

KHENPO'S
TALKS

UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

HOW DOES BUDDHISM SEE THE MATERIAL WORLD



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SODARGYE

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**How Does Buddhism See
the Material World**

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Khenpo Sodargye

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I want to share a quote that has inspired me, from the psychologist Carl Jung: “Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakes.” It is my earnest hope that each of you will understand not only the nature of the external, material world, but also the even more vital truths of your own inner, spiritual world.

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Host

It is a great honor to welcome our esteemed speaker, Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche, to the University of Sydney on behalf of the organizing committee. Tonight's topic, "A Buddhist Perspective on the Material World," is deeply relevant to our modern lives. The insights we will explore can reshape our worldviews, influence our values, and enrich our daily experiences. Now, it is my pleasure to invite the President of the University of Sydney Buddhist Society to the stage for a welcome speech.

PRESIDENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY BUDDHIST SOCIETY

On behalf of the University of Sydney Buddhist Society, I would like to extend the warmest welcome to Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche. We are immensely grateful for your presence, and I would also like to thank everyone in the audience for joining us this evening. I know many of you have taken time out of your busy schedules to be here. Your participation helps foster a vibrant and inspiring environment where we can explore the dharma and absorb Khenpo Rinpoche's wisdom together.

As we turn our attention to tonight's theme, we have an opportunity to reflect on the world we live in. We interact with it constantly in our daily routines, but do we truly understand it? What is its nature, and how did it come to be? These are questions that often go unexamined. When I looked up the term "material world," I found that it mainly refers to physical objects created or modified by human beings. It is interesting to consider how some of these objects, although inanimate, can influence—and even control—our feelings and emotions. As we

begin, let us set aside the busyness of daily life by quieting our phones and laptops, and embrace the serenity of the spiritual world with an open mind.

KHENPO SODARGYE RINPOCHE

A SHARED QUEST OF BUDDHISM AND SCIENCE

(Khenpo Sodargye delivered the following paragraph in Tibetan to the Tibetan attendees.)

While I had initially planned to speak in Tibetan, I have decided to deliver my speech in Mandarin today, considering the majority Han audience, with an English translation provided for all. I hope this arrangement is convenient for everyone, including our Tibetan guests, who are, of course, comfortable with the English language.

Today, I want to share a brief overview of the Buddhist perspectives on the material world. When it comes to understanding our world, any approach that reveals its actual reality deserves our attention and pursuit—whether it stems from Buddhist philosophy or scientific inquiry. Regardless of region, religion, or background, we share a common aspiration: to attain lasting happiness and freedom from suffering. To realize this universal

goal, it is critical to understand the reality of the world we live in.

In this regard, Buddhist doctrines are not only compatible with modern science and technology but can also be presented within contemporary frameworks of knowledge. For this reason, when I speak at academic institutions or other organizations, I often find it unnecessary to rely solely on specialized Buddhist theories or terminology. However, today's discussion will naturally involve some of the more nuanced theories and technical terms from Buddhism, as they are essential to the topic.

I understand that some of you may be unfamiliar with Buddhist ideas and might approach them with a degree of caution. I encourage you to approach Buddhist teachings with an open mind. When you take the time to study them in depth, you will be surprised to discover the remarkable sophistication and maturity of Eastern wisdom, developed over two and a half millennia ago and remaining largely unchanged. In this regard, modern knowledge typically calls for ongoing updates and refinement. For instance, in my homeland, school textbooks are revised every few years to reflect new discoveries. Similarly, public policies and even the guidance of influential figures may lose their relevance over time. Yet, the timeless

core teachings of Buddhism—such as compassion, wisdom, and equality—remain as relevant today as ever. That is why I am so grateful for this opportunity to explore these teachings with you in person. Please consider this face-to-face dialogue an open forum. I wholeheartedly welcome your questions and suggestions, whether they concern the content or style of my talk.



PERSPECTIVES OF THE FOUR MAJOR BUDDHIST SCHOOLS ON MATTER

To gain a relatively comprehensive Buddhist perspective on the material world, it is essential to explore the views of the four principal philosophical schools: Vaibhashika, Sautrantika, Chittamatra, and Madhyamaka. These schools present distinct and progressively sophisticated understandings of reality, particularly in relation to matter. The teachings of one tradition are refuted and superseded by the more elevated perspective of the next. Despite their differences, all four schools share a fundamental agreement: on a conventional level, the objects we see, hear, and interact with in daily life appear to exist. However, upon careful examination, these phenomena reveal themselves to be far less solid or inherently real than they initially seem.

Earlier, the president of the Buddhist Society reflected on an intriguing idea—that certain material objects, though insentient, seem to exert influence and control over us living beings. In fact, Buddhism is particularly adept at exploring such seemingly counterintuitive phenomena. To enlightened Buddhist masters who have realized the true nature of all phenomena, reality itself can appear so paradoxical that it might even provoke laughter.

For example, the esteemed fourteenth-century Buddhist master Longchenpa offered a profound observation:

In the experience of yogins who do not perceive things dualistically, The fact that things manifest without truly existing is so amazing They burst into laughter.¹

Although all phenomena ultimately lack inherent existence, they nonetheless manifest vividly in one's experience. Longchenpa's insight highlights the nature of all things—though they are empty of true existence, their manifestation is striking and remarkable. Longchenpa's words invite us to reflect deeply on the nature of this material world.

In the following discussion, I will briefly outline the perspectives of the four primary Buddhist schools, occasionally drawing parallels to certain concepts in modern science.

1 The Vaibhashika and Sautrantika Schools (Substantialist Schools)

The two substantialist schools, Vaibhashika and Sautrantika, form the foundational basis of Buddhist perspectives on reality, serving as the essential starting point for deeper explorations. They make different assertions, but both affirm that all material phenomena are composed of four primary elements: earth,

water, fire, and wind. It is crucial to understand that these elements are not literal soil, water, flames, or air. Rather, they are four causal forms of all phenomena: the earth element represents solidity, providing support; the water element signifies fluidity and cohesion; the fire element embodies heat and the process of ripening or maturation; and the wind element is characterized by motion and expansion.²

Central to the substantialists' teachings is the idea that all phenomena can be intellectually dissected and have conventional existence. They affirm the ultimate existence of the indivisible smallest particle of matter and the partless moment of consciousness, as these are the basic components for all phenomena. From their perspective, if the two types of partless entities do not exist, there would be no basis for the existence of gross objects—whether material or mental—and thus no phenomena could appear.

The basic position of these substantialist schools shares certain parallels with modern scientific perspectives. Physicists have demonstrated that matter can be broken down into progressively smaller components: from molecules to atoms, then to atomic nuclei, protons, and finally to fundamental particles like quarks, electrons, and photons. Some scientists argue that these

elementary particles, bound together by forces, are essential for the existence of larger structures. Others suggest that fields or energy might be the most fundamental reality, as without them, the macroscopic world could not appear.

At this point, you might find yourself asking: “If all things are fundamentally partless atoms, then how is it that I can clearly perceive physical objects?” Buddhism does not deny the existence of these gross appearances. However, upon closer examination through the lens of wisdom, it becomes evident that all phenomena lack solid, independent existence.

Consider the example of a bottle. Most of us regard the bottle before me as a real, tangible entity. But if we shatter it with a hammer, we will be left with a pile of glass shards. Where, then, is the bottle? If we continue to grind these shards into a fine powder, and then hypothetically divide that powder into its tiniest particles, we will be left with nothing but the constituent materials. If the bottle were to exist as an independent entity, we should be able to identify it among these smallest particles. However, no singular “bottle” can be located in any of them, revealing that under scrutiny, the bottle’s existence is not as solid or fixed as it initially appears.

This analytical approach applies to all external objects. When we examine things with wisdom, we discover that what we habitually perceive as solid, unified entities are, in fact, mere collections of particles. Their different shapes and colors arise from how these elements are arranged and interact with one another. In this light, whether we initially view something as beautiful or unappealing, a thorough examination of its nature reveals that these qualities as well as entities themselves are unattainable.

To sum up, the substantialists assert that physical objects are susceptible to destruction, whereas partless particles, being indivisible, are truly existent. Similarly, they argue that examining the three times—past, present, and future—reveals the indivisible moment of consciousness to be irreducible, and therefore ultimately real.

2 Chittamatra School

The Chittamatra, or Mind-Only school, presents a more elevated perspective than the two substantialist traditions. The Mind-Only view critiques for positing the ultimate existence of indivisible particles and partless moments; it asserts that all phenomena in the material world are nothing but manifestations of consciousness, affirming the true existence of the mind.

This perspective is elaborated in key texts such as the *Twenty Verses on Consciousness-Only*³.

The refutation of the substantialists' theory begins with the assumption that coarse material phenomena are composed of truly existing, indivisible particles, each surrounded by six others in the directions of east, west, north, south, up, and down. If the central particle makes contact with each of these six neighbors, it must have six distinct aspects or parts—thus contradicting its indivisibility. Alternatively, if the particles were to truly lack sides or parts, all six would merge into the central one, and countless particles would collapse into a single particle, rendering the formation of extended objects impossible.

The same logical refutation also applies to arguments proposing the true existence of energy as a fundamental unit of the universe, a view sometimes held by individuals with a physics background. After discussions with multiple mathematicians and physicists in Germany and the United States about the subtlest particle, I have learned that the scientific community has not yet reached a definitive consensus on the existence of such a fundamental unit.

I hope this line of reasoning, which might feel like a “physics lesson,” is clear to you. (Audience laughs.) Such logical analysis

can be engaging for some and perhaps a bit challenging—or even soporific—for others. I recall lecturing at a university where a young woman found the topic so relaxing that she dozed off within the first three minutes and did not wake up until the end—two hours later. I understand that interest in topics like this may vary, so please feel free to rest as needed.

Let us get back to the Chittamatra school. At the heart of the Chittamatra doctrine is the deep insight that all phenomena—including insentient objects—are, in fact, manifestations of the mind. *The Flower Ornament Scripture* offers a vivid metaphor:

*Just like pictures
Drawn by an artist,
So are all worlds
Made by the painter-mind.*⁴

Like a skilled painter, our mind creates our world. In a similar vein, the *Mahayana Sutra on Contemplation of the Mind-Ground of Essential Nature*, a text rooted in the Mind-Only tradition, teaches:

*When the mind is pure, the world is pure;
When the mind is defiled, the world is defiled.*

The Chittamatra perspective is highly relevant to everyday life. We all perceive the world differently—some see beauty, others ugliness—and our circumstances vary. According to Chittamatrins, all phenomena arise from consciousness. In this sense, the world we experience is not fundamentally distinct from the world we encounter in dreams. Just as past events resemble dreams that have already occurred, and future possibilities are like dreams yet to come, our current reality lacks an absolute separation from dreaming, with no definitive reason to claim otherwise.

These Mind-Only concepts find echoes in Western philosophy and modern science. For instance, the French philosopher and physicist René Descartes, in his *Meditations on First Philosophy*, hypothesized an “exceedingly potent and deceitful” evil demon who has employed all his artifice to deceive him. He further stated, “I will suppose that the sky, the air, the earth, colors, figures, sounds, and all external things, are nothing better than the illusions of dreams, by means of which this being has laid snares for my credulity.”⁵

Scientific support for the idea of consciousness-only is evident in the work of Arthur Eddington, the British astronomer, physicist, and mathematician, who, in 1919, conducted the

first observational test to confirm Einstein's General Theory of Relativity conclusively and helped popularize it worldwide. In his work *The Nature of the Physical World* (1928), he stated that the external world remains fundamentally tied to human consciousness.⁶ While acknowledging the challenge physicists face in accepting that all phenomena originate in the mind, he emphasized that consciousness is "the first and most direct thing in our experience," with everything else being "remote inference—inference either intuitive or deliberate."⁷ His view in this book sparked considerable debate within the scientific community at the time.

Eddington's perspective stands in stark contrast to the traditional materialist doctrine that mind emerges from matter. Instead, it echoes the Mind-Only philosophy, suggesting that all phenomena are projections of the mind. The differences and similarities among these viewpoints merit careful consideration. What might have inspired a prominent twentieth-century scientist to challenge long-held assumptions and propose an idea aligned with ancient Buddhist philosophy?

In more recent times, this line of thought has been further explored by Robert Lanza, a biologist and medical doctor who has been featured in media outlets such as *Fortune*, *Time*, and

Discover. Together with renowned astronomer Bob Berman, he co-authored the book *Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness are the Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe*. In this book, they propose that the universe is centered on consciousness and that the material world manifests through the power of the mind. The book presents seven foundational principles to support this thesis. One principle states: “The behavior of subatomic particles—indeed all particles and objects—is inextricably linked to the presence of an observer. Without the presence of a conscious observer, they at best exist in an undetermined state of probability waves.”⁸ The book further maintains that “the structure of the physical world, and of small units of matter and energy in particular, are influenced by human observation.”⁹

While the tenets of Biocentrism differ from those of Darwinian evolutionary theory, do they share an affinity with the ancient Buddhist teaching that every phenomenon—whether insentient or sentient being—is a manifestation of one’s own mind? For those intrigued by this parallel, a comparative study of the relevant texts would offer a rich understanding.

3 The Madhyamaka School

The Madhyamaka school, known as the Middle Way, offers profound insight into the nature of reality. In contrast to the Chittamatra school's view that consciousness holds ultimate reality, Madhyamaka teaches that even consciousness itself is ultimately empty and devoid of inherent existence. According to the Middle Way, all phenomena—whether material or mental—lack intrinsic essence. Yet, this emptiness does not dismiss the conventional appearances of the world; instead, it allows phenomena to arise and function unobstructedly within this foundational absence of self-nature. This insight forms the core of the Madhyamaka tradition.

To further examine the nature of consciousness, we may turn to the *Diamond Sutra*, which says:

*It is impossible to retain past mind,
Impossible to hold on to present mind,
And impossible to grasp future mind.*

The past mind has already ceased, and the future mind has not yet arisen; thus, neither exists in the present moment. As for the present mind, although many assume it is real, scrutiny of its nature as well as the two times of past and future reveal that

it cannot be truly apprehended. Hence, consciousness across all three times—past, present, and future—remains ultimately ungraspable.

This understanding of the emptiness of material phenomena and consciousness prompts a crucial clarification: Does the absence of inherent existence imply a state of absolute nothingness? The Madhyamaka school offers a remarkably insightful explanation. While any phenomenon, upon close examination, reveals no intrinsic substance and is empty in nature, this emptiness is not equivalent to total negation. Rather, it is precisely this emptiness that allows for the myriad appearances of the world to manifest. As the well-known passage in the *Heart Sutra* expresses:

Form is emptiness, emptiness is form;

Form is not other than emptiness, emptiness is not other than form.

The *Surangama Sutra* also addresses this point, explaining that when all phenomena are analyzed down to the finest particle at the very edge of the void, even this is found to be empty upon further analysis. Although the ultimate nature of these particles is emptiness, this very emptiness enables the arising of various appearances of form.

In essence, both external material objects and our internal consciousness ultimately vanish into emptiness upon thorough investigation. It is important to note, however, that emptiness itself is not a substantial entity; it too is devoid of inherent existence. This understanding points to the ultimate reality of all phenomena, described in Buddhism as “freedom from the four extremes and the eight elaborations.”¹⁰ Those who have actualized this state are regarded as accomplished practitioners or awakened beings in Buddhism.

It is worth noting that the Middle Way understanding of emptiness remains largely beyond the reach of modern scientific inquiry, with virtually no research findings in this area. This is primarily due to the methodologies employed in scientific research, which often rely on instruments and experiments. Although these methods have significantly advanced our knowledge, they cannot fully capture the mind’s subtle realities.

Genuine realization of the mind’s true nature does not depend on scientific instruments or external tools; rather, it arises through the wisdom cultivated by calm and careful introspection. For instance, one can reflect on the true nature of phenomena—investigating whether they are inherently existent or

non-existent, or perhaps neither or both. This form of introspective practice is accessible to all and does not require adherence to any particular belief system; it simply invites us to observe our own minds. Such self-reflection can be deeply rewarding, as it can help us realize that the objects of our attachment and desire lack inherent reality, gently encouraging us to refine our perspectives for greater peace and clarity.

Although all phenomena are empty in nature, when the right causes and conditions come together, any appearance can arise. This principle is vividly expounded in the teachings of the great Indian master Nagarjuna, who lived nearly two thousand years ago. In his work, *Verse on the Heart of Dependent Origination*, he employed eight analogies—a recitation, a candle, a mirror, a seal, a magnifying glass, a seed, sourness, and a sound—to elucidate the concept of dependent origination.¹¹ All phenomena in this world are neither created by an eternal creator (permanent cause) nor do they arise without cause or from a non-cause, and causes do not transfer into effects. Instead, all things arise through the coming together of necessary causes and conditions—that is, through dependent origination.

The theory of dependent origination represents a unique and intriguing core concept in Buddhism, offering a wealth of profound implications worthy of further exploration. However, due

to time constraints, I will not elaborate on this further here. I recommend in-depth study of related texts when possible, as they can provide valuable insights into this world and ourselves.



TWO ASPIRATIONS FOR YOUR JOURNEY AHEAD

As I observe the youthful enthusiasm among all of you gathered here, I feel inspired to share two heartfelt aspirations for your future journeys.

First, I encourage you to embrace lifelong learning. Regardless of your circumstances—whether you find yourself in school, at work, or at home—it is essential to nurture a sincere desire for knowledge, especially knowledge that benefits both this life and the lives to come. This pursuit of learning should continue throughout your entire life, with the mindset of growing until your final days. When we cease to learn, we risk falling into spiritual stagnation, and life may lose much of its vitality and sense of purpose.

During my time at the University of Sydney, I had the opportunity to ask students about their love for learning, and I was delighted to find that most were enthusiastic. Such dedication is very meaningful.

My second aspiration is that you build the resilience to face life's inevitable challenges, such as pain and adversity. Life's journey is rarely straightforward and effortless; it often twists and

turns, filled with unexpected hardships. Cultivating the ability to respond to adversity with grace and strength is therefore essential.

I have learned of a common practice in Australia where parents, when their children fall while learning to walk, often allow them to get up on their own rather than immediately offering assistance. This approach embodies a valuable educational philosophy, teaching us the importance of fostering inner strength, perseverance, and profound wisdom. By developing these qualities, we not only better navigate life's fluctuations but also uncover greater joy and meaning in our experiences.

CONCLUSION

It is wonderful to see many of you enjoying a relaxed, comfortable, and joyful life, with relatively little stress and less intense competition—an ideal circumstance. Nevertheless, as a shared human reality, we all must eventually face birth, aging, illness, and death. For this reason, it is beneficial to expand our focus beyond the temporary comforts of this present life and strive toward liberation from the endless cycle of birth and death in samsara.

In closing, I want to share a quote that has inspired me, from the psychologist Carl Jung: “Who looks outside dreams; who looks inside awakes.” It is my earnest hope that each of you will understand not only the nature of the external, material world, but also the even more vital truths of your own inner, spiritual world.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

QUESTION 1 If the world originates from the mind, and both good and evil arise from it, how do we discern good from evil?

KHENPO SODARGYE According to the Mind-Only view, the world indeed originates from the mind; all phenomena are projected by consciousness. However, this perspective does not negate the distinction between virtue and non-virtue. In everyday life, virtuous and non-virtuous minds are manifestations of consciousness, which lead to wholesome and unwholesome actions, resulting in corresponding karmic consequences.

On a deeper level, ultimate reality reveals that the innate nature of the mind is virtuous. Even those who act negatively possess this intrinsic goodness. By abandoning negative actions and cultivating virtue through continuous spiritual practice, one's inherent wisdom and compassion can gradually be revealed, ultimately leading to complete enlightenment. What we perceive as evil is simply a temporary obscuration caused by defilements, much like clouds momentarily blocking the sun. Once these obscurations are dispelled through the realization of the true

nature of phenomena, liberation can be attained. In summary, evaluating whether the mind is good or evil requires a dual analysis: one based on the conventional level and the other on the ultimate level.

QUESTION 2 Where do happiness and suffering originate from?

KHENPO SODARGYE When you are dreaming, you feel real joy and pain. Your dreaming mind generates them. Buddhist scriptures describe a foundational layer of consciousness called the alaya or storehouse consciousness, which holds the seeds of both positive and negative karma. Negative karma leads to suffering, while positive karma brings happiness.

QUESTION 3 You mentioned physics earlier when discussing the material world. From a biological standpoint, how should we understand the physical world?

KHENPO SODARGYE In my earlier analysis, I drew on both physics and biology. For example, I referenced Robert Lanza's biocentrism, which uses biological principles to explain the material world. In my experience, explaining Buddhist teachings through a biological lens helps audiences with a scientific background understand them more fully.

Physics primarily investigates the universe from the scale of celestial bodies down to molecules and atoms. Biology, on the other hand, not only studies the material foundations of life, such as molecules and cells, but also explores the mechanisms of life itself, including animal behavior and nervous systems, in an effort to understand forms of consciousness. However, current biological research predominantly focuses on external physical structures like cells and has yet to deeply explore the nature of consciousness or the relationship between mind and body. I hope referencing biology encourages further reflection. If you are interested, I can discuss more connections between biological insights and Buddhist perspectives in the future.

QUESTION 4 Humans must engage with the material world to survive, like ancient people gathering food for instinctual reasons. Isn't our attachment to material things necessary for life?

KHENPO SODARGYE There are various misconceptions about Buddhism: some view it as a philosophy denying everything, others see it as esoteric mysticism, and still others regard it as an escapist doctrine that avoids worldly engagement. Buddhism is, in fact, life-affirming and deeply engaged with the world. Many findings in biology, physics, and especially

ethics, align with Buddhist principles. Buddhism is remarkably adaptable, capable of explaining emerging phenomena in the modern world without deviating from its core teachings, which have remained unchanged.

Far from rejecting material existence outright, Buddhism acknowledges the importance of pursuing a balanced material life. However, in contemporary society, many people seem to be caught in an endless pursuit of excessive desire—such as constantly upgrading to the latest smartphones—yet this often leads to exhaustion. In the end, even an abundance of “Apples” cannot fill the void in one’s heart.

QUESTION 5 All sentient beings in the six realms create karma. What exactly is karma, and can it be described as a form of energy?

KHENPO SODARGYE Yes, karma can be understood as a very powerful form of energy.

QUESTION 6 Humans and celestial beings have lifespans. Even the Buddha is said to have a certain lifespan. Where does the Buddha abide after entering parinirvana?

KHENPO SODARGYE Indeed, all sentient beings in the six realms, including humans and celestial beings, are bound by the

limitations of lifespan, and upon its end, they have no choice but to take rebirth according to their karma. However, the Buddha, having attained full enlightenment, transcends all karmic constraints. As stated in the *White Lotus Sutra*: “The Buddha is never truly extinguished; the dharma abides eternally in the world.” This means that the Buddha’s wisdom nature is indestructible, and the true dharma remains in the world. Ultimately speaking, the Buddha does not truly enter parinirvana.

QUESTION 7 When a mind leaves its body, what will its state be? What is the state of a mind without a physical form?

KHENPO SODARGYE A mind without the body is similar to the consciousness of a being in the intermediate state between death and rebirth. The mind without a physical form is akin to the consciousness of a being in the formless realm¹².

QUESTION 8 The story of Zhuangzi dreaming he was a butterfly shows life as dreamlike. If our current world is but a dream, and everything is a manifestation of consciousness, who is responsible for the consequences of actions in this dream?

KHENPO SODARGYE As the renowned Buddhist master Chandrakirti explained, in a dream, the dreamer, actions, and objects all seem to exist, but vanish upon awakening. Similarly, in waking life, subject, action, and object appear real, but upon enlightenment, one obtains transcendental qualities and is no longer bound by external conditions. The lives of numerous enlightened masters throughout history attest to this truth.

QUESTION 9 You emphasized looking inward rather than outward to attain realization, which I find particularly inspiring. Do you have practical advice for self-reflection on a daily basis?

KHENPO SODARGYE While the material world is important, material wealth alone cannot bring true happiness. Many people possess luxury—such as expensive cars and lavish homes—yet still struggle with inner turmoil, often with tears in their eyes. In this sense, the spiritual world holds greater significance than the material world. To cultivate a rich inner life, I recommend studying *The Way of the Bodhisattva*. This treatise provides guidance on cultivating altruism and compassion, which are crucial for enhancing joy and fulfillment. A significant number of individuals have transformed their lives through its study, making it an invaluable resource for inner reflection and spiritual growth.

QUESTION 10 I understand the law of karma can be classified in various ways. As a scientific person, I find it easier to accept that actions in this life yield results in this life. Is there any logical or scientific method to prove that karma can bear fruit in future lives?

KHENPO SODARGYE The play of cause and effect within the law of karma is profoundly subtle and cannot be fully understood through logical inference and reasoning alone. The Buddha himself stated in the sutras that ordinary beings cannot possibly know which karmic actions will ripen in this life or future lives. Even enlightened beings like arhats and bodhisattvas only generally understand the karmic law, and some subtleties remain beyond their knowledge.

Nevertheless, by studying relevant Buddhist scriptures, ordinary people can gain a general understanding of karmic patterns, especially how certain actions yield results in this life. For example, severe negative actions, such as killing one's father, mother, or a monastic, are highly likely to bear fruit in the current life due to their intensity. Such principles are detailed in the scriptures, and a systematic study of these texts is necessary to grasp the complex karmic interconnections.

QUESTION 11 Buddhism has a history spanning over 2,500 years and, in some ways, transcends science. Is it reasonable to try to validate Buddhist teachings through scientific methods?

KHENPO SODARGYE Using science to explain Buddhist concepts can be helpful, especially for those who trust science but are less familiar with Buddhism. For these individuals, it is appropriate to use scientific language and principles that are consistent with Buddhist teachings to explain the dharma. Conversely, for Buddhists who are not well-versed in science, explaining scientific ideas through Buddhist frameworks is equally acceptable. A handful of religious groups have already employed this approach.

QUESTION 12 Is it always possible to verify the existence of a truly existent entity?

KHENPO SODARGYE If a phenomenon can be demonstrated through appropriate means, it can be said to exist from that perspective. However, our ability to prove something depends on the tools and methods we use. If these are limited or flawed, even things that truly exist may remain unverified.

QUESTION 13 Releasing captive animals is a virtuous act that benefits spiritual growth and health, but sometimes the animals are recaptured by others. Does this mean that such an act of kindness inadvertently facilitates harmful behavior in others?

KHENPO SODARGYE Animal release is a widely practiced virtuous act, and many people engage in this practice with careful adherence to proper principles. Life release holds great significance, as it embodies compassion—the beauty of the mind—and enhances the beauty of our environment, constituting the beauty of conduct.

No matter what virtuous act we undertake, we should not abandon it simply because of the improper behavior of a few or potential obstacles. In the case of animal release, we can minimize the risk of recapture by carefully observing and wisely selecting safe and suitable locations for release. During my time here in Australia, I inquired about local life release practice. I was told that people often release birds and fish in suitable habitats after careful assessment. This is an exemplary approach.

QUESTION 14 How does Buddhism define matter in the material world?

KHENPO SODARGYE According to Buddhist teachings, matter is generally defined as the object of consciousness. It refers to all phenomena external to consciousness, encompassing the macroscopic realm of cosmic bodies and the microscopic world of microorganisms, molecules, and atoms. My earlier remarks focus primarily on the microcosmic perspective rather than the broader scope of the material world. It is a concise overview that highlights the fundamental concepts revolving around matter.

NOTES

1. *Khenpo's Diamond—Living with Wisdom, Volume I*, 105, The Official Website of Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche,
<https://khenposodargye.org/books/ebooks/khenpos-diamond-living-with-wisdom-volume-i/>
2. Jamgon Mipham Rinpoche, *Gateway to Knowledge: The Treatise Entitled the Gate for Entering the Way of a Pandita*, trans. Erik Pema Kunsang (Hong Kong: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1997), [1,3][1,4].
3. Six particles surround a central particle simultaneously,
This central particle can be divided into six parts.
If these six particles were to merge with this central particle,
Then the Mount Meru would become one particle.
—*Twenty Verses on Consciousness-Only*
Khenpo's Diamond—Living with Wisdom, Volume II, 114, The Official Website of Khenpo Sodargye Rinpoche,
<https://khenposodargye.org/books/ebooks/khenpos-diamond-living-with-wisdom-volume-ii/>
4. *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of The Avatamsaka Sutra*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boulder: Shambhala, 1993), 244.
5. René Descartes, *Meditations on the First Philosophy* (Toronto: HarperTorch, 2013), 14.

6. A. S. Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World: Gifford Lectures of 1927* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929; Cambridge: At the University Press, 1929), 213.
7. A. S. Eddington, *The Nature of the Physical World: Gifford Lectures of 1927* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929; Cambridge: At the University Press, 1929), 216-217.
8. Robert Lanza, MD with Bob Berman, *Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness are the Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe* (Dallas: Benbella Books, Inc., 2010), 59.
9. Robert Lanza, MD with Bob Berman, *Biocentrism: How Life and Consciousness are the Keys to Understanding the True Nature of the Universe* (Dallas: Benbella Books, Inc., 2010), 80.
10. The four extremes are: existence, non-existence, both existence and non-existence, neither existence nor non-existence.
The eight elaborations are: arising, ceasing, permanence, non-existence, coming, going, plurality and singularity.
11. Like a recitation, a candle, a mirror, a seal,
A magnifying glass, a seed, sourness, or a sound,
So also with the continuation of the aggregates—
The wise should know they are not transferred.
The Heart of Dependent Origination, Lotsawa House,
<https://www.lotsawahouse.org/indian-masters/nagarjuna/heart-dependent-origination>
12. The formless realm is a plane of existence beyond material form, where celestial beings without any form abide in deep states of meditative absorption.

Dedication

May the merit resulting from this piece of work contribute
in the greatest possible measure to the long life of all great
masters, to the flourishing of the Buddhadharma,
and to the welfare of all sentient beings.

It is always our wish to present a work of the highest quality to the readers so that anyone who reads this text would find inspiration. So we would very much appreciate your comments, feedback or suggestions for how this text might be improved and made more valuable. You are also greatly welcomed if you want to make a contribution to any of our other projects of translation. Please email us at: *translation@khenposodargye.org*



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