<u>The Necessity of Realizing Emptiness</u>	<u>27</u>
<u><i>Part Two: Identitylessness</i></u>	<u>45</u>
<u>4. Personal Identitylessness</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>Refutation of an Intrinsic “I”</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>Refutation of the Samkhya Theory of Self</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>Refutation of the Nyaya Theory of Self</u>	<u>55</u>
<u>Rebuttal of Arguments against Identitylessness</u>	<u>56</u>
<u>5. Phenomenal Identitylessness</u>	<u>61</u>
<u>The Four Applications of Mindfulness</u>	<u>61</u>

<u><i>Part Three: Refutation of True Existence</i></u>	79
<u>6. Refutation of Others' Conceptions of True Existence</u>	81
<u>7. Proofs of the Absence of True Existence</u>	83
<u>The "Diamond-Splinters" Argument</u>	83
<u>The Interdependence Argument</u>	95
The Argument Concerning the Arising and Cessation of Entities and Non-Entities	96
<u>8. Encouragement to Strive to Realize Emptiness</u>	99
<u>Notes</u>	<u>105</u>
<u>Bibliography</u>	<u>127</u>
<u>Books by the Dalai Lama</u>	<u>129</u>
<u>Index</u>	<u>131</u>



## FOREWORD

---

THIS WORK CONSISTS of a translation from the Sanskrit of the ninth chapter of a work entitled *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*<sup>1</sup> by the Indian scholar and contemplative Shantideva.<sup>2</sup> This chapter, named “Transcendent Wisdom,” sets forth the Centrist, or Madhyamika view of Buddhist philosophy in the context of other Buddhist and non-Buddhist views. From a Western perspective it is philosophical in content; yet it has a definite religious tone to it, and it also belongs to a contemplative discipline that presents empirical means for testing its conclusions.

The translation of this text has been made primarily on the basis of a commentary in classical Tibetan by the fourteenth-century Tibetan master Tsongkhapa.<sup>3</sup> However, reference has also been made to the Sanskrit commentary by Prajñākaramati<sup>4</sup> and to another Tibetan commentary by a major student of Tsongkhapa.<sup>5</sup> The text is accompanied by a translation from spoken Tibetan of an oral commentary presented by H.H. the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, during the summer of 1979 in Rikon, Switzerland.<sup>6</sup> This commentary was delivered before an assembly of roughly a thousand Tibetans and a few score Westerners, and it clearly assumes some background in Buddhist philosophy on the part of the listeners. The “Transcendent Wisdom” chapter of Shantideva’s classic treatise is known among Buddhist scholars as a challenging and profound exposition of the pinnacle of Buddhist philosophy. Hopefully this translation will further elucidate this text for those seeking an understanding of the Buddhist Centrist view and its relevance to contemporary thought.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

---

THIS TRANSLATION WAS completed during my years of study at Amherst College, culminating in December 1986. I am particularly grateful to Robert Thurman, then professor of religion at Amherst College, for his careful reading of the text and commentary. I would also like to thank Vesna Acimovic for her corrections of the Sanskrit translation.

While making the initial translation of the Sanskrit text, I used the version edited by P. L. Vaidya (Buddhist Sanskrit Text Series). I also consulted the Tibetan translation published by the Tibetan Cultural Printing Press in Dharamsala, India, and Stephen Batchelor's English translation of the text. While working on later drafts, I consulted Michael Sweet's translation in his 1977 doctoral dissertation in Buddhist studies at the University of Wisconsin, entitled *Śāntideva and the Mādhyamika: The Prajñāpāramitā-Pariccheda of the Bodhicāryāvatāra*.





PERFECTING  
WISDOM



## INTRODUCTION

### *The Place of Wisdom in Spiritual Practice*

---

1. This entire preparation the Sage taught for the sake of wisdom. Thus, one wishing to bring an end to suffering should develop wisdom.

“This entire preparation” refers to the first five transcendent practices of generosity and so on,<sup>1</sup> or it may refer to meditative absorption.<sup>2</sup> All of these were taught by Buddha Shakyamuni in order to cultivate ultimate wisdom. In order for the realization of emptiness to arise in the mind, it is not necessary for one to engage in the other transcendent practices as well. According to the view of the author of this text and of Chandrakirti and Buddhapalita, listeners<sup>3</sup> and solitary sages<sup>4</sup> overcome spiritual hindrances on their respective Paths of Seeing and of Meditation by means of the view of emptiness.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the practice of transcendent generosity and so on is not necessary for the cultivation of that view; nor is it necessary for eliminating the afflictive obscurations.<sup>6</sup>

What is the nature of wisdom? The view of emptiness entailing the integration of meditative quiescence<sup>7</sup> and insight<sup>8</sup> acts as the antidote for cognitive obscurations;<sup>9</sup> and with that view one experiences the subtle mode of existence of entities.<sup>10</sup> It is a wisdom that arises from meditation. But such wisdom alone is insufficient for overcoming those obscurations. Without being combined with a great store of virtue, that wisdom cannot be an antidote for the cognitive obscurations.<sup>11</sup> The major obstacles to the attainment of full spiritual awakening are the cognitive obscurations. Ultimate wisdom is their direct antidote. To cultivate that, this series

of practices must be followed, thereby accumulating great virtue. Thus it is said: “This entire preparation the Sage taught for the sake of wisdom.” Thus, one who wishes to bring an end to the suffering of oneself and others should develop such wisdom.

There are no teachings of the Buddha that are not means for living creatures to attain prosperity<sup>12</sup> and true felicity.<sup>13</sup> True felicity refers to liberation and omniscience, and to attain either, the view of emptiness is necessary. To dispel either the afflictive obscurations or the cognitive obscurations one must cultivate the view of emptiness. Thus, the entire “method” element of the Buddha’s teachings, not only transcendent generosity and so on, was given for the sake of cultivating wisdom. The listeners and solitary sages must also develop wisdom with the aid of the method element; wisdom cannot be gained without it. Here the term “method” does not refer to the spirit of awakening<sup>14</sup> or to taking upon oneself the responsibility for the welfare of others. There are many virtues such as concentration that are cultivated with the motivation of aspiring to gain one’s own release from the cycle of rebirth.<sup>15</sup> In this way, by following the Three Trainings,<sup>16</sup> mental afflictions<sup>17</sup> are eliminated. All those methods were taught for the sake of liberation.

PART ONE

---

THE METHODS NEEDED  
FOR CULTIVATING WISDOM





# 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE TWO TRUTHS THAT COMPRISE REALITY

---

## THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE TWO TRUTHS

2. The twofold truth is considered to be conventional and ultimate. [Ultimate] reality is not an object of the intellect; the intellect is called “conventional.”

There are many types of wisdom relating to the plurality of phenomena<sup>1</sup> and the fundamental nature of reality. We are concerned now with the supreme wisdom that acts as the antidote for the fundamental cause of the cycle of existence<sup>2</sup>—namely, grasping onto true existence—and the instincts<sup>3</sup> for such grasping, which are cognitive obscurations. Such wisdom is the view by which one realizes emptiness; one thereby knows the fundamental nature of reality.

We need to understand the essential nature of the broad diversity of phenomena. For example, if we are obliged to be involved frequently with a man who exhibits a personality that is true only on the surface, as well as another basic personality, it is important for us to know both of them. To engage in a relationship with this person that does not go awry, we must know both aspects of his personality. To know only the facade that he presents is insufficient; we need to know his basic disposition and abilities. Then we can know what to expect from him, and he will not deceive us.

Likewise, the manifold events in the world are not nonexistent; they do exist. They are able to help and hurt us—no

further criterion for existence is necessary. If we do not understand their fundamental mode of existence, we are liable to be deceived, just as in the case of being involved with a person whose basic personality we do not know.

Now phenomena existing as dependently related events<sup>4</sup> are those that change in dependence upon circumstances and those that appear in various ways due to circumstances. All of the preceding teachings concern phenomena subject to change. They change due to their dependence upon other events.<sup>5</sup> If events existed independently, they could not change. Since they are dependent, they lack an independent nature. Thus, when something appears either good or bad, it seems to have that as an essential trait, but if we inspect matters more closely, we see that it is fundamentally subject to change. Thus, entities have two natures, one essential and the other superficial.

The physical world around us is impermanent, and individual entities have their own specific natures. Because the events that make up this world are dependent upon conditions, they lack an independent self-nature. That absence of an independent self-nature is the essential mode of existence of entities. Since events have two modes of existence—superficial and essential—there exist two types of cognition: one ascertaining the former nature and the other, the latter nature.

What is the essential mode of existence? It is a lack of independence and lack of existence from the object's own side. The absence of intrinsic being is the ultimate mode of existence of an entity. The mind that apprehends that ultimate nature, which appears in accordance with its reality, cognizes reality as it is. It is thus called "ontological understanding."<sup>6</sup> That reality is empty because it is devoid of the mode of existence that is to be refuted, and for that very reason, it is called "emptiness." There is no higher truth to be seen. The mind that sees that reality experiences truth as it is. Thus it is called "ultimate truth," the essential mode of existence. For all other truths, their mode of appearance and their essential mode of existence are incongruent. Thus, they are called deceptive and superficial.

Now for a single entity we must understand two modes of existence. That entity, which is capable of benefiting or harming, has both modes of existence. We should not think of the fundamental nature of existence being found elsewhere. Its own essential nature is its ultimate mode of existence. Both a superficial and ultimate nature are to be found in a single entity, and those are the Two Truths.

The mind that ascertains the essential nature of an object is an intelligence that investigates the ultimate. The other mind is conventional intelligence, superficial cognition. When the text speaks of the need of developing wisdom, it refers to the former type of intelligence. In order to realize ultimate truth, one needs to distinguish between ultimate and superficial truths.

The text speaks of two objects of knowledge: conventional and ultimate truth. Both are to be known. Ultimate truth is not directly ascertainable by a dualistic awareness. When one directly apprehends the ultimate nature of an entity, dualistic appearances vanish. Thus, the ultimate transcends dualistic awareness. Dualistic awareness is polluted by ignorance, so that the ultimate cannot appear to it.

It would be absurd to say that the ultimate is not ascertained by any type of awareness at all. When the text says “Reality is not an object of the intellect,” that intellect refers to dualistic awareness only. The first phrase—“Reality is not an object of the intellect”—entails a defining characteristic of ultimate truth, and the second—“the intellect is called ‘conventional’”—entails a defining characteristic of conventional truth. The objects of dualistic awareness are conventional truths.

## PEOPLE WHO ASCERTAIN THE TWO TRUTHS

3. Two types of people are found: the contemplative and the common person. The [view of the] contemplative person invalidates [that of] the common person.



There are two types of individuals—contemplatives and common people—i.e., those who engage in philosophical investigation and those who do not. Moreover, among the former there are higher and lower levels of investigation. Those who assert phenomenal identitylessness are on a higher level, and those who deny it are on a lower level. Among the former are the Idealists,<sup>7</sup> who advocate intrinsic reality, and above all are the Centrists.<sup>8</sup>

Referring to those common people who do not engage in philosophical investigation, the text says that their way of seeing and describing the world [involving, for example, belief in a personal identity] is invalidated by the experience of those who do engage in such investigation. Likewise, the experience of those engaged in higher investigations invalidates that of people on a more simplistic level.

**4. Even [the views of] contemplatives are invalidated by [those of] successively higher [contemplatives], due to the difference of insight, [which they can acknowledge] in terms of a commonly accepted analogy. [Whatever their views, they strive in virtuous acts] for the sake of spiritual growth, [leaving conventional reality] immune to their analysis.**

As mentioned previously, the views even of contemplatives are invalidated by those of other contemplatives at higher levels of investigation. These views are invalidated by reasoning. Even among the Centrists there are two classes: Svatantrika [Independents] and Prasangika [Critics]. And among the Prasangikas there are different levels of contemplative insight even given the same set of postulates. For a single reality of emptiness there are different ways of experiencing it: an experience that is veiled with a general idea<sup>9</sup> and one that is not [e.g., on the Path of Seeing]. There are also distinctions in terms of the obscurations that successive insights are able to dispel. In each case the higher surmounts the lower.

If more simplistic views are logically annulled by higher ones, in order to recognize the refutation of one's own view, there must be

a common basis of disputation. Here the author speaks of analogies that are accepted both by contemplatives and common people. For instance, dreams and hallucinations: When people in general remark that a certain experience was like a dream, that means that it did indeed occur, but they doubt whether it was real or true.<sup>10</sup>

If as a result of scrutiny, different modes of existence are distinguished, does this mean that such spiritual activities as selfless giving are pointless? No, such methods of spiritual practice are to be adopted for the sake of spiritual growth, without examination or scrutiny.<sup>11</sup> Whatever appears to people is to be accepted conventionally, and one practices on that basis.<sup>12</sup>

**5. Events are seen and also thought to be real by [common] people, and are not regarded as illusion-like. Here is the disagreement between the contemplative and the common person.**

If contemplatives and common people are able to agree on a common basis of disputation, about what do they disagree? When spiritual teachings are given, there are bound to be different interpretations on many levels according to the subtlety and depth of insight of the listeners. For example, Realists assert the true existence of the body and mind, whereas Centrists assert them as lacking true existence: Even though they appear as true, they do not so exist, but are like illusions. Thus, on the basis of one teaching, different interpretations are made. In this way disagreement arises between contemplatives and common people.

### **QUALMS CONCERNING THE LACK OF INTRINSIC EXISTENCE**

**6. Form and so on, although perceived, are [established] by consensus; [their true existence] is not verifiably cognized. Like the consensus that the impure and so on are pure and so forth, [such cognition] is false.**



*Qualm:* If it is an error to think of form and so forth as real, how can it be that we verifiably perceive them? What further criterion beyond verifying perception is needed to establish the true existence of entities?

*Response:* Such entities are indeed verifiably perceived. However, when we say “verifying cognition,”<sup>13</sup> this suggests infallibility. It is a non-deceptive awareness with reference to the appearance of a self-defining object.<sup>14</sup> Realists—those who assert true existence—have just this in mind when speaking of verifying cognition. They believe that phenomena appear just as they exist, and they appear to be truly existent. They call a cognition that is non-deceptive with regard to that appearance “verifying.”

Now in this [Centrist] context, infallible cognition is acknowledged, while denying that there is any such thing as even conventional intrinsic existence. Such cognition is said to be deceptive with regard to the *appearance* of phenomena as intrinsically existent. The Prasangikas, who hold this view, do not accept verifying cognition with respect to such appearance. Thus, they allow that a deceptive awareness may nevertheless verify its object. Therefore, phenomena exist by the power of consensus, not by their own intrinsic reality.<sup>15</sup>

Such phenomena as form are regarded as misleading, for their mode of appearance and their mode of existence are not in accord with each other. Common people regard impure objects as pure, for the way those objects appear belies the way they actually exist.<sup>16</sup> Although they are thought by consensus to be pure, that conviction is false. Likewise, although phenomena are not truly existent, they appear as if they were, and thus they are asserted to be misleading.<sup>17</sup>

**7. In order for common people to enter [gradually into an experience of ultimate reality], [real] entities were indicated by the Lord. One may object that if ultimately they are not momentary, that is contrary to conventional reality.**

*Qualm:* The Lord Buddha is recorded in the scriptures as saying that all composites are impermanent and all tainted things<sup>18</sup> are unsatisfactory. Thus, when the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, he spoke of sixteen attributes, including impermanence.<sup>19</sup> Are those not ultimate truths; are they not absolute?

*Response:* The Buddha taught these in order for people to enter into the experience of emptiness, but ultimately speaking, there is no such thing as the impermanence of a pot. Ultimately, events are not momentary. Ultimately, the object itself does not exist, so it has no properties such as impermanence.

*Qualm:* If one takes that position—that ultimately, events are not of a momentary nature—does that mean that the conventional presentation of phenomena as passing away moment by moment is incorrect?

**8. There is no mistake, for [the wise, looking] upon the world see reality with the discernment of a contemplative. Otherwise, the conclusion that the female [body] is impure would be invalidated by common people.**

*Response:* No, that is not incorrect. That momentary nature is established by conventionally verifying cognition, so we accept that on a conventional basis. All the sixteen attributes of the Four Noble Truths are conventionally realized by contemplatives, so we can accept them.

*Qualm:* Well then, can we not call those sixteen “reality”?

*Response:* Common people mistake things that are essentially impermanent as permanent and impure things as pure. In comparison to such attitudes, the contemplative experiences reality.<sup>20</sup> It is conventional reality.

*Qualm:* Since common people and contemplatives have two different ways of seeing things, might not the contemplatives' conclusions be invalidated by those of common people?

*Response:* No. There is the distinction that the former are backed by verifiable knowledge.<sup>21</sup> Otherwise, if the contemplatives' views could be repudiated simply by general consensus, then the conclusion that the female body is impure would be invalidated, since ordinary people think of it as pure and attractive.<sup>22</sup>

9. In [your] reality [real merit is accrued from revering a real Buddha]; likewise, [we assert that illusion-like] merit [is accrued] from [revering] an illusion-like Victor. If sentient beings are like illusions, having died, how can they take birth again?

*Qualm:* If you deny true existence, do you still assert that one accumulates merit by making offerings to awakened beings and so on?

*Response:* Yes. One engages in illusion-like actions, and illusion-like fruits of those actions ensue. For example, Realists, who assert true existence, maintain that from real actions, real merit is accumulated and real results are experienced. The Centrists acknowledge the accumulation of merit and the effects of actions—but as not truly existent.

*Qualm:* If sentient beings are like illusions, how can they take birth again after having died?

10. As long as the complex of conditions [persists], so long even illusion functions. Why should a sentient being exist [more] truly [than an illusion] by the mere fact of its extended duration?

*Response:* An illusion is not truly existent. If an illusion appears as a horse or elephant, it does not exist as such. Although it is not



real, it appears due to a complex of conditions, and it vanishes due to the cessation of that complex of conditions. So even an illusion depends upon causes and conditions. One cannot establish duration as a criterion for true existence.

**11. There is no evil in such acts as the slaying of an illusory person, for [such an entity] has no mind, but in the case of one endowed with an illusory mind, evil and merit are produced.**

*Qualm:* Although sentient beings are like illusions, killing is evil. Is it also the case that killing illusory beings is evil?

*Response:* Since the being who is “killed” has no mind, no evil occurs.<sup>23</sup> But illusion-like beings have illusion-like minds, so helping or harming them results in merit or evil respectively.

**12. An illusory mind is not [originally] produced, for incantations and so forth lack such a capability. Diverse conditions produce, moreover, a variety of illusions. Nowhere is there a single condition that has the ability [to produce] everything.**

Mind is something that must arise from a source similar to itself, as will be explained later on.<sup>24</sup> There is no way that an incantation can freshly create a mind. So in an illusion there is no creation of an illusory mind. One may create illusory horses and elephants but not an illusory mind.

From diverse conditions, a variety of illusions arise. Even though they are not real, they are produced by various conditions. A single condition cannot produce everything.

**13. If it were the case that while being ultimately emancipated, one were [still] to be conventionally subject to rebirth, then a buddha would also be subject to rebirth. In that case, what would be the point of the bodhisattva way of life?**

In treatises such as Nagarjuna's *Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning*<sup>25</sup> there is reference to ultimate truth, the absence of intrinsic existence, as emancipation. The cycle of existence is conventional. There are three types of emancipation: natural, residual, and non-residual.<sup>26</sup> The first of those is the mere absence of intrinsic existence. Thus, a single individual could abide simultaneously in the world and in emancipation. In reference to this, there is the question as to whether a buddha is in the cycle of existence.<sup>27</sup>

**14. If the conditions are not discontinued, even illusions do not cease. But due to the cessation of conditions, the conventional, too, does not occur.**

Even illusions are dependent upon conducive conditions. If those conditions are not interrupted, neither are the ensuing illusions, and if the former cease, so do the latter. Thus, as long as the necessary conditions prevail, the cycle of existence, which is like an illusion, persists.<sup>28</sup> If those conditions cease, not only is there the natural emancipation of ultimate truth, even the conventional, momentary [i.e., rising and passing with each moment] continuum of the cycle of existence is cut. And that cessation is called emancipation.

For example, just as clouds vanish into an empty sky, so are the obscurations extinguished in the sphere of reality.<sup>29</sup> In that way the afflictive obscurations are dispelled by the influence of conditions, and thus they are eliminated even conventionally. That is called liberation.

## 2. CRITIQUE OF THE IDEALIST VIEW

---

**15. If even deceptive [cognition] does not exist, by what is illusion ascertained?**

Since the Centrists deny the true existence of all entities, then the awareness of illusion-like forms and so forth must be devoid of an intrinsic identity. So, when an Idealist hears that something lacks an intrinsic nature, he [or she] concludes that it is utterly non-existent. And thus he [or she] asks: If even the cognition of an illusion does not exist, by what is the illusion known? The implication is that it would be ascertained by nothing at all. To this the Centrist replies:

**16. If for you illusion itself does not exist, then what is to be ascertained? You may respond that in reality it exists otherwise, simply as an expression of the mind.**

*Idealist:* External objects do not exist. All possible entities are of the nature of the subjective mind. They are substances of the mind, lacking any other substance. We Idealists take as our scriptural source the statement that the three realms of existence<sup>1</sup> are of the nature of the mind.

*Centrist:* According to you, if entities existed externally, as they appear to, they would not be illusory. If they do not exist externally, despite appearances, they would be devoid of an intrinsic nature, and in your view that would make them utterly non-existent. In that case, if the illusion itself does not exist, then there would be nothing to ascertain.



*Idealist:* In reality an entity does not exist externally, as it appears. Phenomena, such as form, exist otherwise—as substances of the mind that apprehends them. Thus, they do not exist as external objects, nor are they utterly non-existent.

**17. If the mind itself is an illusion, then what is seen by what? For the Protector of the World has said that the mind does not perceive the mind. Just as the blade of a sword cannot cut itself, so is it with the mind.**

*Centrist:* You Idealists maintain that the mind is of the same nature as the object that it apprehends. If the subject and object are identical, how can anything be seen by anything? The scriptures also refute the possibility of something apprehending itself. In the *Crown Jewel Discourse*<sup>2</sup> the Buddha states that the mind does not perceive itself. The mind cannot see itself just as a blade cannot cut itself.

**18. You may reply: It is like a lamp illuminating itself. A lamp does not illuminate [itself], since darkness does not conceal [itself].**

*Idealist:* Just as a lamp illuminates the surrounding darkness, so does it illuminate itself. There may be the tacit assumption that if it cannot illuminate itself, it could not illuminate anything else. Likewise, just as awareness perceives other objects, so does it perceive itself.

*Centrist:* It is conventionally inappropriate to say that a lamp illuminates itself. Why? Because a lamp does not have the quality of darkness. If darkness is present, it can be dispelled, but since this is absent in a lamp, it is meaningless to speak of a lamp illuminating itself. This point is discussed at length in Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom*.<sup>3</sup>

19. A blue [thing] does not require another [blue thing] for its blueness, as does a clear crystal. So the mind is seen sometimes to depend on another, sometimes not.

*Idealist:* For example, if one were to place a clear crystal on a blue base, its blue appearance would be dependent upon some other blue substance. Now something like a lapis lazuli gem is blue from the very time it is created, so its blueness does not depend upon another blue substance. Thus, just as there are the two cases of dependence and lack of dependence on another object, so are some cognitions dependent upon objects such as form, while others are focused inward and perceive awareness only.

*Centrist:* To determine whether forms and so on exist, it is indispensable to have a verifying cognition: If something can be apprehended by a verifying cognition, it exists; if it cannot, it does not exist. In fact “something that can be ascertained by a verifying cognition” is the definition of something having a basis in reality.<sup>4</sup> All [Buddhist schools] agree on this point.

Therefore, if there is no verifying cognition to establish the existence of something, one cannot claim that it exists. When one claims that there is verifying cognition of something, such as an objective form, one cannot prove that that cognition is verifying simply on the grounds that it has an object, nor can one claim that that object exists simply on the grounds that it is apprehended. That would be circular reasoning. The problem arises from the [Realists’] inability to establish the existence of an object and the verifiability of a cognition purely on a conventional basis. Thus, to establish the validity of one cognition, one would need another verifying cognition to apprehend it . . . and another would be needed to establish its verifiability, *ad infinitum*. This is a fallacious approach.

Thus, the Idealist speaks of a self-ascertaining, verifying cognition that apprehends verifying cognitions. That cognition establishes the verifiability of cognitions. For example, the visual

perception of form is dependent upon another object. But another type of awareness apprehends itself and does not depend upon another object: The seer and the seen are not different.

**20. Such blue[-ness of a blue thing] is not regarded as the cause of [its own] blueness, as in the case of the non-blueness [of a crystal, where there *is* causation]. What blue would make just blue, itself [made] by itself?**

*Centrist:* The blueness of lapis lazuli is created by other conditions; it is not created by itself.

**21. The statement that a lamp illuminates is made upon knowing this with awareness. The statement that the mind illuminates is made upon knowing this by what awareness?**

*Centrist:* Upon analysis, a prior awareness does not apprehend an awareness in the present that has not yet arisen at the time of the prior cognition. A later awareness does not apprehend an awareness that has arisen and already passed. An awareness in the present cannot be both a subject and its own object. Thus, according to the system that asserts that the designated object<sup>5</sup> is found upon analysis, by means of what cognition is awareness said to be clear?

**22. If nothing observes whether it is illuminating or not, to speak about it is foolish, as in the case of the beauty of a barren woman's daughter.**

*Centrist:* We, who recognize the analytic unfindability of sought referents, maintain that there is no cognition that sees this, so one cannot state whether it is illuminating or not. It would be like speaking of the beauty of a barren woman's daughter—it is nowhere to be found.



*Idealist:* It is necessary that awareness illuminate itself, as stated above, and this assertion is needed to establish verifying cognition. Thus, there is self-cognizing awareness.<sup>6</sup>

23. [Idealist:] If there is no self-cognizing awareness, how is consciousness recalled?

[Centrist]: Recollection is due to the connection with the perception of something else. This is like the poison of a rat[’s bite].

*Idealist:* In order for recollection to occur, there must be prior experience. Without prior experience, there can be no recollection. There is the twofold classification of “self-experience” and “other-experience.” If the experience [of one’s own consciousness] is an other-experience—i.e., an experience of some other entity— infinite regress ensues. Therefore, such experience must be self-experience [i.e., an awareness of an entity that is of the same nature as the awareness itself]. Thus, the experience must be one in which there is awareness of itself, otherwise recollection could not occur. For example, from a prior perception of blue, there later occurs the recollection of the object—blue—and the recollection of the subject—“I saw blue.” Therefore, together with a prior experience of the object, there was self-cognizing awareness of the subject—the visual perception of blue. In that way there can occur a later recollection that “I saw blue.”

*Centrist:* There is no need to experience something in order for it later to be recalled. For example, while one is unaware, one might be bitten and thereby poisoned by a rat. Although one experiences being bitten, one does not experience the invasion of the poison into one’s body. Although that is not perceived, later, when the effects of the poison are felt, one recalls that while unaware, the poison was injected.

Likewise, due to the perception of blue, one later recalls the visual perception of blue, but for that to occur, it was not necessary

for that perception to experience itself. How does that recollection arise? Upon experiencing the other object—blue—due to the connection between the subject and object, recollection [of the former] occurs. So there is no need first to experience the subject.

**24. [Idealist]:** In a different circumstance, [the minds of others] are seen, so [the mind, must also] illuminate itself.

**[Centrist]:** A pot is seen due to the application of an empowered eye ointment, but the ointment itself would not be seen.

*Idealist:* Upon attaining meditative quiescence, it is possible to perceive the minds of other distant people.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it must be possible for one's own mind to be perceived by itself.

Understand the specific point being refuted here. This refers to the refutation of the [Idealist's theory about] mind perceiving itself. For example, one must recall that it is possible to cultivate meditative quiescence which is focused upon the mind.<sup>8</sup> This discussion concerns a single awareness perceiving itself. The Idealist argument, once again, is that if it is possible to observe the minds of other distant beings, there could be no flaw in the statement that awareness perceives itself, which is right at hand.

*Centrist:* The fact that one can see something distant does not necessarily imply that one can see something else close by. For example, by the use of a special eye ointment it may be possible to observe a buried pot of treasure, but the ointment itself would not be seen.<sup>9</sup> According to our understanding of the analytic unfindability of sought referents, it is not possible for awareness to observe itself. When one analyzes former and later moments of awareness and seeks the designated object, it is not to be found. In this way, the Idealist presentation falls apart, i.e., it cannot be applied to reality.

*Idealist:* Do you Centrists refute the entire presentation of cognition, including the experiencing, seeing, and hearing of events? If

you take the above stance [with regard to self-cognizing awareness], this invalidates awareness.

**25. Here that which is seen, heard, and cognized is not refuted; rather, the conception [of them] as truly existent, which is the cause of suffering, is here to be prevented.**

*Centrist:* With regard to cognition, if one seeks the designated object, it is not to be found. But [the cognized object] is not invalidated or refuted by such reasoning. Although it exists, if one seeks it with reasoning [by applying ultimate analysis], it is not found. It is not truly existent, so when reasoning seeks a truly existent entity, none is found. But the fact that it is not found under such analysis is not because it is simply non-existent.

This form of logical analysis has the purpose of eradicating the conception of true existence, which acts as the root of attachment and hostility and brings suffering to individuals.<sup>10</sup> It is reasoning entailing ultimate analysis. If that which is denied—an ultimately existent entity—did exist, then things would exist by their own mode of existence.<sup>11</sup> If that were the case, then when applying logical analysis, [truly existent] things should present themselves. The function of such analysis is to check whether entities exist by their own mode of existence or not; so if they do, that should be discovered by such analysis. But since such analysis yields a negative result, that reasoning repudiates ultimate, or true, existence. That is the difference between something not being found by reasoning and something being invalidated by reasoning.

Here cognition is not repudiated; rather, the conception of true existence, which is the cause of suffering, is to be dispelled.

**26. [Idealist]: Illusion is not different from the mind, neither is it regarded as non-different.**

[Centrist]: If it really exists, how can it be non-different [from the mind]? If it is non-different [from the mind], it does not exist in reality.



*Idealist:* Since external objects<sup>12</sup> do not exist, they are not substantially distinct from the mind. Nor do they exist as mind. Form and so on do not exist as external objects, but they are not simply non-existent. They are not of a different nature than the mind, nor are they the mind itself.

*Centrist:* If external objects truly exist, they would have to exist in the manner in which they appear; and in that case, they would have to be substantially different from the mind. Now, if they are not substantially different, and if manifold images<sup>13</sup> are truly of the nature of a single cognition, then those images would be deceptive. In that case, the cognition would not exist in reality. If they are not substantially different, they would not truly exist.

**27. [Idealist]: Although illusion is not truly existent, it is something observed.**

**[Centrist]: Likewise, the mind [although not truly existent] is an observer.**

**[Idealist]: Cyclic existence has a basis in reality; otherwise, it would be like space.**

*Idealist:* Forms and so forth appearing as external objects are not truly existent; i.e., they do not exist as external objects. They are devoid of such existence, and thus they are like illusions. Nevertheless, they are observed.

*Centrist:* In the same way, the mind, which is the observer, appears to be truly existent, but is not. Thus, it too can be regarded as illusion-like. So there is no need to assert the mind as truly existent. Although external phenomena appear, they are not truly existent, and thus they are considered to be illusion-like. In the same manner, the observing mind appears but is not truly existent, and it is therefore regarded as illusion-like. Where is the fallacy in such reasoning?