

Madhyamaka (དབུ་མ་) — 5-Day Course Student Handouts

Day 1 — Foundations of the Middle Way

Purpose of Madhyamaka

- * To free the mind from grasping at *true existence
- * The heart of *Prajñāpāramitā wisdom
- * Leads to liberation through *seeing reality correctly

The Two Extremes to Avoid

- * Eternalism (རྟག་ལྔ་): believing things exist inherently
- * Nihilism (ཆད་ལྔ་): believing nothing exists at all
- * Madhyamaka avoids both → Middle Way (དབུ་མ་)

Key Figures & Texts

Nāgārjuna (ལྷ་རྩལ་བ་)
Mūlamadhyamakakārikā

Key Terms

- * Emptiness (སྟོང་པ་ཉིད་)
- * Inherent existence (རང་བཞིན་)
- * Dependent origination (རྟེན་འབྲེལ་)

Reflection: What do I believe is solid and unchanging?

Day 2 — The Two Truths (འདོན་པ་གཉིས་)

Relative (Conventional) Truth

- * Everyday appearances
- * Language, concepts, cause & effect
- * Ethics and karma function here

Ultimate Truth

- * Emptiness beyond conceptual elaboration
- * Not a substance or entity
- * Known by **wisdom**, not thought

Relationship Between the Two

- * Not two separate realities
- * Ultimate does not negate the relative
- * The relative functions **because** it is empty

Key Point

“Without relying on the conventional, the ultimate cannot be taught.”

Day 3 — Dependent Origination = Emptiness

What Is Dependent Origination?

* Arising through:

- * causes & conditions
- * parts
- * mental designation

Nāgārjuna's Core Insight

- * Whatever is dependently arisen is empty
- * Whatever is empty is dependently arisen

Why Inherent Existence Is Impossible

- * No change if things were truly fixed
- * No causation if things existed on their own

Fourfold Analysis (Brief)

* Not arising from:

1. self
2. other
3. both
4. no cause

Day 4 — Madhyamaka Reasoning & Emptiness of Emptiness**

Why Reasoning Is Used

- * To remove wrong views, not to establish a new one
- * Madhyamaka has 'no position of its own'

Two Approaches (Overview)

Prāsaṅgika:

- * Uses consequences to dismantle views
- * Makes no independent assertions

Svātantrika:

- * Uses provisional syllogisms

Candrakīrti's Emphasis

- * Let fixation collapse naturally
- * No reification of emptiness

Emptiness of Emptiness

- * Emptiness itself is empty
- * Prevents subtle clinging

Day 5 — Integrating Madhyamaka into Practice & Life**

Meditation

- * Analytical vipashyana → resting in non-fabrication
- * Union of **shamatha and vipashyana**

Emptiness & Compassion

- * No solid self → no solid enemy
- * Compassion becomes spontaneous
- * Supports Bodhisattva activity

Conduct

- * Ethical responsibility without fixation
- * Karma functions without inherent existence

Common Pitfalls

- * Intellectualizing emptiness
- * Using emptiness to justify behavior
- * Losing devotion or compassion