



The Buddha Project

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The conceptual origin of ignorance



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Inhoud

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Introduction

We gradually dive into the real thing, [Svabhava](#): self-existence or inherent existence. The last weeks we used the four immeasurable thoughts as a motivation, a common way to practice. The Bodhisattva on his or her path uses these thoughts to strengthen Bodhicitta.

Before the winter break we tried to generate bodhicitta and now we use these different reflections to reinforce the mind of bodhicitta. In the beginning this mind is weak and vulnerable. Many meditators on the Bodhisattva path use the endless reflections on the four immeasurable thoughts of equanimity, sympathetic joy, love and compassion.

About the meditation

Today we used a specific way of generating bodhicitta: exchanging self and others. We started with a reflection on the disadvantages of self-cherishing. As we explored earlier, the *self* in *self*-cherishing does not exist. however, when we talk about *other*-cherishing, this *other* does exist. This is the paradox in Mahayana language, it is like playing with words.

We try to cherish a sense of self that is not realistic; it is a disconnected *self*. To cherish ourselves disconnected from others doesn't work; we don't exist like that; I used the example of a plant: when a plant wants to cherish itself in contrast to the soil, the water, the sun, it would make no sense. And yet this is how we act, we try to cherish *ourselves* regardless of others, regardless of the natural environment etc.. and doing so, we are completely surprised human race is not doing very well. To let go of *self-cherishing* does not mean we could not be happy. In fact, bodhisattvas are very happy, they have much to give. [Chekawa Dorjé](#), who says: '*we don't know what it means to take care of ourselves.*'

What we really have is a connected self.

Earlier today I taught here in Stockholm, so I was a teacher – but not from my own side. I'm a teacher *in relation* to students. Gendun the teacher exists, but only relationally.

When I listen to his holiness I am not the teacher; then I am a student. I *am* a teacher, but not in the way I believe, but based on ignorance I believe the way I am. That is what we will deeply explore.

We exist relationally

To cherish myself as a teacher for example is self-defeating. This attitude disconnects me from the sources allowing me to be a teacher. If I want to be a good teacher this afternoon, I should take care of what you need. I should teach a topic that meets your

needs, that makes you feel content. When you become a bit dull I will make a joke and when you look bright, I talk more philosophical.

When self-importance arises, I become *self-aware*: *look at me* and that very moment I have a problem, thinking '*what are they thinking about me?*' Oh, she looks curious, maybe I said something wrong. . . .

When I *self-cherish*, I create a sense of self that is disconnected and not nourishing. And to begin with, I am not like this in and of myself. *Self-cherishing* never works, it is a burden leading to conflict and unfortunate behaviour from my side: I would use you. *Self-cherishing* is also the source of the incessant blah blah blah in the head. Have you ever looked closely to all these thoughts about *I am, I am, me, me, me, more me*, it is terrible – relentlessly stealing our peace and contentment.

Chekawa Dorjé invites us to cherish others, arguing that, when I care for you (deeply understand that without you I would not exist) is profoundly nourishing for me as a person. It is the magic of this movement.

That is why Buddhas are infinitely happy, because they find perfection in purpose. A Buddha like Tara knows that she only exists relationally. Therefore she has only one purpose: to care for all others and thereby she is relieved from the burden of 'I am'. The Buddha says: 'I am free of the conceit of *I am*'.

When you practice this meditation this week, look at things like this. Understand the instruction in a poetic way. *Self-cherishing* is cherishing ignorance and that will not work as *self* doesn't exist like that. We do exist but the idea of *self* is incorrect.

When we refer to *other-cherishing* – well they exist interdependently exist with me; a beautiful poetic approach.

It does need some explanation because it is not obvious.

We work towards the topic of Buddha nature, the understanding what personhood really means: a profound and powerful *sense of self*, powerful because it is a *connected* self.

To deeply understand this will bring freedom, the freedom to be agent and to be able to navigate the world.

If I want to be a good teacher, I need to take you into account as you are the conditions that make it possible that I can teach. I should honour my teachers who gave me knowledge and so on. This evening will work well if I honour and nourish my resources; rather than this imaginary sense of *me*.

This is part one.

The second part of the meditation was about emptiness. What I introduced to you is often called *the king of reasonings* and his holiness likes to say that this is his favourite way to negate inherent existence.

I would like to highlight is the awakening factors. You can find them in your additional materials (or appendix).



We go through the awakening factors to remind you of how they play out. After that we will go back to what *self* or *inherent existence* means.

We generate a sense of emptiness by creating a contrast.

First we conjure up the illusory sense of self. Je Tsongkhapa beautifully argues: '*when we say self lacks inherent existence, we affirm the existence of self and at the same time deny its appearance*'. It's very important to understand. I keep repeating this because it is so difficult.

When I say '*I am empty of inherent existence*', also say: *I exist but the way I exist is empty of inherent existence*

When I think *about me*, there is an appearance of inherent existence *about me*. I exist, but the way I appear is not correct; I need to figure out what that appearance is and then prove things are not possible that way.

Then I added *to feel* into the meditation; to not only gradually explore what does inherent existence look like but also what felt sense arises. This way you get to know the idea of *self* is not only ugly, it is also oppressive and a psychological burden.

Analysis shows there is no such thing as a *disconnected self* and an openness, or absence appears, a non-finding. It is nothing but an absence.

This is why the Madhyamaka-school is called the consequentialists. We negate what is not there.

To give you some direction: normally we feel substantial and this substantial aspect is not okay, not right. When you let go of the substantial-self, a spaciousness appears, described as *like space*. This spaciousness is not space but you feel undefined, unburdened by limitation. This takes time, be patient.

Once emptiness appears to you correctly you will also notice you will be released from that burden, it falls away. An often used analogy is it feel like walking in a dark garden and you touch upon a hose – thinking it is a snake – and fear arises. Once the lights turn on and you know there is no snake, a release of fear arises and that feels quite pleasant. And that pleasantness is important. Again, this will take quite some time to develop. We have time.

We will do this practice over and over again. I hope by the end of the season you will have a good idea of what this is about.

The awakening factors

Mindfulness

The first factor is mindfulness, the ability to be mindful is the ability to hold on to familiar. It is difficult to hold on to things we are not familiar with. Our practice will lead to familiarity – which will lead to mindfulness. And it is ok when things do not immediately work out as you might aspire, we just got started. Every time we practice,

the object becomes a bit clearer and a bit more familiar and thereby more easy for mindfulness to hold it. In the beginning you constantly lose mindfulness because you are not familiar with the object of meditation (emptiness, absence, etc.) You have not been here before.

And remember this is something to rejoice in: you practice something new, taking the first steps on the path to freedom. We tend to forget how extraordinary our practice is, something to rejoice in. So congratulations on your practice!

Hold on to mindfulness, even if it is difficult. When you lose the object and don't know how to get back, start from scratch until it becomes steady enough to remain with the object for a while.

Investigation

An extra element is to not only stare at the object, but to actively look. Not so much by reasoning, try to explore the object: *'What am I looking at? What is this?'*

This is an interesting aspect of Zen training. They speak of *endless questioning*. It is the same here. You look at the object in a questioning, exploring way. What you look at is not nothing.

When you practice like this, Mindfulness and Investigation reinforce each other, this active aspect will draw the mind inwards. For beginners, it might feel nothing much happens and the object might become vaguer and vaguer and you might fall asleep. Calm abiding requires an active relation with both the object and the mind. You can explore the object (in this case emptiness) and at the same time explore how that feels. All unfortunate behaviour of the mind is based on ignorance. When you deeply investigate you will notice that, as long as the object is clear, no distractions arise. When you look into emptiness, no depression or pride, or anger will arise and to discover that is very encouraging, empowering. You then get some control over the mind. Since beginningless time we were slaves of anger and other distractions and now you have the medicine.

While calmly abiding, anger stops – just like that (ven. Gendun snaps his fingers).

Energy

The third awakening factor is energy – or you could say self-empowerment. This energy encourages you to pursue more as you discovered practicing is wholesome, empowering and leads to immediate freedom.

Joy

Practicing diligently will lead to joy, a flexible form of joy – the Pali word is [Piti](#). This joy is not dependent on something outside of you, Piti comes from within, especially from the absence of unwholesome things.



When you investigate emptiness and at the same time are able to investigate the mind noticing there are no and will not be distractions, a distinct joy arises. A joy that is different for individuals. This joy makes the mind both tranquil and self-sustaining.

When Piti arises, you get into a process that at one point will work on its own.

This might take some time but when it works, it brings a deep inner stillness. The mind does not need anything else, the mind is content where it is and is self-nourishing. You don't need anything as no '*I*' or *self* appears.

Another aspect of Piti is that the mind becomes pliable. Normally the mind is resisting almost everything. You need to study but procrastinate; I need not tell you the mind is not always into serving your needs! However through this practice the mind becomes capable of acting wholesome.

In the beginning a little bit, and in time a lot.

Tranquillity

Being able to induce wholesome activities is called compliance, another aspect of tranquillity.

Being tranquil leads to the next factor of awakening.

Concentration

Actually, I don't like the word concentration very much, I find unification a better word. Normally the mind is monkey-mind: jumping from branch to branch in a tree. When we talk with somebody, we might also think about the list of groceries we need to buy this afternoon, or I might wonder what the other person thinks of me.

When unification arises, all other activities disappear, there is only one single object and that is fantastic.

Unification leads to the final of the awakening factors.

Equanimity

The mind is free.

The mind neither rejects anything, nor does it want anything. The mind is self-fulfilling and you experience a moment of freedom. You know this moment is a taste of where your practice leads to.

And one day this is where you will calmly abide – this is nirvana, freedom is now eternal.



Self and Person

What I am trying to do is not only make you philosophically understand what *self* and *person* is about, but to give you a deep felt sense.

What is it we need to see? What is it that will liberate us or even already liberates us to the extent what we already see?

Someone asked me *how we end up with this sense of self*. The answer is very simple: when there is function happening, we call this *self*. That is all there is. Within the constellation between *others* and *self*, there is coherent function and this coheres in the notion of *I am*.

That is okay, the *notion of self* brings all kinds of activities together and these activities participate *in the self*. And I keep repeating: the person does exist!

Intermezzo

In Tibetan the word *self* is used twofold, something highly confusing. Though the next explanation is not from our tradition, I find it very helpful *that which exists the person and that which does not exist the self*.

So we are clear what we're talking about. When I say *self*, you know I'm talking about illusion. When I say *person*, I'm talking about that which exists.

The person is selfless and by saying this, I affirm *person* exists.

Two truths

In the [Appendix](#) (Additional Material, chapter 4), you can find information about what is called Two Truths. I will not repeat all the information we talked about, for now a short introduction suffices:

When 'I' say: 'I' *walk*, the I referred to does exist, but dependently exist on:

- Causes and conditions.
Some of these causes and conditions we listed in the meditation.
- Parts
- Imputation.

In the continuity of activities, especially activities of the mind, we impute the *self*. We use a concept to bind all these activities into one.

This self does exist, but it exists *conventionally*. We use a convention, a common social understanding, to make sense of 'I and me'. When you deeply understand this, we come to understand the creators of this universe are **we**. We create each other: we only make sense amidst others.

This is difficult to fully understand, but don't worry, one step at a time.

The 'I' exists conventionally but the conventional appearance is false.

'I' exist, but the way 'I' appear (to myself or you to me), is not correct.

The emptiness of this appearance is called the *ultimate truth*.



The conventional self is an unreal existent in the sense it appears incorrectly to the mind. The modus of abidance and the modus of appearing are contradictory. The *self* seems to exist **in**dependently, where it really exists **de**pendently.

The real modus of existing is emptiness; emptiness of independent existence.

Both truths about 'I' are true:

- Gendun conventionally exists.
- Gendun's true nature is emptiness.

And furthermore, the two depend on each other.

QUESTION

What consciousness is the *we* or the *you* that ven. Gendun refers to?

ANSWER

When I say 'I', I refer to is the self-imputed 'I' on the continuity of my causal series. My mind is a causal phenomenon that has you as a condition. We will get back to that point.

QUESTION

Is emptiness dependent arising?

ANSWER

Exactly. These are two sides of the same coin.

Tsongkhapa wrote a famous text after he achieved the first stage of enlightenment:

'Those who believe dependent arising and emptiness are separate things have not understood the Dharma.'

Back to the Two Truths

We want to deeply understand what is happening, how perception works and how this process creates a wrong appearance.

What I argue here is not an entirely comprehensive story, it is what you need to know.

Tsongkhapa strongly relies on the great Indian master Dharmakirti.

The conventional Gendun arises dependently and therefore Gendun is empty of independent existence. That is we are looking at.

Every great philosophical tradition, in China, India, or ancient Greece, remarked something: *The objects of thoughts are different from the objects of direct perception and they are interrelated.*

Generalizing concepts

In Western philosophy a concept is sometimes called a *universal*.

In the Indo-Tibetan tradition a concept means *generality*: we understand things by generalizing.

How do we form an concept of something? Dharmakirti explains this generalizing in a reversed way, just like the great Wittgenstein does: when I think about *chairs*, I exclude

everything from the mind that is *not chair*, where chair can refer to different things. For example, in English you might say:

- The *chair of Newton at Cambridge*, which is not something to sit on, or
- The *chair next to me*, which is something to sit on.

All things inside this concept are interrelated, where all things outside the concept are excluded. This way we are able to think in a very broad context. Here we can think of wood or iron chairs – big, small, with or without armchairs, leaning chairs, lying chairs, car-chairs etc.

By excluding what it is not *chair*, we understand something about what *chair* is implicit. We make something visible by excluding everything else and then things start to go wrong: we created boundaries in the mind about what is *chair* and everything else. Then, within the boundaries we created, we make sense of the object. We recognize that by using examples.

Generalizing substance

I just highlighted, that I can think of metal chairs, wooden chairs, concrete chairs, leather chairs, etc. at the same time.

This means I generalize substance. I can think (conceptualize) about chairs while ignoring the specific substance which they are made of.

That is very useful, as it allows me to understand something about chairs in general without having to be specific.

Life would be impossible for us without the possibility to generalize substance.

Generalizing in time

Conceptualization also allows me to generalize in time. This becomes pertinent with regard persons. For example, when I think about myself: I do so in one go, all 56 years of 'me.'

I took out the specificity of time, I generalized time – this is also very useful as it allows me to see tendencies that are not obvious in a present moment.

Generalizing in context

I can also generalize in terms of place or context.

Gendun in Stockholm, in Amsterdam, in Toulouse, in New York. Gendun alone or with other people, etc..

And again, this is useful.

One could say: *concepts are a way of theorizing the world.*



When I do this regarding myself, I create a *self-theory* and all theories are definitely not specific as in each moment I am different.

Later tonight, when I sit alone in my room, I am very different from what I am doing now – you already sense a tension there.

When I think of myself, I think in general terms – and at the same time I can never see this *self* (as based on general terms) as I always see a specific moment of *self*. This is where the problems arise.

This is important to keep in mind.

Concepts (or theories) are exclusionary. By exclusion we simplify things and have the possibility to hold whole categories of phenomena. It means the content of concepts is generalized in three ways:

- Time,
- Substance
- Place.

We need concepts, without them we can't make sense of the world. We would have just raw data

This example dates from the 1980's. There were people born with the retina (originally a piece of skin that, through evolution, developed to make us see better) not properly connected to where it should be. They are unable to see. As lasers were introduced in the '80's, opticians realized they could reconstruct the retina in order to see again. To their surprise the lasered people could not see because they never learn to see; e.g. children have to learn to see by ignoring almost all data. Through interaction with the parents and their social environment, children learn to distinguish things. And we still do so. When I look at you, I ignore most of the things in front of me. I pick something out by ignoring everything else.

The scientist / opticians didn't realize this is how we learn to see; they thought independent people, chairs, cars and so on exist in the world. They didn't realize they were mistaken. To be able to see a car, we need to know what it is. Those with this 'lose retina' never developed concepts for visual input, so they couldn't see. You have to learn to see.

That is why nowadays neurologists say: 'we don't see, we *recognize*'.

The proces of generalizing

When perceptions develop, a lot of processing already happened. The mind uses concepts to make sense of the input and then presents us with a useful reconstruction and this reconstruction is the world we see, not as it truly exist. The perception is based on concepts.

This process is (in Buddhist psychology) called *discrimination of discernment*. This discrimination of discernment allows us to recognize characteristics that mark or characterize the object.



We define characteristics, based on concepts generalizing substance, time and context. For example we give name to an object. Things are known because they have a name and a concept.

My perception is a direct perception, but based on conceptual understanding. Every object is put into the mold of conceptual understanding. Hearing and seeing pick out things according to concepts that are I have agreed upon earlier and are relatively stable, thus importing an optical illusion from concepts into reality.

This is what can easily be recognized with children. When they draw something, they draw a line around something. This is how conceptuality works: I see you because I separate you out from the background; the visual perception separates you from the context in which you exist. This leads to an aberration: you think an object exist in a way but it is based on an illusion, this is not the way you exist – it is not even possible. This person here (ven. Gendun points at his body) exists conventionally, but there is no Gendun being separated out.

This appearance (again, based on an illusion) hinders me.

On the one hand the misinterpreted appearance hinders me to see how we really exist. *Conventional truth* is also called *obscurational truth*. The way I appear to myself obscures the way I truly exist, that is the problem in the process.

On the other hand this misinterpreted appearance makes me vulnerable.

We almost always respond to this misunderstanding by mentally elaborating on it. For example: someone says something to me and on my side unpleasant feelings arise, as this person already appeared to me in a separated way. That is how the process works, even though I know that person is not without context.

So, this unpleasant feeling arises and immediately the mind starts to interpret – and as we argued before, we are very often mistaking feelings as they are conditioned by karma.

This is a big challenge, feelings are habitual, felt sense responses to perceptions, where the main condition for feelings to arise is karma, not any exterior phenomenon. The mind immediately mistakes, it believes the feeling is caused by an exterior phenomenon, in this case the person who said something. While the person outside is only an *accidental condition* (of the feelings that arisen) *rather than the cause*.

Then the mind starts using concepts to elaborate and takes this person out of their context. This way the mind blinds me for the possibility that what this person said might not be unpleasant at all; or felt only unpleasant to me because I am vulnerable for the specific expression they used, or the person did not feel okay, or they heard something from me in the past. The context disappears because of generalizing.

If I do not observe what happens in my mind, I risk taking the person out of context. E.g., that is what anger does: it generalizes the person in time.

We all have examples of similar conflicts. I used to have a partner who was very good at it, whenever I did something wrong the response would be *you always do that*.

People here nod in recognition, we all do this. It seems natural but yet makes no sense because there is nothing that I do all the time. Maybe breathing, but for the rest there is nothing I do all the time.



When anger arises, the mind does not realize that it is generalizing in time. It takes a specific incident in this context and generalizes it in time. it *makes from an incident a characteristic*.

Then the next step falls into place: that person is bad.

The problem now is we don't look at the person anymore, we only look at the internal image (an illusion) of the person, not realizing this concept is only a theory and in many ways foundationally wrong.

We exist in context, we constantly change. When anger arises, the mind responds based on what it believes it sees: someone separated out of context who is by nature bad. But the person does not exist in that way.

The illusory aspect that conceptuality imposes is often called *inherent-existence* or *self-existence*. Based on an illusion, I am angry with someone who, in and of themselves is bad. I can almost see badness, based on an illusion and this is a big problem.

QUESTION

Perception to the filter of concepts?

ANSWER:

Almost, I will argue there is no perception without concepts.

We are exploring a very deep and third form of dependence.:

- Things depend on causes and conditions
- Things depend on parts
- Things depend on imputation by name and concepts.

It will take some time to really see what this means, it is the deepest of the three.

That is why I said *we* create the world: concepts are social phenomena. Concepts only make sense between us. That is the meaning of *a convention*, an agreement.

A conventional reality is a reality through agreement.

This thing next to me is something we call a chair, but it's not a chair in and of itself. It is a chair because we agree that it is called chair and what it is used for.

Now we have some idea how conceptualization works and I will repeat this regularly. Conceptualization gives phenomena of perception an illusory aspect, no matter if it is something heard, seen, tasted or smelled. An illusion as though these phenomena exist independently.

For example I seem inherently tall, and that seems to make sense. But what appears to inherently true is incorrect: I am not tall in and of myself. An American basketball team would make me look short. My tallness depends on concept, in this case a comparison. It is not what you mean when you say *Gendun is tall*, tallness is related, it is not an independent characteristic of Gendun. Tallness only exist in relation and is dependently existing. This is true for everything. That is what Madhyamaka is about.



Svabhava

We will now explore the idea of what in Sanskrit is called Svabhava, *Svab* means self, *bhava* means existence, where existence refers to something without depending on something else.

I should be able to find a *thing* not relying on aspects that are *not that same thing*. It is the way the world is understood by conceptuality. My direct perceptions have that appearance; things go wrong when conceptuality starts to elaborate on the appearance. Unskillful emotions like desire, anger, pride, jealousy, depression and so on, are based on this misunderstanding. The mind grasps for this illusionary appearance, takes it to be true and then elaborates on it. The outcome is by necessity unfortunate, unwholesome.

And it gets even worse: this process is self-sustaining. The stronger I hold onto this misunderstanding, the more I become convinced it is correct, it is part of the karmic process.

The contradiction here is: ignorance causes more ignorance. As long as I believe the conceptualized appearance is true, I create the condition for the next moment of ignorance – something that is endlessly repeated.

We have never been without. But there is an end to it, that is what we are seeking.

QUESTION

What is beyond conventional existence?

ANSWER

It is important to understand there is nothing beyond conventional existence, all things exist in dependence.

There are some exceptions, but for now: *all things depend on parts, causes and conditions and imputation by name and concept.*

That is how things come to exist. This is even true for Buddhas.

Dependence on concepts creates an illusory appearance. Things appear in a way they do not exist. That is why *conventional existence* is also called *obscurational existence*, the illusory appearance it is nothing but an appearance.

To resume

We exist dependently in three ways but the process itself makes us appear, to ourselves and to others, in an opposite way: we seem to exist *not dependent* on parts, *not dependent* on causes and conditions and *not dependent* on concept and name. and that makes no sense.

So the appearance is the appearance of Svabhava. As though I, or anyone else or any object have characteristics, independently of anything else.

It makes no sense, it appears to me like that, I might develop *pride* or *not feeling good enough*.



Remember this is the conventional truth about a phenomenon. When I say: *table*, it is a conventional phenomenon. It exists, my laptop is happily standing on top of *table*. Based on its parts, its causes and conditions, the imputation I can use it to put my laptop on.

That is what we do and it works, it is okay. However, the way the table appears to me is problematic, as it appears out of context to me, as though it has these characteristics in and of itself. That is when I start developing dislike towards *table* or I become attached to *table*: I want to take it home.

Then conceptualizing takes over the appearance and starts to elaborate, the concept takes *table* out of context. That is the conventional nature of *table*.

Table also has an ultimate nature: the way it truly exists: empty of independent existence. That is what emptiness is: empty of svabhava - empty of self-existence. To know the ultimate nature of *table*, I need to understand it depends on causes and conditions, such as trees, sales staff, carpenters. I also need to understand *table* depends on parts, such as the legs, the flat surface on top.

None of these parts are *table*; the carpenter is not table, the legs are not, nor is the flat surface.

The way *table* exists is empty of self-existence.

In day to day live, when we don't analyse, then the table is the table. When we analyse *table*, if we try to find svabhava of *table*, we will not find it. We can't find *table*. In meditation we seek to distinguish the non-findability, the absence of self-existence, we want to remove self-existence. Once we have deeply understood – experienced for ourselves – unfortunate emotions get rejected. Anger, desire and other unwholesome emotions depend on this misunderstanding to exist. When misunderstanding concepts ceases, they can no longer arise.

Then ignorance gradually stops reproducing itself, it starts to become less.

In meditation we gradually learn to recognize emptiness, first by concept and then directly.

What this practice also does is when we are out of meditation the appearance of the object will seem illusory. The table is still the table, but the appearance as though *table* exists becomes illusory and in time this practice will in the end crack the code. Even between sessions things will appear illusory: the cascade of anger and other unwholesome emotions will no longer happen.

That is the way we practice. In meditation we analyse:

- What is the appearance?
- Can a thing exist in that way?
- We reason: if so, I should be able to find (e.g.) *table*, you look for *table*.
- We use reasonings: 'if that is true, I shall find it'. However, you will not finding it. When I look for *table*, I find parts, not *table*. There is no *table-ness*. There is no substance of *table*. There's nothing there.

When I look for *table* in the causes and conditions, no *table* either.

The movie: Passion of Christ.

In the beginning there is a scene where Jesus, being a carpenter, is making something. We viewer knows what it is: a table. But the Israelis of that time were always sitting on the floor. So Jesus is working and his mom passes him, asking: *what are you making?* Jesus then says: *I am making a table.* To his mom that doesn't make any sense: you sit on the floor and this table is way above your head. Jesus than explains it is a table because Romans sit on chairs. So she asks *what are chairs?* and Jesus mimics what a chair is. Finally Maria walks of, with an expression he has gone crazy. The context of chairs in those days was Roman soldiers using armor and it became almost impossible to stand up from the floor with all this armor tied around your body, so Roman soldiers dragged chairs around.

There is something important in that movie-scene: Maria does not see *table* or *chair*. She does not know what they are, they did not exist in her world. This shows you dependent existence. The table exists for Romans, *table* and *chair* are conventions amongst Romans but not to an Israeli woman, she does not recognize *table* or *chair* and they therefor make no sense.

Suggestions to practice

Please use the transcripts and the teachings to reflect.

Through understanding how conceptuality works, you get a sense of what svabhava is, it is a by-effect of generalizing and excluding.

Practicing and studying gives you a good sense of what exists and what does not exist. The table exists; it seems to self-exist by the way the concept is formed and that is a mistake.

This is true for tables, but where we are looking at now is persons. Gendun definitely exists, he talked a lot this evening.

You definitely exist, but not the way you believe you do. This misunderstanding creates every problem in the world. When the fighting parties in the Middle East would understand enemies only make sense in relation to other enemies, the war would stop. Yet the Iranians think that Americans are inherently bad and vice versa. They don't understand *enemy-ness* depends on each other. To be an enemy, you need an enemy. The arising of *enemy* is a dependent origination; it takes two to tango.

Even if you find this teaching challenging, I hope you are encouraged by it. In this world there are very, very, very few people practice like you practice: to see for yourself what truly exists. Even among followers of the Buddha.

You took the first steps, and they will inevitably lead to freedom. But it takes time, like all good things take time. Through your practice patience will arise and by the time you become teachers yourself you will be patient.

When we finally finish the path to enlightenment, infinite patience for living beings has arisen as we remember it took us a lot of time as well. We want to be with students for as long as it takes, allowing them to walk at their own pace.

Don't feel pushed or hurried. Take the time you need, enjoy the ride. Even if at times things do not necessarily make sense. It will come. When we go to Nagarjuna, we will get many beautiful examples clarifying what this means.

Bit by bit you will discover an amazing world. This false appearance, created by ignorance, makes the world look ugly. Underneath ignorance is exquisite. When we see that, we are free.

Let us dedicate the merits we created to your Buddhahood. May you all become Buddhas as quickly as possible.

We also need guidance ourselves and we have a Buddha among us: His Holiness the Dalai Lama, amongst others.

Prayers

Closure

Be playful, be childlike in a good way.

Discuss if you want to on the forum.

Know I am accessible when you have questions.

And trust yourself. One day the wisdom realizing emptiness will arise, it is not as difficult as it seems.

I sometimes joke, emptiness is not complicated, ignorance is. Emptiness is easy. And the rewards are fantastic.

Take care and thank you for being here.

