

The 'No-Self' Nature of People and Things

by Charlie Singer

AUTHOR'S COLOPHON: This small book was completed in Kingston, Pennsylvania on the new moon day of the first month of the Tibetan Iron Horse year (March 16, 1990). It was written for purposes of the author's own edification, with the wish that it might somehow be of benefit to other people who might read it in the future.

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: This edition of "The 'No-Self' Nature of People and Things" has been transcribed from the RIGDEN PUBLICATIONS edition, which ran 308 copies. Charlie Singer has given the Tiger Team Buddhist Information Network express permission to transcribe this work.
-- Gary Ray

Copyright c. 1990 Charles M. Singer

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Charlie Singer was born in Brussels, Belgium, in 1952. he received a B.A. degree in General Arts and Sciences from Penn State University in 1973, and from 1976-1978 was a student in the Tibetan Studies Program at the Nyingma Institute in Berkeley, California. Since 1980, he has been studying Tibetan Buddhism at the Yeshe Nyingpo Center in New York City, the seat in North America of the late H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche, Supreme Hoead of the Nyingmapa lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.

Dedicated to:

The Late H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche
H.E. Shenpen Dawa Rinpoche
Ven. Tarthang Tulku Rinpoche
Ven. Ngor Thartse Khen Rinpoche
Ven. Khenpo Paiden Sherab Rinpoche
Ven. Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche
to my late Father, Samuel Singer,
and to my Mother, Paulette;
and Jeanine N. and Tina F.

In the history of ideas, there is perhaps no idea more unusual than the Buddhist concept of anatman, or 'no-self'. This idea of anatman, or 'no-self', was taught by the historical Buddha, Buddha Sakyamuni, as being one of the "three marks of existence", along with dukkha, or dissatisfaction, and anitya, or impermanence. These "three marks of existence" are regarded in Buddhist thought as being the three fundamental conditions which pervade the human condition. The latter two "marks of existence", of dissatisfaction and impermanence, have been much written about in the Buddhist literature now available in the English language, but the notion of anatman, or 'no-self' has been little understood, and represents one of the most unusual, and yet important, ideas to arise in the history of ideas.

Common to all schools or forms of Buddhism, is the idea of anatman or 'no-self' nature of the individual or person (or actually of all beings endowed with consciousness). The Buddha was born into the Hindu religious culture,

and one of the fundamental tenets of the Hindu religion has always been that all beings are endowed with the nature of (having an) atman, or 'soul' or actually a 'self', which is ultimately identical with, or actually partakes of, the nature of Brahman, or the creator aspect of God, in Hindu tradition. Although the Buddha never explicitly affirmed or denied the existence of God, encouraging his disciples to study and practice his teachings until they themselves had attained the level of a perfectly enlightened being, or a Buddha, at which point they would have a direct understanding of this and other such metaphysical questions, the Buddha made it quite clear in one of his first teachings, that in regard to the notion that beings are endowed with an atman, or permanent 'self', that this notion is ultimately erroneous, and that in fact, the condition of having 'no-self' is an underlying "fact-of-life" or principle of existence.

This idea of there being 'no-self' can be analyzed in different ways, but from one point of view, we might say that the idea of 'no-self' means that when investigate the nature of the individual or person, if we investigate what is involved carefully enough, we would find that ultimately, there isn't actually a 'self', or the one we refer to as 'I' or 'me', as a truly-existing 'being' who 'inhabits' our body and mind, in a concrete, ongoing, and permanent way. In common sense thinking, and even in traditional philosophies and religious and scientific thinking, there is a sense in which people have always accepted the belief that there is, in fact, a 'self' who inhabits our body and mind, who is the one we refer to as 'I' or 'me'.

This attitude, or underlying presupposition or existence, can well be summed up by the statement of the French philosopher, Descartes, that "I think, therefore I am". From the point of view of Buddhist philosophy, however, this sort of statement partakes of the nature of delusion. We might *assume* that there is a 'self' who 'inhabits' our body and mind, and is "the one who does our thinking", but if we were to investigate this state of affairs, we would find, according to Buddhist philosophy, that this is, in fact, not the case. Our thoughts and thinking processes might *seem* as if there is an actual 'I' who is generating or thinking our thoughts, saying and hearing the thoughts that arise in 'our minds', but if we were to investigate what is actually involved, we might find that, in fact, this notion of an ongoing 'self' or 'I' is only an erroneous assumption. This idea of there being a 'self' is so deep-seated, that it may seem completely unquestionable, and a 'given' factor of experience and existence, but ultimately, according to Buddhist philosophy, the belief in a 'self' or 'I', but ultimately, there is a sense in which "there may not be anybody there!" What is involved might be said to be like a case of "the talk in our heads" *pretending to be" a "somebody who is having thoughts". Although the common sense belief may be that "I am the one who creates the thoughts", it may be, in fact, that our thinking our thoughts actually help to create the belief that there is a 'self' or an 'I' who truly exists as 'the one who does our thinking!'

Although it is possible to 'unravel' what is involved in regard to the nature of the 'thinker' and the 'thoughts' through practicing different kinds of Buddhist meditation, such as meditation in which we attend to the nature of our thoughts and how they arise in our mind, developing calmness, and direct

insight into what is actually involved, it will not be the purpose of this book to discuss the subject of formal meditation, as this is a complicated subject, and because formal meditation is best learned from a qualified meditation teacher.

Rather, we will next focus on the notion of 'no-self' as it relates to our sense-perceptions. It is said in Buddhist tradition, that the sense of hearing is the easiest of our sense-perceptions by which we can come to an understanding of the nature of 'no-self', and in fact it is said that the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, the personification of the compassion of all the Buddhas (the reader is reminded that in Buddhist tradition, anyone who has attained the level of a completely enlightened being, or Buddha, is designated as being a Buddha, and so there have actually been many Buddhas), attained the enlightenment by following the advice of Manjushri, the personification of the wisdom of all the Buddhas, and attending to the true nature of the sensation of hearing, or sound. If we consider the nature of an ongoing sound, such as a waterfall, or even any sounds such as music, we can ask ourselves - which part of this sound, or audial presentation, is the actual sound, and which part is the 'self' or 'I' who is the one who is 'doing the hearing'? More specifically, where do we 'cut-up' this audial-sensation into the separate components of the one who 'hears' and 'that which is being heard'? It may be, as with our act of thinking, that we have wrongly assumed the idea of a solid, permanent 'self' who acts as an agent or subject, interacting with our sense-perceptions, here being our perception of sound. That is, we regard our 'selves' as being a separate subject which interacts with sensations we regard as being truly-existing and separate from 'us', in a way that the sensation is regarded as a separate and independent object.

As the reader may have noticed, it is very difficult to speak of the non-existent nature of a 'self' without discussing the nature of our world of 'things' and sensations. Although the idea of the ultimate non-existence of the 'self' is a central idea in all forms of Buddhism, of the divisions of Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhism, in the latter two forms of Buddhism, along with the idea of the ultimate non-existence of the 'self', there is also the idea that in addition to the non-existence of a 'self', that what we regard as being the world of 'things' and sensations, also partakes of the nature of 'anatman' or 'no-self'.

As we have seen in the analysis of sound, such as a waterfall or of music, it is very difficult to separate the sensations into a separate subject who is having or experiencing the sensation, and a separate object, that is, the sound being heard. In the literature of the Abhidharma, rather than accepting the common sense notion that there is a 'self' who is a concrete, permanent, truly-existing agent which acts as the subject of our sensations, such as seeing and hearing, sensations were analyzed or 'broken-down' into their apparent component parts. For example, rather than saying that "I see a thing", in the Abhidharma analysis, it would be stated that in the act of visual sensation, it is necessary to have three separate components: an agent of seeing, visual consciousness, and an object of sight.

Whether we analyze 'things' and sensations as being sensed or perceived by a central 'self' who perceives all the various sensations of the

different senses, or analyze them according to the Abhidharma view, according to the view of the philosophical school of Madhyamika, a Mahayana Buddhist school founded by the second-century philosopher, Nagarjuna, which was based upon the Prajnaparamita Sutras of the Buddha, the `things' and sensations in our world also partake of the nature of `anatman' or `no-self', in the same way that persons or individuals partake of the `no-self' nature.

As we have said, the nature of the hearing sensation may be the easiest means by which to understand the relationship between a perceiving subject and the object of perception, or actually, to recognize that they are both equally non-existent, ultimately. Rather than being the case that a subject (or a specific variety of sense consciousness, according to the Abhidharma) interacts with and senses (or "grasps", as it is said in the Buddhist philosophical literature) an object of perception, it may be that sensations arise in a way that there is ultimately no subjective pole of experience interacting with a separate objective pole. Because sensations arise beyond the realm of an independent or separate subjective pole and an independent or separate objective pole, and thus without any interaction between a subjective and an objective pole or dimension, all our sensations, according to the view of Madhyamika philosophy, partakes of the anatman or `no-self' nature. The technical term used in the Madhyamika literature, is that all our sensations, visual, audial, and all others, are "shunya" or "empty", or that they partake of the nature of "shunyata" or "emptiness". In the interest of being fair to the Madhyamika system, however, it must be pointed out that the philosophy of Madhyamika is so adamant in not taking any position in regard to "the way things really are", that even the position that things and sensations partake of the nature of anatman, or `no-self', is not beyond critique. Yet there is a sense in which in the traditional parlance of the nature of anatman, or `no-self', as referring to the same truth of `things' and sensations as being "shunya" or "empty". What they are `empty of', is the status of being inherently or `truly-existing'. We might say that although in perceptual situations we are faced with some kind of an epistemological-object, or an apparent object of knowledge or perception, `its' status as an ontological-object, or as a `truly-existing object' is that it is "empty" of an ontological status, or of the nature of having the nature of being an inherently and `truly-existing' object.

This is true of the objects of all our sensations, but it is the visual sensation and the `object of sight' that we need to analyze in more detail because although all the senses taken together and our thinking work together to enforce or create the view of a separate `self' interacting with a world of `truly-existing things', in a sense it is our sense of sight, among all our senses, which is perhaps the most important sense used in analyzing or understanding our world, along with, of course, our thinking, which in Buddhist philosophy is regarded as being a separate type of consciousness.

We are confronted with all kinds of different `objects' or `things' in our world everyday. There are `objects' of all different sizes, shapes, and colors, in natural settings and in rooms which are in buildings, which are themselves a type of object, and also other beings such as animals and other human beings, which in a sense are another type of object which we as an apparent subject or `self' can interact with.

It may be possible to establish through some kind of logic, the non-existence of a solid, permanent `self' who acts as the agent of our visual sensation. For example, we can try to posit the existence of such a `self' by referring to "the one who sees". But by further stating that "the one who sees, sees", it would be like establishing an agent with a double action, as we have already `accounted for' the act of seeing in the statement of "the one who sees". And as it is not possible to have an agent with a double action, the statement of "the one who sees, sees", would not be logically coherent. But the use of some kind of logic may not be very useful in trying to understand directly the non-existence of a `self' who acts as an agent in regard to the visual sensation (as well as the other sensations), as it is necessary to develop a more experiential understanding of what may actually be involved.

In regard to the so-called subjective-pole, or the `self' dimension in visual sensation, we might say that there is a deep seated tendency to believe that there is `someone inside us' looking out onto the world of `things' and appearances from a stable vantage point `in our head' and `behind our eyeballs'. We believe that there is an ongoing-individual or `self' who `looks-out' from the stable vantage point, such that there is a concrete and solid subject who looks out at all the various appearances, or `things' or `objects' in our world. But this is regarded in Buddhist philosophy to be an erroneous presupposition, or a deluded view.

Through developing insight into what may actually be involved, we may find that this notion of `someone on the inside looking out' is in fact a mistaken belief, based upon the belief in a `truly-existing self', and that in fact, the visual sensation has nothing to do with a dimension of a `self' or even consciousness or mind `going out' to interact with or `grasp' an object of perception.

As for the objective pole of these `things' or `objects', although there appear to be very many types of `things' or `objects', there is a sense in which all of these `objects' are alike in being a mere appearance before us. Wherever we are, there is always some type of appearance before us, and people and the appearances before them always arise together in an inseparable manner.

In common-sense thinking, we regard the appearance before us as being truly-existing `things'. That is, that they are things which really `exist' in a `really-out-there' kind of way. We regard them as solid `things' that are so real that we think that "they would look like that even if we were not looking at them". We regard the world as being like some sort of container for a collection of spread-out `things' that we can interact with here and there, and that these things are `solid things' `out-there' from which we are separated by space, and that these `things' have insides which are also `solid' and `real'.

The Madhyamika philosophy is a very unusual system of philosophy, in that, rather than taking any position in regard to what is actually the case with

this world of `things', it takes the approach of refuting other positions that might be taken in analyzing `the world'.

Still, it may be possible to `hint-at' what may be involved in an accurate analysis of the nature of appearances, the so-called `world of things'. As we have said, people (and other beings, of course) and the appearances before them, always `arise together' inseparably. The key to understanding the true nature of these appearances seems to be to be aware of the dimension in which the so-called form or appearance before us and the *awareness* of this form or appearance, are completely inseparable. It is as if the awareness of consciousness and the form-aspect are `completely intermingling at every point' and as if the consciousness and form aspects are completely and totally integrated to create an apparitional-like appearance. Although we might say that ultimately there is no interaction between a subjective pole of consciousness, or mind, and an objective pole of separately-existing form, it may still be useful to *point-to* the way that `things' might really be, using terms like `awareness' and `form' being `completely-integrated' `beyond duality'.

Also, we might say that the `mind' or `consciousness' does not `go-out' to a so-called `object', but that it is as if the appearance before us has a `built-in' dimension of awareness. It is not that the so-called `appearance before us' is doing the `knowing' rather than the person. But we might say that appearance bears `a knowing dimension' beyond the realm of a subject sensing an object. All appearances are, in fact, non-dual (advaya). That is, they are present in the manner of an apparition, having nothing to do with any kind of truly-existing (as a separate dimension) subjective pole, or `self' or `consciousness' interacting with an `actually-out-there' objective pole or `truly-existing-thing'.

It is because of this dimension of awareness and form being so completely integrated *beyond the realm of a subject interacting with a truly existing object*, that we can say that these appearances or so-called `things' are `shunya' or `empty' of self-nature, or of the nature of being `truly-existing'.

When we say that things are `apparitional' in nature, we mean that it is as if these `appearances before us' are ultimately present as if they were like a reflection in a mirror, rather than being present in a concrete, `really-out-there' kind of way. What we call `things' are really more like `apparitional-like appearances' which are present beyond the realm of a subject interacting with an independent, `truly-existing' `object', and which are, more specifically, actually like a `surface-like apparition'. By `surface-like apparition', we mean that there is a sense in which all appearances are *always on the surface*.

Consider, for example, a common object like a box of cereal. We are presented with what we might call "a patch of color-form", a mere appearance arising within the realm of our awareness. This form is completely integrated with our awareness of `it', and is ultimately present as if it were like a reflection in a mirror.

Another dimension involves a sense in which we assume that the box is a solid object with an inside that has true objective existence. But we need to develop an understanding in which "all you see is all there is" in a completely integrated situation of `completeness'. of course, we can `reveal' further

dimensions of an appearance, but the act called "opening the box and pouring out the contents", but it is important to keep in mind that this will actually be a further or separate non-dual visual presentation `complete' in itself, and arising beyond a subjective pole and an object interacting, which we can connect in our mind to the appearance we call the `outside of the box'. But it is very important to recognize that this principle of `connecting' visual presentations over time (which also partakes ultimately of the nature of being `empty' of inherent or true-existence) is only applicable at the level of conventional common sense, and that the dimension of non-dual visual presentations arising in a manner of `completeness' (with a `built-in' dimension of `timelessness') is the ultimate manner in which appearances arise.

Likewise, we might assume that when looking at `the front of the box' that there is a `behind' or `underneath' part of the box that is presently not visible but which actually `exists' and `looks the way it does'. But as it is with `the inside of the box', so it is with the `behind' or `underneath part'. We can, as with the `inside', `reveal' the `behind' or presently `hidden' part of `the box', but the ultimate nature of the so-called `box' is the surface-like apparitional-like presentation which is present in the manner of a reflection in a mirror - a non-dual appearance beyond the realm of being a `truly-existing thing'.

Let us now consider an example of the situation we might call "a person going over to their car parked across the street". From the common sense point of view, we are `over here', and we see the car which is `over there'. We are the subject and the car is the object that we see, and we are separated by space. At a conventional level, we think that we can get closer to `it' by `walking towards it', until we `get there' and then `pull the door handle' and `get inside the car'.

Ultimately though, the appearance we call `our car' is completely inseparable from our awareness in a non-dual way, like a miraculously-appearing apparition. `We' are completely integrated with `the appearance before us' at the so-called `first-sighting', and there is a sense in which we are never separated by `space' from `the appearance before us'. And so in the situation called `walking over to the car', because the appearance is completely integrated with our awareness at the so-called `first-sighting' and at so-called `subsequent-sightings' as `we get closer to the car'.

Similarly, the concept of `open-space' as separating `us' from `the appearance before us' is ultimately also an illusion arising from not being aware of the sense in which `the appearance before us' is like a non-dual apparition, completely integrated in the realm of awareness. If there is no distance between our so-called `consciousness' and the so-called `object', there is no such thing as `invisible space' separating `us' and `the car'. Also, in light of the appearance we call `our parked car' being completely integrated with non-dual awareness (keeping in mind all the different dimensions involved in the manner that has been discussed), there is a sense in which the car is not a solidly existing `thing' with an `inside' and `outside' belonging to

an 'it' that can be said to 'truly-exist' as "a thing with an inside and outside of its own".

There is also a sense in which, by not recognizing the dimension of the non-dual awareness which is aware of the 'empty' - 'no-self' - nature of 'ourselves' and 'things', that by thinking that 'we' and 'our car' are separately existing 'things' or 'objects' (the word "object" can be broken-down etymologically to mean "thrown-against") and not being aware of non-dual awareness, known as vidya in Sanskrit Buddhist terminology, we actually create or enforce the illusion that we are a separate, truly-existing 'thing', bound by skin, walking around and regarding the world as a collection of 'things' to interact with. By believing that we are "walking over to our car and getting inside this thing", it is as if we solidify or actually create the belief that we are a truly existing 'thing' which exists as 'just another thing' which is separated from the appearance before us.

Ultimately, the scientific notion of people (and other beings with consciousness, such as animals) as being *organisms* which interact with an environment which is separated from them, is completely erroneous, according to Buddhist philosophy. It is true that, in a sense, as people, we are an "embodiment of mind". But this mind is a completely open-ended continuum which is so open-ended, that in a sense, it is as if the mind has the ability to 'take on the form' of 'whatever happens to appear before it', that is, the appearances which we regard as being 'truly-existing things'. Although from the ultimate point of view, this 'mind' is as 'empty' of true or inherent existence as is the 'self' or 'things', it may still be useful to talk about our being an "embodiment of a mind" which becomes 'terminated' by appearances in a non-dual way, beyond the realm of a subject interacting with an object, in order to 'point-to' the way things may be ultimately.

Also, the idea of the environment of 'the world of things' as being a realm separate from the 'beings in the world', as if 'the world of things' was 'standing around' separately, 'waiting to be interacted with', needs to be analyzed more carefully. Consider, for example, the idea of famous landmarks such as the White House and the Kremlin. We might say that there are, in conventional thinking, regarded as actually 'taking up space in a certain place' and having the status of "really being there and 'standing around' looking like they look" and having the status of a 'truly-existing thing in a truly existing place'. It may be possible to undermine this notion of 'things' and 'places' 'waiting for us' in a separate manner. We might be able to end up with a more sophisticated understanding of how it is with these 'people', 'places', and 'things' in a manner that goes beyond the realm of organisms interacting with a solid world of things that 'stand around' as a separate environment. From the point of view of what may actually be involved in the situation called "an American looking at the Kremlin" or "a Russian looking at the White House", if we understand this idea of ourselves as an 'embodiment of mind' which becomes 'terminated' by an appearance in a completely non-dual way, beyond the realm of a subject and object, it may be necessary to completely rethinking our ideas of analyzing the world as being made up of separate 'categories' or 'people', 'places,' and 'things', which would also have far-reaching ramifications in the socio-political realm. And

if, in this light of our being an "embodiment of a mind" which becomes terminated by an appearance in a non-dual way beyond the realm of subject and object, we consider that, for example, in a subject such as the history of warfare or aggression, we are dealing with soldiers of different nations who, as embodiments of mind whose minds, from a higher point of view, become 'terminated' in a non-dual way by the appearance referred to at a common-sense conventional level, as "other soldiers who are the enemy," the implications are shocking, in a manner that goes beyond, and yet encompasses, the realm of moral considerations.

As for the active aspects of this non-dual awareness which is beyond the realm of subject and object, or vidya, this is termed jnana, and as opposed to vijnana, or ordinary dualistic consciousness, in which the subjective and objective poles are regarded as being actually inherently existing, with jnana, one is aware of the non-dual nature of people and appearances. If we use an example of "two people and their parked car", we might say that the person using vijnana regards the car as a truly-existing thing that he or she can 'walk over to and get inside of', while the person jnana is aware of the non-dual dimension in which the 'individual' and the 'thing' are both 'empty' of being actually-existing things which are interacting with each other. From the point of view of the person whose awareness is characterized by vijnana (which can be broken down etymologically to mean "knowing-apart"), there are three separate things involved in this example: that is, two people, plus one car. From the point of view of the person whose awareness would be characterized by jnana, however, this is not the case. But what 'actually is the case' may be beyond the realm of being expressed in the ordinary language of 'people and things' as separate objects to be 'added up', and of "two people interacting with the one same thing". Of course, the person using jnana is still aware of the sense in which things like cereal boxes and cars appear to exist at a conventional level, that is, the way that they seem to exist from the point of view of 'other people using vijnana', but he/she is never separated from the non-dual awareness of vidya, and this is what is said to characterise the awareness of the Buddhas.

If we mistake the appearances before us as being 'truly-existing', 'actually out there' types of 'things' with true, inherent existence, we fall into deep error, according to Buddhist thought, setting up a fictitious realm of an individual separated from the world of appearances (so-called 'things') in a deep-seated way. This is known as the realm of samsara, the world of "running around and around in circles", chasing after 'things' we regard as 'really-existing' that we would like to have, while avoiding 'the things that we don't like'. But these emotions or 'emotional filters' of attachment, or desire, and aversion (combines with irritation, as a sort of 'complex') as well as the other basic emotions of pride and jealousy, all arise from dualistic-ignorance, or "not knowing how it really is with people and things". It is said that this realm of samsara and its 'flip-side' of nirvana, exist nowhere else than in our mind: when our mind is pervaded by emotional and intellectual obscurations about 'the way things are', we are caught up in samsara; but when this same mind is completely freed from those obscurations, we attain nirvana. So nirvana is not some other-worldly realm in which we would see different things than other people see, but our same world as seen differently, that is, pervaded by the non-dual awareness of vidya.

Also, our mind in union with the ultimate nature of appearances is actually the Dharmakaya, the so-called "body of Truth" of a Buddha, which is one of the "three bodies of a Buddha".

Although we begin with the common sense view of 'people' and things' as truly-existing separate entities interacting with each other, after we hear about or read about the 'empty' or 'no-self' nature of people and things, we may begin to engage in the process known as asraya paravritti, or "the turning over in the mind", by which we begin to 'tune-into' the ultimate, 'empty' nature of 'people' and 'appearances'. Little by little, we can deepen our awareness of this dimension until it becomes more and more a part of our nature, and eventually, it may be possible to become a true embodiment of this non-dual awareness, or vidya.

When the Buddhist texts were first being translated in Tibet, the term vidya, or non-dual awareness, was translated into Tibetan as rig-pa. But rather than translating the negation of this non-dual awareness of vidya (avidya) as rig-med, which could indicate a complete negation of rig-pa, it was translated as ma-rig-pa, indicating a *qualitative* drop in the level of rig-pa, or non-dual awareness. So we can see that from one point of view, our awareness of the nature of 'people' and 'things' is not completely confused, but that it needs to be transformed so that it will be 'in-tune-with' 'the way things really are'.

Although in Hinduism, the different yogas are practiced in order to attain union with God, in Buddhism, we might say that 'emptiness-yoga', that is, trying to attain union with the ultimate 'empty' (-apparitional) nature of people and appearances, is practiced. The teachings on the 'empty' (-apparitional) nature of 'people' and appearances (so-called 'things') are fundamental teachings of Mahayana Buddhism which are also very important in the offshoot of the Mahayana, Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism. But even though the teachings on the 'empty' or 'no-self' - nature of 'people' and 'things' are fundamental teachings of the Mahayana, at the highest level of Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism known as Dzogchen, or the "Great Perfection", it is in fact the continual contemplation of the non-dual awareness of vidya which is said to constitute the main practice of this highest mystical system of Dzogchen.

It is regarded as being very important to cultivate the awareness of the non-dual nature of 'people' and 'things' in regard all manner of appearances, deepening our understanding of what this means until it becomes a part of our being at a very deep and completely integrated level. When we begin trying to understand the meaning of shunyata or the 'empty' (-apparitional) nature of appearances, it may seem as if it is easier to recognize this dimension of apparitionalness in regard to some 'things' in a more readily comprehensible way than with other 'things'. We may find it easier to be aware of this apparitional dimension of appearances in regard to 'objects' which appear to partake of a 'shiny, liminous' dimension, such as cans of food from the supermarket, or perhaps magazine covers. But we should eventually try to understand this 'empty', apparitional nature of things in regard to *all* appearances, although we may find it useful to "practice" using objects where we find this non-dual awareness more (potentially, if not actually) apparent.

Along with the idea that appearances are 'shunya' (or partake of the nature of shunyata or 'emptiness') or 'empty of inherent existence', in the manner that has been discussed, in the Vajrayana or Tantric teachings, it is

said that along with this dimension of so-called `things' being `shunya' or `empty', `they' also partake of a luminosity dimension (prabhasvara). That is, that these `empty' - appearances partake of a dimension of a shiny, luminous, light-like nature. Also, these appearances may be characterized as partaking of the nature of "non-dividedness". That is, that they are completely "non-divided" in regard to the subject and object, or more precisely, "non-divided" beyond the realm of a supposed subject and object.

As a footnote to these three dimensions of appearance, we might consider the myth of *Lucifer* in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Lucifer means the "light-bearer", and if we examine this myth from the proper angle, we might find that this myth of the fall of Lucifer may actually refer to the "fall of man" from being in union with the ultimate, `empty' *luminous* dimension of non-dual awareness, into the realm of individuals regarding these appearances as being truly existing in a `real', `out-there' kind of way.

In Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhism, although the term tathagatagarbha can be taken in general usage to refer to the enlightened - Buddha- nature inherent in all beings, existing as a potentiality that needs to be activated and actualized, in another sense it refers to the process by which Being itself is led back to attaining its true state. Since this level of attainment is beyond the level of a `self' who has attained this level of realization, there is a sense in which the realization or attainment belongs to Being itself, rather than to a `self' or "I".

Then it may be possible to understand such notions as that what is behind the nature of `people' and `appearances' is nothing more than the playful nature (lila) of Being itself. It seems that Being has the ability to `set-up' apparitional - like appearances, but it must be understood that these appearances are completely `empty' of true or inherent existence, in the manner that has been discussed. The nature of these appearances is the completely miraculous display or manifestation of Being, by which it `mirrors' or `looks-at' itself, but as regards their status of being truly-existing `things', they are alike in never having come into actual existence, ultimately. Or as the famous Tibetan poet-lama Milarepa expressed it: "Things appear, but they don't really exist!"

If we were to attain this level of being a true embodiment or a "holder" of the non-dual awareness, or a vidyadhara, developing this awareness to ever increasing levels until we embody this awareness to a level of total-realization, while of course being able to act in a completely skillful and compassionate manner with these apparitional-like appearances of `people' and `things', it is said that there is nothing further to attain or realize; nothing higher that we would need to aspire to.

As the famous Tibetan lama of the Dzogchen tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, Longchen Rabjam, has said: "Since everything is but an apparition, perfect in being what it is, having nothing to do with good or bad, acceptance or rejection, one may well burst out in laughter!"

Nam kay tar tug ta yay sem chan nam

May all beings, whose number is as infinite as the sky,

Ma bed zhin du ku sum ngon gyur te

Realize the Three Bodies of the Buddha

Pa ma dro drug sem chan ma lu pa

May my parents who are all the sentient beings of the Six realms of rebirth
without exception

Cham chig dod may sa la chin par shog

Come together in the Primordial Original State (which is enlightenment
itself).

(a Tibetan prayer)