

assignments 3

reflection

TRANSITION

Review the Transition and Cycles reflections from Assignments 2, noticing any shifts or changes. Reflect on the causes and conditions that contributed to the differences. Notice any patterns that emerge over the two weekends and their transitions, and how they relate to patterns in your everyday life.

FIVE OMNIPRESENT MENTAL FACTORS

Continue with your practice of the five omnipresent mental factors, as you go about your day as well as on the cushion, in microscopic, intermediate, or societal range. Refine your semantic understanding (listening prajna) by exploring the meaning of each of the factors, not only verbally, but in your experience. Expand your intellectual understanding (contemplating prajna) through discussion, questions, reading, and the like. Contemplation does not occur during formal meditation sessions.

While analysis occurs to some extent in all three phases of integrative practice, experiential understanding (meditative prajna) is honed only through deep inquiry during formal meditation on the cushion—by staying with the rise and fall of the factors within your experience as much as you are able. Here is where the fruits of listening and contemplating prajna (semantic and intellectual understanding) takes flight.

The point is not to achieve a nondual sensory experience. It is to develop, sharpen, and refine two crucial tools of the meditative arsenal: rough examination (identifying) and intricate investigation (inquiry). These two factors are vital to all Buddhist practice, from shamatha and the dhyana meditative stabilizations beyond it, to vipashyana and beyond.

CONTEXT OF THE MENTAL FACTORS

The five omnipresent mental factors are the first of fifty-one mental factors (also called mental states, occurrences, events, and the like) that form the crux of a valuable psychology of consciousness as it awakens to pure perception from the misperception of samsara.

These mental factors form the basis of the *Abhidharma*, one of the three *pitakas*, meaning baskets or collections of the Buddha's teachings (the other two being *sutras*, which are the more widely known body of the Buddha's instruction, and the *vinaya*, the corpus of teachings on ethical discipline, with particular emphasis on monastic ordination.

Unlike the first five, the remaining 46 of the mental factors are not always present, but refining the mind to recognize and name them as they arise, remain, and fade away occurs in a similar way to the practice we have been investigating.

These mental factors are grouped by function. After the five omnipresent factors (sense contact, attention, feeling, discrimination, and volition) come the five particular-determining factors: yearning, conviction, recollection, meditative stability, and intelligence. There are eleven virtuous mental states: faith, integrity, honor, non-attachment, non-aversion, and non-delusion, diligence, suppleness, heedfulness, equipoise, and non-violence. The root afflictions are attachment, hostility, delusion, pride, wrong view, and doubt. The secondary afflictions are anger, resentment, dissembling, spitefulness, envy, avarice, pretense, hypocrisy, vanity, harmfulness, shamelessness, dishonor, torpor, agitation, mistrust, laziness, heedlessness, forgetfulness, distraction, and anti-vigilance, as well as the afflicting aspects of remorse, sleep, examination, and investigation.

Of course, this is a simplification, each factor including a variety of mental states that fit within the category that they exemplify. The precision, deep inquiry, and experiential understanding of our own mind that comes of this practice yields an intimacy and healing power in the here and now, and progress towards realization in the long term. It is impossible to describe—only by experiencing it yourself can you get a taste of its power.

readings

Excerpt from The Buddhist Psychology of Awakening

Steven D. Goodman

Somebody could say, “Why bother? Why should I care about knowing how to directly perceive reality?” That is an excellent question. The point of the Buddhist teachings is that the direct perception of reality is necessary in order to be truly free. Our capacity to learn how to directly perceive reality is the sine qua non for traversing the path, without which one cannot be truly free. In fact, how free we are depends on how directly we perceive reality.

...

With prajna, the energy packet that can focus itself in a precise, swordlike way (like a collider beam), we can smash what we thought was ultimate and basic. We thought all of our problems, all of our meditative experiences, and all of our insights were solid and unchanging. But when this collider beam known as wisdom mind is focused on these fuzzy, murky ensembles, sometimes, momentarily, they burst apart and leave a little bit of a trace, just like when subatomic particles burst apart. In that space, in the wake of the application of wisdom mind, sometimes we can see and discern directly the way things are. (Then, of course, these factors come together again and it’s a bit murky. Again we can smash apart these murky ensembles.) The best way to smash is to develop the habit of calm, mindful, and relaxed presence. If we’re tight in body or tight in mind, it will be extremely difficult to experience what may occur in the spaciousness.

At any rate, whether we are aware or not, all of these factors are combining and recombining with each other all the time. Unconsciously or consciously, they are streaming, they are flowing, they are working when we're meditating, when we're not meditating, when we're sitting, walking, sleeping, and laughing. There's no situation in which these basic factors are not present. All of them together, as they get together—this is reality. It allows us, with a degree of precision that is not so easily seen in some other Buddhist teachings, to tune in to the variety of all the different factors that make up our thoughts, our emotions, our experiences.

In the very beginning we used the analogy of these factors being like an atomic chart. This is thought to be a completely comprehensive and precise list, one that describes each of these atoms, their qualities, and the various rules for how they combine with each other. This is kind of how we go through life, right? We have a rather sloppy, imprecise, bewildered, or arrogant way of relating to our experiences. We have a habit of actually making prostrations to this arrogance and bewilderment on a regular basis. We do so with the utterance "I," and sometimes, to vary it, "mine" or "you," "yours" or "not yours," and sometimes "not mine." This is the way most of us proceed through our lives, and at the end of our life we're a little exhausted. We have huge demeritorious piles of arrogance and bewilderment, with a completely clear conscience.

The good news is that the Abhidharma says we can break that habit; we can cut it. We can tune in and have as a target exactly this habit of arrogance and bewilderment. When we do tune in, there's a smashing; there's a bit of calm and clearing. In that calm clarity we may glimpse a bit how things actually are. One of the proofs that we have actually glimpsed this is a slight disinclination to continue to prostrate to this arrogant, bewildered heap. It becomes a little bit more difficult to say so quickly and with a clear conscience: "my," "my problem."

The Abhidharma is an invitation to smash, to break down, to cut through, and to completely destroy and overcome every tendency toward extremes of arrogance, greed, and bewilderment. Remember that what allows us to do this is a special kind of wisdom energy. (prajna). Prajna is a dharma, a basic energy packet, that has as its function the capacity to know, through analysis, the specific differences of all the other dharmas, and how they combine into conglomerations which make up the totality of our selves, our world, our experiences, both actual and possible. You can go quite far with this prajna; you can perfect it.

Excerpt from The Attention Revolution

B. Alan Wallace

[T]he shamatha practice of bare attention applied to the domain of the mind results only in the temporary alleviation of such mental afflictions as craving and hostility. So there's no reason to believe that the practice of their attention alone will irreversibly dispel any affliction of the mind.

According to Buddhist tradition, such liberation is achieved through the practice of *vipashyana*, or insight meditation, which results in wisdom [which I translate as *prajna*, precise knowing]. Such realization, when fused with the exceptional attentional stability and clarity [stillness-lucidity] of *shamatha*, irreversibly eliminates the ignorance and delusion that lie at the root of suffering. On the other hand, if our practice of the *vipashyana* is not supported by the achievement of *shamatha*, No realization, awakening, or transformation lasts, and we will never rise above the wounds of our human pain. The liberation that results from the unification of *shamatha* and *vipassana* in no way places us outside the reality of change period the Buddha, too, grew old and died. But the freedom gained by the Buddha and all those who have followed his path to liberation to its culmination has irrevocably healed their minds from craving, hostility, and delusion [attachment, aversion, and apathy] and their resultant suffering. Anything less is unworthy of the name “nirvana.”

From Creation and Completion

Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye [Karma Yeshe Chödrön translation]

Beings of utmost spiritual maturity—those who trained thoroughly in previous lives, together with those with perfected devotion are exceptional, poised upon realization of the nature of reality.

For all others, the progression is as the noble Nagarjuna teaches: Listening yields contemplation, which in turn yields meditative experience.

*If, having let go of distraction, we apply ourselves thus with consistency, then, first from the *prajna* arising from listening, we develop a preliminary understanding of the defining characteristics of *samsara* and *nirvana*. The *prajna* arising from contemplation pacifies superficially the belief in delusive appearances as real. The *prajna* arising from meditation penetrates to a conclusive experience of mind.*

Each preceding step yields the next in sequential progression. To omit this process amounts to wishing for a result despite lacking its cause. Self-satisfied by our rigorous practice of gathering accumulations and purifying obscurations, we aggrandize a scanty practice, devoid of clear knowing, the results of which cannot rise to the level of conclusive meditative experience. Absent such conclusive meditative experience, we remain mired in uncertainty, the one obstacle to the supreme.

By contrast, when listening, contemplating, and meditating yields decisive meditative experience, even were you told “your practice will land you in the hell realms,” you would not flinch, nor panic, your confidence undaunted.

Excerpt from *Rebel Buddha*

Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche

ANALYTICAL MEDITATION

After developing some stability of mind in sitting meditation, you can begin to add sessions of analytical meditation to your practice. Analytical meditation is a contemplative practice. You intentionally think about something that's meaningful to you, and at the same time, you examine the way you normally think about it. Specifically, you look at a particular belief you hold and examine the logic that supports it to see if your reasoning is sound.

When you do this, you're using thought as a tool to investigate your beliefs, and the more you work with this tool, the sharper it gets. In this way, your normally imprecise, confused mind eventually develops an extraordinary degree of clarity and dexterity. Many people enjoy this kind of practice, because in a way, it's like playing a game. You're outwitting the strategy of ego, which counts on your continued belief in its existence to keep you clinging to it. Analytical meditation is a practice that's associated with the third training in higher knowledge because of its power to provoke profound insights. Such insights take you beyond analysis or conceptual understanding alone to a direct perception of the mind's true nature.

In some sense, analytical meditation is like a conversation you have with yourself. You begin the conversation by choosing a topic that interests you and then asking yourself a question about it. It's important to start with a real question, one that matters to you. Whether the Beatles or the Rolling Stones are the greatest band of all time doesn't qualify. Resolving that question might be interesting, but it won't necessarily help you to put an end to your suffering in any way. However, a question like "Is there a truly existing self?" does qualify, and the answer you discover for yourself can make all the difference in your life.

Ultimately, we try to find out from this conversation what we're holding on to as a self. At the same time, we examine our own concepts and reasoning. For example, why do we assume that the "self" exists? If it exists, then where is it, and what is it made of? We take for granted that we're rational, logical beings; however, in analytical meditation, we discover gaping holes and flaws in our logic that many of our assumptions will fall through.

The most important guideline is to be honest with yourself. What do you really think, what do you really feel, what do you really see? If you can remain simple and truthful, you'll make some unexpected discoveries. As on the popular television show "CSI," you just go where the evidence leads. The following meditation instructions are examples of common assumptions and ways to analyze them.

Instructions for Practice

To begin a session of analytical meditation, take your seat and relax your mind, just as in sitting meditation. Then very mindfully bring up a thought or question to analyze. Try to stay focused on the question at hand. If your mind starts to wander from thought to thought without leading you anywhere, stop and go back to following your breath for a

short time. When your mind calms down, resume your analysis as before—you don't need to start all over. At the end of the session, it's good to sit quietly again, without analysis, for several minutes. If you practice with the same question over time, it begins to permeate your being. It keeps working in the back of your mind. The answer may come when you're brushing your teeth or in the shower or in a fit of rage over your phone bill. The

Conversation: This Is Me

You might begin your analysis by bringing something to mind that the Buddha said; for example, "Although everyone believes that they have a truly existing self, that self is imaginary." Then you might think, "Although the Buddha is a reliable source and I respect his wisdom, I still feel like I have a self. It makes no sense to say there isn't a self; it's contrary to my experience. Here I am. This is me. I'm the same person I was yesterday, the day before, last year, twenty years ago, thirty years ago. In the future, I will retire and travel around the world."

If you examine this statement, then you might ask yourself, "If I'm the same self as a child, as an adult, and as a retiree in old age, then what is it that remains the same? Is my body the same? Is my mind the same? If I say that although my body is not the same, my mind is the same mind, then did my child self know everything that I know now? Is the memory of my child self the same as my memory now?" You proceed in this way. In the idea "I am the same person," there are two related assumptions you can explore: sameness and permanence. Is permanence a requirement for a self? When you look around at the planet and the whole universe we live in, do you see anything at all that's permanent? Logically, to say that something is permanent means that it has always existed, will never cease to exist, and never changes in any respect. If it changes, then it's no longer the same, and therefore it's not permanent.

Then you might think, "Still, when I say, "This is me," I know what I'm referring to. There is clearly a self that is one thing, which refers to me, and not to something other or someone else." But ask yourself, if that's true, then what is that one thing? Is it your body, your mind, or something else? If you say it's just your body, then you're in trouble, because then the self would have no mind—the physical organ that's the brain would be devoid of consciousness. If you say it's just your mind, then the self isn't related to the body. But clearly it's not something completely apart from these two. So you might think that the self must be body and mind together. If you say that, however, then you have to decide whether or not body and mind count as one thing. If they are one thing, then they must be the same; otherwise, they are two things. So ask yourself in what ways are body and mind actually the same? When you investigate, perhaps you see only differences. One is material and one immaterial. A body doesn't think, and a mind doesn't eat or walk around in the world. Since the self can't be just body or mind alone, it has to be both. And since body and mind aren't the same, they can't be called one thing. Therefore, the self has to be more than one thing.

You can develop a line of thought like this, and then look at it to see if it holds up. Challenge your own thinking. At this point, you could go further in looking for the self, because both body and mind themselves have many component parts; neither of them is a single, unitary

thing. Could you have as many selves as there are parts of your body and mind? What would happen if you lost one of those parts—or two of those parts? If you lost an arm and your eyesight, for example, would this “I” that appears to be your self become any less of a reference point?

Next, you might think, “Okay. Maybe those aren’t good reasons. But I still feel that I have a self. I have my own existence and integrity of being. I’m not a product of anyone else’s thoughts or actions. Again, ask yourself, what is it within this self that’s truly independent of anything else?” To what degree has your identity been influenced by your education, your family, your community, your health, or even your diet? Would you be the same or different if you had grown up in a different culture? What part of this self, including your thought processes and values, is not a product of causes and conditions? The idea of independence implies that you’re self-made; it means you came as you are, and that this self of yours is not in any way a product of your environment. Is that what you really think?

In this way, we start a process of questioning and follow it as far as we can. The point is to see what assumptions we hold and what they imply. The more we find out, the less logical we seem to be. These examples are meant to point out common misconceptions we have about the self that don’t hold up to reason. While they may not entirely convince us that the self doesn’t exist, they at least show us how vague our sense of self is. We don’t even know where it is, much less what it is. For example, when you have a headache, you say, “I have a headache.” You don’t say, “The body has a headache.” Or if you cut your finger in the kitchen, you say, “I cut myself.” In such cases, you’re thinking of your body as yourself. However, when you’re suffering mentally, you say, “I’m unhappy. I’m depressed.” In this case, you’re regarding yourself as your mind. So sometimes we fixate on body and cling to that, and other times we fixate on mind and cling to that. In everyday life, we alternate like this all the time. Because we don’t see this clearly, we become confused about who we are.

Whether you’re practicing meditation to calm the mind or to examine your concepts, each session is a wonderful opportunity to get to know your mind. You don’t need to approach it as something you “have” to do—that takes all the fun out of it. Meditation is actually very interesting. We hardly ever look at our mind, so when we do, it’s filled with discoveries that make us curious to find out more and to get to the bottom of this thing we call “my mind.”

These days people often feel they have very little time to practice meditation, but even just a little bit of practice every day has a powerful positive effect. Sitting for thirty minutes in a quiet space is very helpful, but you can do it whenever and wherever you can. You can meditate while riding the subway to work, while on hold with your phone company, or while waiting for your water to boil. Be practical about it, and just do what works for you.

Excerpt 2 on Integrative Practice

Based on the teachings of Drupon Khenpo Lodro Namgyal [Jim Scott, translator]
Rigpe Dorje Institute, Pullahari Monastery

When we look at listening, contemplating, and meditating, all three include analysis. Of these, the principal time for analysis is contemplating, but in the meditating phase too, we engage in an analytical meditation, and that is also analysis, in a subtler form. But it is not just analysis gone wild. If we consider what it is that one is listening and contemplating, it is the scriptures and reasonings. That is what allows one to reach an endpoint to analysis and understand the basic nature. There is a process of analysis involved, but it is not free association or unshaped analysis without an endpoint. It is analysis applied within a perimeter of scriptural material using logic. Through that one comes to the end of the process, the understanding of the basic nature.

In doing the analysis, one first develops the prajna of listening. Through authentic listening, one produces authentic knowledge of the basic nature. Thus, the prajna of listening has an end, the understanding of the basic nature. To determine whether one's listening is authentic or not, one must determine whether the teachings listened to are authentic or not, which in turn depends on whether the Buddha, who gave those teachings, came to a final understanding of the basic nature or not.

This is a broad field of study in itself. In a nutshell, since the Buddha is the fully awakened and developed one, he must have reached finality in his understanding of the basic nature; he brought his understanding of the basic nature to final perfection. So, when one takes his teaching as the object of one's listening, one ends up with an understanding of the basic nature. Arriving at the conclusion of understanding the basic nature is based on an analysis whose foundation lies in the Buddha's wisdom experience. That is what one needs to ensure; that the basis for one's listening is authentic.

If the scriptures are authentic, they are presenting the correct meaning, and that is the basis for listening, in that case, the analysis one performs will have an end. But without authentic scriptures and reasoning as the basis, the analysis will never end. To take an example of that, let's look at food. Is a particular food delicious? If you are very hungry, the food would taste good, but the same food would not taste good if you are totally full. In one case, you thought it was delicious, and it was true for you in that situation. But later, when you said it was not delicious, it was also true. So how do you decide which is actually true? There is no end to that. The same applies to deciding whether morning or afternoon is better? Or one country and another. Analysis of that kind has no end.

If we take the case of being out driving, when there are signposts indicating the directions of places, and also you have a map. By using the signposts and the map, you can get to the destination you wish. There is an end to the journey, and you will be able to find your way based on the directional signs and the map. In the same way, with scriptural teachings and logic, your understanding ends in the basic nature. But if you are driving around without a map and without signposts, how can that journey end? In the same way, analysis without scripture and logic has no end. But with it, it ends at an understanding of the basic nature.

Before arriving at an understanding of the basic nature, contemplation is required. The prajna produced by that contemplation allows one to do the meditation, and give rise to the prajna of meditation. It is the prajna of meditation that eliminates the kleshas at their very root. This radical elimination of the kleshas comprises the Fourth Truth of Noble Beings: True Path. The remedy for the kleshas consists of the True Path, the prajna arising from meditation, eliminating kleshas from their root and providing a remedy for them.

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First of all, for this meditative experience to occur, the mind must be in shamatha with emptiness as its reference point. We have difficulty fathoming that because with think of vipashyana¹ as having a reference point of emptiness. It is within the shamatha focused on emptiness that we need a vipashyana that subtly references vipashyana. It is an extremely subtle distinction, and hard for us to fathom because we think that mind focused on emptiness is vipashyana. The shamatha focused on emptiness and the extremely subtle vipashyana produced in that shamatha are hard for us to distinguish.

This is similar to the Mahamudra instruction, where it is said that one should rest naturally relaxed without contrivances. That is shamatha. And that would also be the vipashyana. The vipashyana is also to rest naturally relaxed without contrivances. It is difficult to see the difference. Just as, in the prajna paramita context, where the mind referencing the emptiness in shamatha is difficult. In order for it to be a prajna paramita practice, the shamatha is a shamatha referencing emptiness. But the vipashyana of that practice is also referencing emptiness. What is the difference? The subtle level of analysis that arises from within the shamatha referencing emptiness, which produces the vipashyana referencing emptiness. In the same way, in Mahamudra, the shamatha resting naturally relaxed without contrivances produces the vipashyana that rests naturally relaxed without contrivances.

To speak in the context of emptiness, in one case it is shamatha referencing emptiness, which can lead to vipashyana referencing emptiness. But what is the difference between the two? The former merely settles in the emptiness. The attention is merely settled within referencing emptiness. Vipashyana sees emptiness. So there is a difference between being settled in referencing emptiness and actually seeing the emptiness.

The seer of the emptiness is the mind analytically meditating. This analysis is not the same as the analytical meditation done in listening and contemplating. In the first two phases, analysis coarse and outward turned. The analytical meditation done during the meditating phase subtle and inward turned. It shares a reference point with shamatha, which is also inward turned. The subtle analysis of the meditating phase consists of the prajna of

¹ Note that *vipashyana* in the Indian Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhist contemplative tradition differs substantially from the contemporary practice of *vipassana*. I use the different spellings to distinguish the two without having to clarify the difference every time. The bare attention or nonlabeling awareness of contemporary vipassana practice is viewed in the present tradition as means for settling the mind in shamatha (tranquility), rather than for developing vipashyana (profound insight). By *vipashyana* I mean profound insight developed through subtle meditative inquiry into the nature of reality from within the stillness-lucidity equipoise of shamatha.

intimately and detailed discrimination arising right within the shamatha. That is the analytical meditation. It is the prajna that distinguishes intimately and in detail.

In the context of our example, meditating on emptiness, what this meditative prajna discerns is emptiness. The term meditative experience in this context means experience of the emptiness. The emptiness is the object of the analytical meditation. Having said that, we need to make a further distinction here. What is the relationship between the meditative experience of emptiness and the analytical meditation? Analytical meditation yields the experience, but, during the meditative experience itself, there is no analysis occurring.

The meditative experience is *nges shes* in Tibetan, clear knowing, certitude, certain knowledge. When that clear knowing is present without analysis, that is the experience of the emptiness. For as long as that clear knowing lasts, the meditative experience lasts. At first, when we do not have much familiarity with the practice, the clear knowing fades fast and has to be rekindled with analytical meditation. As you work with it, you gain familiarity with it, such that the clear knowing arises sooner, requiring less analysis. Gradually you need no analysis, then that gradually ripens to direct experience of emptiness.

To be clear, meditative experience is not seeing emptiness directly. It is an experience of emptiness mediated by clear knowing. It is a seeing of emptiness, but not a direct one. It is a seeing that occurs in reliance on the catalyst of clear knowing from analytical meditation. A direct experience of emptiness does not rely in that way. In other words, the meditative experience is the vivid experience of emptiness arising within mind.