



Hearer practitioners apply the emptiness of the selflessness of persons, whereas the Mahayanic practitioner applies the practice of selflessness of persons and phenomena.

When we refer to the “3 scope beings” or the beings of the 3 levels of capability, we are talking about the goals that these different beings aspire to. The small-capability beings aspire not to fall into the lower realms and wish to obtain higher rebirth; the middle-capability beings are those who wish to be free from samsara and attain liberation/nirvana; the higher capability beings are those who wish to achieve liberation for not only oneself but all living beings.

The object of negation for the Hearer practitioner and the Solitary Realiser practitioner are the same but the approach they take are different in the sense that the Solitary Realiser works on negating the mistaken conceptual-thought regarding the difference between subject and object, which is much more subtle than the topic of selflessness of persons undertaken by the Hearer. Therefore although the 3 levels of capability beings seek to understand emptiness, the manner in which they deal with object of negation for each one is different.

Cessation is state of liberation from delusions. Such delusions are the objects of negation and in order to eradicate them, we need to know every aspect of each delusion as stated in scriptures. One therefore needs to gain realizations about the objects of negation and their antidotes. The antidote to ignorance is to actualize the realization on emptiness and only by doing so, is there a possibility of attaining cessation. Once we are convinced there is the definite cessation of suffering, will one be inspired to pursue and complete the path that leads to cessation.

At this point, comes the 4th noble truth.



The 4th Noble Truth of the Path

This refers to the direct realization of emptiness and the Dharma (which is Truth of Path and Truth of Cessation). Therefore if there is no 4th Noble Truth, there is no truth of the objects of Refuge (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) and if there is no objects of Refuge, there is no Buddha. Since the existence of 4th Noble truth is definite, there is the definite existence of the Triple Gem, which means there is Buddha. In this way, one convinces oneself that there is definite blessing of Buddha. To understand the Dharma Refuge, we have to understand, the Truth of Path and the Truth of Cessation.

In summary, one can express the Truth of Path is the direct realization of emptiness. Without this, one will not be able to eradicate delusions and defilements and thus there will be no chance to obtain liberation from samsara or attain full enlightenment. Yet to attain the realization of emptiness, one needs to practice and actualize all the underlying Buddha's teachings.

The entire Buddha's teachings, the essence is the truth of the path, is found in the 3 baskets of teaching, namely, Sutra (discourse), Vinaya (moral discipline) and Abidhammakosha (knowledge). These were then elaborated in the Lam Rim teachings and further elaborated in all the 84 000 teachings.



The method to actualize the Truth of the Path is to first engage into the discipline of morality in the context of having mindfulness, alertness and introspection. We have to live a life being mindful of the actions of our body, speech and mind in avoiding committing any non-virtuous actions and maintaining an ethical life. This way, there is the possibility of gaining concentration which is necessary for us to engage in practices. Without living an ethical life, there is no way to control our emotions and thus no way to develop concentration on the practices we are supposed to engage in.

The initial training in concentration involves living ethically and engage in meditation up to the stages of attaining physical and mental pliancy in order to prepare one's mind to gain the direct realization of emptiness. We can start by simply focusing our mind on not committing gross forms of non virtuous acts like killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, committing divisive speech, harsh speech, gossip, having covetousness, ill-will and mistaken views. Then if possible, we should live a life upholding the Refuge vows first, then the 5 lay vows, then the Bodhisattva vows, Tantric vows, pre-ordination vows, then novice vows, then full ordination vows. Training in concentration meditation to achieve mental pliancy relates to persisting in meditative efforts right through the 9 stages of meditation to the point of samatha (calm-abiding meditative state). At this stage of stable concentration, we then engage in vipassana (special insight meditation) to gain the direct realization of emptiness.

The realisation of emptiness to eradicate all defilements is only possible with this union of samatha (calm abiding) and vipassana (special insight) practices.

One could view the Mahayana path as a chain of connected aspirations and related effort. First we need to aspire to liberation (freedom from delusions and samsara); once we are convinced that liberation is possible, we spontane-



renounce suffering; then through having compassion, we seek to benefit all beings, one will aspire to renounce suffering for both oneself and all living beings.

At first, your efforts in remembering this Mahayana approach may be limited to a short period of let's say for only 1 second or a few hours a day but if you remind yourself daily, by first reflecting the first 2 Noble Truths (Truth of Suffering of oneself and others) and the Causes of Suffering (the delusions), you will gradually find it worthwhile to put more effort into reflection, meditation and retreat. Meditation is mental habituation, which is to remind oneself daily of a particular point. Try to put aside some time for reflection each day, even in sleeping hours! In dreams, we too can aspire for liberation and free oneself and all beings from suffering.

By frequently reflecting in this way, there will come a day where without effort, you naturally and spontaneously renounce suffering within you and this inspiration to liberate self and others will arise with ease within.

Renunciation has different levels: The small and middle capability beings renounce samsaric suffering and seek self liberation; whereas the great capability beings (Mahayana practitioners) renounce suffering not only for oneself but for all living beings and is inspired to full enlightenment in order to liberate all beings.

Up till today, you are only in the process of “practicing” renunciation. When you reach the point where renunciation is actualized and if at that moment, you are simultaneously inspired by great compassion or bodhicitta, that moment will be your entry into the 1st of the Mahayana 5 Paths. If renunciation arises without great compassion/bodhicitta, then one enters the 1st of the Hinayana 5 Paths.



Whether Mahayana or Hinayana path, all Buddhist practitioners need to go through the training of the 5 paths of :

Path of Accumulation

Path of Preparation

Path of Seeing

Path of Meditation

Path of No More Learning

You will come across the term “the 5 Paths and the 10 Grounds” which means the Mahayana practitioner engages in the practice of 5 Paths by applying extra effort to eliminate the subtle defilements through engaging in the 10 Grounds or stages of meditation aimed at removing these subtle defilements.

The Five Paths

The 1st Path is called the Path of Accumulation because this is the period where we focus on accumulating merits/positive potential which forms the start of the 3 countless aeon of merits described in the scriptures as needed for one to attain Buddhahood. This Path of Accumulation has 3 levels - small, middle and highest level of accumulation.

Once one is in this 1st Path, one has the ability to travel a hundred Buddha realms to receive the Buddha's teachings. Not only that, you are able to emanate into a hundred Buddha bodies to help all forms of beings and thus one accumulates merit easily and continuously in a vast manner. Within the 1st Path, there are 3 levels. When one reaches the 2nd level of this 1st Path of Accumulation, one's bodhicitta will not degenerate and there will be no danger of giving up the Mahayanic path.



Prior to this 2nd level, one remains vulnerable to losing the Mahayana aspiration to benefit all beings . If there is no bodhicitta aspiration to liberating not only self but also all beings and if there is no Mahayanic teacher or Mahayanic brothers or sisters to support your practice and if you get overwhelmed by your own suffering and decide to only liberate yourself, you cease being a Mahayana practitioner and become a Hinayana practitioner.

Therefore, we must create causes to practice the Mahayana path namely, the commitment to liberate numberless beings from samsara. If you encounter friends that ask you to give up the Mahayana, you might get confused due to thinking, “I already have so much personal trouble, why would I want to think about other beings’ liberation?” The moment you think this way, your bodhicitta ceases; the Mahayana aspiration is lost. We must create causes right now never to give up bodhicitta no matter what, no matter how much hindrances we face, we must not give up Mahayanic path. We need to think this way. We need strong determination on this.

When one completes this 1st Path of Accumulation, one accumulates the first of the three countless aeons of merit required to become a Buddha.

Next, as you accumulate extensive merits through persevering in bodhicitta and studying and meditating extensively on dependent-arising, you are preparing to enter the 2nd Path of Preparation.



In the 2nd Path of Preparation, you continue to develop your bodhicitta and enhance your efforts in meditating on emptiness. Once you have stabilized your understanding in dependent-arising and emptiness, you start to have visions that are near to realizing emptiness directly as there is a diminution to grasping at inherent existence.

There are also stages within this Path of Preparation. When you actualize the 3rd stage of the Path of Preparation called Stage of Patience, you will gain total confidence that you will never fall into the lower realms again, that you will never lose your bodhicitta nor fall into the Hinayana path of self-liberation. With such firm conviction, you continue accumulating merit and strengthen your understanding of emptiness until the moment you see emptiness directly. At that time, you totally understand the absence of inherent existence of self and of every single phenomena. It's not necessary that you remember the name of each phenomena but rather its nature as being empty of inherent existence. This is why this stage of the Path is called the Path of Seeing. Seeing what? Seeing emptiness directly.

When you enter the **3rd Path of Seeing,** you begin to accumulate the second countless eon of merit from that moment of entry. You also enter the 1st of the 10 Grounds where one is presented with the opportunity to deepen one's understanding of emptiness. The depth of the understanding of emptiness is divided into 9 levels. Within the first of the 9 levels, there are two subdivisions which relate to the gross and the very gross levels of defilements, thereby making it actually 10 different stages, for which the 10 Grounds are the antidotes.



At the 8th Ground, one's delusions (anger, attachment, ignorance, pride, doubt, wrong view) are purified and the remaining defilements to be eliminated are even more subtle and here, you start to accumulate the last of the 3 countless-aeons merit. When the practitioner from the Hinayana Path has completed the 5 Hinayana Paths, his entire afflictions are purified; whereas the Mahayanic practitioner who entered directly into the Mahayana 5 Paths, purifies his afflictions at the 8th Ground (during Path of Seeing). For those who had entered into the Hinayana path, when they get into the Mahayana path, what remains to be purified are the subtle defilements of ignorance and this practitioner still needs to accumulate 2 countless-aeons of merit. Those who entered the Mahayana path directly are able to purify delusions, as well as accumulate 3 countless aeons merit. When they reach the 8th Ground, all delusions are naturally purified.

First aeon of merit is accumulated during the Path of Accumulation. The second countless aeon of merit is obtained from the 1st to the 8th Ground. And the last of the 3 countless aeons of merit is obtained from the 8th Ground to the 10th Ground during the **Path of Meditation**.

When you reach the 10th Ground, there are 2 levels, namely the stage of total vigilance through the application of antidotes and the last stage relates to the elimination of the most subtle defilements which then leads to the attainment of Cessation which is the omniscient mind.

The first moment of the 10th Ground is the total vigilance derived from the application of antidotes to subtle defilements. When antidotes are applied forcefully with full alertness, the subtle defilements naturally disappear, like when you switch on the light, the darkness vanishes.



The 3rd Noble Truth of Cessation

Generally, there are 3 stages of cessation/liberation. Two are within the Hinayana path (the path of the Hearers and Solitary Realisers) where the goal is to free oneself from samsaric suffering and the third is that of the Mahayana practitioner, where the goal is to achieve the state of full enlightenment or Buddhahood for the sake of all beings. Although the methods of cultivation between the Hearers and Solitary Realisers differ in that Hearers cultivate initially through listening to teachings from a teacher; whereas Solitary Realisers tend to escape into caves without any companion or teacher and practice on their own to gain realisations, their mentality is different. They both have the same goal of self-liberation but the level of grasping of the Solitary Realiser is much more subtle than that of the Hearer.

For those on the Hinayana path (sometimes referred to as the path of the small capability-being (the Hearers) and middle-capability being (the Solitary Realisers), the cessation of suffering or liberation or nirvana for them refers to the elimination of samsaric suffering (i.e. suffering of suffering, suffering of change and pervasive suffering) for oneself. Upon attaining the Hinayana form of liberation/nirvana, it means that they will not be reborn in samsara by the force of delusion and karma and they actualize a great amount of peace and happiness and can remain in such a meditative state for aeons within blissful concentration . However, this is a limited form of liberation because one has not yet purified the root of all delusions (which is to remove the subtle defilement which is the obscuration to full enlightenment) and thus, they will be unable to purify all afflictions completely. The



The 2 Truths

Conventional Truth & Ultimate Truth



The Two Truths: Conventional Truth & Ultimate Truth

In the previous chapter, we talked about the necessity of combining bodhicitta with the wisdom realizing emptiness in order to attain full Enlightenment/Buddhahood.

In order to perfect our practice of bodhicitta, we need to understand Conventional Truth. In order to perfect our wisdom realizing emptiness, we need to understand Ultimate Truth.

The state of enlightenment refers to the omniscient state, the all-knowing state, the peerless happiness state, the state where one attains the perfection of wisdom-body called the Dharmakaya and the perfection state of the form body called Rupakaya.

These two enlightened forms of the Buddha is our goal as with these, we are able to benefit countless beings.

In order to obtain this goal, you need to establish the appropriate causes and conditions. What are the causes and conditions required? The causes to be cultivated are the practices of method and wisdom.

The practices of method refer to efforts at loving-kindness, compassion and bodhicitta; the practice of wisdom refers to the cultivation of the wisdom realizing the emptiness of self and emptiness of phenomena.



Without these two wings of knowledge of method and wisdom, one will not be able to achieve the two perfection states of Dharmakaya and Rupakaya.

If our purpose is to become Buddha, then we have to learn, gain understanding, cultivate, meditate, habituate and live a life with compassion towards all and at the same time, put effort towards gaining realization on the emptiness of self and phenomena.

In order to actualize these two forms of practice of method and wisdom, we need a firm foundation on the Buddha's teachings on the Two Truths namely:

- (1) Conventional Truth
- (2) Ultimate Truth

The Conventional Truth in general

Conventional Truth refers to our day-to-day, ordinary perceptions and understanding of things and phenomena around us for example, we have labels for a variety of beings and things such “humans”, “animals”, “objects”, “environment”, etc and we relate to them and function alongside them according to such labels. Therefore, we call these merely labelled-things and experiences as Conventional Truth because they are in accordance with the views mostly commonly held or conventionally accepted. Another example is the sufferings endured by a human being is the Conventional Truth of the human; the particular sufferings of animal beings is the Conventional Truth of animals and so on. The general Conventional Truth of Pervasive Suffering from having been born in samsara is also the general Conventional Truth of all 6 realm beings because these are commonly accepted views and experiences.



The Conventional Truth in particular

When we refer to let's say, a preta/hungry ghost being, they experience both the general aspects of Conventional Truth and the specific aspects of Conventional Truth. The general aspects of the Conventional Truth of a hungry ghost is to be born in that realm, with the suffering attributes of being a hungry ghost. The specific aspects of the preta being's Conventional Truth would be the suffering of hunger, thirst and not finding food despite long searches for it. Even if they find food, they cannot swallow the food as it turns into needles or thorns; any water they find turns into liquid of hot iron.

It is the same with animals, humans, asura beings and god-beings. When I am explaining this, please try to concentrate and obtain the essence meaning of the Conventional Truth and Ultimate Truth.

These Two Truths are often mentioned but we do not enough effort to know more about this and to familiarize ourselves with it. Here I would like to relate the Two Truths in a practical sense and how they relate to our daily life.

The Conventional Truth of an animal is the suffering of torturing each other, eating each other, with bigger animals hunting and eating smaller animals; fierce animals hunting down more gentle animals. There is much harm caused by animals upon each other. The general aspect of the Conventional Truth of an animal is to be born with all the traits of being an animal, which itself is suffering. The specific Conventional Truth of an animal is ignorance and hence, it lives in constant fear and terror.



As for a human being, the specific Conventional Truth of being born as a human being is the suffering of being conceived, birth, aging, death and intermediate state. All these are tremendous sufferings. Further, the Conventional Truth of a human being includes not meeting the object which one desires and meeting the object which one wishes to avoid. The thing that you wish to be apart from such as suffering, never separates from you; whereas the things you wish to encounter never happen, which is also a form of suffering.

If we look at ourselves in just one day of our life, in fact, let's say just 5 minutes of our life, we are never separated from suffering. We constantly encounter all three types of suffering:

(1) Suffering of Suffering such as body aches or mind feeling low, disappointment, grasping, attachment, anger, hatred, anxiety, dissatisfaction. We are always inseparable from dissatisfaction, that itself is the Suffering of Suffering.

(2) The Suffering of Change which arises because we grasp onto our sense pleasures. When we see a beautiful object, we get attached to it because we feel momentarily happy. When we are hungry, we crave for food and when the food goes into mouth, we feel happy right then. But these moments of joy do not last and we end up with dissatisfaction, discomfort and disappointment. These are the Suffering of Change.



(3) Pervasive Suffering arises due to our having aggregates (form, feeling, consciousness, discrimination, karmic imprints) that are contaminated and impure, which have the quality of degeneration. The moment you were born, the aggregates started to degenerate. We think in our youth that we are young, when in fact it is already in the process of degeneration. Look at ourselves now - we have wrinkles, white hair, forgetfulness, failing eyesight, unbalanced tastes, loss of hearing. All these are due to the quality of contamination and degeneration of the aggregates which we all possess.

The devas (god-realm being) and asuras (demi-god beings) also have their Conventional Truth which is the suffering of facing death and the end to their luxurious manner of existence. By wasting all their merits accumulated in past lives and having a preview of their next rebirth (which will be a lower rebirth due to the exhaustion of good karma), their suffering at this time is tremendous.

Now we get an idea that every single Six Realm beings experiences suffering. This is the Conventional Truth of us Six Realm beings.



The Conventional Truth of contamination

All objects or outer phenomena including samsaric possessions, are part of Conventional Truth of contamination. The meaning of the Conventional Truth of contamination is that it exists due to the ignorance and karma of living beings. Such as this table, the Conventional Truth of this table exists by the force of ignorance and karma (of the person perceiving the table) and because of that, it becomes part of suffering and samsara. The fact of samsara, all outer objects is suffering. This is very interesting. When we say suffering, we always refer to “suffering beings” and we never say “suffering objects or suffering outer phenomena”. You would want to know why we include trees, flowers, eye-glasses, earrings, watches, mugs, mala, every object, as part of suffering - this is very interesting.

These are described as part of suffering and samsara because it is contaminated. In what way is it contaminated? It is contaminated by the force of ignorance and karma. Whose ignorance and karma? Our ignorance and karma i.e. the ignorance and karma of the perceiver of the object. This table exists here due to our aggregates (consciousness, etc) being influenced by ignorance and karma. If we don't have the karma to see this table as a table, we will not see this table and it would be as if this table is not here. If our ignorance mind didn't create this label of “table”, this table would not exist for us here. We think we have bought this table or constructed this table but in fact, it is our mind, with its delusion of ignorance and karmic imprints that “created” or gave rise to this table and everything else we perceive around us. Think of this.



For this reason, since the cause behind the arising of the table is tainted with ignorance and karmic imprint, the table as a samsaric object becomes part of samsaric suffering too. If I get attached to the beauty of this table, then I will be affected by suffering. Similarly, if I get attached to this flower which also arises due to my mind seeing it with ignorance and karma, I too will experience suffering. Or someone might ask why this flower has been placed on this table, as it blocks the face of the person sitting at the table. This thought could create agitation and mental agitation is suffering. So even a flower can become the cause of suffering, hence itself is suffering. Similarly, another student could come to offer this flower to a teacher and there might be some people in the audience watching this and wondering "How come teacher shows special attention to this person who is offering flowers?". This kind of jealousy mind also creates great suffering and all because of a flower.

Therefore, why do we call outer phenomena such as flowers and tables suffering? It is because they can give rise to suffering in same way as (and influenced by) ignorance and karma.





What do you do after understanding Conventional Truth?

By understanding Conventional Truth, you realise how you and all beings constantly experience suffering due to their contaminated aggregates. You should then aspire to generate great compassion by thinking, “I am totally trapped and chained by ignorance and karma and in constant suffering. There is not even a single moment of separation of suffering. Every other living being and all 6 realm beings are in the same situation as I and suffer in the same way. Every being suffers general and specific sufferings. Therefore, there is no choice for me but to generate compassion for all, so I must generate develop such compassion “.

When you generate this deep feeling of freeing oneself from suffering, it is called renunciation; when you generate such renunciation not only for oneself but for others, it is called compassion.

Now to get to the real essence: Renunciation and compassion can be cultivated and becomes possible because of one’s understanding of Conventional Truth. If we didn’t understand Conventional Truth and how we perceive beings and objects the way we do and realize the suffering that comes from this, we would not think to renounce such suffering for ourselves, let alone generate the big heart to liberate all beings from suffering. It would be out of the question then! Without renunciation, no matter how much we talk about great compassion, it will be difficult for it to come from the depth of our hearts because we have not deeply reflected on our own suffering and that of others to begin with.



The understanding of Conventional Truth therefore inspires oneself to generate renunciation in oneself and have compassion toward others. This great compassion, the unconditional thought to liberate every single living being from suffering, the altruistic mind called bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is thus based on the understanding of Conventional Truth.

In other words, without understanding Conventional Truth, there can be no renunciation. Without renunciation, there is no way to generate great compassion. Without great compassion, there is no way to generate bodhicitta and without bodhicitta, there is no way to obtain enlightenment.

After contemplating this, you ask yourself, "Do I truly have the ability to actualize renunciation (of suffering) for myself and work for the benefit of all beings out of compassion right now?" By raising this big question to yourself, you will realize it is presently impossible. Why is impossible? Because right now, one's innate quality (which is the clear light mind and the Buddha nature which every being has), is completely dominated by ignorance, completely covered and chained by the ignorant mind. Without cleansing and eradicating this cloud of ignorance, delusions and disturbing emotional thoughts, there is no way to actualize the clarity and luminous qualities of the Buddha nature that is necessary to actualize perfect renunciation and service to all beings.

How do we cleanse this ignorant mind and this cloud of afflictions and disturbing thoughts? What is the cleansing tool? What is the antidote for ignorance? The antidote is the wisdom realizing emptiness, which is the wisdom realizing the true nature of phenomena, the ultimate truth.