

Emptiness

Of the actual realization of emptiness nothing can be said. Conceptualizations about emptiness fill many volumes of Mahayana Buddhist writing. There are, however, 2 basic approaches: The direct and the indirect.

The indirect approach concerns the 5 paths and 10 Bodhisattva Stages, the “Bhumis”. They are expounded in the “Abhisamayalankara” and elsewhere. This was covered in a previous talk.

The direct approach to emptiness is to be found in the sutras of the Prajnparamita, and in the writings of Nagarjuna and others. Here the tools of logic and illogic, of negation and paradox are employed to create conceptual structures that “point” to emptiness.

As the concepts get subtler, they get increasingly more paradoxical. For instance, the curious koan from the Zen Tradition:

“how do you get a goose out of a bottle?”

“It’s out!”, replied the master.

{ the goose was never in the bottle in the first place }

The 20 kinds of emptiness:

(Of course, there is only one emptiness. There are however many perspectives.)

1. Interior Emptiness
2. Exterior Emptiness
3. Interior and exterior Emptiness
4. Emptiness of emptiness
5. Great emptiness (mahashunyata)
6. Emptiness of ultimate reality
(paramartha shunyata)
7. Conditioned emptiness (samskrita s.)
8. Unconditioned emptiness (asamskrita s.)
9. Infinite emptiness
10. Emptiness without beginning or end.
11. Emptiness of non-repudiation (anavakara s.)
12. Emptiness of essential nature (prakriti s.)
13. Emptiness of all dharmas
14. Emptiness of own marks (sva-lakshana s.)
15. Unascertainable emptiness (anupalambha s.)
16. Emptiness of the non existence of own being
17. Emptiness of non-existence (abhava s.)
18. Emptiness of own being (svabhava s.)
19. Emptiness of existence (bhava s.)
20. Emptiness of other being (para-bhava s.)

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