



# **The Awakening to Reality Practice Guide**

A new abridged version of Awakening to Reality: A Guide to the Nature of Mind

**Compiled and edited by Nafis Rahman**

**Awakening to Reality Blog:**

**<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/>**

**Awakening to Reality Group:**

**<https://www.facebook.com/groups/AwakeningToReality>**

*"Life and death are of supreme importance. Time swiftly passes by and opportunity is lost. Each of us should strive to awaken. Awaken! Take heed, do not squander your life." - Dogen Zenji*

*"When you are struck by death's poison, nothing will be of any use. There is no time to tarry: quickly, meditate! Do not be concerned with how you live in this life, subduing enemies and protecting your kin; be concerned with how you will die." – Zurchungpa's Testament*

*"The affairs of the world will go on forever. Do not delay the practice of meditation." – Milarepa*

*"Do not waste time, practice meditation as if your hair were on fire." - Unknown*

*"The reason why we delay practicing is because we always think that we have more time. When you wake up in the morning, you should always say to yourself, "I am still alive – I did not die. I should finish this great work. There is no tomorrow."*

*- Man-Gong*

## **Disclaimer**

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This publication is provided with the understanding that the members of the Awakening to Reality team are not trained to offer psychological or medical advice. If expert assistance or counseling is required, the services of a licensed professional should be sought. The teachings and methods described in this book are of a spiritual nature.

For additional context, please read: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/10/prioritizing-professional-mental-health.html>

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Version 1.3

First Version: 06/19/2022

Last Updated: 01/26/2026

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# Where to Start

If you haven't already, first refer to the [Awakening to Reality blog](#) and go through the 'Must Reads'. Next, reading the free E-Books is highly recommended:

- [Awakening to Reality: A Guide to the Nature of Mind](#)
- [Soh's Journal and Notes on Spiritual Awakening](#)

This document is intended as a supplementary practice guide for those who are already familiar with the AtR stages (see below)

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2007/03/thusnesss-six-stages-of-experience.html>

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/03/on-anatta-emptiness-and-spontaneous.html>

[http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/07/insight-diagnosis-simplified\\_11.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/07/insight-diagnosis-simplified_11.html)

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/11/beyond-awareness.html>

[http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/12/experience-realization-view-practice\\_16.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/12/experience-realization-view-practice_16.html)

[http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/08/substantial-and-insubstantial-non\\_6.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/08/substantial-and-insubstantial-non_6.html)

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/04/different-degrees-of-no-self-non.html>

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/08/insight-buddhism-reconsideration-of.html> (recommended reading:

[https://www.reddit.com/r/streamentry/comments/igored/insight\\_buddhism\\_a\\_reconsideration\\_of\\_the\\_meaning/](https://www.reddit.com/r/streamentry/comments/igored/insight_buddhism_a_reconsideration_of_the_meaning/))

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/07/buddhahood-end-of-all-emotionalmental.html>

Audiobook of the AtR Practice Guide: <https://soundcloud.com/soh-wei-yu/sets/the-awakening-to-reality>

For discussions, you are welcome to join the [Awakening to Reality Facebook group](#).



## Foreword by Soh

I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to Nafis Rahman for his great effort in creating The Awakening to Reality Practice Guide. This guide is a compilation of essential pointers and contemplative exercises, mostly derived (although not entirely) from the much larger Awakening to Reality: A Guide to the Nature of Mind (<https://latest-file-link.tprawks1.workers.dev/AwakeningToRealityGuide.pdf>), written by myself and the AtR Team. This Practice Guide is a much-needed, concise version of the original AtR Guide, which has become too lengthy (over 1000 pages) and potentially off-putting to readers. After a meticulous review, I've made only minimal edits to this streamlined version.

Nafis Rahman, who has undergone rather similar insights in his own path, recognized the need for a more accessible guide. With his dedication and compassion, this guide was born, and I believe it will be an indispensable tool for countless readers on their spiritual journey. It is my hope that this practice guide will aid in the awakening of great numbers of fellow spiritual practitioners in the future.

However, I would like to highlight a crucial aspect that seems underemphasized in both this Practice Guide and the longer AtR guide: the two additional trainings of Samadhi [meditative composure] and Shila [conduct]. These, along with Prajna [wisdom], form the three pillars of the path to liberation. While they might be discussed in the longer AtR guide and more extensively in other resources, their significance is undeniable. Meditation also pairs well with inquiry. For instance, during an hour-long meditation session along with self-inquiry in February 2010, I experienced a deep realization of I AM. This commitment to daily practice of sitting meditation is shared by John Tan, who dedicates 2-3 hours or more daily even today. However, for those finding prolonged sessions challenging, even 30 or 45 minutes daily can be transformative.

Having the discipline to sit daily is important, even though Samadhi should eventually go beyond the sessions of sitting and should equally be integrated into movement, especially with maturity of insight. One should not come under the wrong understanding, however, that Samadhi or meditation practice becomes

unimportant after attaining certain realizations. Even after the realization of anatta, it is important to maintain a daily practice of Samadhi and have quality time to meditate. For more information, I recommend the following resources: Universally Recommended Instructions

(<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2016/05/universally-recommended-instructions.html>) and Mindfulness of Breathing: Anapanasati Sutta

(<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/mindfulness-of-breathing-anapanasati.html>). The right meditation posture and technique are vital, and

guidance from an awakened spiritual teacher

(<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/01/finding-awakened-spiritual-teacher-and.html> and <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/02/teachers-who-realised-anatta.html>) can be invaluable. Videos online such as Rinzai Zen at Korinji

(<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/12/rinzai-zen-at-korinji-why-do-we-sit-in.html>) may also be useful.

Dzogchen teacher Acarya Malcolm Smith wrote, “Samadhi/dhyāna is a natural mental factor, we all have it. The problem is that we naturally allow this mental factor to rest on afflictive objects such as HBO, books, video games, etc. Śamatha practice is the discipline of harnessing our natural predisposition for concentration, and shifting it from afflictive conditioned phenomena to nonafflictive conditioned phenomena, i.e., the phenomena of the path. We do this to create a well-tilled field for the growth of vipaśyāna. Śamatha ultimately allows us to have mental stability and suppresses afflictive mental factors so that we may eventually give rise to authentic insight into the nature of reality. While it is possible to have vipaśyāna without cultivating śamatha, it is typically quite unstable and lacks the power to effectively eradicate afflictive patterning from our minds. Therefore, the basis of all practice in Buddhadharma, from Abhidharma to the Great Perfection, is the cultivation of śamatha as a preliminary practice for germination of vipaśyāna.”

And why is right conduct important? It is conducive to a mind free from regrets and remorse, and a more stable and clear mind free from ill will or intentions, hatred, greed, and other mental afflictions. This is a requirement for the development of meditative joy and composure of samadhi, which supports the development and maturation of wisdom. This, along with the cultivation of positive mental factors like loving kindness, compassion and generosity, will help to dissolve mental afflictions like selfishness, anger, egoity and develop positive mental factors that can be supportive of the development of samadhi and wisdom. For an in-depth

exploration of the three trainings, Geoff's Measureless Mind (PDF) is an excellent resource: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/11/measureless-mind-soundcloud-audios.html>

For clarity, content in the first person below is primarily extracted from the AtR guide, penned by me, Soh. Explicit attributions are made for quotations from John Tan.

## Preface

Awakening is our birthright, our buddha-nature (potentiality for awakening) is never sealed off from anyone nor is it ever the province of an elite group of people. For as Guru Padmasambhava also stated, "If he practices, then even a cowherd can realize liberation. Even though he does not know the explanation, he can systematically establish himself in the experience of it." So as I told others before, you must trust in your own capacity. If ordinary folks like me can get it done, then so can you.

Spiritual awakening used to be relegated to great yogis residing in far off remote places very distant from the lives of ordinary city folks, such that most people will never believe that it is accessible or relevant to the ordinary lay people like you and me. I believe this perception or stereotype will certainly change as time passes.

Technology creates possibilities that have never existed before, bridging thousands of miles to foster exchanges between supportive adventurers on the path. These digital spaces have become gathering grounds for dedicated practitioners from diverse stages, traditions, and backgrounds, creating fertile soil for cross-cultural discussion and deeper understanding. Complementing this technological shift is a cultural one: a growing number of teachers and practitioners are embracing radical transparency. They are openly sharing their insights and experiences of awakening, actively dismantling the taboos and historical dogmas that once shrouded the topic.

In contrast, people living just 50 or 100 years ago aren't nearly as connected to others today, and genuine spiritual teachers (much less truly attained and realized spiritual masters) and teachings and fellowships may be limited to certain localities and may be hard to come by. Today, a truly realized spiritual master may be a Skype call away even if he/she lives in another country. Nowadays, you can have an equivalent of Nalanda library available through a mouse-click away, or the entire

Buddhist canon available on your iPad, thanks also to translators at foundations like [84000.co](http://84000.co). Also, as John Tan commented before, many practitioners in the olden times may not have very strong view due to the lack of easy access to written spiritual texts or scriptures (even though they may be very dedicated, disciplined and sincere, perhaps more so than modern day people). This can have implications on the swiftness of our spiritual progress. So consider ourselves to be very fortunate.

More people are now able to read up and get connected with spiritual resources and fellowships with the help of an open internet which brings entire libraries of information to their fingertips. This is certainly not a replacement for a face-to-face spiritual community or teacher which always remains important and most valuable, but at least more people are becoming aware and have a huge resource available to their aid and have more directions. And it is with the aid of technology, the spread of information through online media, and the support of online communities like the [Awakening to Reality Facebook Group](#) that enables so many people from across the world to awaken.

May the growing awareness of this potentiality - the innate potentiality to awaken to our true nature, spread like wildfire in time to come for the benefit of all sentient beings. And may technology continue to evolve and become an even greater aid for our spiritual advancements.

I am grateful to have attended teachings from various lineages, including those of Venerable Shen Kai (Linji Ch'an), Peter (Genjo) Bruza (Soto Zen), Li Zhu Lao Shi (Ren Cheng Buddhism), and Acarya Malcolm Smith (Dzogchen).

However, my most profound influence has been my interactions with John Tan since 2004. I consider him my main teacher. Below is a self-description he shared regarding his background as a layman in the finance industry and his spiritual history from Soh's [e-journal](#): "I am in the finance and investment industries serving as independent/non-executive directors (sort of watchdog) for some listed companies in Singapore. As for practice, I was initially under the guidance of a Taoist teacher (Gao Shang Tze) in Taiwan but later took my refuge under the Holiness Sakya Trizin. However in actual case, I am a lay practitioner and a non-sectarian. I had my experience of no-dog aka "I AM" at the age of 17 and after the next 25 years is just its unfolding from non-dual to spontaneous perfection." - John Tan, post on Dharma Overground v1, 2009



It is important to understand that reading these information alone will not by itself bring about the benefits one finds in actual enlightenment/awakening. Awakening is experiential realization and completely beyond the realm of intellectual understanding. The difference is like night and day, analogous to memorizing a restaurant menu versus actually eating the meal. An intellectual understanding can be a good semblance of reality and be a good forerunner to true contemplative insights, however one must be very honest with oneself and not fall into the mistake of mistaking a conceptual understanding for direct realization. I have unfortunately witnessed more than one person over the past decade that have tragically mistaken themselves to be realised after reading the AtR materials. They are only having glimpses of experiences - not realization - and thought themselves to be realized after having a little intellectual grasp of AtR materials. It is easy to deceive oneself of being realized when one has not. Parroting learnt wisdom is not a sign of wisdom actualized. One has to look at oneself honestly, how is one living one's life, am I living life in its utter purity and perfection? Can I honestly say that life as experienced in this very moment is perfection and purity, the best that life can give and is always giving freely? Is this moment sullied by any identity, grasping of self/Self, any holding back from complete openness to the utter fullness of life? Then the real test is in the "marketplace", in truly living one's life in complete freedom and peace while engaging in the daily encounters of people, things and events, not in armchair philosophizing and conceptualizing about the meaning of life. As John Tan pointed out, by posting so much information about awakening, I can at times do certain people a disservice by providing them with ample information that they churn into an intellectual knowledge in disguise and mimicry of real wisdom and freedom. Yet it is my hope that these words can serve as pointers -- not as signposts to be collected and hung on one's wall as a decoration, or made into a dogma or belief, but merely as guidance and pointers to one's destination, which is none other than the immediate nature of mind/universe actualized.

Personally, I can say from direct experience that direct realization is completely direct, immediate, and non-intellectual, it is the most direct and intimate taste of reality beyond the realm of imagination. It far exceeds one's expectations and is far superior to anything the mind can ever imagine or dream of. It is utter freedom. Can you imagine living **every** moment in purity and perfection **without effort**, where grasping at identity does not take hold, where there is not a trace or sense of 'I' as a seer, feeler, thinker, doer, be-er/being, an agent, a 'self' entity residing inside

the body somewhere relating to an outside world, and what shines forth and stands out in the absence of a 'self' is a very marvellous, wondrous, vivid, alive world that is full of intense vividness, joy, clarity, vitality, and an intelligence that is operating as every spontaneous action (there is no sense of being a doer), where any bodily actions, speech and thoughts are just as spontaneous as heart beating, fingernails growing, birds singing, air moving gently, breath flowing, sun shining - there is no distinction between 'you are doing action'/'you are living' and 'action is being done to you'/'you are being lived' (as there is simply no 'you' and 'it' - only total and boundless spontaneous presencing).

This is a world where nothing can ever sully and touch that purity and perfection, where the whole of universe/whole of mind is always experienced vividly as that very purity and perfection devoid of any kind of sense of self or perceiver whatsoever that is experiencing the world at a distance from a vantagepoint -- life without 'self' is a living paradise free of afflictive/painful emotions (note: I am not proclaiming a state of Buddhahood or Arahantship where all traces of mental afflictions are totally obliterated, see this link <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/07/buddhahood-end-of-all-emotionalmental.html>, and Traditional Buddhist Attainments: Arahantship and Buddhahood in the original AtR guide (<https://latest-file-link.tprawks1.workers.dev/AwakeningToRealityGuide.pdf>), for more details), where every color, sound, smell, taste, touch and detail of the world stands out as the very boundless field of pristine awareness, sparkling brilliance/radiance, colorful, high-saturation, HD, luminous, heightened intensity and shining wonderment and magicality, where the surrounding sights, sounds, scents, sensations, smells, thoughts are seen and experienced so clearly down to the tiniest details, vividly and naturally, not just in one sense door but all six, where the world is a fairy-tale like wonderland, revealed anew every moment in its fullest depths as if you are a new-born baby experiencing life for the first time, afresh and never seen before, where life is abundant with peace, joy and fearlessness even amidst the apparent chaos and troubles of life, and everything experienced through all the senses far surpasses any beauty previously experienced, as if the universe is like heaven made of glittering gold and jewels, experienced in complete gapless directness without separation, where life and the universe is experienced in its intense lucidity, clarity, aliveness and vivifying presence not only without intermediary and separation but without center and boundaries - infinitude as vast as an endless night sky is actualized every moment, an infinitude that is simply the vast universe appearing

as an empty, distanceless, dimensionless and powerful presencing, where the mountains and stars on the horizon stands out no more distant than one's breath, and shines forth as intimately as one's heartbeat, where the cosmic scale of infinitude is actualized even in ordinary activities as the entirety of the universe is always participating as every ordinary activity including walking and breathing and one's very body (without a trace of an 'I' or 'mine') is as much the universe/dependent origination in action and there is nothing outside of this boundless exertion/universe, where the purity and infinitude of the marvellous world experienced through being cleansed in all doors of perception is constant. (*If the **doors of perception** were **cleansed** every thing would appear to man as it is: **Infinite**. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.* - William Blake)

You know all the Mahayana Sutras (e.g. Vimalakirti Sutra), old Zen talks about seeing this very earth as pure land and all the Vajrayana talks about the point of tantra as the pure vision of seeing this very world, body, speech and mind in its primordial unfabricated purity as the Buddha field, palace, mandala, mantra and deity? Now you truly get it, you realise everything is really just like that when experienced in its primordial purity and perfection, and that the old sages have not been exaggerating at all. It is as much a literal and precise description of the state of consciousness as it is a metaphor. As I told John Tan before, Amitabha Sutra's description of pure land resembles my living experience here and now. "To me it just means anatta. When what's seen, tasted, touched, smelled are in clean purity, everywhere is pure land." - John Tan, 2019. "If one is free from background self, all manifestations appear in clean purity in taste. Impurities from what I know come from mental constructions." - John Tan, 2020

This is a freedom that is free from any artificially constructed boundaries and limitations. And yet, this boundlessness does not in any way lead to the dissociation from one's body, instead one feels more alive than ever as one's very body, one grows ever more somatic, at home and intimate as one's body. This is not a body normally conceived of, as the boundaries of an artificially solidified body that stands separated from the universe, dissolve into energetic streams of aliveness dancing and pulsating throughout the body in high energy and pleasure, as well as sensations of foot steps, movement, palm touching an object, where the body is no longer conflated with a constructed boundary of 'inside' and 'outside', 'self' or 'other', where no trace of an 'inside' and an 'outside' can be found in one's state of

consciousness - there's only one indivisible, boundless and measureless world/mind - only this infinitude of a dynamic and seamlessly interconnected dance that we call 'the universe'. This is better than any passing peak experiences be they arisen spontaneously, in meditation or through the use of psychedelic substances. And yet, despite experiencing life to it fullest every moment without any veils, in complete openness and utter nakedness, nothing gains a foothold in consciousness, for as vivid as they are, they leave no trace just as a bird leaves no tracks in the sky, an empty and lucid display such as a gust of wind and the glittery reflections of moon on the ocean waves - appearing but nothing 'there' or anywhere. All these words and descriptions I just wrote came very easily and spontaneously in a very short time as I am simply describing my current state of experience that is experienced every moment. I am not being poetic here but simply being as direct and clear as possible about what is immediately experienced. And this is only a figment that I am describing. If I were to tell you more of what this is like, you would not believe it. But once you enter this gateless realm you shall see that words always pale in comparison.

So forget about memorizing and parroting these words. Simply go contemplate, meditate and practice to gain these insights for yourself, then you can easily come up with better words than me and share them with the world. When words genuinely come from your lived experience and realization, they signify something beyond mere second-hand verbiage, and shine with authenticity. As John Tan said in 2020, "That is what I want you to do and express. He didn't even use a single word like anatta or total exertion. Really talk out of direct authentic experience, clear and right to the point. So you must also do that. Don't keep repeating same thing... anatta, total exertion and emptiness.... be creative and open up to new expressions."

However you should understand that the experience I described above, which is what I am experiencing on a daily basis all the time, can only come about via direct realization of the nature of mind. Even after direct realization of the nature of mind, it will almost certainly take several years for the awakening to mature. I can say that my depth of awakening has matured by a lot from my initial awakening in 2010, and I am still having breakthroughs this year 2019. Anyone who has an initial awakening and think it is final, or equivalent to a Buddha or Arahant's level of attainment is seriously deluded. As Kyle Dixon said in 2013, "99% of individuals require integration and familiarization. The non-gradual individuals [cig car ba's]

are said to be as rare as stars in the day time, and the Dalai Lama attests that there hasn't been a cig car ba for centuries." The Advaitin teacher Vishrant also said, "the teachers that are flying in and out and telling people they are awake are actually misleading people. The terrible side of that is when somebody is told they are awake, the ego grasps it and says, 'I am awake', and then stop seeking, and then these people stop looking because they think they've already found. So it cuts off their chances for ongoing awakening. It's very sad."

To realize the nature of mind is not the same as having temporary and fleeting peak experiences of what I have described above. Having a peak experience is common and can come about in various ways, sometimes spontaneously. You may even (and many/most people do at some point of their lives - although most have forgotten and may need time to recall) have several glimpses of the perfection and purity that I describe above, absent of any sense of self whatsoever. Even having mere glimpses will be good, because at least then, you know from personal experience that I'm not just bullshitting here, that this is all truly possible and your confidence in this is born out of your direct experience and not based merely on some fickle blind faith in the reports of others. Even then, doubts can still creep back in when the sense of self returns, and from that (deluded) perspective, the paradise one has experienced before seems like a distant and hazy dream, rather than a vividly lived reality. To have the experience that I described become a natural state 24/7 requires thorough realisation. Direct realisation, which is far more important than simply having experiences, comes with a doubtless certainty that will never be lost. This guide should hopefully make clear the importance and difference between view, realization and experience.

Some of you may think what I described sounds too good to be true, and probably before my awakening I would have thought that all these are the stuff of pipe dreams and fairy tales. From the perspective of being a delusory separate self cut off from the infinitude, all these surely seem like a distant dream. From the perspective of truth, there is only perfection and purity abound, no doubts about it - it is a direct taste that hits you like a powerful blast of arctic air, except it is actually the entire luminous and empty universe that 'hits you' without any trace of a 'you', utterly obvious and undeniable. You will know what I mean when you're actualizing it. Some practitioners who have purportedly gained certain awakening seem to imply that enlightenment is a kind of let down. I do not know what their experience, level or depth of enlightenment is, but that is wrong and has simply not been the



case for me. They haven't plumbed the depths. In reality, truth and freedom is beyond one's wildest dreams. I can assure you that this is not fantasy, and I wish that you would see it for yourself and be free.

The point of this guide is to serve as a guide, and so if it serves to point you in the right direction to your next step, that itself might be good enough, just like it is not necessary to memorise all the signposts in your city - you just need to see or utilize the correct signpost at the correct location, time and situation. Having a thousand signposts in the city is a good thing - that means in every location, the citizen does not get lost no matter where he/she is. But that does not mean that all the thousand signposts need to be grasped all at once, or memorised, nor does the citizen need to get overwhelmed by all the different signposts. The signposts just serves a functional purpose, that's all. The guide is not for the purpose of creating a heady intellectual and conceptual model of what reality is, nor is it like a school or academic textbook for memorising and answering questions at examinations. It is also not meant for intellectual curiosity or gathering of information like a kind of research. That is like being handed the key to paradise but tossing it to the bin instead. Spirituality is about your life, it is about your own existence, it must be something very alive and intimate. You will eventually find out the truth for yourself through your own experience and practice.

Lastly, I want to emphasize that the crucial takeaway from "Awakening to Reality" is to have clarity on the view, realization and experience. The point is not to see the "7 stages" as a form of attainment (although in some sense it may be seen that way and be conventionally true, I generally don't see it in terms of attainment but in terms of View, Realization and Experience). Perhaps it would be more useful to see them as facets of our true nature, various aspects which can be revisited and deepened endlessly, a point made in the chapter *On the Non-Linear and Non-Hierarchical Unfolding of Insights* in the longer AtR guide. As a matter of fact, the seventh stage stressed that it should be understood as ongoing "practice enlightenment" rather than a static finality. The emphasis in "Awakening to Reality" is on understanding, distinguishing, awakening and integrating **view**, **experience** and **realization**. Without clarity on this, there will be obstructions. Too many practitioners emphasize on certain aspects - such as skewing to experience only, or on the view only, for example. There is the failure to discern and integrate these aspects, hence John Tan is always emphasizing on this point. This is explained in the chapter *Importance of View, Realization and Experience* in the longer AtR guide.

"All 7 phases of insight can be realized and experienced, they are not verbiage. But perfection in terms of actualization in everyday life requires refining our view, meeting situations and dedication of quality time in anatta and total exertion. The problem is many do not have the discipline and perseverance." – John Tan, 2014

"Has awareness stood out? There is no concentration needed. When six entries and exits are pure and primordial, the unconditioned stands shining, relaxed and uncontrived, luminous yet empty. The purpose of going through the 7 phases of perception shift is for this... Whatever arises is free and uncontrived, that is the supreme path. Whatever arises has never left their nirvanic state... .. your current mode of practice [after those experiential insights] should be as direct and uncontrived as possible. When you see nothing behind and magical appearances are too empty, awareness is naturally lucid and free. Views and all elaborations dissolved, mind-body forgotten... just unobstructed awareness. Awareness natural and uncontrived is supreme goal. Relax and do nothing, Open and boundless, Spontaneous and free, Whatever arises is fine and liberated, This is the supreme path. Top/bottom, inside/outside, Always without center and empty (2-fold emptiness), Then view is fully actualized and all experiences are great liberation." - John Tan, 2012

Lastly, I'll end with something John wrote in 2012, "I do not see practice apart from realizing the essence and nature of awareness. The only difference is seeing Awareness as an ultimate essence or realizing awareness as this seamless activity that fills the entire Universe. When we say there is no scent of a flower, the scent is the flower.... that is because the mind, body, universe are all together deconstructed into this single flow, this scent and only this... Nothing else. That is the Mind that is no mind. There is not an Ultimate Mind that transcends anything in the Buddhist enlightenment. The mind is this very manifestation of total exertion... wholly thus. Therefore there is always no mind, always only this vibration of moving train, this cooling air of the air-con, this breath... The question is after the 7 phases of insights can this be realized and experienced and becomes the ongoing activity of practice in enlightenment and enlightenment in practice -- practice-enlightenment."

## Stage 1 (I AM Realization/Luminous Pure Consciousness):

Note: For Buddhist practitioners, they should go through the following articles along with the sub-chapter "[Why Realize the I AM \(Can I skip straight away to more "advanced stages" like anatta?\)](#)" in this practice guide before proceeding to read the Stage 1 section (click on the colored text/hyperlink to directly access the relevant chapter)

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/02/the-transient-universe-has-heart.html>

<https://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2020/09/the-degrees-of-rigpa.html>

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/09/seven-stages-and-theravada.html>

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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/207646316294607/posts/2330941190631765/>

THE CONSCIOUSNESS THAT KNOWS, "I AM"

Ramana Maharshi describes the sense of 'I' as the fundamental, self-evident awareness that is always present. It is the consciousness that knows, "I am." This 'I' is not the body, mind, or ego but the pure, unchanging awareness that underlies all experiences. Ramana often refers to this as the 'I-I' or the true 'I'.

To know that it is the true 'I' Ramana speaks of, one must recognize that it is ever-present and self-luminous. Unlike the transient thoughts and sensations that come and go, this 'I' remains constant. It is the silent witness to all that occurs without being affected by it. When all thoughts and identifications with the body and mind are relinquished through self-inquiry, what remains is this pure sense of being.

Ramana advises that through persistent self-inquiry, asking "Who am I?" and turning attention inward, the false identifications fall away. The true 'I' reveals itself not as an object to be seen but as the very essence of our existence. It is experienced as a deep, inherent sense of presence and peace, devoid of attributes, distinctions, or forms.

In essence, this sense of 'I' is simply the state of pure awareness, the unchanging consciousness that is always present. Knowing it is the true 'I' comes from the direct experience of this unbroken, self-evident awareness that transcends all temporary experiences and phenomena.

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<https://www.lionsroar.com/rest-in-your-buddhanature/>

Mingyur Rinpoche:

I spent a number of years in a wandering retreat—moving from place to place, following in the footsteps of the great masters of our Buddhist tradition. This experience brought into focus many core aspects of the teachings, particularly impermanence and the transience of life.

As I wandered through the Himalayas, everything changed. I went from having whatever I needed to being without food, shelter, family, friends, students, and teachers. Amidst this constant change, there was something that remained, always: awareness. It provided me with an internal stability regardless of circumstances. Trusting in this awareness, the fundamental nature of our mind, was what allowed me to overcome the challenges I faced.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates this. A few weeks after I began my retreat, I fell terribly ill. I had unrelenting diarrhea and I vomited over and over, probably due to food poisoning. My illness got so bad I was brought to the precipice of death. I lost my ability to see and hear, and I felt as if my life force was like a lamp going out.

Yet, even when my body was collapsing, my senses lost, and the conceptual mind dissolved, awareness remained with me, unchanging. I saw that awareness was beyond the pain and suffering I was experiencing—beyond life or death. Trusting in awareness is what got me through and allowed me to keep going.

This experience echoed what I had always heard from my father, the great Dzogchen master Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche. “Whatever arises—concepts, feelings, your body, subject and object, everything—is like clouds in the sky,” he said. “They come and they go. Your true nature, awareness imbued with love, compassion, and wisdom, is like the sky itself.”

We can train ourselves to experience this through awareness meditation. The important part of this practice is the recognition of awareness itself. No matter what object we choose as a support for our meditation, whether we focus on the breath, sensations, or a visualization, the important part is recognizing and resting in the aware and knowing quality of the mind.

#### Awareness Meditation Practice

Begin by finding a comfortable posture, upright yet relaxed. Bring your attention to the breath. Notice the sensations that you experience as the breath comes in and out. There is no need to control the breath in any way. Simply observe it, and see if you can notice the simple knowing quality of mind.

After a few minutes, expand your awareness to include sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and physical sensations that you experience. Again, simply observe them. Throughout all of these experiences, notice that there is a knowing quality of mind that remains unchanged.

When you feel comfortable, allow your awareness to extend beyond any particular experience. Rest in the knowing quality of mind itself. No matter what comes or goes, this knowing quality remains.

Although everything falls apart, our true nature—awareness itself—cannot fall apart. It cannot die. It cannot be stopped. It cannot be destroyed, because it is unborn. Awareness is always with us. Trust in this. This is your true nature and ultimate refuge.

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1) Investigating Who am I? / Before Birth, Who am I? / Who is dragging this corpse along?

Soh:

Hi,



Steps are not necessary in self inquiry, because this method is meant to cut through all steps, thought-inference-process, conceptualizations, to directly awaken to your True Self. This is why Koan and Zen is known as the method and school of Sudden or Instantaneous Awakening, not gradual or step-by-step awakening. This is the Direct Path.

For example,

Hear a bird chirping.

What/who is hearing?

(silence)

Silence means you aren't trying to answer the question using your mind (because the answer cannot be found there - the more you try to figure out with your mind the more time is wasted because you are looking at the wrong direction), but instead you are directly looking at 'What Hears' and experiencing your True Self, your Hearing-Nature/Pure Awareness. The inner cognizer (I AM) turns within and cognizes itself, its true nature.

The pure silence underneath the sound is your true nature, but it is not an inert nothingness, in fact not even silence as such, but more accurately a featureless wide-awake space which perceives all sounds, all sights, all thoughts, etc. It cannot be understood by the mind. You have to trace the hearing, the radiance, the seeing, to its Source.

If you truly and successfully traced all perceptions to its Source, you will realize and experience a Certainty of Being, an undeniability of your very Consciousness which is formless and intangible but at the same time a most solid self-evident fact of your being.

However if during the process of self-inquiry a thought arise like "could this be it, what is Awareness, etc", just ignore the thought, don't attempt to answer them using the mind/logic, but continue turning the light around, asking "Who am I" or "Who is aware of the thought?" and so on. Turn away from all doubts to the Doubtless Certainty/Undeniability of Being/Consciousness, and all your doubts and questions are resolved in an instant.

As Jason Swason said:

*"By turning the attention to the mind, immediately there are doubts. More thoughts rush in to question the questions, confirm or contradict other thoughts. A maddening cycle...*

*Notice when thoughts are paused there are no doubts; the certainty of (doubtless) Being is obviously present; the unquestionable FACT of EXISTENCE. Notice that the Being is ALWAYS presently shining, effortlessly and spontaneously. Stay with that undeniable non-conceptual confidence. Your Being has always been present for every single experience. That natural cognition in which all experiences arise is not a person.*

*Be as you ARE and not what you imagine yourself to be."*

...

"I was doing self inquiry yesterday with my back straight and legs crossed in the position of sitting meditation, contemplating 'Who am I', 'Before Birth Who am I'... with an intense desire to know the truth of my being. As the thoughts subside, an intense and palpable sense of beingness and presence, the only 'thing' that remains that I feel to be my innermost essence... became very obvious... very very vivid and intense, and feels like a constant background in which everything is taking place, thoughts (almost none at that moment, but arise afterwards) that arise are also taking place in this unchanging background... and there is this certainty and doubtlessness about this I AM-ness, IT is absolutely real and undeniable. IT/I AMness/The Witness is the only solid and undoubtable Presence and is clearly present with or without thoughts." - [Soh's E-Book & Journal](#), February 2010 entry

...

*Qn: Thanks!*

*Could you summarize your method for practice? As you know, I am very interested in obtaining I AM state. I am interested in any method except Vipassana.*

Soh:

The I AM is already fully present right now, so much so that it is like asking 'how do I obtain my eyes?'. You cannot obtain your eye, you are already seeing with your eyes. It will be silly to go looking/searching outward (with your eyes) for your eyes. Similarly, it will be silly to go looking outward (through your Self) for your Self. You just have to notice that all along, you are the seeing! You are the non objective Seer, so to go looking for your Self outside is to look into the wrong direction. So know

that there is no need to look for Awareness and Presence. It is simply a matter of pointing out, noticing, realizing that Awareness is already present and is what you are. It is a simple statement/description of fact, and not a prescription to go out and search for it. You will realize that You Are, and that is an ever-present fact that always has been so. When you realize, you realize you gained nothing new from it: you do not enter a new state, you simply realize something you overlooked all along.

Nevertheless, the method is indeed important to give rise to realization. Any method that leads to realization must be **direct** - means it must be a means that makes a practitioner bypass all the mind's conceptualizations and inference processes which are all indirect and secondary (which is not a direct realization and experience of your true essence and hence leaves doubts), so that you can touch directly and with certainty the essence of your Being without intermediary. On hindsight there was a period when I first started practicing self-inquiry where I was still intellectualizing about this, like how should I practice self inquiry, what does asking 'Before birth Who am I' mean and leads to, etc, which are all sidetracks and distractions because it is still using the mind and indirect inference and hence not a 'direct' approach to realize the essence of Being.

So do beware of intellectualizing these things, because it will not lead to Self-Realization - only the direct approach to investigate and look (a non-conceptual exploration) into the essence of Self leads to realization.

As you may have seen, my method of practice is self-inquiry. Self-Inquiry is the method that leads to direct experience and realization of your own essence, presence-awareness, so that no doubts can arise any more, because that is clearly seen as a self-evident, solid, undeniable fact of your being. One thing to note: having glimpses and recognitions of the I AM experience is not the same as having the realization – the latter is more important. Something I think is quite important, which Thusness wrote to me last year when I have had glimpses and recognitions/experiences of the Witness, but not experienced the Realization, a.k.a. 'Certainty of Being' (also see [the post I made on 14 May 2010](#), on the conversation I had with Thusness about the different phases of I AM in February 2009): [Realization and Experience and Non-Dual Experience from Different Perspectives](#) (see the first part)

As for the method of self inquiry, I wrote this on my forum about two weeks ago, highlighted in red:

*Begin by investigating this sense of existence, this sense of being. What is it? Who am I? This is not meant to be verbally or mentally recited (as Self-Inquiry teacher Zen/Ch'an Master Hsu Yun says, if you want to chant, chanting the name of Amitabha Buddha wholeheartedly will be more meritorious than chanting Who am I? or Who is chanting Buddha?), nor should it be an intellectual inquiry by engaging the mind in concepts to figure things out. No. Rather it is a non-conceptual and non-verbal exploration, investigation, examination of this sense of Presence, what is this Self, what is true, beyond all thoughts and conceptualizations and images we have about who I am. Your conceptualizing mind needs to calm down for true insight to arise (but calmness alone does not result in insight - inquiry does). The inquiry 'Who am I' is a tool to turn the attention inward, to turn the light around and investigate our essential being so that direct realization of this 'I', Beingness, AMness can occur.*

*Keep inquiring in that manner until unshakeable conviction arises through a sudden illumination: the undoubtable sense that I AM, which is beyond all thoughts and concepts - this undeniable, undoubtable sense of presence and existence that is at the same time aware and knows itself and aware of everything. It is both present, and aware. As I wrote: You Are That Knowing which is certain that You Are! The distinction between knower, knowing, and known dissolve into That. You Are That!*

*After this realization, your understanding of spirituality will not remain intellectual/conceptual.*

*However this is just the beginning, as Thusness said before in [Realization and Experience and Non-Dual Experience from Different Perspectives](#): "this realization is not an end by itself, it is the beginning. If we are truthful and not over exaggerate and get carried away by this initial glimpse, we will realize that we do not gain liberation from this realization; contrary we suffer more after this realization. However it is a powerful condition that motivates a practitioner to embark on a spiritual journey in search of true freedom."*

For me, I was asked by Thusness to contemplate on the koan "Before birth, Who am I?"

This was the koan that led both I and him to the realization of I AMness.

Essentially what you have to ask is 'Who am I?' Trace the radiance to its source. You are aware and present, this is undoubtable and undeniable. So Who/What is Aware? Trace the radiance to the source.

You hear sounds of bird chirping, so Who/What is Hearing? Turn the light around, trace the radiance to the source, listen to the listener, investigate 'What Listens', until you can say with absolute certainty and conviction that you realized your true nature. (btw, this is Guan Yin's method of practice - 反闻闻自性)

<http://buddhism.sgforums.com/forums/1728/topics/401963>

**Chinul:** *Do you hear the sounds of that crow cawing and that magpie calling?*

**Student:** Yes.

**Chinul:** *Trace them back and listen to your hearing-nature. Do you hear any sounds?*

**Student:** *At that place, sounds and discriminations do not obtain.*

**Chinul:** *Marvelous! Marvelous! This is Avalokitesvara's method for entering the noumenon.<sup>16</sup> Let me ask you again. You said that sounds and discriminations do not obtain at that place. But since they do not obtain, isn't the hearing-nature just empty space at such a time?*

**Student:** *Originally it is not empty. It is always bright and never obscured.*

**Chinul:** *What is this essence which is not empty?*

**Student:** *As it has no former shape, words cannot describe it.*

When walking, you can notice that the body in itself is inert like a log, after the life force has left the body after death the body becomes a corpse. But right now, your body is alive and functioning well, so next time when you are walking or jogging on the street you can inquire on 'Who is dragging this corpse along?' Certainly the corpse cannot walk or move by itself without the power of the Source/Consciousness/Life. What is this core/source of aliveness? Who is it?

So you can do self inquiry in all kinds of situations: hearing a bird chirping (or experiencing anything else - who/what is aware?), walking on the street (who is dragging this corpse along?), or simply sitting meditation (just ask Before birth, Who



am I?), etc. Before birth does not need to trigger imagination of what existed in time before your birth such as what happened 100 or 1000 years ago or at the big bang, it is much simpler and immediate than that. It is about finding out what you are before notions of time arise, it is about finding out what are you at/as this instant presence before a moment of thought occurs, no rumination is required. Anything perceived through the five senses such as your hands and legs are stuff given birth by your parents decades ago, but what are you prior to what is perceivable by the five senses or imaginable by thought? Don't look at the past for an answer, look at You as this instant Presence. A popular koan nowadays is "Who is chanting Buddha?" but I don't ask this because I seldom chant in the first place, so it may not be as powerful/appropriate for my situation. But whatever it is, it still comes down to this... keep turning the light around and investigate Who am I? I do not want to give people too much to anticipate or expect, but based on my own experience and Thusness's, and observations of others practicing self inquiry, that practice should lead to realization in a few years of practice. It could even be a few months of diligent practice... it depends. You must be very interested to know the truth of your being, to resolve the matter of Who You Are. I believe this is what Zen means by 'great doubt leads to great realization'. The initial realization should not take too long, though there is a long process of deepening/unfolding of further insights.

...

"Someone asked, *"Clarification on the practice of koan/hua-tou/self inquiry.*

*Is the emphasis, the focus, placed on the moment before the koan is asked, or is it placed on the doubt/inquisitiveness that arises by asking the koan, or both?*

*Reading Xu Yun, it seems that the practice is to create as much doubt as possible and looking into that doubt that arises from the questioning? There are some other descriptions however that state that to be a hua-tou the focus/looking-into should be done in that moment before the thought arises?"*

Soh replied, "In Self Enquiry, I asked "Before birth, Who am I?"

The point of self enquiry is really to investigate (and this process of investigation consists of an earnest curiosity and inquisitiveness) and direct the mind to the Source. The Source which is prior to everything - thoughts, perceptions, etc. So that

That which is what you truly are, the I AM prior to "I am this" or "I am that", can be directly realized in complete certainty without a trace of doubt.

Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM". That I AM that I AM is what's present five millenias ago, present five minutes ago, present Now, present before the koan is asked, in fact the original face before your parents were born, before the big bang, before time and space, before everything perceivable and conceivable.

The purpose of generating doubt is not to create endless doubt but to direct the mind to the Source so that the very doubt resolves into the Doubtless Self/Beingness that is revealed in its shining radiance.

The doubt is itself the inquisitiveness and curiosity (an important key element to successful self-enquiry - otherwise the thought 'Who am I?' will just be a monotonous and robotic mental chanting like a mantra rather than lead the mind to the Source) to really find out the truth of your Being. You have to ask "Who am I?" like you really, really mean it, like you really, really want to find out what you truly are at the core of your Being and unlock the secret of Existence. Like, what the hell, after all these years living on this planet, what is at the core of this wondrous Life itself? What is this Existence? What am I??? I've seen many things in life and lived for so many years, but WHO is living this Life? Who is seeing, hearing, smelling? Who is dragging this corpse along? That's the meaning of doubt, nothing else.

To use an analogy of Ramana Maharshi, the doubt is the stick used for stirring the funeral pyre, to be finally dissolved in the end (into the Source).

"The mind will subside only by means of the enquiry 'Who am I?'. The thought 'Who am I?', destroying all other thoughts, will itself finally be destroyed like the stick used for stirring the funeral pyre." - Ramana Maharshi""

Someone else asked, *"Why is "before birth, what am I?" being advocated? Why would we assume we were anything "before birth"?"*

Soh replied, "Before any observable five senses or conceptual phenomena, what are you? There is a doubtless Presence before senses. But don't intellectualize the question or ponder conceptually while enquiring. The purpose of self-enquiry is to have a direct non-conceptual realization of Self/Presence, so any conceptual rumination will be an obstruction during the practice of self-enquiring.

...

I wrote this for someone having difficulty with the koan "Before birth, who am I?"

"You said before birth who am I leads to conceptuality for you. I told you that you should change your koan to "before thinking, what am I?"

There is a similar koan in the past

元音老人

从前有一位师父参“如何是父母未生前本来面目？”参了多年，未能开悟。后来碰到一位大德，请他慈悲指示个方便。大德问：“你参什么话头？”他答道：“我参如何是我父母未生前的本来面目？”大德道：“你参得太远了，应向近处看。”他问：“怎么向近处看？”大德道：“不要看父母未生前，须看一念未生以前是什么？”禅者言下大悟。

大家坐在这里，请看这一念未生前是什么？它在各人面门放光，朗照一切而毫无粘着，无知不见而又非同木石，这是什么？就在这里猛着精彩，就是悟道。所以说“至道无难，言端语端”啊！

Soh's translation:

Yuan Yin Lao Ren:

In the past there was a Master who contemplated, "what is the original face before my parents were born?" He contemplated for many years, but did not awaken. Later on he encountered a great noble person and requested for his compassionate guidance. The noble one asked: "What koan did you contemplate?" He replied: "I contemplated what is the original face before my parents were born?" Noble one replied: "You contemplated too far away, should look nearby." He asked: "How should I look nearby?" Noble one replied: "Don't look into what is before your parents were born, need to look at: before a thought arise, what is it?" The Zen practitioner immediately attained great awakening.

Everyone that is sitting here, please look at what is this before a moment of thought's arising? IT is radiating light in front of everybody's [sense] doors, the brightness radiates everything yet is without the slightest clinging, nothing is known and nothing is seen yet it is not similar to wood and stones, what is This? IT is right

here shining in its brilliancy, this is awakening to the Way. Therefore it is said, "the great way is not difficult, just cease speech and words"!

...

### Meditation and Self-Enquiry

Soh: I wrote this to my mother today in Chinese about the purpose of practicing and to encourage her to meditate. English translation below.

参禅是要参究本来面目是什么，自性是什么，不是要达到一种境界

是要发现，体悟，什么是自性、觉性。要达到完全没有疑惑才是”悟”

要一切念头断后还要回光返照，我是谁？在觉知的是什么？如果有念头回答是这个那个就错，因为答案不在语言文字，所以把念头舍掉再继续参、回光返照。这是明心最直接的法。

要每天打坐，元音老人叫弟子每天打坐两小时。

如果不能把心静下来到无念，很难开悟。你要想想你最容易把心静下的方法是什么？是打坐吗？还是念佛持咒？什么方法如果能安心都可以，可是要每天修，不能断断续续。

可是无念还不是开悟，达到无念时还要回光返照，找出了了分明的是谁，是什么，才能悟到自性，不然你的打坐只是一种静态，还没悟到自性。

悟到自性后只是明心，还不算是悟性（人法二空之理、登地菩萨），还要继续。所以”明心见性”其实是两个：先明心（真心），后见性。

所以要努力修到明心见性。

六祖慧能说过：不识本心学法无益。

English translation:

Contemplating Zen [Koan] is about inquiring what exactly is our original face, what is our Self-Nature, it is not about achieving a meditative state.

It is rather to discover, to realize, what exactly is our Self-Nature/Awareness. One must reach a state of utter doubtlessness/certainty to be considered '[Self-Realization]'.

After the utter cessation of all thoughts, one must turn one's light around to find out, What am I? What is it that is Aware? If there is a thought which answers 'it is this or that' then that's wrong, because the real answer lies not in words and letters. Therefore cast aside those thoughts and continue inquiring, turning the light around. This is the most direct method to apprehend one's Mind.

You should meditate everyday. Master Yuan Yin asks his students to meditate two hours a day.

If you are unable to quiet your mind to a state of no-thought, it will be difficult to realise. You should think carefully what is the best method for you to still your mind? Is it meditation? Or is it chanting the Buddha's name and reciting mantras? Whatever methods which calms the mind will do, but you have to practice everyday, not only practice intermittently or occasionally.

However, reaching a state of no-thought is not awakening. Upon reaching a state of no-thought, continue turning the light around to find out Who is that which is the Clear Knowingness? What is it? Then you will realise your Self-Nature. Otherwise your meditation is merely a state of stillness, not yet realising Self-Nature.

Realizing Self-Nature is only Apprehending one's Mind, it is not yet realizing Nature [the nature of mind and phenomena] (the principle of the twofold emptiness of persons and phenomena as realized by a first bhumi Bodhisattva), therefore one must continue. Hence, "Apprehending Mind and Realising Nature" consists of two parts: first apprehend one's Mind (True Mind), later realize [Empty] Nature.

Therefore practice hard to Apprehend Mind and Realize Nature.

The Sixth Ch'an Patriarch said: It is useless to learn the dharma without recognising original Mind.

...

Soh: In my practice, there was a rather relentless inquiry to penetrate the truth of Being. This earnest inquiry keeps building up and up until it becomes a giant Great Doubt and mass of energy that propels its inquiry into not only sitting but even in walking, in daily activities -- Who am I??? Who is the one dragging this corpse along?? A very earnest zeal to penetrate the core of the matter and discover what my true Essence is.

So in sitting meditation, there was of course silence, but an inward attention to the core of Being/Presence/Existence, dwelling into that, discovering what that is, inquiring, etc. It was not so much an intellectual analysis but a drive to discover what I truly am before everything else -- before birth, what am I? Before thinking, what am I? Or just, who am I?

That is the direct path to Self-Realization.

...

"It was about 20 years back and it all started with the question of "Before birth, who am I?" I do not know why but this question seemed to capture my entire being. I could spend days and nights just sitting focusing, pondering over this question; till one day, everything seemed to come to a complete standstill, not even a single thread of thought arose. There was merely nothing and completely void, only this pure sense of existence. This mere sense of I, this Presence, what was it? It was not the body, not thought as there was no thought, nothing at all, just Existence itself. There was no need for anyone to authenticate this understanding." – John Tan, 2006

...

<https://www.happinessofbeing.com/#self-enquiry>

### **The practice of ātma-vicāra — 'self-enquiry' or self-scrutiny**

A Sanskrit term that was often used, both by Sri Ramana and by other more ancient sages such as Sri Adi Sankara, to describe this empirical practice of self-investigation or self-attentiveness is *ātma-vicāra* (or '*atma-vichara*', as it is often less precisely transcribed), which is generally translated in English as 'self-enquiry' or 'self-inquiry'. However, rather than 'enquiry', the word *vicāra* can be more accurately translated as 'investigation', 'examination' or 'scrutiny'. Therefore the term *ātma-vicāra* really means 'self-investigation', 'self-examination' or 'self-scrutiny', and denotes the simple practice of closely examining, inspecting or scrutinising our fundamental and essential consciousness of our own being, 'I am', with a keen and concentrated power of attention.

Sri Ramana also referred to this empirical practice of self-investigation, self-examination, self-inspection, self-scrutiny, self-attention or self-attentiveness as the

*vicāra* ‘who am I?’ However, when he described it thus, he did not mean that it is a process of questioning oneself ‘who am I?’ either verbally or mentally. What he intended us to understand by this term is that this practice is a keenly attentive examination or scrutiny of our basic consciousness of our own being, which we always experience as ‘I am’, in order to discover the true nature of this ‘I’, our essential being or ‘am’-ness.

That is, though (among its range of meanings) *vicāra* does mean ‘enquiry’, in the context of Sri Ramana’s teachings it means enquiry in the sense of empirical (experiential) investigation rather than in the sense of mere verbal questioning. It is not just mentally asking oneself the question ‘who (or what) am I?’ but is actually investigating what ‘I’ am — scrutinising oneself in order to experience oneself as one actually is. In other words, it is not literally questioning oneself ‘who am I?’ but is figuratively doing so: investigating experientially what this ‘I’ actually is.

...

Meido Moore, Hidden Zen:

Inquiry: “Who?”

When in the introduction we examined what is meant by the word *kensho*, I said that deep inquiry into the nature of one’s own existence is itself an important method of Zen practice. “What is the nature of this mind that experiences?” “Who is it that carries this body around?” “Who or what am I?” These are expressions of fundamental and essential human questions, not at all limited to Zen.

Certainly, inquiring into these questions in any manner is a worthy undertaking. But it should be made clear that such inquiry becomes Zen practice only when it is done in the yogic manner encompassing one’s whole body-mind. Unifying the body, mind, breath, and subtle energetic system, and making use of concentrated *samadhi* power to then enter with one’s entire being into these questions—becoming one with them and so penetrating them to their core—is the only way we could be justified in calling our inquiry Zen practice.

Inquiry done like this in an integrated state, with great energetic effort and commitment, immediately confirms something important: we could never arrive at acceptable answers to our pressing existential questions through intellectual analysis and learned knowledge alone. Nothing that we could read, think,

contemplate, or conceive will lead us by itself to a truly satisfying resolution. Only answers that explode forth from the deepest totality of one's integrated being can satisfy and liberate. Whatever outward forms our path of Zen practice may take, the essential inner point of all practice is like this. Here we may indeed glimpse the footsteps of all the great masters before us, regardless of tradition.

Naturally, Zen preserves many explicit instructions for accomplishing this that we may receive from a qualified teacher. In part two we will revisit this kind of practice, exploring how the methods of internal energetic cultivation inform such an embodied way of working with wato and koan.

But with all that said, I think it not harmful for beginners to take up a general practice of inquiry. In its essence, such inquiry is really another way of turning around the light of our awareness such that we fixate less on perceived objects and instead begin to see at the source of seeing, hear at the source of hearing, and trace back thoughts to the source of thinking. For our purposes here I will thus give simple instructions that could be sufficient for beginners to temporarily use on their own, until they are able to find a teacher.

1. The essential point of this method is to release one's usual rigid fixation on outer circumstances and just look with great energy into the source of all one's experiences. This is to be done within whatever activity one is doing. When you eat, for example, focus completely on the act of eating, bringing your attention to the sensations and tastes, attending to them with your whole body-mind. But as you do this, give rise to a simple thought—or more accurately, a feeling—of inquiry: Who is eating? Who or what is it that is experiencing this? Who is tasting the food?

2. When you are walking about, spread your vision out and attend to the act of walking. Inhabit it with your whole body-mind and enter the samadhi of that activity. While doing so, give rise to the simple inquiry again and again with great energy: Who is walking?

3. All activities are like this. As you throw yourself into your daily work, sparing nothing of your attention and fully engaging your entire body and senses to completely “taste” the situations you encounter, inquire constantly in the background and observe with a feeling of wishing fervently to know: Who is doing this? Who (or what) is it? What is this?



4. In the beginning you will find that you often forget to set up this mind of inquiry. It is easy to be taken up by the wonderful taste of the food, the sights that meet the eye (or the thoughts that arise) while walking, the stressful situations of work, and so on. But just keep reminding yourself to observe and ask: Who is this? Who am I? What is this thing that is experiencing, seeing, hearing, eating, working, shitting, sleeping, growing old? If you like, you could even hang up the single word “Who?” or the words “What is this?” someplace like your desk at work. Seeing them repeatedly, you may be reminded to look closely at your life while engaged within the midst of it.

If you practice inquiring into your daily affairs like this, you may begin from time to time to have a strange feeling. It is something like glancing at a word on a page or at one’s own outstretched hand: normally a feeling of familiar recognition arises. But if we look intently at one of these things long enough, our habitual recognition—that is, the conceptual fabrication we make and project onto the sight of these things—falls somewhat away. A word then suddenly looks odd and foreign, a collection of lines and shapes rather than something with meaning. A hand suddenly looks strange and unrecognizable, as wondrous and odd as the appendage of any alien creature in a science fiction movie. Practicing inquiry of the kind I have described, we will start to have moments when our whole existence and being suddenly seem foreign, unrecognizable, and alien in such a way. We will realize that we really have no idea at all what this strange existence is, and we actually haven’t the slightest clue who or what this one who experiences, lives, and dies actually is.

In such a way we can enter the “great doubt” often spoken of in Zen. And it is crucial to do so, because it is just this fundamental, pressing, existential inquiry that will drive our Zen practice most quickly to fruition. Stepping out from the illusory, projected world of fantasy within which most people unknowingly live, we must come to see clearly that there is nothing we know for certain at all. It is an odd but quite good place at which to arrive, this state of utter nonknowing. It is a state pregnant with the possibility of wisdom.

To sum up this method most simply, the following words from Torei Enji—the great master who helped refine the koan method of practice used in Rinzai Zen today—are incredibly useful. Taking Torei at his word, putting these simple instructions into

practice and engaging the entire body-mind as best we can, there is no doubt that we will draw closer to the gate of kensho.

"Look at what is, at who sees, hears, walks, sits—now, here! With all your heart, look at everything. Without giving rise in the heart to [concepts of] being and not being, to yes and no, without discrimination and without reasoning, just look! When the time is ripe, it will appear of itself, requiring neither knowledge nor discrimination."

...

N.R: Look inside your mind and discover the fundamental essence of your being, this will lead to I AM

Or: Look inside your mind and keep on delving deeper and deeper until you discover the deepest layer of your pristine consciousness that is beyond thought and emotion

Similarly, look inside your mind and discover the radiant source of perception that is beyond sensory experience/sensations

...

2) Without thoughts, tell me what is your very mind right now? -

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/11/what-is-your-very-mind-right-now.html> (click on the link and read this article)

Do not try to prevent thoughts from arising and do not cling to any that have arisen. Let them appear and disappear as they will; don't struggle with them. You need only unremittingly and with all your heart ask yourself, "What is my own Mind?" I keep urging this because I want to bring you to Self-realization. When you persistently try to understand what is beyond the domain of intellect, you are bound to reach a dead end, completely baffled. But push on. Sitting or standing, working or sleeping, probe tirelessly to your deepest self with the question "What is my own Mind?" Fear nothing but the failure to experience your True-nature. This is Zen practice. When the intense questioning envelops every inch of you and penetrates to the very bottom of all bottoms, the question will suddenly burst and the substance of the Buddha-mind will be revealed, just as a mirror [concealed] in a box can reflect [its surroundings] only after the box is broken apart. The radiance of

this Mind will light up every corner of a universe free of even a single blemish. You will be liberated at last from all entanglements within the Six Realms, all effects of evil actions having vanished. The joy of this moment cannot be put into words.

- Rinzai Zen Master Bassui Tokushō

If you want to realize your own Mind, you must first of all look into the source from which thoughts flow. Sleeping and working, standing and sitting, profoundly ask yourself, "What is my own Mind?" with an intense yearning to resolve this question. This is called "training" or "practice" or "desire for truth" or "thirst for realization." What is termed Zazen is no more than looking into one's own mind. It is better to search your own mind devotedly than to read and recite innumerable sutras and dharani every day for countless years.

...

3) Without using any words or language, how do you experience 'I' right now? (This may also lead to nondual)

[John Tan](#)

Hi [Daniel](#),

Experiential insight of "I Am" is not about liberating oneself from suffering, it is about feeling fully your own existence; about being purely "You".

So relax, sit quietly and contemplate "without using the thought of 'I', how do you experience 'I'?"

Feel your existence directly and open the gate to non-conceptuality.

...

Self-Inquiry is called a direct path for a reason: "Don't relate, don't infer, don't think. Authenticating 'You' yourself requires nothing of that. Not from teachers, books, Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Zen or even Buddha, whatever comes from outside is knowledge. What that comes from the innermost depth of your own beingness, is the wisdom of you yourself ... There is no need to look for any answers. Ultimately, it is your own essence and nature. To leap from the inferencing, deducting and relating mind into the most direct and immediate authentication, the mind must

cease completely and right back into the place before any formation of artificialities.

You asked me what is my advice. Still the same. Don't go after experiences and knowledge, you have read and known enough, so return back to simplicity. Your duty is not to know more, but to eliminate all these and get back to the simplicity of the direct taste. Otherwise you will have to waste a few more years or decades to return back to what that is most simple, basic and direct. And from this simplicity and directness, you then allow your nature to reveal the breadth and depth through constantly authenticating it in all moments and all states through engagement in different conditions. Unless you drop everything and get back into a clean, pure, basic simplicity, there is no real progress in practice. Until you understand the treasure of simplicity and start back from there, every step forward is a retrogress". – John Tan, 2020

...

"In addition to what you wrote, I hope to convey another dimension of Presence to you. That is Encountering Presence in its first impression, unadulterated and full blown in stillness.

So after reading it, just feel it with your entire body-mind and forgot about it. Don't let it corrupt your mind. 😊

Presence, Awareness, Beingness, Isness are all synonyms. There can be all sorts of definitions but all these are not the path to it. The path to it must be non-conceptual and direct. This is the only way.

When contemplating the koan "before birth who am I", the thinking mind attempts to seek into its memory bank for similar experiences to get an answer. This is how the thinking mind works - compare, categorize and measure in order to understand.

However when we encounter such a koan, the mind reaches its limit when it tries to penetrate its own depth with no answer. It will come a time the mind exhausts itself and come to a complete standstill and from that stillness comes an earthshaking BAM!

I. Just I.

Before birth this I, a thousand years ago this I, a thousand later this I. I AM I.

It is without any arbitrary thoughts, any comparisons. It fully authenticates its own clarity, its own existence, ITSELF in clean, pure, direct non-conceptuality. No why, no because.

Just ITSELF in stillness nothing else.

Intuit the vipassana and the samatha. Intuit the total exertion and realization. The essence of message must be raw and uncontaminated by words. It cannot be secondhand.

Hope that helps! – John Tan, 2019

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<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/09/adyashanti-art-of-self-inquiry.html>

Adyashanti:

The Art of Self-Inquiry

When it comes to awakening, I have found two elements to be the most helpful and most powerful. The first is developing a meditative attitude, in which we let go of control on a very deep level and allow everything to be as it is. The second is a serious engagement with our own inherent curiosity and intelligence through meditative self-inquiry. Either one of these two separated can be incomplete: Inquiry separated from meditation can become intellectual and abstract; meditation separated from inquiry can result in our getting lost in various different spiritual states. Combined, they provide the necessary energy, the necessary impetus, to produce a flash of recognition of your true nature. And in the end, that is what spirituality is all about.

WHAT IS A SPIRITUALLY POWERFUL QUESTION?

Meditative self-inquiry is the art of asking a spiritually powerful question. And a question that is spiritually powerful always points us back to ourselves. Because the most important thing that leads to spiritual awakening is to discover who and what we are—to wake up from this dream state, this trance state of identification with

ego. And for this awakening to occur, there needs to be some transformative energy that can flash into consciousness. It needs to be an energy that is actually powerful enough to awaken consciousness out of its trance of separateness into the truth of our being. Inquiry is an active engagement with our own experience that can cultivate this flash of spiritual insight.

The most important thing in spiritual inquiry is to ask the right question. The right question is a question that genuinely has energy for you. In spirituality, the most important thing initially is to ask yourself, What is the most important thing? What is spirituality about for you? What is the question that's in your deepest heart? Not the question that some- one tells you should be there, not what you've learned it should be. But what is the question for you? If you meditate, why are you doing it? What question are you trying to answer?

The most intimate question we can ask, and the one that has the most spiritual power, is this: What or who am I? Before I wonder why I am here, maybe I should find out who this "I" is who is asking the question. Before I ask "What is God?" maybe I should ask who I am, this "I" who is seeking God. Who am I, who is actually living this life? Who is right here, right now? Who is on the spiritual path? Who is it that is meditating? Who am I really? It is this question which begins the journey of spiritual self-inquiry, finding out, for your own self, who and what you truly are.

So step number one of self-inquiry is having a spiritually powerful question, such as "Who or what am I?" Step number two is knowing how to ask that question.

## THE WAY OF SUBTRACTION

Before we actually find out what we are, we must first find out what we are not. Otherwise our assumptions will continue to contaminate the whole investigation. We could call this the way of subtraction. In the Christian tradition, they call this the Via Negativa, the negative path. In the Hindu tradition of Vedanta, they call this neti neti, which means "not this, not that." These are all paths of subtraction, ways of finding out what we are by finding out what we are not.

We start by looking at the assumptions we have about who we are. For example, we look at our minds and we notice that there are thoughts. Clearly there is something or someone that is noticing the thoughts. You may not know what it is, but you know it's there. Thoughts come and go, but that which is witnessing the thoughts remains.

If thoughts come and go, then they aren't really what you are. Starting to realize that you are not your thoughts is very significant, since most people assume they are what they think. Yet a simple look into your own experience reveals that you are the witness of your thoughts. Whatever thoughts you have about yourself aren't who and what you are. There is something more primary that is watching the thoughts.

In the same way, there are feelings—happiness, sadness, anxiety, joy, peace—and then there is the witness of those feelings. Feelings come and go, but the awareness of feelings remains.

The same is true for beliefs. We have many beliefs, and we have the awareness of those beliefs. They may be spiritual beliefs, beliefs about your neighbor, beliefs about your parents, beliefs about yourself (which are usually the most damaging), beliefs about a whole variety of things. Beliefs are thoughts that we assume to be true. We can all see that our beliefs have changed as we've grown, as we move through a lifetime. Beliefs come and go, but they do not tell us who the watcher is. The watcher or the witness stands before the beliefs.

The same thing goes for our ego personality. We tend to think that we are our egos, that we are our personalities. And yet, just as with thoughts, feelings, and beliefs, we can come to see that there is a witness to our ego personality. There's an ego personality called "you," and then there is a watching of the ego personality. The awareness of the ego personality stands before the personality; it is noticing it, without judging, without condemning.

Here we've started to move into something more intimate. Your essential, deepest nature cannot be your personality. Your ego personality is being watched by something more primary; it is being witnessed by awareness.

With that, we arrive at awareness itself. We notice that there is awareness. You are aware of what you think. You are aware of how you feel. So awareness is clearly present. It is not something that needs to be cultivated or manufactured. Awareness simply is. It is that which makes it possible to know, to experience what is happening.

WHO IS AWARE?

No sooner do we get back to awareness itself than we encounter the primary assumption that “I am the one who is aware.” So we investigate that assumption, and discover time and time again that we cannot find out who it is that is aware. Where is this “I” that is aware? It is at this precise moment—the moment when we realize that we cannot find an entity called “me” who owns or possesses awareness—that it starts to dawn on us that maybe we ourselves are awareness itself.

This self-recognition can’t be understood in the mind. It’s a leap that the mind can’t make. Thought cannot comprehend what is beyond thought. That’s why we call this a transcendent recognition. It’s actually our identity waking up from the prison of separation to its true state. This is both simple and extraordinarily profound. It is a flash of revelation.

One of the simplest pointers I can give here is to remember that this process of inquiry and investigation really takes place from the neck down. An example of this is when you ask yourself, “What am I?” The first thing most people realize is that they don’t know. So most people will go into their minds to try to figure it out. But the first thing that your mind knows is that you don’t know. In spiritual inquiry that’s very useful information. “I don’t know what I am. I don’t know who I am.”

Once you recognize that, you can either think about it or you can actually feel it. What’s it like when you look inside to find out who you are and you don’t find an entity called “you”? What does that open space feel like? Feel it in your body; let it register in the cells of your being. This is real spiritual inquiry. This transforms what might have been just an abstract thought in the mind into something that is very visceral, very kinesthetic, and very spiritually powerful.

Once we recognize ourselves as awareness itself, our identity can begin to rest in its essence. Who we are is no longer found in our body, mind, personality, thoughts, and beliefs. Who we are rests in its source. When we rest in our source, our body and mind and personality and thoughts and feelings come into harmony.

## THE GREAT INCLUSION

After the Way of Subtraction comes what I call the Great Inclusion. When we start to let go into awareness or spirit, we start to recognize that that is who and what we are. We start to see that everything in existence is simply a manifestation or expression of spirit, whether it’s the chair, or the floor, or your shoes, or the trees



outside, the sky, the body that you call “you,” the mind, the ego, the personality, everything—all are expressions of spirit.

When our identification is caught in these various forms, the result is suffering. But when, through inquiry and meditation, our identity starts to come back to its home ground of awareness, then everything is included. You discover that your humanness is in no way separate from the divinity within you, which is what you actually are.

Now please don’t try to understand this with your mind. This is really not understandable in the mind. This knowing resides at a deeper point, at a deeper place within ourselves. Something else understands; something else knows.

#### THAT WHICH REMAINS THE SAME

Nobody can force this flash of recognition into being. It happens spontaneously. It happens by itself. But what we can do is cultivate the ground and create the conditions under which this flash of recognition happens. We can open our minds to deeper possibilities and start to investigate for ourselves what we really and truly are.

When this awakening to our true nature happens, it may happen for a moment, or it may happen for a longer period of time, or it may happen permanently. Whichever way it occurs, it is perfectly okay. Who you are is who you are. You cannot lose who you are, no matter what your experience is. Even if you have a certain opening and you realize your true nature, and then later you think you’ve forgotten it, you haven’t lost anything.

Therefore the invitation is always to rest more and more deeply, to not grasp at an insight or an experience, to not try and hold on to it, but to recognize the underlying reality, that which never changes. The great 20th-century Indian sage Ramana Maharshi had a saying, “Let what comes come; let what goes go. Find out what remains.”

...

“Don’t overcomplicate the “how”. It is just simple, innocent inquiry into “who am I?” driven by genuine desire to discover the truth of your Being.” – Soh

"Something I always say when you are doing self enquiry or any other contemplations and meditations, this is crucial:

"We think it's all about like, again, because of our modern mind, we almost think everything can be solved through some sort of technology. Right, oh, I just need to do it different, there must be some secret trick to inquiry, that's our technological mind-set. Sometimes that's a mindset that is very useful to us. But, we don't want to let that dominate our spirituality. Because as I witnessed, the intensity of the living inquiry that's more important than all the techniques.

When somebody Just Has To Know. Even if that's kind of driving them half crazy for a while. And, that attitude is as important or more important than all the ways we work with that attitude, you know, the spiritual practices, the meditations and various inquiries and various different things, sort of practices. If we engage in the practices because they are practices, you know like, ok I just do these because this is what I'm told to do, and hopefully it will have some good effect. That's different than being engaged, when you're actually being deeply interested in what you're inquiring about, and what you're actually meditating upon. It's that quality of real, actual interest, something even more than interest. It is a kind of compulsion, I know I was saying earlier don't get taken in by compulsion, but there is/can be a kind of compulsion. And that's as valuable as anything else going on in you, actually."

- Adyashanti

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"ANNAMALAI SWAMI – FINAL TALKS

'YOU SEEM TO BE LACKING INTENSITY'

Q: Bhagavan wanted to know the answer to the question 'Who am I?' He seemed to find the answer straight away. When I ask the question when I try to find out what the Self is, I can reject thoughts that arise as being 'not me', but nothing else happens. I don't get the answer that Bhagavan did, so I am beginning to wonder why I am asking the question.

Annamalai Swami: You say that you are not getting the right answer.

--- Who is this 'you'? Who is not getting the right answer? ---

Question: Why should I ask? Asking has not produced the right answer so far.

Annamalai Swami: You should persist and not give up so easily. When you intensely inquire 'Who am I?' the intensity of your inquiry takes you to the real Self. It is not that you are asking the wrong question.

You seem to be lacking intensity in your inquiry. You need a one-pointed determination to complete this inquiry properly. Your real Self is not the body or the mind. You will not reach the Self while thoughts are dwelling on anything that is connected with the body or the mind.

Question: So it is the intensity of the inquiry that determines whether I succeed or not.

Annamalai Swami: Yes. If the inquiry into the Self is not taking place thoughts will be on the body and the mind. And while those thoughts are habitually there, there will be an underlying identification: 'I am the body; I am the mind.' This identification is something that happened at a particular point in time. It is not something that has always been there. And what comes in time also goes eventually, for nothing that exists in time is permanent.

The Self, on the other hand, has always been there. It existed before the ideas about the body and the mind arose, and it will be there when they finally vanish. The Self always remains as it is: as peace, without birth, without death.

Through the intensity of your inquiry, you can claim that state as your own.

Inquire into the nature of the mind by asking, with one-pointed determination, 'Who am I?' Mind is illusory and non-existent, just as the snake that appears on the rope is illusory and non-existent.

Dispel the illusion of the mind by intense inquiry and merge in the peace of the Self. That is what you are, and that is what you always have been.

“ANNAMALAI SWAMI – FINAL TALKS

Annamalai Swami: Self-inquiry must be done continuously. It doesn't work if you regard it as a part-time activity. You may be doing something that doesn't hold your

interest or attention, so you think, 'I will do some self-inquiry instead'. This is never going to work. You may go two steps forward when you practice, but you go five steps backward when you stop your practice and go back to your worldly affairs. You must have a lifelong commitment to establish yourself in the Self. Your determination to succeed must be strong and firm, and it should manifest as continuous, not part-time, effort.

For many lifetimes you have been immersed in ignorance. You are habituated to it. All your deeply rooted beliefs, all your patterns of behavior reinforce ignorance and strengthen the hold it has over you. This ignorance is so strong, so deeply enmeshed in all your psychological structures, it takes a massive effort over a long period of time to break free from it. The habits and beliefs that sustain it have to be challenged again and again.

Ignorance is ignorance of the Self, and to remove it Self-awareness is required. When you come to an awareness of the Self, ignorance vanishes. If you don't lose contact with the Self, ignorance can never arise.

If there is darkness, you remove it by bringing light. Darkness is not something real and substantial that you have to dig out and throw away. It is just an absence of light, nothing more. When light is let into a dark room, the darkness is suddenly no longer there. It did not vanish gradually or go away piece by piece; it simply ceased to exist when the room became filled with light.

This is just an analogy because the Self is not like other lights. It is not an object that you either see or don't see. It is there all the time shining as your own reality. If you refuse to acknowledge its existence, if you refuse to believe that it is there, you put yourself in imaginary darkness. It is not a real darkness. It is just your own willful refusal to acknowledge that you are light itself. This self-inflicted ignorance is the darkness that has to be banished by the light of the Self within until we become one with it.

...

"Awakening the extremely intense desire for Freedom is the most important key in the book you are now reading... ..The extremely intense desire for the direct experience of the absolute Truth... ..The extremely intense desire to experience who or what you really are at your core and to live eternally as your true Self... ..When you drop all unnecessary activities every day and use all of the free

time thus created to actually practice every day the most direct and rapid means to eternal bliss, you will know the extremely intense desire for Freedom has been awakened... ..If you turn your attention away from thought and towards awareness watching awareness and sustain that look for many hours every day, eventually the ego dream will end and the true Self will be experienced. Then all suffering ends and what remains is the eternal perfection of awareness-love-bliss.” - Michael Langford, The Direct Means to Eternal Bliss

...

Self-Inquiry instructions from the book 'Natural Radiance' - Lama Surya Das:

Once your mind is calm, focused, lucid, and clear, abruptly turn the mind on itself—mind the mind and turn it inward, with laserlike self-inquiry questions: “Who is thinking my thoughts? Who is trying to meditate? Who is it; what is it; where is it? Who is experiencing my experience right now?”

There is no need to analyze too much—just abruptly pop the question and observe what happens. Let go and see if you can startle yourself into a new way of seeing and being, short-circuiting your usual outward-looking, dualistic thought process of self and other. See through the seer, directly experience the experiencer, and be free; rest in luminous centerless openness, the natural Great Perfection, pure presence, rigpa.

Again cutting even deeper, abruptly turn the mind upon itself again: Who is experiencing? Who and what is hearing? Who and what is seeing, thinking, and feeling? Who is having these physical sensations? Who is it; what is it; where is it? Is it in the head; is it in the body; is it in the heart; is it in the mind and consciousness? Who is experiencing? Who or what am I? How is it happening? See if you can enter the bottomless gap between thoughts, beneath thoughts. See if you can directly experience whatever is not thought—the luminous awareness that exists prethought or beyond or beneath thought, or after all thought has ceased. Trace the source of all of your thoughts, feelings, experiences, physical sensations, and perceptions. Notice how they arise, and, after they arise, where they are in your present experience and where they go. See if you can follow the disillusion point back into the luminous void that is centerless—the openness that is everything’s ultimate identity, the great Who, the great What that is known as buddha nature. And if you cannot find anything to follow, just rest in that great silence, and be

nothing for just one instant. Being nothing but pure awareness for an instant would be transformative in itself, and more than enough. Emaho!

When the mind starts to move, as it will, and thoughts and feelings and physical sensations again begin to proliferate, turn the mind upon itself again instead of looking outward at outer phenomena, projections, and perceptions. Turn the searchlight inward and mind the mind, becoming more keenly aware of awareness itself. Continue this laserlike questioning of who and what is experiencing, who is thinking, who is hearing, who, what, where, how and then let go and release—drop everything: drop body and mind—and sense who or what is present between thoughts and when thought has ceased, even for a moment. If you discover that you really do not know who you are, then that is enough. That is what is true for you in this moment, and that is sufficient truth for now.

...

In zazen neither despise nor cherish the thoughts that arise; only search your own Mind, the very source of these thoughts. You must understand that anything appearing in your consciousness or seen by your eyes is an illusion, of no enduring reality. Hence you should neither fear nor be fascinated by such phenomena. If you keep your mind as empty as space, unstained by extraneous matters, no evil spirits can disturb you even on your deathbed. While engaged in zazen, however, keep none of this counsel in mind. You must only become the question “What is this Mind?” or “What is it that hears these sounds?” When you realize this Mind you will know that it is the very source of all Buddhas and sentient beings. The Bodhisattva Kannon [Avalokitesvara] is so called because he attained enlightenment by perceiving [that is, grasping the source of] the sounds of the world about him.

At work, at rest, never stop trying to realize who it is that hears. Even though your questioning penetrates the unconscious, you won’t find the one who hears, and all your efforts will come to naught. Yet sounds can be heard, so question yourself to an even profounder level. At last every vestige of self-awareness will disappear and you will feel like a cloudless sky. Within yourself you will find no “I,” nor will you discover anyone who hears. This Mind is like the void, yet it hasn’t a single spot that can be called empty. Do not mistake this state for Self-realization, but continue to ask yourself even more intensely, “Now who is it that hears?” If you bore and bore into this question, oblivious to anything else, even this feeling of voidness will vanish and you won’t be aware of anything—total darkness will prevail. [Don’t stop here, but] keep asking with all your strength, “What is it that hears?” Only when you

have completely exhausted the questioning will the question burst; now you will feel like someone who has come back from the dead. This is true realization. You will see the Buddhas of all the universes face-to-face and the Dharma Ancestors past and present. Test yourself with this koan: "A monk asked Joshu: "What is the meaning of Bodhidharma's coming to China?" Joshu replied: 'The oak tree in the garden.' " Should this koan leave you with the slightest doubt, you need to resume questioning, "What is it that hears?"

If you don't come to realization in this present life, when will you? Once you have died you won't be able to avoid a long period of suffering in the Three Evil Paths. What is obstructing realization? Nothing but your own halfhearted desire for truth. Think of this and exert yourself to the utmost.

- Rinzai Zen Master Bassui Tokusho in "The Three Pillars of Zen"

...

In order to answer the question "Who am I?", in order to go back to before the beginning within your own experience, you have to put your attention on the deepest sense of what it feels like to be yourself right now, and simultaneously let everything else go. Letting go means falling so deeply into yourself that all that is left is empty space.

To discover that infinite depth in your own self, you must find a way to enter into a deep state of meditation—so deep that your awareness of thought moves into the background and eventually disappears. As your awareness detaches itself from the thought-stream, your identification with emotion and memory begins to fall away. When awareness of thought disappears, awareness of the passing of time disappears along with it. If you keep penetrating into the infinite depths of your own self, even your awareness of your own physical form will disappear.

If you go deep enough, letting your attention expand and release from all objects in consciousness, you will find that all the structures of the created universe begin to crumble before your eyes. Awareness itself—limitless, empty, pristine—becomes the only object of your attention.

As your attention is released from the conditioned mind-process, freed from the confines of the body and the boundaries of the personal self-sense, the inner dimension of your own experience begins to open up to an immeasurable degree.

Imagine that you have been fast asleep in a small, dark chamber, then suddenly awoken to find yourself floating in the infinite expanse of a vast, peaceful ocean. That's what this journey to the depths of your own self feels like. You become aware of a limitless dimension that you did not even know was there. Moments before, you may have experienced yourself as being trapped, a prisoner of your body, mind, and emotions. But when you awaken to this new dimension, all sense of confinement disappears. You find yourself resting in, and as, boundless empty space.

In that empty space, the mind is completely still; there is no time, no memory, not even a trace of personal history. And the deeper you fall into that space, the more everything will continue to fall away, until finally all that will be left is you. When you let absolutely everything go—body, mind, memory, and time—you will find, miraculously, that you still exist. In fact, in the end, you discover that all that exists is you!"

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The contemplation of consciousness—which is the contemplation of no-thing whatsoever—is endlessly fascinating. It's like staring at a candle in a dark night—you find yourself mesmerized by something that is unchanging yet infinitely compelling. You feel drawn into something you don't understand rationally but that your heart or soul grasps completely. You are drawn into it, and as you are drawn into it, the only thing you experience as real is the eternal or timeless nature of Being itself. You find yourself in a state of rapture, because the deepest part of yourself has been released from your ego's endless fears and concerns, and drawn out of the time process altogether."

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"The secret of enlightenment is the absolute, unequivocal conviction that it exists.

What does that mean? It means you have discovered an unshakable confidence in the fact of nonduality—in the perennial mystical revelation that IT IS . . . and I AM THAT. A confidence in that which can never be seen or known is the very ground of the enlightened state. Being is ungraspable, it's unknowable, it's ever elusive, and yet it is the only place you can find true confidence in life. Why? Because it is the very source of life itself.



The conscious experience of Being, which is what enlightenment is, has always been the ultimate answer to the most fundamental spiritual questions: Who am I? and Why am I here? Those who have tasted enlightened awareness find that in that experience, any trace of existential doubt and all the questions that go along with it instantaneously disappear. It's not even that they are answered, but rather, the questions lose their meaning. When you locate the nonrelative, or absolute, nature of consciousness in the depths of your own self, it is experienced as a clarity that is empty of content; a weightiness that is full of nothing in particular; a profound knowing that dissolves all questions. In that questionless state, you find yourself profoundly rooted and radically free, supported by an absolute confidence in the knowing of no-thing that changes everything. The experience of that empty ground is the answer—the one answer that always liberates each and every one of us. You simply know, unequivocally, before thought, that I am. That's the only answer: I AM. There is no why."

From: <https://www.amazon.com/Evolutionary-Enlightenment-Path-Spiritual-Awakening/dp/1590792092>

#### Related Articles:

- 1) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/the-direct-path-to-your-real-self.html>
- 2) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/10/updated-chapter-how-to-practice-to.html>
- 3) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/05/self-enquiry-neti-neti-and-process-of.html> (I AM guided meditations by Greg Goode)
- 4) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/03/do-you-need-to-quiet-mind-for-self.html> (important to engage in regular silent meditation/shamatha practice in order to realize I AM)
- 5) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/12/how-long-does-self-inquiry-take-to.html>
- 6) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Self%20Enquiry>
- 7) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Ken%20Wilber>
- 8) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Ch%27an%20Master%20Hsu%20Yun> (related: <https://www.amazon.com/Tracing-Back-Radiance-Classics-Buddhism/dp/0824814274/>, <https://www.amazon.com/Numinous->

- [Awareness-Never-Dark-Philosophy/dp/0824867394,](https://www.dharmawheel.net/viewtopic.php?t=24952)  
[https://www.dharmawheel.net/viewtopic.php?t=24952\)](https://www.dharmawheel.net/viewtopic.php?t=24952)
- 9) <https://www.happinessofbeing.com/articles>
- 10) <https://www.happinessofbeing.com/books>
- 11) <https://archive.arunachala.org/docs/self-enquiry#p34>
- 12) <https://selfdefinition.org/awareness/awa-discovery.htm> (related:  
<https://selfdefinition.org/awareness/awa-instructions.htm>)
- 13) Awake: It's Your Turn by Dr. Angelo Dilullo  
(<https://www.amazon.com/Awake-Your-Turn-Angelo-Dilullo/dp/1737212323/>)  
along with his YouTube Channel Simply Always Awake:  
[https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLR2bLIYLsk\\_SCjWcxUWJDdX70YbbdyTqg](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLR2bLIYLsk_SCjWcxUWJDdX70YbbdyTqg)
- 14) Documentary by AwakenTheWorld on I AM realization:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUZJea1UnS8>
- 15) Rupert Spira on I AM realization:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=usvt5awnmpM>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JLQfH7c42U0>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZ8tQYYNIg0>
- 16) Ken Wilber – I Am Big Mind: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BA8tDzK\\_kPI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BA8tDzK_kPI)

Sample Booklist for I AM realization:

- 1) Eckhart Tolle - <https://www.amazon.com/Power-Now-Guide-Spiritual-Enlightenment/dp/1577314808/>
- 2) Michael A. Singer (<https://www.amazon.com/Untethered-Soul-Journey-Beyond-Yourself/dp/1572245379/>; good introduction to I AM for someone completely new to spirituality along with The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle, Mindfulness in Plain English by Bhante Gunaratana is helpful for developing a daily meditation routine: <https://www.amazon.com/Mindfulness-Plain-English-20th-Anniversary-ebook/dp/B003XF1LKW/>)
- 3) Three Pillars of Zen by Philip Kapleau (<https://www.amazon.com/Three-Pillars-Zen-Teaching-Enlightenment/dp/0385260938/>; must-read book, features inspirational stories of initial awakening along with pointers for realizing I AM: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/12/three-pillars-of-zen-by-philip-kapleau.html>,

- <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2026/01/why-three-pillars-of-zen-is-best-first.html>)
- 4) Adyashanti (<https://www.amazon.com/Direct-Way-Thirty-Practices-Awakening/dp/1683646142/>, <https://www.amazon.com/End-Your-World-Uncensored-Enlightenment/dp/1591797799/>)
  - 5) Rupert Spira (accessible practice guide for practitioners completely new to spirituality along with Adyashanti's The Direct Way linked above: <https://www.amazon.com/Light-Pure-Knowing-Meditations-Non-Duality/dp/1739537882/>, additional books: <https://www.amazon.com/Being-Aware-Essence-Meditation/dp/1626259968/>, <https://www.amazon.com/Nature-Consciousness-Essays-Unity-Matter/dp/1684030005/>)
  - 6) Ramana Maharshi (<https://www.amazon.com/Be-As-You-Are-Teachings/dp/0140190627/>, <https://www.amazon.com/Collected-Works-Ramana-Maharshi/dp/1597310042/>)
  - 7) Nisargadatta ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDA1Klli\\_Ps](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDA1Klli_Ps), <https://www.amazon.com/I-Am-That-Nisargadatta-Maharaj/dp/0893860468/>, <https://www.amazon.com/Prior-Consciousness-Talks-Nisargadatta-Maharaj/dp/0893860247/>)
  - 8) John Wheeler (<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/01/awakening-to-natural-state-guest.html>, <https://johnwheelernonduality.wordpress.com/books/>)
  - 9) Greg Goode (<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/12/teachings-of-atmananda-and-direct-path.html>, <https://www.amazon.com/Standing-as-Awareness-Direct-Path/dp/0956309151/>, <https://www.amazon.com/Direct-Path-User-Guide/dp/1908664029/>)
  - 10) Galen Sharp (<https://www.amazon.com/What-Am-Study-Non-Volitional-Living/dp/0987380613>)

## What the I AM Realization Is Not

The key aspect that distinguishes I AM realization from I AM experience is that there is the quality of complete doubtless certainty of Self that is unshakeable, a Eureka

moment where you have found out what you truly are, and that certainty remains from that point onwards.

Furthermore - the I AM is not a fabricated state. It is Unfabricated Presence-Awareness. You do not “cultivate” the I AM Presence. It is not merely a state of Witnessing to be maintained. It is not a maintenance state. It is not a state to be reached through effort and cultivation. Instead it is discovered and directly realized to be one’s doubtless shining core of Existence, much like the clouds dissipating (our misidentification with perceived objects of mind and body as self) revealing the shining sun that was all along present but never noticed.

If one has an experience of being a Witness or enter into a state of Witnessing, but it needs to be “maintained” or is felt to be “gained” or “lost”, even if one intuitively that Witness to be ever-present, that is still an “experience” but not “realization” (see the classifications above). This does not mean after the I AM realization one can never be distracted by thoughts ever, it just means there is a kind of unshakeable certainty of Being that is never lost. You realized this is You without a shadow of doubt, as the ground of Being. As John Tan puts it, *“Being freed from individuality -- coming and going, life and death, all phenomenon merely pop in and out from the background of the AMness. The AMness is not experienced as an ‘entity’ residing anywhere, neither within nor without; rather it is experienced as the ground reality for all phenomenon to take place. Even in the moment of subsiding (death), the yogi is thoroughly authenticated with that reality; experiencing the ‘Real’ as clear as it can be. We cannot lose that AMness; rather all things can only dissolve and re-emerges from it. The AMness has not moved, there is no coming and going. This “AMness” is God.”*

The I AM is also not something that one can only “experience” during a state of meditative trance at a faraway mountain shielded from daily life. Someone who realized I AM will come to understand, as John Tan puts it in 2007, “AMness has limitless potential and must be expressed in a relative world in constant interaction.” As the source and ground of everything, AMness is seen to have infinite potentiality to express in, through and as everything.

The I AM Presence as discovered in Self-Realization is a non-dual, Self-Aware Presence of Being. You realize yourself to be a shining Aware-Presence, but it is not a subject-object awareness where “you” know you are a “presence” that is “aware”, it is not ‘you’ knowing Presence (subject knowing object) but there is only You Being Presence-Awareness. It is a non-dual direct realization and direct taste of Mind. At a later phase, this non-dual luminous taste of ‘existence’ is brought from the background to the foreground into all manifestation, which will be elaborated on in the further chapters of this guide.

“After Self-Realization, there is a doubtless certainty of Being that was never lost, so I no longer needed to do self inquiry. I had a certainty that Awareness is what I am, and it is not a maintenance state, not something I can 'gain' and 'lose'.” - Soh, 2018

“You experience of 'Isness' has not come to a point of stillness yet. That is why it is not that sort of Realization I am looking at.” - John Tan to Soh in 2009, one year prior to Soh’s realization of I AM

The I AM is not about having an experience, it is about discovering and realizing what You are. It is not something you do, not something you experience, but something that is realized. Eureka. So find out what is the experiencer. Who and what am I?

When you realize that with complete certainty, you simply know (or rather, is simply the Knowingness) of what you are and don't get confused about conceptual notions of a self entity that is existing and dissolving in time and so on. It is pure, radiant, timeless Presence.

Tracing back all thoughts and perceptions to its source, there is just a radiant light of Being. Before birth, I AM – Soh, 2020

If you are still unsure if what you had is a glimpse of recognition or experience of I AM or the doubtless Self-Realization, check out this article –

<http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2018/12/i-am-experienceglimpserecognition-vs-i.html>.

## The Realization of I AM

([http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/12/experience-realization-view-practice\\_16.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/12/experience-realization-view-practice_16.html))

Having an experience of witnessing, or a state of pure presence, is not the same as having attained the doubtless self-realization - in that case the practitioner can be said to have an experience, but not insight/realization. I have had experiences of Presence and Witnessing consciousness since 2007, but not the realization until February 2010 after almost two years of self-inquiry practice. Also just to be clear: the 'I AM' that Nisargadatta mentions is not the same as the 'I AM' as defined by me and Thusness, for me and Thusness, 'I AM' refers to the doubtless apprehension of as Awareness, doubtless Self-Realization. Just so you know... many people use terms differently. Nisargadatta's 'I AM' is more related to Ramana Maharshi's I-thought, the root thought or the Aham Vritti. When you have seen that Aham Vritti, continue inquiring into the Source of that - Who is it that Witnesses the sense of self? And continuing to ask who am I, who is the source of that, eventually the 'I thought' will vanish and the Source will be realized. This Source that I call "Realization of I AM" is not to be confused with Nisargadatta's "I AM" or Ramana's "Aham Vritti".

Self-realization is attained when there is a complete certainty of Being - an unshakeable and doubtless realization of Pure Presence-Existence or Consciousness or Beingness or Existence as being one's true identity. You clearly see that you are not a machine, you are nothing inert, you are not just an inert or dead corpse but you are pure Existence, Consciousness Itself. There is nothing clearer or undoubtable or irrefutable than You! Eureka. Without this quality of 'unshakeable certainty', whatever experiences one has cannot be considered as a realization. One realizes the luminous essence of mind but is unable to see it as all manifestations under differing conditions (that would be non-dual realization and beyond). Yes, this luminous essence is experienced as a non-dual, non-conceptual, direct, immediate mode of perception (NDNCDIMOP) and is a Self-Knowing Consciousness (the Presence is itself its Knowing, there is no separate knower of its

presence). Yes, in this moment of Beingness, there is no thought, and not even any sense of self. It is all-pervasive and limitless, and is often described as being like a raindrop (sense of individuality) dissolving into the ocean - one identifies oneself AS this infinite Presence, and in this infinite oceanic Presence there can be no sense of individuality (especially when this phase of experience and realization has matured in terms of intensity and impersonality). However, as Thusness puts it: "The sense of 'Self' must dissolve in all entry and exit points. In the first stage of dissolving, the dissolving of 'Self' relates only to the thought realm. The entry is at the mind level. The experience is the 'AMness'. Having such experience, a practitioner might be overwhelmed by the transcendental experience, attached to it and mistaken it as the purest stage of consciousness, not realizing that it is only a state of 'no-self' relating to the thought realm." The sense of 'Self' dissolves in all sense doors and experiences (in seeing just the seen without seer, in hearing just sound no hearer, in thinking just thought but no thinker, etc) when Anatta is realized as 'nature', as a dharma seal. This is discussed later.

In this phase of insight (I AMness) one sees all thoughts and experiences as coming from and subsiding within this Ground of Being, but the Beingness as a noumenon is unaffected by the comings and goings of phenomenon, like the movie images passing through the screen, or the waves coming and going within an unchanging ocean. Seeing a subtle distinction between the Noumenal and Phenomenal, one clings to the pure thoughtless beingness (which is non-conceptual thought) as one's purest identity, as if it is the true unchanging self or ground Behind all things - one clings to a formless background source or witness of phenomena.

Since view of duality and inherency is strong, Awareness is seen as an eternal witnessing presence, a pure formless perceiving subject. Therefore even though the I AM experience is itself non-dual, one still clings to a dualistic view which therefore affects the way we perceive reality and the world. This dualistic framework distorts a non-dual experience by clinging or reifying that experience into an ultimate Background which is merely an image of a previous non-dual experience made into a Self, ultimate and unchanging. So it is being perceived/conceived that I am here, as an eternal unchanging Witness/Watcher of passing thoughts and feelings. The "I" simply witnesses but is not affected by, nor judges the thoughts/perceptions that

are experienced - nonetheless there is a separation between the Observer and the Observed. A true experience is being distorted by the mind's tendency at projecting duality and inherency (to things, self, awareness, etc).

Also, in my experience the I AM experience after the initial realization is tainted with a slight sense of personality and locality. That is, even though the mind knows how to experience Presence beyond all concepts, the mind still cannot separate Presence from that slight and subtle sense of personality. It wasn't until about two months after the realization, that sense of a localized witness completely dissolved into a non-localized, impersonal space of witnessing-awareness-presence (but still dualistic and 'background'). At this level, the I AM is separated from Personality, and it is seen as if everything and everyone in the world share the same source or same space, like if a vase breaks, the air inside the vase completely merges with the air of the entire environment such that there is no sense of a division between an 'inside space' or an 'outside space', such that everything shares the same space, as an analogy of all-pervading presence. Because of the dissolving of personal construct, it seems that myself and the chair and the dog equally 'shares' the same space, the same source, the same substance of consciousness. Actually it is not that one "merges", but one Realizes that one IS the infinite self and not a small enclosed self. This all-pervading presence, though stripped of any sense of a locality or a sense of personality, still pertains to the thought level (non-conceptual thought). One does not experience the same 'taste' of luminous-presence in the other sense doors - like sight, sound, smell, taste, touch. Nevertheless, if this experience of 'all-pervading presence' is sustained, it can lead to an oceanic samadhi experience. As impersonality matures one feels like everything including oneself is expressed by a higher source, a higher power, an impersonal living force or intelligence.

p.s. (update) Just one day after writing this chapter, I found a book by the same name as mine, 'Who am I?' by Pandit Shriram Sharma Archaya. He distinguishes the Soul, the Inner Self/the Inner Witness/the 'Nucleus of your World', from the Universal Self or the Omnipresent Supreme Being which is the supreme source of even that Inner Self and everything else in the world. He says that one has to realise the Inner Self first before realizing the unity or oneness of that Inner Self with that Universal Self, Atman=Brahman.



This is precisely what I'm talking about - the difference between the initial experience and realization of I AM (as the inner Self), then the maturation into the Universal I AM, which is the aspect of impersonality. This is the difference between Thusness Stage 1 and 2. In the Universal I AM, it is just this "unified field" in which "everything belongs to everyone", and that in this phase "A Yogi is one whose individuality has been consciously united (merged) with the cosmic Self." Everything and everyone is impersonally expressed and lived by this pervasive source, as stated by him, "particles of universally pervasive intelligence and energy, cosmic consciousness [Chetna] and life, are activating infinite systems, forms and forces of this cosmos."

### **Subphases in no particular order:**

- Innermost Core of Existence (aka Soul/Atomic)
- Infinite All-Pervading Self/Presence
- Ocean of Bliss
- I and all beings/things are being lived by the one cosmic life and intelligence, the Source of being and will (aka God-Realization as distinguished from mere Self-Realization)
- I am the I in you, me, and everything

### **The experience:**

One can have [glimpses and experiences of I AM without Self-Realization](#) (Self-Realization means reaching the point of complete doubtless certainty of Being/Existence with a Eureka! factor), but Self-Realization will surely come with experiences. Self-Realization is characterized by the direct realization of Self in complete stillness, ultimate, without thoughts, no inference, entire and complete, complete certainty without a trace of doubt, resting completely as Self, as if you have found what your Self is and there is nobody and nothing who can shake your understanding from that point onwards. This is not merely a glimpse or experience

that later fades or leaves doubts or uncertainty, in which case you can be said to have had an "I AM experience" but not "I AM realization (Self-Realization)".

Experiences associated with I AM include:

- Spacious mirror-like Presence behind all objects
- Being an unchanging and formless Witnessing Presence
- Of not being the body, but a Spirit
- Energetic experiences/releases ("At that moment of realization, I experienced a tremendous flow of energy being released. It was as if life was expressing itself through my body and I was nothing but this expression" - John Tan, 2006)

9<sup>th</sup> July 2010

I remember that thoughts of losing awareness used to happen quite often for me in the past. But this is all seen to be totally baseless and ridiculous nowadays.

All thoughts of "I lost awareness" or "I need more effort to maintain awareness" or anything along that line implies having had some 'recognition' or 'experience' of Awareness, but not having the Realization of Who You Are.

This is why, looking back, I think Thusness was very apt in telling me the difference between Experience and Realization last year. He said *"You may have the blissful sensation or feeling of vast and open spaciousness; you may experience a non-conceptual and objectless state; you may experience the mirror like clarity but all these experiences are not Realization. There is no 'eureka', no 'aha', no moment of immediate and intuitive illumination that you understood something undeniable and unshakable -- a conviction so powerful that no one, not even Buddha can sway you from this realization because the practitioner so clearly sees the truth of it. It is the direct and unshakable insight of 'You'. This is the realization that a practitioner must have in order to realize the Zen satori. You will understand clearly why it is so difficult for those practitioners to forgo this 'I AMness' and accept the doctrine of anatta. Actually there is no forgoing of this 'Witness', it is rather a deepening of insight to include the non-dual, groundlessness and interconnectedness of our luminous nature. Like what Rob said, "keep the experience but refine the views"."*

And this is just the case. Having an experience of Awareness still leaves doubts (including doubts like 'I lost awareness', 'I need to maintain it', etc). This is because you have not resolved the question of your true identity. You can have a clear sense of presence and spaciousness, and yet have no real understanding or insight and an **unshakeable conviction** of Who They Are which turns their sense of self and identity upside down. **It is the realization beyond a trace of doubt the undeniability of your true identity as that Pure Awareness.**

If you realized this, then doubts like "I lost awareness" will not be arising, and even if it had, the thought is **completely seen as an illusion** - an illusory thought arising in the undeniable presence of YOU. Such habits of mind once seen in the light of realization will **never be able to shake you** from true seeing and being - it is simply exposed for being an illusion which they are, like the words 'this place is dark' written on the wall revealed by bright light in the room simply reveals the illusion for what it is. See how baseless those words/thoughts are in the light of clear seeing?

So it is not about sustaining a state of experience, **it is seeing how this is your True Self, what you already are, and no illusion will be able to shake you out of that - for it is not a state or experience that requires maintenance, rather it is the undeniable Presence of What You Are and all thoughts and illusions that comes up still only come up in that Undeniability of Immediate Presence and are immediately seen as illusions.**

Through Realization, your so called 'understanding' (though it is not a conceptual understanding) of Awareness will shift from being 'experience' or 'state' based to clearly seeing how Awareness is the undeniable ground of Being and Knowing in which all phenomena comes and goes, and yet Awareness ever remains unmoved.

Can you escape the present moment? No you can't. Can you escape You? No, of course not! Every attempt to avoid Presence is still experienced in unavoidable and undeniable Presence.

So the difference between experience and realization is this - in realization, Awareness is vividly and clearly experienced, **but more than that, it is a clear insight into that fact of your Being that burns away all doubts and questions until only the Light of Awareness remains and is clearly seen to always be so. And in that unshakeable certainty of Being you clearly see you do not need to maintain anything - you simply Are That.**

It is not an experience, but the realization, the understanding (but it is not a mental understanding but a feeling/being-realization), that makes you unshakeable in the face of doubts by exposing them as the illusion they are. Without the realization, doubts will be 'believed'.

Lastly, never think that this realization that I am writing sounds 'difficult to obtain' as I can assure you it is Not. It is simply an *ever-present* and immediate fact of your being shining in plain view waiting to be discovered and realized. It is not a state that you need to gradually develop over time through some kind of technique - rather, it is always already timelessly present right here and now. You simply need to know what and how to investigate (e.g. self inquiry) and you are on your way to true insight and freedom.

### **Why Realize the I AM (Can I skip straight away to more “advanced stages” like anatta?)**

Some people wonder if it is necessary to go through the I AM realization before they realize further stages of insight like Anatta (Stage 5). While possible, it is easy to miss out certain aspects like the luminous Presence. One can have non-dual experiences but it is dry and barren without the luminous taste of Presence-Awareness. Furthermore, as discussed towards the end of this document (in the longer AtR guide), the stages are not to be seen as purely linear progression nor as a measurement of importance -- even the first phase of I AM Realization is important as it brings out the luminous essence. Actually, the taste of Stage 1 (I AM) and Stage 4 and 5 is similar, only the insight and view is different. At Stage 4, John Tan wrote that it is the same luminous taste as the direct taste of Mind (called “I AM”) but now extended to all six senses.

“[11:25 AM, 6/6/2020] John Tan: People that do not go through the phases of insights between I AM will not know the difference but it is important to go through I AM to realize the intensity.”

In 2009, John Tan wrote:

"Hi Teck Cheong,

What you described is fine and it can be considered vipassana meditation too but you must be clear what is the main objective of practicing that way. Ironically, the real purpose only becomes obvious after the arising insight of anatta. What I gathered so far from your descriptions are not so much about anatta or empty nature of phenomena but are rather drawn towards Awareness practice. So it will be good to start from understanding what Awareness truly is. All the method of practices that you mentioned will lead to a quality of experience that is non-conceptual. You can have non-conceptual experience of sound, taste...etc...but more importantly in my opinion, you should start from having a direct, non-conceptual experience of Awareness (first glimpse of our luminous essence). Once you have a 'taste' of what Awareness is, you can then think of 'expanding' this bare awareness and gradually understand what does 'heightening and expanding' mean from the perspective of Awareness.

Next, although you hear and see 'non-dual, anatta and dependent origination' all over the place in An Eternal Now's forum (the recent Toni Packer's books you bought are about non-dual and anatta), there is nothing wrong being 'dualistic' for a start. Even after direct non-conceptual experience of Awareness, our view will still continue to be dualistic; so do not have the idea that being dualistic is bad although it prevents thorough experience of liberation.

The comment given by Dharma Dan is very insightful but of late, I realized that it is important to have a first glimpse of our luminous essence directly before proceeding into such understanding. Sometimes understanding something too early will deny oneself from actual realization as it becomes conceptual. Once the conceptual understanding is formed, even qualified masters will find it difficult to lead the practitioner to the actual 'realization' as a practitioner mistakes conceptual understanding for realization.

Rgds,

John"

"The anatta I realized is quite unique. It is not just a realization of no-self. But it must first have an intuitive insight of Presence. Otherwise will have to reverse the phases of insights." - John Tan, 2018

Also:

I noticed that many Buddhists trained under the doctrine of anatta and emptiness seem to be put off by the description of "I AM realization" as it seems to contradict anatta. This will prevent their progress as they will fail to appreciate and realize the depth of luminous presence, and their understanding of anatta and emptiness remains intellectual. It should be understood that the I AM realization does not contradict Anatta realization but complements it. It is the "original face before your parents were born" of Zen, and the unfabricated clarity in Dzogchen that serves as initial rigpa, it is also the initial certainty of Mind discovered in the first of the four yogas of Mahamudra (see: Clarifying the Natural State by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal). Calling it "I AM" is just another name for the same thing, and you should also know that AtR's definition of I AM is different from Buddhism's term "conceit of I Am" or Nisargadatta's I Am. The I AM of AtR is a direct taste and realization of the Mind of Clear Light.

The view gets refined and the taste gets brought to effortless maturity and non-contrivance in all manifestation as one's insights deepen. - Soh

"I AM" is a luminous thought in samadhi as I-I. Anatta is a realization of that in extending the insight to the 6 entries and exits." – John Tan, 2018

...

Soh: The view of anatta, dependent origination and emptiness is very different from Advaita, so while you intellectually understand this point, continue to do self enquiry which works on a different set of assumptions. Don't get disturbed by whether Presence is self or not self while doing self enquiry, or on anatta, etc. Just direct realize the Awareness/Presence/I AM first. If you get disturbed by thinking or concepts, you will never come to the Certainty of Being-Existence. As a matter of fact, that doubtless taste of luminous Presence does not contradict anatta, but complements it when properly understood. Merely understanding anatta without the direct taste of Presence is dry and nihilistic or merely intellectual.

However after you realize Presence (I AM), then non dual, then anatta and dependent origination and emptiness, you will start to see and appreciate that Buddha's view and insight is profound.

John Tan told me in 2008, "Although the 'teaching of anatta' helps to prevent you from landing into wrong views, the downside is it also denies you from

experiencing that deep and ultimate conviction, that certainty beyond doubt of your very own existence -- "I AM". This is a very important factor for practitioners.

Although I had an intellectual understanding of anatta, emptiness and dependent origination since 2006, I (Soh) did not let it disturb my self-enquiry and my self enquiry between 2008 to February 2010 culminated in Self-Realization.

"Regarding whether it is important to go through I AM realization or can we skip to anatta -- John Tan and I and Sim Pern Chong have had differing and evolving opinions about this over the years (I remember Sim Pern Chong saying he thinks people can skip it altogether, John also wondered if it is possible or advisable as certain AF people seem to have skipped it but experience luminosity), however after witnessing the progress of people it seems to us that those who went into anatta without the I AM realization tend to miss out the luminosity and intensity of luminosity. And then they will have to go through another phase. For those with I AM realization, the second stanza of anatta comes very easily, in fact the first aspect to become more apparent. Nowadays John and my opinion is that it is best to go through the I AM phase, then nondual and anatta..

There was also the worry that by leading people into the I AM, they can get stuck there. (As John Tan and Sim Pern Chong was stuck there for decades)

But I have shown that it is possible to progress rather quickly (in eight months) from I AM to anatta. So the being stuck is due to lack of right pointers and directions, not inherently an issue with I AM." - Soh, 2020

...

Even after anatta, John Tan has at times told me to revisit the aspect of I AM. It is possible, even important, to integrate that quality and taste. He also calls it 'reversing the cycle of insight'. One may need to cycle through the phases of insights, sort of to refresh one's practice and deepen it, for a few rounds.

"After the maturity of anatta insight and twofold emptiness, eventually there is effortless, ongoing and intense experience of "everything as Self", "As in that experience of I AM powerfully present at this moment", "As if like Awareness clear and open like space, without meditation yet powerfully present and non-dual. Where the 4 Aspects of I AM are fully experienced in this moment. This experience will become more and more powerful later yet effortless and uncontrived. How so? If it is not correct insights and practice, how is it possible for such complete and

total experience of effortless and uncontrived Presence be possible?". "Indeed and this is being authenticated by the immediate moment of experience. How could there be doubt about it. The last trace of Presence must be released with seeing through the emptiness nature of whatever arises. After maturing and integrating your insights into practice, there must be no effort and action.... The entire whole is doing the work and arises as this vivid moment of shimmering appearance, this has always been what we always called Presence." "Yes and you should in all moment of 6 entries and exits experience all coming together for this moment to arise....this will dissolve all senses of holdings and will lead you effortless and maha experience of suchness effortlessly", "interpenetration, open, boundless, effortless and uncontrived."" - John Tan, 2012

"There is a very intense and much deeper state I assure you...but there is clear understanding that the manifestation is it....however awareness is like an unbounded and limitless expanse field. The luminosity is intensely clear, the experience is like Non-Dual Awareness broke loose and exist as an unbounded FIELD. There is a difference in seeing sound and a hearer and realizing sound as awareness itself. You cannot focus and there cannot be any sense of effort, there cannot be any sense of boundaries, just itself. You must be very very stable and mature in the anatta state, and you cannot be in an enclosed room... it is the effortlessness and crystal clear transparency and intensity of luminosity... but duality must no more trouble the practitioner, phenomena is clearly understood as the radiance... so nothing is obscuring then in total effortless and emanation arises and the expanse just continues", "one mind is subsuming, therefore there is a sense of dual. In this case there isn't. It is like a drop of water landed on the surface of a clear ocean. The nature of water and ocean are one and the same...nothing containing anything, when sounds and music arise... they are like water and waves in ocean... everything is it" - John Tan, 2013

Related article: <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/02/the-transient-universe-has-heart.html>

**Pitfalls and Dangers of the I AM Phase (only read this section after realizing I AM)**



*(Comments by Soh: Just wanted to explain why Nafis wrote 'only read this section after realizing I AM' in the title. Actually I think it is OK for people to read this section before I AM realization, but keep in mind that one should not think of deconstructing I AM/Awareness but fully realize and experience the I AM until it feels and is realized as one's Sole and Ultimate Reality, first before going into deconstruction of inherent and dualistic view.*

*One should also keep this in mind:*

*John Tan wrote in Dharma Overground back in 2009,*

*"Hi Gary,*

*It appears that there are two groups of practitioners in this forum, one adopting the gradual approach and the other, the direct path. I am quite new here so I may be wrong.*

*My take is that you are adopting a gradual approach yet you are experiencing something very significant in the direct path, that is, the 'Watcher'. As what Kenneth said, "You're onto something very big here, Gary. This practice will set you free." But what Kenneth said would require you to be awoken to this 'I'. It requires you to have the 'eureka!' sort of realization. Awaken to this 'I', the path of spirituality becomes clear; it is simply the unfolding of this 'I'.*

*On the other hand, what that is described by Yabaxoule is a gradual approach and therefore there is downplaying of the 'I AM'. You have to gauge your own conditions, **if you choose the direct path, you cannot downplay this 'I'; contrary, you must fully and completely experience the whole of 'YOU' as 'Existence'.** Emptiness nature of our pristine nature will step in for the direct path practitioners when they come face to face to the 'traceless', 'centerless' and 'effortless' nature of non-dual awareness.*

*Perhaps a little on where the two approaches meet will be of help to you.*

*Awakening to the 'Watcher' will at the same time 'open' the 'eye of immediacy'; that is, it is the capacity to immediately penetrate discursive thoughts and sense, feel, perceive without intermediary the perceived. It is a kind of direct knowing. You must be deeply aware of this "direct without intermediary" sort of perception -- too direct to have subject-object gap, too short to have time, too simple to have thoughts. It is the 'eye' that can see the whole of 'sound' by being 'sound'. It is the same 'eye' that is required when doing vipassana, that is, being 'bare'. Be it non-dual or vipassana, both require the opening of this 'eye of immediacy'."*

"If at the 'I AM' phase you were to practice wrongly, I think you will be stuck probably until old age with little break-through." - John Tan, 2011

One of the most common pitfalls is thinking that the I AM is the final, ultimate Truth. Most people who realized I AM think that way and just stagnate there. As I mentioned before, as an estimate based on my (Soh)'s decade+ years of encountering, reading and conversing with many realized practitioners and teachers, roughly 90% of any given realized person is simply having the realization of I AMness, 8% are about One Mind, and only 2% or less are having anatta realization and further.

"Though buddha nature is plainness and most direct, these are still the steps. If one does not know the process and said 'yes this is it'... then it is extremely misleading. For 99 percent [of 'realized'/'enlightened' persons] what one is talking about is 'I AMness', and has not gone beyond permanence, still thinking [of] permanence, formless... ...all and almost all will think of it along the line of 'I AMness', all are like the grandchildren of 'AMness', and that is the root cause of duality." - John Tan, 2007

As Adyashanti pointed out,

"Emptiness (Soh: Adyashanti's Emptiness means 'I AMness' here of John Tan's Stage 1, not the Buddhistic Emptiness/Sunyata of John Tan's Stage 6 discussed in this guide) is not the totality of what you are. Emptiness is a profound aspect of what you are, it's a profound taste of your true nature, it's not the totality of what you are any than getting up in the morning and feeling good is the totality of what you are, or feeling bad is a totality of what you are... ...Whenever you touch upon a deep truth, suchness of reality, your true nature, each aspect feels like it's total and complete and all-inclusive at that moment. So that's why teachers have a very hard time getting through to people when they have an initial experience of anything because if it's an initial experience of reality it feels totally complete and there is a certain innate confidence that arises within you. Not an egoic confidence but a confidence that comes from reality."

Other pitfalls in the I AM phase include:

### **~ Reifying Host and Guest (An Unchanging Awareness)**

There is a tendency at the I AM phase to reify the space of awareness as the unchanging background, Absolute host, and container, of all the passing contents of thoughts, perceptions, feelings and sensations. Instead of focusing on reifying and solidifying this image of a changeless and inherently existing Host, we should instead focus on the four aspects of I AM as described above. Otherwise we will get stuck in the I AM Phase.

During my I AM phase, I saw Awareness as an unchanging host, like an infinite empty space where the 'guests' of all transient phenomena come and go leaving the formless host of awareness untouched. John Tan subsequently had a conversation with me, from [Soh's Journal and Notes on Spiritual Awakening](#):

Soh wrote (example of reifying host and guest):

"14 May 2010

Walking/Jogging/Running meditation

While jogging just now, I 'forgot' my mind and body. It feels like I'm the still presence in which the world moves through. Instead of being a body running on the road from here to there, it's seen that I am the space that encompasses the whole world and the whole world moves through me. I am not moving. The world is moving through me.

It feels like you're running on the treadmill, you're not actually moving! Except that the scenery moves through you.

You can practice seeing this next time when you walk or jog. This space of awareness is unmoving, whether or not the world is moving.

Later I was reminded of this video [http://www.headless.org/videos/still\\_point.htm](http://www.headless.org/videos/still_point.htm)

...

15 May 2010

Soh: Just had a discussion with John. I think there is something very important to caution readers here based on what he told me.

The experience of the Witness is important, and is undeniable. The Certainty of Being is a natural certainty that cannot be negated. This is not wrong. You cannot deny your own existence (how could you? if you try to deny it, who is it denying it?)

There is nothing wrong with experiencing directly without intermediary the pure sense of existence. But after this direct experience, one should refine the understanding, our views, our insights. Instead of deviating from the right view, reinforcing the wrong view, after the experience.

John also told me that what I have experienced has nothing to do with 'beingness being unchanging, constant and permanent'. Yet I was re-enforcing this wrong view into my consciousness like chanting. He told me not to do that, and that what I described is not my direct experience, but instead it is my mind playing tricks. What is experienced is just luminosity, non-conceptuality, directness, nothing more than that. So instead of describing what I experienced, I was reminding myself what is not true. We actually never experience anything unchanging.

He also said that though I am experiencing the "host and guest", he told me not to focus on 'permanent, unchanging, and independent' aspect as by doing so with a few more months of intense training, I will become stuck for decades in the formless realms and it will be difficult to get out. Instead, I should be focusing on the impersonality aspect, and the four aspects of I AM he talked to me about, then afterwards experience non dual and anatta.

It is not about denying the Witness, but refining our insight of it:

- what is meant by non-dual?
- what is meant by non-conceptual?
- what is meant by being spontaneous?
- what is the 'impersonality' aspect?
- what is luminosity?

"The direct realization of Mind is formless, soundless, smell-less, odourless, etc. But later on it is realised that forms, smells, odours, are Mind, are Presence, Luminosity.

Without deeper realisation, one just stagnates in the I AM level and get fixated on the formless, etc. That is Thusness Stage 1.

The I-I or I AM is later realised to be simply one aspect or 'sense gate' or 'door' of pristine consciousness. It is later seen to be not any more special or ultimate than a color, a sound, a sensation, a smell, a touch, a thought, all of which reveals its vibrant aliveness and luminosity. The same taste of I AM is now extended to all senses. Right now you don't feel that, you only authenticated the luminosity of the Mind/thought door. So your emphasis is on the formless, odourless, and so on. After anatta it is different, everything is of the same luminous, empty taste.

And the 'I AM' of the mind door is not any more different than any other sense door, it is only different in that it is a 'different' manifestation of differing conditions just like a sound is different from a sight, a smell is different from a touch. Sure, the Mind door is odourless, but that's not any different from saying the vision door is odourless and the sound door is sensationless. It doesn't imply some sort of hierarchy or ultimacy of one mode of knowingness over another. They are simply different sense gates but equally luminous and empty, equally Buddha-nature." – Soh, 2020

Also read: <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/the-tendency-to-extrapolate-universal.html>

Related Advice from the Stage 5 (Anatta) section:

"When consciousness experiences the pure sense of "I AM", overwhelmed by the transcendental thoughtless moment of Beingness, consciousness clings to that experience as its purest identity. By doing so, it subtly creates a 'watcher' and fails to see that the 'Pure Sense of Existence' is nothing but an aspect of pure consciousness relating to the thought realm. This in turn serves as the karmic condition that prevents the experience of pure consciousness that arises from other sense-objects. Extending it to the other senses, there is hearing without a hearer and seeing without a seer -- the experience of Pure Sound-Consciousness is radically different from Pure Sight-Consciousness. Sincerely, if we are able to give

up 'I' and replace it with "Emptiness Nature", Consciousness is experienced as non-local. There isn't a state that is purer than the other. All is just One Taste, the manifold of Presence.

The 'who', 'where' and 'when', the 'I', 'here' and 'now' must ultimately give way to the experience of total transparency. Do not fall back to a source, just the manifestation is sufficient. This will become so clear that total transparency is experienced. When total transparency is stabilized, transcendental body is experienced and dharmakaya is seen everywhere. This is the samadhi bliss of Bodhisattva. This is the fruition of practice." – John Tan, 2006, [Buddha Nature is NOT "I Am"](#) (recommended article for practitioners who have realized I AM)

...

"The key towards pure knowingness is to bring the taste of presence into the 6 entries and exits. So that what is seen, heard, touched, tasted are pervaded by a deep sense of crystal, radiance and transparency. This requires seeing through the center." – Thusness/John Tan

...

"It will be advisable to take a step back to re-visit and re-experience each of the 6 sense doors. To cultivate a little on the aspect of being 'bare' for all the senses. Experience as much vividness as possible and have clarity on the luminous aspect of awareness first. Touch, taste, smell and sound... are all equally vivid as compared to seeing. Experience the texture and fabric of awareness. The rest of the conditions that give rise to no-self will come later. :) There is no 'willful' entrance into non-duality, create enough conditions, that's all. :)" - John Tan, 2007

This aspect will come by practicing Vipassana, see John's Vipassana - <https://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2018/12/thusnesss-vipassana.html> and Vipassana - <https://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2018/09/vipassana.html>

## Potential Sleep Disruptions

(Also see the chapter on energy imbalances in the longer AtR Guide: <https://latest-file-link.tprawks1.workers.dev/AwakeningToRealityGuide.pdf>)

This can occur after I AM, or even one mind. This was not a major issue for Soh (it surfaced only to a minor degree), but some people like John Tan and others faced it. One should relax and let go rather than focus on sustaining presence or a state of witnessing into sleep. Natural non-dual or clear light sleep does manifest in sleep naturally after anatta is stabilized, but it is different from the contrived state of effortful sustaining of dualistic witnessing presence which can cause sleep disruptions and insomnia, and one should definitely not mistaken the grasping at a sense of wakefulness (which is actually a form of insomnia and sleep disruption) as a form of achievement.

If one gets stuck with insomnia after I AM/Eternal Witness, it can only be truly solved after realizing John Tan Stage 5. And with regards to the 'Witness', John Tan wrote before in 2008, "There is no problem being the witness, the problem is only wrong understanding of what witness is. That is [under the influence of ignorance, one is] seeing duality in Witnessing, or seeing 'Self' and other, subject-object division. That is the problem. You can call it Witnessing or Awareness, there must be no sense of self."

I have seen so many famous masters and practitioners who have completely mistaken that remaining conscious into deep sleep is a form of achievement. Many masters in various traditions, such as Advaita, Tibetan, Zen, Thai Forest and so on may see being conscious in sleep as an ultimate achievement, the prized 'Turiya' (fourth state) transcending and underlying the transient states of waking, dreaming and sleep. In actuality, not being able to fall asleep completely and being always conscious even when sleeping (what Ramana calls sleepless sleep, wakeful sleep) is an energy imbalance, and it is harmful to one's health. As John Tan warned, "You realize everyone that claims this ended up having serious health issues.", "just don't mistaken all these energy imbalances as achievement. Look at all these issues directly and know how to deal with it."

In 2007, John Tan translated a paragraph from English to Chinese. It was a passage he wrote about I AMness as the changeless ground of being, ending it with an additional comment, "Due to the strong karmic propensities to grasp at a substance of awareness, the practitioner may have difficulties falling asleep, and in serious cases may obtain insomnia, being unable to fall asleep for many years." He wrote that and told me to send it along with the Thusness (John Tan) Stages of Enlightenment to a dharma teacher as that dharma teacher was suffering from

insomnia due to energy imbalance after I AMness. To truly solve this issue, one must be able to relinquish one's grasping at Awareness (reified as a Self) and give rise to John Tan Stage 5 insight of anatta.

**Four Aspects of I AM (highly recommended to read the full article after realizing I AM: <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/four-aspects-of-i-am.html>):**

For progress after I AM realization, Thusness taught me about the deepening of the "I AM" in 4 aspects: 1) the aspect of impersonality, 2) the aspect of the degree of luminosity, 3) the aspect of dissolving the need to re-confirm and abide in I AMness and understanding why such a need is irrelevant, 4) the aspect of experiencing effortlessness (Thusness: any form of clinging, be it Self/self or Presence, will prevent a practitioner from correctly experiencing 'effortlessness')

By focusing on these four aspects of I AM, then later going deeper into the two types of nondual contemplations, I was able to make swift progress into non-dual and anatta realization.

"4 aspects are simply pathing you towards non-dual when you are in the phase of ultimate presence." – John Tan, 2020

"You must also understand that the four aspects are conveyed to you so that in the event you get lost in "I Amness", they can lead you back to the deeper insight of anatta and DO [Dependent Origination]." - John Tan, 2011

**Reasons why Stage 2 and 3 were not included in this practice guide:**

Soh: "Although in my I AM phase, if you look into my e-journal, I went through the phase of impersonality where the I turns universal, I think it is not the full blown Stage 2.

John Tan did not want to lead me too deeply into I AM as he was worried that he will have a hard time getting me 'out of it' because the I AM is seen as ultimate.



But the 'I' turning universal is natural also for one who matures the four aspects of I AM, but with the pointers in the AtR guide there won't be much danger of continuously reifying and creating abstractions. It is the way to nondual along with the nondual contemplations.

February 21, 2014:

John Tan: Also I did not lead you to I AM everything.

Soh: oic.. how is I AM everything like?

John Tan: It is bringing this I AM into everything. I AM the I in you. The I in the cat, the I in the bird. I AM the first person in everyone and Everything. I.

Soh: is this related to impersonality?

Soh: i dont think this is the samkhya understanding though. samkhya understanding of purusha is very individualistic..

John Tan: After impersonality and the experience of the higher power, you should progress into that.

Soh: when i experience impersonality it is something similar.. like universal

Soh: everything is from the same consciousness

John Tan: But because I worry you sank too deep and I worry I can't lead you out...lol. There was a period you went too deep into I AMness so I did not tell you to explore further into it. Instead I tell you to look into dissolving the subject/object duality.

Soh: Oic..

John Tan: Otherwise it should be dwelling further into the ultimate of I. Instead of dissolving subject/object division. I am the phase. That is my second phase. That the I is ultimate and universal. For you, after direct apprehension of Awareness, I think there is no point to further strengthen this tendency to that level.

## STAGE 3: Entering into Nothingness

I (Soh) did not go through this phase in his practice. By practicing the four aspects of I AM and nondual contemplations/bahiya sutta, I skipped from I AM into non dual and then anatta. Should one bypass this phase 3? John Tan sometimes seem to imply I am missing out something, but he also told me that I do not need to promote this phase when sharing with others.

## **Stage 4 (One-Mind):**

Note: If you have already realized I AM, you can proceed directly to contemplating the anatta stanzas along with the pointers in Stage 5. This section is only included for informational purposes.

June 24, 2024:

Soh Wei Yu: I think its safer for them to just contemplate the anatta straight rather than aim for one mind? To me one mind is the result of the lack of thoroughness of insight into no self, so no need to particularly aim for. Although I think many will go through it inadvertently

John Tan: Practitioner will almost without fail skewed towards one-mind because both subject and object are non-arisen is not understood. Therefore latching back to a mind and making it more ultimate despite non-dual experiences becomes the default.

Soh Wei Yu: In my case there was a short one mind phase when i was contemplating no self, bahiya sutta, the borderlessness between awareness and manifestation, etc. not very clear cut

Soh Wei Yu: I see

John Tan: Yes

Soh Wei Yu: Yeah the nondual is there even before mind is thoroughly deconstructed and seen through

I think one can start contemplating on the two stanzas though soon after I AM

John Tan: Yes

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A changeless open and limitless space of awareness that is indistinguishable/inseparable from, but not identical to, the changing contents of consciousness that it contains.

"(One Mind) Means consciousness is of true existence like a container. Consciousness is not in the body, but the body is in consciousness. Sound arises in consciousness. Therefore consciousness doesn't change." - John Tan, 2013

March 15, 2013:

John Tan: One mind is you are always looking at an ultimate mind behind, you are not looking at manifestation

Soh Wei Yu: But it's not I Am right

John Tan: Yes it is not

Soh Wei Yu: It's like integrating foreground as being an aspect of background

John Tan: Everything is consumed into the source (for One Mind)

John Tan: I am is just the pure background behind but external objects are not subsumed into it... like separate

John Tan: I am I ....dualistic

John Tan: In this case (One Mind) all is being consumed/subsumed into the source

John Tan: Sound is consciousness is not one mind but no mind

John Tan: One mind is different. One mind as I told you is the witness is gone but subsume into an overarching Awareness

Soh:

There was a young kid who realized I AM and One Mind at the age of 17. I was just reminded of him.

He wrote: "Some people may perceive all of this as something deeply mysterious beyond the scope of their own capacities. It is not. It is simple and plain living, and nothing mysterious about it. Do not imagine that this unconditioned awareness is somehow apart from the world and daily life. On the contrary, it could be said that one is even more closer to life than ever before, because there is no separation between you and the world. When caught up in dualism, one creates the illusion of someone being aware (subject) and something to be aware of (object). Yet there is just this awareness, there is nothing to be aware of. Conditioned phenomena are not apart from awareness in any way, yet they not really awareness either.

Perhaps the best way to describe this is to use the analogy of a mirror, the unconditioned awareness being the mirror and conditioned phenomena beings images reflected in the mirror. The mirror doesn't change because reflections arise. It does not dwell upon the reflections, yet the reflections exists nowhere apart from the mirror. They are the mirror, yet the mirror isn't the reflections."

- <http://the-wanderling.com/cyber-sangha.html>

This is a perfect description of John Stage 4.

Note: One may perceive/subsume an unchanging, independent universal awareness even before Stage 4 (immediately after realizing I AM):

September 8, 2020:

John Tan: 1-3 Cessation and dual. Phase 4 insight onwards is non-dual.

John Tan: Cessation is important when you want to rid the Self but no way to do it...lol

Soh Wei Yu: Oic..

Soh Wei Yu: so one mind is phase 4 onwards?

Soh Wei Yu: before phase 4 you also had glimpse of one mind right

John Tan: One mind doesn't matter dual or non-dual, it is just a subsuming tendency that the mind attempts to explain everything into an ultimate consciousness.

Soh Wei Yu: oic.. so stage 2 [also it can be stage 1] is also like one mind except dualistic

Soh Wei Yu: stage 4 is like nondual but still have subsuming tendency so might not yet overcome one mind

John Tan: Yes.

Soh Wei Yu: ic.. yeah i remember during I AM i also had subsuming tendency

Soh Wei Yu: but [that I AM sort of one mind was somewhat] different from post nondual [as in, nondual sort of One Mind] but only really overcome subsuming after anatta

John Tan: Subsuming tendency is always beautiful to an inherent mind.

John Tan: 🌈

Soh Wei Yu: lol yeah

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/08/substantial-and-insubstantial-non-6.html>

### **Substantial Non-duality (One-Mind)**

- truly/inherently/independently existing awareness/Subject subsuming subject-object separation and phenomena and sees everything as a display of itself or one's Self (as the truly existing, unchanging and independent One Awareness)

- Subject-object dichotomy collapses, and everything (the various diversity and multiplicity) is subsumed, into inherent oneness, into One Naked Awareness. In other words, subject-object duality collapses by deconstructing and subsuming all sense of objectivity into being mere modulations of a single inherent subjective reality (One Mind/One Naked Awareness). Instead of "awareness seeing a thing

over there”, it is realized that there is no “thing” other than the one awareness itself. One Awareness aware of itself ‘AS’ all its own modulations.

- subject/perceiver/experiencer, experiencing, and experienced, or seer, seeing, and seen, are seen as One Awareness, they are seamless and without boundaries. In other words, it is not realizing the absence of an agent (watcher/perceiver) but more on the seamlessness and inseparability of subject and object, where Awareness is just undivided and seamless beingness: in hearing, hearer and sound are indistinguishably one

- due to the view of inherency (that reality must have 'existence' located somewhere and sometime, even if it is Here and Now), the vivid 'realness' of non-dual luminosity is being treated as something Absolute, as having inherent, independent and unchanging existence, and is being reified into Noumenon (in contrast to illusory phenomenon), and as being the ultimate non-dual Self

- the intimacy experienced via the collapse of subject-object dichotomy is being referenced to a grandiose all-pervasive Self ("I am Everywhere and I am Everything")

- all phenomena are seen to be illusory projections of a single underlying source, such that all phenomena are self-expressions of the single nature of Awareness, as depicted by the analogy of the mirror and its reflections - reflections as such do not have an objective, independent existence outside the mirror - and in fact only the Mirror is seen to have absolute, independent, inherent existence - only the Mirror is Real, and the appearances are only Real as the Mirror

- appearances are inseparable from the Source, and yet the Source is independent of appearances

From the Pitfalls and Dangers of the I AM Phase section:

**~ Reifying Host and Guest (An Unchanging Awareness)**

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Walking/Jogging/Running meditation

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It feels like you're running on the treadmill, you're not actually moving! Except that the scenery moves through you.

You can practice seeing this next time when you walk or jog. This space of awareness is unmoving, whether or not the world is moving.

Later I was reminded of this video [http://www.headless.org/videos/still\\_point.htm](http://www.headless.org/videos/still_point.htm)

...

Rob Burbea, Seeing that Frees (<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/08/a-summary-of-seeing-that-frees-by-rob.html>):

### **Practice: A vastness of awareness**

(Experiment with different approaches to the following practice. You may want to employ the three characteristics ways of looking for a while in a session before

encouraging the perception to open in the ways suggested below. Or you may let go entirely of any deliberate use of the three characteristics. Alternatively, you may incorporate them into the meditation as much or as little as feels helpful in supporting the opening to the space of awareness.<sup>2)</sup>

In a meditation session, once a little calm is established, settle for a while with an open attention that allows the coming and going of the totality of body sensations in the whole body. As you do so, be aware too of the sense of space, and perhaps stillness, around and within the body.

After some time, open the attention further to also include a bare attention to the totality of sounds. Let them all arise and pass, allowing the awareness to be receptive as much as possible, rather than moving toward and focusing on each sound.

Listen to the silence between the sounds as well. Notice how sounds seem to arise out of, and fade back into, the silence.

Allow, or imagine, the awareness to be like an open sky, clear and vast. Sensations, sounds, thoughts and images appear and disappear, like fireflies or like shooting stars in this space. Feel that in this vastness of awareness there is space for everything, no matter what it is.

Notice that the awareness itself does not struggle or become entangled with what appears within it. As you sense the arising of any impulses to control or interfere with phenomena, let the undisturbed nature of the space support a relinquishing of that craving.

See moments of sensation and experience appear, float freely, and disappear within the vastness of the awareness.

Aware of the clarity and the immensity of this empty space, notice how every thing that arises is held within it effortlessly.

Over and over, watching *phenomena emerge from and then melt back into the space*, see if you can practise *letting all phenomena belong to this space of awareness*.

Notice too how experiences seem gradually to begin to lose their substantiality. Is it possible to see whatever arises as *just an impression in awareness*, like a reflection



on the surface of a body of water? Include whatever image of your self, or self-sense arises – see these too as just impressions in awareness.

Just as silence permeates all sounds, gently allow the stillness and space of awareness to pervade and to permeate every thing that arises. Is it possible to see *all phenomena as having the same 'substance' as awareness?*

Watching phenomena dissolve back into the space again and again, is it possible also to get a sense of the vastness – its imperturbability or any other qualities it seems to embody?

(Make sure you practise this meditation in the walking and standing postures, as well as sitting. Experiment too practising both with the eyes open, and with eyes closed.)

...

From <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/two-types-of-nondual-contemplation.html>:

Contemplate “Where does awareness end and manifestation begins?” or “Is there a border/dividing line between awareness and manifestation?” until Witness/phenomena collapses into a borderless one mind, one field of awareness where mind and manifestation can no longer be distinguished.

Guided Meditation by Rupert Spira:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84E1NGMM00s>

## **Pitfalls and Dangers of One Mind**

At the One Mind phase, there is still the reification of an unchanging consciousness, and for some an unchanging and universal consciousness. The pitfalls of the One Mind phase can also be present in the I Am phase, as explained in the chapter on reifying Host and Guest (in One Mind, the Host is now seen to subsume all Guests and be inseparable with them, instead of being absolutely distinct and separate

from them as in the I AM phase, however the Host is still as Absolute and Unchanging).

"This [phase 4] is the beginning of seeing through no-self. Insight into no-self has arisen but non-dual experience is still very much 'Brahman' rather than 'Sunyata'; in fact it is more Brahman than ever. Now "I AMness" is experienced in All.

Nevertheless it is a very important key phase where the practitioner experiences a quantum leap in perception untying the dualistic knot. This is also the key insight leading to the realization that "All is Mind", all is just this One Reality.

The tendency to extrapolate an Ultimate Reality or Universal Consciousness where we are part of this Reality remains surprisingly strong. Effectively the dualistic knot is gone but the bond of seeing things inherently isn't. 'Dualistic' and 'inherent' knots that prevent the full experiencing of our Maha, empty and non-dual nature of pristine awareness are two very different 'perceptual spells' that blind.

The subsection "On Second Stanza" of the post ["On Anatta \(No-Self\), Emptiness, Maha and Ordinairiness, and Spontaneous Perfection"](#) further elaborates this insight." - John Tan, 2009

Be careful of stagnating waters (this can also present itself in even earlier phases than one mind), as the Soto Zen teacher Alex R. Weith wrote:

[A Zen Exploration of the Bahiya Sutta](#)

"There is no end to the process of awakening, but in Zen Buddhism there are steps and strategies. These introductory posts will explain my position, what I discovered so far, and how it unfolds.

Having got hold of the ox, one has realized the One Mind. In Zen literature this One Mind has often been compared to a bright mirror that reflects phenomena and yet remains untouched by appearances. As discussed with one of Sheng-yen's first Western students, this One Mind is still an illusion. One is not anymore identified to the self-center, ego and personality, yet one (the man) is still holding to pure non-dual awareness (the ox). Having tamed the ox, the ox-herder must let go of the ox (ox forgotten) and then forget himself and the ox (ox and man forgotten).

The problem is that we still maintain a subtle duality between what we know ourself to be, a pure non-dual awareness that is not a thing, and our daily existence often marked by self-contractions. Hoping to get more and more identified with

pure non-dual awareness, we may train concentration, try to hold on to the event of awakening reifying an experience, or rationalize the whole thing to conclude that self-contraction is not a problem and that suffering is not suffering because our true nature is ultimately beyond suffering. This explains why I got stuck in what Zen calls "stagnating waters" for about a year.

This is however not seen as a problem in other traditions such as Advaita Vedanta where the One Mind is identified with the Brahman that contains and manifests the three states of waking, dreaming and deep sleep within itself, yet remains untouched by its dreamlike manifestation."

...

Question: "When you say that many teachers are stuck at I AM and ONE MIND, what do those teachers reify? Since usually in Buddhism, contrary to Vedanta, there isn't a single consciousness, what is it that they subsume everything into? I ask this because I'm interested in seeing the 4 stage model (I AM, ONE MIND, ANATTA, SHUNYATA) from an exclusively Buddhist point of view, instead of an hybrid of Vedanta and Buddhism."

Soh's reply:

"Depends. I have seen many Buddhist teachers reify I AM, many reify One Mind, while some have realised anatta and emptiness.

By the way it is not necessary to get stuck with a belief in universal consciousness to get stuck at I AM or one mind. Even non Buddhist systems like Samkhya is about I AM but each I AM is individual. And as I wrote in AtR guide there are different phases of I AM - those who gone through impersonality are more prone to reifying the universal, until insight into anatta arise at least. I would try to avoid naming names of Buddhist masters here as it is a sensitive topic.. but for example, people like Judith Blackstone (I don't think there are students of Judith Blackstone here? Haha) are stuck at One Mind without a belief in universal consciousness - she accepts that it is an extrapolation that cannot be confirmed experientially whether nondual consciousness is universal and says she does not hold this belief afaik but she is certainly at the one mind phase. Means unchanging undivided consciousness subsuming all changing phenomena.

I have seen many Theravadin, Zen and Tibetan masters and teachers reify universal awareness.

I reckon so many Chan/Zen teachers conceive a universal consciousness partly due to doctrinal influence. For example the The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana of Ashvagosha talks about One Mind and that text has been criticised by Lopon Malcolm to be holding a view similar to Advaita Vedanta but this text is usually taken as authoritative in Chinese Buddhism, and even Huang Po talks about One Mind in a way that sounds like that or is often interpreted that way, e.g. "All the Buddhas and all sentient beings are nothing but the One Mind, beside which nothing exists. The One Mind alone is the Buddha, and there is no distinction between the Buddha and sentient beings." Of course, there are those like Dogen that re-interpretes One Mind in a way that makes it congruent with anatta. And Soto Zen masters like Steve Hagen are very clear about anatta, his use of the term is congruent with anatta, "This Mind is nothing other than the Whole. It's simply thus, the fabric of the world itself - the ongoing arising and falling away that are matter, energy and events."

But that is not the case for most. I have seen many teachers of Chinese Buddhism who hold the view of universal awareness from I AM to one mind. It is an influence of the 宇宙本体论 (doctrine of universal substratum). There is a text also taken as authoritative in Chinese Buddhism, 宇宙万有本体论, although I am not sure if it is a substantialist text (have not studied it).

In Tibetan Buddhism side, I have seen a few masters (although more infrequently than Chinese Buddhism) elude to universal awareness, but generally even if they do not, they often still reify an unchanging awareness that is one's innermost essence. Meaning I AM is reified like an unchanging background of pure awareness, or one mind subsuming all phenomena. The sky and clouds, mirror and reflections that AtR talks about in the one mind chapter often gets reified, that is very common. I have seen many Tibetan books just talking about I AM, some one mind, etc. It is rare even in Tibetan Buddhism today (but this applies to any tradition) to break through to no mirror and anatta and emptiness, but as I mentioned there are some. Then as for Thai Forest Theravada, as I mentioned many get stuck at Poo Roo (Witness) and one master that broke through that got stuck at one mind. It is very common in awareness teachings to get stuck there. Therefore, the Thusness 7

stages can help and do apply to all traditions, whatever tradition one is following so that one has a clearer direction and can avoid the pitfalls.”

### **How to Progress from Stage 4 into Stage 5**

Investigate and challenge all sense of awareness being unchanging and independent. Contemplate on Bahiya Sutta and the Wind/Blowing analogy (see John Tan Stage 5). In John Tan Stage 4, Awareness is still understood to be a one-way dependency: transient forms are none other than (expressions of) changeless awareness but changeless awareness is not equivalent to transient forms. Contemplating on the two-way dependency can also be helpful if you like analytical approach: [Greg Goode on Advaita/Madhyamika](#)

Commentary by Soh, 2021: “At phase 4 one may be trapped in the view that everything is one awareness modulating as various forms, like gold being shaped into various ornaments while never leaving its pure substance of gold. This is the Brahman view. Although such a view and insight is non-dual, it is still based on a paradigm of essence-view and ‘inherent existence’. Instead, one should realise the emptiness of awareness [being merely a name just like ‘weather’ – see chapter on the weather analogy in the longer AtR Guide], and should understand consciousness in terms of dependent origination. This clarity of insight will get rid of the essence view that consciousness is an intrinsic essence that modulates into this and that.

~ *Weather metaphor*

There is no weather actively creating, as an independent agent, the activities of clouds, rain, sun, wind, etc. Weather is a designation conceptually established upon a multiplicity of events/activities which are seamlessly interconnected, dynamic, and conditionally-arisen.

It is important to realize these metaphors directly, as the empty nature of Awareness/Mind in one’s direct experience and not remain as an intellectual concept or ideation.

John Tan, 2011:

I did not tell you that pure aggregates is awareness, that is non-dual. When you understand anatta, you realize awareness is like weather, it is a label to denote this luminous yet empty arising, that is pure aggregates.

2013 conversation with John Tan:

John Tan: When you say "weather", does weather exist?

Soh Wei Yu: No. It's a convention imputed on a seamless activity. Existence and non existence don't apply.

John Tan: What is the basis where this label rely on?

Soh Wei Yu: Rain clouds wind etc

John Tan: Don't talk prasanga. Directly see. Rain too is a label. But in direct experience, there is no issue but when probed, you realized how one is confused about the reification from language. And from there life/death/creation/cessation arise. And whole lots of attachment. But it does not mean there is no basis...get it?

Soh Wei Yu: The basis is just the experience right?

John Tan: Yes which is plain and simple. When we say the weather is windy. Feel the wind, the blowing... But when we look at language and mistaken verb for nouns there are big issues. So before we talk about this and that. Understand what consciousness is and awareness is. Get it? When we say weather, feel the sunshine, the wind, the rain. You do not search for weather. Get it? Similarly, when we say awareness, look into scenery, sound, tactile sensations, scents and thoughts".

(Note that this is still understanding emptiness from the perspective of firstfold emptiness, in secondfold emptiness there is nothing to ground conventions on - to be elaborated in the chapter on Stage 6).

Further references/pointers are available in the related articles section of Stage 5.

## Stage 5 (Anatta):

(Comments by Soh: To trigger the realization of Anatta, focus on contemplating in direct vipassana mode [see <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/thusnesss-vipassana.html> and <https://vimeo.com/250616410> ] the following two stanzas of anatta and the Bahiya Sutta. Also a quick note on the two stanzas of anatta: even at Thusness Stage 4, John Tan had a breakthrough insight into the 1<sup>st</sup> Stanza of anatta, however it was not a complete and stabilized insight into anatta. The stabilized, deep insight into anatta and thorough penetration of self/Self happened for him about 2 to 3 years [around year 2000] after the initial breakthrough in 1997, before which he was fluctuating between one mind and no mind for some time.)

John's 1st Stanza:

There is thinking, no thinker

There is hearing, no hearer

There is seeing, no seer

John's 2nd Stanza:

In thinking, just thoughts

In hearing, just sounds

In seeing, just forms, shapes and colors

Bahiya Sutta:

*In the seen, there is only the seen,*

*in the heard, there is only the heard,*

*in the sensed, there is only the sensed,  
in the cognized, there is only the cognized.  
Thus you should see that  
indeed there is no thing here;  
this, Bahiya, is how you should train yourself.  
Since, Bahiya, there is for you  
in the seen, only the seen,  
in the heard, only the heard,  
in the sensed, only the sensed,  
in the cognized, only the cognized,  
and you see that there is no thing here,  
you will therefore see that  
indeed there is no thing there.  
As you see that there is no thing there,  
you will see that  
you are therefore located neither in the world of this,  
nor in the world of that,  
nor in any place  
betwixt the two.*

*This alone is the end of suffering.” (ud. 1.10)*

- Also see comments and article in

<http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2008/01/ajahn-amaro-on-non-duality-and.html>

Related:

[www.awakeningtoreality.com/2010/10/my-commentary-on-bahiya-sutta.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2010/10/my-commentary-on-bahiya-sutta.html)



<https://www.emptyskysangha.com/talks-and-essays/the-sutta-about-bahiya-part-2-feb-12-2005>

I love this teaching by Buddha to Bahiya because this teaching was the one that led to my sudden realization and entrance into the Great Way, which is not an end in itself but the way towards effortless and ongoing practice-enlightenment/actualization:

"So we continue on with Bahiya's meeting with the Buddha and the Buddha's response to Bahiya's urgent pleading to teach him how to truly enter the Great Way of freedom and happiness. Remember that although Bahiya has sought out the Buddha as a result of deep doubt and the realization that he is neither free nor practicing in a manner that will lead to freedom, he is nonetheless completely ripe to receive a teaching that will utterly transform him. He has dropped literally everything, emptied himself of everything except his completely focused urgency for awakening. The Buddha meets his simple openness with a simple and powerful response:

"Bahiya, this is how you should train yourself: Whenever you see a form, simply see; whenever you hear a sound, simply hear; whenever you taste a flavor, simply taste; whenever you feel a sensation, simply feel; whenever a thought arises, let it be simply a thought. Then "you" will not exist; whenever "you" do not exist, you will not be found in this world, another world or in between. That is the end of suffering."

There are at least two approaches to understanding this teaching. The first is to follow closely just what the Buddha says; that this is an approach to training the mind and training one's life; a teaching to be practiced and worked with as a process. Bahiya gets it in one deep jolt which he swallows whole, digests instantly and is fully awakened.

Most of us have to work at this as a practice for a very long time, and yet we don't know how long Bahiya worked at his in order to come to this place, available for this encounter. And it doesn't really matter whether we have gradual cultivation and sudden awakening, or sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation. In fact both are not only true, together they encompass the whole of the life of practice-realization.

...

See, hear, sense, touch, taste; everything happening all at once with no discrimination, preference or choice. Every sense door completely open, welcoming, receptive, alert, completely alive. So that listening is with the whole body/mind; every pore of our skin, every hair on the body, one whole receptive, alive field of listening. In this there is no “who”, is there? No “me” listening, is there? Check it out for yourself. It may be a little slippery to catch, because when “you” are only hearing, seeing, touching, tasting, smelling; there may not be anyone there to record or reflect on the experience; no “you” there! See what happens when you notice there is separation from what is; when the mind is wanting this to be some other way than just how it is. What happens in that moment of just seeing separation? What happens when you’ve traveled down the mind road and there is a sudden seeing of that? Was there a “you” in that moment of awareness? What if seeing is awakening? What is hearing is awakening? What if it is just as simple and as obvious as that? Then you might wonder what you are doing here on this retreat! What happens if there is just awareness of that thought? This is the practice of awakening, but it might be more accurate to say that it is really awakening which is practicing us!

- Douglas Phillips, Empty Sky Sangha

...

“The most direct and succinct explanation of anatta is that there is no actual seer of sights, no actual hearer of sound, etc., there is no actual internal point of reference, or subject, that is apprehending alleged referents, or objects.” – Kyle Dixon, 2020

...

What does Buddhism mean when they say there is no self?

Kyle Dixon: Selflessness means there is ultimately no actual subject, which means there is no actual internal reference point that is apprehending sensory phenomena.

In describing this simply it means through your practice you will hopefully, eventually, awaken to recognize that there is no actual seer of sights, no hearer of sounds, and so on. The feeling of an internal seer or hearer, etc., is a useful but false construct that is created and fortified by various causes and conditions.

We suffer when we cling to this construct and think it is actually real. Recognition of the actual nature of that construct is liberating and freeing."

...

Soh: Someone who realizes anatta will have a paradigm shift as clear as day. Anatta is the realisation that there never was a [truly existing] mind/Mind/Awareness/Brahman/Presence/Ulimate Reality/etc etc. Mind, Awareness, Seeing, etc, all these are just conventions for the ongoing appearance. There is simply no seer-seeing-seen. Having such a realization, one simply stops projecting an ultimate substance or substratum. I remember right after anatta, it was a very obvious shift. I no longer see consciousness as a 'substance' holding all appearances. Rather 'consciousness' is just the mere event and manifestation happening or dependently originating without agent, there isn't even a single thought about 'consciousness', just the self-luminous event/manifestation happening or gaplessly and non-dually appearing at no distance, that's all. No self/Self or static source and substratum or reality underlying all. Completely dynamic and centerless and boundless and seamless beyond/free of the threefold structures of subject-action-object, seer-seeing-seen. As I wrote before, even the notion that 'consciousness is modulating as everything' falls apart. All these can be found in my e-journal entries right after my anatta realization. In Phase 5, the reflections are the mirror and there is no mirror besides the reflections/on-going manifesting/reflecting (whatever arises is Presencing with no Presence besides those colors, sounds, sensations, scents, tastes, thoughts), nothing unchanging or independent and self-standing, no need for a metaphysical essence at all. The sense of being an ultimate and changeless metaphysical essence, source and substratum is replaced by pure manifestation and one then begins to penetrate into Dependent Origination as the mechanism of pure manifestation (see Stage 6).

Stage 5 must break down the view of eternalism. There is no unchanging Mirror that is separate from (like the I AM/Eternal Witness phase), or \*even one with\* reflections (like Stage 4/substantial nondualism). Reflections alone is the mirror(ing) Presence(-ing) without a mirror-er. There is no agent, no source, no perceiver, thinker, hearer, seer, etc. (First stanza) And not only that, seeing is just colors, no seeing, hearing is just sounds, no hearing. (Second stanza). And this means even the I AM/Formless Mind Presence/Subtle Clear Light that dawns at death, etc, is just another reflection/manifestation/empty appearance without being a reflector.

Presencing is always just appearance after appearance. There is absolutely no substratum, no ground, nothing behind appearance whatsoever.

...

"Basically the difference between Thusness Stage 4 and Stage 5 is that in Stage 4, there is the view that awareness is the unchanging substance that can only experience itself in various forms and modulations.

Stage 5 is the realization that like lightning and flash (no lightning ever existed besides flash), wind and blowing (there is no wind besides blowing), there is simply no awareness besides manifestation, no seer-seeing-seen, agent-action dichotomy.. then from there one replaces one's view of a source, substratum, substance, and continues to penetrate into D.O., total exertion and emptiness.

In particular, the important realization to breakthrough this view of inherent self is the realization that Always Already, never was/is there a self - in seeing always only just the seen, the scenery, shapes and colours, never a seer! In hearing only the audible tones, no hearer! Just activities, no agent! A process of dependent origination itself rolls and knows... no self, agent, perceiver, controller therein.

It is this realization that breaks down the view of 'seer-seeing-seen', or 'One Naked Awareness' permanently by realizing that there never was a 'One Awareness' - 'awareness', 'seeing', 'hearing' are only labels for the everchanging sensations and sights and sounds, like the word 'weather' don't point to an unchanging entity but the everchanging stream of rain, wind, clouds, forming and parting momentarily...

Then as the investigation and insights deepen, it is seen and experienced that there is only this process of dependent origination, all the causes and conditions coming together in this instantaneous moment of activity, such that when eating the apple it is like the universe eating the apple, the universe typing this message, the universe hearing the sound... or the universe is the sound. Just that... is Shikantaza. In seeing only the seen, in sitting only the sitting, and the whole universe is sitting... and it couldn't be otherwise when there is no self, no meditator apart from meditation. Every moment cannot 'help' but be practice-enlightenment... it is not even the result of concentration or any form of contrived effort... rather it is the natural authentication of the realization, experience and view in real-time. - Soh

...

If someone talks about an experience he/she had and then lost it, that's not (the true, deep) awakening... As many teachers put it, it's the great samadhi without entry and exit.

John Tan: There is no entry and exit. Especially for no-self. Why is there no entry and exit?

Me (Soh): Anatta (no-self) is always so, not a stage to attain. So it's about realisation and shift of perception.

John Tan: Yes 👍

As John also used to say to someone else, "Insight that 'anatta' is a seal and not a stage must arise to further progress into the 'effortless' mode. That is, anatta is the ground of all experiences and has always been so, no I. In seeing, always only seen, in hearing always only sound and in thinking, always only thoughts. No effort required and never was there an 'I'."

...

(Comments by Soh: in the link below, the analogy of candle and flame merging is an example of a non-dual glimpse or experience without realization, Case 1 or substantial nondualism is akin to Thusness Stage 4 insight where no-self later led to all as ultimate subjectivity or all-is-self, whereas Thusness Stage 5 is similar to Case 2, with no ultimate subject besides mere flow of phenomenality as an insight into what is always already the case)

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/09/realization-and-experience-and-non-dual.html>

#### **4. On Non-Dual Experience, Realization and Anatta**

I have just casually gone through some of your forum discussions. Very enlightening discussions and well presentation of my 7-phases-of-insights but try not to over-emphasize it as a model; it should not be taken as a definite model of enlightenment nor should you use it as a framework to validate others' experiences and insights. Simply take it as a guide along your spiritual journey.

You are right to differentiate non-dual experience from non-dual realization and non-dual realization from the insight of anatta. We have discussed this umpteenth times. Non-dual experience in the context we are using refers to the experience of

no-subject-object division. The experience is much like putting two candle flames together where the boundary between the flames becomes indistinguishable. It is not a realization but simply a stage, an experience of unity between the observer and the observed where the conceptual layer that divides is temporarily suspended in a meditative state. This you have experienced.

Non-dual realization on the other hand is a deep understanding that comes from seeing through the illusionary nature of subject-object division. It is a natural non-dual state that resulted from an insight that arises after rigorous investigation, challenge and a prolonged period of practice that is specially focused on 'No-Self'. Somehow focusing on "No-Self" will spark a sense of sacredness towards the transient and fleeting phenomena. The sense of sacredness that is once the monopoly of the Absolute is now also found in the Relative. The term 'No-Self' like Zen-Koan may appear cryptic, senseless or illogical but when realized, it is actually obviously clear, direct and simple. The realization is accompanied with the experience that everything is being dissolved into either:

1. An ultimate Subject or
2. As mere 'flow of phenomenality'

In whatever the case, both spells the end of separateness; experientially there is no sense of two-ness and the experience of unity can be quite overwhelming initially but eventually it will lose its grandeur and things turn quite ordinary. Nevertheless, regardless of whether the sense of Oneness is derived from the experience of 'All as Self' or 'as simply just manifestation', it is the beginning insight of "No-Self". The former is known as One-Mind and the later, No-Mind.

In Case 1 it is usual that practitioners will continue to personify, reify and extrapolate a metaphysical essence in a very subtle way, almost unknowingly. This is because despite the non-dual realization, understanding is still orientated from a view that is based on subject-object dichotomy. As such it is hard to detect this tendency and practitioners continue their journey of building their understanding of 'No-Self based on Self'.

For Case 2 practitioners, they are in a better position to appreciate the doctrine of anatta. When insight of Anatta arises, all experiences become implicitly non-dual.

But the insight is not simply about seeing through separateness; it is about the thorough ending of reification so that there is an instant recognition that the 'agent' is extra, in actual experience it does not exist. It is an immediate realization that experiential reality has always been so and the existence of a center, a base, a ground, a source has always been assumed.

To mature this realization, even direct experience of the absence of an agent will prove insufficient; there must also be a total new paradigm shift in terms of view; we must free ourselves from being bonded to the idea, the need, the urge and the tendency of analyzing, seeing and understanding our moment to moment of experiential reality from a source, an essence, a center, a location, an agent or a controller and rest entirely on anatta and Dependent Origination.

Therefore this phase of insight is not about singing eloquently the non-dual nature of an Ultimate Reality; contrary it is deeming this Ultimate Reality as irrelevant. Ultimate Reality appears relevant only to a mind that is bond to seeing things inherently, once this tendency dissolves, the idea of a source will be seen as flawed and erroneous. Therefore to fully experience the breadth and depth of no-self, practitioners must be prepared and willing to give up the entire subject-object framework and be open to eliminate the entire idea of a 'source'. Rob expressed very skillfully this point in his talk:

["One time the Buddha went to a group of monks and he basically told them not to see Awareness as The Source of all things.](#) So this sense of there being a vast awareness and everything just appears out of that and disappears back into it, beautiful as that is, he told them that's actually not a skillful way of viewing reality. And that is a very interesting sutta, because it's one of the only suttas where at the end it doesn't say the monks rejoiced in his words.

This group of monks didn't want to hear that. They were quite happy with that level of insight, lovely as it was, and it said the monks did not rejoice in the Buddha's words. (laughter) And similarly, one runs into this as a teacher, I have to say. This level is so attractive, it has so much of the flavor of something ultimate, that often times people are unbudgeable there."

What then is the view that Buddhism is talking about without resorting to a 'source'? I think the post by Vajrahridaya in the thread [What makes Buddhism](#)

[different](#) of your forum succinctly and concisely expressed the view, it is well written. That said, do remember to infinitely regress back into this vivid present moment of manifestation – as this arising thought, as this passing scent – Emptiness is Form. :)

...

There is no hearer, only sound

There is no seer, only forms, shapes, and colors

There's no feeler, only sensations

There's no thinker, only thoughts

There is no observer, only experience

...

"When consciousness experiences the pure sense of "I AM", overwhelmed by the transcendental thoughtless moment of Beingness, consciousness clings to that experience as its purest identity. By doing so, it subtly creates a 'watcher' and fails to see that the 'Pure Sense of Existence' is nothing but an aspect of pure consciousness relating to the thought realm. This in turn serves as the karmic condition that prevents the experience of pure consciousness that arises from other sense-objects. Extending it to the other senses, there is hearing without a hearer and seeing without a seer -- the experience of Pure Sound-Consciousness is radically different from Pure Sight-Consciousness. Sincerely, if we are able to give up 'I' and replace it with "Emptiness Nature", Consciousness is experienced as non-local. There isn't a state that is purer than the other. All is just One Taste, the manifold of Presence.

The 'who', 'where' and 'when', the 'I', 'here' and 'now' must ultimately give way to the experience of total transparency. Do not fall back to a source, just the manifestation is sufficient. This will become so clear that total transparency is experienced. When total transparency is stabilized, transcendental body is experienced and dharmakaya is seen everywhere. This is the samadhi bliss of Bodhisattva. This is the fruition of practice." – John Tan, 2006, [Buddha Nature is NOT "I Am"](#)



...

"The key towards pure knowingness is to bring the taste of presence into the 6 entries and exits. So that what is seen, heard, touched, tasted are pervaded by a deep sense of crystal, radiance and transparency. This requires seeing through the center." – Thusness/John Tan

...

"It will be advisable to take a step back to re-visit and re-experience each of the 6 sense doors. To cultivate a little on the aspect of being 'bare' for all the senses. Experience as much vividness as possible and have clarity on the luminous aspect of awareness first. Touch, taste, smell and sound... are all equally vivid as compared to seeing. Experience the texture and fabric of awareness. The rest of the conditions that give rise to no-self will come later. :) There is no 'willful' entrance into non-duality, create enough conditions, that's all. :)" - John Tan, 2007

This aspect will come by practicing Vipassana, see John's Vipassana - <https://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2018/12/thusnesss-vipassana.html> and Vipassana - <https://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2018/09/vipassana.html>

...

An advise I often give which in my experience is a highly effective method for realizing no-self: "spend quality hours (or however much time you can afford) everyday practicing being naked in awareness (whether in sitting meditation or in movement), which is to say hear the sounds as clear as can be in its pristine clarity and vividness... observe/experience the minutest details of sensations in its crystal clarity and aliveness, the sights, smells, taste, touch. Then contemplate and notice the fact that "there is no experiencer behind experience, just the experience" or "in seeing just the shapes, colours, forms, no seer"... this can eventually lead to non dual experience and insight." – [Soh's E-Book & Journal](#), 9<sup>th</sup> February 2012 entry

...

There is only sound

Geovani Geo wrote:

We hear a sound. The immediate deeply inbuilt conditioning says, "hearing ". But there is a fallacy there. There is only sound. Ultimately, no hearer and no hearing. The same with all other senses. A centralized, or expanded, or zero-dimensional inherent perceiver or aware-er is an illusion.

Thusness/John Tan: Very good.

Means both stanza is clear.

In hearing, no hearer.

In hearing, only sound. No hearing.

At the time of his enlightenment, Zen Master Huangpo said, "When I hear the sound of the bell ringing, there is no bell, and also no I, only ringing-sound."

...

"Good insight. Stability of experience has a predictable relationship with the unfolding and deepening of insights. For example how seamless and effortless can non-dual experience be, if in the back of one's mind, subtle views of duality and inherency and tendencies continue to surface and affect our moment to moment experience - for example conjuring an unchanging source or mind that results in a perpetual tendency to sink back and referencing experience back to a source.

For example even after it is seen that everything is a manifestation of awareness or mind, there might still be subtle tendencies to reference back to a source, awareness or mind and therefore the transience is not appreciated in full. Nondual is experienced but one sinks back into substantial nonduality - there is always a referencing back to a base, an "awareness" that is nevertheless inseparable from all phenomena.

If one arises the insight that our ideas of an unchanging source, awareness or mind is just another thought - that there is simply thought after thought, sight after sight, sound after sound, and there isn't an inherent or unchanging "awareness", "mind", "source". Non-dual becomes implicit and effortless when there is the realisation that what awareness, seeing, hearing really is, is just the seen... The heard... The

transience... The transience itself rolls and knows, no knower or other "awareness" can be found. Like there is no river apart from flowing, no wind apart from blowing, each noun implies its verb... Similarly awareness is simply the process of knowing not separated from the known. Scenery sees, music hears. Because there is nothing unchanging, independent, ultimate apart from the transience, there is no more sinking back to a source and instead there is full comfort resting as the transience itself.

Lastly do continue practicing the intensity of luminosity... When looking at tennis ball just sense the tennis ball fully.... Without thinking of a source, background, observer, self. Just the tennis ball as a luminous light. When breathing... Just the breathe... When seeing scenery, just sights, shapes and colours - intensely luminous and vivid without an agent or observer. When hearing music... Sound of bird chirping, the crickets... Just that - chirp chirp. A zen master noted upon his awakening... When I am hearing the bell ringing, there is no I and no bell... Just the ringing. The direct experiencing of no-mind and intensity of luminosity.. This is the purpose of the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness that is taught by the Buddha." - Soh, 2011

...

"Now with your current insight and understanding, what should be the right approach to end this lingering sense of self? Your practice should be always realization, experience and views. Your experience must refine [to be] like the place where there is no heat or cold\*. Your anatta view must be extended to whatever arises. Your realization must extend your anatta to dependent origination." - John Tan, early 2011

For now, you should not be distracted with stages of insights (sunyata or whatever) but be thorough and leave no trace of "I" for the willingness to let go completely (the I) has arisen. Check this out if you haven't:

[http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2011/11/where-there-is-no-cold-or-heat\\_27.html](http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2011/11/where-there-is-no-cold-or-heat_27.html)

**A monk asked Tozan, "When cold and heat come, how can we avoid them?"**

**Tozan said, "Why don't you go to the place where there is no cold or heat?"**

**The monk said, "What is the place where there is no cold or heat?"**

**Tozan said, “When it’s cold, the cold kills you; when it’s hot, the heat kills you.”**

This is not advice to “accept” your situation, as some commentators have suggested, but a direct expression of authentic practice and enlightenment. Master Tozan is not saying, “When cold, shiver; when hot, sweat,” nor is he saying, “When cold, put on a sweater; when hot, use a fan.” In the state of authentic practice and enlightenment, the cold kills you, and there is only cold in the whole universe. The heat kills you, and there is only heat in the whole universe. The fragrance of incense kills you, and there is only the fragrance of incense in the whole universe. The sound of the bell kills you, and there is only “booooong” in the whole universe...

~ The Flatbed Sutra of Louie Wing, Ted Biringer

...

<https://www.liberationunleashed.com/resources/articles/direct-experience/>

The most important catalyst for triggering Awakening to no-self is to investigate our Direct Experience. Direct Experience is what is noticed, here and now.

We can skilfully divide d.E., for the purposes of investigation, into 3 main aspects:

1) **thought**

2) **sensations**

seeing

hearing

smelling

tasting

feeling [tactile + kinesthetic)

3) **an unmistakable sense of Aliveness**

(presence, being)

The illusion of separation is maintained by a stream of self referencing thoughts that are based on past conditioning. The most common reference point is a thought-created center referred to as “I” / “me” / “self”. There is no such center, and those self-labels refer only to other thoughts, or to some aspect of Experience.

By referring to d.E., one is able to deconstruct any assumptions of separation or self, and see that there is just an Experience. There may be thoughts about Experience that conceptually divide certain aspects of Experience into a “me” and other aspects into “the outside world”, yet those thoughts are also just a part of Experience, and as such there is ONLY Experience.

There is an assumption that there is an experience-er that experiences. This is propagated by a belief, as expressed by a thought such as “I experience”. We investigate this in d.E. by looking for this “I”. Is there a separate “I”, or is there just an Experience that thought conceptually divides as such: “I” + “what is experienced”?

There is an assumption that there is a perceive-er that perceives. This is propagated by a belief, as expressed by a thought such as “I am the perceiver”. We investigate this in d.E. by looking for this perceiver. We can see that there is no such thing as a perceiver, just a perception and thought dividing it in to an “I” + “body” + “perception through the senses”.

A sound is heard, then there is a thought “I hear a sound”. We can investigate and see that there is no hearer of sounds, just sound. If there is something felt and assumed to be the hearer, or self, is it anything more than some other sensations? or that sense of Aliveness? or another thought?

“I feel my body against the chair” a thought says. So, we investigate d.E. and see that there are sensations that are habitually labelled “body” and other sensations we refer to as “feeling of chair against body”. When we investigate where this “I” is that claims these sensations, it cannot be found, as there is either another self-referencing thought, some sensations or another aspect of Experience.

We can pick up an object, and look at it. We might say “I am looking at the object”. We then test this conclusion to see if it correlates with d.E., and what we find is that there is a sensation of seeing, and maybe some sensations that we usually label ‘head’ or ‘eyes’, or even other feeling-sensations labelled “body”. A thought may arise with the conclusion that these are inherently separate, and that one is “self” and the other is “what is observed”. When we test this out we see that there is never an “I” looking, never a watcher, never a seer. There is only seeing, only feeling, only Experiencing. We can say that it is simply Experience experiencing itself.

We look deeply in to Experience, and see that the assumptions of separation, self, “I”, perceive-er or an experience-er are just references to Experience. There is never an actual separate object, just the perception of such, and thoughts labeling it. We deconstruct all these assumptions of there being a watcher, or a looker, or a hearer, and find that there is only Experience, never an actual separate self.

Is it possible there is just Experience, with no separate experience-er?

...

Guy Armstrong, Emptiness: A Practical Guide (<https://www.amazon.com/Emptiness-Practical-Meditators-Guy-Armstrong/dp/1614295263/>)

### NO SELF IN VOLITION

Surely we would expect to find an “I” in an act of volition. Who decides to act? Who makes a choice? But if we look closely at a simple action, we see that a multitude of factors converge to bring it about. Let’s say we are sitting in a room feeling a bit chilly and we decide to draw a shawl over our lap. In a normal account, that is all there is to say: “I felt cold, so I put on a shawl.” But if we look more closely, with the eyes of meditative mindfulness, we see that there are more steps in the process.

First there is the recognition that one is sitting (mindfulness of body). Then at some point there is a sensation (contact) that we recognize as cold (perception). Cold is felt as unpleasant (feeling tone), and there is a reaction of aversion (volitional formation). Not seeing the reaction mindfully (delusion), we don’t pause to investigate the feeling tone or formation, but rather distract ourselves (beginning of proliferation) with the mildly complaining inner voice, “I’m starting to feel cold,” and perhaps we feel a little shiver (sensation). Perhaps some perception of “warm” then arises, either by feeling a part of the body that is well covered or by remembering how the room felt when we sat down. Based on the perception of warmth, a desire (formation) arises to experience being warm (sensation with pleasant feeling tone). Just as the earlier aversion was not seen mindfully as something to investigate, so also the desire for warmth is not seen mindfully or investigated. Based on desire for warmth and a touch of delusion (lack of mindful attention), a memory arises of the shawl lying on the sofa. Based on desire and memory, a volition arises and we turn our head to see the shawl on the end of the sofa (perception). Next the urge arises (volition) to reach for the shawl and cover our lap with it (action) — which we do.

In this entire chain of linked causes and effects, there is never a separate agent or self. Rather there is a back-and-forth dialogue between the body, perceptions, feeling tone, aversion, desire, volition, and action. Volition is just another factor of mind that arises based on prior causes and conditions. It then leads to action, in this case, of the body. It can be very tempting to identify with volition: "I decided to reach" or "I reached." But when we see the momentary nature of all the factors arising and passing, we see there is no continuity to volition either. It too arises, does its work, and passes away.

...

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/fully-experience-all-is-mind-by.html>

[Soh Wei Yu](#) Not only anatta, but one must realize Dependent Origination. Means from the direct taste of Heart/Mind in whatever manifestation, one also intuitively the chain of dependencies involved in the total exertion of a given manifestation. The green is the pure visual-consciousness is not 'there' or 'here' or 'anywhere', is not produced by self, not produced by other, but appears due to conditions. Also it is not that everything is 'one awareness' - pure-visual-consciousness/green-display is peculiar-consciousness-instance according to a given condition, the experience of music, the sensation of hand pressing against an object, are all peculiar displays/consciousness-instances. And just like 'weather' is merely a name when certain patterns are appearing which we then call 'rain, cloud, wind, sunshine' (these too are mere labels), 'consciousness' is not one single unchanging static entity nor even one entity 'transforming into many' (as if weather is some pre-existing or self-existing 'entity' that morphs into various forms, rather than simply a label denoting the entire flow of aggregates and formations) but simply a label denoting the whole bundle or aggregate or composite or collection or heap of self-luminous aggregates/display/manifestation. Mere-name does not mean nothing at all exist but that the various appearances which is the vivid displays of luminosity do not amount to a substantially existing [existing by its own side, having its own essence, independent of conditions, or changeless] entity either in terms of subject or object, which is why the emptying of both leads to the actualization of suchness in the way described in Kalaka Sutta.

Suffering, afflictions, likewise manifest by dependencies. Some practitioners like AF think that when self is there, afflictions arise, as if the 'feeler' causes the 'feeling' but anatta and D.O. reveals that afflictions/sense-of-self/suffering manifest via

dependencies and is nowhere located or stored anywhere nor is it produced by a feeler (there never was a feeler/agent/self/Self), the chain of dependencies is what is always involved in a given experience which is always empty of self/Self/agency. Likewise, 'Awareness'/'colors'/'taste'/'sounds'/'thoughts', etc never resided anywhere just like the reflection of moon on water never resided 'inside' the water but merely manifests in an illusory way due to dependencies -- when condition is, manifestation is, consciousness is - condition, manifestation and consciousness are one and inseparable, never separated and neither are they 'interacting' with each other in the case of a mirror reflecting (stage 4). It is revealed that all phenomena are neither produced by an agent, nor by another, are not existing by its own side, and in fact is unproduced, unoriginated, non-arising, due to merely appearing via conditionality.

All the terms that sounded ultimate, metaphysical and ontological now applies to Mind/Appearance but in a non-inherent, non-metaphysical, non-ontological manner. The sense of quiescence, unmoving, non-arising that once applied to an inherent Awareness now applies to Mind/Manifestation in a non-inherent manner. For as Nagarjuna said and I reiterate, if the conditioned/arising of phenomena cannot be established, how can the unconditioned be established [in contrast to so called conditionally arising/abiding/subsiding phenomena]? So as Thusness wrote many years ago, 'The next understanding you must have after anatta and emptiness is to know that all qualities similar to those that are described and sounded ontological are always manifesting presently, spontaneously and effortlessly after the purification of anatta and emptiness insights.'

All displays are 'illusory' not because it is 'mentally projected' nor due to being subsumed to be 'mere modulations of consciousness' (like one mind) but because whatever appears is nothing there or here or anywhere but appearing via dependencies in total exertion. The taste of illusoriness and indestructible non-arising of a given self-luminous Mind/Heart display which is the total exertion of D.O. must be complemented, -A and +A:

<http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/.../a-and...>

And as Thusness wrote in 2014,

John Tan Saturday, November 15, 2014 at 8:42am UTC+08



Actually if you do not see DO [dependent origination], you do not see Buddhism. Anatta is just the beginning.

John Tan Saturday, November 15, 2014 at 8:46am UTC+08

Be it Buddha himself, Nagarjuna or Tsongkhapa none ever got overwhelmed and amazed with the profundity of dependent origination. It is just that we do not have the wisdom to penetrate enough depth of it.

John Tan Saturday, November 15, 2014 at 8:54am UTC+08

If you see dependent origination and emptiness then Advaita is world apart from Buddhism, if you actualized your view into non-dual experience, then it is different from top to bottom. Simply looking at Awareness and no-self, besides non-dual empty clarity and substantial non-duality clarity, you will not be able to distinguish much.

John Tan Saturday, November 15, 2014 at 8:56am UTC+08

So answer Mike Scarf from DO and emptiness perspective.

John Tan Saturday, November 15, 2014 at 9:07am UTC+08

Just bring out the importance of DO. But what written is NOT the essence. The essence is the freedom from extremes of DO, the "nature" of mind and phenomena is realized to be dependent arising and empty. Dependent arising is exactly non-arising be it whether one sees dependencies from production, designation, relations or imputing consciousness. Conceptual or non-conceptual experiences, permanent or impermanent phenomena, conditioned or unconditioned phenomena, all dependently originates, empty and non-arising. If one sees this, how could it be Advaita....

...

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/08/thrangu-rinpoche-on-nature-of-mind.html>

Thrangu Rinpoche:

In the Vajrayana there is the direct path to examining mind. In everyday life we are habituated to thinking, "I have a mind and I perceive these things." Ordinarily, we do not directly look at the mind and therefore do not see the mind. This is very strange because we see things and we know that we are seeing visual phenomena.

But who is seeing? We can look directly at the mind and find that there is no one seeing; there is no seer, and yet we are seeing phenomena. The same is true for the mental consciousness. We think various thoughts, but where is that thinking taking place? Who or what is thinking? However, when we look directly at the mind, we discover that there is nobody there; there is no thinker and yet thinking is going on. This approach of directly looking in a state of meditation isn't one of reasoning, but of directly looking at the mind to see what is there.

Source: Shentong and Rangtong

...

If we look for a perceiver, we won't find one. We do think, but if we look into the thinker, trying to find that which thinks, we do not find it. Yet, at the same time, we do see and we do think. The reality is that seeing occurs without a seer and thinking without a thinker. This is just how it is; this is the nature of the mind. The Heart Sutra sums this up by saying that "form is emptiness," because whatever we look at is, by nature, devoid of true existence. At the same time, emptiness is also form, because the form only occurs as emptiness. Emptiness is no other than form and form is no other than emptiness. This may appear to apply only to other things, but when applied to the mind, the perceiver, one can also see that the perceiver is emptiness and emptiness is also the perceiver. Mind is no other than emptiness; emptiness is no other than mind. This is not just a concept; it is our basic state.

The reality of our mind may seem very deep and difficult to understand, but it may also be something very simple and easy because this mind is not somewhere else. It is not somebody else's mind. It is your own mind. It is right here; therefore, it is something that you can know. When you look into it, you can see that not only is mind empty, it also knows; it is cognizant. All the Buddhist scriptures, their commentaries and the songs of realization by the great siddhas express this as the "indivisible unity of emptiness and cognizance," or "undivided empty perceiving," or "unity of empty cognizance." No matter how it is described, this is how our basic nature really is. It is not our making. It is not the result of practice. It is simply the way it has always been.

Source: Crystal Clear

Related Mahamudra books (recommended to find a realized Mahamudra teacher as well):

- 1) Clarifying the Natural State by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal -  
<https://www.amazon.com/Clarifying-Natural-State-Principal-Mahamudra/dp/9627341452/>
- 2) Crystal Clear by Thrangu Rinpoche (commentary on the book above) -  
<https://www.amazon.com/Crystal-Clear-Practical-Mahamudra-Meditators/dp/9627341517/>
- 3) Pointing out the Dharmakaya by Thrangu Rinpoche -  
<https://www.amazon.com/Pointing-Out-Dharmakaya-Teachings-Karmapas/dp/1559393882/>
- 4) Ocean of Ultimate Meaning by Thrangu Rinpoche -  
<https://www.amazon.com/Ocean-Ultimate-Meaning-Teachings-Mahamudra/dp/1590300556/>
- 5) Essentials of Mahamudra by Thrangu Rinpoche -  
<https://www.amazon.com/Essentials-Mahamudra-Looking-Directly-Mind/dp/0861713710/>
- 6) Moonbeams of Mahamudra by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal -  
<https://www.amazon.com/Moonbeams-Mahamudra-Classic-Meditation-Manual/dp/0980502233/> (Traleg Kyabgon translation),  
<https://www.amazon.com/Moonbeams-Mahamudra-Tsadra-Dakpo-Namgyal/dp/1559394803/> (Elizabeth Callahan translation)
- 7) Royal Seal of Mahamudra Volume 1 - <https://www.amazon.com/Royal-Seal-Mahamudra-Realization-Coemergence/dp/1559394374/>
- 8) <http://www.mahamudracenter.org/MMCMemberMeditationGuide.htm>

PDF Compilation of all of Thrangu Rinpoche's books are available at a discounted price:

[https://namobuddhapub.org/store/index.php?main\\_page=product\\_info&cPath=10&products\\_id=306](https://namobuddhapub.org/store/index.php?main_page=product_info&cPath=10&products_id=306)

Related Articles (recommended reading):

- 1) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/04/different-degrees-of-no-self-non.html>
- 2) <https://www.liberationunleashed.com/resources/articles/view-experience/> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/10/is-liberation-unleashed-similar-to-atr.html>)
- 3) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/01/no-awareness-does-not-mean-non.html>
- 4) <https://www.liberationunleashed.com/resources/articles/what-is-awareness/> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/G%C3%B6ran%20Backlund>)
- 5) [http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/08/substantial-and-insubstantial-non\\_6.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/08/substantial-and-insubstantial-non_6.html)
- 6) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/theres-no-such-thing-as-awareness.html>
- 7) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/11/beyond-awareness.html>
- 8) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/fully-experience-all-is-mind-by.html>
- 9) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/11/no-mind-and-anatta-focusing-on-insight.html>
- 10) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/10/differentiating-i-am-one-mind-no-mind.html>
- 11) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/08/the-wind-is-blowing.html>
- 12) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2008/10/sun-of-awareness-and-river-of.html>
- 13) [www.awakeningtoreality.com/2010/10/my-commentary-on-bahiya-sutta.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2010/10/my-commentary-on-bahiya-sutta.html)
- 14) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/06/difference-between-stage-4-and-5.html>
- 15) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/07/on-i-am-one-mind-no-mind-anatta-view-vs.html>
- 16) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2007/03/mistaken-reality-of-amnesia.html>
- 17) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/the-tendency-to-extrapolate-universal.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/08/no-universal-mind-part-2.html>)

- 18) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/God>
- 19) [https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2012/10/flawed-mode-of-enquiry\\_12.html](https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2012/10/flawed-mode-of-enquiry_12.html)
- 20) <https://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2020/10/suggestions-for-anatta-contemplation.html>
- 21) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/06/anatta-and-post-anatta-mmk-etc.html>
- 22) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Pam%20Tan>
- 23) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/10/two-stanzas-of-anatta-and-metaphors-and.html>
- 24) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/05/nice-advice-and-expression-of-anatta-in.html>
- 25) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/07/yin-ling-on-no-self-anatta-realisation.html>
- 26) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/04/yin-lings-three-stages.html>
- 27) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/02/angelo-gerangelos-writings-on-anatta.html>
- 28) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/03/about-whether-xyz-teacher-realised.html>
- 29) [http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/10/anatta-not-self-or-no-self\\_1.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/10/anatta-not-self-or-no-self_1.html)
- 30) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/04/wil-gaus-anatta-breakthrough.html>
- 31) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Steve%20Hagen>
- 32) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/07/john-astins-posts-on-anatta.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/07/john-astin-nondual-vs-anatta-flow.html>)
- 33) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/08/the-disease-of-non-conceptuality.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/10/the-trap-of-non-conceptuality.html>)
- 34) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/08/insight-buddhism-reconsideration-of.html>
- 35) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/02/the-transient-universe-has-heart.html>

- 36) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/03/the-magical-fairytale-like-wonderland.html>
- 37) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/04/casual-comment-about-dependent.html>
- 38) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/04/emptiness-as-viewless-view.html>
- 39) [http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/06/how-experiential-realization-helps-in\\_22.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/06/how-experiential-realization-helps-in_22.html)
- 40) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2008/09/no-self-nature-of-people-and-things.html>
- 41) [https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/08/greg-goode-on-advaitamadhyamika\\_9.html](https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/08/greg-goode-on-advaitamadhyamika_9.html)
- 42) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/12/is-abhinavagupta-or-kashmir-shaivism.html>
- 43) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/02/madhyamika-buddhism-vis-vis-hindu.html> (original article: <https://www.byomakusuma.org/MadhyamikaBuddhismVisAVisHinduVedanta.html>)
- 44) [https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2013/01/marshland-flowers\\_17.html](https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2013/01/marshland-flowers_17.html) (pdf compilation: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/01/shridhar-rana-rinpoches-marshland.html>)
- 45) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/11/the-doctrine-of-no-mind-by-bodhidharma.html>
- 46) Seeing That Frees by Rob Burbea  
(<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/08/a-summary-of-seeing-that-frees-by-rob.html>)
- 47) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/07/realizing-nature-of-mind.html>  
(Rob Burbea Audio Transcripts: <https://www.reddit.com/r/streamentry/wiki/resources-rob/>)
- 48) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/11/spreading-good-word-on-reddit-no-mind.html>

(Comments by Soh:

Additionally, do read <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2012/03/a-sun-that-never-sets.html>, <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/10/advise-from->

[kyle\\_10.html](#), <http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com.au/2012/09/great-resource-of-buddha-teachings.html>,  
<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/11/measureless-mind-soundcloud-audios.html>)

### **Dealing with Potential Energy Imbalances Post-Anatta:**

June 29, 2020:

John Tan: Mr. F is very experiential, no need to be too theoretical into emptiness, non-arisen of phenomena for now.

Rather it is to allow him to move the energy and radiance to his body...entire body...although the background is gone, you may think that all six senses are in equal radiance but it is far from truth in real time and causes all the energy imbalances.

Relax into the natural state and feel the energetic radiance over the entire body. Not by way of thinking. Touch anything, touch the toes, they legs, feel them. It is your mind...lol...can you understand that?

John Tan: The mountain is mind, the grasses are mind, everything is mind. That is through the vision and mental, feel the body, toes fingers, touch them. They are mind. So do you understand that in real time?

As for sleep don't worry too much, it will happen and use less thoughts, let whole body be a sense of touch not by thinking, but feel and touch it. So don't think that when insight of all is mind anatta arise, means you are already into all is mind. If you can't embrace and feel all as mind, how are you to eliminate the common denominator called mind and into no mind which is the natural state of anatta."

...

"(To someone experiencing insomnia that lasted a week after realizing anatta:) Did you overfocus on the radiance in the day? Is your luminosity too intense and do you experience energy surges? You should learn yoga and do vase breathing and circulate your energies. If you are experiencing an energy imbalance, stop thinking

about anything for now, even anatta, awareness, emptiness, etc. Just relax and let go. Don't focus on radiance for now. Be more human. Be mindful of energy being stuck in crown and third eye area. And an unconscious tendency to focus on the third eye. Bring your energy to the lower body with abdominal breathing and then to the ground. If after the realisation of anatta one has the misunderstanding that you have to focus to experience more, that will strain your subtle body and nervous system and create an imbalance. Release the overfocused pattern of radiance. Also after energy imbalance is solved, maybe look more into the first stanza and Phagguna Sutta - [https://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2012/09/phagguna-sutta-to-phagguna\\_22.html](https://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2012/09/phagguna-sutta-to-phagguna_22.html)

It is important to be wide open, dissolve and relax into openness.. Do not be rigid or forceful or over-concentrated." - Soh, 2019

...

Soh, 2020:

Anatta realisation will lead to effortless presence that is the opposite of concentrative. Natural and effortless. So don't think you need to concentrate hard to achieve breakthrough

For example in breathing there is just the breath.. in hearing there is only sound. This is not telling you to concentrate deeply into sound in order to merge with sound. It is just a realisation that in hearing there is always only sound, never a hearer. No concentration needed or effort to "merge"

But don't contemplate this for now, just relax

In your practice you should be spacious and immense as the universe but light as a feather.

After you resolve your energy issues, maybe two weeks later you may want to read Clarifying the Natural State by Dakpo Tashi Namgyal.

...

John Tan, 2024:

I have told you many times not to overemphasize on radiance, so you need to be mindful. It must be complemented with the first stanza of non-doership.



For you, after non-dual, your practice should be relaxed and open, insubstantial and free.

Be light and effortless then contemplate on effortlessness.

You must balance first stanza with second to prevent overfocusing on radiance.

...

Soh Wei Yu:

Overfocusing on the luminosity of the details of the world can lead to overstraining the nervous system. It feels that the nervous system is strained, creating a tense energy throughout the body-mind and especially at the head and third eye, along with headaches.

For further information and advice, go through the chapter on energy imbalances in the longer AtR Guide: <https://latest-file-link.tprawks1.workers.dev/AwakeningToRealityGuide.pdf>

...

“Also, there's some sort of energy stuck in my head, mainly btw my eyebrows, sometimes tingles, my head feels heavy. I need to let this energy out but don't know how.”

Nafis: You can try the anchoring the breath exercise in this playlist (part 1 and 2) along with the sinking the qi video (part 4) in order to transfer the stagnated energy in the third eye/crown area to the dantian. Part 5 is relevant as well for learning how to locate the dantian:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N0fTg23psfw&list=PLCUw6eIWn0lghivIzVBAYGUm7HwRqzfQp>

Related playlist on resolving qi deviations:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X5d61mjzg5k&list=PLCUw6eIWn0lj48XWed2wg5atfOj7oL-iz&index=1>

## Mind-Body Drop

- 1) Does the body have a shape, border and weight?
- 2) What is “body”?

Mind-Body Drop arises as a result of deconstructing the construct of a ‘body’. For some, this may arise even at the One Mind phase in John Tan/Thusness Stage 4 realization (e.g. Rupert Spira wrote about mind-body drop even in the One Mind phase in *Transparency of Things*), for others (such as Soh) as a further progression after John Tan/Thusness Stage 5 realization. If you have realised anatta but have not yet undergone a distinct phase of mind-body drop, investigating the body-mind construct according to this chapter might help. I (Soh) remember having a realization and penetration of the body construct - that it is merely a construct extrapolated out of a bunch of disjointed bodily sensations, and thus the ‘body’ along with its shape, contour and boundaries never truly existed as the entity that was conceived, one week after my realization of anatta through Bahiya Sutta that led to mind-body drop. My experience of anatta was deepened and further purified as a result.

I was investigating the sense of a body about a week after anatta realisation, then it was just seen that just like anatta realization, in hearing just sound and in seeing just seen, what we call “body” really cannot be found as an entity beside the various disjoint sensations.. the whole construct of an inherent body along with the sense of a boundary, shape, size, weight is thus penetrated via insight into its delusory nature.

This is different from people who only had a glimpse of mind body drop.. just like anatta realization is a realization of what always is, it is not just a peak experience of no mind. I think you should know the difference. – Soh

...

<http://www.uncoveringlife.com/emotions/>

After we’ve deconstructed the notion of an [objective reality](#), it’s now time to wade through the debris and pick apart whatever conceptual structures still remain that allow us to misperceive reality. One such notion is that of **containment**.

We think that emotions exist *within* the body, but they don’t. Feelings aren’t ‘in the gut.’ Look to your direct experience – do you experience feelings as existing ‘within’

the body? Isn't the body itself a sensation? Are there not merely some free-floating sensations present, some of which you call 'the body' – but which themselves don't *contain* other sensations? Do you ever experience one sensation as *containing another*?

Sensations don't exist within each other. A feeling sensation doesn't arise within another feeling sensation. A visual sensation doesn't arise within another visual sensation – or within a sound or a touch sensation. Our idea of a 'body' however, is fundamentally dependent on this type of grouping of sensations – as a single momentary sensation is not at all what we picture when we *think* of our body. Instead, our minds conjure up a multitude of sensations—visual, auditory, tactile and emotional—that together seem to form the physical object we call 'body' – which would be the object that 'contains' all of these sensations.

But all of that is only going on in thought. In reality, *there is no actual 'container' of sensations*. The only real life referent we could have of a 'container' would itself be a sensation – and sensations cannot exist 'within' each other. [Sensations are nothing but their experiencing](#) – and *experiencing* cannot exist 'in' *experiencing*.

When we at last realize that this model of the body 'as a container of sensations' isn't representative of anything in our direct experience, we can finally drop the notion that containment is a viable model of what's actually going on. Thinking in terms of containment isn't based on our direct experience – it's based on the [universe-model of reality](#) wherein objects are physically contained by other objects.

We believe that thoughts are literally in our heads and that emotions are actually *in the body* – and these beliefs make it seem as if that's true in our direct experience. But having rid ourselves of these beliefs in the objective sense, we must now investigate to see if they match up to what's given by our direct experience.

So look for yourself, right now.

Are thoughts *in* your head? Do the thoughts arise *within the sensation that we call 'head'?* And are emotions experienced as being *in* the body? Isn't the body itself merely a sensation?

Thoughts only seem to come from our heads because we believe that they do. But if you envision thoughts as coming from, let's say, the belly instead (try to put your attention on your belly and 'think thoughts') you'll see that pretty soon *it starts to*

*feel as if they do* – which demonstrates that ‘containment’ is imagined rather than factual.

Thoughts seem to arise from wherever we believe they do. Drop the assumption that they’re located to begin with, and thoughts simply cease to arise *from somewhere in particular* – and instead arise without being located anywhere at all.

We also feel that the tactile feeling of, for example, our hand is ‘within’ the corresponding visual sensation of that hand. That is, I look at my hand and it seems as if the feeling of it resides within the visual boundaries that make up the outline of my hand. But when I investigate closely I find that this isn’t the case at all – the feeling of the hand is merely a free-floating sensation that isn’t located within the visual field whatsoever. It is just *a thought* that suggest it does.

It’s easy to believe when we look down and see our belly, that emotions exist *in there* – but in *where*? That belly is nothing but a visual sensation – and emotions doesn’t exist ‘within’ visual sensations. Emotions exist on their own, uncontained by any other sensation—whether visual, tactile or otherwise.

By seeing that nothing is contained in direct experience, we gradually lose the ability to believe that we’re actually experiencing objects, such as one’s body, which is a giant step towards liberating the knowing of ‘I am’ from being object-bound – to instead allow for the *sense of being to expand and encompass the entire field of experiencing*—equally and neutrally—as the sensations of reality in the absence of containers are clearly revealed as a unified whole.

But moving even beyond that, we must realize that ultimately there are no sensations at all. ‘Sensations’ are nothing but their experiencing—they aren’t ‘something’ that is *known*—but what sensations ultimately *are* is nothing but their momentary subjective *know-ing*.

And *knowing* is not some ‘thing,’ some positive entity that is situated within a larger reality – no, *knowing is all there is to reality as such* and ‘it’ is no thing at all – it’s a pure negative, the very absence of objectivity, and is none other than our own being. Not *a* being, but *be-ing*.

Non-objective, it cannot be ‘known.’

Non-positive, it cannot ‘exist.’

'It' can only *be*.

...

Gary wrote in Dharma Overground in 2009, "In walking meditation the "I" appears to place or make sense of the sensory perception. This involves a body image for example foot sensations are perceived to be at the foot, movement is perceived in relation to the previous position. Once in walking meditation I had the body disappear so there was just the feet touch sensations belonging and going nowhere. Does this describe direct without intermediary?"

John Tan replied, "Yes Gary, what you said is correct. It is only a matter of depth and intensity, ie, how clear, how vivid, how real, how pristine the arising and passing sensations are when compared to the "I AM". In the case of "I AM", it is so clear, so real and so pristine that it burns away all traces of doubts. Absolutely certain, still and thoughtless that even Buddha is unable to shake the practitioner from this direct Realization of "I-ness".

By the way, there should not be any 'image' in whatever experienced, thus, direct.

With regards to the "body's disappearance" that you mentioned, it relates to an experience called the "mind-body drop". There are few more important points that you may want to take note:

1. It is not just due to "concentration on the sensations, the body image had no opportunity to arise", the insight that mind and body are mere constructs must also arise and the disappearance is also the result of dissolving of these constructs.
2. Mind-body drop must also come with a sense of lightness. In the first few glimpses, you will also feel weightless and when the experience becomes clearer, you will also realize the "weight" of these constructs.
3. From the constructs, you may also want to explore further what happen when the constructs of "in/out" disappears.

Lastly the practice of self enquiry is not without danger. A practitioner can also be led into a state of utter confusions when exploring the 'I' through mere analytical process. So practice with care."

Do note however that the dissolution of the sense of body can also occur as a peak experience in deep meditation or samadhi. This is not the same as the mind-body drop that occurs as a result of penetrative wisdom and insights that deconstructs all artificial and constructed boundaries, shapes, and solidity of a body and mind. The mind-body drop of wisdom can be a 24/7 experience, whereas dissolution of body-sense from a peak experience or a state of samadhi is short-lived and temporary.

...

"Nowadays I am being much more somatic, where there is no sense of self but merely sensation, and even the designation of flesh and blood body transcends into the mere sensation of feet touching ground, bodily movement, energy flow, breath flowing and abdomen expanding, sensation of hands touching on objects or bicycle handle, etc. A whole body awareness. All senses are bright, luminous, direct. Presencing is just these." - Soh, 2019

Related: Mind-Body Drop section in the longer AtR Guide - <https://latest-file-link.tprawks1.workers.dev/AwakeningToRealityGuide.pdf>

Stage 6 (A+ and A- Emptiness; Maha Total Exertion/Non-arising):

### **+A and -A Emptiness (The Two Yogic Tastes of Emptiness)**

+A and -A originated from Diamond Sutra's A is not A, therefore A is A.

+A Emptiness is Total Exertion and Maha. -A Emptiness is the empty, non-arising and illusory nature of presencing appearance. Phase 6 is about replacing the whole view with Dependent Origination and Emptiness through direct realization, and +A and -A are the experiences from it. However, it is possible to have glimpses of +A and -A and still lack definitive realization. For example, one may have taste of dream-like nature from all appearances arising as one's radiance, but it is still a glimpse or experience than the realization of emptiness, which overturns the view of seeing phenomena in terms of existing by way of its own essence, arising, abiding and ceasing.

In phase 6, it is no longer about clarity (clarity is already implicit and forgotten rather than singled out or over-emphasized). It is possible to realize and experience +A without going into -A, or realize and experience -A without going into +A, and it is also possible to experience both and later come to an integration of +A and -A through an experiential realization. Total exertion too has various depths, at a mature phase the total exertion penetrates not only the ten directions but the three times (past, present and future).

"Total exertion has 2 flavors: the interpermeation and interpenetration of all things and wholeheartedness of action without self/Self.", "Total exertion is not just interpenetration. Maha is an experience of great beyond measure. It is an experience of everything being consumed as it. Only in anatta this experience can be accessed without much issue." ~ John Tan/Thusness, 2019

#### Total Exertion (+A)

- 1) "When you cook, there is no self that cooks, only the activity of cooking. The hands moves, the utensils act, the water boils, the potatoes peels ...here there is no room for simplicity or complications, the "kitchen" went beyond its own imputation and dissolved into the activity of cooking and the universe is fully engaged in this cooking." - John Tan, 2013
- 2) "Contemplate "does not meeting yet connected" of total exertion and dependent origination." - John Tan, 2017

### Emptiness/Non-arising (-A)

- 1) "This moment ceases as it arises, is this moment arising or ceasing?" - John Tan, 2004 (?)
- 2) "30 years of practice and 23 years of kitchen life is like a passing thought.  
How heavy is this thought?  
The whereabouts of this thought?  
Taste the nature of this thought.  
It never truly arises." - John Tan, 2013
- 3) "Appreciate the vivid, lurid scenery in non-dual and ask,  
Where is this scenery?" - John Tan, 2016

### Total Exertion and Emptiness

- 1) "I like your description of walking down a lighted hallway.

Like while walking in a shopping mall, there is no self, just the full fluxing sensations forming the appearance of the "shopping mall". Then when entering the car park, the entire fluxing sensations turn into a "carpark". The taste of this wondrous fluxing appearance is beyond description.

As for physicality and senses, they are simply conventional designations. In total exertion, all designated boundaries dissolved and the six senses seamlessly inter-permeate each other into one miraculous functioning. In the exertion of seeing for example, it is not only the eyes see; the ears see; the nose sees, the colors see. The entire body-mind-universe marvelously arise as this moment of vivid scenery. In this moment, there is no seer and no seeing, just the beautiful scenery.

Look, appreciate and dwell deeply into it in non-dual and ask,

Where is this scenery?



Unlike sound, taste, thoughts and smell that vanish like evanescent mist, the scenery is vividly and obviously there, but where is it?

Powerfully present, yet empty like reflection.

Integrate the two taste and happy journey!" - John Tan, 2019

- 2) "Those were just some very casual sharing written on the spur of a moment, they were not well thought. Emptiness to me has another dimension if you wish to look into it.

When there is not even a single trace of Self/self nor is there any sense of inner/outer division, experiencer and what experienced collapsed...

At this moment there is just this vivid beautiful scenery, this bright brilliant world...all self arises

At this point...

Close your eyes....

Voidness....

Relax and rest in this all-consuming awaring void, this clear non-dual Awareness standing alone as itself and of itself...

Then shift the focus to the breath...

Just the sensations of the breath...

Then the transparent dancing sensations...absolutely no mind, no body, no experiencer/experienced, no inner/outer division... borderless and boundless

Every moment is great and miraculous...

This must become natural to you first.

Then at this moment of appreciating maha suchness of the breath, the sensations, the entire scenery, the entire world...

Understand that they are **Empty!**

Experience the magnificence then deeply understand that they are empty but this Emptiness has nothing to do with deconstruction nor reification nor do I mean they are simply impermanent. So what is this Emptiness I am referring to?" - John Tan, 2013

- 3) "Why must there be "weather", "chariot"... when the notes formed by musical instruments disappear as they arise, how is it that "music" is heard?" – John Tan

[http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2015/01/an-expansion-on-four-levels-of-insight\\_10.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2015/01/an-expansion-on-four-levels-of-insight_10.html)

John Tan (Thusness): Hi David,

Not only that it does not last and is insubstantial but it is non-arisen.

Anatta sees through the self (background) and with that freedom from the layer that obscures, everything becomes magnificently clear and real.

However when we attempt to further deconstruct the foreground appearance, for example, looking clearly at a red flower, where is this "redness" of the flower?

Outside? Inside? My consciousness or Soh's consciousness or dog's consciousness?

So clear, vivid and undeniable yet was never truly there. How does what that was

"never truly there" disappear?

Likewise for sound. Hit a bell - Tingsss..non-dually clear and undeniable. Where is this crystal clear sound? Outside? Inside? Soh's consciousness, Albert's consciousness, dog's consciousness? No one sentient being hears the same "tingsss"...

Look at everything around...so vivid and lurid...touch anything...so solid and undeniable...when seen with DO, every intrinsic characteristic can never be found despite being fully present!

Same applies to sensations, colors, shapes, scent, sound, thoughts...all experiences are like that...empty and non-arising.

So when background self is negated, foreground appearances become magnificently real, it does not become illusion-like.

What is the actual taste of negating "A" from the "(inherent) existence" of A?

Only when foreground appearances are negated of its existence, then experience becomes illusion-like...it cannot be otherwise. For everything clearly appears but when seen with the eyes of dependent arising, it is never truly there...it is just illusion-like (not that it wants to be named that way)

Seeing dependent arising is amazing!

Whatever appears is non-arisen; indestructible by being not real and phenomena links without being "connected".

Everything simply turns magic!

...

The Karmapa's Middle Way: Feast for the Fortunate, A Commentary on Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara by Wangchuk Dorje (Author), Tyler Dewar (Translator):

: Appendix III

THE FIVE GREAT REASONINGS OF THE MIDDLE WAY

**1. The Vajra Slivers** (*dorje zekma/rdo rje gzegs ma*)

The vajra slivers reasoning analyzes causes. It is synonymous with the “refutation of arising from the four extremes” that is the main reasoning used by Chandrakīrti to refute the self of phenomena. When one analyzes to find whether things arise from themselves, from others, from both self and other, or causelessly, one finds no arising whatsoever, and determines that, because they do not arise, phenomena lack an inherent nature.

## **2. The Refutation of the Result’s Presence and Absence** (*gyö me kye gok/yod med skye ’gog*)

The refutation of presence and absence analyzes results. Focusing on a given result, such as a sprout “arisen” from a seed, one investigates whether the result was present at the time of its cause, or whether it was absent, both present and absent, or neither present nor absent. When one finds no permutation from among these four in which arising is observable, one concludes that the result does not truly arise from the cause, for true arising would necessarily involve one of these four.

## **3. The Refutation of the Four Permutations** (*mu shi kye gok/mu bzhi skye ’gog*)

The refutation of the four permutations analyzes both causes and results. If inherent production were to occur, it would necessarily involve at least one of the four following permutations: 1) one cause producing one result, 2) one cause producing many results, 3) many causes producing one result, and 4) many causes producing many results. When one finds no application of any of these permutations when analyzing, one concludes that all causes and results lack an inherent nature.

## **4. Beyond One or Many** (*chig du dral/gcig du bral*)

“Beyond one or many” analyzes the entities of phenomena themselves. One investigates to see whether any given phenomenon is one thing or many things. Multiplicity implies a collection of many single units. Therefore, when one searches any phenomenon and finds no single unit that cannot be mentally or physically dismantled into further constituent parts, one concludes that phenomena lack an inherent nature and do not truly exist.

## **5. Interdependence** (*tendrel/rten ’brel*)

The reasoning of interdependence analyzes all phenomena and is known as “the king of reasonings,” since, in contrast with the above four, which are capable of

refuting only the extreme of clinging to existence, the reasoning of interdependence is capable of refuting both extremes of existence and nonexistence. When one investigates to see if there is any phenomenon that bears its own nature, identity, or character without relying on another phenomenon to arise or be designated, one finds no phenomena that are not dependently arisen or dependently designated. Since true existence implies independent existence, one concludes that no phenomena truly exist. Furthermore, to dispel clinging to nonexistence, one reflects on how the phenomena that are determined to lack an inherent nature are not utterly nonexistent, for they appear in the world and arise in dependence upon other phenomena in a way that is renowned in the world.

Commentary by Mipham: <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/mipham/four-great-logical-arguments>

Commentary by Thrangu Rinpoche: <https://www.amazon.com/Open-Emptiness-Khenchen-Thrangu-Rinpoche/dp/193157121X>

...

"For me, the initial insight of anatta was mainly what I have stated in scenario 2 -- seeing through the center that the center has always been assumed, it is extra. In reality it does not exist.

Up until this point of anatta, I was very much a non-conceptual advocator, less words more experience. I have heard of the word "Kong 空" (Emptiness) numerous times but never exactly know what it truly meant. The idea of Emptiness struck me probably "2 years later when I came across the [chariot analogy of the Buddhist sage Nāgasena](#). There was an instant recognition that the analogy is precisely the insight of anatta and anatta is the real-time experiential taste of the "Emptiness" in relation to self/Self except that it is now replaced with "chariot" in the example.

The insight was huge and I began to re-examine all my experiences from the perspective of "Emptiness". This includes mind-body dropped, the impression of hereness and nowness, internal and externality, space and time...etc. Essentially a journey of deconstruction, that is, extending the same insight of anatta from the perspective of emptiness to all phenomena, aggregates, mental constructs and even to non-conceptual sensory experiences. This led to the taste of instant

liberation at spot of not only the background (self) but also the cognized, seen, heard, tasted, smelled and sensed without the need to subsume either subject into object or object into subject but liberates whatever arises at spot.

The deconstruction process reveals not only the taste of freedom from freeing the energy that is sustaining the constructs (in fact tremendous energy is needed to maintain the mental constructs) but also a continuous formation of a perceptual knot that blinds us in a very subtle way and that relates to scenario 3 -- Seeing through the fundamental nature of the perceptual knot itself. Seeing the nature of perceptual knot involves in seeing clearly certain very persistent and habitual patterns that continues to shape our mode of knowing, analysis and experience like a magical spell. The perceptual knot is the habitual tendency to reify and Emptiness is the antidote for this reifying tendency.

The journey of emptying also convinces me the importance of having the right view of Emptiness even though it is only an intellectual grasped initially. Non-conceptuality has its associated diseases... lol... therefore I always advocate not falling to conceptuality and yet not ignoring conceptuality. That is, strict non-conceptuality is not necessary, only that habitual pattern of reification needs be severed. Perhaps this relates to the zen wild fox koan of not falling into cause and effect and not ignoring cause and effect. A koan that Hakuin remarked as "difficult to pass through".

Not falling, not ignoring.

A word different, a world of difference.

And the difference causes a wild fox for five hundred lifetimes!

A long post and time to return to silence.

Nice chat and happy journey David!"

- John Tan, 2013

"Snap your fingers, hear the sound.

Clearly heard but where?

Touch anything, feel them, feel the sensations dancing in zero dimension.  
Unlocatable, ungraspable.

Look around, look at the radiance of the color.  
So undoubtedly "external" yet they are as "internal"!

Look at the scenery, clear, lurid and vivid.  
But where? Outside? Inside?  
In Soh's mind? In dog's mind, in everyone's mind?  
Totally present yet absence!

All experiences are like that, like magic, like illusion.  
So why look into space?  
Look directly into the nature of experience.

Neither external nor internal,  
Neither present nor absence,  
Neither come nor go.  
Unobstructable by being not here!  
Indestructible by being unreal!" - John Tan, 2019

John Tan also wrote in 2013,

"Intelligent Knowingness as permanent... continuous... so many projections into time... so involved in mind conceptualities... Deconstruct seer, what happens is just this spontaneously manifested scenery

Deconstruct body further, you have mind-body drop

Deconstruct time, there will only be this clear vivid presence of immediacy

After arising insight of anatta, there is only "directness" and simplicity... go beyond conventions and conceptuality and recognize this immediate radiance is exactly what is appearing in this instantaneous moment...

If you are in need of a view for practice, then embrace the general principle of Dependent Origination that doesn't entertain who-when-where construct, it will help sever dualistic and inherent propensities. Otherwise you will have to go back to the koan I asked you when I first met you in IRC... this moment ceases as it arises, is this moment arising or ceasing? If you are clear, then further penetrate this total exertion of immediacy and realize that though there is vivid appearances, there is nothing here... nothing now... you will never find it!"

...

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2012/06/advice-for-taiyaki.html>

### **Nine Points on Anatta to Emptiness**

John Tan wrote 9 points to Taiyaki (Albert Hong) after his realisation of anatta back in 2012:

"There are several points that maybe of help to Taiyaki:

1. First there must be a deep conviction that arising does not need an essence. That view of subjective essence is simply a convenient view.
2. First emptying of self/Self does not necessarily lead to illusion-like experience of reality. It does however allows experience to become vivid, luminous, direct and non-dual.
3. First emptying may also lead a practitioner to be attached to an 'objective' world or turns physical. The 'dualistic' tendency will resurface after a period of few months so it is advisable to monitor one's progress for a few months.
4. Second emptying of phenomena will turn experience illusion-like but take note of how emptying of phenomena is simply extending the same "emptiness view" of Self/self.
5. From these experiences and realizations, contemplate what is meant by "thing", what is meant by mere construct and imputation.



6. "Mind and body drop" are simply dissolving of mind and body constructs. If one day the experience of anatta turns a practitioner to the attachment of an 'objective and actual' world, deconstruct "physical".
7. There is a relationship between "mental constructs", energy, luminosity and weight. A practitioner will experience a release of energies, freedom, clarity and feel light and weightless deconstructing 'mental constructs'.
8. Also understand how the maha experience of interpenetration and non-obstruction is related to deconstructions of inherent view.
9. No body, no mind, no dependent origination, no nothing, no something, no birth, no death. Profoundly deconstructed and emptied! Just vivid shimmering appearances as Primordial Suchness in one whole seamless unobstructed-interpenetration."

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On another occasion, Thusness wrote (not to Taiyaki):

...Like after anatta, as I have said many times the sense of externality and physicality can still be very strong. My deconstruction process of "externality" and "physicality" is actually based few questions: 1. Why is mind which is "mental" is able to "interact" with something "physical"? 2. Why does consciousness need conditions for its arising? 3. What is interaction? All these questions help stabilized my experiences when I penetrated them in my own way.

Illusion like realization (arose) when I contemplated "hereness" and "nowness" until my mind was able to intuit the logic behind all these, then experience becomes stable. However one can enter by experience to have a taste of it...

...

John Tan, 2019:

Post anatta, there is a phase where experience can turn very "physical", that is why I told you de-construct "physicality". There isn't background yet there are clearly all those external "things" that are solidly and concretely "real". Like "I AMness", the external "things" seem so undeniable.

Therefore at this phase, anatta is limited to no self, no background, only aggregates and one can experience a concretely external world in constant interaction with aggregates forming into the 18 dhatus.

Then when we engage into the teaching of emptiness, "physicality" gets deconstructed, phenomena too are realised to be empty. So what does that mean?

It is not about the cessation of those we conventionally called "things"; not the sudden disappearance of diversities into a whole. Therefore it is not a subsuming either into an integrated wholeness.

Then what is it? How should the view be like to re-integrate this anatta "experience" if we were to do away with the dualistic and substantialist view?

Such integration and re-orientation of "view" with the new found anatta insight and experience are not a one day event or a year or a decade...it is an ongoing continuous refinement as the dualistic and substantialist paradigm runs very deep.

It involves a phase where you are able to deconstruct the meaning and definition of conventional "things" and existence and relook at experience. This is not a "non-conceptual" state where practitioner is unable to differentiate left from right or a lost of diversities or even subsuming into a one whole oneness.

It is a phase post anatta and one begin to taste the six entries and exits in a new deconstructed way without subsuming and with diversities intact, without background. Neither this, nor that; neither internal nor external; neither caused nor uncaused, neither exist nor not exist... beyond extremes... that is where practitioner begin to genuinely appreciate the view of DO and Emptiness into the anatta experience and the phases of experiential insights. That is the beginning of the integration of view, experience and realization.

Most confusions arise because we are too used to analysing things in isolation and separation. Either we exclude awareness when analysing thing or we subsume everything into one, that is the karmic tendency of essence view... once we realize this habit and see the flaw of it, the mind will be willing to drop such paradigm and become open. If the world is seen and experienced from a perspective that is never divorce from awareness and there is no background and conventional things are de-constructed, look into your experience right now and tell me, what is it like when you experience conventional existence.

October 6, 2019:

Soh Wei Yu: Like reflections.. dynamic and functioning but unfindable and without essence. Also when I say leg is aching I don't think true existence of leg and aching is located somewhere inside the leg. It's just dependently originating sensations conventionally called leg pain that's all.. vivid but empty

John Tan: We were trained to think and analyse otherwise. Therefore heart sutra says 远离一切颠倒梦想。 (translation: to distance from all upside-down delusions)

Soh Wei Yu: Ic.. yea

John Tan: Yes correct. Therefore this dynamic functioning without essence without dimension unfindable is expressed in the view of DO [dependent origination] and emptiness. Totally exerted but nothing real. Like water reflections.

...

May 16, 2020:

John Tan: Now having non-dual experience or a state of no-mind does not mean finality.

John Tan: We must also free ourselves from many more intellectual obscurations.

John Tan: And other obscurations of cause.

John Tan: Like having non-dual or no-mind may not free one from the notion of self.

John Tan: Freeing one from the notion of self, may not free one from the notion of cause.

John Tan: Freeing one from the notion of cause, may not free one from the notion of existence.

John Tan: Freeing one from duality, may not free one from non-duality.

John Tan: The color you see is neither inside, nor outside. It is inside, it is also outside. It is private, it is also public.

So it is neither too.

John Tan: So freedom from insight is not different from a blank state.

Soh Wei Yu: You mean is different

John Tan: Yes

Soh Wei Yu: Ic..

John Tan: So in addition to walking in a park, being anatta, borderless and open, non-dual and total exerted, you must also spend time to free up further intellectual obscurations to blind us.

John Tan: That blind us I mean.

Soh Wei Yu: Oic.. through mmk?

John Tan: The chariot analogy is enough...but the diamond splinter, neither one nor many...all these ways of ultimate analysis that see through essence can help also.

John Tan: But simple looking and understanding the chariot analogy helps me a lot...it depends on individual.

John Tan: Then authenticate it with your actual experience in anatta.

...

Soh, 2012:

When we look at a candle, a flame is burning brightly, flickering moment by moment, not having a fixed shape.

We may question, where does the fire come from? Does it come from north? South? East? West?

Does it come from the candle? It would appear so, but before the candle starts burning there is no fire. When the fire starts burning, it appears out of nowhere - the candle and a sudden spark ignites the fire, but the fire came from nowhere - it is merely dependently arisen, without a place of origin - entirely fresh and new.

Where is it? The fire is constantly flickering, cannot catch a location at all. Merely dependently arisen, no substantial core that can be pinned down or located. In fact - try moving your hand across the fire - it's totally hollow and transparent.

Where does it go after the fire is blown out? Does it go north, south, east, west, up or down? Doesn't apply. For what is dependently arisen, ceases upon the cessation

of conditions, and is empty of an entity. The notion of an entity that persists and goes somewhere does not apply at all. Fire is empty of IT-ness. There is no fire-ness of fire.

For what dependently originates does not come into being, and what ceases upon the ending of conditions has no destination, nor can it be said that a 'thing' has been 'annihilated'. It simply means the absence of conditions for further arising.

Look at your current experience. How is it any different from flickering fire?

Isn't it the case that whatever you think, see, hear, and smell, are spontaneously appearing out of nowhere (i.e. there is no origin or source, NOT that things arise from a place that is "nowhere", as if there is an ultimate source that is "the nothingness", "the awareness" or any of that sort of thing)? That it is constantly flickering, unlocatable, insubstantial? That there is no destination to which things proceed to and remain - rather, they simply cease upon the parting of conditions?

If you are to pay a little more mindfulness to your experience, it will not be difficult to directly observe your experiential reality constantly dissolving moment by moment like your fingers drawing on a pond utterly vanishing without a trace upon its inception.

We however have ideas of substantial reality that exists objectively, causing obscuration and proliferation that grasps at solid self and things.

For example we imagine that there is an observer, a self, that is peering out through the eyes at an objective world. The objective world is seen to consist of solid entities and objects each with their own inherent characteristics.

We reason to ourselves that if we close our eyes and open them again, we will again see similar shapes and colours. We then reason to ourselves that these shapes and colours are inherently present as the characteristics of objects regardless of whether we are present to observe the objects.

We fail to consider that for example, dogs see no colours, beings of other realms can see something different, and if we look at the quantum level we see mostly void. We fail to consider also that 'colours, shapes, and forms' are merely our visual experience arisen due to specific causes and conditions. There is no such thing as vision without colours, shapes, and forms. And there is no colours, shapes, and forms without vision. They are synonymous. In any case, they are simply

dependently arisen experiences. Our framework of there being an observer observing the world of objects are baseless, no such delineation can be found in our investigation. There is no seer that is seeing objects, nor objects that stay the same and exists apart from our observation of them. There is rather simply a wide array of appearances, which are dependently arisen but no solid entities can be posited or established whatsoever. Whatever object we investigate to see if they could be characteristics 'belonging' to truly existent objects are found to be more of the same hollow and substanceless, dependently arisen appearance, like an empty shell which only 'appears' but do not pertain to any true existence or core. Being dependently arisen, nothing whatsoever exhibits the characteristics of inherent existence - core-like, singular, partless, independent, unchanging. There are no objects behind the colours, shapes, forms that we experience moment to moment... nor a seer behind the seeing.

It is also not the case that objects pass through our field of awareness or experience. To say that "things arise in awareness" or "things arise from awareness" is fundamentally wrong already since it implies there is "things" that can arise and pass away within some unchanging "awareness", or FROM some ultimate source. But actually both "things" and "awareness" are merely conventions that point to a single self-luminous experience. In actuality there is no 'awareness' other than what is seen, heard, smell, taste, touched, thought, awareness is simply the self-aware, self-luminous quality of each experience, and there is no sight, sound, smell, ... etc that is not the self-luminous display of mind. In short, there is nothing apart from the suchness of every manifestation. And we also realize that there is no real origin (that appearances do not 'come from' somewhere, or come from a 'nowhere' or come from an ultimate Source or 'from awareness', but are merely dependently arisen), no real birth, no real place of abidance, no real destination or cessation (for what has never arisen). Language and thought falsely construes artificial dualities and pin down true existence of self and things. Framing our experience in these false constructs causes confusion, ignorance, clinging and suffering. Awareness is empty of any intrinsic identity - being merely a convention, like everything else are also conventionally designated without any substantial ground to be found.

Thusness: "The teachings of dependent origination, anatta, and emptiness do not require coming and going nor in and out. There is no what that comes from a where, it merely manifests when condition is. Neither is 'thought' inside, nor outside an 'entity'. It merely manifests and subsides into nowhere. This is the way it is. Empty of inherent essence".

...

Khenpo Tsultrim:

#### DEPENDENTLY ARISEN MERE APPEARANCES

Understanding these three stages of the Buddha's teachings highlights one of the main differences between the Middle Way view that Nagarjuna teaches and the view of nihilism. A nihilistic view would have a strong clinging to the notion of nonexistence, whereas in the third stage, the Middle Way explains that the nature of reality transcends both existence and nonexistence. A nihilistic view would also completely deny the existence of past and future lives, the law of cause and result, the rare and supreme Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, and so forth. The Middle Way does not fall into that extreme, however, because it does not deny that all these things—in fact all the outer and inner phenomena that compose samsara and nirvana exist as dependently arisen mere appearances. The best example to help us understand what this means is the moon that appears on the surface of a pool of water. When all the conditions of a full moon, a cloud-free sky, a clear lake, and a perceiver come together, a moon will vividly appear on the water's surface, but if just one condition is absent, it will not. Thus, the moon has no independent power to decide to appear—it appears in the water only in dependence upon the coming together of these causes and conditions. At the same time, it appears, however, it is just a mere appearance, because it is empty of true existence—not the slightest atom of a moon can be found anywhere in the water. Thus, the water-moon is a mere appearance of something that is not really there. In the same way, all the phenomena of samsara and nirvana appear due to the coming together of causes and conditions, and at the same time as they appear, precise knowledge (prajna) that analyzes their true nature cannot find the slightest trace of their actual existence. They are appearances that are empty of any substantial essence, just like water-moons, but just like water-moons, their emptiness of essence does not prevent them from appearing vividly when the proper causes and conditions come together. This is the truth of dependent arising, the union of appearance and emptiness that is the essence of the Middle Way view. It frees the Middle Way from the extreme of realism, because it does not superimpose true existence onto the nature of genuine reality where there is none, and from the extreme of nihilism, because it does not deny that things appear due to the coming together of causes and conditions.

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Loppon Namdrol/Malcolm:

"If you look at the Mulamadhyamakakarikas, if you look at all of the treatises of the great Madhyamika masters, you'll discover that the key thing they're all talking about, the view, is not emptiness! This is the big mistake that people have. They think, Buddhist view is emptiness. That's not true. The Buddhist view is non-arising, and that is the consequence of Dependent Origination.

For example, in the sutta nipata, there is an arahat who achieved final Nirvana. He passed away. And, someone goes to the Buddha and says, you know, where's that guy now? And the Buddha said, it is not appropriate to talk about the non-existence of something which has achieved cessation. There's nothing by which we can describe its non-existence. This is a really interesting thing, because you see, Nagarjuna said in the 15th chapter of the Mulamadhyamakakarika, he says, those that talk about existence, non-existence, inherent existence and dependent existence have not understood the truth of the Buddha's teachings.

If you can't find the existence or the non-existence of phenomenon, you have no other conclusions but to conclude that they don't arise. When you can be in that state of non-arising, you actually discover for yourself concretely, not left as an intellectual posture, then you have some freedom. Then you should start to become a little bit free from your emotional afflictions at that time. But if you think everything is just empty, then you're going to be a little frustrated. Because thinking that things are empty, and then (knocks the table) hitting something solid, these things are totally contradictory. But if you understand, first through analysis, then through meditative stability, and you have some confidence that everything is non-arising, doesn't mean that things don't appear...

I'll give you an example of something which never arose yet appears. Now, a lot of people they hear about illusionists in ancient India. Actually what these illusionists were... because then they say a mantra over some sticks and some clumps of mud and cloth, and then from that you see elephants and princes and warriors, and these kinds of things. For those people who live in Indonesia and nearby, who have been to Bali and seen like those Bali puppet shows, where you know the person sits behind the screen and they have those sticks, and they do the Ramayana and stuff like that... those illusionists are really properly speaking should be translated as puppeteers.



The point is, there is an appearance of a tiger for example, or the appearance of an elephant in a puppet show. And when you're there in a puppet show of course you'll believe it, why do you believe it? Well it's just like watching a movie, you're spontaneously suspending a disbelief. But for you, that tiger appears to arise, that elephant appears to arise. It appears to be there. But in reality, it never arose.

There was never a tiger in that place, there was never an elephant in that place, or a castle. You have to understand that this metaphor is how we can understand dependent origination.

Through the dependent origination of all these causes and conditions, we have these appearances which seem to arise. But when we examine them, we go to find them, we are like thirsty animals chasing a mirage of water. No matter how close we get to that mirage, still, there is nothing to drink. Ok, but there is an appearance. We couldn't say there wasn't an appearance, but did water arise there? No. Water never arose there. Ever. Not at any time.

So therefore we can understand, everything is just like that illusion.

Everything else is just like that mirage, that is what it means when we say, things never arose. We can't find them. They appear, true, I'm not saying that things don't appear, of course they appear. But what's their nature? Their nature is, they never arose. That's why in the tantras it say, Emaho, the secret of all perfect Buddhas is, Perfect Buddhas never arose. Everything never arose from the beginning, even arising never arose. I mean, this is a beautiful statement, honestly. So, if you understand this, if you have this understanding, then you have come to the limit of the view. You have nothing more to investigate. But you have to do the work yourself, you can't just listen to me waffle on about it, you have to do something concrete."

"If emptiness by nature is realized, understand that there is no birth in samsara."

So here he's saying that if you realize emptiness, this is freedom, this is liberation. 'Similar to a reflection in the mirror, understand that the nature of appearances is emptiness. Similar to a display seen in a dream, understand the nature of emptiness is appearance.' So maybe we explain this a little bit. 'Similar to a reflection in the mirror, understand that the nature of appearances is emptiness.' that means that the appearances in a mirror have no substances, they're unreal, just reflections. 'Similar to a display seen in a dream, understand the nature of emptiness is appearance.' A dream is empty, there's nothing there, but nonetheless

things appear in a dream. So this is how we understand it. They're the same metaphor but Jetsun Gyaltzen cleverly reverses them."

"Non-arising is the fundamental principle that Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings are trying to get us to understand. And so if you understand that everything is non-arising then you understand that birth, sickness, ageing and death never happened."

Continued:

"Manjusri said, 'Whatever has arisen in dependence, has in truth, not arisen at all.' So basically speaking, what we should understand is, and this by the way incidentally is why Buddha's teaching on dependent origination is the key factor, that differentiates it from other teachings. And emptiness for example that is not derived from understanding dependent origination will not be correctly understood emptiness. This is Really what Nagarjuna is trying to get across to people. If you don't understand emptiness based on dependent origination, you can have the word emptiness in your mouth, but it's going to be a conceptual emptiness. That conceptual emptiness if you meditate on it, that's going to result in rebirth in one of the formless ayatanas of 'everything is empty' because that is conceptual.

See a lot of people think that emptiness is the big teaching of the Buddha, but it's not. There were people before the Buddha that recognised there was emptiness, that is why we have the formless ayatana of 'everything is empty'. What is unique to the Buddha is understanding how to get to the view of emptiness without creating a throwing karma in meditation that will impel you into one of these formless ayatanas, one of these formless states where you stay hanging out for gazillions and millions of aeons until you exhaust the merits and then immediately fall into avici hell, where you stay for many more millions of aeons until you finally, slowly, work your way out."

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"If we observe thought and ask where does thought arise, how does it arise, what is 'thought' like. 'Thought' will reveal its nature is empty -- vividly present yet completely un-locatable. It is very important not to infer, think or conceptualise but feel with our entire being this 'ungraspability' and 'unlocatability'. It seems to reside 'somewhere' but there is no way to locate it. It is just an impression of somewhere "there" but never "there". Similarly "here-ness" and "now-ness" are merely

impressions formed by sensations, aggregates of causes and conditions, nothing inherently 'there'; equally empty like 'selfness'.

This ungraspable and unlocatable empty nature is not only peculiar to 'thought'. All experiences or sensations are like that -- vividly present yet insubstantial, ungraspable, spontaneous, un-locatable.

If we were to observe a red flower that is so vivid, clear and right in front us, the "redness" only appears to "belong" to the flower, it is in actuality not so. Vision of red does not arise in all animal species (dogs cannot perceive colours) nor is the "redness" an inherent attribute of the mind. If given a "quantum eyesight" to look into the atomic structure, there is similarly no attribute "redness" anywhere found, only almost complete space/void with no perceivable shapes and forms. Whatever appearances are dependently arisen, and hence is empty of any inherent existence or fixed attributes, shapes, form, or "redness" -- merely luminous yet empty, mere appearances without inherent/objective existence.

Likewise when standing in front of a burning fire pit, the entire phenomena of 'fire', the burning heat, the whole sensation of 'hotness' that are so vividly present and seem so real but when examined they are also not inherently "there" -- merely dependently manifest whenever conditions are there. It is amazing how dualistic and inherent views have caged seamless experience in a who-where-when construct.

All experiences are empty. They are like sky flowers, like painting on the surface of a pond. There is no way to point to a moment of experience and say this is 'in' and that is 'out'. All 'in' are as 'out'; to awareness seamless experience is all there is. It is not the mirror or pond that is important but that process of illusion-like phenomenon of the paint shimmering on the surface of the pond; like an illusion but not an illusion, like a dream but not a dream. This is the ground of all experiences.

Yet this 'ungraspability and unlocatability' nature is not all there is; there is also this Maha, this great without boundaries feeling of 'interconnectedness'. When someone hits a bell, the person, the stick, the bell, the vibration of the air, the ears and then the magically appearance of sound -- 'Tongsss...re-sounding...' is all a seamless one happening, one experience. When breathing, it is just this one whole entire breath; it is all causes and conditions coming together to give rise to this entire sensation of breath as if the whole of universe is doing this breathing. The

significance of this Maha experience is not in words; in my opinion, without this experience, there is no true experience of 'interconnectedness' and non-dual presence is incomplete.

The experience of our empty nature is a very different from that of non-dual oneness. 'Distance' for example is overcome in non-dual oneness by seeing through the illusory aspect of subject/object division and resulted in a one non-dual presence. It is seeing all as just 'This' but experiencing Emptiness breaks the boundary through its empty ungraspable and unlocatable nature.

There is no need for a 'where-place' or a 'when-time' or a 'who-I' when we penetrate deeply into this nature. When hearing sound, sound is neither 'in here' nor 'out there', it is where it is and gone! All centers and reference points dissolve with the wisdom that manifestation dependently originates and hence empty. The experience creates an "always right wherever and whenever is" sensation. A sensation of home everywhere though nowhere can be called home. Experiencing the emptiness nature of presence, a sincere practitioner becomes clear that indeed the non-dual presence is leaving a subtle mark; seeing its nature as empty, the last mark that solidifies experiences dissolves. It feels cool because presence is made more present and effortless. We then move from "vivid non-dual presence" into "though vividly and non-dually present, it is nothing real, empty!" - John Tan, 2009

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Consider for example, the simple act of smelling a rose. We see the rose, feel the rose, bring it close, breathe in through our nose. We "smell the rose," as we say, though this refers more to how we conceptualize our experience than it does to what is actually experienced. To say we smell a fragrance would be closer to the actual experience.

But where does the act of smelling a fragrance takes place? If we attend carefully, we can see that all of our usual accounts of the experience start to break down.

Is the fragrance in the rose? If it was, how could you smell it? You're here while the rose is "out there" somewhere. On the other hand, if the rose were removed, you surely wouldn't smell the fragrance. But if you were removed - or if the air in between you and the rose were removed - you also wouldn't smell it.

So is the fragrance in the rose? Is it in your nose? Is it in the air in between? Is it in the air if no one is around to smell it? If so, how could we tell? Is the fragrance in your brain, then? And if it's in your brain, then why is the rose necessary at all?

Ultimately, the simple act of "smelling a rose" - or any other act involving a subject and object - becomes impossible to pin down and utterly insubstantial.

Gradually, however, we can begin to appreciate what the experience of smelling a rose actually entails. It's of the nature of the mirror itself - that is, that the source of all experience is Mind. As such, the act of smelling - or seeing or hearing or touching or thinking - literally has no location. This non-locality is the very essence of Mind. – Zen Master Steve Hagen

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### [Emptiness/Chariot as Vivid Appearing Presence](#)

There seems to be different understandings, or phases of understandings, of emptiness. We can understand emptiness in a manner like 'weather', where weather is merely an imputation upon a collection of phenomena like rain falling, sun shining, and so on. But we can understand this in terms of the emptiness of the imputed label, leaving the collection, the aggregates, the very manifest vivid experience "un-emptied". Actually if we truly realized in direct realization how 'chariot' applies as vivid appearing presence, then that covers all. As John Tan told me before, "Don't keep thinking of aggregates as also empty, if you understand chariot is empty, what is not empty?" However the problem is that the aggregates do appear real unless we've had direct realization that the 'name-only' or 'empty' is actually vivid appearing presence.

The label or chariot that is empty is the vivid appearing presence, unfindable shimmering vivid like mirage.. not mental label. That vivid appearing presence is what is empty just like chariot is empty of itself. This means that one must be able to directly link "empty" with vivid appearances. Instead of empty as empty of essence, empty = vivid appearances.

If we think of a label "chariot" and then think "that labelled chariot is empty of essence", that is not directly experiencing chariot as vivid presence. If we think 'chariot/weather/etc' is empty because of this and that, it is still inferential analysis rather than direct realisation and actualization. However, when one realizes that chariot = vivid appearing presence, it is a direct experiential insight. Empty = this

vivid presence. All along it is trying to convey this taste and insight. But conceptually it is understood that way, empty of essence.

Like any object you see, a handphone, a table, a car, that vivid presencing is 'chariot' - is vivid unfindable appearing presence, hence there is no handphone.. pain is vivid appearing presence, hence there is no pain. The vividly presencing handphone is the chariot that appears and functions but is empty, the vividly presencing pain is the chariot. Being so, there is no chariot, no pain, no suffering, and all that negations in Heart Sutra. Heart Sutra even says, "No forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touchables or objects of mind".

But when we talk about the "no"s, there can have many meanings. What does the "no" as a negation mean? Certainly it is not referring to non-existence, which is an extreme. And we certainly do (conventionally) experience forms, sounds... and so on. Obviously anyone reading this is fully cognizant and conscious rather than an inert corpse or a piece of wood. I have seen new Heart Sutra translations that translate 'emptiness' into something like 'empty of independent existence', stressing on how all phenomena are empty of a separate, independent being, else they might be stressing on 'interdependence'. Although this seems to be a more explanatory and better understanding than 'nihilistic non-existence', I would say even that interpretative translation misses the mark, and hence John and I do prefer the more accurate and precise translations over the interpretive ones or those that take poetic liberties. Furthermore we may think that it is the mentally labelled entities that are empty of self-essence but then we fail to go beyond seeing emptiness on the level of constructs.

At the level of direct experiential insight, it is the very unfindability, ungraspability, referencelessness of empty-luminosity.. an appearing "absence". There is no weather not as in weather doesn't exist but is simply vivid empty appearing/presencing.. but it's not just the mentally labelled entity "weather" that is empty nor is it that weather doesn't exist but the very vivid empty appearing/presencing we call rain falling etc is nothing there, an appearing absence or vivid empty presencing like a rainbow or mirage or hologram. Emptiness is none other than form as it is precisely the appearing absence that is empty, is emptiness. Appearances are mere shimmerings of light-mirages.. it's just taste of empty presencing appearance. So the car I'm looking at, by being like a chariot and mere name is mere shimmering luminous light. It is to see that chariot = vivid appearing presence. Whatever's seen, heard, smelled, sensed, tasted and thought are

unfindable despite the clear display, just like chariot. We don't have to differentiate inherency and non-inherency, conceptual or non-conceptual. If you get used to it, whatever appears is just empty.

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form should be understood in this way... taste, see, and smell emptiness.

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### [Looking Straight at Appearance-Emptiness](#)

Eric wrote:

This begs the question 'What is discriminating supreme knowledge?'. How does one look straight at appearance-emptiness, sound-emptiness, and awareness-emptiness in order to be directly released?

Thank you for sharing, and I hope to hear a reply from you.

My reply:

First realise anatta. No thinker or seer besides self luminous thought, sight and sound. Subject action object is seen through like rain is seen through.

In that moment of immediate and nondual perception of manifestation

Look at its nature, where has that appearance come from? Does it come from somewhere? Does it come from itself? Does it arise causelessly? And if not, what is the mechanism that allows for the appearing of appearances? If what arises, arises via dependencies, does it have any existence of its own? Does it arise, abide or subside?

By investing in such a manner the nature of vivid mind/appearances becomes clear

Staring into at the reflection of my face on the screen

It is obvious the reflection on the screen is dependent on my eyes, the lights, and the movement of my hands

It is obvious that the reflection does not amount to a truly existing face being created or arising inside the iphone

It is obvious that none of these elements exist separately or independently

Even though each of these do not meet, they are intimately connected in a seamless movement or activity

None of these domains have an independent existence in and of its own

Each appearance, being nondual and luminously clear, the vivid reality/display of pure presence/luminous mind, is at once in seamless connection as a seamless activity with all (conditions) that is

And yet although I said the reflection is dependent on eye and so on

I do not mean that the conditions such as The Eye has an independent existence

We are used to thinking of causes and effects as pre existing things that can effect or cause something else to come into existence

In truth the principle of conditionality is not compatible with such flawed and common understandings of causation

For example, have we considered the fact that an eye is not an eye? Or that The Eye is empty of eye or eye-ness of eye? And likewise consciousness is empty of consciousness?

For an eye (or, visual consciousness) is dependently designated on the function of seeing

On the vividness of red colour of the rose

And the vividness of the red colour of the rose makes eyes what it is

For what we call eye is simply a convenient label for an organ that makes sight possible

And what is an eye if not for its function of seeing?



So whatever we defined such as an eye cannot be understood apart from the other conventions that make the convention “eye” meaningful

It is not an entity which exists in and of itself apart from the conditions, parts and functionalities and other conventions that defines it

Whatever we refer to, such as an eye, a rose, and so forth cannot be found or pinned down as an entity besides its parts, functionality, dependencies, appearances, designating consciousness

There is not a (truly existing) originating cause or condition of an effect

For the cause defines the effect and the effect defines the cause

Cause is not before and effect is not after

The cause is cause because the effect is effect

The Son makes the Father a Father, it's not that Father came first before Son, in the act of co-dependent origination, no originator nor origination can be found

nothing has truly originated, arisen, been created, nor is there a creator in an appearance and no true cause or condition can be found to exist in and of its own

Whatever appearance we encounter, meet, is a seamlessly (dependently originating) originating non-originated appearance

Just like reflections, mirages, dreams, nothing truly existing can be found in the reflections

Like a reflection, nothing truly arising (coming into existence) could be found despite the moon vividly showing on the surface of the lake

Neither the reflection of the moon nor the moon in the sky could be found to exist in and of itself apart from all the conditions, functions, and dependent designations that define it

None of them infers an entity that is created or arising anywhere Nor a “that which

originates”

Vivid appearances ceaselessly manifest without amounting to something arising, abiding or ceasing

Like painting on the surface of the lake with your fingers, vividly appearing yet not leaving traces

Like the endless stream of images dependently originating with the fingers scrolling on the screen of this iPhone through Facebook, not ever amounting to something truly arising, coming into being, abiding somewhere and going somewhere. No cat has come from the top and left from the bottom of the screen on your iPhone nor exist inside your iPhone. It does not come into existence of its own accord and cannot be separated from your act of seeing it.

What does not arise from other, from itself, nor causelessly, does not truly arise or come into being. They are like reflections, mirages and dreams. Vividly present yet absent, and the whole field of experience is equal to empty space, not in the sense that nothing is seen but nothing is tangible, nothing seen or heard actually amounts to “something”.

Wisdom arise by getting acquainted with right view through learning and meditative contemplation, and it will be counter productive to fall into seeking a state of non conceptuality. Yet when the wisdom of the nature of appearance arises.. there is no longer a need to conceptualise emptiness and instead one simply rests in the flow of empty clarity in vivid appearance. Dependently originating appearance arises as unborn wisdom

...

“Dependent Formation, No Coming and Going, Release

Just like a movie, appearances are dependently originating as formation like burning flames and bubbles without anything coming or going, completely essenceless. Appearances are completely empty and non arising by nature. Seeing this alone liberates. There is no persisting Essence or self/Self anywhere, only dependent formations. Nothing is there, void of substance yet appearing like flames and bubbles. As with a movie, any sense of something or someone coming from here or going there is wrong. It is because we fail to see the nature of dharma

(phenomena) as dependent formation that we conceive of phenomena as having essences, as having a life of their own, that could come and go, arise, abide and cease on its own. Has the burning flame came from somewhere, arise, abide, and cease, or is merely an empty dependent formation? You may not attribute some essence to characters in the movie coming from somewhere and going somewhere, but you attribute this to things and persons in “real life”. Rather see that all phenomena are like burning flame or bubble that manifest on conditions and cease upon cessation or conditions but without anything coming or going, arising or ceasing. If you try to find where they abide, where they go and come from, nothing whatsoever can be found. Appearing but nothing “there”.

Do you say the flame has some Essence that has gone somewhere else when ceased? Do you say some Essence has arrived from somewhere when fire starts burning? No, just dependent formations. All afflictive and non afflictive phenomena roll on in dependence without a persisting essence, agent, or medium. Yet based on yesterday's events, certain thoughts or actions take place today, as the continuity of the chain of dependencies. Still it is dependent formation, no self/Self involved.

Clinging and afflictions subside in actualizing this as there cannot be any sort of grasping at what is completely without Essence or self-existence. But this liberation does not come from the illusion-like experience but from the complete release of any notion of Essence.. the taste is illusion like but it is the release of Essence that is liberating. Just like it is not the experience of PCE/pure consciousness experience or a state of no-mind (which can simply be peak experiences) that liberates but the release of self/Self from realization of anatta that is liberating.

Seeing this requires us to see the right relationship between experience, view and realization, and not skewing to one aspect.” - Soh, 2019

### ~ Eight Similes of Illusion

The eight similes of illusion (Tib. ལྷུ་མཐི་དཔེ་བརྒྱུད་, *gyumé pé gyé*, [Wyl. sgyu ma'i dpe brgyad](#)) are (in the order in which they appear in [Longchenpa's \*Finding Comfort and Ease in the Illusoriness of Things\*](#)):

1. Dream: like a dream, objects perceived with the five senses are not there, but they appear through delusion

2. Magical illusion: like a magic illusion, things are made to appear due to the temporary coming together of causes and conditions
3. Hallucination or *trompe-l'oeil*: like a hallucination, things appear, yet there is nothing there
4. Mirage: like a mirage, things appear, but they are not real
5. Echo: like an echo, things can be perceived, but there is nothing there, either inside or outside
6. City of [gandharvas](#): like a city of gandharvas, there is neither a dwelling nor anyone to dwell
7. Reflection: like a reflection, things appear, but have no reality of their own
8. Apparition: like an apparition, there are different types of appearances, but they are not really there"

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/09/freedom-from-elaborations-non.html>

August 9, 2023:

John Tan: I suggest u look into DO, emptiness and understand the non-contradiction between free from all elaborations and DO-emptiness of the conventional.

It is not easy to understand functioning in the non-essential way of manifestations.

Even if one is clear of how the mind confuses itself with essential view in terms reification of entities-characteristics, it does not mean one can understand how empty radiance functions in the non-essential way.

This requires not only stable insights but also very stable authentication of energy and radiance patterns -- that the natural expressions of empty radiance exhibits certain patterns.

John Tan: For example, u think it is so easy to come out the 12 afflictive chain of DO?

John Tan: This requires very stable insight and radiance experience and observe how a mind in confusion sets the wheel of samsara in action.

John Tan: Do u think it is so easy to point out consciousness and phenomena are like the 8 similes of illusions? Or despite vivid appearances, there is nothing that is "there" at all, no "thingness" can be found at all and because of this empty nature, whole of samsara as well of the immense diversities of radiance can manifest? How skillful is it in that pointing? Yet we just simply read pass such profound pointing.

.....

John Tan: Yes and even micro and macro cosmic orbit breathing of taoism. But one doesn't need to know all or suddenly change path.

De-construction of mental constructions and conceptualities for example is a very effective way until one releases itself in openness of radiance clarity.

Every de-construction of reification is energy-related, it is a full path itself also just that we do not carry it all the way.

.....

John Tan: For example, as we let go reifications into presence, it is not something just "mental", it is equally "physical"; it is not just "mind", it is equally "body", "breath" and "energies".

When we alternately experience total exertion and freedom from elaborations, the seamlessness and intimacies without self and inherentness of empty parts allow deeper insights of the non-essential (empty) radiance. Then it allows us to glimpse the non-contradiction between the ultimate and relative.

John Tan: Then we slowly have a deep understanding of the "conventional" and "conceptual" not only from mental perspective like arm-chair philosophers, but we "SEE and TASTE" dimensions of energies, radiances, "physicalities" in these so called "conventional concepts". So when we say they r only "conceptually" designated, the depth of understanding is different.

John Tan: "Self" for example, is not just a conceptual construct, it is also at the same time immense energies "stuck" in conflicts manifested everywhere in our body. 🤔👉

**~ Total Exertion and Maha (+A)**

In earlier writings, John Tan used Maha as a descriptor and in latter writings he used both “Maha” and “Total Exertion”, but what they are describing is the same. Maha is a Sanskrit word that means “great”, which you can understand as infinite vastness without boundaries. In the experience of Maha/total exertion, there is the experience that the centerless and boundless infinitude of the universe, i.e. all conditions of the ten directions (spatial) and three times (temporal), are exerting even a simple activity of breathing, eating and walking. Upon the maturing of insights even after anatta realization, as John Tan wrote in 2009, that Maha must become a natural state. It should be your persisting baseline experience, without which the anatta experience and insight has not fully matured.”

“The Maha experience that I share with longchen [Sim Pern Chong] is very important. After the maturing of non-dual experience, this greatness without boundaries and universe doing the work is also understood as part of the natural state.” - John Tan, 2009

Watch these two very good videos by A. H. Almaas which describes total exertion:  
<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/01/ahalmaas.html>

...

“Maha means great without boundaries. When I use the term ‘Maha’, I am expressing an experience of that immensity... what causes or what are the conditions that trigger ‘maha’?

1. Samadhi in a prolonged period of oneness
2. Total exertion where one feels so immensely connected with everything
3. A prolonged period of non-dual experience where the boundaries of subject and object dissolves
4. Non-doership into action

In whatever cases, the sense of self drops and evaporates. But how the sense of self drops is the question. Is it a form of insight like anatta or is it an experience or a particular state?” - John Tan, 2019

...

"Six stream experiences is just a convenient raft. Nothing ultimate. Not only must you see that there is no Seer + seeing + seen... you must see the immense connectedness." - John Tan, 2012

...

"Therefore To study the mind is to study the myriad forms. To study the myriad forms is to study the dependently originated appearance at this instantaneous moment. To study this instantaneous moment is to understand the full exertion of the 'interconnected universe' and this full exertion is expressed without reservation as this vivid moment of arising sound...this breath...this passing thought...this obviously clear scenery...

and

Instantly Gone!" - John Tan, 2011,

[http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2011/03/realization-experience-and-right-view\\_13.html](http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2011/03/realization-experience-and-right-view_13.html)

~ The Practice of No Cold or Heat vs Total Exertion

"What you lack now is feel with the entire body mind until body-mind is entirely forgotten, deconstructed and enter into total exertion all things. There is neither you, body, mind, environment nor super awareness... just fully open up and experience the Beauty of this total exertion of suchness non dually. No body, mind, self can still remain at pure awareness level. The measurement is to total giving up so that the experience of how immensely is this web of interpenetration is experienced as this moment of arising is important. You need to practice with the view in mind to see the interconnection, not non-conceptuality of whatever arises.

There are two practices, one is feel the intensity of this moment of arise till there is no mind, body, self... directly right into the place where there is no heat or cold, the intensity of our luminous essence. The other is holding the view in mind till body, mind, self, universe is being deconstructed in this immense interconnectedness. They are different, yet both practices are equally important. One is total non conceptuality, one is full integration of the view interconnectedness. In non conceptuality of in hearing, just sound...there is no mind, no self, no hearer, just this sound. This universe is filled with the arising sound... Clear vivid and non-dual...

you practice the intensity of luminous essence. But hearing sound, deep in you, you see the empty nature of arise, you see the stick, the drum, the eardrums, the sound ... This requires view... And not non conceptuality. If you continue to see this perpetually, then the mind, body, universe construct will also be dissolved and experience turn maha and dimensionless. Get it?"

...

"Without concepts, experience is naturally present and luminous is not exactly true imo.

We can stop conceptualization or even have many episodes of sustained non-conceptual non-dual or no mind experiences, still intellectual obscurations of seeing entities, entity possessing characteristics, cause and effect, agent and movement... etc continue to haunt us. Non-analytical cessation is temporary.

So the freedom from conceptualization cannot simply be a stopping of "conceptualization", a clear insight that sees through the emptiness of conventional constructs must arise.

Although the insight results in non-conceptuality, it also recognizes the cause of obstructedness is ignorance that obscures and blinds, not designations and constructs.

When contemplating DO (though conceptual), not only does the sense of self not arise, it replaces self view. Non-conceptual resting is too a means to an end. The end is not a non-conceptual luminous state but the complete uprooting of ignorance.

Therefore when Dogen rolls the boat in total exertion, there are concepts, designations and conventions but there is no sense of self, no sense of boundaries, no sense of obstructedness between the sky, the boat, the oar and the sea...all inter-penetrate beyond their conventional boundaries into the act of rolling." – John Tan, 2020

...

John Tan: When Dogen row the boat, can you feel the total exertion? When Buddha walk, can you feel the total exertion? When you hear someone describe immense connectivity and interconnectedness, can you feel total exertion?



Soh Wei Yu: yeah seamlessly connected.. just like dogen rowing the boat makes boat what it is, dogen, boat, rowing the boat are a seamless exertion.. so reading dogen now, and dogen rowing the boat is a seamlessly connected exertion.. lol dunno how to describe

John Tan: Seamless exertion into what?

Soh Wei Yu: this very presencing or whatever is appearing

John Tan: No good. Into the act of rowing

Soh Wei Yu: oic..

John Tan: What appears in presence. But that is not the question. I am asking you about total exertion. Do you need conventions and concepts? If there are no concepts and conventions, can you feel this total exertion? If you are free from concepts and conventions, can there be emptiness? Or all those illusion that you are talking about? You are too worried to be non-conceptuality and can't see anything. So tell me are there conventions or just plain pure experience?

Soh Wei Yu: total exertion depends on seeing that all those conventional phenomena are intimately linked in seamless exertion.. but those conventions are not seen as separate and independent. means you are not denying boat or rowing or dogen.. yet they are all exerting seamlessly in rowing

John Tan: Is there a sense of self? In total exertion?

Soh Wei Yu: not as a separate, distinct, independent entity.. but depending on circumstance they can arise as thoughts and concerns or energy of grasping

John Tan: In total exertion do you have energy of grasping?

Soh Wei Yu: in fully experiencing total exertion no

John Tan: So no sense of self, but feel sense of immense connectivity? Only when you what?

Soh Wei Yu: you see the dependencies and emptiness of those conventional phenomena and self.. means they are all dissolved into the act of rowing

John Tan: You are not investing into your experience again. What emptiness

John Tan: When in total exertion, you look into the conditions of the origination

Soh Wei Yu: as in those conventional phenomena are empty of being independent, separate existences.. they are intimately connected

John Tan: It is the immense web of linkings that give rise to the experience

Soh Wei Yu: oic..

John Tan: Like the chariot, it is at the other side of the equation. When you look at this moment of experience in a state of no self, you realize the immensity of the conditions right?

Soh Wei Yu: yeah

John Tan: So when you want to practice the chariot I am talking about...don't just focus on the empty aspect...

John Tan: Is there a need to relate chariot as dependent on its parts to talk about emptiness? Why do you need to talk about chariot as dependent on its parts at all? not just what appears is empty?

Soh Wei Yu: its conveying that whatever appears although empty of findable essence is the total exertion of all the immense conditions

John Tan: It is conveying all you need to know and understand. It is conveying emptiness. Conveying spontaneous presence. Conveying dependent origination is not a cause-effect relationship as we understand. Conveying origination in dependence

John Tan: To me, post anatta, all these must be experienced and understood.

...

I have told you about the disease of non conceptuality, you need to seek a balance. Otherwise it will limit your progress into phase 6 and especially 7. View must be fully integrated into your practice for you to understand what the maha experience is

Many do not understand the implication of right view yet. You do not go non conceptual and realize the maha experience of suchness.

It also requires to penetrate into DO by deeper investigation of the nature of experience. Where does sound go? Is there a "going, coming", is there a "here and there" of sound, is there a voidness where sound return to? Then what does it

mean by "no going anywhere" and seeing DO. Then we begin to understand the view of activities and actions and when we see everywhere the seamless integration and total exertions, then maha experience will become more and more obvious and effortless. At this phase there is no self, no dual... All these are already implied... They are the content of emptiness.

You should look at few aspects:

1. Seeing inherent object as a mere convention collating... If a practitioner keeps penetrating whatever arises this way, experience will turn groundless and illusion-like
2. Seeing clearly in non dual mode but deep in us realize that this is merely a dependent originated manifestation, nothing ultimate and solidly real
3. You see "no going, no coming, no here, no there" and penetrate deeply into the seamless interpenetration of activities leading to the maha experience

Until this empty nature of whatever arises is intuited in our moment to moment of experience, you can then feel the total exertion and self liberating aspect of experience." - John Tan, 2012

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"There are few conditions to experience maha as a ground [state] (Soh: means effortlessly experienced in all situations as always already so):

1. Mature in non-dual experience
2. DO (dependent origination)
3. Experience and understand that 'interconnectedness' is the universe itself

Then 'self' and even non dual becomes quite irrelevant. In fact now presence is not understand as non-dual to me, but as dependent origination, where non-dual is already included" - John Tan, 2009

...

"Also in between "seeing the Ocean as extra" to directly experiencing the "total exertion in the ceaselessness of this ongoing activity", a process of maturing the insight of anatta is necessary. By maturing I am referring to the ending of any reification of mind-objects be it "Self/self", "here/now", "mind", "body", "weather"... -

- there is no "Self/self", only changing aggregates; no "body", only changing sensations; no "here and now" besides changing phenomena; no "weather" besides changing clouds, rain and sun shines. If this insight can be thoroughly extended to whatever arises then the interconnectedness and total exertion of this moment will become clear and obvious. So much so that when eating an apple, the universe tastes it! -- the full exertion of the apple, the hand, the taste, the throat, the stomach, the everything of everything is completely transcended into this simple action of suchness where nothing is excluded. Here again, do take note that this "total exertion" is not the result of being fully concentrated; it is the natural outcome when practitioners have adequately embraced the 'view' of 2 fold emptiness." - John Tan, 2011,

[http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2011/03/realization-experience-and-right-view\\_13.html](http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2011/03/realization-experience-and-right-view_13.html)

...

"And this is the whole purpose of anatta. To thoroughly see through that this background does not exist in actuality. What exists is a stream, action or karma. There is no doer or anything being done, there is only doing; No meditator nor meditation, only meditating. From a letting go perspective, "a watcher watching thought" will create the impression that a watcher is allowing thoughts to arise and subside while itself being unaffected. This is an illusion; it is 'holding' in disguise as 'letting go'. When we realized that there is no background from start, reality will present itself as one whole letting go. With practice, 'intention' dwindles with the maturing of insight and 'doing' will be gradually experienced as mere spontaneous happening as if universe is doing the work. With the some pointers from 'dependent origination', we can then penetrate further to see this happening as a sheer expression of everything interacting with everything coming into being. In fact, if we do not reify 'universe', it is just that -- an expression of interdependent arising that is just right wherever and whenever is.

Understanding this, practice is simply opening to whatever is.

For this mere happening is just right wherever and whenever is.

Though no place can be called home it is everywhere home.

When experience matures in the practice of great ease,  
The experience is Maha! Great, miraculous and bliss.  
In mundane activities of seeing, eating and tasting,  
When expressed poetically is as if the entire universe meditating.

Whatever said and expressed are really all different flavors,  
Of this everything of everything dependently originating,  
As this moment of vivid shimmering.” - John Tan, 2009

...

“If we were to breathe in and out, in and out...till there is simply this entire sensation of breath, just breath as all causes and conditions coming into this moment of manifestation.

If we were to focus on the sensation of stepping, the sensation of hardness, just the sensation of the hardness, till there is simply this entire sensation ‘hardness’ when the feet touches the ground, just this ‘hardness’ as all causes and conditions coming into this moment of manifestation.

If we were to focus on hearing someone hitting a bell, the stick, the bell, the vibration of the air, the ears all coming together for this sensation of sound to arise, we will have Maha experience.

However ever since incorporating the teaching of dependent origination into non-dual presence, over the years it has become more ‘accessible’ but never has this been understood as a ground state. There seems to be a predictable relationship of seeing interdependent arising and emptiness on the experience of non-dual presence.

A week ago, the clear experience of Maha dawned and became quite effortless and at the same time there is a direct realization that it is also a natural state. In Sunyata, Maha is natural and must be fully factored into the path of experiencing whatever arises. Nevertheless Maha as a ground state requires the maturing of non-dual experience; we cannot feel entirely as the interconnectedness of

everything coming spontaneously into being as this moment of vivid manifestation with a divided mind." - John Tan, 2009

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<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/06/a-discussion-about-ignorance-views-post.html>

Soh Wei Yu: The tendency to be nonconceptual is very ingrained not just after anatta, but even after I AM. It is a non conceptual and non-dual realization and taste of luminosity that is wonderful and blissful, but not necessarily liberating. But what happens after I AM? One always try to remain non conceptual, thoughtless, samadhi in pure beingness... while the views of duality and inherency of an ultimate Self, Source, Substratum remains uninvestigated and unchallenged. Insight into non dual and anatta does not arise until one actively engages in investigating one's views and concepts and penetrate further into the nature of reality.

Likewise, even after anatta, by getting stuck with PCE one does not investigate into dependent origination and emptiness, then all the uninvestigated views of inherency still remain in full force but are either unrecognised or taken as true (like AF) or merely suppressed in a nonconceptual state.

I used to think why the need to engage in conceptual conditionality etc.. prefer to rest in anatta non-conceptuality. Nowadays I know total exertion is triggered by contemplating on the conceptual conditional relations.. but its not an issue to me. More important is seeing dependent origination and then into total exertion and emptiness. Then one is liberated be it conceptual or non-conceptual. It's more important to experience release and taste of total exertion and emptiness be it in conceptual and nonconceptual.. rather than getting confused in conceptual and then seeking refuge in nonconceptual.

However, I believe total exertion can also remain a mere nonconceptual experience, in the sense of mere infinitude, taste of maha... this is the AF sort of total exertion but this fails to see the dependencies involved... and because one doesn't see dependencies one ends up in a very solid physical view of universe, everything is local, existing inherently in specific space time as objects and properties

June 10, 2020:

John Tan: Total exertion cannot be merely non-conceptual

Soh Wei Yu: so AF type of total exertion is conceptual?

Soh Wei Yu: they dont seem to contemplate D.O

Soh Wei Yu: they only describe it as the dissolution of self/Self to the extent of permanently experiencing the infinitude of the universe

John Tan: It is conceptual but the experience is immense

John Tan: What give rise to that?

Soh Wei Yu: for me, dependent origination... for AF i dunno lol, more like self immolation and seeing the nonseparation of themselves with the infinite universe

John Tan: Total exertion is not restricted to time also

Soh Wei Yu: vineeto described her total exertion as three stages, first she had glimpses of infinite space, then she had permanent experience of infinite space, and then finally she had permanent experience of infinite time

Soh Wei Yu: for me contemplating the relation of events to past can also trigger total exertion of three times.. totally exerting in this thought or activity

John Tan: Hale describes abt total exertion b4...his experience beyond time and space linking back centuries like guru yoga...like I told you b4

Soh Wei Yu: i also had glimpses of that

John Tan: Yeah

Soh Wei Yu: in 10 June 2019 vineeto criticised those who only attained 'basically free' AF and unable to breakthrough to 'fully free' AF... by claiming they are socially conditioned with various beliefs and conditionings, including, belief in 'Reincarnation in lieu of experiencing that the very stuff we are made of is as old as the universe'

Soh Wei Yu: lol

Soh Wei Yu: <http://actualfreedom.com.au/actualism/actualvineeto/alan.htm>

Soh Wei Yu: but i see no issue with total exertion and rebirth

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"Now Appearing: Everything, EveryWhere, and EveryWhen. Ta-Da

In addition to the paradigm-shifting realization that there was no separate me to carry around containers called 'memories', 'hurts', 'accomplishments', or 'regrets', there were two more shifts I wanted to tell you about, dear reader. Why do I feel the need to document it? I'm not certain. It feels like it's time to let folks know what's happened here, especially those seekers who've come to me for pointers on anatta realization. I mean, this whole business of guiding people, whether for money or on a volunteer basis, is just pretty weird when viewed from a conventional perspective. Where are the credentials? At any rate, I'll tell you about a second shift. It had everything to do with the Bahiya Sutta and contemplation of each line. I'd been reading Soh Wei Yu's AwakeningtoReality blog and followed a rabbit trail of links to Alex Weith's journal on his own progress in working with the sutta. (I've since been unable to find the journal). In addition, I'd continued reading on in Wei Yu's blog, especially the sections where he'd gotten into ideas about realizing emptiness and interdependence.... although at the time I didn't realize it was called emptiness.

The story: Relaxing by the side of a pool, I read and contemplated for hours, then glanced up to notice a snail sitting on the very edge of the lip, the place where water in motion rolls into a very sudden interruption, causing a wave. The snail seemed, in my mind anyway, to be struggling against what must have seemed like a relentless series of tsunamis. He teetered on the edge, each moment threatening to send him into the depths. (that's three feet of water to you and me). When I looked across to pool to find the source of this epic disturbance, I saw a woman sporting a sublime but bright smile brought about from basking in the glow of Sunshine and Saturdays. Despite her generous size, she appeared to delicately occupy her perch at the deep end. Thoroughly enjoy her afternoon, she lazily and delicately swished her feet back and forth, then sighed. It was then that the thunder of interdependence struck. Like some sort of special effects movie, I 'saw', all at once, the woman, the water, the sun, the breeze, the weather, her parents, her grandparents and ancestors, the earth, the universe. And from the other end of the spectrum there was the snail, his ever-growing shell, and every movement that had led him to the moment of finding himself at his poolside ledge. Then there was the pool, the workers who'd constructed it, the water which filled it, and the rain and evaporation that moved the water. Everywhere I looked, Everything appeared. For lack of a better way to express this, what I saw could be expressed as a complete and whole view of anything at all that ever existed. Not only that, but that it had to



exist PRECISELY as it had in order for this very moment to be as it was. Ta-Da. It would increasingly come to me that this is seen not just in that moment, but all the time, everywhere, and in every 'thing'. Total exertion, and I do mean Total, is what This is. The simultaneous complexity and simplicity of this is absolutely mind blowing in the best sort of sense. What's more, it's not static and not inherent. It's what it appears to be right now, but not a thing there at all. Forget the nihilistic teachings that say there are no things for a second and just look at the experience of what appears. The Total Exertion still applies. That this blog post is being typed is It. The whole shebang. It's the appearance that contains the appearances of 'my entire history' which includes the history of existence. That it's being read by a you is the whole thing too. Everything that is normally thought of as "YOU" is right here. This also means that EveryWhen and EveryWhere is appearing too. Very much like examining a fractal, zoom in at any point, and it's All there. Amazing, isn't it?" - Delma McConnell, 2014

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<https://www.facebook.com/groups/546474355949572/posts/659893007941039/>

Dr. Angelo Dilullo:

Talking with a friend recently about the more profound states of realization. She commented, "The clarity is unbelievable, it's like seeing the entire ocean from the surface."

This is very good analogy. I'd like to add:

Yes it is like seeing to the bottom from the surface...

And at the same time seeing the surface from the bottom.

It is also seeing the entirety of the ocean from the point of view of one single water molecule—one single molecule AS the whole ocean.

It is also seeing the entirety of the ocean from the point of view of EVERY SINGLE water molecule in the ocean.

Also seeing that the interplay of all aspects of view described above and recognizing that this interplay is what actually creates the possibility of "experiencing" all of the aspects or views.

I used quotation marks above because what I mean by experience here is not limited to the conventional sense of experience (subject/object), which is made possible by the amazing mechanism of mind called consciousness or reflective capacity.

Here by experience I mean DIRECT experience which is phenomena self-experiencing (color sees, sound hears). This is non-dual, meaning without the artificial subject/object split that appears through the inflection of sensory phenomena through consciousness.

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It is also seeing that the ocean isn't actually there at all.

Also seeing that the not-there-at-all-ness appearing as the ocean and all of the aspects, IS the isolated molecule of water that doesn't know that it is the ocean or is even able to recognize the nature of the molecules around it.

This last portion is the deeper meaning of Dogen's "When one side is illuminated, the other side is dark."

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Excerpts from <https://www.amazon.com/Awake-Your-Turn-Angelo-Dilullo/dp/1737212323> by Dr. Angelo Dillulo:

One day while you are pondering the depths of the reflective surface (still not realizing that this is a pond), it hits you . . . the fundamental question! "If all of this is reflective nature, what in the world is it that is *being reflected?*" The very possibility that there might be something more than this reflection, which contains all possible conformations of light, while perfectly accommodating darkness, shakes you to your very core. You sense things stirring in places far beyond your limits of perception and even beyond your physical incarnation in this lifetime. You know instinctually that your experience of reality is about to change in fundamental and mysterious ways. A sublime, paradoxical, and radical shift is at hand.

The moment you recognize that with a reflection there must also be that which is being reflected, you turn your gaze away from the surface of the pond for the first time. You had never before had the capacity to recognize that the reflective surface—with all of its mystery, profundity, and splendor—was still only an exceedingly small and fleeting part of what is actually occurring. Now as you gaze

upon the actual world for the first time, there is a quantum leap in depth and realness of all textures and experiences. Everything is radiantly alive and interconnected, and there is a paradoxical immediate and complete dissolution of distance, time, and experiencer/experience split. This vivid, experience-less reality goes far beyond anything you'd encountered when you believed the universe was contained in that reflection. The radiant brilliance and radical intimacy of all phenomena is dazzling beyond compare.

This "new" world functions quite differently than the reflective surface and all of its expressions of light and darkness. When the reflective surface was perceived to be the whole of reality, there was clearly a continuity of some sort, a set of natural laws that seemed to govern all experience. The sense that there was a world or a container of experience, sort of like a substratum, and a perceiving entity navigating that world, seemed like just the way things had to be. Now it's clear that the seeming substratum that contained the dark and the light doesn't exist on its own in this reality. It is seen to have always been part of the intimate textures of zero-distance experience. With that recognition, the phenomena themselves take on a new degree of integrity, clarity, and perfection. When there is no relational matrix, every discreet phenomenon is naturally expanded to infinite significance.

In this world of the actual, there is also a notable absence of another characteristic that seemed quite inherent to the reflective world. Even though the reflective world seemed to offer tremendous variation in experiences, events, and objects, it carried with it a certain intrinsic weight that had gone unnoticed. This unnoticed burden, somewhat like a tether or an anchor, was impossible to appreciate until it was finally released by looking away from the reflection. This tether, this weight, was the sense that this was all somehow happening to, or for a central character (earlier) or a universal awareness (later), called, "*me*." All the time that that sense of a discreet self was there, it had felt like something that needed to be upheld and defended. Now it becomes exquisitely obvious that it was never an actual thing, and that trying to constantly reconstruct, define, and defend that artificial construct had caused a nearly constant sense of isolation, doubt, and lack. Now that has all come to an end. The restraints of doubt are nowhere to be found. Reality moves, creates, and dissolves effortlessly, displaying the full spectrum of its potential.

As you gaze upon the trees, the stars, and the moon, it's exquisitely clear that *there are only the trees, the stars, and the moon*. The profundity of this cannot be described, even to yourself. This gets exceedingly difficult to talk about, and even

the pond analogy really begins to break down here. This is because when we start to ask, “Then what is it that is being reflected?” it is like asking, “What is reality *like* when the paradigm of identity that interfaces with reality has completely disappeared?” or “What is actually here when we don’t take reference from reflective consciousness as to how reality is experienced?” The salient feature that occurs at this stage is a dissolving of the paradigm of identity altogether. It is dissolved at the intellectual, emotional, and instinctual level.

Let’s investigate exactly how and why the pond analogy breaks down here. This will help to make the transition into describing how this stage of realization plays out for the individual. In the pond analogy, it would seem that the moment we turn away from the pond, we see a vast world of objects arranged in three-dimensional space, and the person who turned away from the pond can now go navigate that world. In the actuality of realization, it’s not like that. It’s more like the moment the person standing on the shore turns to the world of the actual, that person ceases to exist. The whole experience of being a someone looking at this and looking at that, trying to figure it all out and having the experience of being someone experiencing an evolution of insight and understanding (awakening) was fundamentally in error. Now when they turn to the world of the real, they were simply never there to begin with. Now there is *only* the real with nothing standing apart from it to observe it. There was only *ever* the real! You could say that now you experience yourself as everything, but importantly there is no “yourself” so there is just everything. That everything is crisp, vivid, undeniable, and has no apart-ness to it. The reflective nature of consciousness (self-referencing) made things appear as if there was a noticer and that which was noticed, a person and a life that person was living, objects out there and a subject here, navigating those objects. This ranges in scale from the macro (life events, beliefs, time, and space) down to the discrete (a single sound, sensation, shape, taste, or smell).

In realization this is what I refer to as liberation. It can happen suddenly, and it can happen gradually, but the relational (reflective) framework of experience we perceive that creates the illusion of separation subsides. Technically, this is the end of the entanglement with consciousness that was creating the sense of a discrete self apart from the world. Now when there is sound, there is *only* sound—pristine, complete, and all-pervasive. When there is a color or a shape, there is *only* that color, only that shape—impossibly vivid and not apart from anything. There are

only trees, with no observer. There are only stars, with no one watching them. There is only the moon, with no one gazing upon it.

The awareness of the dazzling dance of color has collapsed into the colors themselves. Color does the seeing. Sound does the hearing. Sensation does the feeling; sensation *is* the feeling. With this collapse of the seeing into the colors, the feeler into the sensations, and the thinker into the thought, there is also a collapse of the individual into *everything*. This is somewhat like a self-propagating and self-dissolving cloud of radiant and pure (no experiencer) experience. Whether it's a car, the hum of a fan, or a voice, there is no one hearing it; the hearing is intrinsic to the sound. The experiencer has fully collapsed onto the experience, and it is seen that this is the natural way. There is no longer the possibility to "stand apart and observe" as seemed to be happening before. Instead, the sense of observing is seen to have been a simple misreading of the nature of reflective consciousness. Consciousness doesn't have to go away; it is simply experienced as another vivid no-distance sense. There is no inside and there is no outside. There is no other possibility, as every possibility is playing out effortlessly as the Universe coming into being and dissolving *as* each discreet quanta of sense phenomena, each movement, each expression of radiance. That sound is completeness itself and it is not apart from, or essentially different from, all of existence. Those colors and shapes are not other than the observer, and their radiance and clarity are exquisite and without equal. That one bodily sensation fills up the Universe and dissolves instantaneously.

There is no substratum here. There is no background or foreground. Nothing is held; everything is just on time, and also not in time. There is no timeline. Nothing is moving from moment to moment. There aren't even moments. This is the only moment and thus there is no need to call it a moment. It is not a point in time; it is *every* point in time, always right here. Timelessness is intuited to be simply the way it is. Eternity is no big deal because it simply and obviously *is*. There is nothing acting against anything else. This struggle is over. There is wholeness in discrete experiences, yet nothing is carried out of those experiences.

There is one more "aspect" to this realization that is probably the most bizarre of all and inherently impossible to fully relate, but it is intrinsic to this world of the actual. It can be related in one simple statement:

*There is no way that things actually are.*

I have no idea how that comes across as you read it. I can imagine it could trigger some sense of confusion, fear, or helplessness. However, in actual experience, it is just obvious and wonderful beyond compare. It may also sound impossible or somewhat like an oxymoron. Yet in this bizarre world of no self apart from anything, there is also no view or frame of reference inherent to reality. A different way of saying this is that reality, as self-experiencing, radiant phenomena, has no location or boundary, and also no absolute or essential nature. Still another way of saying this is that there is infinite degree freedom. Reality is like a magician that can do anything, including being nothing at all. It can do seemingly contradictory things simultaneously. It can stop being any certain way and effortlessly transition in marvelous and profoundly mysterious ways. Indeed, there is not even a thing called "reality." This could sound dizzying, confusing, or disorienting, but when there is no distance "between" anything, and nothing trying to stand apart and manage experience, or hold a reference frame, then it is just simply so. Nothing apart—nothing to offend or disrupt. Just everything-ness, and/or one-thingness expressed out of nothingness, and at the same time never leaving nothingness, moment to moment. Spontaneous, free, intimate, and void of any essential nature.

An analogy I sometimes use is this. Imagine you are walking down a hallway. Only the portion of the hallway you occupy is illuminated at any given time. So as you pass a certain area, the lights behind you go out. Similarly, as you enter a new area of the hallway, the lights begin to turn on. Ahead and behind there is darkness. Now further imagine there is no body, no "you," and no sense of continuous consciousness. The lights illuminating down the hallway are vivid zero-distance sense phenomena (sounds, colors, shapes, sensations, tastes, smells, and consciousness). Instead of lighting the way for "you," they are simply coming into being (or at least their radiant nature is apparent) moment to moment. If viewed a certain way (by looking through the distorting lens of reflective consciousness), it could appear as if this creates movement down a hallway, or a sense of someone or some consciousness moving and aware of the lights. In actuality, consciousness is itself simply one of the vividly illuminated yet empty phenomena appearing and disappearing. In reality there is no body, mind, or world. There is only illumination, and nothing apart from that illumination to know or to observe it. There is just a magnificent display of impossibly vivid and essence-less textures creating the illusion of movement and solidity. It is self-illuminating and radically intimate. Here and gone, here and gone.

Continued:

From this point forward, it remains clear that the real world, the world of the actual that was realized upon turning from the reflective surface, is reality in its natural state. Although we still can feel a pull and tendency to gaze upon the pond from time to time, we know its nature and we are instinctually aware of the simple and non-conditional truth that there is a reality that is intrinsically free of the distortions of reflection. The trees, objects, and celestial bodies in this world are pristine, alive, radiant, and intimate in a way they simply could not be when reflected off the surface. There is a great relaxation that comes with this realization that all hindrance, isolation, and struggle was brought about by habituated entanglements with the nature of the reflective surface. Now you begin a deeper exploration of the details of this world of the actual. What is the underlying essence of the stars and the moon that cannot be experienced as objects? What is this interconnected nature that is intuited in all radiant experience? What is the nature of this “here and gone without a trace” aspect of everything? What causes the tendency to entangle attention with conscious reflection in a way that distorts this pristine, natural reality? You could say you’ve lost interest in the lifelong pursuit to understand and realize the truth of you and how you fit in to everything. It’s seen that that was never an issue in the first place; it was only a misperception based on the illusion of separation and a view of a self in time that never actually was. So now out of true enjoyment and spontaneity, you investigate the nature of the fabric of reality itself. What is the substance and mechanism of radiant experience? How does it function? How can everything be eternally here and nowhere at all simultaneously, yet feel instinctually exactly right?

We now take up the investigation of the most fundamental quanta of existence, zero-distance experience, and reality. This isn’t out of a need or desire to wake up. That concern is no longer found except in an occasional fluctuation in consciousness that briefly catches our attention. No, this is a spontaneous movement of pure fascination. It is fueled by an unconditional love for truth and all of existence and nonexistence. To be perfectly honest, it is because there is nothing else left to do.

Just when it seemed things couldn’t get more difficult to talk about, we arrive at a place that is so primordial, so instinctual, so subtle, and paradoxical that I almost don’t want to say anything about it. It is extremely easy to miscommunicate, but here goes. At some point it becomes clear that the nature of the most fundamental

building blocks of experience—let's call them *vivid sense phenomena*—come out of nothingness, return to nothingness, are never separate from nothingness, and yet somehow create all possibility of experience. The word *experience* here means nothing like the usual sense of the word. Also, the word *nothingness* means nothing like the usual sense of the word. The most fundamental movement of nondualistic experience and nothingness or emptiness are one intertwined here. This is the urge of the Universe to experience itself, or of a single color to come forth *as* the entire Universe. This experience is immediate, immaculate, without doubt, without distance, and not subject to time (...)

Related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/02/angelo-gerangelos-writings-on-anatta.html>

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"While walking in the Singapore botanic gardens just now, the total exertion of universe walking, then the total exertion of a single thought is experienced, and the analogy arose - even a repetitive "discursive" thought is Maha total exertion, like the echo is the echo of the universe, but that thought is the echo of the three times. Of course at that point those are not discursive thoughts." - Soh, 2019

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[http://dharma-rain.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Hua\\_Yen\\_Buddhism\\_Emptiness\\_Identity\\_Inte.pdf](http://dharma-rain.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Hua_Yen_Buddhism_Emptiness_Identity_Inte.pdf)

In the Mirror of Mysteries, Cheng-kuan writes:

If we use the example of the ten mirrors (arrayed in a circle or sphere so that all face all the others) as a simile [for phenomenal interpenetration], one mirror is the one, nine mirrors are the many [...] one mirror includes in it reflections of nine mirrors, meaning that one mirror is that which includes and nine mirrors are that which is included—yet because the nine mirrors also are that which includes (because they contain the reflection of the one mirror), the aforementioned one mirror which includes also enters the nine mirrors, so one mirror enters the nine mirrors. One mirror's reflection of the nine mirrors illustrates the idea that one entity contains all other entities. Conversely, the reflection of the one mirror in the nine mirrors illustrates the idea that all entities likewise contain the one entity. Thus the metaphor of the mirrors accurately conveys the principle of all-in-one (nine



mirrors in the single mirror) and one-in-all (the single mirror in the nine mirrors). The mirror analogy also shows us the principle of one-in-one (any one mirror contains any other mirror), and all-in-all (every mirror contains every other mirror).

The mirror analogy also illustrates the infinite interpenetration of the one and the all. This is so because each mirror reflects not only every other mirror, but also what every other mirror itself reflects. Anyone who has stood in the middle of two mirrors will understand what is being referred to here, namely, the infinite reflections that appear in mirrors facing each other. As Fa-tsang says, "Among the phenomenal characteristics [...] each one again contains the others, includes the others—each contains infinitely multiplied and remultiplied delineations of objects".

Relevant Section:

"One of the shortcomings, however, of the mirror-analogy, and any spatially based analogy for that matter, is that it does not capture the reality of temporal interpenetration. This refers to the fact that each moment contains every other moment. This is important to note because time is also a part of the phenomenal expression of sunyata, and is not outside of cosmic interpenetration. "An atom," writes Fa-tsang, "contains the ten directions with no abrogation of great and small; an instant contains the nine time frames, with extension and brevity being simultaneous". The nine time frames are (1-3) the past, present, and future of the present, (4-6) the past, present, and future of the past, and (7-9) the past, present, and future of the future. All moments fluidly interpenetrate since time, like all spatial entities, is empty. Temporal interpenetration does dissolve the distinct identities of all the time frames, since "it is like the five fingers making a fist yet not losing fingerhood".

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[https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2013/05/the-buddhist-teaching-of-totality\\_21.html](https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2013/05/the-buddhist-teaching-of-totality_21.html)

From Garma C.C. Chang's "The Buddhist Teaching of Totality. The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism.":

One day Empress Wu asked Fa Tsang the following question: Reverend Master, I understand that man's knowledge is acquired through two approaches: one is by

experience, the direct approach, and the other by inference, the indirect approach. I also understand that the first five consciousnesses and the Alaya only take the direct approach; whereas, the mind, or the sixth consciousness, can take both. Therefore, the findings of the conscious mind are not always trustworthy. The superiority and reliability of direct experience over indirect inference is taught in many scriptures. You have explained the Hwa Yen Doctrine to me with great clarity and ingenuity; sometimes I can almost 'See the vast Dharmadhatu in my mind's eye, and touch a few spots here and there in the great Totality. But all this, I realize, is merely indirect conjecture or guesswork. One cannot really understand Totality in an immediate sense before reaching Enlightenment. With your genius, however, I wonder whether you can give me a demonstration that will reveal the mystery of the Dharmadhatu including such wonders as the "all in one" and the "one in all," the simultaneous arising of all realms, the interpenetration and containment of all dharmas, the Non-Obstruction of space and time, and the like? After taking thought for a while, Fa Tsang said, "I shall try, your Majesty. The demonstration will be prepared very soon."

A few days later Fa Tsang came to the Empress and said, "Your Majesty, I am now ready. Please come with me to a place where the demonstration will be given." He then led the Empress into a room lined with mirrors. On the ceiling and floor, on all four walls, and even in the four corners of the room were fixed huge mirrors-all facing one another. Then Fa Tsang produced an image of Buddha and placed it in the center of the room with a burning torch beside it. "Oh, how fantastic! How marvelous!" cried the Empress as she gazed at this awe-inspiring panorama of infinite interreflections. Slowly and calmly Fa Tsang addressed her: Your Majesty, this is a demonstration of Totality in the Dharmadhatu. In each and every mirror within this room you will find the reflections of all the other mirrors with the Buddha's image in them. And in each and every reflection of any mirror you will find all the reflections of all the other mirrors, together with the specific Buddha image in each, without omission or misplacement. The principle of interpenetration and containment is clearly shown by this demonstration. Right here we see an example of one in all and all in one-the mystery of realm embracing realm ad infinitum is thus revealed. The principle of the simultaneous arising of different realms is so obvious here that no explanation is necessary. These infinite reflections of different realms now simultaneously arise without the slightest effort; they just naturally do so in a perfectly harmonious way. . . . As for the principle of

the non-obstruction of space, it can be demonstrated in this manner . . . (saying which, he took a crystal ball from his sleeve and placed it in the palm of his hand) . Your Majesty, now we see all the mirrors and their reflections within this small crystal ball. Here we have an example of the small containing the large as well as of the large containing the small. This is a demonstration of the non-obstruction of "sizes," or space. As for the non-obstruction of times, the past entering the future and the future entering the past cannot be shown in this demonstration, because this is, after all, a static one, lacking the dynamic quality of the temporal elements. A demonstration of the non-obstruction of times, and of time and space, is indeed difficult to arrange by ordinary means. One must reach a different level to be capable of witnessing a "demonstration" such as that. But in any case, your Majesty, I hope this simple demonstration has served its purpose to your satisfaction.

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Garma C.C. Chang's "The Buddhist Teaching of Totality. The Philosophy of Hwa Yen Buddhism.":

"(...)we have found that the Totality and Non-Obstruction of Buddhahood are expressed in these terms:

1. That a universe can be infinitely vast or small depending on the scale of measurement, or the position from which a measurement is made.
2. That the "larger" universes include the "smaller" ones as a solar system contains its planets, or a planet contains its atoms. This system of higher realms embracing the lower ones is pictured in a structure extending ad infinitum in both directions to the infinitely large or the infinitely small. This is called in the Hwa Yen vocabulary the view of realms-embracing-realms.
3. That a "small" universe, (such as an atom) not only contains the infinite "lesser" universes within itself, but also contains the infinite "larger" universes (such as the solar system), thus establishing the genuine Totality of Non-Obstruction.
4. That "time" has lost its meaning as merely a concept for measuring the flow of events in the past, present, and future. It has now become an element of Totality

which actualizes the total interpenetration and containment of all the events of past, present, and future in the eternal present.

5. Upon the grand stage of the infinite Dharmadhatu, countless various dramas of religion are being enacted in numerous dimensions of space/time throughout eternity.

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AEN:

Thusness: Is your experience beingness or maha suchness? (comments: on the term 'maha suchness' see <http://awakeningtoreality.blogspot.com/2009/03/on-anatta-emptiness-and-spontaneous.html>) Then in the most ordinary and mundane activities, every action is fully exerted.

Me: Yes, it is like universe activity... not drop of water dissolved into static beingness but oceanic activity in which drop and ocean is seamlessly arising.

Thusness: No sense of beingness anymore... that is good. Rather it is this maha suchness of total exertion in this immediate moment... yet empty. Mature this experience. Feel this maha suchness... until it becomes as natural as breathing.

Now you know the difference? Tell me the difference between anatta and this experience and what is exactly obscuring the smooth progress to this insight and experience?

Me: The dualistic agent may be gone but maha requires the replacement of inherent view with D.O. so that when you see this, you see that... you see everything as entirely seamless self-arising activity. Not just this but how this arise without self, this is, that is.

Thusness: Well said. First you must be left with only manifestation. Solely that. Then into the general [principle of] D.O. Before that, there is this mini sense of activity but will not be thorough. But you must make this a continuous practice and keep

integrating the view of general D.O. to replace dualistic and inherent framework. Till even this view is also forgotten.

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Excerpts from <https://www.amazon.com/Being-Time-Practitioners-Guide-Dogens-Shobogenzo/dp/1614291136> by Shinshu Roberts (this book requires a strong foundation in terms of intellectual view and prior insights into total exertion in order to properly understand it):

#### DHARMA POSITION AS ALL BEING-TIME

We can't really penetrate what Dōgen means by being-time if we don't understand the unique particular moments, things, or events, called dharma positions or dharma stages. A dharma position, understood as a unique independent moment, also has multiple aspects, which, when taken together, are being-time. Without understanding the encompassing nature of a dharma position as a being-time and all being-time, we mistakenly experience unique particular moments like the Buddhist parable of the blind men examining an elephant. One man said the ears were like a basket, another said the tusk was a plow's blade, and a third thought the foot to be a pillar — you get the idea. Since the examiners were blind, not one of them was able to see the whole of the elephant, so they grasped what they could and compared it to something they already knew, not understanding that each thing they touched was a part of a larger unseen whole.

A dharma position is a moment, thing, or event of being-time that is also definable as transitive and impermanent. A person is a dharma position. Since nothing ever stays the same and all things are in flux due to their interactive, interpenetrating nature, it would be folly to say that a dharma position or a moment of being-time begins here and ends there. Dharma positions are not finite in this sense, nor are they sequential way stations along a continuum of past, present, and future. Although Dōgen does not deny the conventional, everyday sense of time as a horizontal line of sequential events that we experience as past, present, and future, in "Uji" Dōgen is concerned with the nondual nature of time and being as expressed in the presencing moment. From the point of view of practice, a linear view of time can impede realization.

A dharma position has a past, present, and future, but it is freed from being defined by that past, present, or future. Each dharma position is particular and independent. We are aware of past experience and future desires when actualizing

our enlightened mind, but such ideas do not obstruct our ability to respond fully to the totality of each situation as it is. This nonobstructive awareness is important because the independent nature of a dharma position allows us to choose how we will respond to them. We are not caught up in some fatalistic, predetermined course of action. Dōgen writes in “Hotsu-Bodaishin” (Establishment of the Bodhi-Mind):

“In general, establishment of the mind and attainment of the truth rely upon the instantaneous arising and vanishing of all things. If [all things] did not arise and vanish instantaneously, bad done in the previous instant could not depart. If bad done in the previous instant had not yet departed, good in the next instant could not be realized in the present.”

From the perspective of nonduality, past, present, and future are present in this moment, yet at the same time each moment must have the freedom to express its individual flavor. In the example above, Dōgen is describing how we are not trapped by unskillful behavior. This “instantaneous arising and vanishing” is the dharma position as fluid and all-inclusive. At the same time it is an independent dharma position. Dōgen famously expresses this idea in the “Genjōkōan” (Manifesting Suchness), where he writes about the nature of firewood:

“Firewood becomes ash; it can never go back to being firewood. Nevertheless, we should not take the view that ash is its future and the firewood is its past.

Remember, firewood abides in the place of firewood in the Dharma. It has a past and it has a future. Although it has a past and a future, the past and the future are cut off. Ash exists in the place of ash in the Dharma. It has a past and it has a future.”

Here we have what appear to be two opposing ideas: the future of firewood is ash and the past of ash is firewood, and yet the past and future of firewood and ash are cut off from what seems like their natural progression. Each statement is equally true and important to our understanding of a dharma position or a being-time. We do have a past and future, but we are not bound by a fossilized past or future. We use our past experiences and future desires as tools for discernment. If we can engage with the present moment in this way, we are freed to respond to this moment unobstructed by motivations that might hinder a skillful response.

A dharma position holds all being-time — a being’s time and time’s being — in this very moment. This is the complete nonduality of things, existence, and time. A

particular being-time expresses two states. First, there is the universal state of all being-time. This is the inclusive nature of everything taken as a whole. Second, a being's time is a particular event, person, or thing, which is expressed as an independent dharma position. Simultaneously, a dharma position is both universal being-time and a particular being-time. Everything is present at the same time without hindering the universal and particular nature of any other. This is also true of time's-being.

When we include everything in our understanding, we are more cognizant of the intrinsic value of each thing, and we are more aware of the place each being or event has in relationship to us. We don't exclude anything, recognizing that everything is already present. Accepting things as they are is predicated upon knowing that the present includes all those things we want and those things we don't want. We cannot reject anything merely because it causes us discomfort or does not fit our idea of how it should be. Our suffering arises from this overlay of likes and dislikes, but truthfully there is nothing obstructing the fully realized moment because nothing is excluded and all things arise simultaneously.

Furthermore, everything interpenetrates everything else and is all other beings and times, within a particular dharma position. This idea is articulated in the Huayan phrase "to know one thing is to know all things." If you understand this foundational truth about a thing's essential nature, you will also understand the basic truth of all things. Our interconnecting, interpenetrating, unobstructed nature is the basis for intelligent empathy resulting in compassionate and wise action.

Since a dharma position is interconnecting, interpenetrating, impermanent, and fleeting, it functions within the context of all other dharma positions. In concert, these dharmas practice together and make the world. From this perspective Dōgen writes in "Zenki" (All Functions), "life is what I am making it, and I am what life is making me . . . life is the self and self is life." Lest we get too anthropocentric in our views, he also writes in "Uji" "each grass and each form itself is the entire earth . . . each moment is all being, is the entire world."

Included in each moment is the entire world and the individual being-time-ness of each being making the world. Dōgen calls this all-inclusive activity *gyōji* or continuous practice. Continuous practice is the practice-realization of the Buddhist ancestors, and it also includes the continuous practice of all other beings: trees, rocks, insects, etc. It is the wholehearted effort and total presencing of each being

in the ten directions within the context of each dharma position or being-time. Dōgen writes in “Gyōji” (Continuous Practice):

“The working of this activity-unremitting upholds the self and the other. Its import is such that through one’s activity-unremitting the entire earth as well as the whole heaven of the ten directions share in its working. Even if others are unaware of it, and you may be unaware of it, that is the way it is.”

When does this practice happen? It happens within a particular dharma position as one, all, and everything as it is right now. As Dōgen writes in “Gyōji” (Continuous Practice), “The time when continuous practice is manifested is what we call ‘now.’”

In addition, there is the issue of how a dharma position transitions from this moment to the next in a nonsequential model. Dōgen also addresses this in “Uji.” This passage is not sequential nor is it strictly nondual. In general, while not denying cause and effect, Dōgen avoids characterizing reality as sequential in any way. If all being-time is essential for each being-time, then there cannot be one thing that we can say is a first cause. Passage or transition happens within the context of this moment’s movement in concert with all being.

For example, an ear of corn must be born from a corn seed. But that seed (and the resulting cornstalk) is as dependent on water, air, earth, and the totality of the universe for its life as it is upon the seed. In this way, the corn is beholden to all of existence for its appearance. Myriad events are necessary for a life. From this view, how can we distinguish one cause separately from all causes or one time separated from all time?

In Buddhist practice, transformation happens through our focus on this moment as direct experience and our response informed by the Buddhadharma. To practice with a sequential expectation of spiritual attainment, such as delusion transforming into enlightenment via a particular activity, is false. Practice unfolds in the context of all of reality coming forth at this very being-time, which creates a flow of activity not delineated by sharp boundaries of before and after, then and now.

Masao Abe discusses this by saying:

“Each and every time (for example, yesterday), because it is simultaneously the manifestation of the total dynamism of all times while abiding in its own dharma-stage, cannot be correctly seen as passing into another time (for example, today).



The relationship of one time and another time must be seen not as a matter of passing away, but as passageless-passage (kyōryaku)."

Dōgen does not deny that change is happening, but he emphasizes that it does not happen the way we think it does. How things do happen and the importance of this view to our understanding of practice as realization are part of Dōgen's discussion of being-time as Buddhist practice in "Uji."

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#### HUAYAN SCHOOL: MUTUAL IDENTITY AND MUTUAL PENETRATION

While "we must study and learn that myriad phenomena and numberless grasses exist over the entire earth" would seem self-evident, we do not understand that "each of the grasses and each of the forms exists as the entire earth." Realizing this relationship is key to Dōgen's understanding of the simultaneity of practice as realized response. He wrote in "Genjōkōan" (Manifesting Suchness), "If a person practices and realizes the Buddha Way, when he attains one dharma he penetrates completely that one dharma; when he encounters one practice, he practices that one practice." This one dharma and one practice involve learning that each grass is the entire earth. Dōgen extols us to study and learn that everything (the one hundred grasses) is the entire world as it manifests as particularity.

The seventh-century Chinese Huayan School called this teaching, "to know one thing is to know all things." In order to understand Dōgen's comment that each grass or form is the entire earth, two Huayan concepts are key: mutual identity and mutual penetration.

Mutual identity is the observation that all things share the qualities or processes of (1) having no inherent existence separate from all being, (2) being subject to and the result of causal relationships, and (3) being impermanent. When seen from this perspective of nonduality, there is no difference between one thing and the next. Is there anything in this world that has a separate inherent existence? Is there anything that does not arise from causes and conditions? Is there anything that is not impermanence? If these three states are our criteria for defining the basic nature of all beings, then we must say that all beings are the same. If you know the truth of grasses' impermanence, you will know the truth of your own impermanence, interconnection, and interpenetrating intimacy with all beings. Essentially all being-time is a process, rather than unrelated events banging up

against each other. Being-time is dynamic, not a fixed thing. This is how we can talk about reality when we view it from the perspective of nonduality.

Mutual penetration posits that if all beings share mutual identity they also physically penetrate or commingle with each other. Taking the idea further, it can be said that seen from a being's independent aspect, that being cannot be isolated and is embedded in a codependent relationship of function and existence. Mutual penetration is not an abstract concept. If you are sitting in a room with a group of people, you are all sharing the same air. As soon as you breathe in, your inhalation includes gases from another's exhalation. That air becomes incorporated into your body on a cellular level. In a very real way you have become part of another person, as they are with you.

The scope of mutual identity and mutual penetration applies to all of time and space, in each moment. Everything arises simultaneously. All the forms and all the grasses are dependent upon each other and arise together to make up the earth. In the way of mutual interpenetration and mutual identity, the grasses and myriad things exist as the entire earth. Usually when we think of causal relationships, we think of them as sequential: this caused that and that caused this. Viewing this process as a multidimensional holistic event is a more accurate model that includes the simultaneity of causal, interpenetrating, interconnected, and unobstructed being-time.

Huayan uses the image of a net to illustrate this teaching. Imagine a net with jewels at every intersection within the net. Each jewel reflects all the other jewels. This jeweled net is everything, without end. This is Indra's Net. Fazang's "The Golden Lion" describes Indra's Net as:

"The infinite interpenetration [of all things], the unimpeded identity [of all things], . . . [is] shown in the symbol of the net of Indra. When these concepts are manifested [in the mind of the Bodhisattva], then when one of the many obstacles is overcome, all are overcome, and one acquires the destruction of [moral and intellectual faults . . .] . . . In practicing the virtues, when one is perfected, all are perfected, and with regard to reality, when one [part] is revealed, everything is revealed. All things are endowed with universality and particularity, beginning and end are the same, and when one first arouses the aspiration for enlightenment [*bodhicittotpāda*], one also becomes perfectly enlightened. . . . the goal is inherent in causal practice."

The actual state of the world is that things do not obstruct each other. The particularity of each being or thing does not get in the way of the universal sameness of each being or thing. At the same time that each grass and form exists as a particular being, they simultaneously exist as the entire earth.

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### Chapter 7: The One Hundred Grasses Are Time

“As the time right now is all there ever is, each being-time is without exception entire time. A grass-being and a form-being are both times. Entire being, the entire world, exists in the time of each and every now. Just reflect: right now, is there an entire being or an entire world missing from your present time, or not?”

IN THE PREVIOUS SECTION, Dōgen wrote that the hundred grasses (all phenomena) exist over the entire earth and exist as the entire earth. To understand the true nature of a single form is to understand all of reality. This paragraph is the same teaching from the perspective of time. A present moment is all there is, and each particular time is entire time. Just as one being’s existence is the entire earth, so that being’s time is entire time.

There is no experience of time that we can have that is not grounded in the present moment. Our minds are constructing or remembering events in this moment, even if we feel that we are actually experiencing past or future. Present time is really all there is. Our mind defines our experience as past (a memory that can only be recalled in the present moment), as present (which can only be defined to ourselves at this time), and as future (a present moment thought about something that might happen). All of this mental activity is in the present being-time.

This is not to say that we do not have a past, but our conscious experience of our past can only happen in the now. Fazang writes this about time:

“Regarding the harmonizing mergence of one moment with the aeons . . . since a single moment has no substance of its own, it becomes interchangeable with the great aeons. Because the great aeons have no substance, they also embrace the single moment. Since both the single moment and the great aeons have no substance, all the marks of the long and the short are merged into [a great harmony], . . . all the Buddhas and sentient beings, and all things and events in the past, present, and future come into view simultaneously. Why is this so? . . . [Since time is inseparable from events,] if one moment becomes non-obstructive, all

dharma will [automatically] become harmoniously merged. That is why all things and events in the three times vividly appear within one moment . . .”

Shohaku Okumura points out in his book *Realizing Genjokoan* that the present moment we think we are experiencing cannot be thought about or defined at the time of its happening. He surmises that time does not exist in the way we think it does; therefore, we cannot grasp it. We cannot fix or conceptualize the present moment as it is happening. Our being-time is always morphing into the next moment. Yet, this present now is a particular now that we experience, and simultaneously it is the inclusive now of our entire world, which includes all past, present, and future. This is the intersection of all of being-time with right now.

As you read this book, this moment contains all the moments and events, known and unknown, that have ever been or will be. The causal connections of your present moment contain all the causal connections possible. This book you hold is paper and that paper was a tree, and that tree depended upon the sun, rain, soil, and the whole universe throughout time in order to grow. This moment of reading is being-time spread throughout the 360 degrees of time and space. Like the grass-being, your being-time includes entire time, and in this way, the time right now is all there ever is.

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If we only understand our life to be a series of discrete sequential moments passing by, we do not see the virtue and intimacy of each moment’s interconnection and impermanence. Impermanence can be understood not just as fleeting stability, but as an expression of process and interconnection. It is when we embrace the impermanence of being-time that we drop our egocentric self and fully participate in the total activity of all beings’ time because we can now perceive ourselves as part of the whole.

This complete engagement is freedom. Engaging with an open mind is inclusive, skillful response. When we are totally engaged with each moment, we stop pitting ourselves against something we perceive as outside and in need of control. This is the intimacy of no-self.

#### OUR BEING-TIME IS ALL BEING-TIME

Experiencing our present moment is experiencing our life. Our life includes “the time the mountain was being climbed and the river being crossed.” We are

simultaneously being all the individual being-times that we have known along the way. The elements of all the being-times we meet make up each being-time. In other words, this moment in time holds all the other moments and times of our experience, including past, present, and future. Wherever we are, it includes the time of the mountain and the time of the river; it is still “in us” and not something that has left us.

In the example given, Dōgen is speaking of our practice. The mountain may represent a monastic practice period, and the river might be a meeting with a teacher. What is important in the example is that this spiritual journey is more than our sequential conceptualization. Our experience may appear sequential, but that is not the full experience. The meeting with the teacher is already present in the moment of the monastery.

#### EACH MOMENT INCLUDES ALL BEING-TIME

Although the totality of being-time is usually not experienced consciously, since our focus is on the activity of this moment, it is still present. Each moment of our experience is part of a network of interconnected and interpenetrating being-times which includes past (time of climbing the mountain and crossing the river) as present. Each moment is Indra’s Net. This is the truth of mutual interconnection and interpenetration, and this is why the time of climbing the mountain and crossing the stream is in each step.

Dōgen writes, “It cannot be that time passes away.” Each present moment holds all being-time. Another expression used to talk about the present moment is the eternal now. As we ground ourselves in experience, our reality, this reality, this life, right at this moment, there is nothing else but this moment, and that is the eternal now. Each moment is this impermanent moment, eternally renewing itself as this moment. Eternal does not mean unchanging; it means that this impermanent moment goes on endlessly. In this way, we come to understand that time cannot pass away. It is the eternal presencing of all being-time. Again, it is not a moment that divorces us from interconnecting relations; rather, it is a moment that includes the totality of all existence and will be the genesis of our ethical enlightened response.

In the example given of climbing mountains and crossing rivers, each aspect of the journey is present in each moment or step of that journey. The time of the mountain and the time of the river are also part of a person’s being-time. Imagine

you are actually walking through mountain ranges and crossing rivers. Can you feel the time of the mountains and rivers is also your being-time? You and the mountain are having a particular experience of being-time that includes the being-time of each other, and simultaneously, the particular being-time of each individual expression of that moment. Our experience is not one-sided; it's just that as human beings, we tend to think about things exclusively from our perspective, not from the perspective of a mountain or other beings. In actuality, we make up the mountain's being-time just as much as the mountain's being-time makes up ours.

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### Chapter 17: Penetrating Exhaustively

"Entirely worlding the entire world with the whole world is thus called penetrating exhaustively."

WHEN DŌGEN USES the same word as subject, object, and verb, he is using this grammatical structure to indicate that each dharma is so intimately penetrating its dharma position that it is freed from itself in such a way that it becomes liberated to express itself completely in and through existence's totality. His methodology is meant to indicate being-time as *gūjin*, often translated as "total exertion," or *ippō gūjin*, "the total exertion of a single thing." In Dōgen's example of the world worlding the world, there is the world as a singular dharma position making complete effort as itself 100 percent, resulting in the simultaneity of the whole world expressed with nothing left out. For us, this would be a completely unselfconscious immersion in one's activity.

Steven Heine writes:

"The total penetration and realization of any single practice, explanation or experience at this very time fully discloses the entire Dharma-realm because all beings, all selves and all buddhas at each and every moment are harmoniously and simultaneously linked together."

This nondual expression of a particular practice, explanation, or experience happens in everyday life. When a sailor goes out in a boat on the ocean and has the experience of simultaneity with all aspects of that dharma position — ocean, boat, self, and everything simultaneously presencing — he or she is having a direct experience of the world making the world. Setting oneself out in array by responding without separation to the totality of a situation is penetrating

exhaustively. Our sailor might not know that this is happening because she is not observing herself; she is just responding to what is. When this happens we might say sailing sails sailing. This is total exertion as complete interconnected intimate involvement with “what is” through a particular activity.

## DEEP INVESTIGATION

In the United States, we often hear about mindfulness associated with Buddhism. A popular definition of mindfulness is a kind of complete attention on an activity and its object. For instance as we are washing dishes, we might be saying to ourselves, “I am washing a plate,” and focusing our thoughts on the feeling of the activity itself. We might slow down, follow our breath, and put all our focus on the sensation of the task as an object of our attention.

This would not be how Dōgen would approach the practice of deep investigation or exhaustive penetration. He might describe the activity of washing dishes as washing washes washing, thereby removing the subject-object relationship. Mindfulness may be a dharma gate to intimacy, but it is not the Zen practice of exhaustively penetrating the totality of one’s experience. In the true intimacy of complete engagement there is no labeling of self or other that comes from paying attention to something outside the self.

When engaging in work practice, a Sōtō Zen student is interacting with the totality of all the elements arising within the context of that activity. This means that one makes effort to fulfill the task in such a way that one is respectful of the tools used, the context of the work, the instructions of the work leader, the time allotted for the task, and working in unison with others. The purpose of our effort is to complete the job through our total exertion and practice with the task itself. It is not to be mindful of the activity as an object of our attention. When we are able to engage in work this way, we drop our own agenda and fully engage with the complete activity of cleaning and community.

Included in this intimate total immersion in the being-time of a particular moment is the simultaneous arising of all being-time. This nondualism is not separate from the relative or everyday. Washing dishes is not special. By entering the world of washing dishes, we enter the whole world, which is our world, by jumping in with wholehearted effort.

## DHARMAS ARE REAL FORM

Nishijima and Cross translate Waddell and Abe's "penetrating exhaustively" as "perfectly realizing" and associate it with a phrase from the Lotus Sūtra: "buddhas alone, together with buddhas, can perfectly realize that all dharmas are real form." Dōgen unpacks the meaning of real form in "Shohō Jissō" (All Dharmas Are Real Form):

"Real form is all dharmas. All dharmas are forms as they are, natures as they are, body as it is, the mind as it is, the world as it is, clouds and rain as they are, walking, standing, sitting, and lying down, as they are; sorrow and joy, movement and stillness, as they are; a staff and a whisk, as they are; a twirling flower and a smiling face, as they are; succession of the Dharma and affirmation, as they are; learning in practice and pursuing the truth, as they are; the constancy of pines and the integrity of bamboos, as they are."

This perfect realization is all dharmas totally expressing their true nature. Identifying real forms as all dharmas is washing dishes, for example, and when it is fully expressed (gūjin), it is the realized activity of buddhas. When we can fully express or enact the total exertion of a single thing, we are expressing our true nature. We are "buddhas alone, together with buddhas." We remember the true state of ourselves and all being(s).

The integrated self is therefore not separate from all being-time. For this reason, Dōgen writes earlier in "Uji," "to set the self out in array is to make the world," which is the singular expression of "entirely worlding the entire world with the whole world."

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#### MOVING ENDLESSLY UP AND DOWN

Dynamic movement can also be understood as a moment abiding as impermanence. Tanahashi translates this section as "actualized by ascending and descending of the time-being at each moment," suggesting a quality of staying put yet dynamically moving.

If you are a dancer, you respond to sound and rhythm with your body. Yet each dance has its own demands or particularity. If you are a ballerina, you have a certain set of forms defining the style of how you will dance, yet within those parameters, your options of expression are innumerable. As you dance, that moment also holds the moment of the music's composer, the moment of



composition, the history and culture of the music, the creativity of the choreographer, endlessly naming and including everything in the universe. There is also the nondual, total inclusivity of each moment, as the dance dances the dance — no subject and no object. At the same time, there is just the unique, independent, exclusive moment of the individual dancer dancing. Both are happening together, both depend upon the other for being-time's expression. This is the moment's constancy in the midst of dynamic expression.

Abiding in this moment is the right-here-and-now of our experience: it is enduring suchness. This suchness is the dynamic interpenetrating connection with all of reality. You may have a feeling that this moment is tranquil and quiescent, separate and complete. Yet, this moment is still interacting with all of reality. We're not usually aware of the universality of the moment, but that does not negate its expression.

This moving up and down can be understood as a kind of deep penetration of a particular occurrence of our being-time. At the same time, it is all being-time. The universal quality is the connective glue of all dharma positions as they simultaneously actualize being-time. Because each moment is interpenetrating being-time and also independent in and of itself, we get a sense of impermanence expressed.

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<https://www.amazon.com/Readings-Treasury-Columbia-Buddhist-Literature/dp/0231182295/>

Steven Heine:

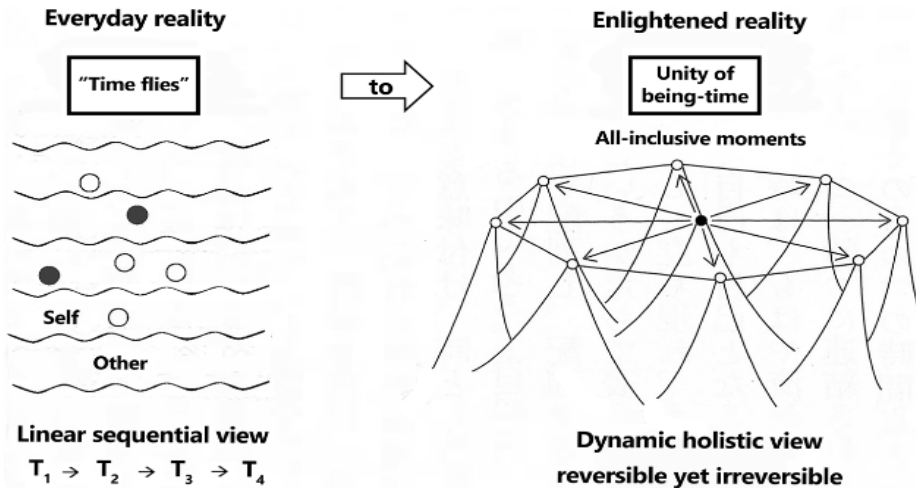


FIGURE 5.2 The conventional linear view of time overcome by Dōgen's dynamic view  
Adapted from Yōrizumi, *Introduction to the Treasury*, 147

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<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2007/05/different-degrees-of-non-duality.html>

John Tan, 2007:

"Hi Star,

You have loosen the 'bond' of a background, no-self is experienced; but the propensity of 'attempting to understand through seeing things as object and subject' is still there. "What it means, what it is, how do we make sense of it' is a struggle. It is a struggle of the dualistic mind attempting to understand something from measurement and comparisons. This propensity must also be deconstructed until you are so comfortable of being naked in awareness. This mode of gaining knowledge from deduction, induction, measurement and comparison is 'learnt', it is not the natural state of awareness. There must be a clear understanding that the depth of spirituality cannot be known through such mode of 'understanding'. This is also a 'seed' that creates the 'sense of self'. A unit of experience is 'blocked' by all these propensities that we are unable to intuitively know the unborn nature of awareness. It is not a 'mind trick' as what some said although wisdom practitioners do not talk about non-local issues.

Conventionally, to experience non-local aspect of pristine awareness is through concentration. It is the job of concentration. Concentration till one enters into a deep stage of absorption and object-subject becomes one, a state of

transcendence. Non-local experiences in such a practice are reached through the power of 'focus'. So the key towards non-local experiences is absorption and transcendence.

Non-duality on the other hand is a form of realization, a realization that all along there never was a split. Its clarity and level of transcendence come from dissolving the 'seeds' that prevents the 'seeing'. Very seldom we hear people talk about the non-local aspect in the practice of wisdom but non-duality do meet non-locality at the point of transcendence (phase 4). It is some sort of absorption as in the case of concentration but it is more of 'clarity till the point of absorption'. It may sound paradoxical, but this is true. This is the way of wisdom.

There are many layers of consciousness and the truth of non-duality must first sink deep down into the inmost consciousness. It is important to reach the phase of 'turning point' as at this phase, the realization of no-self has sunk sufficiently deep into consciousnesses till there is no retreat. Otherwise that joy and experience of no-self will be lost in a few months time (This is my experience) and resurface again until "Emptiness as forms" is deeply experienced. In phase 2-3, non-local experiences may be experienced for some people and mostly with the help of concentration (like asking a question of our past lives) it can be experienced after 6-9 months of practices especially after deeply experiencing 'Emptiness is Form'. Non-local aspect is triggered at the point of transcendence.

Below is some sort of summary of what I think an insight practitioner will go through. What I outline is far from being authoritative, it is just for communicating and sharing purposes. :)

1. Perception still lingers but there is a clear understanding that there is no-self apart from manifestation. Practice clarity from insight meditation will help. Clarity from all 6 doors – eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body, consciousness.
2. Perception is dropped. Mind/body dropped. A very important phase. 'Body' is but a 'mental construct'. When that 'imprints' and 'meanings' of 'body' is dropped, division between inner and outer is gone. All divisions of senses are also gone. All is One Taste. Just Isness. Manifold of presence experienced clearly.
3. Emptiness as Forms and Spontaneous manifestation.

Submerge oneself into spontaneous manifestation yet there is crystal clarity of the texture and fabric of awareness as 'forms'. Dualistic cognition is replaced by

directness, naturalness and spontaneity. Spontaneity, naturalness and flow took over all dualistic perceptions. Conscious, sub-consciousness and unconsciousness function as a whole without division. There is no need to hold on to a conscious knowing; there is no need to understanding anything. Whether one understands is no more important, all knowingness comes from flow of wholeness. There is no attempt to deviate from what is as a whole. Here, there is a danger of skewing towards spontaneity. Not to miss out the luminosity aspect, Emptiness as Forms. These 2 aspects must be one. Luminosity is conscious level and spontaneity is unconscious level, the 2 as one. :) True spontaneity is in luminosity. Psychological death is overcome. Turning point.

4. Only one tremendous spontaneous clarity flows, there is no differentiation between what that spins the earth or what that pumps your heart beats or what that makes the plants grow. When you eat an apple, it is the entire universe that eats the apple. Just one whole clarity spontaneity flow. Continual experience of transcendence joy and bliss.

How the 'seeds' bond us is amazing... Ultimately nothing gained! :)

Good Luck!"

Related articles: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/09/a-compilation-of-simpos-writings.html>, <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/07/on-supernatural-powers-or-siddhis.html>

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Lovingkindness by Sharon Salzberg:

The Buddha himself was asked why people experience such diverse conditions in this world. He replied that we are all the owners of our differing karma and its fruits. Even after death, our only true property is this force of our intentions and their results.

The Buddha said that people who take the lives of others tend to live a short time, and those who refrain from killing tend to live long. People who cause pain to others tend to experience pain, disease, and weakness; those who practice nonviolence tend to experience good health and strength. Those who are greedy and do not give much tend to experience poverty, while those who are generous have abundance. People who are interested and investigate the truth tend to be intelligent; people who do not care about looking more deeply and seeing more

clearly tend to be more stupid. Those who practice stealing or adultery do not have many good friends; people who are careful and virtuous in their actions are respected and loved, and they have many friends.

Again, these are not rigid absolutes. They are just tendencies. And there is no judgment in any of it. In the incredible vastness of the vision of buddha-mind, this world of birth, death, and change we call samsara had no beginning. In this inconceivably immense vision of reality, we have all wandered forever, and so we all trail an endless, infinite amount of past karma. Through this timelessness we have all done everything, every one of us: we have loved, hated, feared, killed, raped, stolen, given, served, loved. We have done it all. Through beginningless and ongoing rounds of rebirth, we are all one another's parents, children, friends, lovers, and enemies, over and over again.

There is no reason for a feeling of separation from anything or anyone, because we have been it all and done it all. How then can we feel self-righteous or removed from anyone or any action? There is no spot on this earth where we have not laughed, cried, been born, and died. So in some sense, every single place we go is home. Everyone we meet we know. Everything that is done we are capable of.

That is why we do not hold an understanding of karma in a narrow way. It is an extremely vast vision of life. If at a given moment we experience the fruits of a past action, whether wholesome or unwholesome, our experience is the experience of all beings. If we see an experience happening outside ourselves, we understand that this also is our experience, as in a dream when every character is some reflection of our own mind.

If you do not feel any resonance with this teaching about many lifetimes, you can still understand this radical nonseparation from all who are and all that happens by looking within. Whether or not you believe in rebirth, you can see that all states exist within you. You do not need to feel separate when they arise within you; you do not need to be afraid. And you do not need to feel separate when you see them outside of yourself, either; all of it is just reflecting the mind with all of its possibilities. No matter what happens, inside or outside, no matter whom you meet, all of it is just another way of seeing yourself.

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<https://www.amazon.com/Samatha-Jhana-Vipassana-Meditators-Experience/dp/1614293570/>

Hyun-soo Jeon, MD, PhD; Samatha, Jhana, and Vipassana: Practice at the Pa-Auk Monastery: A Meditator's Experience:

### The Effect Dependent Origination Meditation Has on Our Outlook on Life

We have now completed our review of the practice of meditation on dependent origination by discerning the twelve links of dependent origination concerning our five past lives. As we live in an age of science, we have the tendency to think that the things that we can't perceive through our senses aren't there. Therefore we think that past lives don't exist. But once we actually see our past lives through the practice of meditation, we no longer have those thoughts. However, that doesn't mean that we are able to prove the existence of past lives scientifically.

When we practice, we develop faith in the things that many practitioners have experienced since the Buddha himself experienced and taught them. At the very least we no longer think that past lives don't exist. Rather, we learn to believe that lives are connected and understand that our present life is but a short life among all of our connected lives. On this basis we no longer try to explain the problems in our lives solely based on our present life's experiences.

In psychoanalysis there is a tendency to explain everything as being affected by our parents when we were young. Since we can see things mistakenly on the basis of this view, we need to let go of this tendency and instead try to see what is actually arising. We also need to admit when we don't know something. Admitting that we don't know when we don't know is wisdom. All we have to do is make an effort to know the things we don't know and to see reality. If we live with this kind of attitude, we will not clumsily make conclusions, our lives will become well grounded, and we will stand on a firm base. Although it takes a long time, we establish a base of life that doesn't easily falter.

Once we know that beings pass through various realms when undergoing rebirth in saṃsāra, we will escape from a human-centered life. Our attitude toward animals will also change. When we know that if we harm others the result of that action will definitely come back to us, we will never harm others. We will gladly help other beings. We will also understand that this world is one that we can come back to and live in again.

If we look at the people around us who are eager in their practice of Buddhist meditation, the majority of them believe in rebirth. Once we believe in rebirth, our point of view toward our present life changes. Rather than enjoying ourselves in

our present life, our biggest priority becomes preparing for our next life. The factors that we consider to be important in life change, and as our practice becomes thus urgent, we always practice without looking elsewhere.

Also, once we believe that rebirth exists, we will never end our own lives. Freud said that humans have the drive of seeking pleasure and the drive of death. Whenever people undergo hardship they long to be at ease. They wish that the hardships would disappear. And so they have thoughts of dying. There is probably not a single person who hasn't ever thought about wanting to die at least once. However, once we believe in rebirth, no matter what kind of situation we are in we will understand that we must practice meditation to control the mind in every moment that we are alive.

Once we practice meditation on materiality, mentality, and dependent origination, our view of death also changes. Rather than fearing death, we fear what state we will die in. In the Pa-Auk "meditation on death" practice, we see when we will die in our present life. Of course the future can change. But when the time comes our present life will certainly end. When our present life is over, our next life will unfold itself based on the law of cause and effect. If lives continue on and on, we don't need to cling too much to our present life. And if our future life is better than our present life, we have no reason to be sad that our present life will end.

Related books:

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<https://www.amazon.com/Wisdom-Wide-Deep-Practical-Mastering/dp/086171623X/>

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Nafis Rahman

Admin

Top contributor

This is a basic overview of ATR Stage 5/6:

1) Anatta

2) Mind-Body Drop

3) Initial Total Exertion (Infinite Space/Boundlessness + feeling interconnected with one's surroundings/sensory experience)

4) Sensory Non-arising

5) Mutual Interpenetration across Time and Space

6) Sensory/Perceptual Interpenetration

Even within this group, only a handful of members have realized all the insights above. However, even after someone manages to fully realize stage 6, there are further phases of insight available that eventually leads to full enlightenment/Buddhahood. For the criteria of realizing Buddhahood, one needs to dissolve the 10 fetters attained upon Arhatship along with cognitive obscurations, develop omniscience, and eventually transcend the cycle of rebirth. Until one has reached this stage, there is still a long way to go in terms of spiritual practice.

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/07/buddhahood-end-of-all-emotionalmental.html>

Shardza Rinpoche (Bon Dzogchen teacher presumed to have realized rainbow body):

“Once the practice of self-arising/self-liberated is stable and automatic, the practitioner has begun the third and final map—the path of liberation that starts with the practice of self-arising/ self-liberated and has the final endpoint of stable enlightenment or complete liberation. This third set of teachings on the path to complete liberation includes the practice of dharmadhatu exhaustion, specific to exhausting ripening karmic propensities and afflictive emotions; sleep and dream yoga; the practice of Inner Fire to purify the residual substantiality of the physical body; the practice of the various levels of by-passing visions to purify ordinary perception and to bring about the complete exhaustion of impure perceptions; the practice of external appearances as illusions or dreams; direct manifestation of Buddha fields; the experiences of many realms and times all-at-once; and the experience of the final realizations, like the fruition of the three-fold embodiment of enlightenment, the five primordial wisdoms, omniscience, and the manifestation of inexhaustible enlightened activities toward all beings.”

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Based on what has developed, the last session, session fourteen, Bru rGyal ba calls “continuous pointing out” because the rest of the path is fairly automatic.

Primordial wisdom’s innate intelligence is such that at this point the path shows itself-to-itself-by-itself. The essential pith instruction pertains to pointing out directly the mind’s “limitlessness” {mtha’ med), until directly opening the scope of mind beyond this ordinary bubble of external reality to the direct realization that all realms and times are spontaneously present all-at-once and always right here in the present moment. Once deluded perception has been sufficiently purified, the practitioner only sees this world as a world of the pure Buddha-fields of the mandala. Furthermore, through the direct pointing out instructions on the three-fold embodiment of enlightenment, the skilled practitioner experiences the fruition, enlightened Buddhahood as “holding its own place” (rangsa zinpa), i.e., as the innate potential of each practitioner’s mind-stream to always have been here. (fol. 36b) Once this process is complete, resulting in automatic subduing of the mind-stream’s habitual tendencies, (fol. 46b) there “is never separation from the basis [of enlightenment].” (fol. 47b) At this point the skilled practitioner has attained “heroic automatic meditation” {sems dpa’i ngang sgorri). (fol. 46b)

Lastly in the process comes “mastery meditation” (klong bsgom). Here, all residual subject/object duality is completely eradicated, including the distinction between a meditator and something to meditate upon. The meditator is “freed from the progression of states.” (fol. 48b) Now, the completed realization manifests primarily as conduct—conduct for the welfare of others, (fol. 48b) In the commentary, mastery meditation is described as establishing the threshold for passing from samsara. The commentary also lists a variety of extraordinary “signs” that this passing has occurred, (fol. 49b) The endpoint fruition entails four final developments that bring the path to completion: the realization of the three-fold embodiment of enlightenment, full development of the five primordial wisdoms, omniscience, and inexhaustible enlightened activity toward all sentient beings. Making a decisive determination of the three-fold embodiment of enlightenment manifesting directly and permanently in the mind-stream is the fruition, (fol. 51b) The realization of primordial wisdom is brought to completion as primordial wisdom becomes an unceasing and proliferating unfolding of its lively, miraculous display, so that everything that arises is the “same miraculous display.” (fol. 52b) Finally, conduct comes to completion as “enlightened activity” (phrin las) wherein the realized being acts inexhaustibly for the welfare of others so that “whatever is

done is done for the welfare of others,” (fol. 53b) and sentient beings are guided along by the great scope of a realized being.

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In order to fully experience limitlessness it is important to see if the ordinary mind has imposed any mental constructions of edges or boundaries upon limitless space. If so, the practitioner “opens” his or her awareness directly into any edges or boundaries, like pouring space into space, until the edges dissolve like mist dissolving into the atmosphere. The practitioner continues this process until all residual impositions of edges and boundaries disappear and there is a direct experience of genuinely limitlessness empty awareness/space.

Purification of residual karmic memory traces, afflictive emotions, perceptions, and/or the remaining substantiality of the body eventually results in sufficient purification that the practitioner is able to get glimpses or previews of the pure Buddha-Fields. In other words, the practitioner begins to see that what was once an ordinary world has become a sacred organized world of the mandala, and that he or she is a specific deity within that mandala. As ordinary perception is purified even more, the direct perception of the pure Buddha-fields of the mandala of the sambhogakaya becomes more and more stable, until ultimately there is no more deluded perception of an ordinary world. As this occurs more and more, an aspiration grows to help all sentient beings who fail to have this realization and who continue to wander in samsara. In other words, this aspiration more and more becomes aligned with the enlightened intention of Kun tu bZang po. As the practitioner aligns more and more with this enlightened intention, the aspiration develops into enlightened activity and the emanation of many enlightened bodies (nirmanakayas) to serve the welfare of others throughout the realms of samsara.

The emergence sequentially of the limitlessness of the dharmakaya, then the stability of the pure Buddha-fields of the sambhogakaya, and finally the many emanations and enlightened activities of the nirmanakayas leads to all three enlightened bodies emerging simultaneously—what is called stable, fruition enlightenment. This shift is immediately evident as locking into the structure of ultimate reality, and is typically accompanied by awe. As a consequence of fruition enlightenment, the practitioner no longer has moments of uniting with or moments of separating from ultimate reality. You neither unite to nor separate from the

ultimate reality that is always right here, and that you manifest every moment in your being.

The next section introduces the “manner of arising” of the threefold embodiment of enlightenment, primordial wisdoms, and enlightened activity, respectively. First, with respect to the manner of arising of the three-fold embodiment of enlightenment, Shar rdza Rinpoche first explains that the enlightened body transcends all limitations of the ordinary physical body: “This superior enlightened body has no outflows and is adorned with the major and minor marks [of a Buddha]” (p. 451). This passage means that normal “outflows” like urine, feces, and mucus cease. The body changes its physical structure (i.e., with the development of “major marks” such as long ear lobes, a bigger tongue, etc. characteristic of an enlightened Buddha). Furthermore, the positive qualities flourish (“minor marks”). Enlightened speech is the eloquent speech of the authoritative scriptures. Enlightened mind consists of the three pure visions of liveliness—ultimate sound, light, and light rays (p. 451). All of these are “the essence of self-appearing awakened awareness” (p. 451). Additionally, the five wisdom lights manifest as the deities and Buddha-fields of the five Buddha families “all having the same essence” (p. 453).

Next, Shar rdza Rinpoche introduces the “manner of arising of the deeds of enlightened activity” (p. 457). The “purpose” of enlightened activity is to manifest immeasurable compassion to all sentient beings, “like the sun that shines everywhere” (p. 458), using a combination of “expert skillful means” and “omniscience” to guide sentient beings along the path and subdue their mind-streams. Enlightened beings influence the mind-streams of sentient beings with four kinds of enlightened activities—(1) pacifying negative states, (2) causing flourishing of positive states, (3) directly influencing their mind-streams, and (4) using intense pointing out teachings like the A Khrid actual foundational practices and by-passing practices. Knowing how to guide each and every sentient being requires “omniscience” so that nothing “is never not known” (p. 458). Shar rdza Rinpoche defines enlightened deeds saying, “These deeds do not serve the purpose of only a single sentient being. Such deeds are ongoing and never occasional. Such deeds do not do only one thing but everything, and also have [great] variety. Such deeds are effortless and spontaneous. Such deeds are never [done] indirectly [through others] but are direct. Such deeds are never self-serving but come from [selfless] loving kindness” (pp. 458-459).

Shar rdza Rinpoche adds that these precious instructions are not intended for everyone. They are intended “for those individuals with fortunate karmic connections, for those who hold the next life more important, for those who have diligence and generosity, for those who have great faith, admiration, and respect, for those who have gathered determination and fortitude, for those of the authoritative lineage who have great endurance, for those who work hard and endure suffering, for those whose mind and conduct are both virtuous, for those whose mindfulness and metacognitive intelligence are clear, and for those whose elements and aggregates [of the physical body] are youthful [and neither aged nor immature]” (p. 460). They are intended for those unconcerned with self-importance, and who value these teachings and the lama as precious. He adds, “If one [person] happens to be a [proper] vessel, or a hundred [are proper vessels] pass it on to them” (p. 461).

From <https://www.amazon.com/Self-Arising-Three-fold-Embodiment-Enlightenment-Meditation/dp/195695001X/> (note: this text has a lot of translation errors, which is why some of the excerpts posted above were manually proofread.

This thread on Dharmawheel goes into further detail:

<https://www.dharmawheel.net/viewtopic.php?t=36767>)

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Guhyasamaja Tantra:

The recitation also describes a visualization in which the “array of all the three times’ and ten directions’ world spheres...fits within the space of each successive atom [in that totality of world spheres].” This is like the lines [from the Samantabhadracaryāpranidhānam] that state: “Atop each atom are buddhas equal to the atoms [in all the worlds] / [Each one] seated in the midst of [a retinue of] bodhisattvas.” So we should visualize a multitude of world spheres fitting within the space of each single atom that make up the totality of each world sphere. And within each of all the world spheres that fit inside each atom are found individual groups of the fifteen guardians of the directions, along with their respective retinues. In other words, no matter how small an atomic particle may be, the possibility of examining that space ever more minutely is without limit. This is similar to how we hear that scientists are able to discover subatomic particles within atoms, even though they cannot be observed with ordinary perception. While ordinary beings cannot observe the expanse that exists within an atom,

spiritual beings that have attained high levels of realization are able to perceive countless worlds there and they can also emanate duplicates of themselves into these worlds.

Another way to understand this visualization is to think how one person, another person, a third person, and so on, up to an unlimited number of individuals, can generate in their minds the very same Guhyasamāja mandala with its complement of deities. In a similar way, the space within a single atom is able to accommodate vast world spheres and an individual can actually experience this reality. The possibility of this reality stems from the fact that all entities lack any independent or self-existent nature; that is, they exist only as nominally ascribed phenomena, as dependent originations that are contingent upon a dualistic, conceptualizing mind. This is another way of understanding the vastness of this meditation. If the recipients of the offering are visualized in this limitless manner, then the offerings presented to them must also be correspondingly vast in their extent.

Kalachakra tantra:

“That meditated upon” refers to that stabilized by the branches of withdrawal and meditative absorption. By nature it illuminates the three worlds, and it is a conventional truth. That is to be recalled and by doing so, “its forms perfectly emanate.” “Its forms” refers to conventional forms, while “perfectly emanate” means seeing them as pervading all realms of space. “Know this as recollection” means that seeing the three worlds of the three times should be understood as the branch of recollection. Because of that it was taught. “Illumination is created there” means the illumination of the three realms is created “there” in the branch of recollection.

To explain this passage a little, “That meditated upon” refers to an empty-form real mother-and-father Kālacakra in embrace arising from the primary accomplishments and stabilizations of the branches of withdrawal and meditative absorption. It radiates light capable of illuminating the three worlds, and itself is a conventional truth. This is to be recalled or recollected, and therefore this branch is known as recollection. [440] “Its forms perfectly emanate” refers to being in the form of a conventional-truth empty-form Kālacakra in mother-and-father embrace that emanates and pervades the realms of space, and that this too should be regarded as recollection. This is to be focused on or recollected. “Know this as

recollection” means that, furthermore, seeing the three-world empty forms of past, present, and future, which were stabilized previously by withdrawal and meditative absorption, should also be known as the branch of recollection. Because of these reasons it was taught. “Illumination is created there” means that the well-illuminated empty forms of the three worlds are actual phenomena and not just appearances in the mind, and that they are created “there” in the branch of recollection. Therefore the Cakrasaṃvara Commentary talks of signs arising when first meditating on empty forms and of signs arising at the time of accomplishment. Concerning the latter: (...)

Note: These excerpts were mainly posted to demonstrate that Tibetan Buddhism has practices related to mutual interpenetration. To properly engage in tantric teachings, one must receive the relevant empowerment and develop a relationship with a qualified teacher.

Related articles:

<https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/vajrayana/tantra-advanced/what-is-guhyasamaja-practice>

<http://studybuddhism.com/en/tibetan-buddhism/tantra/kalachakra/kalachakra-a-buddhist-tantra-practice> (<http://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/vajrayana/kalachakra-advanced/question-sessions-with-the-dalai-lama-about-kalachakra/advice-on-keeping-the-kalachakra-vows>,  
<http://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/vajrayana/kalachakra-advanced/question-sessions-with-the-dalai-lama-about-kalachakra>)

<http://studybuddhism.com/en/tibetan-buddhism/tantra/buddhist-tantra/buddhist-deity-or-mickey-mouse-what-s-the-difference>

<https://www.lionsroar.com/what-to-do-when-energy-runs-wild/> (alternative link in case the original one is inaccessible: <https://unfetteredmind.org/when-energy-runs-wild/>)

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/tibetan-buddhism-on-maha-total-exertion.html>

...

“There are at least 5 phases of total exertion. Each is a deepening.” – John Tan, 2020

...

Back in 2015, John Tan said, "John Tan Friday, March 20, 2015 at 10:24am UTC+08

The way you described has a lot of over emphasis, there is a lack of intensity but expressed as if you have realized and experienced the intensity of these insights and experiences...lol. You have to reverse the cycle of experiences and you stabilize both your insights and experiences. Even in AF (*Actual Freedom teachings*), there is such intensity. When practitioners expressed something like the universe doing the washing of the plates, they are having that experiences... not just to sound nice. In a simple breathing process, one too undergo deconstruction process to later end up in maha and total exertion. Like in experience, you say you become just the breathing and the universe is inhaling... conceptually you understand after anatta but the intensity isn't there.

For example I tell you to breathe in slowly and deeply for focus in placing your intention on the lower dantian to the chest and to the fingertip. Just this process, how do you enter into anatta and a state of total exertion? I mean a state of no-mind and into total exertion. You say that you think you can breathe in slowly and deeply but I can tell just this is enough for you to learn for sometime. To fully understand the whole mechanics, the whole DO into the seamless act of the pose -- the whole movement of breathing into the fingertip.

In energy practice you go by the "feel" and "taste", fully engaged and involved into it without discursive thoughts, the whole movement learning itself from moment to moment. But if you analyse, you will see the process of deconstructions - the chest, the air movement, the stomach, the tailbone, the tightening of the muscles of your abdomen, the holding of your breath at your lung ... how you can deconstruct these into the seamless activity of breathing into your finger tip. If you go through the process of deconstruction, you too can get into the direct taste of maha and total exertion but it involves the conceptual mind until all these different events and related activity are deconstructed into a seamless flow. Though it involves the conceptual mind, your intellect is clear and knows exactly where the hindrances are... why the breath cannot flow smoothly ...

So when I asked you can you breathe in slowly and deeply for those simple poses... you told me you think so... Immediately I know there is still a long way for you to go... lol"

...

"You must breathe until your inner organs are activated... until you can feel the vital energy flow... the intensity of vibrational sensation throughout... then consciousness will expand and together with your anatta and emptiness insight, your experience and insight will be powerful and deep. Nauli kriya is not only a very powerful cleansing technique but crucial when you can integrate it with breathing control." - John Tan, 2016

...

"Energy practice must start from naval base... You will know why next time...now you still don't have experience of how energy moves...how is energy like at each gate and what is it actually...lol. you cannot just focus on brow and crown, not suitable for most.

Next time when you are back then teach you in detail. What I want you to practice is not just chakra, you have to experience qi, vital energy...as in full of vitality and aliveness...when I call you to stand with one leg and stretch the other leg out horizontal to the ground and put your iPad on your lap and watch video, you must be able to do it...lol

I want you to know your body relationship, qi and mind ... For example you have fear... You concentrate and think and think the fear might still be there...but when you breathe, spread out your fingers and feel the sensations you directly experience fearlessness...no fear and it cannot enter ...even if you think...y ... The relationship of mind, body and qi.

When I call you to think of the air moving to the end of your toe...it is not as good as tip toe, breathe in hold your breath for few seconds and breathe out and have your intention focus on the few energy points of your 丹田, 会阴 and 永泉. Like when I do split, I am not just doing the stretch or just breathing in deeply but I want the air to move to these few points...so I have my intention, strength and air on naval, butt, and both toes....

So your naval, leg and toes all must have control and have energy...then your presence can be powerful and strong esp when you are able to move, fill and feel the air in various parts of the body.

Chakras depending on what is your practice."



"But intensity is directly related to energy practice...lol. The insight of Anatta will break the reified constructions and artificial boundaries. Energies tied to mental constructs will be released.

You must do until you like to breathe from your abdomen first and it becomes quite natural...will take about half to one year. Then later go into poses."

"Currently your presence is not all radiance because there are body and energy blockages. But when you are able to open up your meridian in your whole body with asanas and breath control from finger tip to toes... Your body becomes no obstructions...your Shen at your brow is bright and radiance...means sometimes your thoughts are muddy and mind loses focus but when all these are open up, you are like a ball of energy (I really mean it...lol), presence radiates beyond body...but it is still I AM...later all these energies will naturally distribute to all parts and senses become sharp and entire body beams. Effectively all sensations and the entire body is full of vital energy and aliveness, senses are clear but no matter how one tries, he will find it difficult to break-through the body and "connect" with the universe because of the "view". In other words, not the bodily energy blockage anymore but the "constructs" are the next step forward to break the boundaries of the mind-body-universe -- the mind-body drops, anatta and total exertion is the next phase." – John Tan

...

"In Maha, one does not feel self, one 'feels' universe; one does not feel 'Brahman' but feels 'interconnectedness'; one does not feel 'helplessness' due to 'dependence and interconnection' but feels great without boundary, spontaneous and marvelous." - John Tan, 2009

"To say the universe is involved in this action as if differentiated entities is not exactly correct. Cause is neither same nor different from effect, like sun and rays. And in terms of yogic taste, it is more accurate to describe it in terms of "the universe is the action."

When you breathe, is the air in the environment, the nose, or the lungs and diaphragm that is breathing? The universe is the breathing

...

Yes.. There is no "outside" to the infinitude of total exertion" - Soh, 2019

Related Articles (recommended to read the Stage 6 section in the longer AtR Guide as well)

Total Exertion:

[http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2013/09/dharma-body\\_7.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2013/09/dharma-body_7.html)

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2017/12/what-is-total-exertion.html>

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/06/the-total-exertion-of-success.html>

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/06/purpose-of-deconstruction-and-dependent.html>

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/06/different-phases-of-understanding.html>

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<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/total-exertion-jeweled-mirror-samadhi.html>

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/04/being-time.html>

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<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2026/01/dogen-total-exertion-totality-beyond.html>

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<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/08/the-world-of-interrelatedness.html>

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/01/drivin-dogen.html>

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/03/boundless-cosmic-activity-vs-focused.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/03/the-magical-fairytale-like-wonderland.html>)

[https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/03/realization-experience-and-right-view\\_13.html](https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/03/realization-experience-and-right-view_13.html)

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/12/being-time-by-shinshu-roberts.html>

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/01/ahalmaas.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/05/the-totality-of-all-that-there-is-that.html>)

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Ted%20Biringer>

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Shingon> (related: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/kukai/>)

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/11/a-compilation-of-zen-teacher-anzan.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/12/zen-master-ven-jinmyo-renge-senseis.html>, <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/10/space-like-nature-and-age-of-universe.html>)

<https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Huayan>

Time, Space, and Knowledge – Tarthang Tulku: <https://www.amazon.com/Time-Space-Knowledge-Reality-Psychology/dp/0913546089/>

#### Non-Arising:

- 1) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Non-Arising>
- 2) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Dependent%20Designation>
- 3) [http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2015/01/four-levels-of-insight-into-emptiness\\_9.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2015/01/four-levels-of-insight-into-emptiness_9.html)
- 4) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/07/the-key-towards-pure-knowingness.html>
- 5) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/12/post-anatta-pointers.html>
- 6) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/03/wrote-this-yesterday-and-have-since.html>
- 7) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2017/11/emptiness-and-causal-efficacies.html>
- 8) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/08/compilation-of-post-anatta-advice.html>

- 9) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/06/non-arising-due-to-dependent-origination.html>
- 10) [http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2015/01/designation-made-alive\\_6.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2015/01/designation-made-alive_6.html)
- 11) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/01/emptiness-of-intrinsic-clarity-in.html>
- 12) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/02/some-writings-by-thusnessjohn-tan-on.html>
- 13) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2009/02/nondual-emptiness-teachings.html> (related: <https://greg-goode.com/article/introduction-to-the-emptiness-teachings/>, <https://greg-goode.com/tag/emptiness/>)
- 14) [http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/07/a-and-emptiness\\_1.html](http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/07/a-and-emptiness_1.html)
- 15) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2019/11/the-two-truths-of-buddhism-and.html>
- 16) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/p/a-conversation-with-john-tan-some-time.html>
- 17) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/04/the-only-way-to-ultimate-truth.html>
- 18) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/06/emptiness-non-arising.html>
- 19) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/03/my-favourite-sutra-non-arising-and.html>
- 20) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/05/kyle-dixon-on-dependent-origination-and.html>
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- 23) <http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/equipoise-and-post-equipoise.html>
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- 25) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/01/i-am-vs-anatta-vs-twofold-emptiness.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2011/06/the-unborn-dharma.html>)
- 26) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/01/22-year-old-taiwaneses-recent.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/05/perspectives-on-dependent->

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- 27) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/03/integrating-and-a.html>
- 28) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/12/nothing-hidden.html>
- 29) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/06/intuiting-middle-path-of-buddhism-via.html>
- 30) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/06/the-intertwined-path-dependent.html>
- 31) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/09/freedom-from-elaborations-non.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Freedom%20from%20Elaborations>)
- 32) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/06/the-link-between-emptiness-of-inherent.html>
- 33) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/dogen-gorampa-tsongkhapa-and-emptiness.html>
- 34) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/08/non-contradiction-of-dependent.html>
- 35) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/05/transcript-of-a-r-awakening-to-reality.html>
- 36) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/09/a-compilation-of-simpos-writings.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2018/07/on-supernatural-powers-or-siddhis.html>)
- 37) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Merits>
- 38) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2013/03/rainbow-body-and-thusness-advice-to-me.html>
- 39) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/10/exhaustion-of-all-phenomena.html>
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- 41) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/03/no-original-face-every-face-is-original.html>
- 42) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/04/the-dispeller-of-disputes-nagarjunas.html>
- 43) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/08/comparing-english-translations-of.html>

- 44) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/08/the-unfindable-fullness-how-drum.html>
- 45) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2025/11/dependent-arising-spontaneous-presence.html>
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- 47) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2024/02/cittamatra-is-expedient-pedagogic-tool.html>
- 48) Lankavatara Sutra (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/p/normal-0-false-false-false-en-sg-zh-cn.html>, <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2023/01/some-quotes-from-lankavatara-sutra-on.html>)
- 49) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/the-philosophical-foundations-of.html> (related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/10/the-practice-of-dzogchen-longchen.html>, <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/05/longchenpa-finding-rest-in-illusion.html>, <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/02/a-letter-to-almaas-on-dzogchen-and.html>), requires the relevant empowerment/reading transmission:  
<https://www.berotsana.org/collections/dzogchen/products/precious-treasury-of-the-genuine-meaning>,  
<https://www.berotsana.org/collections/dzogchen/products/jewel-treasure-of-the-dharmadhatu-book>)
- 50) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2026/01/is-dzogchen-similar-to-advaita-vedanta.html>
- 51) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/04/natural-liberation-by-padmasambhava.html>
- 52) [https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/02/buddhahood-without-meditation\\_8.html](https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2014/02/buddhahood-without-meditation_8.html) (<https://www.amazon.com/Stilling-Mind-Shamatha-Teachings-Lingpas/dp/0861716906/>, <https://www.amazon.com/Fathoming-Mind-Inquiry-Insight-Lingpas/dp/1614293295/>, <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B078MP8HC4>, <https://www.berotsana.org/collections/troma-publications>)
- 53) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/12/revealing-nagarjuna-series-all-12-parts.html>

- 54) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Guy%20Newland> (related: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GlkrW7aP4j8&list=PL8DRNsJySiiYtVJ14zrP3f1-ls2CmOoyC>, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUwyKYKtJBA&list=PL8DRNsJySiiYQxJfL1f\\_l3DfLzcJEEhar](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SUwyKYKtJBA&list=PL8DRNsJySiiYQxJfL1f_l3DfLzcJEEhar))
- 55) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Time>
- 56) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/search/label/Sonam%20Thakchoe>
- 57) <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2022/02/zen-master-hong-wen-liang-teachings.html> (for Chinese readers only)
- 58) <https://luminousemptiness.blogspot.com/2008/11/niguma-vajra-verses-of-self-liberating.html> (highly recommended to go through the Mahamudra books listed in the section for Stage 5)
- 59) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/twotruths-india/>
- 60) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/twotruths-tibet/>
- 61) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gorampa/>
- 62) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/tsongkhapa/>
- 63) <https://www.lotsawahouse.org/tibetan-masters/mipham/four-great-logical-arguments> (commentary by Thrangu Rinpoche: <https://www.amazon.com/Open-Emptiness-Khenchen-Thrangu-Rinpoche/dp/193157121X>)
- 64) <https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/lam-rim/emptiness-advanced/imputation-mental-labeling-and-designation>
- 65) Jamgon Mipam: His Life and Teachings by Douglas Duckworth and Beacon of Certainty trans. John W. Pettit (must read books; related: <https://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2021/03/book-recommendations-beacon-of-certainty.html>)

(Comments by Soh: Also read these, they are important:

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/06/primordially-unborn.html>

<http://www.awakeningtoreality.com/2020/06/non-arising-due-to-dependent-origination.html>)

Sample Booklist related to Total Exertion

Soto Zen view (ordered based on subjective difficulty, nothing exhaustive):

- 1) Realizing Genjokoan by Shohaku Okumura (good introduction to total exertion if someone has realized anatta) - <https://www.amazon.com/Realizing-Genjokoan-Key-Dogens-Shobogenzo/dp/0861716019/>
- 2) Meeting the Myriad Things: A Zen Practitioner's Guide to Dogen's Genjokoan by Shinshu Roberts - <https://www.amazon.com/Meeting-Myriad-Things-Practitioners-Genjokoan/dp/1645472728>
- 3) Each Moment Is the Universe by Dainin Katagiri - <https://www.amazon.com/Each-Moment-Universe-Being-Time/dp/1590306074/>
- 4) The Light That Shines Through Infinity by Dainin Katagiri - <https://www.amazon.com/Light-That-Shines-through-Infinity/dp/1611804663/>
- 5) The Mountains and Rivers Sutra by Shohaku Okumura - <https://www.amazon.com/Mountains-Waters-Sutra-Practitioners-Sansuikyo/dp/1614292930/>
- 6) Eihei Dogen: Mystical Realist by Hee-Jin Kim - <https://www.amazon.com/Eihei-Dogen-Mystical-Hee-Jin-Kim/dp/0861713761/> (optional: <https://www.amazon.com/Dogen-Meditation-Thinking-Reflection-View-ebook/dp/B010MQCEB4/>)
- 7) Readings of Dōgen's "Treasury of the True Dharma Eye" by Steve Heine - <https://www.amazon.com/Readings-Treasury-Columbia-Buddhist-Literature/dp/0231182295/> (optional: <https://www.amazon.com/Dogen-Japans-Original-Zen-Teacher/dp/1611809800/>)
- 8) The Flatbed Sutra of Louie Wing by Ted Biringer - <https://www.amazon.com/Flatbed-Sutra-Louie-Wing-Ancestor/dp/1589825179/>
- 9) Zen Cosmology by Ted Biringer - <https://www.amazon.com/Zen-Cosmology-Dogens-Contribution-Worldview/dp/1537187309/>
- 10) Being-Time by Shinshu Roberts - <https://www.amazon.com/Being-Time-Practitioners-Guide-Dogens-Shobogenzo/dp/1614291136/> (this book



requires a strong foundation in terms of intellectual view and prior insights into total exertion in order to properly understand it)

- 11) Shobogenzo - <https://www.amazon.com/Treasury-True-Dharma-Eye-Master/dp/1590309359/> (Tanahashi translation)
- 12) <https://terebeess.hu/zen/dogen/true1-7.pdf>,  
<https://terebeess.hu/zen/dogen/true8.pdf> (Soto Zen Translation Project – includes extensive annotations/commentary on Shobogenzo from a scholarly/linguistic perspective: <https://www.amazon.com/Treasury-True-Dharma-Eye-Eight/dp/0824899253/>)
- 13) optional: Eihei Koroku - <https://www.amazon.com/Dogens-Extensive-Record-Translation-Koroku/dp/0861716701>

Hua-yen view:

- 1) Hua-Yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra by Francis Cook - <https://www.amazon.com/Hua-Yen-Buddhism-Jewel-Indra-laswr/dp/027102190X/>
- 2) Buddhist Teaching of Totality – The Philosophy of Hua-yen Buddhism by Garma C. C. Chang - <https://www.amazon.com/Buddhist-Teaching-Totality-Philosophy-Buddhism/dp/0271011793/>
- 3) Entry into the Inconceivable – An Introduction to Hua-yen Buddhism by Thomas Cleary - <https://www.amazon.com/Entry-Into-Inconceivable-Introduction-Buddhism/dp/0824816978/>
- 4) [http://dharma-rain.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Hua\\_Yen\\_Buddhism\\_Emptiness\\_Identity\\_Inte.pdf](http://dharma-rain.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Hua_Yen_Buddhism_Emptiness_Identity_Inte.pdf)
- 5) Avatamsaka Sutra - <https://www.amazon.com/Flower-Ornament-Scripture-Translation-Avatamsaka/dp/0877739404/>

Tiantai view:

Emptiness and Omnipresence: An Essential Introduction to Tiantai Buddhism by Brook Ziporyn - <https://www.amazon.com/Emptiness-Omnipresence-Essential-Introduction-Philosophies/dp/025302112X/>

(optional: <https://www.amazon.com/Beyond-Oneness-Difference-Antecedents-Philosophy/dp/143844818X>, <https://www.amazon.com/Clear-Serenity-Quiet-Insight-Chih/dp/0824873777/>)

Madhyamaka booklist (nothing exhaustive):

Gelug:

- 1) How to See Yourself As You Really Are – His Holiness the Dalai Lama (<https://www.amazon.com/How-See-Yourself-You-Really/dp/0743290461/>; good introduction to Madhyamaka along with Seeing That Frees by Rob Burbea and Introduction to Emptiness by Guy Newland)
- 2) Introduction to Emptiness: As Taught in Tsong-Kha-Pa's Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path by Guy Newland - <https://www.amazon.com/Introduction-Emptiness-Taught-Tsong-Kha-Pas-Treatise/dp/1559393327/>
- 3) Steps on the Path to Enlightenment: A Commentary on Tsongkhapa's Lamrim Chenmo. Volume 5: Insight by Geshe Lhundub Sopa - <https://www.amazon.com/Steps-Path-Enlightenment-Commentary-Tsongkhapas/dp/1614293236/>
- 4) Tsongkhapa's Praise for Dependent Relativity by Losang Gyatso - <https://www.amazon.com/Tsongkhapas-Praise-Dependent-Relativity-Tsongkhapa/dp/0861712641/>
- 5) Meditations on Emptiness by Jeffrey Hopkins - <https://www.amazon.com/Meditation-Emptiness-Jeffrey-Hopkins/dp/1614299137/>
- 6) The Library of Wisdom and Compassion (10 book series) by The Dalai Lama and Thubten Chodron - <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B078YG7K5Q> (Mainly Vol. 7 - 10)

- 7) Berzin Archive: <https://studybuddhism.com/en/advanced-studies/lam-rim#emptiness-advanced>

Mipham:

- 1) Jamgon Mipam: His Life and Teachings by Douglas Duckworth - <https://www.amazon.com/Jamgon-Mipam-His-Life-Teachings/dp/1590306694/>
- 2) Beacon of Certainty commentary by Anyen Rinpoche - <https://www.amazon.com/Journey-Certainty-Quintessence-Dzogchen-Exploration/dp/1614290091/>
- 3) Beacon of Certainty trans. John W. Pettit (must read book) - <https://www.amazon.com/Miphams-Beacon-Certainty-Illuminating-Perfection/dp/0861711572>
- 4) Mipam on Buddha-Nature: The Ground of the Nyingma Tradition by Douglas Duckworth - <https://www.amazon.com/Mipam-Buddha-Nature-Ground-Nyingma-Tradition/dp/0791475220/>
- 5) Mipham's Sword of Wisdom by Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche - <https://www.amazon.com/Miphams-Wisdom-Khenchen-Palden-Sherab/dp/1614294283>

Kagyü:

The Center of the Sunlit Sky: Madhyamaka in the Kagyu Tradition by Karl Brunnholzl - <https://www.amazon.com/Center-Sunlit-Sky-Madhyamaka-Tradition/dp/1559392185/>

Gorampa:

- 1) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gorampa/>
- 2) Constance Kassor PhD thesis on Gorampa: <https://etd.library.emory.edu/concern/etds/5712m675f>

- 3) Freedom from Extremes: Gorampa's "Distinguishing the Views" and the Polemics of Emptiness by Jose Ignacio Cabezon and Geshe Lobsang - <https://www.amazon.com/Freedom-Extremes-Gorampas-Distinguishing-Emptiness/dp/0861715233/>
- 4) The Two Truths Debate: Tsongkhapa and Gorampa on the Middle Way by Sonam Thakchoe - <https://www.amazon.com/Two-Truths-Debate-Tsongkhapa-Gorampa/dp/0861715012/>

Root Texts:

MMK by Nagarjuna (numerous commentaries are available, best to explore all of them):

Thich Nhat Hanh commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Cracking-Walnut-Understanding-Dialectics-Nagarjuna/dp/1952692466/>

Jay Garfield commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Fundamental-Wisdom-Middle-Way-M%C5%ABlamadhyamakak%C4%81rik%C4%81/dp/0195093364/>

Tsongkhapa commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Ocean-Reasoning-Commentary-Nagarjuna-Mulamadhyamakakarika/dp/0195147332/>

Mabja Jangchub Tsöndrö commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Ornament-Reason-Commentary-Nagarjuna-Middle/dp/1559393688/>

Siderits/Katsura commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Nagarjuna-Middle-Way-Mulamadhyamakakarika-Classics/dp/1614290504/>

Buddhapalita commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Buddhapalita-Commentary-Nagarjuna-Treasury-Buddhist/dp/1949163202/>

Madhyamakāvatāra by Chandrakirti:

Mipham commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Introduction-Middle-Way-Chandrakirtis-Madhyamakavatara/dp/1590300092/>

Tsongkhapa commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Illuminating-Intent-Exposition-Candrakirtis-Entering/dp/086171458X/>

Madhyamakālamkāra by Shantarakshita:

Mipham commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Adornment-Middle-Way-Shantarakshitas-Madhyamakalankara/dp/1590304195/>

Gelug commentary - <https://www.amazon.com/Ornament-Middle-Way-Madhyamaka-Shantarakshita/dp/1559392053/>