

The Blooming of a Lotus

#31 Breaking habitual thought patterns

1. Aware of myself as a collection of five aggregates, I breathe in.

Seeing the five aggregates rooted in all that is, I breathe out.

Myself as five

Myself as five

aggregates

Roots in all that is

2. Aware of myself as made up of what is not myself (vapor, water, air, ancestors, habits, society, economics), I breathe in.

Seeing that my everyday perception of myself as a separate entity is in error, I breathe out.

Myself made of nonself elements

Separate entity,

erroneous

perception

3. Aware of the human species as an animal species though it has a culture and has become sovereign of the earth, I breathe in.

Seeing that the human species cannot exist without the animal, vegetal, and mineral species, I breathe out.

Humans one animal species

No human species without other species

4. Seeing the presence of the human species in the presence of the animal, vegetal, and mineral species, I breathe in.

Seeing that my idea of myself as belonging to a separate, independent species is in error, I breathe out.

Humans in animal, vegetal, and mineral species

Separate species, erroneous idea

5. Aware of all animal species as subject to birth and death, with feelings and consciousness, I breathe in.

Seeing that the animal species cannot exist without the presence of the vegetal and mineral species, the sun, the water, and the air, I breathe out.

All animal species have feelings and consciousness, impermanent

No animal species without vegetal and mineral species

6. Seeing the presence of the animal species in the presence of the nonsentient species, like plants, minerals, sun, water, and air, I breathe in.

Seeing that my everyday perception of an animal is in error, I breathe out.

Animals in nonsentient species

Everyday perception of animals erroneous

7. Aware of my life beginning at my birth and ending with my death, I breathe in.
Seeing that I was already present before my birth in many different forms and that I shall be present when I die in many different forms (the sun, the water, the air, the earth, ancestors, descendants, habits, society, economics), I breathe out.

My beginning, my ending

No beginning, no ending

8. Seeing that my lifespan is not bounded by the span of my birth and death, I breathe in.

Seeing that my perception of a lifespan is in error, I breathe out.

Life unbounded

Lifespan, erroneous perception

This exercise originates in the Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita sutra (known in English as the Diamond sutra), and its purpose is to help us break through our habitual thought patterns, in this case the following four conceptions:

1. The conception of myself as a separately existing entity (parts 1 and 2)
2. The conception of the human species as a separately existing species (parts 3 and 4)
3. The conception of animal species as separately existing (parts 5 and 6)
4. The conception of a lifespan beginning with birth and ending in death (parts 7 and 8)

The quintessent Buddhist teaching is the teaching on emptiness (Sanskrit *sunyata*). Emptiness is a way of expressing that all species exist in connection with and in dependence upon each other. Our meditation practice breaks down the frontiers between us and what seems to be other: the human species and all the other species; the animal species and the so-called nonsentient species; a short lifespan limited by space and time and a lifespan not limited in that way. If we can break through our habitual conceptions and thought patterns, we will emerge in a state of fearlessness, and our love for all species will be like our love for ourselves. Our practice will include the protection of all species, whether vegetable, animal, or mineral. Anyone who works to protect the plants, the animals, the environment of our earth, can take the Vajracchedika sutra as a fundamental text.

Acting in accord with its teachings, we shall not give way to anger, chagrin, and despair. If we base our actions on perceptions that open wide our mental frontiers, we shall know to use only the materials of understanding and love in our work for all species. In this task, we will feel happy and at peace.