



The Buddha Project

IDMT Year 3-Term 2

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Emptiness of a SSSE-self



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Introduction

Today I will shortly introduce some things about refuge, then we will look at the meditation and finally we will exchange some philosophical arguments.

Taking refuge

We will soon have the possibility to take refuge for the first time or reinforce refuge by doing then again. We will take a whole day as taking refuge is foundational in our tradition. To really generate refuge is not easy, that is why we take an entire day. We can reflect on all the different aspects of refuge. We not only reflect on refuge itself, we will also reflect on the trainings that come with refuge:

How we generate such a mind, how to protect it in order it does not degenerate as the mind is fragile.

We often describe refuge as something outside of ourselves, but that is partially true: it is about generating a mind that is a refuge to ourselves, very important. Refuge is not an external reliance.

All the capacities, characteristics and skills we grow, grow in relationship to others, it is the way we exist. When refuge would only be in reliance to other(s), it would be developing a relationship of dependency – and that is not the safety we want. We seek a safety within. There is a paradox: in letting go, in a world of dependent origination we will find independent safety, that is what we seek. We can rely upon this safety as it is within us. When we need safety, we can find it within.

Refuge also guides our intent, perceptions and feelings, the way we are in the world and the way we experience the world.

That is the purpose of refuge.

Asanga argues related to refuge: we start with causal refuge. We can only become enlightened with help from someone else. Meeting an enlightened other does not make us understand or able to become enlightened as well, we need their help. And that is true for all of us. A meeting with a musician might inspire you to become a musician as well. Watching a marathon might inspire you to start running. We are not born with the brilliant idea to run a marathon, to become a painter or a mathematician; we meet someone who illuminates the aspiration. Especially with something as radical as enlightenment, we truly need another.

But a symbiotic relationship is not enough, it would create dependency. The purpose of any cause is to produce a result. This is why Buddhas don't require our devotion, devotion in Buddhism is towards a person but *a devotion to an opportunity*. We understand the opportunity when we encounter enlightenment in someone else.

Through this encounter we understand we have that same potential: we can be free as well; the nourishing and the fruit of our practice produces the resultant refuge, our awakening, when we become the three noble jewels. We become Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. That is an important point to make.

If you want more information about refuge the commitments have a look at the Sravasti Abbey website, it is very informative.

Refuge always comes with necessary trainings, but the five lay vows are optional although I highly encourage them.

Additional materials

I added four topics to the document of [Additional materials](#):

- An introduction to emptiness
- An introduction to inherent existence
- An introduction to object of negation
- What we have been doing for the last two weeks: the mistakes of a permanent, unitary, and independent self (PUI) , and the self-sufficient, substantially existent self (SSSE).

When you are not too familiar with these topics, I advise you to read it.

About the meditation

In today's meditation, we looked for a *self-sufficient, substantially-existent self* (SSSE) through a series of meditation prompts. We used different ways to investigate this misperceive of *self*.

We ended the meditation exploring the possibility of lifting the burden of this distorted view of the self.

Not being good enough

Often, especially western people, do not feel not good enough about our practice.

The topic tonight is about what causes this problem: the wrong beliefs about *the self*, we attribute a form of agency to *the self* that we don't have.

The reason for feeling guilt is we think we have complete agency and that distracts us. We do have a agency, the capacity to act, but agency is far more complicated than you might think: ignorance is in our way.

We already noticed this in meditation: we try to control the mind but we actually don't have control over the mind and that is frustrating.

For those who feel guilty about not practicing enough: it is importance to understand this feeling of guilt deepens the ignorance, feeling guilty is counterproductive.

Example given: last night meditation was not the best practice ever, many distractions for example. Investigation learns us this could not have been any different because those moments are a result of causes and conditions. The task is to analyze what causes and conditions came together that led to being distracted, where you tried to meditate. Knowing so is very informative – we then have power realizing *I was distracted because of these causes and conditions*, and find the means to do differently next time. Guilt is not informative – even worse, it deepens the misunderstanding of who you are.

Guilt just tells you '*I'm not good enough*' and that is not true, we will all become enlightened one day.

Guilt suggests you should be able to do something that causes and conditions were not facilitating at that moment. Just like roses cannot grow from a pine seed – simply impossible.

When yesterday evening's practice was hindered by distractions, they arose because there were conditions for the mind leading to these distractions where the conditions to be mindful or to counteract the distractions were lacking.

When you want to be different today, you need to know what caused the distractions previously. When you understand why introspection and mindfulness fail you, new options arise to diminish distractions to strengthen mindfulness and introspection.

And of course this is challenging for everyone at the beginning.

One thing the meditation highlighted is *we are our own context*. There is no supervisor who is always aware of what body and mind do. There is no *self* like that.

When the mind is distracted, the person is distracted. When you expect you are able to force a distracted mind to calm abiding for example you oversee causes and conditions, that is why meditating on emptiness is so important.

The delusion we have self-sufficient control over body and mind is a disaster. This delusion creates an unrealistic view on agency and on top of that it makes you feel bad about yourself. Something completely unnecessary.

Practice Advices

This is not a course of philosophy, but one of practice, so I'd like to begin by providing some advice about four different elements to support your practice: training reminders, the physical environment, the social environment, and the international environment. I will talk about these things in a practical sense.

Training reminders

As we argued often, the counterpart of *mindfulness* is *forgetfulness*; another word for forgetfulness is distraction: attending to something you did not want to attend to.

The untrained mind is by far more forgetful than mindful and you can only gradually change this balance. You need help in the beginning. One could say *you need a causal refuge*.

- External reminders

I think I told the story before, about when I was newly ordained my causal refuge were post-its. It felt like being a monastic 'suddenly' and there are more rules than I expected and it is almost impossible to keep to all these rules and I felt bad about forgetting the rules.

Then I realized the Buddha used the word '*training*' (a translation, there are other), so I realized I needed to train and remember the rules and precepts in order to follow them. When I break the rules and vows I start anew. I used this method of hanging post-its everywhere for my training until I became good at it. Again and again and again.

It is a good practice is to use external reminders of what you set out to do, like a

mindfulness app on your phone to remind you when to meditate. I use alarms and reminders while on retreat and also in daily life. Alarms tell me when to wake up, when my morning practice end, when my afternoon practice is, and when I should go to bed. A schedule and external reminders are a way of bringing structure to your day, and it becomes habitual. That is one way.

Another way to use external supports is to place physical reminders in different places. In the apartment where I live, e.g. on my table at home there is a book on impermanence by the great Zen-master Dōgen. At the moment, one of the things I am looking into is the relation between time and impermanence (one of Dōgen's famous arguments). The book is not there for me to always read it. But it keeps one of *the theme of impermanence* in mind whenever I see the book. Create an environment that helps you remember, including using such mnemonic tools.

- Another idea to improve memory comes from an ancient Greek memory training tool (the *method of loci*, or *memory palace*).
When you give a presentation and have trouble remembering the details, you imagine a physical space, like a *memory palace* with many rooms. And then put all these details in different locations throughout *the memory palace*. When you want to recall the details, you can move with your inner eye through the palace like you would from the couch to the lamp, now from detail to detail. Having my Dōgen book on my table serves the same purpose. It is using something in the physical space to remind me of things. This is a conducive environment.

The physical environment

Another way to support your practice is through attention to your physical environment.

One way to create a conducive environment is to carefully manage your electronic devices. Don't contact me before noon or after 8 p.m. because I unplug from the internet. You can try to get my attention as much as you want, but I keep those hours stringently for mental hygiene. It becomes habitual, now after 8 o'clock a space opens where all activity, not related to Dharma-practice, ends.

This might mean you remove some apps from your phone; maybe you want to read the news in the morning, but only do that on your laptop. There is an extra step to take (going to your browser) before the news is presented. There is nothing on my iPad to disturb my attention, no social media. There are lots of book-apps and the like that I need to work, but nothing else. So when I'm working with this device, nothing will disturb my attention.

When I study, or prepare or work, I don't want to be disturbed. So my iPad is a conducive environment for these tasks. It even looks pretty, you know. Nice desktop. I like elegant aesthetics.

It is good to have a place devoted to sitting meditation. Sleep therapists will tell you the same thing to overcome insomnia. Only use your bed for sleeping because that



makes your sleep better. When you bring your body to your bed, your body knows what to do, your mind knows what to do. Similarly, my sitting cushion with my altar is prominent in the apartment, but it is used for that only. I will never use it for something else. I will never sit there to work, for example. I work somewhere else. I have a desk for my work, but I have a cushion for my sitting session and for my pujas. The moment I sit down on my cushion I feel the symbolic of my practice. Having a dedicated practice space is also a good practice.

The social environment

Another thing to consider how you can skillfully create a space for practice within your complex social lives. Be very direct and make agreements with those who are closest to you. Make sure your practice does not lead to endless pulling and pushing.

When you have children and a partner, of course they need attention. When your practice starts to get competitive with your relationships, then you have a problem. Your practice will probably lose. You should never take time away from your partner or your children. You can find similar advices in Thich Nhat Hanh's book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*.

It is very important for meditative practice to pay full attention to your relationships; you need to spend time with your partner and children. But normally we do that in a chaotic way.

When you want to have time to practice, the best way is to spend quality time with the important people in your life. Sit down with your partner and be in that moment. Be there only for your partner without distractions of phones etc.. With your children the same thing. Be present so they start to realize your meditative practice is also of benefit to them and does not compromise your relationship. That's another very important way to cultivate a wholesome meditative environment.

The internal environment

The final practice-advice is reserve time to survey your activities to decide which matter and which are less important. Then dump everything that is not necessary. There are only 24 hours in a day, when there are regular activities that do not add real quality, let them go, let go.

Agency

And there is one more I like to mention as it works: we have agency, there is a *self*, but the relation with body and mind is different from what we think. It is a relation of mutual dependency.

This *self* fully depends on body and mind. And body and mind fully depend on this *self*. We often think in terms of a possessor-relationship, there is a caring-relationship. To storm out of a complex situation intending to let Shamatha arise in meditation is not likely to happen – when you try to do so, equals not understanding who you are and how you relate to body and mind. It will never work.

When there is a safe space to meditate, it is like a portal to get you there. I am thinking about the house where I was born in, a pre-Second World War house, with a very long hallway. From the front door to the living room was 15-20 meters. Think about how your meditation practice needs some time and space to transition from daily demands.

Previously, I had an extremely stressful marketing job. When I got back from work in the evening, my mind was thoroughly disturbed. So after work I did long walks, collecting flowers to use for offerings and it gradually calmed the mind to down. Then I took time enjoying offering prayers. Find prayers that mean something to you, relate to you, that you find beautiful and are personal.

My prayer book is very personal and full of beautiful images, it is almost 200 pages by now. It is an inspiring thing. It is the result of 20 years of monasticism, plus the many years that led up to that point. When you look through the book, you can see my whole Buddhist life. I took refuge in 1987, and those prayers I still do. That's almost 40 years later. Page two has prayers I recited for 40 years and I love them., they are intimate. I recited these prayers far more than half my life. There is no '*I should recite these prayers*', they tell me something about me.

when you approach prayers this way, they give you a graduated path into meditation, find out what this means to you.

Again, there is no '*you have to do this*'. In contrast to over-emphasis on the tradition itself, I find it more important you know the elements of the tradition and then figure out how they work for you: what exactly performs this function for you. For example, if you want to offer water bowls – like the Tibetans do – good on you. If want to offer flowers and incense, of course, why not! Find what moves you.

Meditate always *with your heart*, and you will get there.

So these are just some ideas to get you thinking.

It is very important to look critically at your practice without judgment. While considering your practice, don't judge; just analyze, there is no need to be normative. When yesterday's meditation didn't work out as you expected, it is just the way things were, the past is the past. There is no point in feeling bad about it. But you can use it as a source of wisdom. What happened and why did it happen? In that sense, what happened is very informative, showing you what hindrances you face, not just theory. What are we really struggling with?

Well, these were some practical in-the-world ideas that will hopefully help you. Please also consult the Appendix to the IDMT-reader, especially:

- 1) Asanga's five hindrances and eight antidotes
- 2) Kamalashila's *Stages of Meditation (Bhavanakrama)*, the first text that gives advice on creating a conducive environment for meditation.

Meditating on *self*

I was thinking earlier today how easy it is to explain impermanence, but hearing about impermanence changes little.

Once you experienced impermanence in meditation everything will change. It is the same thing with incorrect views of *self*. It is not too difficult to explain it, but to really feel and see the absence of *self* is life-changing.

To realize this, you must understand how to practice.

During meditation, I need to give instructions, there is no other way.

During a meditation of, let's say, an hour:

- Take about ten minutes for the first part: setting your motivation, and generating immeasurable love.

Don't take too long, so you have time to work with all the other aspects as well.

Today I crammed everything into one session to show you to the different aspects, but in your own practice, it is not necessary to explore it the same exact way.

- Then start the meditation itself.

During today's meditation, I gave you four different reasonings to contemplate *self*, and for each I gave accompanying reasons why this *self* does not exist like that.

When you meditate, it is fine to take only one of these reasonings.

For example, explore what would be left if you take body and mind away. Is something left there?

Imagine what you take away when you take body away?

Body is not too difficult. And we already looked at mind; if you take mind away, you take volition away, feeling away, discrimination away, awareness away. Then, what *self* is left?

There is a lot to explore!

Just explore the circumstances that arise in your life. When you have an exam tomorrow; does it appear as though you should have control over your mind preparing for the exam? What does the control-relationship look like? Let it appear and investigate what arose in your memories: how did you feel in the memory, what is this *self*?

And also explore what expectations, what burden comes with it.

Have a good sense of the object of negation when you practice meditating on emptiness: we discover the way the mind portrays *self* is unrealistic. To deeply understand that is challenging because what we *truly are* and *ignorance* are mixed together in perception. Whenever afflictions arise, when the mind behaves unskillful, the *existing-self* and the *illusion* get mixed up.

Some of what we perceive is true and a lot is not true. To separate these is challenging, it takes time to get it right. It will probably takes you years to get it right and that is fine. This is a gradual process of deepening, but you will find it very helpful in life.



When you get this sense of **I**, explore how oppressive that is.

If *self* exists in the way **I** perceive it, then **I** should be able to find *self* and can **I**?

Did **I** ever see it in reality? Would it be possible

You come to the conclusion, no – it is not; **I** have never seen *self*, *self* is not possible. **I** have never seen that kind of control, it is not there. We lived with this intuitive sense about *self*, and when we want to verify its existence, *self* is not there. It is like you walk in your house and think you see a ghost, so you turn on the light, and there is nothing there. Relief arises simultaneously with the puncture of the illusion of *self*. Hold on to this insight and the relief and don't worry too much if it is correct; you will get there – it will emerge in time.

The Paradox of *self*

As you contemplate *self*, always be mindful not to undermine you – as a person. The puncture of the illusion of *self* definitely does not mean you don't exist. We talk about non-existent.

When **I** tempted you to read Nagarjuna's verses, you will nevertheless notice Nagarjuna seems to say we don't exist. What Nagarjuna means with non-existent is: we don't exist as we seem to exist. The illusion doesn't exist and that is a different ballgame.

To paraphrase Tsongkhapa in this context: the fact Gendun is empty of a *self-sufficient*, substantially existent *self*, affirms there is Gendun: **I** started by saying there is a Gendun, that's very important to keep in mind.

A big misunderstandings about Buddhism is, when the Buddha talks about non-self, he plays a word game that is clear to his audience (*of monastics*) but not always to us. Make sure you keep yourself healthy.

That is one of the reasons why **I** always put something affirmative, for example: '*Buddha empowers me to make everyone happy*': **I** affirm my existence, a powerful new sense of agency. This is much more important than a decision to go to the gym tomorrow. This is ultimate agency, the ultimate power.

We take the Bodhicitta affirmation about *self* as a starting point, and then take out the problem of *self*. Our perception about who we are is in the way. It hinders progress on the path, while it is merely an illusion.

That's why Tsongkhapa argues it is important to define the object of negation. We cannot take away too much or too little. When we take away too much, we end up with nothing, which is neither true nor empowering. And when we leave too much intact, we leave our problems intact.

We will gradually take out what needs to go and thereby get a realistic sense of what it means to be a person. Once we really know what *I am* means, we are enlightened.

That is a promise – and we no longer have this misperception about '*I am*', all this blah blah in our head will stop; there are no more stories to tell – we can stop arguing *I am this – she is that – they are thus*.

The impermanent *self*

Last week we looked at a *self* that entirely is a product of religion and philosophy. Although in the West that is much more undefined compared to India; there is a body, there is a mind, and there is *a third thing*, something we can translate as *a soul*.

In Indian philosophy there are many more theories than were ever developed in the West. That is the reason Buddhist philosophy is so specific in what it negates, there were many different ideas in those days.

The idea there is something permanent and unchanging about me (*Gendun is one thing, independent of cause and conditions*) is relatively easy to negate because it is so fanciful. It something we would maybe like to have, rather than something realistic. There are many reasons for its development, and the fear of death is one of them.

Because we fear non-existence, we conjure up fantasies as they temporarily alleviate the fear. We fantasize to persist in time, that stays the same while the rest falls apart. This seems nice until we realize what it leads to, something we explored in today's meditation. This fantasy is like sugar: it tastes nice for a moment, but leaves rotting teeth behind. We know it is a fantasy and carrying this fantasy around is way too heavy. As I argued before, the idea of something permanent and unchanging is a byproduct of philosophical and religious thought: no child is born with it. For that reason, it cannot be a cause of our problem, because otherwise children would be born already free from this delusion and later on obtain the problem. If that were the case, babies would be born into this world as fully loving and compassionate beings.

Some of us have children, and I would like to talk to just one mother who gave birth to a child that in its first night thought '*my mother is tired; I shall not make any noise. I can wait for food until tomorrow morning for food.*' There are no such children. Children do have problems like we have. If a child truly exists, it would be aware of their interdependence with the mother. This would be visible through the child's actions – but a baby will not act like that, other drives are taking over.

Some of these ideas are acquired and some we are born with. That makes it complicated to explain it. A sense of permanent, unitary and independence (PUI): came into existence from conceptualization. However, the innate part did not, the innate part is unvoiced, a by-product of the way cognition works.

The innate aspect is something we have not defined. It suggests something (*self*) that doesn't exist. So to describe something that neither exists nor is well formulated is challenging.

The official term is we seem to exist *self-sufficiently and substantially*.

The un-unitary *self*

One of the aspects of *self-sufficiency* is it gives the illusion this *self* is independent of the five aggregates, but the aggregates depend on *me*: I can control the aggregates and I should be able to act freely and the aggregates should abide by my rules.

That is one aspect of this *sense of self*.

You see there is an ambiguity in there: it seems this *self* is separated, but *not entirely*. For example, you have a sense you need to study for tomorrow's exam and the mind needs to absorb all the information on command. Here is an interesting differentiation between the *self* and the *mind*. It feels like you are able to tell the mind what it should do – where we all know it doesn't work like that.

We almost always act as if body and mind are separated. If they were, we might trade e.g. our body in. Well, there is no supermarket with a Brad Pitt body for sale!. This idea of a separated body and mind implies a negative sense of body and mind. We would like to have complete power over body and mind, but we don't have it and that makes us feel bad about ourselves. Body and mind often just do not collaborate - some things we wish for our body and mind to do, well they won't happen. I can come up with the illusion to run a marathon but it will never happen; too late, my knees are worn.

When we are confronted with a situation like this, where *self* and *reality* collide, we feel a grudge: things should not be like that. People who get sick often say *why me?*. Both others and we ourselves easily start to point fingers: *the fault is this or that*. Imagine when you have a conflictual relation between your body and mind, it can easily lead to a lot of misery. It not only makes you feel bad, but as body and mind are disconnected it becomes almost impossible to nurture body and mind.

And as a result, what do we tend to do, is to double down: when the mind is unwilling to study we force it and the mind responds with less capacity to learn (in the example of tomorrow's exam. Forcing is just not the way to remember something. That is why most of us leave high school without any memory of what we studied. We crammed the evening before and for a short time it seemed to work, but it doesn't. Your short-term memory can pour out the information on your exam paper, but the day after the information is gone.

This indicates a fundamental misunderstanding about the nature of *self* and the scope of control.

Self-sufficient, substantially existent

We will further investigate *self*, to lay a strong foundation for the rest of the course. We will look into what self-sufficient, substantially existent means.

It refers to the idea this *self*, for example Gendun, could be known in and of itself without relying on something else. The term implies such a notice, a rabbit hole we will try to go down this term.

I – seem to have an authentic essence, I can be known by a label: Gendun, and you could know Gendun without needing to know my body and mind. Imagine: when was the last time you saw me without encountering my body and mind – never of course and yet it seems that way. When I say I have a body and I have a mind, that is exactly what I said. I speak of an owner, owing two body and mind. Based on this the idea arises you can know the *mind* in and of itself and that you can know the *body* in and of itself without relying on anything else and that you can know the *self*.



This idea is poisonous, particularly in our own time.

We are falling over each other trying displaying this *authentic self* without realizing it is mere performance.

This is what is called a substantial existence: as if something has an essence by which it can be known. We have the feeling there is Gendun-ness about Gendun that could be known (at least by Gendun) without knowing my body and my mind.

In this sense, it is self-sufficient: as if I can exist without my body and my mind. Body and mind are dependent on Gendun and his orders, but not vice versa. That is impossible.

Where the opposite is true: we are an imputed existence.

Foundationalism

I want to note a big challenge with the view of *self* as found in the lower schools of Buddhism. I will touch upon it, but it is today's cliffhanger. The lower Buddhist schools are called *foundationalists* as they agree the *self* exists depending upon the particles of the body and individual moments of mind; but not self-sufficient and substantial..

For those who hold that view argue: moments of mind and elements of the body exist substantially, but the mind is imputed on the aggregates.

As we will see next week, they explain this differently. Some say it is imputed on the collection of the aggregates, others say it is through the continuity of thinking consciousness. All these arguments create a *self* that is unreal.

Today's argument say *some things are more real than other* and that is problematic; it liberates you to some extent, but it leaves some ignorance intact.

This foundationalist-approach also leaves you with another problem: when the *self* is too unreal, where do I get the agency to want to become a Buddha for the welfare of all living beings? The foundationalist' view makes *me* not real enough and that is a problem with their arguments.

On the one hand, it is not deep enough (it leaves many things intact) while on the other hand it diminishes things too much.

This is the problem with all expositions where something is more real than something else. There's a lot of philosophical literature on that topic.

Those who believe there is something more fundamental underneath phenomena are monists. For example, God. Monists feel God is really real, but we are not.

Some time ago I had a conversation about this with the Sufi Master, and monism leads to the conclusion the person doesn't exist at all, it is only illusory.

It is the same with these lower schools. Making the foundational elements and moments of mind too real makes the self too unreal.

This imputed part is important. Imputed does not mean something is non-existent, that might be what we hear due to our materialist background as though it is only unreal, only an illusion. That is not the case. But that will take us some time to wrap our heads around.



The two lower schools, Vaibhasikas and Sautrantikas, say is: there is a *self*. But to know *self*, you must depend on the knowing of something that is *not self*: the body and the mind. That is what they really say.

However, this creates an unevenness and it is what imputed existence means. Please keep that in mind: something that exists substantially can be known by itself, you don't need reliance on something else. There is an essence with characteristics, you can know it as such.

Other things are imputed existence. So they exist, but to know them, you need to rely on something else.

For example, waves on the ocean are imputed existence.

Do they exist? Yes. But you can only know waves in dependence on knowing water and the wind. You cannot know waves independent of water and wind, that's not possible.

The particles of the water exist and the waves have imputed existence on these particles. That doesn't mean the waves don't exist, but to know waves you must know water. You rely on something that is not wave, because water in itself is not a wave.

Conclusion

This was a gradual introduction to this topic.

The final view is *all things exist merely as imputations*.

That is why it is so important to understand what imputation means. We will need to take a few intermediate steps. I tailored the explanation to today's meditation. These talks are meant to serve your practice. I'm not trying to explain Tibetan Buddhist philosophy. That's why I leave some of the details out.

Use this material to your advantage in your practice, learn to question and to feel something. What do you feel when insight lacks? When meditation becomes uncomfortable, stop for a moment. The discomfort comes from having no experience with the alternative. It is like when your mum tells you Santa Claus doesn't exist. Hearing that the first time may not feel nice, you have been lied to! The second day you might realize there is nobody spying on you when you act naughty or nice. Day one is bad, but day two is a great relief and it is the same here.

In the beginning, it feels something is taken away you had 'since ever' and the mind tries to hold on to the original belief. This is the reason we put so much emphasis on reflecting how these images are a burden. To be a child, believing your parents are writing letters to Santa Claus about your behaviour is the ultimate betrayal. It is bad enough parents correct you, but telling Santa Claus about this misbehaving is treason! Then you find out mum never wrote a letter because Santa Claus doesn't exist. That takes a burden away, but also reveals the kindness of your parents.

When we realize the absence of a permanent unitary, independent *self*, the *sense of self* that then arises is much more beautiful.

Especially when we take away the idea of inherent existence, something I will introduce next week.



Remember, nothing in the Dharma is more virtuous than studying emptiness!

A final question

How do you explain the sense of self when the survival instinct is present?

Answer:

Because this sense of *self* is correct.

I did not say that there is no self. When I say *I am going back to my apartment*, this **I** does exist! If **I** meet a tiger on the way to the apartment, **I** will try to escape, run away or hide. This **I** does exist.

Please remember **I** exist, but not the way we imagine. That is the problem, these two are mixed. What exists in our perception and the *illusion of self* are mixed and we need to take the illusion away. That's what it means when we say the 'I' that appears to us. As we have seen, that is not an object of language. Once you come to deeply see this, you are free – just like that

The Dharma offers many beautiful important things. All these beautiful insights can alleviate the symptoms, but none of the other things can heal us.

The realization of emptiness is the medicine.

No matter how profound compassion and love and joy are – and they are necessary, without them, realizing emptiness is not possible – but they do not have the power realizing emptiness has. Ultimately they cannot heal you.

Love, compassion and joy suppress unskillful activities of the mind, but cannot take them away.

The understanding of emptiness is unique to the Buddha.

The fact that we spend an evening thinking and contemplating this, and that you have the courage to be here and do that is rare. Of the 350 million supposed Buddhists, I don't think many try. What we are doing this is something to rejoice in.

Prayers

Final remarks

Thank you for your presence.

Thank you for your prayers.

Thank you for your courage and your care for all sentient beings.

Sadhu- sadhu – sadhu

