

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

Chapter 11 – Realizing That You Do Not Exist in and of Yourself

Chapters 8 and 9 emphasized a calm, focused mind. Chapter 10 gave us the motivation to begin the inquiry on our own self and not on other objects. Now Chapter 11 lays out the blueprint for how we go about meditating on the emptiness of the self. There are four steps in the meditation. This chapter distinguishes the four steps, and goes into detail about Step 1.

The Four Steps

- 1. Identify the Target.** The target is the inherently existent “I,” not the conventional “I” that depends on the mind and body. Chapter 11 talks about this.
- 2. Determine the overall logic of the inherently existent “I.”** The logic is this: if the inherently existent “I” exists, then it must either be the same as the mind and body, or different from the mind and body. There are no other logical possibilities. Chapter 12 talks about this.
- 3. Analyze whether the inherently existent “I” is the same as the mind and body.** Chapter 13 talks about this, and calls it “oneness.” That is, **IF** the inherently existent “I” is the same as the mind and body, then they are “one.”
- 4. Analyze whether the inherently existent “I” is different from the mind and body.** Chapter 14 talks about this, and calls it “difference.” That is, **IF** the inherently existent “I” is different from the mind and body, then they are “different.”

Conclusion: If we cannot find the inherently existent “I” being the same as the body or being different from the body, then we have realized that it doesn’t exist. There are no other logical choices. When we are sure that we have looked everywhere this “I” could possibly be, and haven’t found it anywhere, then this is a case of the realization of the emptiness of the self!

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Step 1 – Identify the Target

This is the step where we identify what we are going to look for. The target is sometimes called the “target of refutation” or the “target of your reasoning.” It is the inherently existent “I.” We know theoretically that this “I” is not supposed to exist, though it appears to exist. Chapters 2 and 3 in the book helped sensitize us to this exaggerated sense of the existence of the self. The idea is, if this “I” really exists the way it seems to, then we should be able to find it when we look closely for it.

We are not looking for the conventional “I.” This is important. It is part of the whole process to distinguish as well as we can between the inherently existent “I” and the conventional “I” that depends on the body and mind. Here are some differences:

Conventional “I”	Inherently Existent “I”
Exists in a thoroughly conventional way.	Does not exist in any way. It only seems to. The conception of this “I” does exist. The conception of this “I” is what causes suffering. Realizing the emptiness of the “I” helps dissolve this conception.
This is the “I” that pays bills, eats dinner, meditates on emptiness, and realizes that the “I” is empty. This “I” doesn’t exist on its own, but depends on the body and mind.	This “I” doesn’t actually do anything, because it doesn’t exist. However, it seems to be the unchanging constancy underlying the changes in the body and mind. It seems to be the owner or controller or support of the body and mind.
This “I,” like all conventional phenomena, exists “in name only.” That is, the process of naming is one of the things that this “I” depends on. This is a very casual, contingent existence, and is not self-established. However, this “I” appears to exist inherently, and we mostly go along with the appearances, which is why we have the sense of the inherently existent “I.”	This “I” doesn’t exist in any way at all, not even conventionally. We have the conception of this “I” for many reasons, including how we attribute self-existence to the conventional “I.” The conventional “I” shows up as though it were inherent, and we go along with that. Sometimes, we might even have official spiritual or philosophical teachings that say that this “I” is really there.
When we observe the body and/or the mind, we designate these elements as an “I.” This is normal, and by itself not problematic.	When we observe the conventional “I,” we attribute inherent existence to it. The conventional “I” appears as though it were inherent. But it’s not.
This “I” is not even looked for in our emptiness analysis. (In fact, we could say that this is the “I” that does the looking and realizes emptiness.)	This “I” is looked for in our emptiness analysis. When the inherently existent “I” is refuted in all the logically possible ways, then we have realized the emptiness of the “I.” The “I” that is empty is

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Conventional “I”	Inherently Existent “I”
	the conventional one.
Not refuted by our emptiness analysis. If we refute this “I,” the result is nihilism.	Refuted by our emptiness analysis. If we don’t refute this “I,” the result is essentialism.
The more we realize the emptiness of the “I,” the easier it will be in the future to tell the two “I’s” apart. They appear to be mixed like milk and water.	The more we realize the emptiness of the “I,” the easier it will be in the future to tell the two “I’s” apart. They appear to be mixed like milk and water.
The conventional “I” appears as though it is inherent, but it is never the inherent “I” that appears. It is just a sense or an attribution of an inherent “I” that appears.	This “I” doesn’t appear, but a sense of it does. The sense of this “I” is stronger in certain circumstances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When we are insulted or feel indignant ● When we are proud ● When we feel that we must defend or attack something ● When we feel like we are the unchanged essence underlying the changes of the body or mind
This is the “I” that is doing the emptiness meditation.	We can visualize scenarios like these in order to generate a tangible sense of the “I.” How does the “I” appear at these moments? As if it were truly, really present! We can use the unpleasant emotions as a lightning rod to lead us to the sense of the inherent “I” behind them. With that sense in place, we meditate by looking for the inherent “I” itself (see Chapters 13 and 14). It is not the emotions we are trying to target, but the seemingly inherent “I” that they appear to refer to. Getting a sense of the inherent “I” is the important Step 1 in the emptiness meditations. It is the most important part when we are meditating along the lines explained in this book (there are other ways too). Getting a sense of the inherent “I” can take weeks and months, but it is well worth the effort. It is the key to realizing the emptiness of the self. The more clearly we can isolate the target, the more clearly we will see that it doesn’t exist, and the more powerful will be our emptiness realizations.