

Chapter 7 Emptiness According to the Middle Way School (Verses 44 - 59)

Commentary

The Minds of Arhats

According to Khenpo Künpal's commentary, Shantideva is here presenting arguments to demonstrate the superiority of the Mahayana path.

44. The true monk is the very root of Dharma,
But difficult it is to be a monk indeed.
And hard it is for minds enmeshed in thoughts
To pass beyond the bonds of suffering.

45. You say there's liberation in the instant
That defilements are entirely forsaken.
Yet those who from defilements are set free
Continue to display the influence of karma.

The text states that if we insist without accepting the doctrine of emptiness that the root of the doctrine is the monastic community, it is impossible for members of the monastic community to become arhats. That is, **if the community of arhats is the root of the doctrine, then the very existence of such a community would be implausible if we do not accept the doctrine of emptiness.**

To this, Hinayanists might respond that we can posit a community of arhats without accepting the doctrine of emptiness because even without realising emptiness, it is still possible to attain full liberation from cyclic existence through the realization of the four noble truths. In reply, **the Madhyamika states that even in order to gain freedom from cyclic existence, the realization of emptiness is indispensable. For the root cause of bondage to cyclic existence is ignorance grasping at the true existence of phenomena. Without cutting this root cause, there is no possibility of attaining liberation. Without the realization of emptiness, meditating on emptiness will be merely remaining in a non-conceptual state. Simply shutting out thoughts can never lead to full liberation from cyclic existence.**

With regard to verse 46, there is a divergence of interpretation between the two Tibetan commentaries. The verse reads:

46. "Only for a while," you say. "For it is certain
That the cause of rebirth, craving, is exhausted."
They have no craving, granted, through defiled motion.
But how could they avoid the craving linked with ignorance?"

The Hinayanists respond to Shantideva by arguing that, although these arhats, who have gained liberation from samsara, might not have gained full freedom from the habitual patterns formed by deluded states of mind, on account of having gained liberation they have nonetheless cut the root of cyclic existence, and therefore there is no rebirth for them.

Shantideva states here that only by engaging in a path that involves full realization of both the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena can we arrive at the state of the Buddha's full omniscience. According to Shantideva, such a path can be found only in the Mahayana teachings. In this sense, Mahayana scriptures can be seen as being superior to the Hinayana teachings, because it is only in the Mahayana that the path to full enlightenment is found. As for the arhats, who have gained liberation from samsara, Shantideva argues that we can still observe the effects of karmic imprints. For example, in the case of Shariputra and Maudgalyayana, although they have attained liberation from samsara, they are not free from the habitual patterns formed by past deluded states of mind.

Shantideva continues:

47. This craving is produced by virtue of sensation,
And sensation, this they surely have.
Concepts linger still within their minds,
And it is to these concepts that they cling.

Shantideva is saying that although these so-called arhats whom the Hinayanist considers fully liberated from samsara **may not have craving as such, since they have the fundamental ignorance grasping at a notion of self, a form of attachment can still arise.** To this, the Hinayanists could respond that these arhats cannot have any craving because there are no deluded states in the mind. The Madhyamika would then respond to this by stating that because they have sensations, or feelings, these so-called arhats will grasp at these feelings as real, and that will give rise to attachment. Therefore, even from the Hinayanist's point of view, these so-called arhats are not fully liberated from samsara because they still have the potential to take rebirth. In the next verse **Shantideva states that as long as the individual's mind is not freed from the tendency to grasp onto something as real and truly existent, it is not freed from grasping and, therefore, from attachment and craving.**

**48. The mind that has not realised emptiness,
May be halted, but will once again arise—
Just as from a non-perceptual absorption.
Therefore, emptiness must be cultivated.**

As long as craving remains, the conditions for taking rebirth will be present within the individual's mental continuum. Therefore, in a mindstream lacking the realization of emptiness, the factors that bind an individual to cyclic existence will recur.

This is just like the case where someone remains in a non-conceptual, thoughtless state, and when he or she comes out of that absorptive state, the conceptual thought processes start again. Therefore, **in order to arrive at the point where we have gained total freedom from all tendencies to cling onto things as truly existing, it is necessary to realise emptiness.**

Realization of Emptiness Required Even for Liberation

According to Minyak Künsö's commentary, these verses state that, **even to attain liberation from cyclic existence, the realization of emptiness is indispensable.** So these verses are related to the main thesis about the indispensability of realising emptiness. This issue was raised by the Hinayanists when they asked, "What need is there to realise emptiness when by applying the teachings of the four noble truths, we can gain liberation from samsara?" According to this reading, verses 44-48 mean that, **if the root of the Buddha's doctrine is the monastic community composed of arhats, then without the doctrine of emptiness, it would be impossible not only to attain the fully enlightened state of buddhahood but also to attain even liberation from samsara. As long as our mind remains fettered by the tendency to objectify, there is no possibility of gaining liberation.**

If anyone were to state that we can gain liberation by simply engaging in the path of meditating on the sixteen characteristics of the four noble truths, such as impermanence and so on, and by doing so negate the self as a self-sufficient and substantial reality, the Madhyamika would reject this claim on the ground that this realization of selflessness at such a gross level cannot lead to full liberation. **The arhat that the Hinayanists claim to be a fully liberated being is in reality not an arhat, for that person still has, within his or her mental continuum, the tendency to grasp at true and intrinsic existence of phenomena. Such a person would manifest emotions and thoughts, such as craving, and would also display the effects of karmic actions, habitual patterns, and so forth.**

The Hinayanists might still maintain that such a person, due to the power of his or her realization of selflessness, is free from craving. The Madhyamika, however, would contend that the Hinayanists' notion of craving remains incomplete; relating only to gross, manifest, and conscious levels of craving. In the mind of an arhat, there are still subtle forms of craving that, by the Hinayanist definition, are not regarded as defilements. However, just as the Hinayanist accepts two types of ignorance (ignorance that is the root cause of cyclic existence and a more subtle ignorance) similarly, we can also posit two types of craving; a more obvious, conscious state of craving and a subtler form. So even within the mind of that so-called arhat, there persists a subtle grasping at true existence. Because of this, there exists in their mental continuum other derivative, deluded states, such as craving and attachment. **As long as the tendency remains within any of our psyches for objectifying and grasping at things as truly existent, we cannot be said to be free from craving and attachment.**

It is not adequate to realise only the gross levels of selflessness; it is essential to realise the emptiness of intrinsic existence of persons and phenomena as well. As long as we lack this deep insight into the nature of emptiness, although gross levels of negative emotions and thoughts may temporarily subside, since the potential still lies within our psyches, these emotions and afflictive thoughts will recur. Therefore, the realization of emptiness is indispensable to attain full enlightenment, and even to attain liberation from cyclic existence.

Prasangika and Svatantrika Understandings of Emptiness

When cultivating the understanding of emptiness, it is critical to recognise that the various Buddhist philosophical schools understand its meaning and scope differently. The Svatantrika-Madhyamikas maintain that all phenomena are devoid of true existence, but what do they mean when they say this? Despite their rejection of true existence, they still hold that all phenomena possess some form of *self-nature* (*svabhava*) and thus accept a degree of objective existence. That self-nature, or mode of being, they posit in relation to a non-deceptive cognition. In this way they maintain that there is no mode of being that exists autonomously and independently of the perceiving mind. However, because phenomena possess some form of objective reality, valid perceptions are necessarily said to be non-deceptive. **The Prasangika-Madhyamaka school, by contrast, attributes no degree of intrinsic nature or objective mode of being to phenomena whatsoever. Even the self-nature accepted by the Svatantrika-Madhyamika becomes an object of negation for the Prasangika-Madhyamika.**

For the Prasangika, all our ordinary perceptions are deceptive in some sense. For example, our visual perception of a vase may be valid in relation to the vase, in that it validly perceives the vase, and that its object, the vase, exists. However, that perception is deceptive in that it perceives the

vase as existing independently; as if enjoying some form of intrinsic reality.¹¹ In contrast, according to the Svatantrika-Madhyamika, this visual perception of the vase is not only valid in relation to the vase, but also in relation to the **intrinsic reality** of the vase. The visual perception that apprehends¹² the vase to exist objectively and as possessing self-nature is considered valid. Moreover, the criterion of valid perception, according to the Svatantrika-Madhyamika school, is that it must be valid with regard to the inherent nature of its perceived object. **For the Prasangika-Madhyamika, the vase does not enjoy any objective, intrinsic existence, even in conventional terms, because the Prasangika does not accept the existence of self-nature. Therefore, the visual perception that apprehends its object as objectively existing and enjoying some kind of intrinsic nature¹³ is mistaken and deceived.**

Thus, although both Madhyamika schools accept the philosophy of emptiness, the scope of their negations differ. Similarly, although both schools recognise fundamental ignorance as the root cause of all defilements, they differ in their understanding of the subtleties of this misperception. **Both accept the fact that our ignorance gives rise to manifest afflictions, such as craving, attachment, and grasping.**

Because the Svatantrika-Madhyamikas believe in some kind of intrinsic nature, they do not accept that **attraction to objects on the basis of such a belief is deluded.** In contrast, the **Prasangika-Madhyamikas maintain that such attractions are deluded and are instances of afflictive emotions.** So, because there are differences in their identification of the object of negation and their definitions of subtle ignorance, there are differences between the two Madhyamikas in their **understanding of the nature of the states of mind that derive from ignorance.**

Different Degrees of the Emptiness of Persons

Let us pause and reflect, taking as the object of our analysis 'the person'. **We can speak of different degrees of emptiness in relation to persons. For example, we can speak of the emptiness of the person as**

1. being absent of any permanent, independent, indivisible reality.
2. the absence of any self-sufficient, self-certifying, and substantial reality.
3. being absent of true existence
4. being absent of intrinsic existence.

So, even in relation to a single phenomenon, such as a person, we can speak of different degrees of subtlety in its emptiness.

1a. The conception of an independent, unitary, and permanent self is the *atman*, or self, posited by non-Buddhist schools in the classical Indian traditions.

1b. This self is said to exist independent of the physical and mental aggregates, and such a self is conceived to be the controller or the governor, enjoying a substantial reality. The negation of such a self is one level of the selflessness of persons.

2. Another level of emptiness is the absence or emptiness of the person as the basis or true referent of the term "person." Although the person is the referent of the term "person," it is not so intrinsically; independent of language and thought. The correlation between the person and the term "person" emerges in dependence on convention.

3. Then there is the emptiness of person as truly existent, which is the emptiness of person as defined by the Svatantrika-Madhyamika school.

4. The subtlest level of emptiness of person is the emptiness of the intrinsic existence of person, which negates any degree of intrinsic personal identity.

So **we find five different degrees of selflessness, or emptiness, in relation to one single entity, such as a person.** Just as there are different levels of emptiness of persons, there are also five opposite levels of reification.¹⁴ Out of these five, the earlier ones are grosser compared to the later ones. Similarly, **we can posit different levels of the derivative afflictions (such as anger, hatred, attachment, jealousy) corresponding to the degrees of reification of persons.**

So, what is being stated here in these verses is that the understanding of afflictive emotions and thoughts according to the Hinayana school is relatively coarse and incomplete, and hence a person who has overcome only this level of afflictive emotions and thoughts cannot be said to be an arhat, a person who has attained freedom from cyclic existence. **Shantideva argues that, according to the Hinayana, a person may have overcome the delusions as defined by the Hinayanist, but as this person has not eliminated the ignorance grasping at the intrinsic existence of phenomena, there still remains within that**

¹¹ **Intrinsic reality** refers to the idea that things have real properties that are completely internal to them, making them real in themselves. These properties are constitutive grounds for intrinsic reality, meaning they are fundamental to the thing's existence. Intrinsic reality is relational, meaning it involves relationships like cause-effect.

¹² **Apprehend.** understand or perceive: we enter a field of vision we could not otherwise apprehend.

¹³ **"Intrinsic nature"** refers to the inherent or essential characteristics of something, the qualities that define it from within, rather than being imposed by external factors. It's about the fundamental essence of a thing, its core being. Exists independently.

¹⁴ **Reify** make (something abstract) more concrete or real:

person's mental continuum derivative afflictive states that will manifest as emotions and thoughts. Therefore, such a person cannot truly have attained liberation from cyclic existence.

Three Extra Verses

The following three verses continue with the comparison of the Mahayana scriptures and the Hinayana scriptures. However, according to the Indian commentator Prajnakaramati, these three verses are not written by Shantideva. In fact, they contribute little to the overall argument.

49. If all that is encompassed by the sutras
You hold to be the Buddha's perfect speech,
Why do you not hold the greater part of Mahayana,
Which with your sutras is in perfect harmony?

50. If, due to just a single jarring element,
The whole is held to be at fault,
How might not a single point in concord with the sutras
Vindicate the rest as Buddha's teaching?

51. Mahakashyapa himself and others
Could not sound the depths of such a teaching.
Who will therefore say they are to be rejected
Just because they are not grasped by you?

Emptiness Is the Key

There seems to be again a slight difference in the interpretation of the next verse, although I think the two commentaries end up at the same point, which is that a bodhisattva remains free from the two extremes; the extreme of cyclic existence and the extreme of the solitary peace of nirvana.

52. To linger and abide within samsara,
But freed from every craving and from every fear,
To work for the benefit of those who ignorantly suffer:
Such is the fruit that emptiness will bear.

Only by engaging in a path of emptiness does the bodhisattva arrive at buddhahood, which is free from these two extremes. All of the preceding verses are aimed at proving the central thesis; that the realization of emptiness is necessary for both attainment of full enlightenment, and for attaining liberation from samsara. Bodhisattvas remain within cyclic existence and do not seek the solitary peace of nirvana for their own benefit. Bodhisattvas voluntarily seek to take rebirth in cyclic existence; such is their altruism, which is actually said to be the fruit of meditation on emptiness.

Shantideva then goes on to say that **since no valid refutation of emptiness can be found, there is no doubt that realization of emptiness must be cultivated.**

53. From this, the emptiness doctrine will be seen
To be immune from all attack.
And so, with every doubt abandoned,
Let us meditate upon this emptiness.

54. Afflictive passion and the veils of ignorance—
The cure for these is emptiness.
Therefore, how could they not meditate upon it
Who wish swiftly to obtain omniscience?

55. Whatever is the source of pain and suffering,
Let that be the object of our fear.
But emptiness will allay our every sorrow;
How could it be for us a thing of dread?

**56. If such a thing as "I" exists indeed,
Then terrors, granted, will torment it.
But since no self or "I" exists at all,
What is there left for fears to terrify?**

He is stating that the realization of emptiness is in fact the cure for the afflictive emotions and for all the obscurations to knowledge. Therefore, those who seek the attainment of the fully enlightened state of buddhahood and omniscience must swiftly cultivate the understanding of emptiness.

He further states that normally fear arises appropriately toward something that produces suffering, but in the mind of the person who has realised emptiness, there is no room for suffering to arise, for there is simply no basis for it.

Shantideva says that, if there were such a thing called "I" or "self," then there would a basis from which fear could arise. However, since there is no such self, where can fear arise when there is no one to experience that fear? The point he is making is this: If there were some real entity behind the term "I," then there could be fear due to this real "I," but as there is no such thing as the self, then whose fear can it be?

Identitylessness of Persons

Another major section begins with verse 57, presenting detailed reasoning to establish emptiness. The first subdivision of this section is about establishing the identitylessness of persons. As I've already mentioned, **emptiness consists of two classes: the emptiness, or identitylessness, of persons and the emptiness of phenomena. In terms of their natures, there is not even a subtle difference between these two classes of emptiness.** However, due to the difference of the object upon which the emptiness is established, it is said that the emptiness of persons is easier to realise than that of phenomena. This is reflected in the sequence in which these two emptinesses are presented in the scriptures. Shantideva's text, for example, presents the emptiness of persons first followed by the emptiness of phenomena.

We should understand that **intrinsic existence is not like a physical illness or like mental obscurations, which can be removed through a process of awakening. Intrinsic existence is not something that existed in the past that, through practice and meditation, can be removed.** It never existed to begin with, whereas the mental obscurations do exist. Thus, negating intrinsic existence is different from eliminating the mental obscurations. The question will arise, "If intrinsic existence was never there from the start, why then do we need to negate it?" Although it has never been there, due to our fundamental ignorance, we experience it as if it really is.

Identifying the Self to Be Negated

So, what is important, as we prepare to understand this section on the emptiness of the self, is to **first develop a good understanding of precisely what is to be negated.** Meditation on emptiness depends on properly identifying the object of negation. **When we speak of emptiness, we should understand that, when things are said to be empty of intrinsic existence,** it is not like negating the presence of persons inside a temple. In this example, the basis of emptiness, the temple, and what it is empty of, the people, are two separate entities. However, **in the context of negating intrinsic existence, what is being negated is an apparent mode of being of the very object itself.**

What is meant by *self* or *identity* when we speak of selflessness or identitylessness? In his commentary on Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses*, Chandrakirti states that, **within the context of selflessness, self means an independent, autonomous being. Whatever things or events we take as an example, if we attribute to them a way of being that is independent, autonomous, and possessing an intrinsic reality, then that perceived characteristic becomes the self that is the object of negation. This mode of being is what we negate within the context of the teachings on selflessness.**

This definition of *self* by Chandrakirti is found in his commentary on a particular verse in *Four Hundred Verses*, where he states that **no things or events exist by means of autonomous forces. Rather, they exist only by their dependence upon other causes and conditions; other factors. Therefore, they do not possess any ontological¹⁵ (state of being) status that is independent and autonomous. Such a status is called self. Since all things and events are devoid of such independent, autonomous existence, they are said to be absent or empty of self-existence.**

The sense of self or the thought "I am" that arises in us has different aspects. In his *Supplement to the Middle Way*, Chandrakirti speaks of two aspects of our sense of self: the mere focus of our "I" consciousness, and **the object we grasp at as intrinsically existent.** The latter is our object of negation, not the former. Chandrakirti states that our sense of self focuses on the conventional "I" that is the subject of all our action and experience. Then, **focused on that self, we apprehend it as intrinsically real. This grasping at the intrinsic reality of the self leads us into all sorts of confusion and afflictions, and it is this grasping, Chandrakirti says, that a yogi must recognise and endeavour to eliminate.**

Using philosophical terms, we could make distinctions between, say, an *appearing object* on the one hand and a *referent object of apprehension* on the other. Through simple introspection, however, **if we just look at our ordinary feeling of self, of "me," we can detect within that feeling a strong grasping at self, a belief in some intrinsically existing entity. Within our own sense of personal identity, this belief in an autonomous, unitary agent is strong and instinctive.** Changkya Rolpai Dorje writes that some of his contemporaries seemed to believe in an independently existing self "out there" that is the object of negation, while leaving their own innate apprehensions of selfhood intact. However, **there is no object of negation separate from the self that is the object of our innate grasping. The very appearance of self to our ordinary, commonsense experience contains within it all the objects of negation. If our understanding of emptiness is such that, while engaged in the negation of selfhood, we get caught up in a verbal game, using exotic terms like *true existence* and *intrinsic existence*, then we risk leaving our instinctive grasping at self untouched and intact. We might seek an imagined self that, in actual fact, has no bearing on our instinctive sense of selfhood.** If we fall into this trap, we will not succeed in

¹⁵ **Ontology** is the study of being. It is the branch of philosophy that investigates the nature of existence, the features all entities have in common, and how they are divided into basic categories of being. It aims to discover the foundational building blocks of the world and characterise reality as a whole in its most general aspects. In this regard, ontology contrasts with individual sciences like biology and astronomy, which restrict themselves to a limited domain of entities, such as living entities and celestial phenomena.

the negation of the self, and we will leave our innate self-grasping unscathed. We will have managed to negate, at best, only a very gross aspect of the object of negation.

The great Tsongkhapa says that one of the most difficult points in Madhyamaka philosophy is maintaining the reality of the world of conventional truth following the negation of the intrinsic existence of all phenomena. As I mentioned earlier, **the qualm that quite naturally arises in our mind is this: “Following the negation of the intrinsic existence of phenomena, how can I coherently think and talk about identity?”** This question points to the crux of the philosophical problem. It is useful to make distinctions between the *appearing object* and *referent object*, as this helps us be precise in not negating the actual existence of the self. If there were no self at all, why aspire to enlightenment? Why seek the path of perfection? There would be no point at all, because there would be no one to attain freedom or perfection!

According to Tsongkhapa, **except for the direct realization of emptiness, all our perceptions and experiences are tainted by the apprehension of intrinsic existence. We need to be thorough in identifying the object of negation. We need to utilise our own personal experience and examine how the innate sense of self arises instinctively within. We need to question our experience carefully. If the self to be negated were to exist, in what manner would it exist? We should at least have some sense of what this hypothetical self would be like. Only through a careful examination of the way we actually experience the self will we be able to understand how realising emptiness can negate the apprehension of intrinsic existence.**

In his *Four Hundred Verses*, Aryadeva states that **the seed of cyclic existence is consciousness, and only by apprehending the selflessness of objects (in this case, consciousness) can we uproot that seed. When we realise the emptiness of intrinsic existence at a deep level, there is definitely a marked decrease in the force of our afflictions, such as anger and attachment, toward the objects of these emotions. It is as if the realization of emptiness loosens the grip of our afflictions.**

Among any gathering of people, **each person has his or her own individual fears, hopes, and problems; we see a multiplicity of mental states. Each of these diverse states lacks grounding, or a solid foundation, no matter how forcefully they are felt. Although devoid of intrinsic reality, they appear as if they do have a firm grounding.** It is almost like a magic show conjured by a highly skilled magician. The nature of that reality is, in the final analysis, unfindable. Does it sound strange?

In our daily lives we work hard, often motivated by intense emotional states such as anger, pride, and attachment. What exactly are the objects toward which our intense emotions are directed? **If we were to search for them, would we find them? Is there anything actually to be found? This is the way we need to question our everyday experience.** If, however, as a result of your critical thinking, you conclude that there is no point even in seeking buddhahood because it is devoid of intrinsic existence, this is an indication that you are beginning to slide into nihilism.

Dromtönpa once said that **within the sphere of emptiness, a hand is empty and fire is empty, but if you put your hand into the fire, the fire will burn you!** I think this is very true. If you go to people who say, “Oh, everything is like an illusion, everything is like a dream, nothing is real,” and prick them with a needle, how do they react? Let them find out if there is a reality! **I am not stating that things do not exist; things and events do exist, they do impact our experiences of pain and pleasure. What is being stated here is that things do not exist the way we perceive them to exist.**

The Unfindability of the Self

Within our apprehension of true existence, there are two types. First is the innate or instinctual, which can be found even in the mindstreams of animals, and second is the apprehension of selfhood that comes about through the process of reasoning or philosophical thinking. This second type of apprehension is known as *intellectually acquired grasping at selfhood*. **The root of cyclic existence is the first; the innate grasping at intrinsic existence. As an aid or a step toward uprooting this innate, instinctual grasping, we can first dispel the intellectually acquired grasping at the intrinsic existence of phenomena.**

As I've stated, **it is obvious that the self or person that interacts with others and the world, and that experiences pain and pleasure, exists. However, at the root of our instinctive experience of self, there is an underlying belief in a self that is unitary, autonomous, and enjoys some kind of intrinsic reality.** If such a self truly exists, then when we search for it, we should be able to find it. The more we search for the reality of such a self, the clearer and clearer it should become. It is true that the self does not exist *independently* of the composite of body and mind, but it also does not exist as it appears to our instinctual, innate sense of self. **If an intrinsically real self exists, then it should exist within the physical and mental aggregates that constitute a person. In other words, it should be findable within our body and mind.**

Nagarjuna states in his *Precious Garland (Ratnavali)* that the person is not the earth element, nor the fire, water, air, or space element. Neither does the person exist independently of these elements. So, if we were to search for the person or the self, we would be unable to locate it within the constituents of the

body. Likewise, if we try to locate the self within the continuum of consciousness, we will fail to find it there as well. The consciousness is the consciousness of a person; it cannot be the person. Similarly, the person is not the composite of body and consciousness or the continuum of the composite. If we were to search for the true referent behind the term *person* or *self*, we could not find it individually among the various parts of the body nor within any instant of the consciousness. We could find it neither together with nor separate from the composite of body and mind. I.e., **there is nothing whatsoever to be found within the continuum of the consciousness & body that can be identified as the true referent of person or self.**

Nagarjuna states in his *Stanzas on the Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way (Mūlamadhyamakakārikā)* that even the Tathagata (the Buddha, toward whom we cultivate faith and devotion) cannot be found if we search for the true referent of the term *Tathagata*. **The Buddha's aggregates, his body and mind, cannot be posited as the Buddha; neither can the Buddha be identified independently of his body and mind. The Buddha does not inherently possess the aggregates; nor are the aggregates inherently the basis of the Buddha.** When we search through such an analysis, even the Buddha turns out to be unfindable.

What exactly do we mean when we say that things and events are empty? Since all things and events come into being as the aggregation of causes and conditions (other factors beside themselves) they are therefore devoid of any self-sufficient, independent nature. That absence of any independent nature or intrinsic reality is emptiness. It is a mistake to think of emptiness as some ontological category separate from the things and events.

So, in returning to Shantideva's text, we find his next concern is to set out a series of contemplations that analyse the various parts of the body, questioning whether each element of the body is the person.

57. The teeth, the hair, the nails are not the "I,"
And "I" is not the bones or blood;
The mucus from the nose, and phlegm, are not the "I,"
And neither is it made of lymph or pus.

58. The "I" is not the body's grease or sweat,
The lungs and liver likewise do not constitute it.
Neither are the inner organs "I,"
Nor yet the body's excrement and waste.

59. The flesh and skin are not the "I,"
And neither are the body's warmth and breath.
The cavities within the frame are not the "I,"
And "I" is not accounted for within the six perceptions.

And we will see below that Shantideva continues with a series of contemplations on the various aspects of consciousnesses and other factors of existence, enquiring further whether any of these can be posited as the real person.

Meditation

Now try to meditate on emptiness. As Shantideva states in this text, it is quite evident that if we search for the "self," it is unfindable. However, the implication of this is not that the self does not exist, for we know from our personal experience that we undergo pain and pleasure. We know that it is something or someone who has these experiences. However, if we search for it, it is unfindable. The conclusion we arrive at, therefore, is that the self can only be said to exist nominally, by the power of conceptual designation.

With this thought in the background, try and examine how things, including your own self, appear to your mind. Do they appear as if they possess only nominal status, or do they appear to you in a different light? Certainly they do not appear as being only nominally real; **they appear to possess some kind of objective, intrinsic existence; to exist in their own right.** They do not appear to exist by the power of designation; they **appear to enjoy an objective, independent status.** Then what we arrive at, as a result of our reflection, is a deep conviction that things do not exist in the manner in which they appear.

While resting in meditative equipoise on emptiness, you should not have even lingering feelings that "This is emptiness" or "I am meditating on emptiness." **You should instead try to remain absorbed single-pointedly in the mere absence of intrinsic existence;** the unfindability of phenomena when searched for through critical enquiry. It should be as if your mind has become fused with emptiness. You should not have any sense of a subject-and-object duality, as if you are observing something "out there." Like this, meditate now for a few minutes on emptiness.