



# The Buddha Project

IDMT Year 3-Term 1

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Introduction year 3



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## Introduction

As we have some new participants, I will give a short introduction on what we normally do during this teaching. Every session, I will first discuss the meditation we did, why I did it that way and how we are going to use it in the future. Then we talk about the challenges you might encounter, and what advantages the meditation offers.

Today I will also give an overview of what we will do this year and how we are going to progress. If we have enough time I will give an overview of the challenges we have compared to what we did last year. The upcoming weeks will start with Shamatha practice.

## About the meditation

From next week on we will start every meditation with a visualization of the Buddha. In Tibetan Buddhism, when you practice Shamatha, you start by visualizing the Buddha above you and we will continue to do that for two reasons:

- 1) There is benefit in the presence of the Buddha in your meditation'
- 2) In Tantra visualization is essential

Because visualization is not easy for everyone, we will spend this year practicing again and again until we find our way in visualization – it is something very personal. For some it is easy, for others it is impossible where most of us are somewhere in between. If visualization is not possible at all, we practice to feel the Buddha's presence. Between visualization and feeling, feeling is more important. Many of you know there is a difference between the *knowing-side* and the *feeling-side*, where the latter is more important. In our practice we cultivate the way we *feel* the presence and thus, bit by bit, we will found our way to visualize.

Visualization is not about 'painting the mind', it is *remembering* something. When I ask you to visualize your kitchen, you can immediately place yourself in the kitchen because you are familiar with it. When I ask 'where is the coffee-machine?', or 'where is the tea?', you can immediately tell me. You can bring up the mental image very clearly. In my head, I can walk around my kitchen. It's not as clear for everyone, but most people can more or less do that. There are cases of neurological problems where this is not possible, but that is quite rare. If that is the case for you then focus on the *felt* sense.

Normally it is important to realize visualization is using your memory; e.g. your kitchen is so clear to you because you use it every day. You've seen it over and over again. I looked at the kitchen here in Amsterdam for seven years and I know this kitchen

intimately. Its details are easy to bring to mind.

With visualizing the Buddha, it is the same. In the beginning this might be difficult, because we don't have a clear image of the Buddha. By practicing visualizations over and over, the mind becomes familiar, the visualization becomes an intimate image – and once we are familiar with the image, it becomes easy to bring it up.

I have been practicing Tantra for the last twenty-five years, endlessly repeating the same visualizations day after day, week after week, year after year; visualizations grow on you.

It also reminds me of my favorite writer John Steinbeck, two of my favorite books he wrote are *Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden* and I have read these books for 40 years. Because I read them over and over, I can tell you what the people look like in that story, what their homes look like, what their cars look like; I have built them over the years, they have become friends. *Grapes of Wrath* starts at little shack where mom is cooking bacon. It's been ages since I read it, but I can just walk into that door and I know where the stove is, I know what her pan looks like. I know the sizzling sound of the bacon she is cooking.

Visualizing the Buddha works the same way. In the beginning, when you read a book images arise, but if you re-read the book the images fill with more and more detail, each time you will notice when something is added.

That is the reason we will shortly visualize at the start of each meditation, like today with the [Seven Limb Practice](#).

If the Seven Limb Practice is new to you, you can find more information on the IDMT-website under 'Additional material' and you can read up on it.

There are two aspects to visualization.

Firstly, it is a typical Tibetan way to learn to meditate in the presence of the Buddha and to experience how this presence affects the mind.

Secondly, by practicing visualization for an entire year, we let the mind find its way, find what it means to visualize. Otherwise, we might quickly become frustrated. If the visualization doesn't immediately work, don't worry, there is plenty of time and the mind will figure things out, take it easy!

## This year's program

### Emptiness

Next week we will start the meditation with a visualization of the Buddha, we will place the Buddha above our head and then practice Shamatha on the mind. We start with practicing Shamatha on the mind, as this has to do with the way Bodhisattvas find

awakening. Our tradition gives a description of the path to awakening in five different stages. Awakening, or enlightenment, really starts to happen in what is called [The Path of Seeing](#). This is when we deeply understand (in contrast to rational understanding) emptiness or, in other words, selflessness. Rather than simply understanding emptiness, we come to deeply understand emptiness for ourselves: it is like this. Then your practice really becomes transformational.

To rationally understand emptiness is already very helpful, but those of you who have been familiar with emptiness for some time know an intellectual understanding is not enough: we want to see it for ourselves.

The question ‘emptiness of what?’ might rise.

Emptiness is not something in and of itself. Emptiness is the way in which things exist. Things exist, but as we will gradually discover, they don't exist in the way they seem to

Bodhisattvas realize – through The Path of Seeing – the emptiness of the mind itself. We will work towards understanding the emptiness of the mind, but we will take it slowly as it is quite challenging – it is a challenging idea, one step at a time. Once you get there, you will experience it as liberating.

We do need to find a balance as initially the question ‘*do I exist?*’ might rise and that can be very confusing. So we approach this with great care. Yes, you do exist, but not in the way you believe you exist.

The word *emptiness* can be unhelpful sometimes. It is true, but initially we misunderstand the deeper meaning. Emptiness – and this is the end point – will show the purity of the mind. The mind is truly like a diamond, completely transparent, but capable of reflecting all the colors of the world. Once you get this, this is an enormous relief.

Even an intellectual understanding brings calm, stillness, ease and balance to life. Emptiness provides us with the foundation, upon which we can act in the world; it is much better than the ‘I am-story’.

On the IDMT-website you will find the reader, the Prayers, and additional materials. I know it is a lot, but I want to provide you with this information because:

- It gives you the opportunity to ‘taste’ the richness of our tradition. There is so much to be had, so much to enjoy, so much beauty. I find it worthwhile to explore it with you, to take some of the foundational texts of our tradition.
- I want to explore meditation according to your needs and not simply according to some text. So I brought a lot of different texts together that provide different input according to your needs.

I always meditate and practice with you; based on your questions and our discussions I adapt where we go. Just like the first two year of IDMT, we will jump around a bit.



Sometimes I will give you something to read from a certain text, then from another text, according to your needs.

The central text and theme of this year is [Kamalashila's Middle stages of meditation](#), one of the most important texts on meditation in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Kamalashila wrote three texts on meditation, and the one in the reader is the middle one, the one that is most widely used. I have a transmission of this text from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, that alone is worthwhile using the text.

We will keep going back to this text, and we will probably finish the text at the end of the year, using everything else to highlight what Kamalashila shows us, he says some things quite succinct and then we need another text to explore what that means. In the early days of Buddhism in Tibet, there was a major debate as to whether Buddhist schools wanted to follow the Chinese or the Indian tradition. In the monastery of Samye there a major debate and Kamalashila was one of the debating partners and a student of master Shantarakshita, who brought Buddhism to Tibet. The outcome of the debate for the Tibetans was to follow the Indian tradition.

## Shamata

We will practice Shamatha the first couple of weeks. to get a good basis; learn to calm the mind again, to slowly develop and grow in applying Shamatha; this is not an easy practice, it is even very hard!

The last two years, we alternated between insight meditation and Shamatha because they have a mutually supportive role. To transform the mind we need a calm mind, and at the same time, insight helps us to let go. So every year we practice Shamatha, and use the level we get to for insight. We go back and forth between Shamatha and insight meditation until the mind understands it.

## Motivation

Then we introduce motivation.

Shamatha is difficult to achieve because, as you probably experienced, the mind has *a life of its own*. If you want the mind to be calm, to achieve Shamatha, you need to give it a reason. The mind is very much used to entertainment and distraction. We need to convince the mind that to be concentrated is more important than to be distracted. A major part of our work is convincing the mind. In the past we did that by looking at the hindrances, from a very individualistic perspective, and that is worthwhile.



## Compassion

Last year we investigated compassion and the way we are interrelated. This year we will look deeper at interrelatedness and using compassion to generate Samadhi. For that, we will use the seven verse mind training, an amazingly beautiful text. I am not yet sure if we will start at the beginning because the second half is quite practical and gives all kinds of things to practice during day-to-day life. For example if the mind is disturbed; how we deal with disturbances. We all have busy lives, we are operating in the world – and when the mind is disturbed 23 hours a day and then try to concentrate for one hour, things will be hard to be hard; we need tools to find calm in the other 23 hours and the mind training text offers good advice how.

We will argue in Buddhism the care for others and the care for oneself are not separated. The Buddha shows us they are the same. To take care of others is to take care of ourselves, and to take care of ourselves is to take care of others. We are not as separate as we seem. Then we will figure out that to be motivated by compassion is the easiest way to generate Samadhi. Self-motivation requires a lot of effort, when you want to subdue the mind, the mind will fight you all the way. But we have time to do so. We have tried to do so along different roads, and interestingly enough, when you use compassion as context, the whole practice becomes so much easier. This is the paradox: when the mind is truly caring, it becomes very supple, very pliant and obedient. And that is what we want, we want a mind that serves our needs. You might have noticed the mind often doesn't serve your needs, the mind feels unpleasant when you want to feel pleasant. And it might feel funny when you need to be sad; it will talk when you want to sleep and when you need to think, it will refuse to do so. If the mind would be a child, it would need a lot of *'adjustment'*.

The mind is our vehicle for the world, so we want a mind that behaves well, producing a world that is agreeable but also nourishing for our health.

At the end of the year, we aim for a good and innovative approach to compassion, and to have a good sense of how that plays out in Shamatha meditation.

During the lessons and meditations I will drop little grains of emptiness, because real compassion in the Mahayana tradition is not separated from emptiness, they are mutually complementary. If we really want to be compassionate, we must understand how we exist. We exist relationally rather than essentially

Because of the difference in experience related to emptiness, this approach offers the opportunity to become really familiar with emptiness. We can approach emptiness in a very practical way while I introduce all kinds of little elements that give you a good, robust, primary understanding of what emptiness is, and understand good enough things 'are empty' and add this to your meditation.

## Back to Nagarjuna

In February we will go heavily into emptiness, we will have a solid basis and we go back to Nagarjuna as he is the fountainhead where knowledge comes from. According to tradition, Buddha Shakyamuni himself predicted the coming of Nagarjuna in the second century.

The foundational and beautiful poetic text on emptiness is Nagarjuna's Verses to the Middle Way, the *Mulamadhyamakakarika*. This text belongs to the high point of Sanskrit literature. I have a Sanskrit recitation of the text and it is beautiful. So precise, so poetic, and so deep. Until about sixty years ago, we did not have the language to translate it. It took philosophers such as [Jaques Derrida](#), [Ludwig Wittgenstein](#), and others, to provide us with the language to be able to have an idea of what Nagarjuna is telling us. It is interesting it took us almost 2,000 years to catch up. And we are still debating what is actually said, it is that deep and central to the Tibetan tradition.

We then have developed a better understanding of emptiness as we looked at the mind from left to right, from the middle, above and below. We have a good sense of what emptiness of the mind means.

## Tong Len

At the end of the year we will turn things around as our practice is something very positive – it does not only free us from the believed idea of permanence, unchanging nature and an independent self, it gives us back Buddha nature, we are *Buddhas to be*, we are free by our very nature but did not realize we got stuck in a dream. The moment we deeply realize we do have Buddha nature, what needed to be done has been done: we are Buddhas.

That is the final point, to show we have Buddha nature, to show the beauty of the mind. The fact that the mind is empty also means it is extraordinary.

The mind is the most amazing, beautiful thing in the world. And especially for Western citizens, it's important because we live in a culture that even doesn't believe in the existence of the mind any more, something very strange as the mind is the one thing we know for sure we have.

## Taking a step back

For those new to IDMT, there are weekly transcripts of the teachings, which can help you revise if the material is new to you.

And in the document *Additional materials*, you can find a lot of information about



emptiness, a lot to contemplate. And I will keep adding information over time. Everything you need to know to get a basic insight into emptiness is already there.

## The self

According to the Buddha, our biggest trouble is our mind behaves in unpredictable ways. Sometimes it behaves well and we feel okay, and then suddenly, out of the blue, it does something very different, and we try to respond to it.

Very often the response of the mind does not improve the situation and this shows two things:

- 1) The response is not under our control
- 2) We don't understand what the mind is and needs

In year we looked at the *foundational* schools - they give a *foundational* argument of what is called *the self*.

Of course the self exists, we exist. The self of Gendun is talking and I hope your self is listening with pleasure.

But the Buddha says there is a difference between the way your self *exists* and the way it *appears* to you. And that's odd!

It looks so familiar to you – when you say '*I*' it seems straightforward what you're talking about. But if that was the case, then it would be equally straightforward to navigate the '*I*'. But you noticed it is not. Knowing this should give you a warning something is not okay with the understanding of *self*.

## About experiences

In order to understand this further, we need to talk about experience. The one thing that we know for sure is '*there is an experience*'. It would be wrong to say '*I have an experience*' as that would emphasize on '*I*'. So we know there is an experience, but what an experience *means*, is something we are not too sure of. How the experience is made is a complex story we looked at that during the first year.

If you are interested, you can access that material. Little by little, I will record background information for you, as we have different levels, some of you have already done high-level studies and for others this is more unfamiliar territory. So over time, I will record additional modules that will be useful when you want to know a little bit more about a specific topic.

When we say 'experience' something happens to the mind, but what is mind?

To describe the mind, we use analogies. And I like the analogy of a mirror, the mind

reflects the world and at the same time the mind is more than a mirror, the mind *knows* is mirroring. This is obvious - I *know* I'm seeing a person. I *know* I'm seeing a table.

The experience is arises based on two important aspects of the mind.

- One aspect is 'feeling', a complex word as it expresses only one aspect of what is going on. Feeling is the nature of experience *ourselves*. The mind is not just a mirroring, the mind also *experiences* what is mirrored.

When I shave in the morning, my mirror is not 'knowing', it has no experience, the mirror only reflects.

The mind reflects like the mirror does, but is also 'knows', the mind has an experience. An experience is something *known*.

In Buddhist epistemology, the first 'knowing' is in fact a feeling, a *felt* knowing. I experience something that is either pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. That is the first encounter with the world. I look at something, and the first thing that happens is that I *feel* something about what I see – that is what the Buddha tells us.

In meditation I focus on the *felt* sense, because that is what we encounter first – the felt sense motivates intentionality.

If something feels unpleasant, intuitively you feel inclined to walk away, or to become aggressive or defensive.

If something feels pleasant, you are intuitively attracted to it – you want more of it.

It is very important to realize that when we talk about *experience*, above all we talk about the *felt* experience. The mind feels pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral – the felt sense is the major 'engine' of our intent.

Unless questioned, our intent, our volition, follows the felt sense.

- The other aspect is called '*discrimination*' or '*discernment*'. The mind takes characteristics and puts them together into '*things*'. Every neurologist will tell you we don't *see*, we *recognize*. We see that which we know, we cannot see what we don't know.

This is something crucial to understand: we use previous understanding to make sense of raw data. The mind 'pre-organizes' what it sees, and this happens way below our conscious level of mind.

A lot of activity has already been done by the time we have an experience. A lot of pre-processing, to use computer terms, has already happened by the time we see something.

We recognize based on *concepts*. That is also how as children learn to navigate the world. We are born with some concepts on a genetic basis, but most of our concepts we learn by navigating with others. First our parents, our siblings, our family, our friends, our school, they provide us with concepts that we use to 'know' the world and to

organize our experiences. That is true for the objects of the world. However, one of the objects of experience is this 'me', 'I'. the self. Every psychologist will agree children need to develop self-awareness. Children grow a model of *the self* – it is not a given. There is an intuitive sense, but what we use to become an ethical person, what we use to become someone amidst other people, we need to learn. This takes a lot of time, it takes until adolescence to really figure out what it means to build a story to be able to participate in society.

## About concepts

The Buddha says a concept is a theory.

We take lots of instances over time and we bring them together, we simplify. The world is so complex it is almost impossible to navigate. If I took all the data of every moment of my life it would be useless. It takes time to learn what an object is.

A theory is always a simplification of something. A table, for example exists in different forms, in different environments, in different contexts, with different people. I generalize all this understanding into a single notion of 'table'.

The benefit of understanding this concept is I can investigate; I can look at it with my inner eye – look at the table in the mind, turn it around, I think about 'table' irrespective of time, of place, of people. I can think about different types of tables, including iron tables, wooden tables, plastic tables etc. I can think about 'table' in a generalized way and hold it in front of the mind.

It's called a 'universal' in Western philosophy. But Western philosophers also realized universals are not what you directly see. The world is a world of 'particulars'. What is out there is always in a specific moment, in a specific context, in specific relationships and so on. So there is some tension there.

Consider a car; you can bring a car to mind.

It seems obvious the car is a thing with qualities. That is the reason we want one car, and don't want another car.

However, when you investigate 'car', you find 'car' is dependent on parts, and none of those parts are the car.

Thus you come to the conclusion 'car' does not have any characteristics at all. 'Car' is a name of bits and pieces stuck together in a certain way, in a context with people driving cars.

But that is not what you see when you think about 'car', you don't spend a lot of money on a car that does not have characteristics.

We do the same to 'me', 'I' and the sense of a 'self' that is separated from everything, that seems to be like the king. There seems to be something about 'me' that stays the same throughout time, indifferent to context, indifferent to changes in body and mind.

When tell me ‘Gendun, you talk nonsense’ we get offended or defensive as we have this separated sense of self.

We got to this *sense of self* because we use concepts to look at the world. ‘I’ appear to my mind. And when look at you, you seem to be a separate thing in the world. That is not the way you exist, but it is the way you appear to my mind. That is the way the mind makes sense of this world and it comes with a price.

I appear to myself as though ‘I’ am independent of *my* body and independent of *my* mind. It is something we all struggle with – when the body becomes ill, we want to force it to behave differently. When we feel depressed or anxious, we feel we should be able to control it. And when we feel anxious, we often feel guilty for feeling anxious, as if there was an independent existing ‘I’, this ‘I’ should be able to control the anxiety. This shows that when you think about yourself, you think about three things:

- The body
- The mind
- Something independently existing of body and mind.

The Buddha says that is where problems start, because that is not you – you use the wrong model; this is not the way to navigate yourself.

The self exists; Gendun exists. *My* body does not do what Gendun does. If that were true, then when ‘I’ die, the body would continue ‘doing Gendun’, but it will not.

Each individual aspect of *my* mind is also not Gendun – but together, they produce something which none of the parts is, like with a car.

Through investigation I know I am dependent on parts. I am also dependent on causes and conditions, e.g. my parents: without my parents, I would not be here!

Without education we would not be functioning beings, without a social context, without farmers and so on. But that is not the way I appear to myself – I appear to be independent of all these things.

I also have the sense I persist throughout time.

This morning, I saw a photo of myself when I was about two and a half years old. And I seemed to recognize it, I identified with it. I had the sense this is the same Gendun, but when you think about it, it’s not at all. If I met the two-year-old me, he would be as different to the current me as he would to any other person in the world. Luckily I changed in between! I think my parents were very happy with that change, especially my mother, as breastfeeding someone for 55 years is not ok!

The way Gendun exists is in dependence on parts, causes and conditions, the aggregates. And I am constantly changing, I am impermanent. I change from moment to moment as causes and conditions in me and around me constantly change. ‘I’ is something ‘in-between’. To put it in a philosophical way: we exist in an *impermanent*,

*compounded and conditioned way.*

But the way we *appear* is the opposite. We appear as though we are self-sufficient, as though we should have control over body and mind, where in fact we inter-exist with the body and the mind – when they change, ‘I’ change.

There’s more and more research showing this; e.g. when the bacteria in my intestines are not doing well, I don’t feel well either. As feeling is something of the mind, the conclusion is the mind is dependent on the bacteria in my abdomen. When the bacteria change, I change and vice versa. When I feel unhappy my immune system suffers; when I feel comfortable and at ease, my immune system flourishes: we inter-exist.

The body is my body, and it’s dependent on me. But I am also a creation of my body and my mind, so I’m also dependent on them. We are inter-dependent.

The Buddha highlights that when we are angry, when we desire or when we are jealous or depressed, it is the sense of self that leads to misunderstandings. When I accuse you or when I say something harsh, the mind re-acts as the ‘sense of self’ was attacked!

The object of year was to investigate – through insight meditation – how we exist and we approached this process in two ways.

- Shamatha

We first tried to calm the symptoms, Shamatha calms aversion, calms desire, calms sinking and excitement and it calms spiritual doubt, simply by looking. But Shamatha does not overcome the afflictions, it can only suppress them. As soon as you stop the afflictions come back.

It is like having a disease: you can do something about the symptoms. If you have cancer, you can treat the symptoms, but will not heal the cancer. One needs to treat the underlying illness.

- Investigation

When we look for the self, we discover we do have *function*. Gendun has a function you do not fulfill, and you have functions that Gendun does not fulfill. We are individual functioning phenomena and all functioning phenomena are *dependent*. Phenomena function because they can change, things that do not change don’t do anything.

We investigated again and again: how do I relate to my aggregates, to body and mind? How do I relate to the world?

And thus discovered a very different sense of self. A self that is empty, free of being permanent, that is free of being independent of causes and conditions, free of independence of parts. We discovered a *dependent* self.

Knowing you function as a dependent phenomenon is very relieving. it gives you

a more open-ended, dynamic sense of who you are. It allows you to rediscover yourself in every moment and to leave your past behind. We should be free of our guilt. In the moment that something happens, we should be able to say that I will not do that again. But I am allowed to leave it in the past.

## Yogacharas

Last year we looked at the Yogacharas who investigate experience in an even deeper way: they acknowledge that what we have is experience. Yogacharas investigate these experiences; what does it mean to have experience and how do they arrive? The Yogacharas argue that every experience can be reduced to mind.

Yogacharas deny the existence of objects outside the mind and argue it is sufficient to speak of *consciousness*.

This is very helpful, for example when desire arises it also includes an object (pizza!). When I desire pizza, I am convinced the pizza is going to make me happy. The Yogacharas went a step deeper and advice you to investigate if this happiness would come from the side of the pizza, then more pizza would make you happier. And you can try that, but it's not the case.

Yogacharas say there is no evidence of a pizza outside of you, it's not even necessary to posit a pizza outside of you. Yogachara explain everything by way of karma.

The Yogachara school posits a subconscious they call '*the dependent nature*'. A continuum, a causal continuity in which karmic imprints and emotional habits abide. The dependent nature produces conscious experiences which we misunderstand in two ways:

- 1) We misunderstand the self
- 2) We misunderstand phenomena

The Yogacharas help us question what the lived experience is – the central theme of our life is to experience *self*.

We also saw the Yogachara school creates a disbalance as there are two things about it that are awkward.

- Firstly, Yogachara takes too much 'reality' away of the external world – it makes everything *too* illusory, it became a bit of a stretch. When we want to be compassionate beings in the world, the world needs *some* reality. It becomes difficult to maintain the Yogachara type of thinking.
- Secondly, it makes the mind too 'real'. Yogachara gives a 'stiffness' to mind and we pay a psychological price for it: we get too locked up in the mind.

This is the exact argument of the school we will look at this year: the Madhyamaka school, who balance this evaluation.

## Madhyamakas

The Madhyamakas argue the external world exists **and** the mind does not exist from its own side – mind exists in a “related” way.

They have a very beautiful, elegant vision of a world in which everything inter-exists, to use the beautiful expression by Thich Nhat Hanh.

When we look for something, we find relationships.

That is going to be our search this year – to see that for ourselves, one step at a time.

We wrongly have the sense we exist *intrinsically*: something authentically, unchangingly ‘me’. And we think this to be true of all things.

The Madhyamakas argue that is not correct: we exist *extrinsically*. We (and everything) exist in relationships in relationship.

E.g. when I look for a car, I find tires and an engine and a steering wheel etc.; I also find a gas station, a factory, a designer, a factory worker. I find iron and I find the star, the supernova creating iron. In other words: I find relationships and this is a beautiful and wholesome view we need in this world: for us to exist we need everything else.

This is how Buddhas exist, they don't see an intrinsic self, they see an extrinsic self. When they look at themselves, they see all living beings and know compassion and self-interest cannot be separated.

I hope that towards the end of this year, you can feel this, Madhyamika can deeply transform your life in a way that when you meet others, you feel that you are being made anew; and in becoming new you have choice.

For example when I approach you with anger, I make myself anew as an enemy. And when I meet you with kindness, I make myself anew as a friend. That is the choice we have, the freedom we have. A compassionate being, is a happy being, where an enemy is always defensive, is always anxious, is always fearful.

May we together we will find freedom, one step at a time.

## Conclusion

This is just the overview, during the upcoming year we will fill in the details, there is a lot to be said.

Once you get it, Madhyamaka is very simple. It takes effort because of our ignorance. What the mind adds to the world makes the world very complicated, we experience ourselves and the world as very complicated things, where they are not.



in the process of understanding the mind will fight us, the mind has difficulty believing such a radical view – that is why we need to become familiar and comfortable with this new view and it takes time – and we have the time!

We will first do some Shamatha, then we look at compassion with grains of emptiness before we dive into emptiness using Nagarjuna's chapters. Then I will show you are a Buddha to be: the only thing you need to do is see who you really are; once you know who you are, it is done. You can get the Lion Throne for yourself and no longer need to visualize it anymore.

My final point is that I am so happy you are here.

I arise in dependence on you, you are my conditions and I missed you!

There are many new students both on Zoom and in person. I am very happy to meet you.

Let this be another year of friendship, please do not impose anything on yourself. I will try to teach in an organic, humorous and enlightening way; enjoy the ride! Let the mind simply get what it gets from the teachings.

And then we will start again, and again, and again – this is the way I (and many others) approached the path! Even now when I read the Four Noble Truths, I am as excited as always – 40 years later.

Let us have fun together!

Let us enjoy the beauty of this tradition, the elegance of the arguments, the love and the kindness spoken.

## Prayers

## Final words

Again – thank you for being here.

Go forth and multiply your virtues!





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