

# **Emptiness Meditations**

## **The Rock Meditation**

This meditation focuses on the emptiness of the correlation between what we see with our eyes, and what we touch with our hands. It takes as an example a rock you can hold in your hand and look at. Why do we think that what we are seeing and what we are feeling comprise the same object? It is actually two different pieces of sensory data, which the mind then combines together. This exercise is very helpful for establishing how the mind creates all the objects around you, and for realizing that it really is impossible for any object to affect another object at all – the connections we think we see are images of our own mind.

### **Steps of the Rock Meditation**

1. Hold a stone in your hand.
2. Close your eyes and feel the hardness.
3. Open your eyes and see the shape and color.
4. Think of how you normally conceive of this object's features – that both its shape and its hardness are within the rock itself.
5. Now see how the mind is creating the connection between the thing the eye sees, and the thing the hand feels.
6. Now take away your projection of that connection, and see that there is no other connection there at all.

[Note: You can also practice this meditation without opening your eyes and just imaging the shape and color. Once you've got the idea, you can try this meditation using other objects as well.]

### **Example of the Rock Meditation**

If I didn't have the seed in my mind to see this rock as hard, it wouldn't be hard. And if I didn't have the seed in my mind to see it as round, it wouldn't be round. These qualities are not coming from the outside, from the rock itself. If I had different seeds, or could control my seeds, it could actually not be hard, for me. And that is why great saints can walk through fire without getting burned, because the hotness is not inherently a quality of fire. And that is why Jesus could walk across water.

## Kedrup Je's Four-Part Meditation on Emptiness

This is one of Kedrup Je's meditations on emptiness, which he used as a preparation for Tantra. It deals with the integral relationship between the dependent origination of things and their emptiness – the fact that everything we see around us is only a projection, and the fact that it never could have been any other way.

In order to properly prepare your mind for this meditation, you should first do a short meditation on *tong len*.

This mediation can be done with any one of the senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch. However, it is most commonly practiced with things we see, because we tend to rely more heavily on our visual sense than any other to give us information about our surroundings.

### The Four Parts of Kedrup Je's Meditation

1. Just Looking:

In your mind, without opening your eyes, scan the objects in the room around you. Pick one of those objects and focus upon it, just looking at it like a child would, with no analysis.

2. Ignorance:

Now become aware of your feelings that this object is existing outside, from its own side; that it is existing towards you. Watch the feeling you have about that object -- that it would still be there if you left the room. This is our ignorance of the object.

3. Dependent Origination:

Now shift your mind to a correct view of the object. This object is just an image you are projecting. It comes from you, it is a part of you – a child of your own mind.

4. Emptiness:

Drop everything that you are projecting about that object, just cancel it, and see what's left. Then stay in that space of there being nothing else.\*

\*Note: Step #4 is difficult to hold onto for any long period of time. If you find yourself losing it, simply go back and repeat the process of going from #3 to 4.

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**An Example of Kedrup Je's Meditation**

In my mind I see the table that's in front of me. I think it's out there because I can use it – I can put my book on it. Actually, I'm just projecting an image of a table onto that yellow rectangle – there is nothing about that yellow rectangle that says "table" from its own side. If I drop my conception of it as a table, the table is gone, and I am left with only the yellow rectangle. I think the yellow rectangle must be out there because I can see it. But actually the rectangle of yellow is really only a bunch of spots of yellow picked up by my eye and then turned into a rectangle by my mind. The yellow rectangle is also just a projection onto many pieces of sense data. If I cancel this projection, the yellow rectangle is no long there.

## Dropping the Object

What exactly does it mean to “drop the object” during an emptiness meditation? In essence, there are three steps:

1. Becoming aware that the object you are focusing on is a projection.
2. Consciously trying to dissolve that projection which the mind is creating, and then
3. Focusing on the absence of that object existing once you take away its projection.

Of these three steps, it is the last which is the most important. It is that absence which we want to fix our minds on for as long as possible.

What if I try to dissolve the object but it doesn't work? This is quite likely, actually, because it takes a lot of good karma to be able to do this completely. The mind is really just replacing a projection of an object with a projection of its absence, and as we all know, we can never control our projections in the present moment. In this case, we would *imagine* that the projection has disappeared, and then focus on that third step – the absence of there being anything beyond that projection. And because doing this meditation is such good karma, with practice we collect the karma to be able to do it better and better.

### An Exercise in Dropping the Object

I become aware of my right shoulder. I feel the curve of the skin, and watch the mind as it forms a mental picture of that same shape.

Now I move my mind down to my left big toe. I can see and feel the outline of the toenail and the shape of the toe. I can feel the fabric of my pants pressing against it.

Now quickly I check, while I am still focusing on the toe, where is the shoulder? Since I was single-pointed in my focus on the toe, my mind dropped the image of the shoulder. The shoulder was removed from my consciousness for that period of time. (Of course, as soon as I think “shoulder”, it pops up again.)

So really, I am dropping conceptions all the time and replacing them with different conception, but without any awareness that I am doing so.

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Now I need to apply an awareness of emptiness to this act. When I think about it, in those moments when I was focusing on my toe, I was completely unaware of every other part of my body. They simply didn't exist as objects of my consciousness in those moments.

In fact, I can never actually be conscious of more than one part of my body at any given moment. Though of course I can switch quickly from one to the next, like when I think of "eye", "nose", "mouth" so quickly that it seems like I can experience "face".

But this idea of a "body" – where did it come from? It has no basis in an actual experience of an awareness of an entire body, because I can never be aware of more than one part at a time. Even when I look in a mirror, my eyes can only register one part at a time.

So it is my *mind* that is linking these distinct experiences of consciousness together and calling them one body. This is just a concept. And the fact that in reality there is no body out there, coming from its own side, is the emptiness of this body.

This mental image I have of a body – this is just something being projected by my mind. That is step #1. Now for step #2, I simply take away that image which my mind is projecting; I just dissolve it. Now, step #3: after I have taken away the body that my mind was projecting, what body is left out there? There *is* no body that exists outside of my projection. I lock my mind onto that absence of a self-existent body, and I try to stay there steadily and clearly for as long as I can.

When the image of a body starts creeping back in my mind again, or when the emptiness I am focusing on starts to get fuzzy, I just take myself through the three steps again.

But what about the parts of the body? Are they really out there?

I bring my focus back to my shoulder, and I analyze what I am experiencing. First the mind "locates" the shoulder, meaning that it outlines an area of "space" where it thinks the shoulder should be.

Then when I place my mind on that shoulder location, two things arise: an image of the general shape of the shoulder, and a corresponding physical feeling. In actuality these are two separate projections of the mind – neither one is "out there" the way they seem to be.

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I focus on the fact that these are mental images. I watch how my mind is actually drawing a curved line to make a shoulder. And I think about how the feeling of the shoulder wasn't there before I focused my mind at that location – if it was “out there”, wouldn't I always feel it?

Now that I've got it firmly in my mind that what I am experiencing are merely two projections (step #1), let's see if I can stop projecting them (step #2). First let's try to remove the visual image. Then I'll try to remove the feeling.

Now that my projections of a shoulder are gone, let's see what shoulder is left (step #3). There *is* no shoulder outside of my projections. I fix my mind on this absence of a shoulder out there for as long as I can.

[Note: while using your body and its parts is a bit more difficult initially, it is a much more powerful meditation. It directly attacks our wrong views of seeing a self-existent “me” and “mine”, and is a very good seed for seeing emptiness directly. (When you see emptiness directly, the emptiness you focus upon is yourself.)]

## The Six Flavors of Emptiness

This meditation takes us through six different wrong views of the world around us and, one by one, establishes that these views cannot be true; that what these views profess is, in fact, impossible. By this we arrive at the six flavors of emptiness. However, according to the highest school of Buddhism, only the last one is really emptiness. Each of these wrong views is a view we hold constantly in our daily lives, and each step of eliminating them gets us closer to a pure understanding of emptiness itself.

### Six Wrong Views and Their Antidotes

1. Wrong view: Things stay the same for a while.  
Antidote: Things are constantly changing every second.
2. Wrong view: I own this; I control its fate.  
Antidote: Absolutely nothing in the present moment is in my control.
3. Wrong view: I am at the mercy of things randomly happening to me.  
Antidote: One past deed caused both the object, and myself who perceives it at that moment.
4. Wrong view: Things are exactly how I see them, and no other way.  
Antidote: I am imposing judgments on things; they could be different.
5. Wrong view: Things are coming from their own side completely.  
Antidote: Things come half from their own side, and half from my perceptions.
6. Wrong view: There is some part of the object that comes from its own side.  
Antidote: It is all only my projection.

### ***Mahamudra: Applying the Six Flavors of Emptiness to Your Own Mind***

This meditation takes these same previous six wrong views and their antidotes and applies them to a new object: one's own mind. There are many different features of the mind – discrimination, raw awareness, etc. – but it is advised for this meditation to focus on the mental function of feeling. Feelings are easy to access, and they also tend to cause us a lot of trouble when we see them as self-existent, leading us to do bad things in order to avoid what we dislike and attain what we like.

### **Six Wrong Views and Their Antidotes, Applied to Mental Feelings**

1. Wrong view: I will feel this same way for a while.  
Antidote: My feelings are constantly shifting, moment to moment.
2. Wrong view: I control how I feel.  
Antidote: I have no control of my feelings in the present moment.
3. Wrong view: I am at the mercy of my random feelings.  
Antidote: One of my past actions caused both this feeling, and myself perceiving it.
4. Wrong view: This feeling is definitely good or bad.  
Antidote: I am imposing a judgment on the feeling that is not inherently part of that feeling, and could be different.
5. Wrong view: Outside forces are completely responsible for how I feel.  
Antidote: Outside forces, combined with my perceptions, compose how I feel.
6. Wrong view: There is some outside factor affecting how I feel.  
Antidote: How I feel is entirely a projection.

### **Example of a *Mahamudra* Meditation**

1. I think this feeling of unhappiness will last for a while. But really, the rise and fall of a moment of emotion is just like the rising and fading sounds of a plane passing overhead – it comes and goes quickly, and even in the space of its short existence it is constantly changing by degrees, from softer to louder to softer, etc.
2. I think I can control my feelings. Actually the thoughts and feelings come into my mind completely unbidden – I never invited this unhappiness to come and disturb my mind.
3. I feel like I'm being bombarded by this random feeling of unhappiness. But to be sure, nothing is random. I have been brought to this moment, and the feeling of unhappiness has been brought to this moment, by the same karma—the fact that in the past I caused someone else to be unhappy. I am fully responsible.
4. I think this feeling of unhappiness is really lousy! But does it really have

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an inherent badness about it? I could look at this feeling of unhappiness

as a great motivation for me to practice even harder, so I can get out of this stupid cycle of pain and then bring others out of it. Then I'd have to say that the unhappiness is a good thing.

5. I am sure my feeling of unhappiness relies entirely on things outside of me: the bad weather, lack of sleep, the start of a cold. I think if those things were different, I'd be happy. But really, come on, then we could all just work on manipulating our outside situations so we'd always be perfectly happy. We could all move to Florida or something. That doesn't work. Even if everything outside goes perfectly, there are still unhappy feelings left. That part must be coming from inside of me. So outside circumstances can only play a part in how I feel, and my own mind provides the rest.
6. These outside circumstances must play some part in how I am feeling, right? It really seems like when I get a nice surprise gift from someone, I feel happier than if the gift never came. But there are times when I'm so sad nothing can make me feel better. And times when I'm so happy nothing can faze me. These feelings actually have nothing to do with any outside circumstances that I thought were affecting them. It is *all* a projection forced on me by my past actions. And that means that if I plant the right seeds now, I can create a future of total joy every moment of the day.

## ***Lam Rim* Emptiness Meditation**

The way to see emptiness directly is to practice the stages of the path properly, and to contemplate emptiness. This meditation is a combination of both. Each day, go through one step of the *lam rim*, and examine both its dependent origination and its emptiness, until you go through the entire *lam rim*. Included here is an outline of a *lam rim* based upon Je Tsongkapa's prayer, *The Source of All My Good*. For people who have entered into the secret world of the Diamond Queen, it is recommended that you use Master Tsarchen's prayer at the end of the *dakkye*, going through one verse each day.

### **Lam Rim Outline**

- I. How to take a Teacher
  - A. Developing faith in Them
  - B. Remembering Their kindness
- II. How to purify you mind
  - A. Taking the essence of this life
  - B. Steps shared with those of lower capacity
    1. Death and impermanence
    2. Refuge
    3. Karma and its consequences
  - C. Steps shared with those of medium capacity
    1. Develop the desire for freedom
      - a. The sufferings of this existence
      - b. The cause of all suffering—our mental afflictions
      - c. How to get out of this cycle
        - i. The training of morality
        - ii. The training of concentration
        - iii. The training of wisdom
  - D. Steps shared with those of higher capacity
    1. Developing the wish for enlightenment
    2. Training yourself in the deeds of a bodhisattva
      - A. The six perfections
        - i. Giving
        - ii. Ethics
        - iii. Not getting angry
        - iv. Joyful effort
        - v. Concentration
        - vi. Wisdom
      - B. The secret practices
        - i. Entering the Diamond Path
        - ii. Keeping you pledges and vows
        - iii. Meditating on the two
- III. A request for conducive conditions and an end to all obstacles.

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- IV. A prayer that your Teacher will always stay and guide you, until reaching the final goal.

**Example of a *Lam Rim* Emptiness Meditation**

I have been taught the sacred laws of karma and its consequences. The fact that I understand them is a projection of my mind; my past deeds are forcing me to understand them. If I hadn't done these deeds, I couldn't understand now. There is no other kind of understanding. If I take away my projection of understanding these laws, no understanding at all exists.

## Onion Skin Meditation

This meditation is an exercise in dividing things into parts, and then parts of parts, in order to try to find some sort of solid, self-existent essence that an object is made of. You take the mind down layer by layer, until you come to understand that what you are looking for simply doesn't exist.

### Example of an Onion Skin Meditation, Using a Neutral Object

I picture a table in front of me. Thinking about it, I see that it is only five pieces of wood, which my mind is labeling "table". There is no table out there coming from its own side.

When I look closer, I realize I can't even see the other pieces of wood – I can only see the one piece on top, and my mind is adding on the other four pieces that it "knows" must be there.

Further, the very identification of this rectangular object as a piece of wood is something which my mind has constructed, not something coming from the object itself.

And if I am really honest about it, my eyes can't see the bottom or the sides of this rectangular object – it is my mind that is superimposing a three-dimensional object onto this brown colored rectangle.

So the actual sense data which my eye perceives is really only a brown rectangle. But if I watch my eyes carefully and think about what they are actually doing, I see that they move from one side of this rectangle to the other. Actually the eyes can't see a whole rectangle all at once; they first see the left side and then the right, and then the mind pieces that data together. The eyes see, for example, two square pieces and assemble them into a rectangle.

So there are two brown square pieces. But even focusing on of those squares, I realize it still takes the eyes time to move across it, and up and down. The eye is really sequentially seeing even smaller squarish patches, which my mind *remembers* and synthesizes into a larger square.

But can my eye even take in one of those smaller squares in a single instant? In actuality, taking this line of thought even further, every millisecond would produce in the eye only a tiny dot of brown color, which my mind then synthesizes into a shape, like a square or a circle. My eye is not actually

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seeing shapes at all!

But what about the dot of brown? If I think about it carefully, I realize that the eye could never think to identify anything as a particular color; that brown also is a concept which must be coming from my mind, projected onto the space in front of me. And the dot as well could be divided, infinitely.

And the very space in front of me, this too is only an idea of the mind, called into being by my thought of it.

So in fact, every single detail of every single object that I ever see is all a projection of my mind – there is no raw data “out there”. And that means that it is infinitely changeable. This ordinary, neutral table that I see in front of me could have been something altogether different, some holy object which produced in my mind incredible bliss, with every millisecond of the eye’s “experience” of it.

**Example of an Onion Skin meditation, Using an Attractive Object**

I call to mind the face of someone I like. Immediately this image brings to mind a pleasant feeling. But what is it about this image itself that is so pleasant from its own side?

I think this face is beautiful, but is this beauty contained somewhere in the shape of the nose, or within the pores of the skin? If that were the case, then everyone who saw this face would have the same feeling about it. The idea of this beauty must be coming from my own mind.

So without my projection of pleasant or unpleasant, this object I am seeing is simply an image of the face of a certain person. But what about the recognition – the very identification of this face as belonging to a certain person?

It seems like this image contains information about who this person is – I look at the face and immediately think of a name, and all sorts of other information about a “person” that my mind connects to this image. But none of this information could be contained within the face itself; my mind is super-imposing all of that information onto this image.

And even the “face” is just a concept of my own mind. My mind is linking together the different parts like eye, nose, mouth, and then combining them into a whole image of a face. My eye as it travels could never actually *see* a whole face all at once, it can only see fragments – shapes and colors which the mind then labels. In actuality, there *is* no face out there.

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My eye can't even think to identify the parts of this "face". For instance, the "eye" I am seeing is really just a couple of circular things (pupil, iris, etc.), and then my mind comes along and labels that an "eye". There is no eye without my mind constructing it.

And even these circles are a whole *idea* that my mind has put together, based on the fragments my eye picks up as it moves from millisecond to millisecond – first a speck of blue here, then another speck of blue, then a speck of black, and so on.

So all that there is out there, really, are different specks of color and light which my mind creates into these huge elaborate concepts, starting from a simple shape and ending up with a person I like.

What about color? Is it really out there? If I think about it, the very identification of any particular color must be coming from my mind. The fact that I am able to see and understand the concept of what "blue" is, is its own separate projection itself. And if I wasn't able to understand this concept, "blue" would cease to exist, for me.

So what is my eye really seeing? It is watching pictures in my mind.

What does this mean? It means that everything about my experience is infinitely changeable: the fact that I associate this object with something pleasant; the fact that I can identify this object as someone I know; the very fact that I can understand what a human face is – all could change in an instant, into something much better or much worse, depending upon the seeds I have collected in my mind.

## The Diamond Cutter Meditation

This meditation analyzes the difference between a quality, and something that is characteristic of that quality. In Tibetan this is known as “*chi-jedrak*.” A deep grasp of the relationship between these two things is a trigger for seeing emptiness directly.

### Example of the Diamond Cutter Meditation

Why, when I look at that Ford Tempo outside, do I think “That’s a car”? What about it has the quality of “car-ness”? Is the car-ness in the four wheels, or the engine, or the bumper? No. Is it somehow hovering in the air around the whole thing? No. I am projecting the idea of “car” onto that hunk of metal. Really the only cars that exist are in my mind. “Car” exists in my mind -- an image of my mind. It is a quality, and this thing in front of me is characteristic of that quality.

*These meditations were compiled by Christie McNally from various teachings given by Geshe Michael Roach.*