
Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇམ་དགེ་ལུན་ལྷན་ཀློག་པའི་ཐོན་པ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

22 September 2009

As reminded many times previously, it is good to develop a good motivation for receiving the teachings. (*Pause for meditation*)

HAVING MEDITATED ON SELFLESSNESS, ESTABLISHING IMPUTED EXISTENCE

1. MEDITATING UPON ONESELF AS AN OBJECT (CONT.)

This outline is the first of four subheadings from Kyiwo Tsang's commentary. In the last session we quoted verses from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* and covered the auto-commentary's explanations of those verses.

The auto-commentary states:

As such, there is no other instance of the self existing in the way that it appears and apprehended by the meditator. The sutras also state: Form is not self; feelings are not self; discrimination is not self; compositional factors are not self; consciousness is not self.

Having investigated whether there is a truly established or truly existent 'I' within oneself, one comes to the conclusion that if there is a truly existent self, then it would have to be somewhere within one's six elements or aggregates. Verse 30 of the root text¹ investigates whether the self exists inherently or is truly existent within any or all of the six elements from which we are comprised. Nor are any of the five aggregates the self.

Before we go on with the text, it would be good to try to gain a really good understanding of what has been explained so far, and try to develop a vivid image of what it is that is being negated. In relation to the self, what is it that is being negated? What is the object of negation? We need to try to gain a really clear understanding of what that is first.

When we think of the self, how does it appear to us? How do we apprehend the self? When that is clear to the mind it means that we are getting closer to identifying the object of negation. As explained in the teachings, the self appears to us as being a self that is inherently existent; an independently existent self.

As the auto-commentary mentions, if such a self were to exist, then it would have to exist in relation to the five aggregates, because it is the five aggregates that make up one's existence. Thus, as the teachings suggest, we carefully investigate first how the self is related to the form aggregate. If the self were to be inherently and independently existent, then that would mean that the form aggregate is also independently existent. We need to be able to relate to this logical analysis so that we can expand our view. If we were to conclude that the form aggregate is independently existent, then that is clearly contrary to the normal perception of the aggregates, which are not a single independently existing entity, but a collection of many different parts.

If the self or the 'I' were to be independently existent as the form aggregate, then the form aggregate itself would have to be a single, independently existent entity or phenomenon. But when we observe our own form aggregate, which is the body, it is clear that our body is made up of many different parts, so it is not a single entity existing just by itself. In this way, even when we use our common sense it becomes clear that the self or 'I' that appears to us, and that we grasp as being an independently existent entity, does not exist in that way. Then the object of negation becomes very clear in our mind, and when that becomes clear then we know what it is that we need to refute.

The auto-commentary continues:

Thus, the meditator's five aggregates, six elements, the collections of these, the shape of the collections and so forth are not the meditator's being.

The appropriate syllogism for this explanation is: Take the subject 'a person or being' - it does not exist truly or ultimately - because it is merely imputed upon the five aggregates. This reasoning shows that because the self or being is merely imputed upon the five aggregates, it cannot exist inherently or independently within the five aggregates. One needs to specifically understand here that the self or being is neither inherently one with nor inherently separate from the aggregates. One must understand the reasoning that the self is not inherently one nor separate from the aggregates to mean that the self cannot be found within the five aggregates. When we think in this way we arrive at a deeper understanding.

As the auto-commentary further reads:

For if it were, then the fallacy of the bases of imputation and the imputed phenomena; the one that adopts and that which is adopted; and that which possesses branches and the branches themselves; would have to become one.

The fallacies mentioned here would occur if the self, person or being were to be inherently existent. If the being or the person were to be inherently existent, then the basis of imputation, which is the aggregates, would also have to be inherently existent. If the person and the basis of imputation were both inherently existent, then because 'inherently existent' implies a single independently existent entity, the fallacy that would occur is that the person (the imputed phenomena) and the aggregates (the basis of imputation) would have to exist as a single entity, as one and the same. And if they were one, then there would be no way to identify the imputed phenomena as being a separate entity from the basis of imputation.

Likewise, 'that which is adopted' refers to the five aggregates. Due to karmic consequences, we come to adopt the five aggregates, so the one who adopts the five aggregates is the person. Therefore there is a distinction between the one who adopts and that which is adopted. While that distinction exists conventionally, if it were to exist inherently then the fallacy would occur that the one who adopts and that which is adopted (the five aggregates) would have to be one and the same, an inseparable entity.

What one needs to understand is that if asked whether there is a basis of imputation, then yes, there is a basis of imputation, and yes, there are conventionally existent imputed phenomena, but they do not exist inherently or independently. The same fallacy occurs with the example of the branches and that which possesses the branches being

¹ Quoted at the end of the teaching.

one and the same, or a single entity. These fallacies would occur if all these examples were to be inherently existent.

The conventional existence of, for example, the basis of the imputed phenomena that is the person, is that it exists as a mere imputation of the mind or conception, i.e. that it exists as merely imputed phenomena. So the conventional existence of a person is a merely imputed existence of the person. Likewise the conventional existence of the basis of imputation, are the merely imputed aggregates. That is how it is to be understood. When one relates the understanding of mere imputation on the conventional existence of phenomena, then one gains a deeper understanding of how, according to the Prasangika system, phenomena are established as being merely imputed. One needs to incorporate an understanding of 'merely imputed' into the conventional existence of phenomena.

The auto-commentary further reads:

If the aggregates are claimed to be the 'self' then the following fallacy will also occur, because of many aggregates there would have to be many selves.

This is presenting the particular fallacy where if the aggregates were to be the self then, as there are five aggregates, there would have to be five different individual selves; and if there is one self, then all the five aggregates would have to become just one single entity. These fallacies, of course, were presented in the Madhyamaka teachings so basically students should be clear about this fallacy². If the self were the aggregates, then there would have to be either five selves (because there are five aggregates) or there would be only one aggregate, just as there is one self.

The reason the teaching goes into all of this detail of looking into every possibility, is to rule out any instance of an inherently existent self. If the self were to be inherently existent or truly existent, then there would have to be an instance of it - it would have to exist somewhere. Thus the teaching goes into every possible way that a self would exist if it were to exist inherently. Then, having exhausted every possibility, one is left with a clear conclusion that a self cannot exist inherently. The process of investigation is followed by contemplative meditation.

Having identified the object of negation (a self that is to be negated) and determining the nature of that object of negation, (which is that it is an inherently or truly established self), one investigates in every possible way whether such a self exists or not. Having investigated every possibility, one comes to the point of not being able to find an inherently existent self anywhere. Thus one is left with a sense of complete absence of anything resembling a self and the meditator experiences a sense of vacuity. It is that vacuity which is the absence of anything resembling an inherently existent self, that one then remains focussed on in meditation. That is basically the understanding of selflessness or emptiness that one meditates on.

In particular, if the consciousness were the being, then statements such as a being or person getting sick, talking, seeing, giving birth to a child and so forth would not be possible.

This is referring to a specific doubt relating to the consciousness. If the mind or consciousness were to be the being, then because the consciousness or the mind is intangible and unobservable to our eyes, we would not be

able to say that a person is becoming sick, or talking, or seeing, or giving birth to a child. These are all things that we can see and relate to, but which would not be possible if the consciousness were to be the being.

As the auto-commentary further explains:

Also, just as there are six consciousnesses, so too will one being will have to become six beings. Or alternatively, just as there is one being, so too will the six consciousnesses be a single, inseparable consciousness.

This is presenting the same logical fallacies that were explained earlier. Here again, if the consciousness were the being then because there are six consciousnesses, there would naturally have to be six beings or persons. And if we were to say that there is only one being, then because the consciousness and the being could not be separated, we would have to conclude that the six consciousnesses become one consciousness. The auto-commentary continues:

If the shape of the collections [referring to the shape of the person, for example, of the aggregates] were the being then as the being would have to be physical form, the fallacy of no beings existing in the formless realm would occur.

Also a person other than the five aggregates does not exist because the aggregates would not possess characteristics that illustrate compounded states, since they would be unrelated inherently established entities.

Basically what is being presented here is that if the aggregates were to exist inherently, then the aggregates themselves would not possess the characteristics that illustrate the compounded states, because that which illustrates compounded states does not relate to inherently existent aggregates. The reason given is that 'since they would be unrelated inherently established entities'. This means if the aggregates and that which illustrates the compounded states are unrelated inherently established entities, then it would not be possible for them to relate to each other. Thus the aggregates could not have those characteristics. There are three characteristics that illustrate compounded states: production, abiding and disintegrating. The aggregates have those characteristics - they are produced, they abide and they disintegrate. What is being explained here is that if the aggregates were to exist inherently, then those three characteristics could not apply to the aggregates.

These sorts of fallacies are backed-up with a quote from the texts:

As stated in the texts: If they were other than the aggregates, the characteristics of the aggregates would become non-existent.

Also as stated in the sutra *Play of the Elephant*:

If an inherent nature of phenomena were to actually exist,
Then the Conqueror, hearers and so forth would have to realise that,
At the end there will be no liberation of any phenomena,
And scholars will never be free from mental fabrication.

If phenomena were to actually exist inherently, then the conquerors (meaning the buddhas), and the followers such as hearers, bodhisattvas and so forth, would have to realise that. If phenomena were to actually exist inherently, then liberation would not be possible and the scholars who are trying to realise emptiness will never be free from mental fabrications. These are the fallacies that would occur.

² This material was covered over a number of sessions, beginning on 25 May 2004.

Then the auto-commentary further explains:

Thus when investigated with a subtle mind during the meditative equipoise, the false appearance of the being, self, person or 'I' as it appears to the meditator, will be completely removed without even an atom remaining. Bringing to mind the generic image of that vacuity, one meditates single-pointedly on it without allowing anything else to come to mind. When the apprehension of the vacuity of the non-affirming negation begins to slightly wane, then within a state of meditative equipoise, one again engages in the analysis as done previously. Combining analysis with a single-pointed meditation in this way is what is referred to as the space-like meditative equipoise.

One needs to gain the clear understanding of what 'the apprehension of the vacuity of the non-affirming negation' implies. Without a clear understanding of what is being negated, there is the danger that one will negate too much and come to a mere absence of phenomena, which is then confused with the actual emptiness of phenomena. So if one does not have a clear understanding of the vacuity induced by the non-affirming negation, there is the danger of making a grave mistake and missing the point.

When one does the investigation exactly as explained earlier, one comes to the point where the non-affirming negation dawns. Realising that vacuity or absence of an [inherently existent] self is where one gets a sense of actual emptiness or selflessness. Then one meditates on that.

As the auto-commentary further explains:

When a person without much acquaintance with the view first realises this, they will experience fear. Whereas for those who already have a degree of familiarity; they will experience joy.

When a person without much familiarity with the view of emptiness or selflessness initially begins to realise the non-affirming negation and the sense of vacuity, they may experience some sort of fear. I suppose that comes from a sense of losing touch with everything and a feeling as if one is falling into an abyss. When Lama Tsong Khapa was giving teachings on emptiness, one of his disciples had to grasp on to his own shirt just to make sure that he was still there. That sense of fear arises with the dawning of the sense of emptiness. However, for those who have some familiarity with the experience of emptiness, when the sense of emptiness or selflessness dawns there is a sense of great joy in actually having found the correct view.

Thus far we have covered the thorough investigation of selflessness using oneself as the object, and arrived at the point of gaining the sense that there is no inherently existing self. As mentioned previously, it is very important to have a really clear understanding of the self that is to be refuted, which is the object of negation. Based on that clear distinction in one's mind, one investigates oneself by going through the six elements and the five aggregates and so forth, as explained earlier. Then when the vacuity/absence of the self that is to be negated dawns upon the meditator, then the sense of selflessness becomes clear in the mind.

However even though the self that is to be negated is eliminated, the conventionally existent self needs to remain stable, and not disturbed in any way. Otherwise there is the danger of falling into the extreme of nihilism, where one actually negates the very existence of the self, and comes to the wrong conclusion that there is no self that exists at all. One has to be clear that while there is a self that is to be

negated, the conventionally existing self remains in place. That has to be clear from the very outset.

All of these explanations arise from Verse 30 of the root text which is actually a quote from Nagarjuna's text:

30 'An individual person is not the solid matter of his body, nor is he the liquid, heating or gaseous matter. He is not the space of his body, nor is he the consciousness. If an individual is not any one of these, then the kind of person other than this who does exist is merely the label of a person on the six sensory spheres.'

The relevant syllogism here is: Take the subject 'a person or an individual being' - it is not truly existent or ultimately existent - because it is merely imputed upon the six senses. Using that syllogism as a basis, this quote explains how none of the six elements are the self - solid matter is not the self or individual person, nor is the liquid and so forth. Nor is the collection of the six senses the self. The verse goes through each of the six elements and refutes each one of them as being the person, while 'an individual is not any of these' refers to the collection of the six elements not being the self. 'The kind of person other than this who does exist' is saying that a person that exists as a separate entity from the six senses also cannot exist. Thus a person is a merely labelled entity.

In preparation for our next session, it is good to read ahead in the text and try to get a preliminary understanding of it. If we periodically read and think about these points, it will help to maintain whatever one has understood and make it further clearer.

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In accordance with the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have recited we visualise the lama above us. Then having taken refuge, the lama in a very pleased manner descends to the top of one's crown and enters into one's crown aperture. At the point when the lama abides at one's heart, one feels great joy and bliss. Being aware of that state of bliss, remain focussed on it for the next few minutes. (*pause for meditation*)

Last session we left off the auto-commentary where it reads:

... for those who already have a degree of familiarity; they will experience joy.

What needs to be understood from the explanations given so far is that it is not sufficient to just remain in the single-pointed state of meditative concentration with calm abiding. Just focussing on emptiness and remaining in that concentrated state is not sufficient to generate special insight. To develop special insight within the meditative state, one needs to actually engage in investigation, which is explained in the text. One must really take this to heart and understand the point that is being made here. Otherwise one may fall into the wrong conclusion that it may be sufficient just to attain calm abiding focusing on emptiness and remain in that state.

5. PRESENTING THE STATE OF POST-MEDITATIVE EQUIPOISE

The commentary reads:

To present the state of post-meditative equipoise:

As stated: Because the 'being' encompasses the six elements, it is not ultimate.

The syllogism in relation to this statement was presented earlier: take the subject 'the being' - it doesn't exist ultimately - because it is merely labelled upon the six elements.

As the auto-commentary further reads:

When investigated after rising from the meditative equipoise, one comes to understand that the distorted appearance of a being as it appears to the consciousness under the spell of ignorance, does not actually exist. However a mere being, person, or 'I' does definitely exist.

After coming out of meditative equipoise, one brings to mind that the being that appears to the faulty state of mind under the spell of ignorance (meaning the misconception that we have) does not actually exist in that way. However that does not negate the existence of a conventionally existent being, because there is definitely a person or a being.

Then the auto-commentary further reads:

The mode of its existence is: just as one would label a heap of stones as a person, and a stripped rope as a snake, similarly a being is a mere name, mere label and mere imputation by conception on the mere collection of the six elements or five aggregates. Like an illusion it is not true, and is merely an appearance of emptiness arising as interdependent-origination. One needs to develop a sound understanding on this point and then meditate on it.

'Like an illusion it is not true' means that it does not exist truly or ultimately. These analogies are similar to what has been explained earlier. The main point to be understood here is that conventional phenomena will reappear to the meditator when the meditator comes out of meditative equipoise and enters the post-meditative state. Thus a being or person will once again appear as being truly established, or inherently existent. Then the meditator must bring to mind the point that even though it appears to be truly established or inherently existent, in reality it does not exist in that way, i.e. it does not exist in the manner that it appears.

An analogy used to verify this point is for example, mistaking a heap of stones to be a person. From a distance, a heap of stones may appear to be a person. However, not even an atom of a person actually exists on the heap of stones. Even though it appears to be a person, there is no person there at all. Likewise with a striped rope: at dusk a striped rope may appear to be a snake. Even though it appears exactly like a snake and one may believe that there is a snake there, in reality there is not even an atom of an actual snake existing within the rope. These analogies show that even though a person, a being or an individual appears to be truly established or inherently existent, it does not exist in that way at all. Is this clear?

What one really needs to understand here is that things or phenomena are merely imputed, and so the understanding of imputed existence has to readily come to mind. What is being explained is that the mode of existence of a person is that it is merely imputed on the basis of imputation, which are the five aggregates or six elements. A person is a mere imputation, a mere label given on the basis of imputation, and does not exist from its own side. One needs to incorporate the understanding of the object of negation here as well.

When a person is analysed, the object of negation is a being or an individual person that exists independently, without depending on the conceptual mind that labels it, or the name or label itself. In other words a person that exists independently and self-sufficiently is the object of negation. So, when identifying the mode of existence of a person one needs to incorporate that understanding as well.

What is being specifically introduced here is that since a person does exist, what then is the mode of its existence? As explained, the mode of existence of a person is that it is merely labelled and merely imputed by conception and does not exist in any way from the side of the basis, independently, or self-sufficiently. When the object of negation is clear in one's mind then one can understand

the actual mode of existence of a person, being or individual.

We need to be very clear about the process of identifying the object of negation, and undertake a thorough investigation of understanding what is being negated. If one has analysed thoroughly and really worked towards gaining a very clear understanding of what the object of negation is, then when one comes out of the meditative state and things still appear as being inherently existent, then due to the earlier investigation and analysis, one will immediately be able to understand that it is a false appearance; and that even though there is no inherently or truly existent person, there is still an existent person that is a merely labelled and imputed upon the aggregates. In other words the perception of a truly existent person or being will not harm the reality of the conventional existence of a person.

The practical benefit of familiarising ourselves with this view is that the understanding of emptiness can help one to deal with strong emotions such as attachment and anger. Even though our understanding right now may be a mere concept rather than the actual realisation of emptiness, nevertheless the more we familiarise ourselves with the view of how things do not exist in the way that they appear (i.e. as being inherently or truly existent), the more it can help us in our daily lives when we encounter objects of delusion, such as objects of attachment like beautiful objects or objects of anger. For example when we encounter an object of attachment, the reason why we normally allow ourselves to cling to the object is because we truly believe in its attributes as they appear to us. This influences us to develop strong grasping.

However, if one has familiarised oneself with the view of how things do not exist in the way that they appear, then when one encounters a beautiful or attractive object, one would be able to resort to that familiarity and immediately apply that logic. If one can actually apply the logic that even though the object appears to be very beautiful or attractive, in reality it does not exist in the way that it appears, then one will find that, the strong attachment starts to reduce immediately. Then and one will not be influenced by strong attachment that beautiful or attractive object.

In this way one will reduce the negative karma that is created as a result of having strong attachment to the object; it is the same with anger. By reducing the negative karma arising from the influence of attachment and anger, one will then be naturally preventing the creation of karma for future unfortunate rebirths. If one can actually reduce the negative karma that leads us to unfortunate rebirths through even a mere familiarity with the understanding of how things actually exist, then that would be really worthwhile. Even though we may not have gained the actual realisation of emptiness or selflessness right now, just the mere understanding of the view can still help prevent creating negative karma. So in that way there is definitely a practical personal benefit.

This explanation sheds light on the explanation in the teachings where it says that projecting karma, (which is the specific karma that causes us to be reborn into cyclic existence in the next life) is influenced by ignorance. The

more we familiarise ourselves with the correct view that 'things do not exist in the way that they appear' (even just repeating this phrase) the more it will help us to really limit the creation of negative karmas, which is a great benefit for ourselves. As mentioned in the auto-commentary one needs to relate to the appearance of phenomena as being like an illusion, i.e. as not true. This is the manner of how one should train one's mind in perceiving and relating to phenomena in the post-meditative state.

Things are conjured by a magician to appear in a certain way to our eye consciousness. However the mental consciousness can assert that those things do not exist in the way that they appear to the eye consciousness. The understanding that one needs to derive from this explanation is called the 'emptiness of appearance'. While there is a certain appearance to the eye consciousness, that appearance can be verified as being non-existent or empty by the mental consciousness. In relation to the analogy of an illusion, the eye sees the illusion but the mental consciousness knows that it is an illusion, and so it can contradict what is seen by the eye consciousness. Just as the illusion can be seen as being empty or not existing in accordance with how it appears, so too the mental consciousness can verify that all phenomena, even though they appear to be inherently existent or truly established, do not exist in that way. Thus one can understand the meaning of the emptiness of appearance. With this explanation, one comes the conclusion that 'emptiness of appearance' applies to all conventional phenomena, in that they are like an illusion and thus false and not true.

Even though the following explanation has been presented many times before, nevertheless it is a way to re-affirm and remind you of the difference between conventional and ultimate phenomena. First of all, the conventional existence of phenomena is regarded as being like an illusion - as being not true, and false. The distinction between conventional phenomena and ultimate phenomena should be understood through their definitions: *that which is not established in accordance with how it appears to the primary consciousness that perceives it as its object, is the definition of conventional phenomena. That which is established in accordance with how it appears to the primary consciousness that perceives it as its object, is the definition of ultimate phenomena*

If we were to use form as a particular instance to clarify this distinction: first of all, the primary consciousness that perceives form is the eye consciousness. So, form itself is a conventional truth because it does not exist in accordance with how it appears to the eye consciousness that perceives it. In fact the Tibetan term for conventional truth incorporates the element of being false.¹ It is false and not true, because its mode of existence does not accord with how it appears to the primary consciousness that perceives it. Whereas the emptiness within form is ultimate truth, because it is established and exists in

¹ Ed: To convey this Jampa Ignen suggests the translation 'concealer truth' while Ven. Fedor suggests 'illusory truth'.

accordance to how it appears to the primary consciousness that perceives it, which is the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise. Thus the emptiness within form is true and not false.

What I've been elaborating so far is the mode of existence of a person in accordance with this explanation from the auto-commentary:

...the distorted appearance of a being as it appears to the consciousness under the spell of ignorance, does not actually exist. However a mere being, person or 'I' does definitely exist. The mode of its existence is: just as one would label a heap of stones as a person, and a stripped rope as a snake, similarly a being is a mere name, mere label and mere imputation by conception upon the mere collection of ones six elements or five aggregates. Like an illusion it is not true, and is merely an appearance of emptiness arising as interdependent-origination. One needs to develop a sound understanding on this point and then meditate on it.

Without a sound good understanding of this one will not be able to grasp the unique presentation of Prasangika. Even though the auto-commentary only refers to it by saying '...it is merely an appearance of emptiness arising as interdependent-origination', one needs to understand that it implies both ways; just as the appearance of emptiness needs to arise as interdependent-origination, likewise the appearance of interdependent-origination also needs to arise as emptiness. In other words the perception of emptiness and interdependent-origination should enhance each other.

What does 'an appearance of emptiness arising as interdependent origination' actually mean? It means that the same mind that validates emptiness, also contributes to the understanding of how things exist conventionally or interdependently. It is applied in the same way in the opposite direction. Interdependent-origination arising as emptiness means that, without using further reasoning, the mind that investigates and validates phenomena as being interdependent originations is also able to validate emptiness. Is this clear? For some who say that you understand now, perhaps that understanding may be gone after you leave the room.

For example, the mind that establishes the conventional or nominal existence of the person (which is that it is merely imputed or merely labelled) also understands, without using further reasons and without having to rely on further investigation, how a person is thus empty of inherent existence. That is what is meant by interdependent origination arising as emptiness.

On the other hand, when one investigates the non-inherent existence of a person and concludes that a person does not exist inherently or truly, that same mind also understands, without resorting to further investigation and reasons, the conventional/nominal or inter-dependent existence of the person. That is what is called emptiness arising as interdependent origination.

The understanding of 'merely an appearance of emptiness arising as interdependent-origination' relates to the instance of the meditator in meditative equipoise focussing single-pointedly on the non-inherent existence or the emptiness of their individual being. When the

meditator comes out of that meditative state into the post-meditative state, then they are able to enhance their understanding of how the nominal existence of a person does exist as being a merely labelled and merely imputed phenomenon, even though a person does not exist inherently or truly. That is the meaning of emptiness arising as interdependent-origination.

These are actually quite subtle points that are not easily grasped even by some scholars. To gain an understanding of emptiness itself is not that difficult but being able to establish emptiness so that it does not harm the interdependent-origination or nominal existence of phenomena; in other words being able to use the understanding of emptiness to enhance the understanding of interdependent-origination of phenomena is much more subtle and difficult.

The unique view of the Prasangika is that the appearance of emptiness negates the extreme of nihilism, whereas the appearance of conventional or nominal existence negates eternalism. The explanation of lower Buddhist schools from the Svatantrika and below is the other way around: the appearance of emptiness negates eternalism and the appearance of conventionality negates nihilism. The unique presentation by the Prasangika will be explained further on in the text, so we can go into more detail then.

As a way of backing up this explanation the auto-commentary presents a quote from a sutra:

The sutras also confirm these points, as stated in the *King of Concentration Sutra*:

When magicians conjure up forms, creating various
horses, elephants, or chariots,
What appears to be there does not exist at all.
The nature of all phenomena is to be known like this.

If one doesn't know it to be an illusion then conjured horses, elephants and so forth appear to be actually existent. However they do not actually exist in the way that they appear. So too, one must understand all phenomena to be like this - they appear to be inherently existent, but yet they do not exist in that way.

When a young woman sees the birth and death
Of a son in a dream, she is delighted at birth but not at
the death.
All phenomena are to be known like this.

When, for example, a woman has a dream of giving birth to a son then there is a great joy. However, in the same dream she dreams that the son died and then there is great sorrow. But in fact, both are equally an illusion - no son has been born, and no son has died. The emotions are based on a false notion that is affected by the sleep state. When the mind is affected by the sleep consciousness, emotions and so forth arise in dreams but they are not based on real events.

The main point being made here is that although the appearances in dreams appear to be real that it is only because of the mind is under the influence of the dream state, which makes appearances in dreams seem to be real. However when one wakes up, one realises that it is not true and that it was just a dream. Likewise in our waking state the reason why phenomena appear to have inherent existence or true existence is because our mind is influenced by the ignorance grasping at true existence.

That is what one needs to understand: even though happiness, sadness and everything that one experiences appear to be truly existent or inherently existent, that appearance of being truly existent or inherently existent is because of the influence of ignorance.

It is good to incorporate these explanations into our daily lives, and develop a cautious mind. Sometimes we may not be clear that something is an illusion and start to really believe in it, so it is good for us to understand that there are times where we might be actually just imagining things or even hallucinating. We should be able to recognise that, so that we don't get carried away or affected in a negative way.

Many years ago when I was living in Kopan, there were about six geshe serving as teachers there. Once we were all coughing at the same time with a contagious cold. There was an acupuncturist who suggested that we should all have acupuncture done. I declined that offer and said 'no, I won't have acupuncture'. However Geshe Tenpa Dhargye did have acupuncture, so I asked him later whether it had helped. He replied 'well, I lay down with needles stuck in me for about two hours and I don't know if it really helped or not'. Later on he said that this doctor had given him some good medicine, and one of the reasons he said this medicine was very good was that after taking it he started seeing flowers, and had a feeling of being uplifted and floating in the sky. *[laughter]* Then he started to also see individuals who were looking into the window where he was lying down. He said that he was able to console himself thinking, 'OK, I see these people looking at me, but this must be an illusion, it cannot be true; I am having an hallucination here'.

There are incidents where we may see things that don't really exist. Of course sometimes it may be because of some medication or drugs, but even normally we might start seeing things that really don't exist or even start hearing things that are not really true, like songs and so forth. If we can be a little bit more mindful and maintain our awareness, we will be able to detect whether or not we are having an hallucination.

We can cover the rest of the verses from the sutra in our next session. Meanwhile you can refer to the text books and try to familiarise yourself with the material and try to get a good understanding by reading it.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
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Student: Because they have removed the latencies of self-grasping and so they no longer have the causes to perceive true existence.

From this explanation one needs to understand that the reason why sentient beings have the appearance of true existence is because they are influenced by the imprints or latencies of ignorance that are present in their mind stream.

With the analogy itself, who is the being who has neither the appearance nor the apprehension of the conjured illusion of horses and elephants?

Student: The person who arrives after the performance.

Why doesn't that person have an appearance or apprehension?

Student: Because they are not affected by the spell.

In this context it relates to the being in the post-meditative state, who sees everything as an illusion. In relation to the analogy they have the appearance but not the apprehension of true existence or inherent existence. Do you now understand the meaning behind the analogy of how things are seen as an illusion? Is that clear?

Students: Yes.

The main point to be derived here is how a person or being is actually merely labelled, and that it is a mere name and a mere imputation by conception. This unique point is said to be very difficult to grasp. Understanding something to being empty while existing nominally is said to be a really unique and subtle realisation to gain.

What one needs to understand here is the unique presentation of the Prasangika, which is that while living beings and all other phenomena are imputed existents, conventionally they still perform their function.

It is quite crucial that we familiarise ourselves with these points and try to get a true sense of it within our own understanding. When I was living in Kopan and contemplating these points, there was a time when this specific and unique presentation suddenly became quite clear in my mind. Apart from just repeating the words, there was a real sense of feeling quite confident within myself about Lama Tsong Khapa's unique presentation. However over time it seems that even though I can still repeat the words and have a general understanding of it, that deep inner confidence has waned a bit. It seems that over time something that was once very clear can lose its sharpness. So that's why I'm reminding you to try to really work at it and if you get some sense try not to lose it. *[laughs]* When I got that feeling of being very very confident, it dawned upon me as being a really crucial point. I'm not too certain, but I think it was Lama Lhundrup that I shared my understanding of what seemed to be Lama Tsong Khapa's real intention about the correct view.

The main point is that if by establishing the understanding of how a person is empty of true or inherent existence helps to induce the understanding of how a person is interdependently or nominally existent as well, then one is heading in the right direction.

In our last session, we got to the point where the auto-commentary said:

One needs to develop a sound understanding on this point and then meditate on it. The sutras also confirm these points...

The auto-commentary is implying that as one recites the words from the sutra, one needs to be able to bring to mind the implicit meaning of these words. With the *Heart Sutra*,

for example, when one recites the words 'there is no form and no eyes and so forth', one also needs to be able to understand that it means no inherently existing form, no inherently existent eye or nose and so forth. One has to apply that same understanding to these quotations as well.

The earlier masters explained that if one were to recite, for example, the *Heart Sutra* and passages from the sutras such as these, while bringing to mind their meaning of emptiness, then it will definitely be a very powerful way to purify the great negative karmas that one has created. And it is also a very powerful means of removing obstacles. Thus the *Heart Sutra* is considered to be one of the main sutras to recite for removing obstacles. This is how it must be understood.

We covered the first two verses from the *King of Concentration Sutra*, which read:

When magicians conjure up forms, creating various
horses, elephants, or chariots,

What appears to be there does not exist at all.

The nature of all phenomena is to be known like this.

When a young woman sees the birth and death of a son
in a dream,

She is delighted at birth but not at the death.

All phenomena are to be known like this.

One needs to understand that the presentation in the auto-commentary is similar to that contained in many other texts. First there was a quotation from the great Indian master Nagarjuna that said 'because the being encompasses the six elements, it is not true'. Now the auto-commentary goes on to quote the actual sutra that validates that commentary as well. This is how meanings are validated with quotes from commentaries, leading back to the Buddha's own words in the sutras.

The next verses from the sutra read:

When reflections of the moon appear at night in clear,
clean

Water, they are empty and vain, ungraspable.

All phenomena are to be known like this.

A person tormented by thirst, travelling at midday in
summer,

Sees mirages as pools of water.

All phenomena are to be known like this.

'A person tormented by thirst, travelling at midday in summer' refers to a very thirsty person travelling in summer at midday, when the sun is hottest. When these conditions are intact then, such a person would see a shimmering thing in the distance that appears to be water. Then because of their own particular thirsty condition they perceive that shimmering light to be water and immediately develop a strong desire to go and drink that water. However as they approach near to the place where they saw the water, there is no water there at all. Only then do they realise that it was illusion.

Thus all phenomena, although they appear to be truly established or inherently existent, do not exist in that way in reality. That is how this is to be understood. When the conditions mentioned in the analogy - the hot mid-day sun, the summer heat, and the sandy surface - are intact, then the illusion of water naturally appears, which a thirsty person may totally believe in. Similarly, all of us have all of the conditions, i.e. the latencies of ignorance, that make us perceive phenomena as being truly or inherently existent. We perceive and apprehend them in that way because of the condition of being influenced by ignorance and its imprints.

The last verse of the sutra is:

Someone may peel away the watery trunk of plantain tree
Looking for a pith, but neither inside nor outside is there any pith at all.
All phenomena are to be known like this.

Here we can use the banana tree as an example of a 'watery trunk of a plantain tree'. When you peel away the outside layers of a banana tree, you don't come to any inner trunk. That analogy is applied to all inner phenomena that are related to a person or being, the mental consciousness and so forth, as well as outer phenomena. Whatever the phenomenon may be, no matter how much one searches for it, one cannot actually find that phenomenon within the basis of imputation. Thus it is merely imputed, merely labelled, but does not exist truly or inherently on the basis. This is how it is to be understood.

How one can also understand the meaning here is that regardless of whether it is internal phenomena or external phenomena, the mode of existence is that it is merely labelled upon the collection of the aggregates that form the basis of imputation. So phenomena exist as a collection of different parts. But if one were to separate the parts, and try to look for a phenomenon within any of the parts, one cannot find it there at all.

In the lower Buddhist schools when you investigate, you can find something that can be posited as the thing that you are searching for. Whereas the unique presentation of the Prasangika is that when you search for the meaning through analysis and investigation, you cannot find anything that exists inherently.

2. APPLYING IT TO OTHERS

The auto-commentary then reads:

One gains a good familiarity with the meditation practice on selflessness based on the self within one's own continuum. Then as stated in the text called *Compendium*: 'However one finds oneself to be, realise that to be the same for all sentient beings; however one finds other sentient beings, realise that to be the same for all phenomena'.

This is in accordance with how the meditation on the selflessness of other beings and phenomena has been presented. One first uses the self or being within one's own continuum as an instance to investigate. When one has accomplished the realisation of the lack of an inherently existent self or 'I', then it is easy to relate that to the possessions that we call 'mine'. Specifically, in relation to the quote here, when one realises the lack of inherent existence of oneself as an individual being, then one can relate that to the lack of inherent existence of other individuals. One can easily relate the understanding of oneself within one's own continuum to other phenomena. This relates to the second outline of Kyiwo Tsang's commentary, which uses others as an instance to be investigated upon.¹

The auto-commentary then reads:

In order to explain how to meditate on selflessness of other beings and phenomena, the following verses [from the root text] have been presented.

31. Thus a person or a self-identity [being merely a label on a collection of sensory spheres] has no ultimate true independent existence. Moreover, none of the sensory spheres has independent existence either, since each of them too is a label on a collection of parts.

32. Therefore, if you try to find your self-identity in the light of these teachings on the non-independent existence of all things, you will never be able to find the true independent existence of even the smallest part of a meditator who is settling his mind single pointedly in meditation. In this state [when you have realised the true void nature of your mind in the above manner], you should single pointedly settle your mind on this realisation without any mental wandering. In this way you cultivate the placement of single-pointed concentration on voidness, which is [empty of the obstructions of true independent existence] as space [is empty of obstruction and tangibility].

After quoting these verses, the auto-commentary goes on to explain:

As explained, one affirms the appearance of all ordinary and arya beings, as well as all inner and outer phenomena, by investigating whether they are either each of the elements of earth, water, fire, wind and consciousnesses, or the culmination of them all.

In accordance with Kyiwo Tsang's outline, this refers to seeing the lack of inherent or true existence, using other persons and phenomena as the object. Just as one has affirmed the lack of true or inherent existence of oneself, one relates that to other beings and phenomena. What is being affirmed here is that all ordinary and arya beings as well as inner and outer elements (earth, water, fire, wind and the six consciousnesses), and in fact the accumulation of all phenomena appear to one's mind as being truly existent or independently existent. Just as the self within one's own continuum appears as being independently or truly existent (which means existing without depending on any other factors), likewise other persons and phenomena also appear in the same way. So one must investigate how that is not true and false.

As the commentary further reads:

Just as one had previously investigated the mode of appearance and the mode of apprehension in the state of meditative equipoise, and established that not even an atom of truly established phenomena can be found; at that time it will be in accordance with the statement, 'This not finding is the supreme finding; this not seeing is the ultimate seeing'. Just as it has been stated, when the ultimate nature of mind is seen, one has recognised the mind.

In verse 31 'Thus a person or a self identity [being merely a label on a collection of sensory spheres] has no ultimate true independent existence' refers to the fact that because each of them is a label of a collection of parts, they lack independent existence. This explanation relates to all phenomena. Thus we investigate an external phenomenon such as the physical aggregates of a person, and other external phenomena that are not within one's continuum. It is easy for us to relate to the fact our physical aggregate is actually a collection of many parts. Beginning with the limbs there is the structure of the bones, the veins and so forth and then there are all the internal organs. So it is that collection which makes up the physical aggregate of our body.

¹ See the teaching of 1 September 2009. The four outlines are:

1. Meditating upon oneself as an object
2. Applying it to others
3. Using the mind as an object
4. In brief, applying it to all appearances

Likewise we can see that external matter is also a collection of different atoms and parts and so forth. Even an intangible thing like space has parts, such as its eastern part and so forth. We can understand that it is the collection of the directional parts of space that make up space. Then, of course, when we really investigate the mind we come to realise that there are different moments of mind - earlier moments, the present moment, and future moments, as well as the different states of mind. It is that combination which establishes the mind.

Then we come to even more obscure phenomena like emptiness. As explained in the teachings there are many categories of emptiness such as the twenty categories of emptiness². In this case we are not referring to one of these categories, but to the distinct emptinesses of, for example, the emptiness of the cup, the emptiness of the pillar and the emptiness of the table. These are instances of the emptiness of different phenomena where the basis of imputation is different. As the basis is different, so too the emptinesses within those phenomena are also distinct. So, even emptiness is an accumulation of different instances. When we relate to all phenomena as being a mere accumulation of different parts or instances, then we are giving it a label. So because anything is an accumulation of different parts, it cannot be independently existent or inherently existent. That is the main point of this verse.

What one also derives from this investigation is that because everything is a collection of different parts, and because its existence depends on that, it is therefore an interdependent-origination. Therefore all phenomena are interdependent-originations. The main point here is that one uses the same analysis, investigation, reasons and so forth to investigate external phenomena as was used when investigating the existence of an individual self within one's own continuum. Similarly one uses the same syllogism to establish the non-inherent existence or the lack of true existence of other beings and phenomena.

One of the verses in the *Four Hundred Verses*, indicated that having meditated upon and seen the emptiness of one object, one can relate that to all other phenomena.³ As explained during that teaching, that doesn't mean that the emptiness of one thing is the emptiness of everything else. Rather it means that when the meditator realises the emptiness of one object, they can then use the same reasoning with all other phenomena to establish the emptiness of all other phenomena.

What is to be understood here is that the mode of investigation and analysis is the same, whereas the object or the basis is different. In this teaching, one first uses the self within one's own continuum as an instance, and when one realises that self as being empty of inherent existence, and that it is not established truly or inherently, then it becomes very easy for us to relate that to, for example, one's possessions, which we call 'mine'. That is then much easier, as it does not take much effort.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
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² See Madhyamaka teachings beginning 21 September 2004.

³ Verse 191. See 26 June 2007

Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇིགས་པ་ལྷན་ཕྱག་རྒྱ་ཆེན་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

13 October 2009

As usual we will spend five minutes in meditation. (*Pause for meditation*)

In our last session we finished the first heading from Kyiwo Tsang's commentary, 'Meditating upon oneself as an object', and commenced the second, 'Applying it to others'. So was it clear how the teachings were related to those headings?

2. APPLYING IT TO OTHERS (CONT)

This heading refers to meditating on the selflessness of other persons and phenomena. In *Precious Garland* Nagarjuna said: 'Because the 'being' encompasses the six elements, it is not ultimate'. Using that quote as a basis, the main syllogism is: Take the subjects 'persons and other phenomena' - they cannot exist as independently existents or inherently existents, because they are imputed upon their parts.

The last part that we covered from the auto-commentary read:

Thus, without any distractions one places one's focus single-pointedly upon the space-like emptiness, which is a mere negation of truly established existents.

3. USING THE MIND AS AN OBJECT TO FOCUS ON

The auto-commentary states:

Otherwise the subtle basis of imputation of the self is also said to be the extremely subtle wind and mind.

Here the auto-commentary is pointing out that according to highest yoga tantra, the basis of imputation of a person or being, is the subtle wind and mind.

As presented in earlier sessions, mahamudra can be categorised into sutra mahamudra and tantra mahamudra. Using the mind as the object to focus on, the tantra system is said to be a means to overcome the very subtle misconceptions that cannot be removed merely by following the sutra system. Thus, even when presenting sutra mahamudra in the text, there is periodic reference to the subtle mind and wind. This is an indication that mahamudra is ultimately a means for recognising the ultimate nature of the extremely subtle mind, which is based upon subtle wind.

According to the explanation given in highest yoga tantra, the subtle wind and mind serve as the basis for achieving all mundane and supramundane goals, i.e. samsara and nirvana. To explain this further, in the death process when the very subtle mind occurs (which is the clear light state), a yogi who is familiar with the practice will conjoin the example clear light with the meaning clear light on the path, which leads them to liberation and enlightenment. Whereas for an ordinary being, the subtle wind and mind become the basis for taking rebirth in samsara again. So, this covers the statement, 'Otherwise the subtle bases of imputation of the self is also said to be the extremely subtle wind and mind'.

The auto-commentary continues:

Thus, in accordance with those who have imparted sound instructions and said, 'In order to realise the

ultimate nature of mind, one must first recognise the mind', the following verses are presented:

33 *In this state of single-minded concentration [on space-like voidness] you should further analyse the true nature of your mind, this bare clarity that appears with no form. Upon it many [different conceptual thoughts] arise, without any obstacles, [causing you to remember many things and make associations] which your mind then wanders after.*

34 *But the mind or consciousness itself is [merely a steadily flowing stream of] unobstructed clarity or awareness without any discontinuity. Such a mind, however, appears to be an independently existing entity which does not rely on anything else for its existence, and you grasp at it as such. Concerning the object implied [by such grasping, a mind existing truly independently], the great protector Shantideva has said,*

35 *'It is false to consider streams of instants and groups of parts, such as a rosary or an army, [to be independently existing entities in themselves]'. Thus as Shantideva has explained with scriptural authority and logic, you should single-pointedly concentrate on this state of the non-self-existence of the mind-a mode of existence that is completely different from the way things ordinarily appear.*

In verse 33 and the first part of verse 34 the mind itself is being identified. As stated it is a 'bare clarity that appears with no form'. So, an attribute of the mind is that it is void of being form or physical matter. 'Upon it many different conceptual thoughts arise without any obstacles' means that there is nothing to obstruct various conceptual thoughts from arising in the mind. The analogy of a butter lamp is used to explain 'But the mind or consciousness itself is merely a steadily flowing stream of unobstructed clarity or awareness without any discontinuity'. Unlike a butter lamp, where the rays of light cease when the flame is extinguished, the continuous stream of clarity and awareness of mind never ceases to exist.

Of course the commentary will give a more detailed explanation later on, so I'm just referring to the meaning of the lines from the verse. The mind needs to be clearly identified, because it is the basis of the investigation as to whether or not it exists independently or inherently. Thus to establish the non-inherent existence of mind, one must first be able to clearly identify what the mind is.

The second part of Verse 34 reads: 'Such a mind, however, appears to be an independently existing entity, which does not rely on anything else for its existence, and you grasp at it as such'. Having first identified the actual entity of the mind, the root text now explains that sentient beings perceive the mind as existing independently, without relying on anything else. So, what is being specifically identified here is the object of negation in relation to the mind being the bases of investigation.

Verse 35 begins with a quote from Shantideva's text, which relates to refuting the object of negation. As the verse says, through 'scriptural authority and logic' one refutes the object of negation and thus establishes the mind as lacking true existence or inherent existence.

The auto-commentary then quotes Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara*:

Chandrakirti also states:

It is taught that mind alone creates the great variety,
Of the worlds of sentient beings and environments.

Thus, as the mind has been shown to be the very source of sentient beings and the environment, when one recognises the mind for what it is, it will be a great feat unlike any other.

What is being presented here is how the mind is the originator for both living beings and the environment. Therefore, it would be a great feat indeed when one actually recognises the mind for what it is. In summary, one needs to first identify the mind, and then understand how the mind appears and is apprehended by ordinary sentient beings. This is the process of removing the misconceptions in relation to the ultimate nature of mind.

In identifying the particular features of the mind that are explained here, one also brings to mind the particular attributes of the mind that were explained earlier in the text. As you would recall, the mind has three main attributes: by nature the mind is very clear and bright; it is void of all obstructions such as forms; and it also is the basis on which all phenomena is cognised. In relation to those attributes, the mind was also described to being like a mirror. All phenomena appear to the mind just like a mirror reflects all external phenomena. It is because of these attributes that the mind is considered a unique object to focus on for developing calm abiding and developing the realization of emptiness. The earlier explanations are also to be understood in this context.

The commentary then continues:

When investigating the mind within the continuity of the previous meditative equipoise, this mind which is void of being established as form or matter...

In this context investigating the mind refers to investigating the conventional mind. Thus it is the conventional mind that is initially investigated. Even though the conventional mind is being used, it is still good for us to incorporate the understanding of the lack of inherent existence or true existence of the mind itself. Then the understanding of both the conventional mind and the emptiness of the mind will be enhanced simultaneously.

It is also good for us to acknowledge the fact that it is very difficult for us to focus on the mind, because unlike other external objects the mind is an obscure object. There are different explanations of the method in how one uses the mind as an object to focus on. In this context is that it is a later moment of mind that focuses on earlier moments of mind. Because the mind is a continuity of different moments, we focus on an earlier moment of mind. This explanation withstands the objection that 'mind can not focus on itself, just as light cannot illuminate itself and a sword cannot cut itself'. However the explanation of a later moment of mind focusing on an earlier moment of mind cannot be affected by this objection.

As the commentary then further explains:

...is like the sun being free from clouds, unobstructed, and is the basis of all conceptual thoughts and superstitions to arise and issue forth

Thus one recognises the mind as being devoid of form or matter. Furthermore, just like the sun shines very brightly and clearly when clouds do not obstruct it, the mind has the entity of being clear.

While it does have a basis, the mind's very entity is that it is devoid of form. Because the mind has that attribute it is easy to mistake the attribute of vacuity for the lack of inherent existence or emptiness of the mind. So, there is the danger for some who, when identifying the conventional mind,

come to the wrong conclusion that they have actually realised the emptiness of mind.

However, even though there is this danger, the mind is a good object to focus on because it has the attribute of vacuity. Recognising the vacuity enables one to get closer to the understanding of the lack of inherent existence of the mind as well.

The example of the mind being like the unobstructed sun means the nature of the mind is very clear. That nature serves as the basis of all good or bad thoughts to arise from within the mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned in one of his teachings that if one can first get a sense of the vacuity of the mind and reflect on that, and intentionally cease all preconceptions and thoughts, then when thoughts do reoccur again, it should dawn upon oneself that these thoughts arise from none other than the mind itself. This technique is way to help us identify the mind.

We have now covered the explanation of the lines, 'this mind which is devoid of form or matter, is, like the sun being free from clouds, unobstructed and is the basis of all conceptual thoughts and superstitions to arise and issue forth'.

The auto-commentary continues:

...unlike the rays of a butter lamp that cease when the flame extinguishes, the mind's continuity of clarity and knowing is unceasing.

This refers to the definition of the mind as being clear and knowing, and that this attribute of clarity and knowing is unceasing. As an earlier moment of mind ceases, a later moment comes into existence, thus the continuity of clarity and knowing is unceasing.

The auto-commentary further states:

To the awareness that apprehends one's own mind it appears as a self-sufficient entity, which is not depended upon anything else, and is apprehended in that way.

Here 'awareness' refers to a deluded awareness of ordinary beings, specifically the misapprehension of 'the mind appearing as a self-sufficient entity which is not depended upon anything else'. This of course is contrary to its actual mode of existence, which is that it is merely imputed by conception and merely labelled. However when the mind appears and is apprehended by ordinary beings, it does not appear as being merely labelled and imputed by conception. Rather it appears as being independently existent, existing from its own side. That appearance is refuted with a quotation from Shantideva's text. So, this is how the object of negation is introduced in relation to the mind. Is that clear?

Here of course the object of negation relates to the mind. Another very important point, in fact a unique point, is that the very appearance of any object to a sentient being is actually the object of negation. As ordinary beings when we perceive the vase with our eye consciousness, it appears as actually existing from its own side, self-sufficiently and independently. There is no other way for the vase to appear to us other than as a self-sufficient and independently existing vase. We are totally convinced with that appearance of a vase, and we relate to it as being independently and self-sufficiently existent. So, this very appearance of a vase is to be negated. The object of negation in relation to a vase is an independently and self-sufficiently existent vase; because a vase cannot exist in that way it has to be negated. As mentioned previously, a vase exists merely in dependence on the labelling and conceptualisation of that vase. Thus, the

unique point made here is that our manner of identifying the object is the very object of negation.

The way of establishing the lack of inherent or true existence of a vase is to reflect upon how the vase does not exist in the way that it appears to our eye consciousness. Thus it is a matter of re-affirming to ourselves that things do not exist in the way that they appear to our eye consciousness. When one can actually affirm that, then in relation to the object being perceived one has affirmed the object of negation.

Normally we have no doubts about a vase existing in the way that it appears to us. We immediately think, 'I'm seeing a vase'. We are totally convinced that a vase that is independently and self-sufficiently existent is actually the mode of existence of the vase. However what is being explained here is that very appearance needs to be negated. In other words the object of negation is non other than the appearance of the object to the eye consciousness.

Verse 35 uses the phrase: 'with scriptural authority and logic' which indicates how to establish something as being valid. 'Scriptural authority' refers to citing an authoritative text, in this case Shantideva's text, to explain the lack of inherent existence of the mind. We can leave that explanation for our next session.

It is not a matter of just going through the text quickly, just giving some explanations and moving on. That would not really serve much purpose. Rather, it would be really good to fully understand the points being made. Here it is identifying the object of focus, which is the mind. What is it? How does it actually appear? Then go a little bit further, trying to get a sense of the entity of the mind, trying to really reflect upon that and internalise the understanding that one gets. This would be the proper way of studying of the text.

So first of all one tries to identify what the entity of the mind is, then one tries to establish the object of negation, which is a truly established or truly existent mind, and then confirm that such a mind does not exist. That is something which one needs to reflect upon.

In relation to the conventional mind, when the vacuity of the conventional mind dawns upon oneself, one needs to be able to relate that to the non-inherent existence of the mind. However there is the danger of assuming that the voidness of the mind is the emptiness of the mind. It is easy to come to that wrong conclusion. Thus, at the very outset, as one establishes the identity of the conventional mind, it is very important also to get a proper understanding of the emptiness of the mind as well. That would be the safest approach to establishing the non-inherent existence or emptiness of the mind. If we can understand the relationship between the relative and ultimate nature of mind, we will not fall into the trap of confusing the conventional attribute of vacuity for the emptiness of mind.

We can go into the explanation of the quote from the *Bodhicharyavatara* later on. However, just to touch it briefly, Shantideva uses the analogy of a rosary and an army to describe merely imputed and merely labelled phenomena. Both the rosary and army are a collection of many parts that you label as a single entity.

To elaborate a bit further, even though we identify a rosary as a single object, it is in fact made up of many individual beads, and if we were to separate the beads then the rosary no longer exists as such. So even though we may identify a rosary as a single object, in reality it is an entity that is made up of many different parts. Likewise we may identify an army as a single unit, but it is made up of many soldiers.

Similarly, even though we refer to the mind as a single entity, it is in fact made up of many separate moments of mental continuums.

To be more specific, when put a rosary in front of us and look at it and think about it, it really appears to us as an entity that exists independently. However when you investigate how the rosary exists, it is, as mentioned earlier, dependent on each of the beads for its existence. But it doesn't appear to us in that way when we first look at the rosary.

Anyway a more elaborate explanation of these particular analogies can be presented in our future sessions. However next week is the discussion, so it would be good to reflect upon the relationship between inter-dependent origination and emptiness, and also how all phenomena are like an illusion. In relation to this verse 108 of the *Guru Puja* says:

Samsara and nirvana lack even an atom of true existence, while cause and effect and dependent arising are unending. We seek your blessings to discern the import of Nagarjuna's thought, which is that these two are complementary and not contradictory.

In previous sessions, we explained how interdependent-origination arises as emptiness and how emptiness arises as interdependent-origination. That same point is being made in this verse when it refers to 'the import of Nagarjuna's thought, which is that emptiness and inter-dependent origination are complementary and not contradictory.

The same point is made in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Three Principle Paths*¹. One needs to reflect on, and discuss these points, to try and enhance one's understanding of them. The more we enhance our understanding of how inter-dependent origination and emptiness are not contradictory but complementary, the more we will really enhance our understanding of the correct view. Then when we do practices such as the *Guru Puja*, we will have a deeper understanding of the meaning of its verses. And the same is true of other teachings, where these points recur again and again.

As mentioned earlier, the next session is discussion. It would be good for you to do the discussion with a good motivation as well as the intention of enhancing one's understanding. The exam will follow that, and it is also good to do that in a good state of mind. It would be good for older students to impart their understanding and knowledge without being miserly, and share it in a good way.

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Edited Version

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¹ The relevant verses from Three Principles of the Path as quoted in *The Principle Teachings of Buddhism*, Classics of Modern Asia, 1988 are:

- 11 You've yet to realise the thought of the Able as long as two ideas seem to you disparate: The appearance of things - infallible interdependence; and emptiness - beyond taking any position.
- 13 In addition, the appearance prevents the existence extreme, emptiness that of non-existence, and if you see how emptiness shows in cause and effect you'll never be stolen off by extreme views.

DISCUSSION

Week 1 (22 September 2009)

1. Explain one of the fallacies that would occur if the self, person or being were to be inherently existent.
2. The process of investigation is followed by contemplative meditation. Go through this meditation.
3. Give the syllogism relevant to verse 30.

Week 2 (29 September 2009)

4. Explain what 'emptiness of appearance' means using the analogy of an illusion. [4]
5. Give the definitions of conventional phenomena and ultimate phenomena. [4]
6. [This Q won't be on the exam but is included here to aid in the discussion of Q10]
What does an appearance of emptiness arising as inter-dependent origination, and interdependent origination arising as emptiness actually mean?

Week 3 (6 October 2009)

7. Go through the points of the analogy of the magician who casts a spell over pebbles and pieces of wood.
8. What is the unique presentation of the Prasangika?
9. Explain the analogy of the plantain tree or banana tree.

Week 4 (13 October 2009)

10. Geshe-la said it would be good to reflect upon the relationship between inter-dependent origination and emptiness, and also how all phenomena are like an illusion. In relation to this Geshe-la particularly referred to verse 108 in the *Guru Puja* and Lama Tsong Khapa's *Three Principle Paths*. "One needs to reflect on and discuss these points to try and enhance one's understanding of them".

Question 10 can be left as a discussion and omitted from the exam, in which case we can leave question 6 in. OR vice versa in which case you would answer question 10 with an

explanation of the relation ship between interdependent origination and emptiness and leave out question 6.