

5 De-Reifying and Dismantling the Reactive Self

Therefore, all the reasonings of the central way are factors in the eradication of the habit-pattern of misknowledge, the root of the (compulsive) life-cycle. Hence, having identified how our own unconscious misknowledge maintains its hold, we should strive to put a stop to it, and should not amuse ourselves with expertise in mere hairsplitting with other philosophers.

(Tsong Khapa, *The Essence of True Eloquence*¹)

In these words of the great renaissance master Tsong Khapa (1357–1419), founder of the Geluk school of Tibetan Buddhism, the therapeutic imperative underlying all Buddhist teaching and practice rings clear as a bell. What may not be so clear to the untutored ear is the distinctive logic and method of self-healing he sought to explain to his fellow Tibetans. In his *Essence of True Eloquence*, he traces that distinctive logic and method back through the same lineage that preserved the mind-clearing practice. Before we return to the second point of Chekawa's text, to further unpack the actual practice of compassionate openness, it may help to put the spotlight on the distinctive way in which the Nalanda tradition understood and approached healing insight. That distinctive way has three main aspects: the therapeutic logic or rationale of healing insight in this tradition; the understanding of the nature and workings of delusion or misperception; and the contemplative therapeutic method used to put that logic and understanding into practice.

The Therapeutic Logic of Self-Analysis: Personal Freedom Versus Social Change

You may recall from our discussion in part 1 the causal model assumed as basic to all Buddhist psychology: the model of the twelvefold cycle of traumatic development. Within that cycle, there are two weak links where the conditioning of stress and trauma can be most easily broken: the eighth link of addictive craving; and the first link of self-reifying delusion. In Nagarjuna's map of the gradual path, the logic of personal self-healing through mindfulness is to break the cycle of conditioning at the eighth link—craving—while the logic of social healing through mind-clearing is to break it at the first link—delusion. The reasoning here is that renouncing addictive cravings and compulsive lifestyles through mindfulness practice is a more accessible first step for those embroiled in the cycle of stress and trauma, although it does not yield as profound a recovery as correcting the misperceptions underlying that cycle.

When it comes to the greater challenge of extending the self-healing process through our daily interactions with others still embroiled in that cycle, we need a deeper level of insight and corrective experience so as not to be triggered into falling back on old, compulsive habits. Of course, personal self-healing would be impossible without some real degree of healing insight. Likewise, social self-healing assumes a well-developed capacity for renunciation as well as deeper insight and more extensive empathic art. Rather than a black-and-white, either-or difference between these two phases or vehicles on the gradual path, the distinction is one of progressively deeper levels, greater scopes and finer degrees of insight-oriented practice.

The Deep Link Between Cognitive Self-Correction and Emotional Change

Supporting this distinctive therapeutic approach, the understanding Nagarjuna and his heirs have of delusion makes the path of profound self-analysis and healing insight indispensable to all contemplative self-change, personal, and social. While some Buddhist schools see false views and the self-reifying instinct as cognitive blocks to insight, clearly differentiated from the affective blocks caused by stress emotions like attachment and aversion, Nagarjuna, his close disciple Aryadeva, and the sub-school of their followers later defined by Chandrakirti see false views and the instinct for reifying them as both cognitive and affective blocks.² In fact,

they see the self-reifying instinct as not just one among many affective blocks, but as the main taproot which gives rise to all destructive emotions, primary and secondary.

In effect, the Dialogical Centrist lineage of Chandrakirti views the cognitive component of stress and trauma as pervasively and inextricably involved with the negative affects that cloud our capacity for insight and empathy. What this means therapeutically is that, however much we ameliorate or renounce the disturbing emotions that drive the cycle of stress and trauma, there is no way to fully resolve those emotions or break their cycle without delving deeply into the root misperceptions that anchor them. Nagarjuna says in *Emptiness Seventy*, “The Teacher (Shakyamuni) proclaimed that misknowledge is the consideration that things arisen from causes and conditions are (intrinsically) real, and from that the twelve factors (of dependent origination) arise.”³ His direct disciple, Aryadeva, explains in *Four Hundred*, “Delusion gets into everything, just as the physical sense (pervades everything) in the body; hence, by conquering delusion, all compulsions are also conquered.”⁴ And finally, Chandrakirti, often called Nagarjuna’s ultimate disciple, spells this out still more explicitly in his *Central Way Introduction*: Misknowledge, whose nature is the obscuration of the understanding of the real nature (of things) and the reification (of intrinsic reality) in things without intrinsic reality, is utterly false ... Thus, the superficial truth (of mundane social consensus) is established under the influence of the compulsive misknowledge included (as the first link) in the (twelve) factors of existence.⁵



Figure 5.1 Nagarjuna, Master of the Engaged Path of Insight

The instinct for misknowledge is the hindrance to complete comprehension of knowable things. It also exists as the instinct for desire, etc., and is the cause of corresponding (compulsive) functions of body and speech. Further, that instinctual propensity is only (fully) eliminated in Buddhahood or omniscience, and not in other (persons or stages).⁶

In terms of modern psychology, this distinctive view of misperception and its effects also clearly distinguishes the therapeutic approach of the Nalanda tradition from those of both the main schools of contemporary therapy, cognitive and analytic. While this view agrees with cognitive therapy that changing habits of thought and perception can help change learned emotional and behavioral habits, it differs in its assumption that learned habits are anchored in unconscious instincts which cannot be changed by altering thinking and behavior alone.⁷ And, while it agrees with analytic therapy that learned habits are anchored in unconscious instincts, it differs in its assumption that the binary instincts of attachment and aggression are both rooted in a deeper instinct for misperception; and that all three of these can be unlearned by a method which combines analytic insight with emotional regulation and profound meditation.⁸

The Distinctive Method of the Centrist Tradition: Analysis, Meditation, and Dialogue

Finally, when it comes to that method, there are two features that distinguish the Nalanda tradition refined by Chandrakirti from the classical tradition of personal self-healing, as well as other methods of socially engaged teaching and practice. The method it prescribes for uprooting misperception is a more intensive version of the method of insight meditation taught within the mindfulness tradition. Like classical insight meditation, it works by conjoining the deepest stages of concentrative meditation with profound analytic insight into the reality of things, growing naturally out of the consistent practice of mindfulness and awareness. While the modes of analysis involved in this method are not qualitatively different from those employed on the path of personal self-healing, they are broader in scope, more penetrating in depth and rigor, and more extensive in duration. In Tsong Khapa's words,

Although there is no other way to abandon these objective obscurations (of misknowledge) than the above-explained path of realizing the ultimate reality (of persons and things), the difference of the abandonments in the Individual Vehicle and in the Universal Vehicle arises from the (various) degrees of completeness of the factors of the method and from the duration of the time of familiarity (with the method).⁹

The second distinctive feature of the method prescribed in the Nalanda tradition is the radical way in which it uses language to help people transcend the limits and pitfalls of language.¹⁰ Since the main engine of human intelligence is speech, the self-limiting instinct all animals share for reifying their own sense, percept or concept of themselves is most powerfully expressed in us as the unconscious reification of our linguistic forms of conception and expression. Since the most basic parts of speech are words for subjects and objects, the main forms of reification that limit our capacity for radical open-mindedness and open-heartedness are reifications of our constructs of the subjective experience of persons and the objective reality of things.

When we reify our constructs of the objective reality of things, we tend to fall into a more or less naïve realism, in which we confuse the words and images we project onto things for their true reality. Unchecked, this tendency eventually hardens into some kind of dogmatism, in which our minds close around familiar habits of thought and perception and impose these on reality and others, even when they don't fit. On the other hand, when we reify constructs of our personal subjectivity and experience, we tend to fall into a more or less naïve subjectivism, in which we confuse the concepts and images we have of ourselves for our true reality. Unchecked, this tendency eventually gets us mired in some form of idealism, in which our minds close around familiar self-concepts and self-images, impose these on our inner world and project them into the inner lives of others.¹¹

The distinctive method of contemplative self-analysis systematized by Nagarjuna and refined by Chandrakirti avoids both these extreme tendencies, clearing a middle way that helps open our hearts and minds by counteracting the instinct for reification that locks us into the self-created cell of our own fabrications. Their Centrism uses language in a purely liberating way, not to impose any set of constructs on

ourselves, others or the world around us, but to help ourselves and others find our way out of the trap of reified habits of thought and speech. It does this by assuming those habits are literally true as they seem, and then examining the persons or things they refer to until we expose the ways in which our mental habits conflict with reality as revealed by analysis.

So the method of self-analysis prescribed in this Centrist tradition diverges from the argumentative methods of mainstream philosophy, science, and religion, East and West, and converges with the liberative methods preferred by therapeutic philosophy and modern psychotherapy.¹² Though some describe this method as dialectical, I like to think of it as dialogical.¹³ Like the Socratic method revealed in the *Dialogues* of Plato, its aim is not to advance our thinking towards some positive conclusion, whether fixed or evolving, but rather to free ourselves from the hubris that imagines any formula we construct could capture the ultimate reality or infinite complexity of things better than a mind that stays radically and consistently open to learning from others and the new.¹⁴

After Reaching Stability, Reveal the Secret: The Profound Insight of Emptiness

In this chapter, we will unpack the key aspects of this method, by following the procedure spelled out in the remaining precepts of Chekawa's pivotal second point. Not surprisingly, that procedure begins by alluding to the profound theory of emptiness Nagarjuna built into one of the world's most rigorous methods for cultivating a radically open heart and mind. Chekawa's precept, *after reaching stability, reveal the secret*, alludes to a famous verse from the eighth chapter of Shantideva's *Guide*:

So whoever wants to spontaneously protect
Both themselves and others
Should practice this noble secret
Of exchanging self and other.¹⁵

Of course, the active ingredient in the secret teaching is the analysis of the emptiness of the constructs of self and other Shantideva invoked to expose our reification of those constructs in the preceding verses:

Though there is no I there,
Through the force of familiarity
I cling to an "I" within a body
That developed from the egg and sperm of others.
In the same way, why can I not
Identify "I" with the bodies of others?
And likewise, I should not find it hard
To identify "other" with my own body.¹⁶

To be clear, the de-reifying analysis and insight Shantideva invokes in this verse is not new, but recalls a similar observation made by Chandrakirti in the dedication to his classic on the altruist's path, *Central Way Introduction*:

I honor those who feel compassion for beings
Who circle as helpless as buckets in a water-wheel,
Coming to insist on a self, once they say "I,"
Growing addicted to things, saying "This is mine."¹⁷

And finally, Chandrakirti's insight in turn echoes a similar analysis invoked in *Jewel Garland*, Nagarjuna's guide to the profound practice of compassionate openness:

"I exist; my (mind/body systems) exist;"
Such (mere words) are mistaken for ultimate realities.
Therefore neither of the two is found (under analysis)
By complete knowledge of reality as it is.
The (compulsive) mind/body systems arise

From the conception of “I” which is false in fact.
How could that which has grown
From such a false seed be true?¹⁸

Of course, in the context of Chekawa’s text, the secret to be revealed in the profound aspect of building compassion is the secret of targeting the traumatized self which chains us to the cycle of stress and trauma. Shantideva says as much in unpacking his verse on “this noble secret:”

What wise person would indulge (such a false) self
Or (compulsively) cling to this body (as “mine”)?
We should see the self-indulgent mind as our opponent
And reject it accordingly.¹⁹

Yet it is equally clear that this pivotal mind-clearing strategy of confronting the traumatized self hinges on the insight that this debilitating sense of self in fact is not as real as it seems, but is only a reified mental construct, which is empty of any ultimate basis in the reality of our mind/body process. Whether we take the “secret” to be the teaching of targeting the traumatized self for analysis or the method of analyzing that self with the insight of emptiness, the reason why this profound phase of practice is kept secret until the student is ready is that it amounts to a delicate psychosurgery that must be performed with great precision and care.

The idea and insight of emptiness stands as a reminder that, however attached we get to our favorite network of words and images, the net is not the fish it catches. The metaphor is clear enough. We weave nets of language and conceptuality just as naturally as a spider weaves its webs. Yet the thing that makes our conceptual webs so exquisitely useful is their emptiness of any fixed form or anchor in reality, since this means that they can be endlessly altered to adapt to our own changing aims and needs, and endlessly applied in ever-new ways to the ever-changing world around us.

Where the Noble Secrets of Emptiness and Self-Analysis Meet

Just as we must take care not to misuse the term emptiness by mistaking people and things for being less empty than they are or more empty than they are, so we must take care not to misuse the term selflessness by subtracting too little or too much from our habitual sense of self.²⁰ The point of both these ideas is to help guide our self-analysis to a fully accurate understanding of who and what we really are, by helping us expose the extreme tendencies to see ourselves as more than we really are or less than we really are. With selflessness helping us see through extreme views of self which make us seem more or less than we are and emptiness helping us see through extreme views of mind/body systems and elements that make them seem more or less than they are, these insights work hand in hand to bring us to an accurate, working view of our selves and our lives.

Since emptiness is the more general of the two concepts, it helps insure that our self-analysis will avoid our tendencies towards the dualistic extremes caused by the reifying modes of projection and denial.²¹ What is more, since language—used reflectively or in dialogue—is indispensable to the method of conjoining analytic insight with meditative clarity and calm, understanding how to use emptiness to expose and cut through even subtle abuses of language is absolutely critical to insuring the precision and effectiveness of contemplative self-analysis.²²

All Things’ Emptiness of Anything Non-Relative Equals Their Sheer Relativity

The best way to understand how emptiness works is to think of it as a conceptual formula or equation. On the one side of the equation, the negative term emptiness stands as a reminder of the kind of identity and reality we project into people and things, which they in fact do not have. On the other side, the positive term relativity stands as a reminder of the kind of identity and reality people and things in fact have, which we must affirm, not deny. While different schools of Buddhist thought define the kind of identity and reality people and things are empty of differently, the most general and simple definition is Chandrakirti’s: emptiness means things are empty of any identity, reality, or objectivity that is not relative to causes and conditions, including social conventions.²³

Chandrakirti's definition allows a very general and elegant formulation of the teaching of emptiness as a negative statement of the Buddha's positive teaching of relativity. It goes like this. All people and things without exception are empty of any non-relative reality, identity or objectivity; because all people and things without exception exist and work only in and through complex relationships of causal, conditional, and conventional interdependence. Spelled out in this elegant way, using the "royal reason of relativity," the "secret teaching" of emptiness seems too simple to be true. The whole equation sounds like a tautology; both sides of which state the same blatantly obvious truth, only one side says it in negative terms while the other says it in positive terms. All things lack anything in any way non-relative; and all things in every way are entirely relative.

The Therapeutic Uses of the Analysis and Insight of Emptiness

If the noble secret of emptiness, boiled down to its essence, is so disarmingly simple a child could grasp it, why is it considered so potentially harmful? And how could it possibly be so ultimately helpful? Again, the answer lies not in the teaching itself, but in the habit it is meant to heal. Unlike most of our words and ideas, emptiness is not presented as a truth supposed to be ultimately, absolutely or objectively true in itself. Instead, like the Buddha's four noble truths, this noble secret was designed and delivered as a medicine. The enormous potential benefit of this truth is that if we can take the medicine wisely and well, we may finally dissolve the confusion that weaves the tangled web which has mummified our minds in isolation and fear instead of freeing us for life.

The Noble Secret, Noble Truths, and Two Realities, Ultimate and Relative

To clarify the healing message of emptiness, the Nalanda tradition makes more than a casual comparison between this noble secret and the Buddha's noble truths. In particular, Nagarjuna and his heirs align the two sides of the equation of emptiness and relativity with two healing truths, ultimate and relative.²⁴ Like two sides of a coin, these two truths describe the same reality from two points of view. The emptiness side of the coin is aligned with the ultimate healing standpoint of Shakyamuni's Nirvana and enlightenment, described in the third noble truth. The relativity side lines up with the relative, conventional standpoint of the three other noble truths: of suffering, its origin and the path of self-healing. Taken together, the two truths work like a double-edged scalpel to help the analytic mind cut through reified projections of a self or life independent of causes, conditions, and social conventions, as well as through reified denial of the intentional agency which nonetheless shapes our suffering or happiness in dependence on causes, conditions, and social conventions.

In effect, the formula of the two truths sharpens and guides the scalpel of analytic insight to insure that our psychosurgery only cuts out the malignant tissue of delusion and misperception, while leaving the healthy tissue of intentional agency ready, willing, and able to act for our benefit. So Nagarjuna says, "Without relying on convention (i.e. words and ideas like emptiness), the ultimate cannot be taught; and without realizing the ultimate (truth of emptiness), one cannot reach Nirvana."²⁵

In this key verse, Nagarjuna describes the healing logic of the two truths, also known as the two realities. By insisting on a method based on convention, he means that any effective way of teaching self-analysis must be framed in terms of the everyday social conventions of speech. Although the two truths are really two perspectives on one and the same reality, the nature of that reality is taught in terms that can be easily grasped by the human mind, namely in terms of the binary structure of human language and conceptuality. While the truths are defined in binary terms, to conform to the dualistic bent of our symbolic minds, the reality they refer to is not dualistic at all. To paraphrase a famous verse from the *Transcendent Wisdom Scriptures*, emptiness *is* relativity and relativity *is* emptiness.²⁶ Hence a genuine understanding of one truth involves a genuine understanding of the other, and vice versa. As long as our understanding of the ultimate emptiness of people and things seems to violate their relative compatibility with causes, conditions, and social conventions, that understanding cannot possibly be genuine. And as long as our understanding of the relative and conventional workings of people and things seems undermined by their emptiness of non-relative reality and identity, that understanding cannot possibly be genuine.

The Two Truths: The Equation that Reconciles Our Bifurcating Minds

If this non-dual formulation of the teaching of emptiness is to strike us as anything but a riddle or paradox, once again we need to understand it within the living context of our complex body-minds. The analogy used

to help explain the seeming paradox of the two truths about one reality is the analogy of perceptual distortions like those we experience in dreams and illusions. These commonplace cases of perceptual distortion or error help illustrate the exceptional experience of analysis and insight which are the means and end of the teaching of emptiness.

When we experience a dream or illusion, one part of our mind has a perception which another part of our mind can expose and see through. Once our higher, analytic awareness examines the deceptive appearance constructed by our sense perception or dream state, we are no longer deceived or confused by that appearance. Instead, we are certain that the evidence of our experience is not as real as it seems, but mistaken; even though that certainty may not remove the illusion. When the spoon in a water glass looks bent to our eyes though our rational mind knows it's not, we experience a mundane version of the two truths: our minds perceive one reality in two seemingly conflicting modes. The resolution of the seeming conflict depends on our ability to prioritize our analytic insight and trust it to correct for the limits of our more primal faculties.

As the analogy of perceptual distortion suggests, the distinct perspectives of the two truths can be reconciled once we accept the ultimate truth of emptiness as a corrective for the reified perspective of the relative truth. In one sense, then, we can think of the two truths as correct versus mistaken perspectives on one and the same reality.²⁷ Yet to be fully effective, we still need to sharpen the double-edged scalpel of these truths, being careful not to take this helpful analogy for reality.

Shaving Your Mirror Image: How the World is Illusory Without Being Illusion

While some contemplative traditions, Indian and Western, see the everyday, relative world as illusion, the Buddhist tradition was always careful to qualify the analogy of misperception by insisting that the relative world may be illusion-like but is definitely *not* an illusion. So while ordinary people and things, causes and effects, agents and actions are mistaken in that they seem to be far more fixed and real than they in fact are, that does not mean that they are strictly illusions in the sense that they don't work at all. To underscore the distinction between things being less real than they seem and totally unreal or unable to work, Chandrakirti makes another analogy. Though the reflection of our face in a mirror is like an illusion in that it is less real than it seems, it is not an illusion plain and simple in that it is causally linked enough to our face that we can use the reflection to actually shave by.²⁸

The Binocular Vision of the Two Truths: Two Modes of Perceiving a Single Reality

To sharpen our view of the two truths, then, we can think of the perspective of emptiness as the ultimate truth revealed by critical analysis and insight, and the perspective of relativity as the relative truth manifested in the unexamined workings of causality and social conventions. In this view, the two perspectives are two distinct mindsets or modes of knowing reality: an ultimate or critical mode, in which we critically examine things until we expose the truth that they are not as real as they seem; and a relative or practical mode, in which we do not critically examine them, either because we are wrongly convinced that they *are* as real as they seem, or because we simply take them for granted and work with them without wondering how real they are.²⁹

In order for us not to get too black and white about these truths, we must recall that the critical mode is ultimately true only in that it corrects the distortions that limit our practical mode. Likewise, the practical mode is mistaken or delusional only in relative terms, since it has two kinds of validity that most delusions do not. First, the misperception that things are real in themselves is valid in the sense that it is shared by most living beings, including the majority of our fellow humans. This is because it reflects the natural limits of our primal perceptual instincts and untutored faculties, just like common sensory illusions. Second, that misperception is valid in the sense that, used in an unreflective way to engage the world, it does not prevent us from relating effectively with people and things, either in terms of causal processes or in terms of social conventions.

The Medicine that Heals Our Blocked Insight Eye

With the symbolic organ of our mind's eye healed of the congenital disorder of reification, we are fully

prepared to turn it inwards on the path of healing self-analysis.³⁰ Here, our new ability to see through the distortions of projection and denial guides us as we surgically remove the accretion of unrealistic expectations and doubts that blinds us to the actual workings of cause and effect, leading us off the middle way of genuine and effective agency. Whether we're looking at ourselves, others or the world we share, the healing formula of emptiness and relativity helps us expose and break the vacillating cycles of grandiose and paranoid outlooks, manic and depressive moods, obsessive and compulsive behaviors, all of which stem from our innate and learned reification of binary constructs of self, other, and world.

As we gradually cut through the tangle of extreme black and white ideas and habits we take for ourselves, we eventually arrive at a truly realistic view of ourselves, others, and the world around us. Awakened from the self-indulgent nightmare of reified narcissistic distortions, destructive emotions, and post-traumatic reactions, we gradually arrive at a realistic view of ourselves and our place in the world that reflects the triumph of principle over personality, objectivity over bias and causal efficacy over wishful thinking.³¹ With this brief introduction to the “noble secret” of the emptiness insight and its role in the art of exchanging self and other, we can now return to the precepts of Chekawa’s text, to map the path of self-analysis which leads to compassionate openness.

Consider the Dream-Like Nature of All Things: Breaking the Objectifying Habit

The first signpost on the path of self-analysis in this practice alerts us to one of the main sources of self-deception we humans and our animal ancestors are prone to: projecting our own wishes, fears, and confusions onto others and the world, and mistaking them for the objective reality of people and things as they are. A confused mix of reification and projection, the objectifying habit of perception is so automatic and primal that we are generally quite blind to it. One example of this habit figures prominently in psychotherapy, in the projection of unconscious parental images and associations onto the therapist. Known as transference, this self-deceptive habit doesn’t function only in psychotherapy, but is busy clouding our perception of emotionally charged interactions throughout every day.

Yet however commonplace the insight of transference has become, very few of us—lay or professional—are aware that this type of projective distortion is not the exception in our perceptual lives but the rule. Decades of cognitive neuroscience research have overturned our naïve view that our perceptual apparatus works like a camera or mirror to objectively reflect the world around us. Instead, the emerging consensus is that the mind and brain work very actively to construct virtual maps of our natural, social, and cultural environment, and to project these out onto people and things as filters and guides for our interaction with the world.³²

While the new consensus on perception in brain science is overturning our long-held modern view of waking state consciousness as a mirror of reality, it is no news at all for Indic contemplative science, especially in the Nalanda tradition. According to Nagarjuna and his heirs, the world as it normally appears to us is a mere construction of consciousness projected onto reality, with individual minds more or less coordinated by social conventions of language and action. All this construction may be quite useful, even when it is automatic and unconscious, provided it actually helps us engage with others and the world in ways that are effective and mutually beneficial.

Emptiness of Subject-Object Duality: The Deconstructive Psychology of Asanga

According to one voice in the Nalanda tradition, the Constructivist lineage of magnificent deeds traced back to Asanga, the most helpful interpretation of emptiness is that it refers to the lack of any substantial or essential dichotomy between the inner life of the mind and our experience of the external world.³³ In this view, the perceiving subject and perceived object are not just empty of any ultimate difference, but both in fact boil down to binary constructions of one and the same agency: the subconscious mind. The main analogy used for this critical insight is that our normal waking experience of self and world as independent realities is deceptive, just like the self and world of a dream. So when Chekawa directs us to *consider the dream-like nature of all things*, he is encouraging us to expose and see through the reified constructs of self and world we unconsciously craft and mistake for independent realities.

Without the insight to correct such distortions, our own minds deceive us into taking the worst-case

fantasies we project on the world at face value, locking us into a self-fulfilling gloom-and-doom prophecy that unnecessarily disappoints and re-traumatizes us over and over again. As long as we choose to pursue a path of peace and well-being in the everyday world, we need to be able to see through our false views of people and things, even when our delusion is consensual and seems to be reinforced by everyone and everything around us. As in the consensual illusion of cinema, in daily life our brains and bodies believe what our entrained imaginations feed them, and respond to a shared virtual experience of the world as if it were in fact a reality.

The Dream is Not Just a Dream but Reality as We Know It

While contemporary neuroscience, social science and philosophy now agree that our consensual worldviews, popular and scientific, are psychological and social constructions, the Centrist critique Chekawa implies goes quite a bit deeper than our most radical post-modern thought. One could easily assume, in the neo-Kantian spirit of Karl Popper,³⁴ that what this precept means is that this critique applies to our mental constructs and views of the world, not to the evidence our senses give us about material things, which exist in themselves. But the critical analysis and insight of emptiness includes not just mental constructs and images but even the unprocessed evidence of our senses and the objective physical elements that give rise to it.³⁵

So when Chekawa points to the illusory nature of the world as we know it, he doesn't simply suggest we *consider the dream-like nature* of our mental projections, but explicitly draws our attention to the dream-like nature of *all things*. Given this, we can see that the analysis and insight of emptiness challenges not just our habit of objectifying conscious worldviews but also our instinct for objectifying the raw data of our senses. In short, it challenges us far more than current science or philosophy, assuming a reading of the notion of relativity more radical than that of today's strongest critics of our naïve view of things as being just as they appear to us.

Examine the Uncreated Nature of Mind: Breaking the Subjectivity-Habit

Once we've burst the bubble of our own naïve worldview and opened ourselves to others and the world as they are, Chekawa's next precept encourages us to delve deeper into the self-deceptive workings of our own minds.

It assumes the gradual refinement and critique of depth-psychology within the Nalanda tradition.³⁶ The first step in this second leg of the engaged path of self-analysis is to expose and cut through our instinctive tendency to hang our sense of self on certain contents within our mind, including verbal self-constructs, perceptual self-images, familiar emotions and raw sensations. Applying the traditional view which identifies mind with the primary process or medium of consciousness rather than with any of its constructs or acts, this precept challenges us to delve below the surface of our cluttered waking minds to examine the deeper layers of awareness we tap into in altered states like deep, dreamless sleep.

The insight here is that our tendency to grab hold of certain mental contents and cling to them as reference points for all our experience and action is neither necessary nor effective, but reflects the conservative instincts of the reactive mind. However understandable this habitual identification with contents is, it inexorably narrows, biases, and obstructs the optimal expanse and flow of consciousness, creating a clot within the mind-stream which limits, clogs, and blocks its full transparency, plasticity, and creativity. While the deeper, more primal layers of consciousness are less differentiated and less symbolically active, that also means that they tend to be more intensely focused and less content-bound. Although we normally only experience these layers in primal states like dreamless sleep, orgasm, or near-death experience, Indic contemplative science assumes that we can train higher consciousness to tap and link them into a more integrated, synthetic consciousness with deeper clarity and radical openness.³⁷

Primal Awareness, Metacognition, and Vegetative States: I'm Not What I Think

In addition to challenging our instincts for identifying with and clinging to mental content, the very idea of giving the process or medium of mind primacy over its constructs challenges the modern view of consciousness since Descartes. In that view, consciousness is identified strictly with thoughts and the agency that thinks them, and so is limited to humans and restricted to the waking state. While this view of mind grew out of modern philosophy, it was taken up by modern science, as is reflected in the current medical reduction of consciousness to the symbolic activity of the primate cortex.³⁸ This view is only now being

challenged, based in part on reports from people who have emerged from so-called vegetative coma states or near-death experiences yet seem to have preserved a continuous primary consciousness that allowed them to observe, remember and recall events which took place around them while they were supposedly “brain dead” and devoid of all consciousness.³⁹

So it is that Chekawa’s precept to *examine the uncreated nature of mind* challenges both our instincts and our modern view of our minds as identical with the thought content of our waking state. By encouraging us to see through the surface symbolic content of our minds into the deeper medium that creates and recognizes that content, he is effectively urging us to shift our whole frame of reference on consciousness toward the process of knowing rather than the forms of symbolic knowledge it produces.

The aim of his directive is to help us turn awareness back on itself, in a reflective process that reveals the nature of knowing as distinct from the forms of the known. It is this radically open, transparent element of consciousness that Chekawa points to as the natural state of mind, a state which, unlike its manifold creations, is itself uncreated.⁴⁰ Whether or not we agree with this radically process-oriented view of the mind, the benefits of being able to come at our inner life from this vantage of radical freedom from habitual contents should be obvious. In fact, some of these benefits have been demonstrated in recent efforts to enhance the effectiveness of cognitive therapy with the enhanced freedom and objectivity made possible by even simple mindfulness, which some describe as “meta-cognition.”⁴¹

Deep Mindfulness, Primary Awareness, and the Spacious Equipose Intuition

In practice, this step on the path of radical open-mindedness is an extension and deepening of the basic exercise of mindfulness of mind. Through persistently prying the mind free from its habitual attachment to positive and negative thoughts, emotions, and images, we gradually begin to experience a new state of mind, usually described as having qualities of spaciousness, openness, clarity, contentment, and peace. Initially of course, this shift in consciousness may seem strange, even threatening, as we experience an increasing separation from our familiar reference points of identity and perspective. So we’re advised to examine this altered state carefully until we come to recognize and own it as the primary process of mind, the natural home of our awareness and source all the familiar constructs created by mind. As we grow increasingly familiar and at home with this deep experience of mind, we grow able to immerse ourselves more and more deeply in it, and so come to taste and master the state-specific qualities it has to offer us.

Unlike the dream-like insight the last precept asked us to cultivate, the practice of immersing ourselves in the uncreated nature of mind aims at an insight described as spacious, which combines an experience of radical openness with an unwavering equanimity and peace of mind. In effect, this spacious insight helps us realize that it’s not just our projections of an outer world which lack objectivity. By helping us experience an unbounded openness with no reference point on which to hang our sense of a separate, isolated inner world, it allows us to realize the mind’s emptiness of any fixed identity or subjectivity.

In this sense, the two insights Chekawa recommends—dreamy and spacious—work together to help us experientially realize the emptiness of any fixed, non-relative distinction between inner and outer, subject and object. The outcome of this two-pronged analysis is to effectively expose our normal mode of subject-object experience as an elaborate, unconscious construction of mind. The power of this two-edged analysis and insight to free us from the complex of reified instinctive structures, emotional memories, and learned constructs we mistake for the reality of our lives is obvious.

The Union of Analysis and Quiescence: Tapping the Depths of the Natural Mind

Technically, the emptiness insights developed on the path of self-analysis are seen as based on a contemplative method which joins analytic insight with concentrative quiescence.⁴² Practically, this compound method grows out of the deepening of mindfulness and awareness developed in the basic and intermediate practice of mindfulness. In particular, analytic insight grows out of the deepening and refinement of awareness, while quiescence grows out of the deepening and refinement of mindfulness. The transition from deep mindfulness to the practice of insight and quiescence begins in earnest when mindfulness and awareness are aided by the intensification of effort and the eventual growth of expertise.

When this compound insight meditation is turned reflexively on itself, it delves beyond mere mindfulness

of mind to expose and transform the deepest nature and workings of consciousness. This practice of self-analysis is key not just to the ordinary practice of compassionate openness but also to the secret practice of blissful openness taught in the Process Vehicle we'll explore in parts 3 and 4. Consequently, the synthetic systems of self-analysis transmitted into Tibet by Padmasambhava, Naropa and Atisha, present this art of examining the uncreated nature of mind in light of the final stages in the highest level practices of the Process Vehicle, called the Great Seal and Great Perfection. As we'll see in the precepts that follow, these parallel teaching traditions differ only in whether the depth of the mind is mapped in terms of a critically revised version of the Constructivist subconscious or of the still more critical, neurolinguistic model of the Process Vehicle.⁴³

Though using such insights to access the primal clarity of mind is a common practice among the Indic contemplative traditions, and is touted by many as the final goal of self-analysis, the Nalanda tradition assumed by Chekawa's text challenges this conventional wisdom. For the most critical of Nagarjuna's heirs, accessing the spacious openness and lucid clarity of the primal mind is not the end-all and be-all of self-analysis, but a helpful platform or jumping off point for a still deeper realization of emptiness and more radical experience of openness. The added depth and openness, however, comes not just from a deeper level of quiescence or concentration, but rather from combining deeper focus with a more profound analysis and insight into emptiness.⁴⁴

The Final Meanings of "Uncreated:" Mind as Naturally Disidentified and De-Reified

In terms of Chekawa's precept, this deeper level of analysis corresponds to two more profound senses of the adjective "uncreated." First, not only is the primal mind not to be confused with any symbolically created subjective identity or perspective, but when examined still more deeply it even lacks any criterion, reference point or identifiable character of belonging to any particular self or person, i.e., of being intrinsically "mine." This sense of the term uncreated is especially key to exposing even the most primitive, unconscious sense of a fixed, unitary or independent subjectivity or point of view, which could act as the seed for the construction and reification of a mentally created sense of self.

Recognizing the mind as "uncreated" in this sense helps to challenge our reifying instinct to seek a hook somewhere, somehow within our stream of consciousness on which we can hang our habitual sense of having a fixed, unchanging self. In effect, the insight that our primal consciousness is empty of any such fixed identity or point of view means that it is not created or born as "my mind;" that it has no built-in bar code or mark of identity which would allow it to be distinguished from any other mind. As Shantideva made clear in his verses on exchanging self and other, this breakthrough has the power to infinitely expand our capacity for empathy with other minds. Its potential application to the practice of compassionate openness is clear.

The final sense of the term "uncreated" points us to the most profound and freeing of all insights into the emptiness of the mind. This is the insight that, when fully examined under the microscope of contemplative self-analysis, the ultimate nature of mind turns out to be empty not just of any fixed personal identity but even of any iota of fixed, independent or intrinsic identity *as mind*. Such a profound insight into the objective reality of consciousness effectively transports us out of the trap of subjective bias generated by our self-protective instinct for reification. So Shantideva concludes in his Guide, "Just as illusion-like forms lack any intrinsic reality, so it is with the mind that perceives them."⁴⁵ For a glimpse into the experience of these deepest insights into the natural mind, consider these verses from Chokyi Gyaltsan's *Highway of All Victors*:

While a special insight directly perceives
The true nature of mind as such,
Nothing can be shown or grasped as "this,"
Whatever dawns, it rests naturally, without grasping.
The great Himalayan meditators of today
Proclaim more or less in unison
That this is the prime directive which grants
Attainment of Buddha's illumination.
Be that as it may, I, Chokyi Gyalsten,
Pronounce this method as (no more than)
A technique of remarkable effectiveness
For diligent beginners to gain mental stability

And to recognize the superficial mind.
 As for the method of precisely identifying
 The ultimate reality of mind,
 I offer the personal advice of my root Mentor,
 Who cleared the deluded gloom from my mind,
 And who, in the guise of a saffron-clad monk,
 Embodied all the intuitions of Buddhas!
 In an equipoised state, (examine) the mind:
 Pure openness with no static material,
 (Where) diversity dawns and evolves unobscured;
 An incessant stream of lucid awareness
 That engages (objects) without interruption.
 Though it seems independent as an object
 Of (mental) perception, (when examined)
 By reasons and references like Savior Santideva's,
 "So-called 'masses,' 'continua' and such
 Are as artificial as garlands and armies,"
 The way it appears is unfounded (on analysis);
 So rest single-pointedly in its (empty) nature.⁴⁶

By immersing ourselves in breakthrough insights like the one Chekawa and Chokyi Gyaltsan describe, we effectively climb out of our own biased minds, not just in the sense of overcoming our personal self-indulgence, but in the objective sense of no longer seeing ourselves and other minds as ultimately distinct from the natural world around us. The potential of this insight to deepen compassionate openness lies in the way it helps to galvanize impartial empathy and free up a spontaneous, impersonal response to the needs of others and the world we share.

Even the Remedy Itself is Objectively Free: Breaking the Denial Habit

The final step on the path to openness Chekawa maps turns our reflection back on itself yet again, to expose and correct any dualistic tendency to reify the negative logic or findings of the emptiness insight. As the self-reifying frame of reference for our habitual perceptions of self and world is gradually deconstructed, revealing their emptiness of any ground in reality or mind, the self-protective instinct of the reifying mind is to cling to what seems to be left, namely the insight, analysis, and findings which help us realize that emptiness. This natural reflex is what drives us towards the extreme of denial that comes of consciously or unconsciously reifying the language and logic of emptiness.

Just as Descartes was tricked by his own mind into reifying the language of his positive reflection—I think, therefore I am—into self-evident truth, those who use the negative logic of emptiness as an aid in self-analysis may abuse this potent medicine and get hooked on it like a conceptual drug. In particular, the danger Nagarjuna and his heirs warn about is the tendency to reify emptiness into an ineffable something or absolute nothing, either of which then acts as an opium of sorts—whether mystical or cynical—rather than a genuine cure for the human condition. So Chandrakirti says, in his *Reason Sixty Commentary*,

When you introduce beings who are intellectually unprepared to the view of reality—voidness—they become utterly confused. Consequently, the noble do not teach them voidness right at first...When not taught in this (gradual) way, students may succumb to error through the teaching of voidness, since they may come to confound the principle of the two realities, superficial and ultimate. In such cases, they would be unable to avoid non-virtue, since the intellectually inept might cling to the idea, "this world is void." Hence, (thinking), "If this is voidness, what use is it all," they may not be inspired to cultivate the virtuous actions that make success certain. Consequently they may be destroyed, like a bird with undeveloped wing feathers thrown from its nest.⁴⁷

Later in the same work, Chandrakirti calls the noble secret of emptiness "the sublime secret instruction of relativity."⁴⁸ And in this he echoes a celebrated formula of Nagarjuna's which Tsong Khapa found so important he thought it should be added as a refrain to each and every analysis of emptiness on the path of insight:

If you regard things as existent by virtue of (a reified) intrinsic reality, you thereby regard them as bereft of causes and conditions. And thereby you are condemning effects, causes, agents, actions, activities, originations, cessations, and even fruitional goals. Whatever is relativity we proclaim that emptiness. Nothing whatsoever is found which is not relativistically originated. Therefore, nothing whatsoever is found which is not empty. So if all things were *not* empty, there would be no origination and no destruction.⁴⁹

So in order to work effectively, the negative insight, analysis and findings of emptiness—that objects and subjects, world and mind lack any non-relative, self-sufficient reality or self-evident identity—must be understood as simply ruling out that they have any kind of reality or identity that would keep them from being causally created, transformed, or destroyed, without implying that they have any other kind of reality or identity, positive or negative. As such, emptiness must be understood logically as the pure and simple negation of a family of malignant errors our minds instinctively tend to make. And the proof of this pudding is that the same insight, analysis and finding is applied reflexively to emptiness itself, guided by two key Centrist principles of self-analysis: the emptiness of emptiness; and the freedom from any reified position or point of view.

The Emptiness of Emptiness: Avoiding a Mystical View

Like a self-dissolving suture, the truth of the teaching of emptiness lies not in its intrinsic validity or self-evidence but rather in its usefulness as a remedy for the mind's self-deceptive instinct of reification. While the subject and object of any perception naturally appear to us as self-sufficient and self-evident, we know by examining their intimate dependence on one another and the sensory faculty that mediates their contact that they are not in fact as independent or given as they appear. Such careful analysis eventually brings certainty that the self and things we experience as so real, including our minds themselves, are in fact empty of the kind of reality our instincts unconsciously project into them. Yet here we come to a crossroads where our analysis could easily fall from the extreme of projection to the opposite extreme of denial. To prevent this misstep, we must learn to contemplate not just the emptiness of persons and things, but the emptiness of emptiness itself.⁵⁰

Once we've arrived at a glimpse or even a deep insight into emptiness, it's time to turn the scalpel of analysis back on itself. We do this by reflecting that the emptiness insight, like the people and things it examines, is itself the object of a perception that has validity only through relations of mutual dependence. As an inference of our discursive mind, the truth of the emptiness insight inexorably depends on the perceptual error it exposes, the conventions of logic and language that support it, and the negative finding that people and things when examined do not have certain kinds of reality our faculties naturally see in them. So the truth of emptiness is itself empty, entirely relative to the reifying instinct which projects a false sense of unity, fixity, self-sufficiency, and self-evidence into all we perceive and imagine.

To perceive or imagine this purely critical, de-reifying reminder as a fixed, unitary, self-sufficient or self-evident void would involve the blatant misunderstanding and abuse of the teaching Nagarjuna called "taking emptiness as a (nother reified) view." So all his heirs—from Aryadeva to Chekawa and his modern descendents—insist on teaching the emptiness of emptiness as a failsafe against any such misunderstanding or abuse.

The Emptiness Insight as a Self-Corrective Capability

Seen in this light, the genuine analysis and insight of emptiness support what you might call a negative capability, a new rational certainty that conclusively overrides and corrects our self-deceptive habit of reifying our own mental constructs. This is in fact how Tsong Khapa describes it in his *Essence of True Eloquence*.⁵¹ Yet, this does not in any way deny the validity or positive efficacy of developing and maintaining virtuous habits, such as the healing skills of personal self-care or the social-emotional virtues of compassion cultivated through mind-clearing. Once the emptiness insight has done its work of clearing our minds of the cobwebs of reified constructs, it doesn't leave us in a mystical or skeptical void, but rather opens and frees up our minds, unlocking the power of our positive intentions to seek freedom and happiness for ourselves and others. While the complexity of the way emptiness fosters openness may be hard to grasp, in fact it is no more unusual than the range of capacities which allow us to mix insight, illusion and action at one and the same time: knowing with certainty that our reflection in a mirror is not our real face; perceiving the illusion nonetheless, like a dream, as if it were our real face; and using the reflection to shave, without ever examining whether it's real or

not.

Emptiness as a Self-Dissolving, Freeing Truth

Of course, the idea of a self-dissolving truth, one that is ultimately healing while being thoroughly relative, is so unfamiliar as to boggle the mind. Apparently we are not alone in having trouble wrapping our minds around the nuances of this healing insight. Chandrakirti addressed at great length the doubts his contemporaries had about how a thoroughly relative or conventional emptiness insight could possibly lead us to such ultimate, freeing truths. In fact, the analogy of his I cited, in which he compares the emptiness insight to shaving with the help of a mirror reflection, he used to illustrate his distinctive view that the inference of emptiness could be ultimately true despite the sheer relativity of its premise, logic and findings. In his *Introduction Commentary*, he affirms that the reasoning of emptiness, though thoroughly relative and conventional, still effectively rules out the possibility that our reified constructs of people and things are as real as they seem, “Refutation devoid of intrinsic reality refutes what must be refuted, and a reason, even without (intrinsic) validation, being devoid of intrinsic reality, proves what is to be proven.”⁵²

This may sound like a paradox, but in fact is straightforward, since the premise to be proven is that all people and things are totally relative, while the presumption that must be refuted is that causality, agency, reason, and language have or need some non-relative nature or essence in order to work. The teaching here feels hard to swallow not because of any internal illogic, but because it flatly contradicts our instinct for reification and the ingrained, extreme habits of projection and denial it engenders. However disillusioning and disorienting that may feel, we must recall that reification is precisely the disease that the medicine of emptiness is meant to cure. This is why Chekawa’s precept—*even the remedy (the emptiness insight) itself is objectively free (of intrinsic reality)*—puts the self-dissolving seal on that medicine which guarantees its safe and effective use.

Emptiness as the Remedy for Any Self-Limiting Point of View

Since the pure negation of emptiness is meant to be therapeutic not dogmatic, it must not be reified into a positive stance, narrow viewpoint or set position of any kind, either in our own minds or in our dialogue with others.⁵³ Like the self-dissolving logic of emptiness, the principle of avoiding any rigid position directly challenges the driving instinct and cultural habit we humans have of reifying our favorite constructions of language and knowledge into supposedly objective truths. In contrast to the dogmatic or didactic method of most systems of knowledge and practice, the principle of positionlessness urges a therapeutic or liberative method closely aligned with the therapeutic philosophies and psychologies of modern thinkers like Nietzsche, Wittgenstein and Freud and ancient thinkers like Socrates.⁵⁴

Like Wittgenstein’s method of language-games and Freud’s method of free association, this principle begins not from a fixed preconceived standpoint, but rather with a radical openness to whatever form of thought or perception seems to be troubling us or others. It proceeds by accepting these forms as they are, and then critically examining their health or illness, truth or falsehood, until we and others can see through our own self-limiting perceptual biases and habits of thought.⁵⁵ Once we are freed of these limiting blocks and habits, and our minds opened up and expanded, the language and logic of emptiness have done their work and can be left behind, just as the dialogue of psychotherapy ends when it has healed the suffering that prompted it.

Understood in this way, the principle of holding no reified position serves as a safeguard against the reification of the language of the reflective mind, even of the healing language of Buddhist thought and practice. In stark contrast to Descartes’ reification of his reflection into a supposedly analysis-proof “first principle,” the Centrist tradition of self-analysis aims squarely for the healing goal of radical openness, and sees any clinging to forms of perception or thought as blinders that narrow and bias the mind. Like the “complete clarity” sought by Wittgenstein, Nagarjuna aimed his teaching at the pure freedom of compassionate openness, which he called “the peace that resolves (all) perplexity.”⁵⁶ To help prevent this healing teaching from being perverted into a rigid dogma or doctrine, he warned,

“All is empty,” should not be asserted, nor should “all is not empty,” “all is both (empty and non-empty),” nor “all is neither (empty or non-empty).” Each is maintained (only) in the (appropriate) context in conventional reality.⁵⁷ The taming of all perceptions, the resolution of all perplexities, that (alone) is

supreme peace. The Buddha never taught any doctrine to anyone!⁵⁸

And, in *Reason Sixty*, he explained in more detail the importance of the principle of not holding to any reified, self-limiting habit of thought or speech as “I” or “mine,” both in terms of breaking the hold stress instincts and traumatic reactions have on our minds, and in terms of helping others find their own way to greater openness and freedom:

If any sort of hold is found,
The cunning poisonous snake of compulsion
Will seize it; but those whose minds
Have no (such) hold, will not be seized.⁵⁹
Great souls are beyond disputes,
(For) they assume no (reified) position.
For those whose minds have no (such) position,
How can there be opposition?⁶⁰

These verses make clear the logic behind using emptiness to de-reify even our most cherished habits of thought and speech. Since reified errors of thought serve to rationalize traumatic distortions and emotions, there is simply no way to tame and heal our traumatized self without seeing through our reified habits of mind. As long as any such habit remains, even attached to the healing language of emptiness, the mind will never fully free itself from reifying and identifying with traumatic distortions and stress emotions. The practical experience of this most profound level of self-analysis is described in the following verses from Chokyi Gyaltzan's *Highway of All Victors*:

From within the prior state of equipoise,
Like a minnow darting within still, clear waters,
The subtle consciousness critically examines
The nature of the person of the meditator.
You should investigate it following the formulation
Of the Savior, Noble Nagarjuna,
“Since the person is not solid, not liquid,
Not gas, not energy, not space,
Nor consciousness, nor their sum,
Nor apart from them, what person is there?
As the person has no ultimate reality,
Because it is composed of sixfold elements,
So each of its elements has no ultimate reality,
Because each in turn is also composite.”
When you cannot discover even a subatomic particle
Of equipoise or someone equipoised,
Then cultivate space-like equipoise,
With unwavering single-pointedness.⁶¹

While the dream-like insight into things helps us see through reified projections and the space-like insight helps us break through reified constructs of the subjective mind, this insight into the emptiness of words and symbols helps de-reify habits of speech that rationalize and reinforce our habitual narrative of “I” and “mine.” Practiced in sequence, these insights gradually bring us towards the aim of complete self-analysis, just as progressing on the path of meditation through the realms of pure form and formless absorption help prepare us for the final realization of Nirvana on the path of self-healing.

The Actuality of the Path Rests in the Fundamental Realm: Embodying Openness

The various levels of insight Chekawa alludes to in his text are not just conceptual, but link directly with a practical map of the experience of contemplating emptiness over time. This precept and the next describe that linkage of theory and practice in a clear and straightforward way. According to the practice tradition, the

actual experience of meditating on emptiness follows a predictable path. It begins when we decide to critically analyze the surface appearance that people like our friends and things like our homes are self-sufficient and self-evident, examining whether we find any basis in reality for their appearing so ultimately real. Inevitably, when we examine their parts, their causation, their transformation in time and/or their conceptual aspects, we find no non-relative being or essence that would support that surface appearance.

Once our analysis has conclusively shown the lack of anything that could ground the deceptive appearance of people or things, our habitual perception of them seems to dissolve, leaving a space-like sense of their absence traditionally called the spacious equipoise intuition of emptiness. Like the experience of disillusionment when we expose a perceptual error or sensory illusion, this intuition is especially profound when we've just seen through something near and dear to our habitual view of the world, such as our sense of self. The experience feels as if the whole world around us and our whole inner world have just dissolved, leaving our consciousness unhinged from its familiar framework and bearings, absorbed in an otherworldly trance.

While normally, we would take such an otherworldly experience as an altered state and dismiss it as an outlying point to be relegated to the margins of our "real" daily lives. To the contrary, Chekawa is advising that the practice of clearing the mind for compassionate openness begins to be real when we choose to accept this de-centering experience as a new normal or reference point around which to re-center our lives. In effect, we do this by taking its spacious equipoise as the "groundless ground" on which we will base a whole new way of life. In practice, this intuition lines up directly with the spacelike insight cultivated by deeply examining the uncreated nature of mind, especially when that insight is sealed by a reflexive analysis of the discursive awareness which lead to that insight. The act of immersing our mind in the radical openness that follows and choosing to take it as the foundation on which our way forward rests effectively aligns our new lives with the healing edge of our contemplative insight.

Of note, the language Chekawa uses to describe this new grounding in openness is the depth-psychological language of Buddhist Constructivism. In that context, the "fundamental realm" he speaks of would refer to what is left of the subconscious mind when self-analysis has completely healed the traumatized sense of self, by seeing through its reified, traumatic constructs of the inner and outer world. Once the mind has undergone a complete inner revolution and turned away from that afflicted subjectivity, the split between the conscious and subconscious mind disappears, and the mind is restored to its natural state of unblocked, pure awareness.

This depth-psychology was later refined in light of Chandrakirti's psycho-linguistic approach to the mind, and eventually integrated with the neuro-linguistic depth-psychology of the Process Vehicle. In view of these refinements, Chekawa's precept actually refers to the subtle realm of reality experienced by the subtlest depth-consciousness, known to his contemporaries as the objective clear light.⁶² Regardless of terminology, this precept directs us to dissolve our habitual projections and biased subjectivity into a radical openness to others and the world, an openness that allows us to embrace other perspectives with the objective clarity of an omniscient narrator.⁶³ It is this radical openness that galvanizes the cultivation and exercise of universal compassion with the selfless wisdom that knows myself as another and others as myself.

Between Sessions Act as an Illusory Being: Embodying Compassion

Once we've seen through the surface of appearances and embodied the most profound openness in the form of the spacious equipoise intuition, sooner or later the interplay of subjects and objects resumes, and we find ourselves back again in the relative world. To borrow the simple imagery of the Zen koan made popular by pop singer Donovan, "First there is a mountain, then there is no mountain, then there is!" The next experience on the path of contemplating emptiness links up with the insight of the dream-like nature of things. Called the illusory aftermath intuition, this experience involves the mixed mode of perception we described as a negative capability.

In it, the people and things of the world reappear, only now they are clearly seen in light of the breakthrough experience of the spacious equipoise, as being less real than they seem, just like dreams, illusions, reflections or mirages. And, as Tsong Khapa insists in his formula of the authentic view, this aftermath must not be confused with a mystical sense that reality is out of reach or a cynical sense that the world is illusion. Rather, it opens up a new sense of the dream-like fluidity of self, others and the world we share, combined with the lingering peace and openness of the spacious equipoise. In the aftermath between meditations, these two intuitions work together to heighten our ability to connect empathically with others and their diverse points of view; as well as our ability to flexibly alter our habitual way of being so that we can

respond more naturally and skillfully to others' true needs and perspectives.

By suggesting we practice between sessions using the illusory aftermath to shape a whole new way of being in the world, Chekawa is showing us how the insight of emptiness can foster the deeper openness and greater flexibility we need to reshape our habitual self so it can more fully embody the spirit of love and compassion. So he suggests we *act like an illusory person* not because our actions or person are ineffectual illusions but because our ability to see our mind/body process as a dream-like raw material can help free us to reform it into a more effective agent of compassionate openness.

Based in the radical freedom of spacious openness, the illusory person we practice becoming in the aftermath between meditations is also free to learn, grow, and change in a radically new way. By living as if, in Shakespeare's terms, "we are such stuff as dreams are made on," we have the capacity to make our daily lives into a self-creative process, aimed at embodying our highest ideals with the living fabric of our flesh, mind, and nerve. In terms of the language of Buddhist Constructivism, Chekawa's precept may be seen as an allusion to the idea that, once the ultimate truth of emptiness has been realized, the relative workings of mind are naturally transformed into forms that embody the peace and compassion of enlightenment. As in the case of depth-psychology, this Constructivist view of enlightenment—also refined by Chandrakirti—was then integrated with the depth-psychology of the Process Vehicle, in which the embodiment of enlightened forms of expression and action is described as the illusory body.

Integrating the Spacious and Dream-Like Modes of Emptiness Insight

Beyond the first pendulum swing from spacious openness to illusory personification, the path of self-analysis moves through a narrowing oscillation between these two complementary poles of insight. Gradually, the seeming polarity between these two emptiness insights resolves, and we grow to experience them, in Tsong Khapa's words, without alternation, as two inseparable sides of the same fabric of empty relativity.⁶⁴ Left unexamined, this illusory fabric feels like transparent, empty appearance; once examined, it feels like a spaciously open, apparent emptiness. So with time, all appearances "dawn as emptiness;" and all emptinesses, as appearance. Eventually, as repeated immersion in profound spaciousness increasingly opens our mind, and repeated re-emergence at the illusory surface helps us personify empathic art, these two sides are interwoven so seamlessly that they are fully melded in one synthetic fabric of compassionate openness.⁶⁵ This reversible fabric made of spacious and dream-like insight marries the ultimate and superficial truths, realization of emptiness and relativity, in a mind of selfless openness and a body of pure compassion. With this mature integration, we've reached the final fruition of the path, known as the ultimate spirit and perfect embodiment of enlightened altruism.⁶⁶

When the Environment and (All) Life are Poisoned by Vice: Self-Analysis in the World

With this provocative precept, Chekawa moves on to the third point of mind-clearing practice: using contemplative self-analysis to transform our way of being in the world. Although the application of self-analysis to daily life is said to take place in the dream-like aftermath of the spacious insight which de-reifies our habitual self-sense, the tradition sees such practical application as anything but an afterthought. This opening precept stands as a clear reminder of the lay orientation of the socially engaged teaching which this text and practice distill.

Of course, the insight that the everyday world and its life are polluted by misperceptions and toxic emotions is not new to Buddhist contemplative science. The toxic influence which the causality of stress and trauma exerts on the minds, bodies and lives of beings of all kinds is what defines the normal cyclic condition of compulsive life. In Chekawa's precept, the term "vice" refers to the vicious role this causal cycle plays in poisoning our mind/body systems as well as the natural, social, and cultural environments we co-create. What is novel about the engaged teaching tradition on which this practice is based is that it is explicitly designed for those who choose to build a contemplative life by staying within that world rather than by renouncing it in favor of a monastic community set apart.

Another way this precept is often read takes off from the temporal qualifier "when." According to some Indic traditions, the changing nature of contemplative teaching and practice over time is explained by invoking a process of historical decline, social corruption or cultural decadence which requires more potent remedies to suit the age. Of course, civilization has historically become more complex and inclusive as it has

evolved, and with that increasing complexity and scope comes increasingly challenging problems. But this process may also be seen as one of progress, with civilization and contemplative ways spreading to less fortunate segments of the population within ancient centers and to less developed societies at the margins of the civilized world.

Viewed in this light, the word “when” should be read more generally as describing a circumstance in which one is trying to build and spread a contemplative way of life within a less reflective, more rugged sociocultural environment. Looking at the historical context in which the art of mind-clearing spread to remote regions like Indonesia and Central Asia, this reading would seem more consistent with what we know about the intentions of masters like Survarnavipa and Atisha.⁶⁷ Read in this way, Chekawa’s precept also seems relevant to the transmission of these teachings to the West, despite the fact that we are now in an age of rapid global advancement, at least on the level of material development and access to information.

As we learned in chapter 3, many of the mental and emotional habits Buddhist psychology identifies as vices are cherished as virtues or at least defended as harmless preferences within the mainstream traditions of the modern West, scientific and humanistic, materialistic and religious. Although some or all of these are deeply ingrained in our cultural institutions and way of life, the consensus emerging from new sciences like stress research, neuroscience, positive psychology, sociobiology, and behavioral economics suggests that the Buddhist tradition may well be right to point out the risks and challenge the benefits of such habits. Chekawa’s precept aligns with this new consensus in viewing many aspects of our way of life as culture-bound errors and self-defeating habits that must change for us to thrive sustainably, as individuals and as a society. This defines the art of compassionate openness through mind clearing as a form of non-violent resistance to compulsive ways of life that have dominated our culture for centuries.

Turn Adversity into the Path to Enlightenment: The Alchemy of Self-Transformation

If the context for practicing mind-clearing is a social environment that indulges obsessive, compulsive, and addictive ways of life, the key to that practice is learning to take social stress as an opportunity for deeper self-analysis and self-change. Harking back to the opening of the second point, *drive all blame into one*, this precept indicates the high road we must take in our interactions with others mired in stress, namely: rising to the challenge of taking responsibility for parenting our own distress well enough that we can avoid being triggered and respond with mature empathy. While we all celebrate dramatic gestures of heroism and altruism, from the standpoint of this practice, the rubber of enlightened altruism meets the road of daily life in the routine obstacles we run into whenever someone we’re interacting with has fallen into a rut of traumatic repetition, stress emotion, or compulsive behavior.

This seeming paradox is central to the path of social engagement advanced by Nagarjuna and his heirs. It is symbolized by the analogy of the altruist who matures in the midst of the world to the lotus that grows out of the mud. Traditionally, this deep character change is also conceived in terms of the Constructivist idea of a fundamental transformation or “inner revolution” in consciousness, as well as in terms of the process-oriented notion of an alchemical transmutation at the deepest, subtlest levels of the mind/body process. The secret ingredient that galvanizes this profound change is the wisdom that helps us to see through the reification of our traumatized self and so open our hearts and minds to engaging others in a more mature and proactive way. The reason we don’t take this high road more often is that we lack the necessary perspective and strength to climb out of our childhood rut and step up to it. This is why clearing the mind is an indispensable discipline for those of us who are committed to fundamentally changing our whole way of being in the world.

Apply Meditation to Whatever You’re Facing Right Now: Make the Practice Your Life

All too often, we turn to meditation as a refuge or even escape from the daily challenges of our lives. We may make it a pastime, a hobby, a getaway, or sanctuary of pristine purity, serenity, and calm, but that approach to practice will never fundamentally change our lives. Like the ultimate vacation from which we must inevitably return to our laundry and bills, an escapist practice of meditation may refresh and even restore but ultimately leaves the basic conditions of our lives unchanged. In a sense, this approach is natural in any culture where spirituality or contemplation are seen dualistically, as a pure, sacred realm set apart from the mundane tasks and burdens of the everyday world. But the basic premise of the socially engaged approach to contemplative life distilled in this practice is that meditation can play a vital, pragmatic role in transforming the conditions of

everyday life in the world.

The Best Method is (Practice) with the Four Preparations: The Yoga of Everyday

Of course, most of us, especially early on, will be unprepared to apply meditation in real time to whatever challenge we're facing in the present. So until we're ready to meditate on our feet, so to speak, Chekawa's next precept spells out the kinds of regular exercise that will gradually prepare us over time to use our practice to meet challenges in the here and now. Some of these preparations are similar to those practiced on the preliminary path of personal self-healing, some are specific to the socially engaged path of compassion. In my experience, I've found it helpful to distil the motivational psychology of these preparations from the ritual context in which they are traditionally practiced.

In that light, I define the four preparations as follows: (1) correcting unhealthy habits; (2) cultivating positive energy and action; (3) offering generosity in the face of obstacles; and (4) building trust in the efficacy of positive motivation, practice, and development. As a shorthand, I refer to these as correcting vices, cultivating virtues, welcoming opposition, and building trust. Though the first two of these should be generally familiar from our brief look at the motivation of personal self-healing in chapter 3, I'll begin by reviewing them and describing how they help to motivate and guide social self-healing.

The First Preparation: Correcting Unhealthy Habits

The preparatory practice of correcting unhealthy habits is vital for beginners who want to learn to practice clearing the mind. Since more often than not we're blind to our reactive habits until they make themselves painfully obvious in our interactions, the first task of self-analysis on this path involves retrospectively looking at incidents in which we've found ourselves triggered by day to day social stress. Learning how to see these incidents for what they are—to see through the unhealthy self-habits driving them—is the first step in changing our ways over time. As in most deep learning and change, the first step in the fourfold process of self-correction is to break through our habitual projection and denial so that we can clearly see our part in negative events—the perceptual distortions and destructive emotions underlying our traumatic, stress-reactive habits—and have realistic, healthy regret or remorse, rather than self-indulgent self-pity or self-hatred.

Once we've stopped blaming others and clearly identified our part in the problem, even if it's only withholding empathy out of fear or being triggered into past trauma, we're now ready for the second step: turning to reliable sources of guidance who can model realistic self-knowledge, self-mastery, and healthy alternatives. Traditionally, this step involves confessing our limits and faults to select role-models and peers, or generally to the historic or mythic community of noble sages and masters, enlightened beings and altruists. Inspired by healthy models, traditions, and communities to believe that a better way of being in the world is possible and accessible, the third step is to commit or resolve to avoid our unhealthy habits in the future and to learn to shift our outlook, motivation, and habits towards healthy alternatives. Such commitments and pledges are often rehearsed ritually by reciting affirmations or prayers for blessing and help. The final step is to actually practice new ways of seeing, feeling, and acting that will replace unhealthy old habits and the instincts underlying them with healing insight, positive motivations and compassionate action.

As we apply these four remedial powers—regret, reliance, resolve, and correction—retrospectively to our negative interactions, we inexorably prepare ourselves to apply meditation to challenging situations in real time. Gradually, a thorough post-mortem of our missteps becomes more rapid and certain, until we can begin to see our mistake in real time, as it's being made. Finally, we're able to anticipate triggering situations and avoid unhealthy reactions before they arise by proactively choosing a healthier way to engage and respond.

The Second Preparation: Building Positive Energy and Momentum

Beyond the first aid of self-correction, the next preparation—building positive energy and virtues—takes off with the new leaf turned by the four remedial powers. This practice involves conceiving, initiating and maintaining the exercise of healthy capacities: from the cognitive powers of learning, analysis, insight, and intuition; through the affective disciplines of mindfulness, concentration, distress tolerance, positive emotions and flow; right up to the behavioral skills of positive intention and motivation, communicative speech, effective social action, communal service, and inspired action. Just as systematic self-correction leads over time to whole new degrees of freedom from internal resistances and blocks, building virtues yields not just areas of

expertise but a cumulative momentum of positive thought and action that acts as an altruistic critical mass or positive psychological capital, accumulating exponentially through the compounding synergy of effort, application, and mastery.⁶⁸

In terms of mind-clearing practice, the preparation of removing blocks breeds openness while the preparation of building virtues builds compassion, eventually bringing us to the point when we can master the art of proactive engagement by resolving problems in real time with either one or both these wings of altruistic life. Symbolic of this accumulation is the ritual practice of dedicating virtues and positive energy to our long-term aims and goals. Traditionally performed by reciting formulas of dedication, this practice essentially earmarks or deposits accumulated enthusiasm and mastery into a virtual “bank” in which they safely gather interest by being merged with the accumulated energy and virtues of all contemplative individuals, enlightened altruists, and fully enlightened beings.

The Third Preparation: Practicing Generosity in the Face of Resistance

The third preparation, offering generosity in the face of resistance, should be familiar in principle from the art of giving and taking. This exercise prepares us to naturally respond to others’ distress and limitation by taking the high road of proactive acceptance and responsibility rather than by falling back into reactive opposition and conflict. The gist of this preparation involves a fundamental shift in our childhood sense of ourselves as small and helplessly dependent on the good will of larger, more powerful others. The reflex of falling into resistance and conflict with individuals, institutions or cultures that obstruct our aims or interfere with our progress is a regressive reflex based on our traumatized childhood self and our primal self-protective instincts, which typically results in the demonization of such obstructions.

Invariably, such demonization only compounds the resistance we face from others, while pointlessly stressing our systems and hijacking the higher faculties we need to negotiate such obstacles. This preparation goes to the heart of that reflex, the unconscious longing we have to be accepted, helped, and cared for by others, which effectively transfers our unresolved childhood dependency onto unreliable individuals, institutions, and cultures. By rehearsing over and over again our full, current capacity to choose the high road-not-taken, we can engage limited, deluded, or afflicted others from a proactive stance of confidence, empathy, and adult responsibility.

The Fourth Preparation: Building Trust in the Efficacy of the Positive

The final preparation, building trust in the efficacy of positive motivation and action, works to complement the preparation of offering generosity to obstructers, much as the practice of building virtues complements that of correcting bad habits. As I said, underlying our tendency to demonize obstructions is an even deeper tendency to idealize others in the hopes that they will protect and care for us. Nowhere is this deeply ingrained childhood coping mechanism more glaring than in the circumstance modern psychologists call identifying with the aggressor.⁶⁹ The insight here is that children, who quite reasonably feel small and helpless, and adults who still identify with that childhood sense have a natural social tendency to seek out and admire others they see as strong and powerful enough to protect and care for them.

The problem is that this naïve tendency involves a distorted perception of strength which leads us to see more self-involved, neglectful or abusive others as truly powerful, and so to seek to be near or like them. In fact such ingrained might-makes-right misperception is not unique to humans, but belongs to a family of primitive instincts of dominance or submission that seems to color the group behavior of many if not all social animals. The aim of this final preparation is to expose such childhood distortions and disarm the primitive instincts underlying them, so that we are more resistant to conformist impulses that would block our capacity to think and act as free social agents who can engage in truly non-violent resistance or civil disobedience towards individuals, institutions and cultures who dominate through overt or covert violence.

To help prepare us to feel and act like free and effective social agents, this fourth practice works to build and strengthen our trust in the ultimate effectiveness of positive social motivation and action over any antisocial forces like brute military or economic might, self-serving cunning, or self-satisfied entitlement. Of course, the foundation of this trust is rational analysis and certainty of the supreme importance of positive interdependence and social cooperation in human fortunes and in moving towards a sustainable future. This involves exposing any primitive instincts or confused notions that would make it seem that even the most powerful or ruthless of individuals acting alone or in small numbers could possibly equal the collective power of the shared aims, interests, and actions of whole human communities or of civilization itself.

Vital to any such self-correction is the certainty that all such reactive habits belong to the cycle of stress and trauma which hijacks the powers that make us the most effective form of life on earth. This preparation helps us internalize and rehearse the systematic disarmament of our primitive self-protective habits and the transfer of our security needs onto models, traditions, and communities that embody the higher faculties of social learning and collaboration. As with offering generosity, this preparation is traditionally practiced through ritual enactments in which we offer ourselves and resources to protective archetypes of enlightened intention and action, requesting their blessing and support of our positive efforts. This involves a gradual transformation from childish clinging to authoritarian habits towards a mature commitment to egalitarian, consensual alternatives. This shift reflects the gradual internalization of the rational insight that our security and efficacy comes not from any narcissistic personal power but from sober respect of the natural powers of causality and human consensus.

Meditative Experiment 5: The Royal Reason of Relativity

Once again, unplug from the world as much as you can and settle into a comfortable, stable posture. Clear and center your breath, either by alternate nostril breathing or by exhaling a long, full sigh, then sweetly welcoming a fresh, gentle breath. Use the sweetness of this gentle rhythm of breath to center your mind, alternately reigning distracted energy and awareness in to rest on the breath and rousing flagging energy and awareness up to meet the breath. As you gradually ease in to a kinder, gentler breath-rhythm centered at the heart, immerse your mind in the subtle chemistry of the breath and ride that wave out to every cell in your body and back to your heart again. Tuning into the lighter, more fluid physicality of your “body of light,” now scan your raw sensation, embracing your whole comfort level and trying to balance excitement, indifference and distress. Finally, turn your mindfulness reflexively onto your mind itself, delving beneath the surface activity of positive and negative thoughts, feelings, and images to the deeper flow and spacious clarity of your primal awareness. From within that clear, calm space of deep mindfulness of mind, now scan all five of your mind/body systems: more centered breathing body; more balanced raw sensation; the bare awareness of intuitive perception; your full range of emotions from healthy to toxic; and your range of thinking from delusional to enlightened.

Next, again prepare yourself by tapping into your most positive motivation. First, revive your basic urge to free your mind from stress and trauma by contemplative learning, living and practice. If it helps, again review the eight insights: life’s preciousness and brevity; the causal power of mental acts and the wild mind’s self-destructive effects; the impossibility of escape and the need to tame the mind through healthy reliance; as well as the decisive commitment to break free of stress and trauma. Now stir the heroic spirit that chooses to realize and spread enlightenment for all, as by reviewing the four steps of equalizing empathy, clearing self-indulgence, building compassion, and exchanging self-bias for altruism, or the seven steps of recognizing kindness, nurturing gratitude, taking responsibility, giving love, engaging with care, strengthening resolve and galvanizing enlightened altruism. You may touch on these points lightly or take as much time to reflect on them as you need.

With your body-mind centered and your motivation fresh, now turn again to the practice of self-analysis, insight, intuition and openness. Begin by scanning the surface activity of your waking mind, trying to expose and see through your habitual forms of desire and aversion as projected and reified constructs of your primal confusion. Remind yourself of how often you fantasize how nice it will be to be with someone you desire, only to be disappointed or disillusioned by the real interaction. Remind yourself how often you project your worst fear or childhood trauma onto people you have an aversion to, only to find through some real interaction that they’re neither as threatening nor as malignant as you’d imagined. And remind yourself of how often you completely overlook or fail to notice people you’re indifferent to, only to later find through real acquaintance that you’d been missing out on someone in some way truly relevant, interesting, and vital to your life. Finally, survey this whole scope of habitual engagement with objects of attachment, aversion and indifference, and try to trace the roots of your obsessive-compulsive mindset down to the depths of your instinctive habits of fear-based clinging, stress-reactive anger, and shame-based self-pity.

However clear a glimpse you’ve gotten into the network and roots of your reactive mind, turn your full attention inwards now and reflect that this network with its roots is the delusional system that turns your interactions with others in the stress-world into a nightmare. However free you might feel in deeply contemplative states, once you return to daily life, this network reasserts itself, like an inner straight-jacket that holds your traumatic memories and stress emotions in place. So choose now to not rest content

with such fleeting states, but to use your mindfulness as a platform to clearly and objectively expose and see through your habitual system of self. Within the space of sheer clarity and openness, begin to analyze the network and roots of your habitual self-sense using the simplest of all frameworks of self-analysis, called the three keys.

First, try to vividly recall the last time you felt deeply threatened, misunderstood or unseen. Notice the way you cling to your body as a fixed entity or precarious fortress you must defend. Scan your sensations, and try to feel how your distress about the present and longing for the future both lock you into the self-enclosing survival mode of the fight-flight reflex. Watch your mind, and see how closed it is around self-indulgent victimized sense of self, fear-based clinging to attachments, and blind projection of blame onto others. Tune into your emotions, and feel the toxic cocktail of shame, fear, and rage that quickly poisons your whole body-mind. Finally, examine your inner dialogue and face the obsessive rush of worst-case thinking, self-indulgent self-pity, and reflex assertions of blame. Overall, pinpoint the way your habitual sense of self is reified as fixed, unitary, self-sufficient and self-evident. Try to get a clear view of how adamant and convinced you are of the rightness of your experience of being objectively threatened, alone, misunderstood, deprived, in need, helpless and hopeless. Now commit to examining this felt sense of self thoroughly and decisively, until you can reach the conclusion that that sense is either based in reality or is not.

The third and final key of this quickest and most elegant form of self-analysis is to scan through your habitual sense of self from within your clearest and most poised state of mind, looking carefully for any systems, elements, moments or aspects of your mind/body experience which are not thoroughly relative. Once you delve critically into your sense of self as having a fixed identity and independent reality, you'll begin to see how intimately it relates to and depends on the systems that support your life, and how these in turn relate to and depend on a range of constantly changing elements, moments and aspects of experience. By taking this in as deeply as you can, your habitual felt sense of self will gradually seem to fade and melt into a flow or space of seamless, selfless relativity. Repeated over time, this analytic insight grows more intuitive, and your reified experience of yourself in the world—with its threefold network and roots—will begin, piece by piece, to break down and dissolve. Such breakthroughs should eventually merge into the intuition of spacious openness, which in turn will transform into the dream-like aftermath that will help you reengage with the world far more openly, empathically and flexibly.

So for now, imagine that each time you practice the three keys of self-analysis with the royal reason of relativity, you're chipping and melting away the reified habits that lock you into a reactive mode in the stress-driven world. Imagine your threefold network of dear friends, feared enemies and strangers, along with their roots in clinging, reactive blame and shame-withdrawal gradually melting into a sheer spacious openness, which you are now free to take as your new, open mind. Next imagine that, as you re-engage the world with more dream-like fluidity and empathic art, your old, guarded body will naturally shift towards a lighter energy of acceptance and care, which you are now free to take as your new, caring body. Embracing this new mind and body—as both subjective experience and objective events—imagine owning them as the wings of compassionate openness that will support your emerging life of enlightened altruism. Finally, remembering that the wings of this life only fly thanks to the spacious and dream-like intuitions of emptiness that unburden the mind/body process of its cognitive and affective blocks, reflect that the emptiness intuition is all you need to protect your new life from the poisons within you and all around you in the world.