
Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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10 February 2004

You need to generate a good motivation.

One should remember that one has a very precious opportunity to accomplish one's purpose. One has the complete inner and outer conditions to accomplish a very great purpose. Having been able to accumulate all of those conducive conditions it is important that we don't waste them.

We have to think that when we die then we definitely have to go with our mind to a future life, leaving behind everything in this life.

You have to reflect on the positive potential of your mind and harmful potential of your mind; the positive potential benefits the mind and in such a way also benefits the person, while the harmful potential harms the mind and also harms the person. Since the person and the mind always have to go together one has to make use of the positive potential.

It is very important that one directs one's effort towards the attainment of happiness in the next life, and that one's activities are not focussed on achieving the happiness of this life. One needs to let go of the grasping for the happinesses of this life and direct one's efforts towards the attainment of happiness in future lives.

It is very important that one gives up the grasping for the happinesses of this life. By giving up the grasping for the happinesses of this life then naturally in the future those happinesses will come to one. While the more grasping at them there is in this life, the less one will have later. By giving up grasping at the happinesses of this life, grasping at material possessions, grasping at friends and relatives, grasping at one's body, the mind becomes very relaxed, clear, vivid and attentive. Of course we don't have that experience now because our mind is so occupied with external objects and with the material world. However, if we are able to let go of the external and material world then we can have that experience. So in order not to waste this opportunity that one has now, and in order not to let one's mind go to waste, it's important that one engages in study.

It is important one does not focus one's activities only on this life, but that one also makes preparation for the future. This means either taking care that one can again achieve a high rebirth in the next life as a human or as a god, or that one prepares for the attainment of liberation, or that one prepares for the attainment of enlightenment. It is important that one makes use of one's precious human life in such a way. One needs to be clear that it is necessary to do that; what one should do with one's life needs to vividly appear to one's mind. For that purpose it is also important to study.

If, for example, we look at our present situation there are very few people will still be here in 2050. Maybe one or two of those who are now here will still be here but otherwise it is very difficult. Also as one advances in age into one's forties and so forth, then it becomes more and more difficult, and the time of death comes closer and closer.

One is always pre-occupied with having a young body and a young mind and so forth, but as one advances in age one becomes sick more often and the body becomes weaker and so forth. However if one has studied and trained well in this life, then in the next life one will again have a young and strong body with all the necessary attributes. That maybe will make you happy, thinking you will receive again a fresh young body in the next life.

One needs to engage in the sequential practices of listening, contemplation, and meditation. The text *Introduction to the Middle Way* that we are going through is one of the most important and best texts on which to base those practices.

So one needs to generate a good motivation for the year.

3.5. The Way Suchness Is Explained

3.5.1. Establishing Emptiness Through Reason

3.5.1.1. Establishing the Selflessness of Phenomena with Logic

Out of the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena the major topic that we studied last year was the presentation of establishing the selflessness of phenomena with logic.

3.5.1.1.2.2. Refuting the Mind Only School in Particular

We reached the point of the debate about the self-knower between the Mind Only and the Prasangika. The **Mind Only** assert that there is a self-knower, and that the self-knower is necessary to generate memory, and the **Prasangika** refute that idea, saying that asserting a self-knower is illogical. The Prasangika say that asserting a self-knower is like saying that a candle flame can illuminate itself or that a knife or sword can cut itself.

The **Mind Only** say that a self-knower is important to generate memory and so they assert that there are two parts to each consciousness - there is the part that knows the object and then there is the part that knows the mind itself, which is the self-knower.

This self-knower is not accepted by the **Prasangika** on the basis of not accepting inherent existence. The reason why the Prasangika do not accept a self-knower is because they don't accept inherent existence. We talked about that previously when we talked about the eight difficult features of the Prasangika system, which all are all based on the refutation of inherent existence. Chandrakirti says to the Mind Only that in order to generate memory there is no need to for an inherently existent self-knower, and that memory can still be generated without an inherently existing self-knower.

3.5.1.1.2.2.2.1.2.2. How Memory Is Generated Even Without a Self-Knower

How Memory is Generated According to *Introduction to the Middle Way*¹

The root text says:

*Therefore, from the experience of the object.
For me this memory doesn't exist as other.
Therefore one remembers, thinking 'I saw'.
This is also the worldly way.*

Here Chandrakirti explains that the memory of the object-possessor is generated in dependence upon the memory of the object, because the object and the object possessor exist dependent on each other. Chandrakirti is not saying that we have the situation where we have an inherently different memory being generated from an inherently different object. This is not what is being said. It is all on the basis that it is unfindable at the time of analysis.

In the **Prasangika** system the memory of the object possessor is generated through the memory of the object. Remembering the object, for example, 'That is the blue that I saw', induces the memory, 'I saw blue'. So by remembering the object one then remembers the object possessor.

The memory of the object inducing the memory of the object possessor is something that doesn't happen in the **Mind Only** system, because in that system the memory of the object can't induce the memory of the object possessor. According to the Mind Only system there is this self-knower that is necessary in order to generate memory. The self-knower has different features; it is an awareness that is directed only inwards and is solitary, meaning it is an awareness that is not concomitant with another mind or mental factor.

So much for the presentation of the way memory is generated according to the *Introduction to the Middle Way*.

How Memory is Generated According to *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

There is also the way the memory is generated according to the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, a very special text that is taken very seriously.

First the **Mind Only** present a debate saying that if the self-knower doesn't exist then it becomes impossible to establish the existence of the consciousness. They argue, 'Because you say that there is no self-knower you don't have possibility of actually establishing the existence of the consciousness. If the consciousness is established by a knower apart from the known consciousness then it becomes difficult, because then you would need limitless instances of experience in order to establish the initial consciousness.'

Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life explains how memory is generated if there is no self-knower, with the help of an example²? The eye-consciousness apprehending blue is established relative to blue, and that is the way the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is established. There is no need for a non-dual self-

knower to establish the eye-consciousness apprehending blue.

After initially seeing blue, subsequently the memory of blue and the memory of the awareness of blue are generated. At that time by remembering, 'Previously I saw blue', the memory of the object possessor seeing blue is generated. There is no way of remembering the eye-consciousness apprehending blue without relying upon the memory of blue. Just remembering the eye-consciousness apprehending blue alone without remembering blue is not possible. What you have to keep in mind is that without the depending upon the memory of blue, the memory of the eye-consciousness awareness apprehending blue is not generated.

The *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says memory of the object-possessor is generated through the memory of another experience and uses an example to explain how the memory of the object-possessor is generated. It gives the example of a prairie-dog that is bitten by a rat with poisonous teeth while hibernating in winter. At the time of being bitten there is awareness of being bitten, of the pain, but it is not aware that it is infected with poison due to fogginess. When it comes out of hibernation it starts to feel the effects of the poison, and then by remembering that it has been bitten it also remembers that at that time it has been infected by poison. So while it is in hibernation there is awareness of the pain but it doesn't know it has been infected by a poison. After having come out of hibernation and starting to feel the effects of the poison it then remembers, 'At that time when I was bitten I was infected by the poison'.

If we relate the example to the meaning:

- The animal being bitten in hibernation and being aware of the pain is when the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is experiencing blue.
- Even though the poison has entered its body the prairie-dog is not aware of the entry of the poison due to fogginess, which is like being unaware of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue.
- The subsequent memory of having been infected with the poison through remembering being bitten is the example for remembering the object possessor of blue through the memory of blue.

Remembering that it was poisoned through remembering that it was bitten is the example for the memory of the object possessor of blue being generated through the memory of blue.

Did you understand that? Did you understand why there is no self-knower in the Prasangika system?

Even though there was no awareness of having been poisoned at the time of being bitten, later through remembering having been bitten the animal also remembers being poisoned. This is similar to there being an awareness of blue by the object possessor at the time of perceiving blue, which equals the awareness of the pain of being bitten, but at that time there is no self-knower that experiences the awareness of blue. So the awareness of blue is there but there is no self-knower that experiences that awareness of blue. This is like the poison

¹ The numbered headings are those used in *Mirror Clearly Reflecting the Meaning of the 'Madhyamakavatara'*. The headings without numbers have been introduced to assist the reader.

² *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Ch. 9, v. 23.

having entered the body but there not being any awareness of the poison.

Later, even though there was no awareness of the poison at the time of being poisoned, the animal feels the effects of the poison, and thinks back and remembers being bitten. Then it also remembers that it was poisoned at that time. That is similar to subsequently generating a memory of the object possessor through the memory of blue, even though there was no self-knower that experienced the awareness of blue at the time of apprehending blue.

Before Lama Tsong Khapa's time this way of generating memory as explained in the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* was sometimes not recognised. Lama Tsong Khapa validated this explanation saying that it is an accurate way of generating memory.

To go through it again, initially we have the awareness of blue that is the object possessor, and that awareness of blue is experiencing blue. It is directly perceiving and experiencing blue. However at that time, even though there is an experience of blue by the object possessor, by the awareness directly perceiving blue, there is no experience of the object possessor itself. So there's an experience of blue but there's no experience of the experience of blue. In the example the animal being bitten and being poisoned has an awareness only of the pain of being bitten, but has no awareness of being infected by poison.

Even though there is no awareness of being infected by poison at the time of being bitten, when, on hearing thunder, the animal subsequently comes out of hibernation it remembers being infected by poison while being in hibernation, even though there was no awareness of being infected with the poison at the time when it was actually being bitten. So it generates a memory of something it didn't have an awareness of at the time when it was happening.

If we relate that to the time of the direct perception of blue, this direct awareness of blue experiences blue, so we have an experience of blue, but there is no experience of the awareness of blue itself, similarly to having an experience of the pain, but no experience of being poisoned. Then subsequently through the memory of blue the memory of the awareness of blue, of the experience of blue, is also generated, without having actually an experience of the awareness of blue at the time when blue was being perceived.

So how did that go down?

Student question: Are you saying that the experience of blue is experienced, but there is no experience there. Is that what you are saying?

What Geshe-la is saying is that you have the experience of blue which is the direct awareness of blue, but there is no experience of the experience, so there is nothing that experiences the experience.

Student: Yes, that's what I meant.

It is similar for example to be being bitten by a dog. At the time of being bitten we only experience the actual pain of the bite. If for example one was infected when one

was bitten, because the teeth were dirty, then subsequently when one feels the effects of the infection one remembers, 'Oh actually I was infected at the time when that dog bit me - that was when I was infected'. It is similar when the eye-consciousness directly apprehends blue. Even though there is no self-knower that experiences that 'I'-consciousness, by just by remembering the object blue, then the memory of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is subsequently generated.

Student question: There was point of clarification from a student, which was inaudible.

There is the sequence where first you generate a direct perception and then subsequently you generate the different conceptual thoughts that deal with what you have directly perceived. Here you generate a memory of something that you hadn't had an awareness of before. So you generate a memory of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, even though you didn't originally have an awareness of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue at the time. This is similar to generating a memory of being infected by poison, even though you have no awareness of being infected by poison at the time of being infected.

Summary of the Comparison of Mind Only and Prasangika Systems Concerning Memory of the Object Possessor

The **Mind Only** say that the memory is generated because at the time of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue there is this self-knower that experiences that eye-consciousness. Then because of having had the experience of that eye-consciousness apprehending blue at that time, one can later remember that eye-consciousness. They don't say that the eye-consciousness is remembered because one remembers the object. So the Mind Only say that if one hasn't experienced something first then one can't remember it subsequently.

While the **Prasangika** say that one doesn't have to have an actual experience at that time in order to subsequently remember it. In the Prasangika system one remembers the object possessor through remembering the object, and it is not necessary to have had an experience of the object possessor first in order to then subsequently remember the object possessor. The object possessor is remembered through the memory of the object. But for the Mind Only that is not the case.

This leads up to another debate between the Mind Only and the Prasangika. The Mind Only posit the self-knower as that which establishes inherently existing consciousness. They say that the way one can know that there is an intrinsically existing consciousness is because of the self-knower. 'So', they say, 'If you Prasangika don't accept a self-knower then how can you posit a consciousness in the first place?'

The Mind Only say to the Prasangika, 'You don't accept a self-knower, you don't accept establishment through a different knower. So how is this consciousness established?' Then the Prasangika explain how direct perception is established, how inferential cognition is

established, and then also how other categories of consciousness are established. We will go into that the next time.

Think about these two different ways of looking at it: one remembering, 'I saw blue', where the emphasis is on the blue that I saw; and then remembering that it was me that saw blue, 'I saw blue'. So those two memories are related to each other - they exist relative to each other. We have this situation where we remember different objects, and then through the memory of those objects we also remember the object possessor. For example we remember that it was us who saw those objects. Through the memory of the object then memory of the object possessor is induced.

For the **Mind Only**, however in order for the object possessor to be remembered it needs to have this self-knower that generates an experience of the object possessor at the time, and then through that experience one subsequently can remember the object possessor.

For the **Prasangika**, because phenomena exist in dependence upon each other and because phenomena exist relative to each other, this system of remembering the object possessors through the remembrance of the object works.

Student questions: Inaudible.

At the time of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue there is no self-knower that experiences the eye-consciousness apprehending blue. For example you have the eye-consciousness apprehending blue and concomitant with it there is a mental factor of feeling. That mental factor of feeling also experiences itself without necessarily taking itself as its focal-object. In general we say that if there's an experience of something, that experience needs to take that which is experienced as its focal-object. However when, for example, the concomitant mental factor of feeling is experiencing itself then it doesn't take itself as its focal-object.

There is also for example the debate that since omniscient consciousness realises everything, it realises everything directly, so does it experience suffering since it realises suffering directly. But that is also of course not the case. Enlightened consciousness experiences itself. Why does enlightened consciousness experience itself? Because it arises in the aspect of enlightened consciousness. The eye-consciousness apprehending blue doesn't experience itself because it doesn't arise in the aspect of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue. Rather it arises in the aspect of blue. The mental factor of feeling that is concomitant with the primary eye-consciousness experiences itself but it is not focussed on itself, as it is focussed on blue. So the mental factor of feeling that is concomitant with the primary eye-consciousness also arises in the aspect of blue, it doesn't arise in the aspect of itself, it is focussed on blue and but it still experiences itself.

Anyway you know the debate. The **Mind Only** say that without having had a primary initial experience of the object possessor by this self-knower one can't have a subsequent memory of that object possessor, while the **Prasangika** say that without having had an initial

experience of the object possessor by a self-knower one can still have a subsequent memory of the object possessor.

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Generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment to accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings. To do so I have to practice the profound Mahayana Dharma, and in order to do that I am going listen to this profound Dharma.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.1.2.2. How Memory Is Generated Even Without a Self-Knower (cont.)

We have reached the point where Chandrakirti discusses with the Mind Only the existence or the non-existence of inherently existent other-powered phenomena, and how those other-powered phenomena are established. The **Mind Only** posit the other-powered phenomenon of an eye-consciousness apprehending blue, and they say this is an other-powered phenomenon that exists inherently. That inherently existing other-powered phenomenon of an eye-consciousness apprehending blue is established through the self-knower of that eye-consciousness apprehending blue. The Mind Only say that without such a self-knower the subsequent generation of memory of such an eye-consciousness would be impossible.

This is then refuted by **Chandrakirti**. *Illumination*¹ first sets out the way memory is generated without a self-knower according to *Introduction to the Middle Way*, and then secondly it shows how memory is generated without a self-knower according to *Introduction to the Bodhisattvas' Way of Life*. That's what we have done.

Then the **Mind Only** reply to the Prasangika, 'Well according to you it becomes very difficult to establish the existence of valid cognition - be it a direct valid cognition or inferential valid cognition. On the one hand you don't accept a self-knower that can establish the existence of a valid cognition, and on the other hand valid cognition can't be established by a other-knower, because then one would have the fault of needing limitless other-knowers in order to establish the existence of one valid cognition. Therefore according to you it becomes very difficult to establish the existence of valid cognition'.

Establishing the Existence of Direct Cognition

Then we have the **Prasangikas'** reply, which first examines the way one establishes the existence of direct cognition, and then how one establishes the existence of inferential cognition. This debate is not in the root text.

In this debate between Chandrakirti and the Mind Only we can't of course say who is enlightened and who is not, but according to conventional appearance one has a

higher view than the other. When we read these debates we should also use them as an occasion to think about what it really means when we talk about consciousness.

What is the meaning of consciousness? To elaborate this further, consciousness is divided into mind and mental factors, and there is also the division of valid cognizers into non-conceptual direct valid cognizers, and inferential valid cognizers. We went already through this a little bit when I attempted to teach some Awareness and Knowing².

It is a very valuable to reflect upon those different divisions of consciousness because that helps us to identify these different divisions of consciousness within our own mind. The reason why we now have difficulty in identifying those different divisions of consciousness is because we haven't made the effort to study and identify them. In general we have a consciousness, then we have mind and the mental factors. Mind is a primary consciousness, and we have six types of primary consciousness in one system, and in the other system we have eight types of primary consciousness. Without going into them in detail, within the mental factors we have the division into fifty-one mental factors where there are the five ever-present mental factors, the five ascertaining mental factors, the eleven virtuous mental factors, the six delusions, the twenty secondary delusions, and the four changeable mental factors. It is very good to know all these divisions.

When we read through these debates about the existence or non-existence of a self-knower then it will probably happen that one also develops an opinion about whether there is in fact a self-knower, or whether there is no self-knower. That is a point that one should arrive at. Through thinking about the topic and developing one's own point of view with reasons one could assert that there is a self-knower, or if one tends to the non-existence of a self-knower, one would assert the non-existence of self-knower. Through reading these debates and thinking about them, one should develop one's own point of view in one direction or the other. That is something that is quite likely to happen.

We have here the situation where the **Mind Only** posit this question to the Prasangika saying, 'Well then, how is the existence of consciousness established according to you, since you don't accept a self-knower and it is not possible to be established through a other-knower. Then you have the fault that the existence of consciousness can't actually be established'. This point of the Prasangika that the memory of the object possessor can be established through the memory of the object is a very fine point to grasp and is one of the eight difficult points of the Prasangika. 'Therefore', Lama Tsong Khapa says, 'I will explain it in great detail'.

If we look at the **lower tenets** such as the Vaibashika or the Sautrantika then we find that they say that the existence of the object can be established through a valid cognition. However, they say, the valid cognition can't be established through the object, and in order to

¹ *Illumination of the Thought, An Extensive Explanation of Chandrakirti's Entering the Middle Way*, by Lama Tsong Khapa.

² Geshe-la taught this in October 2001. The text used was *Mind in Tibetan Buddhism*. See the supplement for a summary of definitions.

establish the valid cognition one needs the self-knower. The position that the object possessor can be established through the object is one of the fine points of the **Prasangika** system, which comes about through the dependent arising that exists through the interdependent relationship between the object and the object possessor.

The **Mind Only** say to the Prasangika, 'Since the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, the apprehension of blue, lacks a self-knower it lacks what is called a self-experience, and it is also not established through another experience or through an other-knower. Then how is the existence of this apprehension of blue established?'

The **Prasangika** don't accept the self-knower, and they also don't accept what is termed 'other-knower'. Other-knower doesn't necessarily mean just a consciousness that is different, because enlightened consciousness knows enlightened consciousness. However, just because enlightened consciousness is known by enlightened consciousness, that doesn't mean that it is known by a self-knower or by an other-knower. Similarly, when we talked about refuting generation from other, we said that generation from other in this context is a very particular term that refers to a very particular thing. Just because something is generated from another cause doesn't mean that it is generated from other. Similarly here, just because something is known by another mind that doesn't mean that it is established by an other-knower.

Countering the Realists' Objections

Lama Tsong Khapa says:

If I explain the way of remembering the object and the object possessor with an example then you will be able to understand it very easily.

Lama Tsong Khapa says that since one remembers the object possessor when one remembers the object, there is no need to establish the object possessor in any other way.

Through the mere memory of the object then one also remembers the object possessor, therefore apart from that there is no need for a memory of the object possessor. If one relates it to an object possessor such as the apprehension of blue, then through the mere realisation of the object blue that which realises blue is established.

Hence apart from the realisation of blue no other mode for the realisation of that which understands blue is necessary. One has the mode of the way blue is realised, so there is no other specific way needed in order to realise that which understands blue, apart from the way blue is realised.

The point that is being made here is that the eye-consciousness apprehending blue realises itself, so it has a valid cognition of itself. So the eye-consciousness that realises blue, the apprehension of blue, establishes blue. Here 'establish' means to realise. So the apprehension of blue establishes blue, meaning it realises blue. Through this that which comprehends blue is also established, meaning that it is also realised. The point that is being made here is that the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, realises itself. This is Lama Tsong Khapa's view.

There is a slightly different interpretation in *Dose of*

Emptiness by **Khedrup Je**, who was one of Lama Tsong Khapa's spiritual sons. Khedrup Je doesn't accept that the apprehension of blue realises itself. Why? Because he says that if the eye-consciousness apprehending blue were to realise itself then it would become a self-experience - it would become a self-knower. First of all he says the eye-consciousness apprehending blue can't realise itself implicitly. It also doesn't realise itself directly. That is because if it were to realise itself directly in an explicit way it would mean that it would have to arise in the aspect of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue. So it would have to have to arise in its own aspect. Both are impossible and that's why he doesn't accept that the eye-consciousness apprehending blue realises itself.

However in **Lama Tsong Khapa's** system the eye-consciousness apprehending blue realises itself. That's why when blue is established, meaning being realised, the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, that which understands blue, is also established, meaning it is realised. The significance is that this eye-consciousness apprehending blue realises itself i.e. it understands itself.

You have to understand very clearly the difference in position between the Mind Only and the Prasangika. The **Mind Only** say that the apprehension of blue, the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, is established independently of its object. It is realised by its self-knower that is non-dual with regard to that eye-consciousness. However it is impossible for such a self-knower to take blue as its object, so the only object which the self-knower apprehends non-dually is the apprehender itself - the eye-consciousness apprehending blue. The eye-consciousness apprehending blue is established or realised completely independently, and unrelated to the object self-knower.

In the **Prasangika** system this happens without a self-knower and through the realisation of the object. Through realising the object the object possessor is also automatically realised.

How Is Memory of the Object Possessor Actually Generated?

Memory of the object possessor happens by remembering the object. The object possessor is remembered through remembering the object. So by remembering, 'Previously, at such a time, I saw blue', with the emphasis being on blue, or 'It was blue that I saw', then one also remembers the eye-consciousness that apprehended that blue.

Therefore, here there is no way of realising the apprehension of blue without remembering blue itself. So the memory of eye-consciousness apprehending blue cannot be generated without the memory of the object blue.

Before we go on with a quote from *Clear Words*, did you digest that a little bit? Did you generate some understanding of what is going on?

If you relate it to a situation where, for example, you remember, 'Oh previously I saw that person', then when we generate the memory, 'Oh I saw that person at such and such a time', we don't only generate a memory of the person, but we also generate a memory of ourselves

having seen the person at that time.

In Tibetan there are two ways of saying 'I remember seeing this'. In one the emphasis is on the object, and in the other, when you talk about the memory of the object possessor, the sequence of words is different. But in English whether we refer to the blue or to ourselves, we say 'I saw blue', and the emphasis could be referring to the blue, and it could also be referring to ourselves. In English when we refer to our memories one needs both the object and the object possessor, and we don't have different ways of expressing it. Of course we could also say, 'Oh it was blue that I remembered', but that's not the way we normally think. So maybe it's a little bit easier for us to understand the point that through the memory of the object one also remembers the object possessor.

In fact we can't remember the object possessor without also remembering the object and it is very difficult to separate thinking that one saw something without also remembering what one saw. So you can see that the memory of the object is tied to the memory of the object possessor, and vice versa. One can't have a memory of the object possessor without having a memory of the object, and that is why the *Prasangika* don't accept a self-knower. According to systems that accept a self-knower, it is possible to remember the object possessor without remembering the object. If you look at it in this way then you will probably also tend more to the position that there is no self-knower.

Now we come to a quote from *Clear Words* by Chandrakirti. This text is a commentary on *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna, so it is a very important text.

It says there that:

The number of valid cognitions is determined through the object that is being understood.

In the **lower tenets** the objects are established by valid cognition. However the reverse does not apply. The valid cognition is not established through the object.

Whereas, according to **Chandrakirti**, the valid cognition is established through the object, and the number of valid cognitions is determined by the number of objects that exist.

The valid cognition that understands manifest phenomena is a direct valid cognition, and the valid cognition that understands hidden phenomena is an inferential valid cognition. The number of valid cognitions, direct and inferential, is determined by the number of objects. The valid cognition that it takes as its object the manifest phenomena is direct valid cognition, and the valid cognition that it takes as its object hidden phenomena is an inferential valid cognition.

When a valid cognition arises in the aspect of an object then that is enough to establish the existence of the object. The source for the point of view that the valid cognisor is established through the object is Nagarjuna who said,

The valid cognisor is established from the object. Should a valid cognisor be established independently from the object then one would have the case that an effect could arise without cause.

The valid cognisor is really generated in dependence on the object. Should a valid cognisor be generated out of itself independently from the object then one would arrive at the fallacy that an effect could also arise independently from a cause.

If the eye-consciousness apprehending blue were to be established independently from its object blue, then it would have to be established in a non-dual manner. As we said before, if the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is established independently of its object blue, then that can only happen through the non-dual self-knower that establishes that eye-consciousness apprehending blue. That is one fault. It then follows that the eye-consciousness apprehending blue would also be established independently of its object blue. Why? Because its own existence is established by a self-knower independently of the object blue.

So you can understand the point that the object possessor is established in relation to the object, and that the object possessor cannot be established independently from the object. You can see here that the existence of direct valid cognition and inferential valid cognition is established through the realisation of the object.

Then the **Mind Only** say, 'Well here at least we have two divisions of valid cognition. So it might be feasible to say, Oh, a valid cognition realises itself, so both a direct valid cognition as well as an inferential valid cognition can be established through the memory of the object. It realises itself because they are valid cognition'.

The Case of Distorted Object Possessors

However then they go onto another subject and say, 'What happens to your theory when we talk about distorted object possessors, such as the eye-consciousness that apprehends a white snow mountain as blue, or the grasping at sound as being permanent'? The **Mind Only** say, 'Take the subject "distorted consciousnesses" - it follows that there's nothing that establishes their existence - because on one hand they don't realise themselves implicitly upon realising the object, because they are not cognisors. On the other hand you don't accept that they are realised by a self-knower, so that doesn't leave any other possibility. Therefore there's really no knower that establishes the existence of distorted consciousnesses'.

The **Prasangikas** answer is that there is no problem. They say that non-conceptual distorted awarenesses that arise in dependence upon adventitious misleading causes such as faults in the eye sense-power and so forth, e.g. the eye-consciousness apprehending the white snow mountain as blue and so forth, and the different types of distorted conceptual consciousnesses e.g. the grasping at permanent sound and so forth, establish themselves implicitly upon establishing their object of comprehension directly.

Do you accept that? Do you accept that upon realising the object of comprehension explicitly then they realise themselves implicitly.

Here the point is that if it is a consciousness then there is a pervasion that it is a valid cognisor with regard to the appearance appearing to it. The appearance that appears

to the individual consciousnesses is always a manifest phenomenon. By being a valid cognisor of the appearance, then one also implicitly cognises the consciousness that realises the appearance. So through realising the appearance then the realiser of the appearance is also established.

In the example of the distorted eye-consciousness to which the falling hairs appear, the eye-consciousness cognises the appearance of the falling hairs, and through that cognition of the appearance of the falling hairs it also cognises itself.

Here we arrive at the point that if it is consciousness then there is a pervasion that it is a valid cognisor with regard to the appearance that appears to it. However that doesn't mean that this consciousness is a valid cognisor. Here then there is a fine distinction. If the consciousness is a valid cognition with regard to the appearance appearing to it, there is no pervasion that it is a valid cognition. For something to be a valid cognition it has to be a valid cognition with regard to its primary object. It has something to do with the way the primary object is apprehended.

Here one is only talking about the understanding of the appearance. For example the grasping at sound as permanent is a distorted conceptual consciousness. To that grasping there is the appearance of sound as permanent - sound appears as permanent to the grasping at sound as permanent. That appearance of the sound as permanent is understood by that grasping. Through understanding that appearance of sound as permanent, then that consciousness also understands itself. That however doesn't mean that it is a valid cognisor. It is still a distorted consciousness because it is mistaken with regard to the primary object.

The position is that if it is a consciousness then there is a pervasion that it directly realises the appearance that appears to it. If we relate it to the example of the grasping at sound as permanent, there is the appearance of sound as permanent to that grasping. That appearance of sound as permanent is a manifest phenomenon that is directly realised by that grasping. Through directly realising that appearance of permanent sound, then implicitly it realises itself. So the grasping at permanent sound directly realises the appearance of permanent sound, and through that then it implicitly realises itself. However it is still a distorted consciousness, because it is mistaken with regard to the primary object.

This is similar to self-grasping. If we are grasping at the self of person there is the appearance of self of person. Self of person doesn't exist, however there's the appearance of a self of person to the self-grasping. That self-grasping realises that appearance of the self of person directly or explicitly, and then it implicitly realises itself. So that appearance of the self of person is a manifest phenomenon that is understood directly or explicitly, by the self-grasping, and then implicitly the self-grasping understands itself. However that doesn't mean that self-grasping is a valid cognition. Just being a valid cognisor with regard to the appearance doesn't make that mind a valid cognisor. The definition of a valid cognisor includes being incontrovertible with

regard to its primary object.

Defining Valid Cognition

The Sanskrit term *pramana* refers to valid cognition. Sometimes it is translated as prime cognisor, and sometimes as valid cognisor. The difference comes through the different interpretations of the word *pramana*. The **lower tenets** interpret it as meaning new or fresh. For them the valid cognisor is always a primary cognisor, only referring to the first instant. Here in the **Prasangika** system it is interpreted as a clear valid cognition. For them the definition of a valid cognisor is being incontrovertible with regard to its primary object. It doesn't have to be a new incontrovertible knower. Because of their different interpretations of the word *pramana*, the lower tenets define a valid cognisor as a newly incontrovertible knower while according to the Prasangika a valid cognisor is merely an incontrovertible knower.

If you relate this to an example, both the first and second moment of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue are incontrovertible, however obviously only the first moment is new, and the second moment is not new any more. So according to the **lower tenets** only the first moment is what is translated as prime cognisor and the second moment is what is termed as subsequent cognisor. The first moment is a newly incontrovertible knower and then the second moment is a knower that realises an object that has already been realised by a previous consciousness. But according to the **Prasangika** there is no need to make this distinction because their definition of a valid cognisor is merely being an incontrovertible knower. Since both the first moment as well as the second moment of the eye-consciousness apprehending blue are incontrovertible knowers, they are both valid cognisors.

In this way we conclude the outline How Memory Is Generated Even Without A Self-Knower, which relates to this verse from the root text:

*Therefore, from the experience of the object.
For me this memory doesn't exist as other.
Therefore one remembers, thinking 'I saw'.
This is also the conventional (worldly) way.*

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.1.3. Refuting Self-Knowers With Other Reasoning

The next we come to the outline refuting self-knowers with other reasoning. This relevant verse from the root text is:

*Consequently, if self-knowers are non-existent,
What apprehends your other-powered phenomenon?
Since agent, action and activity aren't one,
This itself is unsuitable to apprehend that.*

Here then the reasoning that agent, action, and activity would become one if there were self-knower is used. But we can stop here for tonight.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

Edited Version

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17 February 2004

Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

། དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པོ། །

24 February 2004

Generate a good motivation.

The **Mind Only** assert that the other-powered phenomenon of consciousness exists inherently, and that an other-powered inherently existing consciousness is established by the self-knower. The **Prasangika** say the self-knower is not necessary in order to establish consciousness, but that the consciousness is established through the object and realises itself. We talked about that the other day in the context of valid cognition and distorted consciousness.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.1.3. Refuting Self-knowers with Other Reasoning

*Consequently, if self-knowers are non-existent,
What apprehends your other-powered phenomenon?
Since agent, action¹ and activity aren't one,
This itself is unsuitable to apprehend that.*

The **Prasangika** ask the Mind Only, 'If self-knowers are non-existent then,

'What *apprehends your other-powered phenomenon*? It follows it isn't apprehended, because if it were established it would have to be apprehended by *self-knowers*, which are *non-existent*. It follows that this very self-knower is *unsuitable to apprehend that* consciousness because *agent, action, and activity are not one.*' (Mirror)

Here it is saying that not only is the self-knower refuted with the line of reasoning that uses memory, but also that the self-knower is untenable because of other reasonings.

'There is nothing that apprehends the other-powered phenomenon that is posited by you. There is nothing that apprehends that other-powered inherently existing consciousness, because the self-knower is non-existent.' Why? Because the Prasangika posit that if a self-knower were to exist then agent, action and activity would have to be one, but since they aren't a self-knower doesn't exist. This point should be contemplated very carefully.

In order to understand this reasoning we have to be familiar with the way the **Mind Only** posit the self-knower. In the context of the eye-consciousness then we have the apprehension of blue, which is relative to the focal object of blue. When we talk about that which is being experienced and that which does the experiencing, the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is that which is being experienced, and it is experienced by the self-knower. The self-knower is that which experiences the

apprehension of blue. When we posit something that is experienced and something that is doing the experiencing, then we really need to posit two objects that are completely different from each other.

In the Mind Only system we have the eye-consciousness that apprehends blue, and the self-knower that is generated from the immediately preceding instance of clear and knowing. The eye-consciousness is that which apprehends the object, which exists relative to the object, and the self-knower is posited from the point of view of the immediately preceding condition of a previous instance of clear knowing. Both are posited as two parts of the one clear and knowing. One clear and knowing has two parts, one part eye-consciousness, and one part self-knower. They are not really posited as two different objects, but at the same time they are posited as that which experiences and that which is being experienced.

The eye-consciousness is that which is being experienced by the self-knower, which is that which experiences the eye-consciousness. If we have something that is experiencing and we have something that is experienced, we are really talking about two different things. But the Mind Only don't really posit the self-knower as something completely different from the consciousness it is experiencing. So there is a contradiction there, which is how one arrives at the reasoning that if a self-knower were to exist then action, agent, and activity would have to be one, which they aren't. Here action refers to the object of the action, which is the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, the agent is that doing the experiencing, which is the self-knower, and then we have the activity of experiencing

The clarity of the candle flame cannot be posited apart from the candle flame. Similarly the clarity of light can't be posited apart from the light. When we switch on the light in the room then the room becomes clear. One can't really have one without the other. The Mind Only posit the self-knower in a similar way - the self-knower becomes one with the consciousness that it is doing the experiencing, in the same way that the clarity of the candle flame is really one with the candle flame itself. Just as one can't posit the candle flame without the clarity of the candle flame, we can't posit light without the clarity of the light. That's the way one has to think.

In the *Journey to Lanka Sutra*, the Buddha refuted the existence of a self-knower with an example saying that a knife or sword can't cut itself, and a thumb can't touch itself. You can feel other things with your thumb, but no matter how much you try it can't touch itself. These types of examples are used to show that a self-knower doesn't exist.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.1.4. Inherently Existing Other-Powered Phenomena Are Like the Foal of a Mule

We have already mentioned that the term *mosham* refers to a mule, and *mosham gi bu* refers to the foal of a mule, which is non-existent.

The root text reads:

*Should a non-generated unknown identity,
A natural other-powered phenomenon, exist;
This is unsuitable by whatever means, what harm
Is inflicted by the foal of a mule on others?*

¹ Refers to the object of the action; i.e. the agent is the woodcutter, the object of action is the wood and the activity is the cutting.

Examples like the foal of a mule, the horn of a rabbit, the horn of a horse, and so forth are used as examples for a non-existent. In Tibet the horn of a rabbit was very popular, while in India they quite often talked about the horn of a horse e.g. *Ornament of Madhyamika* uses the horn of a horse as the example for a non-existent. Have any of you seen a horse with horns?

There are various examples for a non-existent. Sometimes there is doubt about whether or not a horse with horns does actually exist. Once a Chinese king heard that a rabbit with a horn was sighted in his realm, so he ordered his people to catch it in order to show it to a famous Amdo Lama who had come to visit and teach. If a mule's foal were to exist then it would harm the conventional knowledge of others, such as the Mind Only etc., that it doesn't exist. But since it is non-existent no such conflict arises. Other-powered phenomena are similarly non-existent.

The crux of the matter here is that if an other-powered inherently existing consciousness were to exist then it would be like the existence of the foal of a mule.

Mirror:

My dear Mind Only, further, this other-powered phenomena is *unsuitable* to exist by whatever means, because, *what harm is inflicted by the foal of a mule?* It follows that would be a correct premise - because *an other-powered phenomenon with a non-generated unknown identity, a phenomenon established out of its own nature, exists.*

The **Prasangikas** say to the Mind Only, 'If, after the other-powered phenomenon that is generated from self, such as asserted by the Samkya, is refuted, and after the other-powered phenomenon that is generated from other is refuted, and after your proof for the existence of other-powered phenomenon, the self-knower is refuted as well, you still insist on positing an other-powered phenomenon, then you are completely in outer space and you are really holding onto an untenable position.

'My dear Mind Only, if you still insist on the existence of such other-powered phenomenon existing out of their own nature even though they are not generated inherently, and are actually in the nature of being completely unknown by valid cognition; if you still continue to insist the existence of such an other-powered phenomenon of which there is no knowledge by a valid cognition, the proof of which, a self-knower, has been refuted, which is refuted as generated from self or other, then what problem would there be with positing the existence of a mule's foal? Positing the existence of a mule's foal should not attract any debate or contradiction'.

Within the heading 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.2. Refuting Proof That Other-Powered Phenomena Exist Inherently, the first sub-heading was 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.2.1. Refuting Self-knowers the Proof for Other-powered Phenomena, which we have just now completed.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.2.2. Showing that the Mind Only system Doesn't Remain Within the Two Truths

The root text says,

*When other-powered phenomena don't exist
At all what becomes the cause of conventionalities?
According to others, through being attached to substance,
The whole presentation of conventional existence is lost.*

Mirror reads,

Take the subject 'inherently existing other-powered phenomena' - it follows that they don't become *the cause of illusory conventionalities* - because they *don't exist at all.*

It follows that *according to others*, the Mind Only, *the whole presentation of conventional existence is lost through being attached to the true existence of the substance of other-powered phenomena.*

Here it talks about being attached to substance. Substantially existing phenomena, which are the basis for illusory nominal existence in the other tenets, are non-existent in the **Prasangika** system. In the Prasangika system substantially existent, ultimately existent, truly existent, and so forth refer to the same thing. However one can't say that they are synonymous because in order to be synonymous they would have to be existent. In the Prasangika system if it exists then it is always an imputed existent, and it can never exist substantially. For the Prasangikas substantial existence equals true or ultimate existence, so it is something that doesn't exist.

In the **lower schools** if it is impermanent then it exists substantially. So it is not necessarily a substantial existent, but it can still exist substantially, e.g. the person. The lower schools make this distinction between existing substantially and being a substantial existent. Even though they use the same terminology as the Prasangika system, the meaning of being an imputed existent or being a substantial existent is different for the lower schools.

If making it an object of awareness depends upon making another phenomenon an object of awareness then it is **an imputed existent**. If making it an object of awareness doesn't depend upon making another phenomenon an object of awareness then it is a **substantial existent**.

The lower schools, the Svatantrika and below, say that something can exist substantially without being a substantial existent, e.g. the person. In the **Prasangika** system, there is no such thing as existing substantially or being a substantial existent. If it exists then it's always an imputed existent, and there is no difference between being a substantial existent or existing substantially, but their definition of what an imputed or a substantial existent is varies from the lower schools.

As it says in the root text, the **Mind Only** assert that the consciousness is an inherently existent other-powered phenomenon that exists substantially, and as such can be the cause for the illusory conventional world. They say, 'Since no such phenomenon exists then what would become the cause of conventionalities according to you'? Because the Mind Only posit other-powered phenomena as ultimately existing objects they have strayed from the **ultimate** truth. Also, the whole presentation of **illusory**²

² The Tibetan word *kundzob* is mostly translated as 'conventional', but

conventional nominal existence is lost because of being attached to the true existence of the substance of other-powered phenomena.

So the Mind Only don't remain within the two truths - they stray from the two truths. That is because they assert an inherently existing consciousness that lacks external objects. First of all, because of asserting an inherently existent consciousness they assert an ultimately existing, truly existing consciousness, and that makes them stray from the ultimate truth. Secondly, asserting a lack of external objects makes them stray from the conventional illusory truth.

The **Prasangika** say to the Mind Only, 'You don't remain within the boundaries of the two truths, you have strayed from them by asserting an inherently existing consciousness that lacks external objects. First of all by asserting an inherently existent consciousness you assert an ultimately existing truly existent consciousness and that makes you stray from the ultimate truth, and by doing that you don't remain within the boundaries of ultimate truth. You stray from the conventional illusory truth because you deny external objects. So by denying external objects you deny nominal conventional existence and in such a way you deny the illusory truth. Conventionally or nominally we say 'I'm eating', 'I'm drinking', 'I'm doing this', or 'I'm doing that'. There are many types of activities of the self that relate to external objects, and by denying these external objects then you deny conventional truth, the conventional illusory world. In such a way then the presentation of the illusory world is completely lost. If there were no external existence then lots of the things that conventionally, nominally exist would be lost'. What do you think? [laughter].

If it were as the Mind Only posit, then because of being attached to truly existing substantial existence, the whole presentation of the conventional illusory world would be lost.

Student question: I want to ask you how can you apply this current teaching to daily life. For example it is hard for me to see the connection between understanding that there's no self-knower or there's no other-powered phenomenon with decreasing mental afflictions. How does it connect?

By establishing the non-existence of a self-knower and by establishing the non-existence of other-powered phenomena one establishes the lack of inherent existence. The Mind Only assert inherently existent consciousness, saying that at the time of analysis there is this aspect of clear knowing that can be found, which is consciousness. They establish this through the self-knower. By refuting the self-knower and inherently existing other-powered phenomena one refutes inherently existent consciousness.

Grasping at inherently existent consciousness is self-

grasping. So by refuting the inherently consciousness one lessens that self-grasping. All of this leads up to the next outline, which is that in order to attain liberation one needs to follow Nagarjuna's path. If one strays from Nagarjuna's view then one will not be able to attain liberation. We will go that through next time.

By asserting inherently existent consciousness one asserts ultimately existing, truly existent consciousness. In doing so one strays from ultimate truth. By denying external existence one also denies nominal conventional illusory truth, because conventionally we have many different types of feelings that are generated upon contact with external objects. By denying those external objects then we also deny illusory conventional truth. The main method for attaining liberation is the wisdom that realises selflessness. However all the lower tenets assert some type of inherently existing self and they assert selflessness as something that exists ultimately. By doing this they can't attain liberation. So that is a hurdle that has to be overcome.

We also have to also relate it to ourselves. When they say that the person exists inherently what do they really mean? They mean that when the person is looked for at the time of analysis there is something that can be found - there is an instance of a person that can be found. They say there has to be some instance of person findable, such as the universal mind-foundation, the stream of mental consciousness and so forth. By then negating that with the Prasangika reasoning one arrives at a correct understanding of selflessness. One has to relate that to one's own practice and one's own understanding of selflessness. One has to relate it to one's meditation on selflessness.

Not all the lower tents assert a self-knower. For example Bhavaviveka in his commentary on the two truths refutes the self-knower in the same way as Chandrakirti does. But then there are those schools that assert a self-knower, such as the Mind Only and so forth. Their reason for doing so is basically because they say that there is something findable at the time of analysis. They say that at the time of analysis ultimately some instance of person or the object has to be findable. That's why we have these different presentations of the universal mind foundation as an example of the person, or of the mental consciousness as an example for the person, and so forth.

Understanding this helps one's own understanding of selflessness. When they posit an inherently existent consciousness, they say that the self-knower establishes inherently existent consciousness. Why does a self-knower exist? Their proof is because we are able to remember the object possessor. They have their own sequence of reasoning and establishing their point of view, which was refuted point by point by Chandrakirti. In such a way one refutes the reasoning why consciousness should exist inherently. One has to relate it to one's own practice.

Did you understand the point about why one strays from the ultimate truth if one posits ultimate existence? What is ultimate truth? Ultimate truth is the lack of ultimate existence, so the lack of inherent, ultimate existence is ultimate truth. By positing ultimate existence then one

this is actually a mistranslation as the word *kundzob* literally means all-obscured. As such it should express a discrepancy between appearance and existence and that is why I have chosen the word illusory, which seems to do the trick just fine. All-obscured doesn't sound nice to me. If you feel uncomfortable with illusory then I am happy to revert to plain old 'conventional', but then I fear you miss out on the full meaning of the Tibetan word. However, Geshe-la said you should be comfortable with the use of the word illusory in this new context.

strays from ultimate truth.

This table's lack of inherent existence is ultimate truth, its ability to perform functions is the table's conventional illusory truth, and the table's ability to perform functions while being empty of inherent existence is its subtle conventional illusory truth. By denying external existence then we deny nominal conventional existence such as internal feelings and so forth generated through the contact with external objects.

That's the way you have to think about it. When one asserts ultimate existence then one strays from the ultimate truth and when one denies external existence then one denies nominal conventional truth. The two truths are something that should be considered very carefully.

By trying to generate some understanding of emptiness in this life then in the next life the realisation of emptiness will come much more easily.

Student question: I have a friend who is dying, and I'm not sure of his religion. If he doesn't believe in the bardo and future rebirth and believes in the Christian concept of heaven and hell can attain rebirth in one of these two?

I'm not sure if there is a separate hell that is reserved for Christians. In general religions are important at death to make it easier to give up grasping, and to die in a virtuous state of mind, which facilitates a good next life.

In the Christian tradition one can go to heaven by having faith in god, and if there is no faith one goes to the hell realms. So there is some idea of the next life. They don't accept rebirth but do accept going to heaven or hell.

Student question: Doesn't rebirth contradict the lack of inherent existence?

They don't contradict each other, because when you go to a next life there's a lack of inherent existence. We already went over all those points. If something were to exist inherently then it either wouldn't be generated at all, or it would be generated from each and every cause, or it would have to be generated already at the time of the cause, and the cause would have to exist also at the time of the effect. Then there were all those different types of faults associated with inherent existence. We said that basically something can't be generated properly if it exists inherently. There are different types of fallacies if something were to exist inherently. We've already been through this. If something lacks inherent existence it can be generated.

If happiness were to exist inherently then we wouldn't need to experience any suffering, if suffering were to exist inherently then we would only experience suffering. The fact that there are conditions for happiness and suffering shows that there's a lack of inherent existence.

Student question: What is it that goes to the next life that lacks inherent existence?

The 'I' and the consciousness go to the next life. The self that came down through previous lifetimes is with us now and existed before we were named. Then there's the self that exists after we were named. We have this

presentation of those two selves.

When for example we just think in terms of just 'I' without thinking, 'I such and such', at that time it's not in the context of any particular name. It is this 'I' that goes from life to life. There is also the other situation where for example we introduce ourselves to somebody and then we say, 'I'm such and such'.

Student question: If karma is carried on the imputed 'I' and we realise that the imputed 'I' is not there, is there not a fine line between falling into nihilism and enlightenment?

I have said before that one needs to be very careful to distinguish between non-existence and non-inherent existence. We have talked about that a lot. When we say 'I don't exist inherently' that doesn't mean I don't exist. If you say that lack of inherent existence is non-existence then you fall into nihilism.

Student question: If you carry an imputed 'I' are you still under the influence of cause and effect? Once you realise emptiness do you still fall within the law of cause and effect?

There different stages. An ordinary individual, i.e. not an arya, having realised emptiness still falls within the law of cause and effect. However there will be a decrease in accumulation of projecting or throwing karma for that individual. Ordinary individuals create projecting karma on the belief in the appearance of inherent intrinsic existence. Having realised emptiness, even though there is the appearance of inherent intrinsic existence, one realises that there is a discrepancy between what appears and what really exists, because one doesn't believe that appearance. One creates less projecting karma because of that.

I have told you before the story of the student who practised a mistaken meditation on emptiness, meditating on everything being completely non-existent. He believed he was meditating on emptiness and he got benefit from that. It really gave him some happiness and bliss just to meditate on everything as being completely non-existent.

Here the idea of the practitioner is that one tries to go beyond the feelings of happiness and suffering that are generated because of attractive or unattractive encounters and appearances of external forms. By stopping external forms from appearing to the mind one also stops the generation of pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Here of course the person has not really stopped the appearance of true existence, but they have stopped the appearance of external form to their mind, which brings a certain type of benefit with it.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett
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Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པོ།

2 March 2004

Please generate the motivation of bodhicitta thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. Therefore I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching and then put it into practice for that purpose.'

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3. It is appropriate to follow Nagarjuna

Showing Through Logic

If one wants to attain liberation one has to follow Nagarjuna's system only, and not follow any other system. The reason is because if one follows the Mind Only system then one has the assertion of an inherently existing other-powered phenomena, the inherently existing consciousness, that lacks an external object. By following that assertion one transgresses from the two truths: by asserting an inherently existent consciousness one asserts an ultimately existing consciousness, and by negating external existence one transgresses conventional existence. In such a way one has fallen from the two truths and cannot attain liberation.

The root text reads,

For those falling outside of Venerable Acharya Nagarjuna's path the method for peace does not exist. They lapse from illusory¹ and suchness truth, And can't attain liberation because of that lapse. Nominal truth becomes the method and Ultimate truth becomes that arising from method. Not knowing the distinction between the two in any way They are on the wrong path due to distorted ideas.

Mirror:

Take the subject '*those falling outside of Venerable Acharya Nagarjuna's path*', they don't have *the main method* for attaining peaceful nirvana - because they have *lapsed from illusory and suchness*, or ultimate truth, and as long as one strays from the two truths and doesn't persist one *can't attain liberation*. That is because realisation of *nominal truth becomes the method*, and realisation of *ultimate truth becomes that arising from method*, and whoever doesn't know *the distinction between these two truths in any way is on the wrong path due to distorted ideas*.

The Madhyamika and the Mind Only differ in the way they look at the basis, path, and result. From the Madhyamika point of view basis, path, and result have to lack inherent existence, while from the Mind Only point of view basis, path, and result can only function on the basis of true existence. Therefore the Mind Only lack the

main method for attaining liberation. What is the main method for attaining liberation? The three principles of the path are the main method for attaining liberation, and one of those principles is the correct wisdom understanding selflessness². So the Mind Only have strayed from that wisdom and therefore don't have the main method for attaining liberation, or peaceful nirvana.

Because the Mind Only have strayed from an undistorted perception of the two truths, they have strayed from an undistorted understanding of the two truths, therefore they cannot attain liberation. Why? Because since they have strayed from the conventional illusory truth they have strayed from the nominal presentation of existence, which is the method through which one can realise ultimate truth, through which one can subsequently attain liberation. Therefore because the nominal conventional truth becomes the method through which one then can realise ultimate truth, they don't have the method for realising ultimate truth. They can't attain liberation if they stray from that nominal presentation of conventional illusory existence.

Because of not knowing the distinction between these two truths in any way, the Mind Only are on the wrong path due to distorted ideas. As long as they persist in this wrong path, and as long as they follow their distorted ideas, they are only on the path to further cyclic existence, or samsara and not liberation. So if one wants to change from the samsaric path to the path to liberation one needs to get to know the two truths very well.

This shows through logic that if one transgresses from the two truths, for example as the Mind Only do, then one is unable to attain liberation.

Showing Through Scripture

The Concentration That Shows the Ascertainment of Suchness Sutra says,

'The Comprehender of the World (one of the titles of the Buddha) showed the two truths by relying on his own realisation without having listened to or relied upon others. Whatever is illusory, meaning conventional, is likewise ultimate, and there is no need for a third truth.'

It also states in the *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna,

'Without reliance upon the nominal there is no understanding of the ultimate. Without understanding the ultimate there is no attainment of liberation.'

So it says the same thing.

You can see that understanding the two truths is incredibly significant. We have been over the presentation of basis, path, and result many times before. It is something that really one really shouldn't forget: the basis being the two truths, the path being method and wisdom, and the result being the two or four bodies of the buddha.

As we already mentioned before, it is also incredibly important to understand the distinction between not existing inherently and not existing at all, and the

¹ Used here for conventional since it is closer to the actual Tibetan word.

² The other two are renunciation and bodhicitta

distinction between inherent existence and existence.

What do we mean when we say that something is non-existent?

Students: It doesn't exist at all.

Yes but what is the meaning? You can't just say, 'Oh non-existent means it doesn't exist'. You have to give some kind of reason. For example we say that the mule's foal doesn't exist. What is the reason we give?

Without getting lost in space, the way of approaching it is beginning with the definition of existence. The definition of existence is being the focus, or object of valid cognition. That's how we define whether or not something exists. If something is the object of valid cognition then it is an existent. If it is not the object of valid cognition then it is a non-existent. From our own understanding we should be able to say that is how we define that something exists - if something can be the object of valid cognition then it is an existent, and if something cannot be the object of valid cognition then it is a non-existent.

Existent, established base, object of knowledge are synonyms. When we talk about an established base, how and by what is it established? We refer to a base that has been established through valid cognition. If something is established through valid cognition then it is an established base, it is an existent. Likewise, why do we refer to something as an object of knowledge? Because it is something that is suitable to become an object of awareness, that can be comprehended by awareness because it is an object of comprehension. That's why we refer to it as an object of knowledge.

If we take the example of a vase, is the vase an existent or not?

Students: Yes

What is the reason for that?

Student: I have a valid cognition of it.

The vase exists because it is an object of comprehension by the eye-consciousness, which is the main object-possessor of the vase. Then we go on and ask, 'Is vase inherently existent?'

Student: No.

Because the vase exists therefore it is not a non-existent. One cancels the other out. But the vase lacks inherent existence, so it is non-inherently existent. So it is not a non-existent, but it is a non-inherently existent.

Do you agree with that? Is the vase a non-inherently existent?

Student answer: Yes.

So the lack of inherently existing vase is the emptiness of the vase. Do you agree?

Student answer: Yes.

If it is the lack of inherently existing vase, is it necessarily the emptiness of the vase?

Student: Yes.

Wouldn't you say that if it exists there is a pervasion that it is the lack of inherently existing vase?'

For example, the vase itself lacks inherent existence. But is the vase the emptiness of the vase? No. The vase is empty of inherent existence, but the vase is not the vase's emptiness. Sometimes we tend to think that the vase itself is its own emptiness because it lacks inherent existence. The vase is the lack of inherently existing vase, but that doesn't mean that the vase is necessarily the vase's emptiness.

Just because something is the lack of truly existent vase doesn't mean that it is the vase's emptiness, just like we say that everything that exists lacks true existence.

The vase's existence is established by a nominal valid cognition, but the inherently existent vase is not existent. Why? Because it is not the object of valid cognition, it cannot be found with any type of valid cognition. If one doesn't understand this distinction between existence and inherent existence, and non-existence and a lack of inherent existence, then of course one can start to wonder, 'What is it then that that takes rebirth'. If one is not clear about this distinction between non-inherent existence and a non-existence, then when one meditates on a lack of inherent existence, one starts to wonder, 'Oh, then what is possibly left that could then take rebirth', and one arrives then at a nihilistic point of view. That is because one is not very clear about this distinction between a lack of inherent existence and complete non-existence.

3.5.1.1.2.2.2.4. Showing that refuting other-powered phenomena and worldly convention isn't the same

The **Mind Only** say to the **Prasangika**, 'Your refutation of other-powered phenomena and worldly convention is synonymous. By refuting other-powered phenomena you also refute worldly convention'. The **Prasangika** reply saying that refuting other-powered phenomena does not equal refuting worldly convention.

Here we have these three verses,

*I don't accept the illusory³ the way
You posit other-powered phenomena.
Saying for effect that they exist even though they
don't,
Was done for the mind of worldly beings, I state.*

First the **Mind Only** say to the **Prasangika**, 'Refuting inherently existing other-powered phenomena equals refuting worldly convention.'

The **Prasangika** reply,

*'This isn't the same at all because I don't accept the
illusory the way you, the Mind Only posit inherently
existing other-powered phenomena. (Mirror)*

Earlier the **Prasangika** said to the **Mind Only**, 'We do not accept inherently existent other-powered phenomena ultimately. Not only do we refute them on the basis of the ultimate truth, but we don't even accept them as existing in an illusory conventional way. We refute them completely and we don't accept them in any way'.

Then the **Mind Only** come back at the **Prasangika** and ask quite cleverly, 'Well, don't you accept inherent existence from time to time? Aren't there certain cases when you do accept inherent existence?' Then the

³ Conventional

Prasangika reply that those statements about forms and so forth existing inherently, even though they don't, was only done for the effect of worldly beings realising suchness. Sometimes with the long view in mind of ultimately being able to lead confused worldly beings to an understanding of emptiness, then one agrees with the distorted views of those worldly beings at a particular point in time. This is in order to be able to later lead them from their distorted views to a correct understanding of suchness.

The Prasangika say that illusory conventional truth is always distorted and never accurate. However according to **worldly perception** there is the division into distorted illusory conventional truth and accurate illusory conventional truth. Similarly, these statements about forms and so forth existing inherently were made only according to worldly perception and are not correct in actuality.

The Buddha stated on different occasions that there is inherent existence. These statements have to be understood as statements that were made for the perception of the students. They were not definitive statements. The Buddha taught certain things according to the perception of certain disciples, but that doesn't mean that those statements definitive.

Then the **Mind Only** say to the Prasangika, 'Well if you don't accept inherently existing illusory conventional truth, what type of illusory conventional truth do you accept?'

Here the **Prasangika** reply, 'I accept illusory conventional illusory reality that exists relative to worldly convention'. Conventional illusory reality exists in dependence upon worldly convention. However independently from worldly convention, illusory conventional reality is non-existent.

*If non-existent for worldly beings, like
Not existing for an arhat who, having abandoned
The aggregates abides in peace, then accordingly
I wouldn't say 'They exist because of the world'.*

I already mentioned before that we have nirvana with remainder, and nirvana without remainder, and we have an arhat that abides within the nirvana with remainder and arhat abiding within the nirvana without remainder. The different tenets have different interpretations of what remainder means. According to the **Mind Only and Svatantrika** the remainder refers to the remainder of the contaminated aggregates, and therefore nirvana with remainder is attained first, and subsequently nirvana without remainder is attained. According to the **Prasangika** the remainder refers to the remainder of true appearance, and so nirvana without remainder is initially attained, and nirvana with remainder is attained subsequently.

According to the **Mind Only Following Scripture**, nirvana without remainder refers to a state without the any contaminated aggregates. When arhats enter the nirvana without remainder after death they go into a pure mental state.

If forms etc. were non-existent for worldly beings like they do not exist for the perception of an arhat who abides in the sphere of peace after having abandoned

the aggregates, then I wouldn't say 'They exist in dependence upon worldly perception'.

For the **Mind Only** the negation of inherent other-powered phenomena equals the negation of illusory conventional existence. Then the **Prasangika** say, 'Well according to my point of view conventional illusory existence comes about in dependence upon worldly convention. But if you don't accept that then I would say that according to you the need to train in the path for many many eons on end becomes unnecessary. If you don't accept the presentation of conventional illusory existence arising in dependence upon or relative to worldly convention, then I would say that the need to train in the path for eons and eons becomes irrelevant'. We can relate this dispute about conventional illusory existence to external existence. The **Mind Only** refute external existence, while the **Prasangika** say external existence is a conventional phenomenon.

*In case you aren't contradicted by the world
You should refute this relative only to the world.
At this point you and the world shall debate and
Subsequently I will rely on the one with strength.*

Here again the subject is external existence. The **Prasangika** say to the Mind Only, 'If your assertion of the lack of external existence is in concordance with worldly convention then you shouldn't debate with us but with worldly convention, and then we will see who is right. You should just debate with worldly convention and then I will just rely on the one who comes out the stronger, which is worldly convention'.

Student Question: So we say that we don't accept the Mind Only system because it doesn't follow convention?

It is OK to accept the Mind Only tenet, which is a valid tenet. There are many great beings who accepted the Mind Only tenet e.g. Dharmakirti or Vasubandhu. Mind Only is a tenet suitable to be followed.

That we have these different Buddhist views shows the greatness of the Buddha's teachings, because it shows that he could teach according to the level, or state of mind, of his followers. For example we are all Mahayanists, but there are millions of beings who follow the Hinayana path through the kindness of the Buddha.

These different tenets need to be meditated upon, moving from one to the next, comparing one tenet to the next highest, rejecting the lower one and moving on to the next one, and in this way, following a 'graduated path of emptiness', one arrives at an understanding of the final Prasangika view. We are presented from the beginning with the highest view, but that doesn't mean the lower views are worthless.

People ask, 'Why bother? Why not go to the final point of view first?' The Buddha taught different views to different disciples. For some a self-knower is reassuring and it would be detrimental for them not to learn about a self-knower. First these people accept a self-knower and then through their development they come to reject it because of its inherent existence. So they come to realise that inherent existence is non-existent.

This richness of views showing different stages shows the greatness of the Buddha. Atisha said that teaching

individuals without clairvoyance is like a bird trying to fly without two wings. Having different types of tenets really shows the greatness of the teachings.

Further, through his kindness the Buddha might say one thing but his disciples heard what he said according to their own disposition

The Buddha turned the wheel of Dharma on three occasions. The cycle of teachings belonging to the first turning was according to the Vaibashika and Sautrantika view, the cycle of teachings belonging to the second turning shows primarily the Madhyamakas view, and the third turning shows the Mind Only view, i.e. mental fiction lacking true existence and other-powered phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena existing truly.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version

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DISCUSSION

BLOCK:	1
WEEK:	5
ASSIGNED:	9 MARCH 2004

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1. The Mind Only describe the self knower to be 'an awareness that is not concomitant with another mind or mental factor'. Compare and contrast the self-knower to an awareness that is 'concomitant with another mind or mental factor'.
 2. Explain why the story of the prairie -dog and the poisonous rat is relevant in disproving the self-knower.
 3. How do the Prasangika School explain memory?
 4. Outline the general divisions of consciousness
 5. Why do the Mind-Only School fuss so much about this self -knower? Give two reasons that support their case. Outline the general divisions of consciousness
 6. Explain the difference between the Prasangika's definition of a valid cognisor and the lower schools definition. What is the significance of their difference?
 7. How do the lower schools distinguish between an imputed existent and a substantial existent? Why don't the Prasangika's make this distinction ?
 8. Why does the Mind-Only School stray from the two truths, and what hurdle does this present to gaining personal liberation ?
 9. What does the Prasangika School liken the existence of a mule's foal to?
 10. It is incredibly important to understand the distinction between not existing inherently and not existing at all. What do we mean when we say that something is non-existent?

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EXAM

NAME:

BLOCK: 1
WEEK: 6
ASSIGNED: 16TH MAR 2004

MARK:

/28

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1. The Mind-Only describe the self knower to be 'an awareness that is not concomitant with another mind or mental factor'. Compare and contrast the self-knower to an awareness that **is** 'concomitant with another mind or mental factor'. [4]
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2. Explain why the story of the prairie-dog and the poisonous rat is relevant in disproving the self-knower. [4]

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3. How do the Prasangika School explain memory? [2]

4. Why do the Mind-Only School fuss so much about this self-knower? Give two reasons that support their case. [2]

5. Explain the difference between the Prasangika's definition of a valid cognisor and the lower schools definition. What is the significance of their difference? [4]

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6. How do the lower schools distinguish between an imputed existent and a substantial existent? Why don't the Prasangika's make this distinction? [4]

7. Why does the Mind-Only School stray from the two truths, and what hurdle does this present to gaining personal liberation? [5]

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8. What does the Prasangika School liken the existence of a mule's foal to? [1]

9. It is incredibly important to understand the distinction between not existing inherently and not existing at all. What do we mean when we say that something is non-existent? [2]