

**Instruction of the Mahāyāna View:
Clarification of the Two Truths¹
by Patrul Rinpoche**

translated by Jan-Ulrich Sobisch

There are two instructions, namely

- (1) the instruction that is to be realized by those who seek liberation
- (2) and the instruction that is to be practiced.

The instruction that is to be realized by those who seek liberation

- (1) The first has again two parts:
 - (1.1.) the original state of knowledge objects² in general
 - (1.2.) and the original state of the consciousness.

The original state of knowledge objects in general

- (1.1.) The first has again two parts:
 - (1.1.1.) relative truth
 - (1.1.2.) and absolute truth.

Relative truth

(1.1.1.) Regarding the first, in general, all appearances from the ceaselessly tormenting hell up the post-meditative³ state of the tenth bodhisattva level are relative truth. Within that, there are again the wrong relative and the pure relative truth. From among these two, whatever appears up to the level of beginners is wrong relative truth.⁴ As soon as practitioners on the stage of “intentional conduct” have seized the elixir of realisation, whatever appears is pure relative truth,⁵ but as long as they have not seized it, wrong

¹ The terms (skr.) *satya* and (tib.) *bden pa* represent both “truth” and “reality.” In Buddhism they refer to something that is both true and real. It is truth because it is consistent with true reality (which is an epistemological statement). But it is also a “reality” because if, for example, the statement is made with regard to the absolute that it is without origin and cessation, then this is a statement about its existence: The true essence of the absolute is the absence of origin and cessation (which is an ontological category).

² “Knowledge objects” are the totality of those objects that are the object of a mind (tib. *blo*). “Original state of knowledge objects” refers to the true nature of objects, which in turn can be viewed in relative and absolute terms.

³ A bodhisattva of the higher levels can have a preliminary experience certain forms of awakening in which the perception of phenomena comes to a standstill. When he rises from meditation, however, the phenomena reappear, although they are already understood to be a delusion. This is technically referred to as the “postmeditative phase”. However, it is not simply a phase between meditation sessions, but a phase existing from the “path of seeing” onwards, which follows the respective phases of meditation after the attainment of the “meditative equipoise” (skr. *samāhita*, tib. *mnyam gzhaq*).

⁴ “Beginners” refers here to all ordinary beings who are still completely subject to the illusion of appearances. Many scholars refer to “false relative truth” as something that is a deception and has no function. Jigten Sumgön, on the other hand, states that every deception fulfils a function, albeit an ultimately undesirable one. For him, “false relative truth” is something deceptive that leads to disaster due to entanglement and evil motivations.

⁵ Practitioners at the level of “intentional conduct “ seek liberation on the paths of accumulation and preparation, i.e., they are still below the “path of seeing” and the first bodhisattva level. When they have

relative truth. After having obtained a bodhisattva level, whatever appears to their consciousness is pure relative truth. It is still relative truth, because mere appearance has not ceased, but these appearances are now directly perceived as false.

The appearances appearing from the first to the tenth bodhisattva level arise because the earlier traces of being accustomed for a long time to grasping things have not been eradicated. They are like the odour of a box of musk. For the Buddha, who has totally eradicated the habitual traces, there are no appearances at all. He remains only in absolute truth, without mental proliferation.

Attachment to the ordinary receptacle of the world and its contents, namely the beings, as real is wrong relative truth. Having transformed (receptacle and contents) into its antidote, the pure deity and its illusory palace,⁶ the meditative practice, etc., is pure relative truth.

Absolute truth

(1.1.2.) The essence of absolute truth is the sphere of true reality (Skt. *dharmadhātu*), free from mental proliferation. Even though its essence is indivisible, if one differentiates it from the perspective of “actualized” and “not actualized,” it is the “absolute truth of the natural fundamental state” and “of the actualized realization of that,”⁷ or the “absolute truth of removing imputations by listening and reflecting” and “by the experience of the yogis,”⁸ or the “absolute truth of ordinary beings inferring the object universal” and “of direct intuitive perception by the Noble Ones.”⁹ These [terminological pairs] are taught to be the “absolute truth that is conceptualized and non-conceptualized.”

There are three ways of appearance for these two truths: Appearance that occurs within the mental continuum with attachment is the level of ordinary beings and is called

seized the “elixir of realization”, i.e., have recognized the emptiness of the phenomena of a true self, they reach the first bodhisattva level.

⁶ The palace is the mandala palace of the visualized deity. They are “pure” because they are no longer false relative truth, and on this level of meditation the phenomena are no longer taken as truly existent (therefore they also work here as an antidote to the deceptive phenomena of the world and its beings). They are “illusion-like” because they appear without having a true existence. Jigten Sumgön also teaches that the deity is perfect in a definitive sense from the beginning (*yongs su grub pa*), because it is a manifestation of the true nature that has always been present in the ground, not differing in its essence from the ultimate result (it is only temporarily defiled). This is why the Mantra vehicle is also one in which the result is taken as a path.

⁷ The “absolute truth of the natural fundamental state” refers to the absolute, which is perfect in the fundamental nature of mind, but still veiled by temporary stains (and therefore “not yet realized,” see also previous footnote). The “actualized realization of this” is the ultimate realized state of the absolute, in which all veils have been removed.

⁸ The “absolute truth of removing imputations by listening and reflecting” refers to the realization that arises when the false attributions such as “existent” and “non-existent” are eliminated through study and reflection. But this is still an abstract understanding, without direct insight into the nature; therefore “not yet realized”. “By the experience of the yogis” refers to the realization through direct insight within the practice of the yogis.

⁹ “Inferring the universal object” means (similar to the previous case) that an abstract idea of something is created in the mind through logical inference. It is like looking at the finger that points at the moon. The “Noble Ones” (*ārya*), on the other hand, perceive the moon directly.

“wrong relative truth.” Appearance that is realized as wrong and is free from attachment is the level of the Noble Ones, and it is called the pure relative truth. Complete absence of appearance and non-appearance and freedom from any attached or non-attached evaluation is the Buddha stage,¹⁰ and it is called absolute truth. The first of these has both appearance and attachment, the second has apart from mere appearance no attachment, and the third has neither appearance nor attachment. The three are “false understanding,” “understanding that knows the relative,” and “understanding that knows the absolute.” The discriminative knowledge that knows the relative truth [on the level] of ordinary beings depends on analysis. The Noble Ones are direct perceivers.

Even though there is no labelling such as “understanding” and “not understanding” in absolute true reality, mastering absolute truth is nevertheless labelled “understanding” or “realizing,” and so forth. To conceptualize that, which is ultimately to be realized as the inseparability of the two truths, as the relative that exists and the absolute that does not exist does not accord to the view of Madhyamaka. The automatic separation from all extremes of existence and non-existence and permanence and cessation when pure relative truth is realized as the natural state, is the mingling of the two truths into an inseparable state. In the *Prajñāpāramitā* it is said:¹¹

That which is the true reality of the relative is the true reality of the absolute.

The labelling, however, as “two truths” is, temporarily based on the two perspectives of our consciousness,¹² merely made to facilitate realization. With regard to this, the manifold appearance of things in a deluded consciousness is labelled “relative.” Since not even a mere dust particle exists for a consciousness in which delusion has ceased, and since even that non-existence itself cannot be perceived, this is labelled “absolute.” As it is said (in *Bodhicaryāvatāra* 9.34):¹³

When neither entity nor non-entity
exist in the mind,
then, since there is no other alternative,
one rests without any perception in total peace.

In truth, a differentiation cannot be made concerning the original state of knowledge objects, because ultimately, a ground for differentiating into two truths cannot be found within the great sphere of true reality (*dharmadhātu*) that is free from proliferation. Within the mind of the fully perfected Buddha, too, there is nothing to be differentiated into two truths. Within these present delusive appearances, too, one cannot find two

¹⁰ On the Buddha level there is neither appearance nor non-appearance, because there is no duality of object and consciousness anymore. For the same reason there is no mind anymore on this stage. Since object and consciousness are no longer two things, there can be no perception of the one by the other.

¹¹ The phrase cannot be found in this wording in the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtras*. Kamalāśīla also attributes it to this sūtra (*Madhyamakāloka*, D vol. 107, 234v).

¹² This means that being relative and absolute is not rooted in the exterior, but is a subjective perspective. This is not accepted by all schools.

¹³ Ontul Rinpoche explains that in Dzogchen this stage is called “exhaustion in the dharmatā” and in Mahamudra “no more practice”.

different truths. They exist as inseparable appearance and emptiness and inseparable awareness and emptiness, and just that realization or mastering like that is the mind of the Buddha, the dharmadhātu, the non-dualistic primordial wisdom. To fully understand the individual aspects of the two truths and to have them inseparably united is labelled “the union, which is a non-dualistic primordial wisdom,” “nirvana that does not remain [in the extremes of existence and peace],” and so forth.

The original state of the consciousness

(1.2.) If, even though the ultimate state of the knowledge objects is realized in that way, the ultimate state of the subject, the consciousness itself, is not realized, all phenomena remain as objects of the consciousness and that will not serve as an antidote against the afflictions. Pride and conceit with regard to such a realization will rise again and the Self of the person will become coarse again. Therefore, the ultimate state of the mind or consciousness (Skt. *buddhi*, *cittam*, *manas*) itself, which is the perceiver of knowledge objects, needs to be realized. This has two aspects:

(1.2.1.) what is temporarily to be realized as the two truths, and

(1.2.2.) what is to be realized as the ultimately inseparable two truths.

What is temporarily to be realized as the two truths

(1.2.1.) The general ultimate state of the knowledge objects is realized as relative truth, like an illusion that appears despite its lack of an own nature. In absolute truth, the ultimate state of knowledge objects is realized to be like space,¹⁴ i.e., neither established as existent nor non-existent. Ultimately, the mind or consciousness itself that realizes the two truths as inseparable, dharmadhātu, and great Madhyamaka free from all mental proliferations of extremes, is relative. Śāntideva said (BCA 9.2):

The ultimate truth is not the sphere of the mind.
Mind is held to be relative.

Such a mind that realizes like that possesses pride and conceit, and since pride and conceit are the work of Māra, it will turn out to be a false understanding. The *Acintyabuddhaviṣayanirdeśanāma Mahāyānasūtra* says:¹⁵

“Obtained” is fluctuating. “Realized” is conceit. Whatever is fluctuating and conceit is the work of Māra. Those who are excessively proud conceptualize “I have obtained,” “I have accomplished.”

The mind that realizes is relative, but its nature is the absolute. When the mind or consciousness that realizes looks at itself, nothing at all can be found. It is from the beginning empty of existence and non-existence, empty of arising and ceasing, empty of coming and going, empty of permanence and cessation, and empty of the three times. Therefore, it is true reality (*dharmatā*) and the absolute. In the *Kāśyapaparivartanāma*

¹⁴ Ontul Rinpoche explains that no other analogy than “space” can be found for this.

¹⁵ D vol. 43, 266b6–284b7, this passage on 273r.

Mahāyānasūtra it is said:

The mind that is not existing inside, not existing outside, and not existing in both, is unobservable.

And in the *Maitreyaparivarta*(?) it is said:

The mind has no shape, colour, or place. It is like space.¹⁶

What is to be realized as the ultimately inseparable two truths

(1.2.2.) The original state of the mind exists ultimately as the inseparable two truths. To designate this single nature of the mind as “two truths” is nothing but to provide a mere temporary name, a mere sign, and a mere labelling. Since there is no mind on the ground, the sphere of reality (*dharmadhātu*), the label “two truths” is not acceptable. Since there is no mind in the result, the mind of the Buddha, there is nothing to be labelled as “two truths.” In the luminous empty nature of the mind of deluded sentient beings, too, mind cannot be found. Since it exists as nothing but luminous and empty awareness, the two truths are to be realized as inseparable.

Since the meaning of “inseparable two truths” will have to be realized based on knowing the characteristics of the two truths, they are divided into two. In that way, the original state of the objects of knowledge, free from mental proliferation, and the ultimate state of the consciousness, free from mental proliferation, merge indivisibly into a single taste. At the time when that state is empty of phenomena and Self, all outer and inner phenomena are free from all mental proliferations of existence and non-existence, or permanence and cessation, and the realizing and perceiving in the manner of being free from the thing-to-be-perceived and the one who perceives, or the thing-to-be-realized and the one who realizes, which are like the unproduced space, is the unmistakable realization.

The Dharma to be practiced

(2) Teaching the Dharma to be practiced has two aspects.

(2.1.) The instantaneous¹⁷ practice by those of sharp faculties is as follows. Since realization arises [instantaneously] for those, who possess the support of their earlier gathering of the two accumulations, and who possess profound karmic remainders and are endowed with fortune, by merely teaching them the instructions of the two truths, it is sufficient for them to maintain that within the state of realization. They practice within their meditative equipoise (*mnyam gzhag*) in a state that is like space, empty of both

¹⁶ The mind looks at the seeking mind without finding the mind. It looks at the body without finding the mind in the body, on the body or outside the body. It looks at the feelings: Where do they come from? Where do they exist? Where are they going? Can one find the mind or the Self in them? Finally, it looks at the phenomena, i.e., the visible, audible and tangible objects, etc. It realizes that nothing exists intrinsically, but is always dependent on something else, that is, it is empty of a self or an own being. These are the “four basic mindfulnesses” of the body, feelings, mind and phenomena (Ontul Rinpoche).

¹⁷ Here, “instantaneous” is to be understood in contrast to “gradual”. Those who are equipped with sharp faculties enter into realization instantaneously by merely receiving these instructions.

consciousness and knowledge object, without a Self, and without the mental proliferation of a twofold truth. When they practice like that, there is no negative mental construction to be removed and no positive mind to be relied upon. Maitreyanātha said (*Abhisamayālaṅkāra* 5.21; *Uttaratantra* 1.154):¹⁸

[Here, nothing is to be removed,
and not the slightest thing is to be found.
Look at the true reality].
Having seen it, one is liberated.

In the post meditative state, all appearances rearise and are without own nature. The inseparable union of the two truths is maintained as in a dream. With regard to the sentient beings who have not realized that and who are like a dream and an illusion, the merely illusory two accumulations are gathered for the sake of beings with merely illusory love, compassion, and resolve for awakening, and vast aspirations are formed for their sake.¹⁹

The gradual training

(2.2.) The beings of dull faculties must gradually habitualize themselves to the practice starting from the four thoughts of turning the mind away from samsara.²⁰ If they do not proceed like that, apart from merely an aspect of the object universal, profound realization will not arise.

All thoughts and appearances are the relative truth.
To realize their nature²¹ is the absolute truth.
The mind that realizes like that is the relative truth,
and the absence of an own nature in the mind is the absolute truth.
The words that proclaims the two truths are the relative truth.
and the absence of an own nature in them is the absolute truth.
They are without duality, the inseparable union of the two truths.
Since, however, such inseparable union cannot be observed
in the original state of knowledge objects and the mind of the Buddha,
that is called “sphere of true reality (*dharmadhātu*) free from proliferation.”
In that, neither a Self of the person nor of phenomena can be found.
That which realizes like that is “view.”
To dwell within that view is “practice.”
To gather accumulations for the sake of others out of compassion is “conduct.”
The disappearance of subject and object in the dhātu is “result.”
The primordial wisdom that pervades all impartially is “quality.”

¹⁸ The text presents only the last line. The whole verse is: ‘*di la bsal bya ci yang med// gzhaḡ par bya ba cunḡ zad med// yang dag nyid la yang dag lta// yang dag mthong na[s] rnam par grol//*.

¹⁹ This practice corresponds to the level of pure relative truth.

²⁰ Thinking about the (1) pleasures and endowments of the precious human body, (2) impermanence and death, (3) karma, cause and result, and (4) the disadvantages of samsara. Jigten Sumḡon teaches that these thoughts should be at the beginning of every meditation session.

²¹ The *dharmatā*, free of all mental proliferations (Ontul Rinpoche).

To automatically accomplish the benefit of beings is “activity.”
Consider the meaning that is illustrated by expressions, words, and signs,
without grasping a meaning in expressions and signs.

Since the nature of mind, which is the perceiver, is without own nature, the actual meaning of the term “without [= not existing]” that is applied in expressions such as “non-existence of a Self,” “non-existence of sentient beings,” “non-existence of the person,” and “non-existence of the agent,” is “cannot be found to exist.” And since it is not established as existing, it is also not established as not existing. Thus, this term “non-existence” stands for “not established as existing and not existing at all.”²²

This consciousness that perceives objects does not rest upon the senses, it does not arise from the objects, it does not reside in between, it does not exist inside, and it does not exist in the outer world. When it arises, it does not come from anywhere, when it ceases, it does not go anywhere. It arises and is empty, it perishes and is empty. Thus, and so forth, it is taught. In the *Prajñāpāramitā* it is said:

In perfect seeing, no phenomena is perceived at all.

And again in the *Prajñāpāramitā*:

Mental activity is to be involved with the sphere of desire, the sphere of form, and the sphere of formlessness;²³ not to be mentally active is not to be involved with anything.

And in the *Sūtra* it is said:

When one does not do anything, that is, therefore, called the “yogic conduct.”

Therefore, to maintain the ordinary mind in a state that is free from phenomena is the supreme teaching. In the *Sūtra* it is said:

When asked: “What is the supreme Dharma,” he replied: “To be free from the notion of a phenomenon with regard to anything.”

And again in the *Prajñāpāramitā*:

Since awakening is not perceivable, “awakening” is only a term. The inconceivable Buddha is only a term.

The realization that the original state of all phenomena, which is like space, lacks an

²² In other words: from the negation of existence one cannot derive an existence of the non-existent.

²³ These three spheres or realms cover the entire Samsara. Humans, animals, hungry ghosts, etc., live in the realm of desire. The gods live in the realms of form and formlessness. Mental activity always refers to a knowledge object of a being from these three realms (e.g. sense objects, previous thoughts, emotions, etc.). By entering into a connection with them, aversion, attachment or indifference (the latter, according to Jigten Sumgön, is a form of delusion) arise, which then lead to further activities and thus karmic results, which in turn always manifest themselves in these three realms.

object for the consciousness and for the primordial wisdom, is the view. Resting in that state in the manner of non-resting is practice. To gather in the post meditative state the accumulation of merit, which is like an illusion, for the sake of sentient beings that are merely an illusion, is the conduct. The disappearance of the mind and the appearances, which are like an illusion, in the dhātu is the perfect result.²⁴

The sphere of true reality (*dharmadhātu*) is free from mental proliferation and cannot be expressed or thought.

Regarding the objects of knowledge, there is nothing to be known.

Despite those negations, there is a viewing and practising of that, which is nothing but space that views and practices space.

In the true reality, there is no mind and no appearance.

Through negating non-existence as well, one gets beyond the concepts of existence and non-existence.²⁵

It is taught that a person who does not fear the meaning of profound emptiness and enjoys and aspires to rest in it is an example of someone who possesses from early on the fortune of learning and training and obtains awakening quickly.

Dharmatā is like space, the sphere that cannot be imagined.

Within the state of the inexpressible primordial wisdom that realizes that, the absence of conceptualization and action, the absolute nature, sameness, is the mind of the Buddhas of the three times.

Absolute true reality is like the son of a barren woman.²⁶

To enjoy without accepting and rejecting and free from attachment relative attribute possessors – the illusions of the inseparable union – in a state where nothing appears, nothing is thought – the ordinary absolute nature – is to put the Buddha-mind into practice.

To be without attachment for all kinds of enjoyment and to keep to the wilderness like a wild animal until you have obtained authority over your mind is to dwell on the irreversible path.

To remain without joy and sorrow and without attachment and aversion, etc., towards favourable and unfavourable outer and inner conditions

and to use whatever there is as an assistance of the path is to obtain stability with regard to the unborn phenomena.²⁷

To possess in equal measure a view and a conduct that inseparably unites discriminating knowledge that realizes the nature of the mind to be like space

²⁴ This is the true reality, free of all mental proliferations. In Mahāmudrā terminology this would be called “complete absence of activities” and “beyond the mind”. One looks inside, at the nature of mind, where there is nothing to eliminate and nothing to attain, and rests effortlessly in naked awareness. (Ontul Rinpoche).

²⁵ This means that one does not adopt any kind of view (Ontul Rinpoche).

²⁶ One cannot describe the eye color or any other characteristic of the child of a barren woman (Ontul Rinpoche).

²⁷ “Unborn” is synonymous with “being empty of an own nature.” Bodhisattvas attain the state of immutability on the eighth Bodhisattva level in the face of the unborn state of phenomena.

and compassion that does not abandon illusory sentient beings
is to quickly obtain the great primordial wisdom that is non-abiding [in existence or
cessation].

In the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra* it is said:²⁸

What is called “empty” is not to be perceived as either empty or non-empty. The natural expression of the empty appears as everything possible,²⁹ and when it appears, it is empty by itself. Therefore, appearance and emptiness are inseparably united. All that is only to be perceived inwardly, not anywhere else. It is the sphere of the primordial wisdom that is intuitive awareness.

Ma-chig said:

When you remain without any mental activity whatsoever,
what could become a sidetrack?
Annihilate all notions and rest in that state.

And:

Since there exists no duality within the mind,
watch the mind in the manner of nothing to be watched.
By looking at it, one’s own mind is not perceived.
By perceiving something, the true nature of the mind is not recognised.
Therefore, there is not the slightest atom to be watched.

The nature of the mind is the completely pure ultimate original state of unobservable emptiness and luminosity. Since awareness, which is free from mental proliferation and unidentifiable, arises as the unceasing³⁰ illusory natural expression, remain completely immersed in the state that is free from grasping the indivisible meditative equipoise and post meditative state, or the clarity and emptiness union, and practice!

[Translated on March 7 and 8, 2011 (and revised between March 2 and 6 2018) by Jan-Ulrich Sobisch.]

²⁸ So far I have only identified the first line (H vol. 78, 130r).

²⁹ This refers to the luminous-awareness aspect of the mind. Nono Rinpoche compares “emptiness” and its “natural expression as everything possible” in his commentary on the Fivefold Path with the ocean and its waves.

³⁰ The text has ‘*char sgom ‘gags pa*. However, the point that separates the syllables should be set after *sgo*. The correct reading is: ‘*char sgo ma’gags pa*.