

NOTES ON “HOW TO SEE YOURSELF AS YOU REALLY ARE”

Chapter 16 – Testing Your Realization

It is possible to mistakenly conclude that you have understood the subtler emptiness when you have actually understood only the coarser one. (p. 151)

Coarse and Subtle Realization

The Dalai Lama draws a distinction here that he had not mentioned before. There are two levels of subtlety possible in realizations of emptiness. They have to do with a difference in how people and things appear. If we have the more subtle realization, then we can instantly transfer this realization to something other than the self.

Doing the Test

Recall the steps in your realization of the emptiness of your self.

Recall that if the self exists as it appears to exist, then it must be the same as the body-mind, or different from the body-mind. It must be able to be found in one of those two contexts – in and around the body-mind, or apart from the body-mind.

Recall that you weren't able to find the self in either context, and so the self doesn't exist in the exaggerated way it appears to exist.

Now, take some time and try to apply this procedure to your arm or to the mind. You can even try to apply it to an apple or a table.

Possibility 1: If the force of your reasoning immediately applies to these other objects:

Then your realization was of the subtle sort. The force of your reasoning should be able to apply to any object or phenomenon you turn the mind to. This is because any phenomenon, when appearing to the mind, appears as though it exists inherently, in an objective, self-established way. In isolating your target, you have isolated the most subtle aspect – the sense of inherent existence. This is called the “**subtle misconception.**”

Possibility 2: If the force of your reasoning DOES NOT immediately apply to these other objects:

Then your realization might have been of the coarser sort. The coarser sort of realization is the kind of realization that could apply only to persons, souls or sentient beings. You might have

thought of the self as being a doer, owner, thinker, chooser, sufferer or enjoyer. When you realize is that the self is not any of these things, and when this is all you realize, then this is a coarser realization. This realization cannot be applied to the parts of the body or mind, or to objects in the world.

That is, it doesn't make sense to realize, "My car doesn't exist the way I thought it did, because the car is not a thinker." Of course the car is not a thinker. But realizing this is no help, since (a) you were never under the mistaken impression that it WAS a thinker, and (b) you can still have the impression that the car exists inherently even though you never regard it as a thinker.

In other words, this coarse realization cannot be transferred to objects that are not candidates for being the self.

So if your realization fails to apply intuitively to other objects, then you go back and get a better sense of inherent existence. You can try again to grasp the sense of inherent existence of the self, or that of some other object. Perhaps the key element needed to isolate the sense of inherent existence is the sense that the phenomenon, whatever it is, exists without having to be posited by conceptuality. If it seems **mind-independent**, that is, **objectively there**, able to exist without anyone ever having posited it, then this is a good indication of the sense of inherent existence of that phenomenon.

So how can we tell the difference?

Coarse Misconception of Self	Subtle Misconception of Self
<p>The classic definition is the sense that the self is substantially existent or self-sufficient. This includes the feeling that the self is a doer, owner, thinker, chooser, sufferer, enjoyer, and so forth.</p> <p>Notice that if you realize that the self isn't any of these things, this realization <i>cannot</i> be applied to any other object.</p>	<p>The sense of a thing being inherently existent, in which it seems to exist without needing to be posited by a mind.</p> <p>Notice that if you realize that the self is not able to exist without being posited by the mind or conceptuality, then this realization can be applied to other objects.</p>
<p>The coarse misconception arises mostly in the context of blatant exaggeration or emotional upset. We go along with an appearance that the self is a doer, owner, thinker, chooser, sufferer, enjoyer, and so forth.</p>	<p>The subtle misconception arises whenever the "I" appears. There are plenty of times that the "I" appears in a mild, even emotionally neutral way. It does not always appear in an exaggerated fashion as it does when we suffer from the coarse</p>

Coarse Misconception of Self	Subtle Misconception of Self
<p>The coarse misconception is a very good initial indication of the more subtle misconception.</p> <p>Whenever coarse misconception is present, the subtle misconception is present as well. In addition, the subtle misconception may be present even after we are free of the coarse misconception.</p> <p>Eventually, we need to become free from both of them.</p>	<p>misconception of self. Sometimes the “I” appears in a mild and neutral way.</p> <p>Nevertheless, the appearance of the “I” carries the appearance that it exists inherently. (This is the same for all objects, which is why realizing that this appearance is false is able to apply to all objects.) It seems to really be there. This is a slightly different and more subtle sense than the sense that the “I” is strong or intense or very tangible.</p> <p>Even if the “I” appears in a mild and emotionally neutral ways, and even when we strongly believe that the “I” does not exist inherently, it still appears as though it did.</p> <p>Our emptiness meditation begins, not by trying to eradicate this appearance, but by working to reducing our assent to this appearance.</p> <p>(NOTE: It is part of the Dalai Lama’s school’s teaching that whenever objects appear, their appearance includes the appearance that they exist independently. We can go along with this seeming independence, or not. According to the Dalai Lama’s Mahayana teaching, from the eighth bodhisattva level and above, after many rebirths, our mental and sensory consciousnesses begin to be clarified, purged of the tendency to convey the false appearance of inherent existence. This is the path towards removing the obstructions to omniscience, which happens after we remove the obstructions to liberation.</p>

The Dalai Lama Encourages Us to Keep At It

On page 161, he says:

In this way, meditation is a long journey, not a single insight or even several insights. It gets more and more profound as the days, months, and years pass. Keep reading and thinking and meditating.