



EMPTINESS, WEEK 9

WHAT IS INTRINSIC NATURE?

We recommend you read the meditation slowly and make use of the opportunities for contemplation as they occur to you.

FIRST FEW MINUTES

Touch in with your motivation for this meditation. Begin by connecting with your actual motivation. Then, see if you can expand from that motivation to include a longer view, and expand the scope.

NEXT 20-25 MINUTES

What is Intrinsic Nature?

The self, like all other existing things, depends on others. Take a moment to reflect on what ‘to depend on others’ means for you.

Geshe Tashi explains that for Prasangika Madhyamaka, it means “to be dependent on both the causes and conditions that bring it into existence and the conventional consciousness that apprehends it.”

Geshe Tashi explains that, from the perspective of the object to be negated, the self we grasp to has independent objective status. It is independent not only from causes and conditions “but also—and this is very important—of the consciousness apprehending it.”

Take a moment to consider what role the mind plays here.

Geshe Tashi quotes Chandrakirti saying, “Self is the essential nature of things that is independent of others, its inherent nature.”

Take a moment to consider that for Prasangika masters, *things* exist. It is only the essential nature of things that does not exist. The lack of this essential nature in an existing thing is its selflessness or emptiness. It is what things are empty of.

The emptiness of the letter ‘A’

Another way of saying things don’t exist inherently is to say things don’t exist from their own side.

In Chapter 7 of his book *Introduction to Emptiness*, Guy Newland describes teaching by writing the letter ‘A’ on a blackboard.

Looking at this ‘A’ in your mind’s eye, or on a piece of paper in front of you, ask yourself,



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“Where does this identity as ‘A’ come from? Does it come from the chalk dust [or the pen’s ink]? Does it come from the shape of the left slanted line? The right line? The centrally located crossbar?”

When you first look at the ‘A’, is there a sense that you are seeing something that is out there, existing from its own side as ‘A’?

Does it seem, as Guy Newland suggests, that “it is radiating out, broadcasting clearly, the message of its ‘A’ identity?”

After some consideration, if you agree that the letter ‘A’ must lack any essence or identity from its own side, then ask yourself the following:

Can it still function as the letter ‘A’?

Can it still function as a grade on a test?

The emptiness of the snake and the rope

When looking at how things don’t exist from their own side, this is the scenario that is traditionally used. You are walking along a path at dusk, you see a snake and you freeze. When you look closer, however, the “snake” turns out to be a rope.

In mistaking a coiled rope for a snake, take a moment to ask yourself and consider, is it clear that the snake identity and narrative comes entirely from your side?

What isn’t so clear for most of us is that when we correctly label a snake a snake, the snake identity and narrative is still coming entirely from our own side.

One is a valid narrative, the other is an incorrect narrative. According to Prasangika, neither narrative exists in the snake. Take a few moments to consider this.

“There is nothing from the snake’s side that is inherently ‘snake’ and nothing from the rope’s side that is inherently ‘rope’...

... This is what Prasangika means by ‘posited by the mind’.”

Geshe Tashi Tsering, *Emptiness*, p86

According to Prasangika, there is nothing from the snake’s side by way of its own nature. None of our classifications of what makes a snake a snake, none of our facts, none of the meaning and identity that we give a snake, none of these exist from the snake’s side. None of these exist by way of the snake’s own nature.

Take a few minutes to consider the emptiness of the ‘A’ and the emptiness of the ‘snake’. We recommend you allow yourself the time and space, over the coming days and weeks, for further questions, thoughts and understandings to arise.



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Why does this matter?

“The big lesson here, the Prasangika masters tell us, is that by mis-perceiving the rope as a snake, the fear generated is the same as if it were a snake. And this is true of all samsara. Misperceiving all objects inherently existing, and hence inherently desirable, fearful, hateful, and so on, we generate negative minds, and so are stuck forever in cyclic existence.”

Geshe Tashi Tsering, *Emptiness*, p87

In conclusion, spend a few minutes on the relevance of this analysis to your daily life and practice.

DEDICATION

In conclusion generate a determination to gain a greater experiential understanding into the nature of reality, and to experience the longer term benefits from this. As much as possible try expanding these benefits to others around you, widening the circle of your care and concern.