
Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇམ་དགེ་ལུན་ལུག་རྒྱ་ཆེན་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

3 November 2009

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

That will also suffice for generating a positive motivation for receiving the teaching.

3. USING THE MIND AS AN OBJECT TO FOCUS ON

We have already covered part of this heading.

The auto-commentary states:

When investigating the mind within the continuity of the previous meditative equipoise, this mind that is void of being established as form or matter, which - like the sun being free from clouds - is unobstructed is the basis of all conceptual thoughts and superstitions to arise and issue forth, and unlike the rays of a butter lamp that cease when the flame extinguishes, the mind's continuity of clarity and knowing is unceasing. To the awareness that apprehends one's own mind, it appears as a self-sufficient entity that is not dependent upon anything else, and is apprehended in that way. This mind which seems to exist in this manner is just as Shantideva states in his *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*:

Streams of instants and collection of parts,
Are false, just as a rosary or an army and so forth.

We gave a brief explanation of this extract from the auto-commentary in the last session. The main point to be understood from Shantideva's examples is to relate it to the reasoning in the syllogism 'things lack inherent existence, because they are dependent on a collection of parts'. The reason for the lack of inherent or true existence is that things exist in dependence on their parts, rather than existing independently.

Shantideva's examples are used to explain that just like a mala and an army are a collection of many parts, so too the mind is a collection of many moments. Thus, because everything has to depend on their parts for their existence, things cannot exist independently.

In explaining the meaning of the two lines of Shantideva's text, the auto-commentary reads:

As mentioned, a rosary is merely labelled upon the collection of individual beads strung together...

This was briefly explained in our last session. A rosary or mala is actually a collection of many individual beads. However, when we think of a mala it does not appear to us as being an entity that is a collection of many different beads. Rather, we apprehend a mala that exists independently, in and of itself. The mala appears to exist solidly or independently as a single entity. Of course when we investigate the reality of the mala's existence, we find that it is in fact a collection of individual beads that have been strung together. This is a very important example that shows how deceptive our perception is.

While our perception gives rise to an appearance of an independently existing mala, in reality there is no inherently or independently existent mala. One has to really think about these analogies thoroughly and try to get a real sense of what is being explained. This explanation is in fact refuting the object of negation.

The main point to be understood is that for ordinary beings, the very mode of appearance of any phenomena is the object of negation. How does the mala or rosary appear to us? It appears as being an independently or inherently existent object. So this very appearance is the object of negation. Does an independently or self-sufficient mala exist? If it does, then how does it exist? Where does it exist? If we further investigate each of the individual beads that make up the mala, does an independently or self-sufficient mala exist in any of those beads? No. Right?! So, in the process of investigation one comes to the conclusion that an inherently existent mala cannot be found anywhere.

At the point in our investigation where we conclude that an inherently existent mala cannot be found anywhere, we need to further investigate whether one is negating something that actually exists, or something that has never existed before?

Of course, if we negate something that actually exists, then we have missed the point and fallen into the extreme of nihilism. What we find through our investigation, is that the object of negation is something that has never existed previously. If the mala were to actually exist as it appears to us, then the more we investigate it, the clearer and more evident its inherent existence should become. However the opposite is true - when we investigate the mode of existence of the mala in relation to its appearance to us, it becomes very elusive and in the end we can't actually find such a mala. That in itself is proof that there was never an inherently existent mala to begin with.

One needs to also reflect on the fact that in the process of investigation one is not altering the basis of imputation in any way. It is not as though we are actually taking the mala apart and spreading the beads around in order to illustrate that there is no inherently existent mala, right? We have not physically touched the basis, so the basis is still intact. Thus, we have not altered the basis of imputation in any way to come to the conclusion that there is no inherently existent mala.

When we come to the point of not finding the mala that initially appeared to us, we bring to mind the fact that because not finding the mala is not due to altering the basis of imputation in any way, this proves that an independent and self-sufficient mala does not exist, and that it has never existed before. When in your investigation you reach the conclusion that there is no inherently or self-sufficiently existent mala to be found on the basis of imputation or anywhere else, then that is finding the ultimate mode of existence of the mala. It is equivalent to refuting the object of negation, which is an inherently or self-sufficiently existing mala. One needs to understand that these two understandings come down to the same thing. Refuting the object of negation in relation to the mala and that not finding a self-sufficiently or inherently existent mala when you search for it comes down to the same thing.

When one comes to the understanding that the ultimate mode of existence of a mala is that it is devoid of inherent existence or existing self-sufficiently, then one has also clearly identified the mala that is to be negated. At that point, one has touched the emptiness or selflessness of the mala, while at the same time understanding appearance of a mala. Normally one has the apprehension of an inherently existent mala, because that is how it appears to us without any investigation, and that is what needs to be refuted. When the actual mode of existence of the mala dawns upon oneself, then one comes to understand that what is referred to as 'mala' is a mere label and mental imputation placed upon the basis which is a collection of many beads. Although being merely labelled, at the same time it fully functions as a mala. That is the mode of existence of the mala.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary then touches on an explanation of Shantideva's next example, which is that a collection of different individuals is called an 'army'. An army is merely a mental imputation or label that is given to a collection of different individuals bearing arms. Apart from that collection there is no army that exists independently or self-sufficiently by itself. Again, in relation to our perception, an army appears to us as being a single, self-sufficiently existent entity, but in reality an army is dependent on many different individuals who make up what we label an 'army'.

These two examples are to be used to understand the point that just as the collection of beads is labelled as a rosary and the collection of individuals is called an army, so too what is called 'mind' is nothing but a collection of different moments of mental continuums. According to the root text, the mind is to be understood as a mere collection of the continuity of different mental continuums.

The auto-commentary continues:

...and an army is merely labelled upon the collection of individuals armed with weapons and wearing a uniform. Thus they are not truly established from their own side. Thus, with the validity of the citations and logical reasons, one reaches a point of determining the fact that phenomena [the mind in this case] do not exist in the way that they appear to the mind. Then within that meditative equipoise, you must place a single-pointed focus on this conclusion.

As stated in the *Eight Thousand Verses*:

The mind does not exist as mind, because the essence of mind is clear light.

This means, an inherently established mind cannot exist as mind because the essence of mind is clear light and thus empty....

This last sentence explains the first part of the quote from *Eight Thousand Verses*, 'The mind does not exist as mind', because 'the essence of mind is clear light and thus empty'. Here, one must be careful not to misinterpret the mind itself as emptiness. Rather it is the essence or the ultimate nature of the mind that is emptiness, which does not mean that the mind itself is emptiness. Elsewhere this quote from *The Eight Thousand Verses* is used to explain the mind itself not being stained by the defilements.

The auto-commentary then further reads:

The *Kontsek sutra* states: All buddhas of the three times has never seen in the past, do not see at the present and will never see in the future an [inherently existent] mind.

An inherently existent mind is not seen by the buddhas of the past, is not seen by the buddhas of the present and will never be seen by the buddhas of the future.

Then the auto-commentary continues:

The lord Marpa also uses the term 'flaring the mind with emptiness'¹ when the nature of mind is meditated upon and clearly identified; as Marpa states:

This is indicating that Marpa gained the realisation of emptiness by relying on his master Lord Maitripa.

To quote from Lord Marpa's sayings:

I went to the banks of the River Ganges in the East,
There through the kindness of the Lord Maitripa,
I was able to gain realisation of the basic nature of reality which is unborn,
And my mind flared in voidness, [my mind was grasped by emptiness]
As I saw the nature of the actual primordial state parted from all mental fabrication,
I directly met with the three Buddha-bodies like with my mother,
From then on, I cut off my mental fabricating.

The commentary then quotes another master:

Drokun Paktru also states:

The root of samsara and nirvana is the mind,
The mind is primordially pure in suchness,
It is primordially peaceful and unproduced,
Thus the mind has always been free from fabrications.

The indication that 'it is primordially peaceful and unproduced' is an indication that the actual nature of the mind is primordially or from the very beginning, free from mental fabrications.

4. IN BRIEF, APPLYING IT TO ALL APPEARANCES

The auto-commentary explains:

In summary, I convey the instructions of my own spiritual master who is not only 'omniscient' in name, but in accordance with the meaning of his name, is indeed all knowing.

36. *Let me record a few words from the mouth of my root Guru, Sangay Yeshe, a truly omniscient Buddha, who has said succinctly,*

37. *'If you can see whatever thoughts arise in your mind as a process of mental labelling, then the sphere of all things [cho-ying, dharmadhatu], the true supreme voidness, is dawning on you without any reliance on other forces of logic. In this state, when voidness has appeared [on your mind's perception], fixing your consciousness single-pointedly on that voidness, is truly a wonderful feat.'*

The verse says that 'If you can see whatever thoughts arise in your mind as a process of mental labelling, then

¹ That is the term used by Alexander Berzin. Another translation is 'grasping the mind with emptiness'

the sphere of all things, the true supreme voidness, is dawning on you without any reliance on other forces of logic.'

The auto-commentary then explains the meaning of the verse:

As mentioned, when whatever appearance is perceived as being projections of thoughts, a mere labelling by conception, then the supreme voidness dawns upon you without having to resort upon other factors. It is as stated in the *Madhyamakavatara*:

Nominal truth becomes the method and,
Ultimate truth becomes that arising from method.

Being able to resort to the very reasoning of appearance, which is the ability to unite the appearance of emptiness with the mind that apprehends emptiness itself in the state of meditative equipoise, is indeed a wondrous feat.

Referring back to the last two lines of verse 37 the root text continues:

38. *Similarly, Pha-dampa Sangay has said, 'Consciousness applied in the perception of voidness, once it has understood voidness, should be turned round full circle to destroy the ignorance of grasping for its own true independent existence. Voidness itself and the perception of voidness are both devoid of being tangible concrete entities obstructing anything, O! people of Ding-ri.' All such quotations lead to the same idea.*

As the Kyiwo Tsang commentary explains, the main point of this presentation refers to using whatever appears to one's mind as a way to enhance the understanding of voidness. Furthermore, when the auto-commentary says 'in summary', the author - Chokyi Gyaltan is indicating that this is the summary of how to engage in the practice. Then Kyiwo Tsang quotes from Lama Tsong Khapa's *Three Principles of the Path*.

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.

When one understands that the understanding of emptiness enhances interdependent origination and that the understanding of interdependent origination enhances the understanding of emptiness, then at that point one has gained the intent of Buddha Shakyamuni.

As explained in our previous session, striving to understand interdependent origination should help to enhance the understanding of emptiness or voidness, and striving to gain an understanding of emptiness or voidness in turn should enhance the understanding of interdependent origination. When one has understood this then one has touched the main point. The quote from the *Madhyamika* text, 'nominal truth becomes the

method and, ultimate truth becomes that arising from method'², relates to this point.

As Kyiwo Tsang's commentary further explains, what is being clarified here is the demarcation between the point where one has gained the correct understanding of the view, and the point where one has not yet gained the understanding of the view. As explained here, when one gains the clear understanding of the emptiness or voidness of any phenomenon, then that in itself establishes the independent origination of the phenomenon. The point where one reaches the correct understanding of the view is that when one is able to establish voidness or emptiness, one is also able to establish the independent origination of that phenomenon. If, in establishing the emptiness of an object, one is able to maintain the nominal or conventional understanding of phenomena, then one is not tainted with the faulty appearance of phenomena that we have right now, which is that it exists inherently or self-sufficiently.

As the quote from the *Madhyamakavatara* indicates, it is only when one is able to fully grasp the conventional existence of phenomena that one is able to establish the ultimate existence of the phenomena. It is impossible to establish the ultimate existence of phenomena, without being able to establish the conventional or nominal existence of phenomena.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary goes on to further explain the quote from Lama Tsong Khapa, which is that the understanding of the appearance of emptiness should enhance interdependent origination, and the appearance of interdependent origination should enhance the understanding of emptiness. What does that actually mean? When one relates to the interdependent origination of any phenomena then one is able to gain the understanding of the emptiness of that phenomenon, which is that it lacks inherent or true existence. The reverse is also true: when one relates to the emptiness of that phenomenon, then that enhances the understanding of the phenomenon as being an interdependent origination.

In other words, referring to emptiness helps to negate the extreme of nihilism, and referring to interdependent origination helps to negate the extreme of eternalism, and that is when one has gained the unique presentation of the *Prasangika* point of view. This, as mentioned previously, is different to the presentation in lower schools where interdependent origination negates the extreme of nihilism and the view of emptiness negates the extreme of eternalism.

Referring to an explanation from another commentary, to understand the statement, 'things do not exist inherently', we can take the example of a sprout; if merely hearing the words 'a sprout does not exist inherently' brings about the understanding that this does not mean that the sprout does not exist at all, but rather that the sprout exists in relation to, or in dependence upon, many causes and conditions, and that it is actually an interdependently arisen phenomenon, then that is referred to as 'emptiness

² Verse 6.80. See teachings of 2 March 2004.

enhancing the understanding of interdependent origination’.

On the other hand if, when hearing the statement ‘a sprout is dependent on causes and conditions and is an interdependent origination’, one gains the understanding that the sprout does not exist self-sufficiently and independently, but rather that it is completely devoid of inherent or independent existence, this is then ‘the understanding of interdependent origination enhancing the understanding of emptiness’. This is how they enhance each other and one should be able to relate to this really profound and subtle understanding of the relationship between the two.

Verse 36 of the root text uses the words ‘let me record a few words’, this can be understood to mean ‘in summary’. So the summary comes from the author’s own guru, Sangay Yeshe, which is the validation of gaining the correct view.

As the Kyiwo Tsang commentary further explains, the main point is that one needs to be able to gain the understanding that interdependent origination (or how things are dependently arisen) is the complete opposite of the view that things exist inherently or truly. When a person is able to apprehend that those two distinct modes of existence cannot co-exist together at any one time, and that they are in fact complete opposites, then with this understanding of interdependent origination, one can gain an understanding of the lack of true or inherent existence of any phenomena. The view that establishes the reasoning of interdependent origination as the reason why things do not exist inherently or truly is unique to the Madhyamika system and does not apply to any other system.

The auto-commentary does not give an elaborate explanation of ‘in brief applying to all appearances’ at this point, however, it does do so later, under the heading ‘Dedicating the merits derived from the composition’.

The main point presented this evening is the crucial point that gaining the correct view is the understanding of how interdependent origination enhances the understanding of voidness or emptiness and the understanding of emptiness enhances the understanding of interdependent origination. We can go into more detail about these points in our next session.

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where the object and one's own mind focusing on it appear to be one and inseparable, then at that point one's focus becomes very firm and very stable. This will enhance one's focus and whatever meditation one may be doing becomes very effective.

In the root text the author Cho-kyi Gyaltsen says, 'Let me recall a few words from the mouth of my root Guru, Sangye Yeshe'. Kyiwo Tsang's commentary further elaborates that what is being implied in this statement is that in order to gain the profound understanding of dharmadhatu, and to be able to meditate on it, one needs to rely upon the profound instructions of one's own guru. It is further emphasised in the commentary that without relying upon the profound and unmistakable instructions of one's own root guru, one will not be able to gain the correct understanding leading on to the realisation of emptiness. The commentary explains that the lama should not be any one but a qualified lama, who has the unbroken lineage of the Buddha's own words, that which has come down to one's own root guru through an unbroken lineage of masters. In that way one will receive the unmistakable and profound instructions on how to gain the correct understanding of the view.

As the auto-commentary does not have an elaborate explanation of these verses, I have resorted to Kyiwo Tsang's explanations. Although it contains further elaboration, I have just presented the main points.

The next verse, which we have also briefly covered, basically encompasses the same points that were made earlier.

38. Similarly, Pha-dampa Sangay has said, 'Consciousness applied in the perception of voidness, once it has understood voidness, should be turned round full circle to destroy the ignorance of grasping for its own true independent existence. Voidness itself and the perception of voidness are both void of being tangible concrete entities obstructing anything, O! people of Ding-re.' All such quotations lead to the same idea.

The main point that is being made here, which has been explained earlier, is that when reflecting on the interdependent origination of phenomena, one needs to be able to immediately reflect upon the empty nature of that phenomena, or its lack of inherent or true existence. Likewise when reflecting upon the lack of inherent existence or true existence of any phenomena, its interdependent origination needs to dawn upon one.

The Kyiwo Tsang commentary then further explains that in brief one first meditates on the selflessness that is to be understood as imputed existence, using one's own continuum as an object. Having understood how it applies to oneself, one can then apply it to other phenomena. Using the mind itself as an object, as well as whatever appears to the mind, one sees them in the light of being established as interdependent originations thus negating the independent existence or inherent existence of all phenomena. Meditating in meditative equipoise on that point is the Gelug Mahamudra tradition of meditating upon voidness and is the actual mahamudra.

2.3. Conclusion

According to the Kyiwo Tsang commentary, this has three further sub-divisions:

1. The manner of dedicating the merits
2. The manner of removing interferences by applying the benefit derived from meditation
3. The manner of actualising the correct path

1. THE MANNER OF DEDICATING THE MERITS

The corresponding part in the auto-commentary reads:

The virtues of having meditated upon mahamudra are dedicated towards the peerless awakening mind of Buddhahood. In accordance to the presentation in the root text there is the preparation, the actual and the conclusion. While the earlier categories have been presented, the conclusion is not explicit in the root text. However it can be presented here in order to distinguish the separate categories:

39 At the conclusion of your meditation session, you should dedicate whatever virtue has accrued from meditating on mahamudra, as well as your ocean-like accumulation of virtue in the past, present and future, towards your attainment of the peerless enlightenment of buddhahood (for the sake of all beings).

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary explains that having completed the meditation session the main factor that one is dedicating is the motivation of bodhichitta with which the meditation session commenced. One also dedicates the merits that one has accumulated over the three times to all beings, so that they can generate the mind seeking enlightenment.

Here 'dedication' refers to dedicating the virtues that one has accumulated during one's meditation session on mahamudra, which was preceded by the bodhichitta motivation. At the very beginning of one's practice, one generates the motivation 'I engage in the practice of the meditation of mahamudra in order to free all beings from all suffering for the purpose of achieving enlightenment'. In accordance with that motivation, at the very end one also dedicates whatever virtues one has accumulated during one's sessions towards enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings.

Here one also needs to bring to mind the difference between motivation and dedication. In order for a dedication to become a dedication, there has to be some substance to dedicate, which in this case is the merit that one has accumulated from one's practice. Whereas motivation is similar to an aspirational prayer - one may not have actually engaged in any practice, but one may still have an aspirational prayer to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. When one has not actually engaged in any particular practice, then the motivation is like a mere aspiration, which cannot become a dedication because there is no substance or virtues yet accumulated to dedicate. One needs to understand this difference between motivation and dedication.

While one is specifically dedicating the virtues or merit that one has accumulated from engaging in the practice of mahamudra, one also brings to mind all the merits or virtues that one may have accumulated in all three times -

all the merits that one has accumulated in the past, is accumulating now, and will accumulate in the future. This is a very profound, vast and extensive way of making a dedication, so it is good to bring this to mind in whatever practice one engages in. When one actually dedicates the specific practice one does now, one also brings to mind all virtues that one has accumulated in the past. Even though we may not recall specific instances of having accumulated virtue, particularly in relation to past lives, we can however still dedicate that. This is a very extensive way of dedicating merit to accumulate vast amounts of merit.

When the teachings indicate dedicating the virtue of the beginning, the middle and the end, one can reflect and bring to mind:

- ∞ One generates the bodhichitta motivation prior to engaging in the meditation session.
- ∞ Even though the bodhichitta motivation is not manifest during meditative equipoise on emptiness. Nevertheless, due to the motivation prior to engaging in the meditation session, the mind focusing on emptiness is said to be accompanied with a continuum of that bodhichitta motivation. Thus, while single-pointedly engaged in the focus on emptiness, one still accumulates the merit from the motivation of bodhichitta.
- ∞ At the end, being mindful of the merits and virtue that were accumulated during the meditation session, one dedicates the merits towards enlightenment.

In this way we can see how the beginning, the middle and the end of the practice have all been extensive ways of accumulating merit.

It is good to apply this to every practice. The main point is that whatever virtue one may accumulate in any practice that one does, if one dedicates that towards enlightenment then that is the most supreme form of dedication.

One can also dedicate one's merits towards having the perfect conditions to continuously meet with the sutra and tantra teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa, and to be able to uphold the Dharma.

One also does dedications for the great Mahayana teachers who are expounding the unmistakable path, to have a stable and long life, and for all of their aspirations to be fulfilled. To make dedications in this way would be very meaningful.

In summary, we are dedicating towards the fulfilment of the all hopes, wishes and happiness of all beings and for the Dharma to spread. In addition we also dedicate that we will be able to continuously meet with, and follow a Mahayana spiritual friend who has all the qualities intact, to become like them and to practise in accordance with the instructions of the spiritual teacher, and to be able to follow the spiritual master who are like Maitreya and Manjushri.

In whatever virtue or practice one engages in, one must be able to apply these forms of dedication, and in particular, to secure the three main factors, which are the beginning, the middle and the end, and to ensure that remains intact. Being intact refers to the three main

factors, which are that it is imbued with bodhichitta, complemented with the view realising emptiness, and sealed with the dedication at the end. When one's practice is suffused with these three factors, then it becomes the unmistakable path leading to enlightenment.

The particular dedication being presented here is dedicating the merits of meditating on mahamudra. Dedicating the merits of the composition actually comes in later verses.

2. THE MANNER OF REMOVING INTERFERENCES BY APPLYING THE BENEFIT DERIVED FROM MEDITATION

The corresponding part in the auto-commentary continues:

After having come out of meditative equipoise, 1) the manner of practice during the post-meditative state, 2) the manner of determining the object of negation when re-entering meditative equipoise, 3) as well as clearing doubts about how to overcome the extremes during both of those two states, is presented together in the following verses:

40. Having developed, in this manner, the habit of meditation on mahamudra, then during the post-meditation period you appear to your six types of consciousness and scrutinise how they appear to you. In this way the bare mode of existence of things will arise before you brilliantly.

41. In short, then, whatever appears to you, such as your mind, [you should take its ordinary appearance as a truly independently existing entity to be your object of refutation for voidness analysis]. You should not grasp at such things as existing the way they appear to be. Instead you should try to ascertain their actual mode of existence.

42. Then constantly nourishing your understanding [by meditating alternately on space-like voidness during formal meditation sessions and on mirage-like voidness during post-meditation periods], you should combine the essence of all things in samsara and nirvana into their single common nature as void [and meditate upon this]...

It seems that there are still quite a few verses left, so we can have two more sessions this month. Then December 8 can be the discussion, followed by the exam on December 15.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

17 November 2009

As usual we will begin with a short meditation (*pause for meditation*).

We can now remind ourselves of the positive motivation for receiving the teachings.

3. CONCLUSION¹

According to the Kyiwo Tsang commentary this section has three sub-headings:

1. The manner of dedicating the merits
2. The manner of applying the benefits and removing impediments
3. The manner of actualising the fine path

1. The manner of dedicating the merits

We have covered this first heading, which relates to verse 39 of the root text.

2. The manner of applying the benefits and removing impediments

1. THE MANNER OF APPLYING THE BENEFITS

With respect to this sub-division, the auto-commentary reads:

After having come out of meditative equipoise, 1) the manner of practice during the post-meditative state, 2) the manner of determining the object of negation when re-entering meditative equipoise, as well as 3) clearing doubts about how to overcome the extremes during both of those two states, is presented together in the following verses:

Note that these subdivisions in the auto-commentary have a different wording to that used by Kyiwo Tsang.

40. *Having developed in this manner, the habit of meditation on mahamudra, then during the post-meditation period you appear to your six types of consciousness and scrutinise how they appear to you. In this way the bare mode of existence of things will arise before you brilliantly.*

41. *In short, then, whatever appears to you, such as your mind, [you should take its ordinary appearance as a truly independently existing entity to be your object of refutation for voidness analysis]. You should not grasp at such things as existing the way they appear to be. Instead you should try to ascertain their actual mode of existence.*

42. *Then constantly nourishing your understanding [by meditating alternately on space-like voidness during formal meditation sessions and on mirage-like voidness during post-meditation periods], you should combine the essence of all things in samsara and nirvana into their single*

common nature as void [and meditate upon this]....

The first line of verse 40, 'Having developed in this manner, the habit of meditation on mahamudra' refers to developing familiarisation with meditative equipoise on mahamudra. The next line refers to the six types of consciousness. So, first we need to recall that what appears to your six types of consciousness are the six types of objects that are perceived by the six consciousnesses². As indicated here, it is good to develop a sound understanding of what the six consciousnesses and their corresponding objects are, as the teachings often refer to them.

As the verse indicates, having familiarised oneself with them during the state of meditative equipoise, you then examine or scrutinise how the objects of the six consciousnesses appear to you during the post-meditative state.

The auto-commentary explains:

Because of having acquainted yourself in the state of meditative equipoise, when in the post-meditative state, whatever appears to the six consciousnesses such as forms to the eye consciousness and so forth, if you investigate the mode of that appearance with a fine mind, it will dawn upon the investigator that though things appear as truly existent, just like dreams and the reflection of the moon on a lake appear to be true but can be understood as being false, similarly the interdependent origination of phenomena will become very clear. This in turn will enhance the understanding of suchness.

As explained here, in the post-meditative state things will still appear as being truly existent, but one needs to scrutinise that mode of existence. Do the six types of objects that appear as being truly established actually exist in that way or not? As mentioned in the auto-commentary 'with a fine mind, one further investigates' their mode of existence. Then due to the familiarity with that in the meditative state, one will be able to understand the definitive mode of existence of those things in the post-meditative state as well.

When single-pointedly focused on the emptiness of form, for example, only the mere negation of 'inherently-existent-form' will appear to the being in the state of meditative equipoise. Thus, what appears to the meditator is a mere voidness. Except for the mere negation, nothing else appears, thus 'form' itself does not appear to the meditative equipoise single-pointedly focused on emptiness. After coming out of that meditative state into the post-meditative state, form will re-appear to the eye consciousness as being truly established and inherently existent, due to the imprints still in the mind.

When form re-appears in that way, one resorts back to the familiarity of focusing on the negation of 'inherently existent form' during the state of meditative equipoise. After analysis in the post-meditative state using the reasoning of interdependent origination, one sees that

² They are the eye, ear, nose, tongue body and mental consciousnesses which perceive respectively form, sound, smell, taste, tactile or objects of touch and phenomena.

¹ The wording of the headings has been revised since last week.

even though the mode of existence of phenomena such as form appears as being truly established and inherently existent, one understands that in fact form doesn't exist in that way. Because of one's familiarity with the reasoning of interdependent origination, (which was presented earlier) the dependent arising of phenomena will become very vivid in one's mind. So it will be clear that even though form does exist, it lacks inherent or true existence.

The main point being made here, which is also emphasised later in the text, is that it is necessary to maintain the connection between how things appear in the meditative state and how to apply that in the post-meditative state by alternating these two states of meditation. It is crucial to understand that, in regard to how things actually exist, there is no difference in the mode of existence of things in either state. Thus, one needs to familiarise oneself with, and integrate this view in one's daily life as much as possible.

As indicated in the auto-commentary, by resorting to the reasoning of inter-dependent origination with respect to analogies like the reflection of the moon on a lake, illusions, dreams and so forth, and clearly seeing that things arise in dependence on causes and conditions (which is what inter-dependent origination means), one will understand that things could not possibly exist independently, existing from their own side; this in turn enhances the understanding of suchness.

As mentioned in earlier sessions, this is also the main Prasangika point of view, which is that the mere appearance of interdependent origination enhances the understanding of suchness or emptiness and vice versa. When one resorts to these points and really reflects upon how there is no contradiction between phenomena arising as interdependent originations and their lacking inherent existence, then one sees that the emptiness of phenomena and the interdependent origination of phenomena are actually one and the same thing; there is no contradiction at all. When, through such reasoning one arrives at a profound level of understanding, then there is no way the delusions can affect us. The union of interdependent origination and emptiness will overcome any strong delusion in one's mind, as one will not be carried away with the mere appearance of phenomena. Thus, one will begin to see the real value of gaining the correct view.

The reason why the teachings and all great masters keep reminding us of the importance of the realisation of emptiness is that it is the main antidote for overcoming every delusion. When one has a profound understanding of emptiness, then there is no possibility of the delusions affecting us.

The auto-commentary continues:

Just as the venerable Matripa has said: 'The crux of the correct view is in the identification of appearance'.

This essential point relates to the earlier point that the correct identification of appearance relates to the identification of interdependent origination of all phenomena. When one has the correct understanding of interdependent origination of phenomena then one has obtained the crux of the realisation of the correct view of emptiness as well.

Kyiwo Tsang emphasises the same point: without having to resort to other factors, gaining a profound understanding from the appearance itself (i.e. within the very appearance of phenomena), seeing that because things are dependently arisen they cannot be inherently or independently existent, is the crux for gaining the correct understanding of the ultimate reality of phenomena. This also comes to the same point as understanding that as things are merely labelled and merely imputed they therefore lack true or independent existence. This was the point indicated in verse 37 of the root text:

37. 'If you can see whatever thoughts arise in your mind as a process of mental labelling, then the sphere of all things [dharmadhatu], the true supreme voidness, is dawning on you without any reliance on other forces of logic. In this state, when voidness has appeared [to your mind's perception], fixing your consciousness single-pointedly on that voidness, is truly a wonderful feat.'

The point being made here is that when it dawns upon you that things are merely labelled and merely imputed, then the understanding of voidness or lack of independent existence of all phenomena will dawn upon you. One should reflect deeply on the profound meaning of these passages and not take them lightly. What is being explained here is how one needs to use the very appearance of phenomena to understand that everything that appears is merely labelled and imputed by conception, which then directly contradicts the appearance of phenomena as being independently existent. If we don't scrutinise in this way then we normally fall victim to the usual appearance, as we totally believe that things exist from their own side in the way that they appear to us. And for as long as we apprehend that appearance then delusions arise unceasingly from that misapprehension. So, to use the very appearance of phenomena as a reason for things lacking independent existence is indeed a very profound and unique technique!!

To explain this further: rather than believing that things exist from their own side, inherently and independently as they appear to do, one needs to resort to the fact that they are merely labelled and mentally projected. We are actually projecting a label onto the bases, which is completely contradictory to the way they seemingly appear to exist. When we really begin to get a sense that what appears to us is nothing more than a mental projection, a label that we give from our side, rather than existing from the side of the object, then there is no way for delusions, such as attachment or anger and so forth in relation to that appearance, to arise in our mind. This is how we can begin to relate to the profundity and effectiveness of this presentation.

That, of course is not surprising, as the author, the Venerable Losang Cho-kyi Gyaltsen was in reality an enlightened being; in terms of his realisations and achievements he is revered as being the same as Lama Tsong Khapa. We can see how the Venerable Losang Cho-kyi Gyaltsen presents these teachings in such a profound way that it really becomes a very powerful

method to overcome our delusions. If we really consider the points being made here, we will find that it is actually advice that sinks right to the core of our heart, in that it shatters the view of our normal appearances. The point is that when we reflect upon the uniqueness of this presentation and analyse and really think about it, then we can definitely derive a very positive effect.

The auto-commentary then reads:

Leaving aside too much elaboration, in brief for us ordinary beings who are this-sider³, the very mode of appearance of mind and other phenomena is the appearance of the object of negation.

Referring to ordinary beings as this-siders implies that they are 'merely concerned with the affairs of this life'. Having explained these points earlier, the point being presented here should be clear. The clause 'the very mode of appearance of mind and other phenomena is the appearance of the object of negation', refers to the way how things appear to ordinary beings as being the object of negation, which is a faulty appearance.

The auto-commentary further reads:

Not grasping and apprehending that mode of appearance but rather affirming the mere negation of that appearance...

As explained here, one deals with overcoming the appearance of inherent or true existence by affirming the mere negation of that appearance, rather than grasping and apprehending at that apparently inherent mode of existence.

In earlier sessions we used the example of a vase to give a more detailed explanation of this point. When we are asked to identify a vase, we identify a vase that seems to exist independently and truly - there is no other way to refer to a vase other than as an independently and truly existent vase. When someone says 'bring me a vase', we immediately identify and refer to a truly and independently existent vase without any hesitation. The point here is that for as long as we grasp at that appearance and believe that that is the vase, we fall victim to that appearance, and rather than refuting it, we are actually affirming the object of negation. What we need to do is the exact opposite which, as mentioned here, is not to apprehend and grasp at that faulty appearance.

As we go through the remaining presentation of the text, the earlier explanations will dawn upon one, and it will make sense as it all begins to fall into place. The auto-commentary continues:

Arising from that meditative equipoise and looking into what is left after having refuted the object of negation, the merely labelled and merely imputed interdependent functionality of phenomena will dawn upon oneself. The yoga of alternating meditative equipoise with the state of post-meditative equipoise is adhered to in this way.

Then, having refuted the object of negation in the state of meditative equipoise, when one comes out of that meditative equipoise, and interacts with phenomena on conventional level again, then the merely labelled and merely imputed interdependent functionality of phenomena will dawn upon oneself, which will protect oneself from falling into the extreme of nihilism. So, in the state of post-meditative equipoise one is able to resort to the fact that though things don't exist inherently or truly, they still exist nominally or conventionally. This relates to the meaning of verse 42.

42. Then constantly nourishing your understanding [by meditating alternately on space-like voidness during formal meditation sessions and on mirage-like voidness during post-meditation periods]...

The point to emphasise here, is the need to constantly nourish your understanding by meditating alternately on space-like voidness during formal meditation sessions and on mirage-like voidness in the post-meditation period. Here 'alternately' refers to periodically changing from meditative equipoise to the post-meditative state. Rather than having to be in meditation for a long period and then a long break in the post-meditative state, it could be that one goes into meditative equipoise and comes out of it at will, many times during a day. As you come out of meditative equipoise, whatever understanding you have gained will enhance the mode of appearance in the post-meditative state. In this way a meditator can go back and forth between these two states, without falling victim to the inherent appearance of phenomena in the post-meditative state.

As the auto-commentary further presents:

Having understood the manner of practice in the state of meditative equipoise, as well as that of the post-meditative equipoise; i.e. when you see that the nature of all phenomena in samsara and nirvana are merely the negation of true existence, without separating from this, you engage in the state of meditative equipoise. In the post-meditative state, you meditate on the nature of conventionality as being a mere appearance, like an illusion.

The point being made here is similar to the points made earlier, which is that the more one relates to the interdependent origination of phenomena (or the cause and effect functionality of phenomena), the more the understanding of voidness of the emptiness of phenomena (or their lack inherent or intrinsic existence) is enhanced. Then the more one reflects upon the lack of inherent or true existence of phenomena (or the emptiness of phenomena) the more the understanding of the interdependent origination or the functionality of phenomena will be enhanced. At that point one gains a profound understanding of the reality of how things actually exist. The way in which the understanding of interdependent origination and emptiness enhance each other is re-emphasised again and again.

As the Kyiwo Tsang commentary further explains, alternating between the state of meditative equipoise and post-meditative state, and gaining familiarity with that practice will strengthen the conviction that while lacking interdependent or inherent existence, all phenomena are

³ The meaning of the literal translation of this-sider is ordinary beings who are only concerned with the affairs of this life. See the teaching 17 July 2001, for example. Another interpretation is that it refers to seeing only the side of cyclic existence and not being able to see freedom from cyclic existence (liberation and enlightenment). The main point, though, is that the word 'this-sider' implies ordinary beings.

established as being interdependent originations, (i.e. dependent on causes and conditions). Moreover their mode of existence is that they are merely labelled and merely imputed. When those understandings are applied in unison to all existence, then that is when one has derived the great benefit from the practice of alternating between the state of meditative equipoise and the post-meditative state.

The root text states:

42. ... Concerning this point Aryadeva has said,

43. *'Whichever watchman [mind understands the void nature] of one particular thing, that same watchman [mind should be applied for understanding the void nature] of all things. The way in which one particular thing has voidness as its true nature is the same way in which all things have voidness as their true nature.'*

The main point here is that when one realises the voidness or emptiness of one phenomenon, then without resorting to any other reasoning, and just by merely reflecting on another phenomenon with the same perception of the emptiness of the earlier object, one can immediately use the same reasoning to reflect upon the emptiness or voidness of that second (or any other) object. This point was also mentioned in earlier sessions. It was further clarified then that 'seeing the emptiness of one is seeing the emptiness of all' does not imply that the emptiness of all phenomena is the same. It doesn't imply that the emptiness of one phenomenon is the emptiness of all phenomena. Rather, it means that when one is able to realise the emptiness of one phenomena then without having to resort to any further reasoning, one can change the object and reflect upon that and be able to immediately perceive the emptiness of that second phenomenon as well.

With the techniques used in other meditations such as generating love and compassion and bodhichitta, we can see that the object of meditation changes from equanimity, to recognizing the kindness of sentient beings, developing great love and compassion and so forth. Whereas with the meditation on emptiness, one does not have to change the object of one's focus when analysing the ultimate mode of existence. Rather one uses the same object and the same mode of analysis to gain the understanding of the ultimate reality of the object. Then, as one goes further into analysing the mode of existence of that object, one comes to the final stage of refuting the object of negation in relation to that object. As the emptiness of that object dawns upon oneself, one is taken to the subtlest level of understanding the reality of that object. Thus the very technique of realising emptiness involves just scrutinising and analysing the same object on a deeper and subtler level. When one realises that for the one object, then when focused on other objects, the fact that this is the same mode of existence of all phenomena will dawn upon oneself.

2. THE MANNER OF REMOVING IMPEDIMENTS

Having presented the explanation of verse 43, the auto-commentary presents this qualm:

If asked, while in the state of meditative equipoise on emptiness, does interdependent phenomena appear as being merely imputed and labelled or not?

The Kyiwo Tsang commentary presents two of these doubts or qualms. These are not just hypothetical doubts but rather doubts that arise as the meditator analyses the nature of the reality of phenomena at increasing levels of subtlety. Hence they are referred to as impediments that need to be overcome in order to gain the correct view. The first doubt, which is also explicitly mentioned in the auto-commentary, is whether or not the conventional levels of phenomena appear as being merely imputed and labelled during the state of meditative equipoise. Do they appear as being merely imputed and labelled to the meditator? The Kyiwo Tsang commentary presents a second doubt: if they don't appear as being merely imputed and merely labelled, then do things appear as being totally non-existent to the meditator? These two doubts are quite profound doubts.

Thus, these impediments are described in the form of doubts. The teachings have explained that interdependent origination and emptiness are not contradictory but are complementary and should be understood in unison, so the doubt as to whether the meditator, single-pointedly focused on emptiness, perceives things as being merely labelled and imputed is feasible. If the interdependent origination of phenomena, don't appear to the meditator while they are in meditative equipoise, then the next doubt that arises is then in that case, do things appear as being entirely non-existent?

The auto-commentary says:

In response, the following verse is presented:

44. *Thus in your formal meditation session when you concentrate single-mindedly on voidness according to the proper methods, you will become convinced that all things in samsara and nirvana, whether validly existent or not, are devoid of the extreme of the mental fabrication that they have true independent existence*

The meaning of this verse eliminates these doubts or impediments. This same point was clarified in the *Madhyamaka* teachings. According to Kyiwo Tsang, things do not appear as existent to the wisdom realising emptiness. Thus the doubt arises as to whether phenomena are existent or not. To illustrate this we will use the mind as an example. The mind does not appear to the wisdom realising emptiness in meditative equipoise, but that does not mean that the mind does not exist. Conventionally of course the mind does exist. However for the being in meditative equipoise on emptiness, the non-appearance of the mind is the ultimate mode of existence of the mind. This is the point that was clarified in the *Madhyamaka* text.

These are important points to understand. For the wisdom realising emptiness in meditative equipoise, there is no conventional appearance, as there is no dualistic appearance. However, even though conventional phenomena do not appear to the wisdom realising emptiness, that does not mean that things do not exist. Kyiwo Tsang also gives an example of how, just because something doesn't exist conventionally to the

wisdom realising emptiness in meditative equipoise, that does not negate the general existence of conventional phenomena. He says that although our back does not exist in the front, that doesn't mean that the back does not exist at the same time that the front exists. Likewise, even though phenomena such as the mind do not exist for the wisdom realising emptiness in meditative equipoise, that does not negate its actual existence. So this explanation also removes the second doubt as to whether things do not exist at all.

The auto-commentary quotes Milarepa:

The Venerable Milarepa says:

In regard to the ultimate truth,
Let alone obstacles even the Buddhas don't exist,
Both meditator and object of meditation,
Grounds to be obtained, as well as,
Paths and realisations don't exist.
The resultant form and wisdom bodies don't exist.
Therefore, nirvana doesn't exist.
Bedsides being merely labelled by name and words,
The three realms as well as the entire universe,
Lack production, because they lack intrinsic establishment.
They are baseless and lack spontaneous birth,
Thus samsara doesn't exist even in name.
This is what dawns in the light of the ultimate.

If asked, in that case is karma and its effect and so forth non-existent? Just because it does not exist ultimately, that doesn't mean that it does not exist at all. Karma, its effects and so forth definitely do exist.

At this point the next verse is presented:

45. Moreover, when you arise from your meditation session and make further analysis of things, you will then be able to see the unmistakable operation of independent origination working merely on the fact that things exist only on the basis of mental labelling alone. In this way things will naturally appear to you as similar to dreams and hallucinations, like mirages and the reflection of the moon in water.

The auto-commentary quotes Milarepa again:

As presented, the Venerable Milarepa also says:
Goodness, if sentient beings don't exist,
From where did the buddhas of the three times originate from?
Without a cause there can not be a result,
In regards to conventional truth,
As the Buddha said,
Everything in samsara and nirvana do exist.
To perceive that which exists as functional,
And that which does not, as empty.
When these two are seen inseparable in one taste,
Without distinction between subject and object,
All is broadened in the state of unification.

Also elsewhere it has been stated:

The perfection of wisdom is unfathomable and inexpressible.

The great adept Khedrup Kyungpo also states:

All appearance will naturally subside like magical illusions and dreams.

As the auto-commentary then further explains:

One needs to be satisfied with 'merely labelled' and 'merely imputed' as the mode of existence of phenomena.

This is the same point that was explained earlier. To come to the wrong conclusion that things do not exist because they don't exist independently or inherently would be falling into the extreme of nihilism. Thus, one needs to understand and be satisfied with 'merely labelled' and 'merely imputed' as the mode of existence of phenomena. This was explained in detail earlier as well.

Then the auto-commentary quotes Nagarjuna:

As the great arya Nagarjuna states: 'Because tangible things are merely labelled, space is merely labelled too'. Therefore since the ultimate meaning of the mahamudra view asserted by the father and sons is said to be 'mere nominal imputed existence' this should be clearly understood and thus explained.

These points were also mentioned earlier. The ultimate meaning of the mahamudra view is the view of ultimate reality. Here 'asserted by the father' refers to Nagarjuna and sons refers to his main disciples, for example Aryadeva. The mode of existence is said to be 'mere nominal imputed existence', which is the main point that is to be understood. The Prasangika point of view is that the mode of existence of things is that they have a mere imputed existence. The auto-commentary then goes on to explain this with an example that is not too complicated to understand. However we can leave it for our next session. I think the upcoming explanations will be quite easy to follow as we have already covered the main points.

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Edited Version*

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Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇིགས་དགོ་ལྷན་ལྷན་གྱི་ཆེན་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

24 November 2009

Sitting in an upright, relaxed and comfortable posture generate the altruistic motivation, such as 'In order to benefit all sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'.

2.3. Conclusion¹

2. THE MANNER OF APPLYING THE BENEFITS AND REMOVING IMPEDIMENTS (CONT.)

One needs to be satisfied with 'merely labelled' and 'merely imputed' as the mode of existence of phenomena.

If asked, the ultimate meaning of the mahamudra view is that all phenomena are 'merely labelled' and 'merely nominated'. The specific point where we left off in the last session is where the auto-commentary reads:

Therefore since the ultimate meaning of mahamudra view asserted by the father and sons is said to be 'mere nominal imputed existence', this should be clearly understood and thus explained.

We have explained in detail of how things are merely labelled and imputed, and here another example is used to illustrate how things are merely imputed.

For example one must accept that pillars exist in a house with four pillars, because four pillars exist in it.

When we refer to a house with four pillars, then we have to accept that there are pillars in it, because of the very reference to the house as a 'house that has four pillars'. So we cannot deny the fact that there are pillars in the house - that is quite obvious. Each of the four pillars of that house is also a generic universal (or generality), which means that when we refer to the pillars of the house, that very notion of the pillars of the house serves as a generic universal of each of the four pillars. When we think about the pillars in the house, we are not thinking of each individual pillar, but rather we just have an image of pillars in the house, which is a generality.

As the text further explains:

However, if one searches for an instance of that generic substance of pillar, then (something other) than each of those four is not suitable to be an instance of that...

We accept that there is a generic universal of the four pillars in the house. However if we were to search for that generic universal pillar, then none of the four individual pillars could serve as an instance of that generic universal pillar.

... and the collection of those four is neither an instance of that. Also one cannot demonstrate an instance that is separate from each of those four or (that is separate from) their mere collection.

This is similar to the earlier explanation about the six senses and labelling the person. We have to accept there is a generic universal of the four pillars of the house, but if we were to search for it, we would find that none of the individual pillars is an instance of a generic universal pillar. However, if we search for a generic universal pillar other than the four pillars, we won't be able to find an instance that can serve as a generic universal of the pillars either.

As the commentary explains:

Therefore the generic substance of a pillar among those (four pillars) is merely imputed by name to be 'a pillar in addition to the four pillars'. Other than positing it as being merely imputed by name and being satisfied with that, it is said to be 'a merely nominal imputed existent' since it is not found when sought, and all dharmas (phenomena) are similar.

We have to accept that when we talk about the pillars of the house our valid perception perceives that there are four pillars. Thus when we refer to 'pillars', there is a generic universal of the four pillars in the house. However if we were to search within each individual pillar and ask 'is this the generic universal of the four pillars in the house?', then of course it is not. Neither are the individual pillars nor the collection of the four pillars in the house the generic universal of the pillar. So one cannot find a generic universal of the pillar in the house. However it does exist, and to assume that it does not exist would be to deny what is perceived by our valid perception. Thus, its existence is merely imputed and merely labelled, and this is the same for all phenomena. This vivid analogy can be applied to all existence; apart from being merely labelled and imputed you cannot find its intrinsic existence.

Student: Is the generic universal a perception or is it pointing to the actual pillar?

There is a difference between, say, vase in general and a particular vase. If we say 'vase' then that is a generality referring to all vases, whereas a golden vase or an earthen vase or a glass vase would be a 'particular' of a vase. When we talk of a 'person' then that is a generality - as people do exist. Whereas when we refer to an individual person, then that would be an instance of a particular person. Similarly with pillars; when we say 'pillars', then that is a generality, but if we talk about 'the pillar in that house' then that is a particular.

Actually, we must go a little bit beyond the mere literal explanation of this example. First of all, when we think about the pillars of a house, they seem to exist intrinsically in and of themselves, don't they? So, what is really being negated here is the pillar that we perceive as being intrinsically or inherently existent, and such a pillar doesn't exist. By understanding it in that way, one gains the complete and full meaning of this analogy. Thus, this is yet another analogy to illustrate that there is no inherent or intrinsic existence in any phenomenon. The pillars of the house do exist but their mode of existence is that they are merely nominated and labelled. This is the unique Prasangika presentation: all phenomena are merely imputed existences.

The crux of the Prasangika view is that things exist by being merely labelled and imputed. The term 'imputed existence' means that everything exists by mere label or conceptual imputation. This is the unique presentation of things existing as merely labelled and imputed phenomena, while at the same time performing their particular functions. Thus,

¹ Because of the use of two texts with different numbering systems it has been very difficult to keep track of them as the weeks have unfolded. They have, at best, been indicative.

positing the functionality of merely labelled and imputed phenomena is the crux of the Prasangika view point.

The auto-commentary eliminates a doubt which was also addressed earlier:

Now this doubt that should be eliminated exists and many earlier and later authors, who composed (treatises) related to this system, say that all awareness of ordinary beings is mistaken awareness and for that reason all that appears to the minds of ordinary beings appears to be inherently established. But those who assert a mode of appearance of the object of negation distinct from this mode of appearance of present (objects) hold true establishment in a plethora of ways.

The Svatantrika system asserts that whatever appears to perception of ordinary beings is mistaken. However while asserting that, they are reluctant to negate the very appearance of phenomena. As the auto-commentary explains 'those who assert a mode of appearance of the object of negation distinct from this mode of appearance of present (objects) hold true establishment in a plethora of ways'. The reason why they assert appearances in a 'plethora of ways' is because they are not able to establish things contrary to that appearance. For that reason they assert inherent existence.

As the auto-commentary further reads:

But since we cannot say that what appears to the mind of us ordinary beings is not established as it appears, there is a fault. In that way Svatantrika scholars assert that form and so on exist by the power of appearing to awareness unharmed (by valid assessment).

Scholars of the Svatantrika system 'assert that form and so on exist by the power of appearing to awareness unharmed by valid assessment'. Ultimate existence is established by the way of its appearance unharmed by valid assessment. If things were to appear in a manner contrary to that, then it could not be established as being existent phenomena. The Svatantrika posit that since the appearance of inherent existence or existing by their own characteristics and cannot be harmed by a valid assessment, they must exist in that way. So, the reason things have inherent existence is because they are unharmed by an awareness that can validly assess them.

The auto-commentary further reads:

The glorious Chandrakirti considers this method of formulating the object of negation to be excellent. However just as the five objects are not established as self-sufficient to the five sense awareness of a being who is a this-sider, they are mistaken awarenesses since those (objects) appear to be self-sufficient. But it should be understood that they are valid awareness from the perspective of the five objects appearing to be established by their characteristics, and for that reason they are posited as valid awareness establishing conventional (truth) and so on.

The Prasangika point of view is that the very appearance of inherent existence is the object of negation. Saying 'this method of formulating the object of negation to be excellent' points out that what the Svatantrika assert as being established as inherent existence is actually the very object of negation according to the Prasangika. The Svatantrika scholars posit, for example, that inherent existence of form is established because it appears to an awareness that can be validly assessed. As it can be validly assessed it is not to be negated. Whereas according to the

Prasangika, inherently existent form is to be negated i.e. that in itself is the very object of negation.

The auto-commentary continues:

Again some think that many have stated that the person is not negated, but the truly established person is negated, and then posit an entire person (fabricated) in equipoise. But toiling to negate the true establishment of a person made by mind is completely unacceptable because that would evince an extreme of permanence. [or eternalism]

Those who adhere to this assertion agree that there is an object of negation in relation to a person, but they do not attempt to negate the inherent appearance of the person. Rather they try to find another object of negation, which is, as explained here, missing the point. As emphasised many times over, the very appearance of the person as being inherently existent, is the object of negation, and this is the point which is being re-emphasised here.

The auto-commentary then concludes by stating:

There is much more to say on these points, however for fear of over-elaboration I shall end with this much.

3. THE MANNER OF ACTUALISING THE FINE PATH

This is the third subdivision from Kyiwo Tsang's commentary is actually in accordance with how it is presented in the auto-commentary which reads:

Having meditated in this way, now the manner of actualising the fine path which is free from the extremes of eternalism and nihilism is presented:

What is being established here is that having meditated on the mahamudra as explained earlier, one now comes to the part of actualising the 'fine path', which is free from both extremes of eternalism and nihilism.

The next verse of the root text reads:

46. When you have seen how the conventional existence of the appearance of things does not obscure their void nature, and how their void nature does not obstruct the operative or functional existence of their appearance, then you have realised the excellent path of the unified meaning of interdependent origination and voidness.

This is reiterating the points that were emphasised earlier; the fine point is the understanding of how interdependent origination and emptiness are supportive of each other. 'The appearance of things' refers to the conventional existence of phenomena. If the conventional existence of phenomena enhances the ultimate mode of existence - the voidness of phenomena - and if the voidness of phenomena enhances the conventional existence of phenomena, then one has actualised the 'fine path'.

The auto-commentary then quotes Lama Tsong Khapa's *Three Principles of the Path*:

On this point, the omniscient Je Tsong Khapa has said:

As long as the two, realisation of appearances - the infallibility of dependent arising -
And realisation of emptiness - the non-assertion [inherent existence],

Seem to be separate, there is still no realisation
Of the thought of Shakyamuni Buddha.

When [the two realisations exist] simultaneously
without alternation

And when, from only seeing dependent arising as infallible,

Definite knowledge destroys the mode of apprehension [of the conception of inherent existence],

The analysis of the view [of emptiness] is complete.²

The auto-commentary then quotes Chandrakirti:

Chandrakirti in his *Madhyamakavatara* says:

Likewise, all functioning phenomena, even though empty,

Arise out of emptiness.

The two truths don't exist inherently,

Therefore they aren't eternal or annihilated.

In the above verse, 'all functioning phenomena' refers to the conventional mode of existence of phenomena, their functioning and so forth. 'Even though they are empty, they arise out of emptiness' means that even though things don't exist inherently, they still function. That is the main point.

The second last line reads 'The two truths don't exist inherently', which means that because they don't exist inherently, they are free from being either internally existent or completely annihilated. This quote from Chandrakirti's text also elucidates the unique point of the Prasangika system where appearance negates the extreme of eternalism and voidness negates the extreme of nihilism. So this unique point of the Prasangika is being reiterated again. It is said that Lama Tsong Khapa regards these points as the crux of the Prasangika presentation.

My own teacher the late Khensur Urygen Tsetan used to check my understanding on this very point on a few occasions (in New Zealand, Sera and when he visited here), he would say 'would you explain the point of how appearance negates the extreme of eternalism and voidness negates the extreme of nihilism?' He was basically pointing out the importance of gaining a good understanding of these points.

Indeed when I used to see Khensur Rinpoche, there would be occasions where I would be with him for three to four hours on end, just in discussion. First he would say 'I will ask you a question' then in response to that I would also raise further questions, and we would have a debate. We went on for several hours in that way. Others waiting in line to see Rinpoche would be told 'Rinpoche is now busy with Geshe Doga and they seem to be having great fun in debating', and they would have to wait because Khensur Rinpoche was so involved in our discussion. At the end of our discussion Rinpoche would say 'we have had a good and meaningful time, haven't we?' In this way we spent a significant time just discussing the Dharma, which was very precious.

The auto-commentary then further quotes Nagarjuna:

Lord Nagarjuna also says:

Those who understand this emptiness of phenomena,

Yet (also) conform to the law of karma and its results,

That is more amazing than the amazing!

That is more wondrous than the wondrous!

This is referring to the unique presentation that the ultimate nature of emptiness (i.e. the emptiness of phenomena) does not negate the law of karma and its results. It is therefore (as explained here) 'more amazing than the amazing'. This means that it that it is more

amazing and wondrous than any other presentation. This is again similar to Lama Tsong Khapa's praise to Buddha Shakyamuni in *Praise to Interdependent Origination*. The text is composed in the unique way, praising Buddha Shakyamuni, not by referring particularly to the qualities of his body, speech and mind, but rather to his profound teachings on interdependent origination.

In the verse from Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom* that we recite at the beginning of the teaching, Nagarjuna praises Buddha Shakyamuni for propounding interdependent origination and emptiness.

The auto-commentary then presents the actualising of special insight in relation to mahamudra:

Thus, by mounting on the horse of calm abiding and upholding the techniques of mahamudra, whenever one obtains the meditative concentration focused on emptiness which is conjoined with the physical and mental pliancy and bliss derived from the power of analysis, at that point one has obtained the heat stage on the path of preparation.

Special insight is actually obtained at the 'heat stage on the path of preparation', which is the first stage on the path of preparation. In the first path, the path of accumulation, the being is focused single-pointedly on emptiness. As explained in the teachings, the point when the being focused single-pointedly on emptiness obtains physical and mental pliancy derived from their analysis occurs simultaneously with obtaining the heat stage of the path of preparation, and that is also when they obtain special insight in relation to focusing on emptiness. They have thus obtained the union of calm abiding and special insight.

Kyiwo Tsang further explains that all phenomena simultaneously have both the conventional mode of existence as well as the ultimate mode of existence. If we were to take the mind as an example, the negation of an inherent existent mind is the ultimate mode of existence of emptiness of the mind, while the mere luminosity of the mind is the conventional existence of the mind. Only the wisdom of an omniscient mind (an enlightened being) is able to simultaneously perceive both the ultimate and conventional mode of existence of any phenomenon. Specifically, awareness that perceives both conventional and ultimate realities simultaneously is only posited for the mental continuum of enlightened or omniscient beings.

As ordinary beings we are not able to perceive conventional and ultimate realities simultaneously, because of the obscurations in our mind. An enlightened mind, on the other hand, is completely free from all obscurations and defilements, and so there is no barrier that obscures the enlightened mind from seeing both conventional reality and ultimate reality simultaneously. That is also the reason why sentient beings are always the focus of enlightened beings' minds and compassion, as there are no barriers whatsoever for the enlightened minds to perceive all phenomena at all times.

What is being specifically explained here is that the ability to perceive conventional and ultimate reality simultaneously does not exist in the continuum of a sentient being's awareness. However an individual being can have both the experiential understanding of conventional reality and ultimate reality at the same time. This indicates that an arya being, for example, has gained the direct perception of emptiness, but may not be able to perceive conventional phenomena during meditative equipoise. But because they are acquainted with, and have the realisation of conventional

² This translation of verses 11 and 12 is that used by the FPMT, which differs from that used earlier.

phenomena, they have an understanding of conventional reality as well, so one person can have a profound understanding of both truths, but the awareness of one sentient being's mind cannot perceive them simultaneously. It is only a buddha's awareness, consciousness or mind that can see both truths directly at the same time.

Kyiwo Tsang also elaborates on the particular meaning of these lines from verse 46:

46 ...When you have seen how the conventional existence of the appearance of things does not obscure their void nature, and how their void nature does not obstruct the operative or functional existence of their appearance...

The more one acquaints oneself with the appearance of things, which is the interdependent or conventional reality of phenomena, the more it actually enhances (rather than obscures) the void or empty nature of the phenomena. Likewise, the more one is acquainted with the void or empty nature of phenomena, the more it also enhances (rather than obscures) the understanding of the conventional reality of phenomena or the interdependent origination of phenomena. Kyiwo Tsang commentary explains how this is possible for someone who has acquainted themselves with the correct understanding.

Of course the points explained here have already been explained many times. However what is specifically being elaborated here is the reason why the appearance of conventional existence does not obscure the void nature of phenomena, which is that understanding the conventional reality of phenomena helps to enhance rather than hinder the interdependent nature of phenomena. The more one actually relates to the actual appearance of the mode of conventional reality of phenomena the more it enhances the interdependent origination of the phenomena, and so the view of the inherent and independent existence of that phenomena is naturally eliminated. That is how understanding the nature of conventional existence enhances the void nature or the emptiness of phenomena.

Kyiwo Tsang goes on to further explain that the manner of actualising this 'fine path' lies within one's own mental continuum. When reflecting on the emptiness of one phenomenon enhances one's understanding of the lack of inherent existence of that one phenomenon, then one is also able to gain an understanding of the conventional reality of that phenomenon. When one is able to gain that profound understanding based on one object, and relates that to all other phenomena, then at that point one has gained the 'fine' meaning, or the subtle point of the path.

This unique point of the Prasangika presentation of the great Indian masters, such as Nagarjuna and his main followers such as Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, Chandrakirti and Shantideva, was elucidated even further by Lama Tsong Khapa in his great works. When one gains the profound understanding of these points, then one has actualised the fine path.

The auto-commentary next presents some assertions by some Kagyu masters as well as other traditions. These presentations may appear to contradict each other but are said to come to the same meaning. We need not however go into those details here. Having quoted those different masters, there is one who explains how mahamudra is divided into four parts, which is accepted here as well. In summary, leaving aside the individual presentations by different masters, we will just refer to what the author

Losang Cho-kyi Gyaltsan states at the end of these presentations, which reads:

The actions of highly realised beings are completely beyond the understanding of ordinary beings, and the faults built up by negative thought and words about them are extremely heavy. Therefore, I, Losang Cho-kyi Gyaltsan, appeal to everyone to leave aside the anger of partisan sectarianism. May everyone's mind give rise to pure appearances.

Cho-kyi Gyaltsan mentions here that although there may be different presentations, that is not a reason for we ordinary beings to immediately come to the conclusion that they are contradictory to each other and that some may be right and some wrong. To fall into that state would be falling into a danger of creating the heavy negative karma of partisan sectarianism. Thus, as Cho-kyi Gyaltsan himself says, we must leave aside such partisan sectarianism and develop the pure appearance; that would be the appropriate way to practise.

3. DEDICATING THE MERITS DERIVED FROM THE COMPOSITION

The final verse of the root text is:

47. Thus I, the meditator called Losang Cho-kyi Gyaltsan, who has heard many teachings, dedicate the merit gained from composing this mahamudra text for the quick attainment of enlightenment for all sentient beings by this excellent path. There is no way to gain peace for all living beings other than this.

This verse presents the completion of the composition as pledged, and dedicates the merits derived from the composition for all beings to gain victory over the two obscurations.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary gives a further elaboration of this verse. He explains that Losang Cho-kyi Gyaltsan's mention of his own name is not out of vanity, but is an assertion that he has heard the unmistakable teachings from his own masters in an unbroken lineage, and after having actualised it himself, he has composed the treatise. As he had pledged to do so at the beginning, it is also an indication that he has fulfilled that pledge of composition.

Having fulfilled his purpose, Cho-kyi Gyaltsan then dedicates the merits of the composition, indicating that relying on this presentation may serve as a cause for beings to reach the freedom from bondage, and emphasising that there is no other way to be free from cyclic existence without relying on the understanding of emptiness.

The concluding verses of the auto-commentary reads:

This supreme essence of an ocean of sutras and tantras,
The crux of all Indian and Tibetan scholars,
The path taken by all the noble adepts,
Is the teachings on mahamudra that shine like the sun at this time.

This is explaining that the 'supreme essence of an ocean of sutras and tantras' is like the essence of the milk that turns into cream and butter when we churn the milk. Similarly having related to these teachings of sutra and tantra, that which is seen to be the essence or crux of all past Indian and Tibetan scholars and the path that taken by all the noble adepts or practitioners, is the teaching on mahamudra that shines like the sun.

The auto-commentary further reads:

It is a joyous sanctuary providing rest,
For beings dragged by the sullied water of an ignorant
mind,
Who are placed in the fearsome person of samsara,
And are tormented by the three types of sufferings.

This is explaining how sentient beings are dragged into cyclic existence, using the analogy of water that is sullied with dirt and filth. Similarly through the ignorant mind, sentient beings are dragged into samsaric existence and thus experience various types of suffering. That which serves as a point of rest from all the suffering is this very teaching of the mahamudra.

The auto-commentary then continues:

That which serve as eyes for all beings to see the fine path,
The pith instructions of the great and noble beings,
The clarified and unmixed form of Mahamudra,
The precious mirror that reflects all appearance,
And that which severs the bindings of the eight worldly
concerns,
For many fortunate ones who strive to accomplish their
wishes,
It is their unfailing teacher instructing them on the fine path,
The collection of virtues amassed from endeavouring in this,
Like the opened petals of the cooling jasmine blossom,...

Just as eyes guide us to where we want to go, so too the mahamudra guides us to the ultimate state of liberation.

Here, 'the great and noble beings' can refer to the beings who, in the ultimate sense, have realised emptiness directly. But a more general interpretation of 'great and noble beings' would those who constantly engage in virtue and shun negative karma, in addition to those who endeavour to gain a clear understanding.

The analogy of the precious mirror that reflects all appearance indicates that just as a mirror reflects all beautiful forms, the mahamudra (being analogous to beautiful form) allows us to see the ultimate nature of all existence.

'It is their unfailing teacher instructing them on the fine path' refers to the mahamudra itself as being like a great teacher.

The 'cooling' in 'like the opened petals of the cooling jasmine blossom' is another metaphor for the moon³. When the moon comes out, the beautiful fragrant jasmine flower opens its petals, likewise mahamudra is that that helps us to open our mind, and to cool us from the misery of samsara.

Finally:

Whatever I have amassed from the supreme white
virtues,
I dedicate to the great enlightenment for the sake of
liberating all mother beings,
From the might of these virtues may all migrating
beings,
Fill the treasure vase of their minds unified with sutra
and tantra,
With the nectar of well illustrated mahamudra,
And may they be satiated with the great bliss of
unification.

Of course much more could be said clarifying and elaborating the points made in this conclusion, but we have run out time.

When we began the teaching on this text, I indicated that if I were to serve as a mere means to inspire you to read the book and refer to the commentaries, then it would serve some purpose. It was not my intention to give an elaborate, detailed and profound explanation of the text, rather it was to present explanations that would serve as a means to inspire you to further study this text.

You seem to have very joyfully and happily engaged in reading and study, and from my observation you also seem to have enjoyed the teaching as well. So it seems that my purpose in presenting this teaching has been achieved.

In brief, Dharma practice can be abbreviated into the saying 'If it makes others happy then it's the Dharma'. So if I have made you happy by presenting the teachings then that must have some virtue. Actually this very simple saying is quite profound in itself, because it also indicates that that the opposite is also true. If making others happy is the Dharma, then doing anything that annoys others and makes them unhappy must be the opposite of Dharma; thus negative karma or non-virtue is to be avoided.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
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Edited Version*

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³ Although jasmine is used here it actually refers to the kumunda flower, which is believed to blossom when the moon comes out.

DISCUSSION

Week: 1 (3 November 2009)

1.a) Give the next syllogism relating to things lacking inherent existence.[3]

b) Give Shantideva's examples in relation to the syllogism. [2]

2. The two examples are to be used to understand which point? [2]

3. Using the sprout as the example explain 'emptiness enhancing the understanding of interdependent origination' and 'interdependent origination enhancing the understanding of emptiness. [4]

Week: 2 (10 November 2009)

1.What does 'non-affirming negation' mean? [2]

2. What is one of the main points Geshe la emphasizes regularly when presenting the technique of meditation? [2]

4."In whatever virtue one practice one engages in. one must be able too apply these forms of dedication and in particular. To secure the three main factors." What are these three factors and what do they mean? [6]

Week: 3 (17 November 2009)

1. What are the six types of consciousness and their corresponding objects? [6]

2.How do we begin to relate to the profundity and effectiveness of this presentation? [4]

3.a) What point does verse 42 emphasize? [2]

b) Here what does 'alternately' refer to? [2]

4. Doubts or impediments arise as the meditator analyses the nature of the reality of phenomena at increasing levels of subtlety. The first doubt is whether or not the conventional levels of phenomena appear as being merely imputed and merely labeled during the state of meditative equipoise. Do they appear as being merely imputed and merely labeled to the meditator? The second doubt is that if they don't appear as being merely imputed and merely labeled, then do things appear as being totally non-existent to the meditator?

How are these doubts eliminated? [4]

Exam

Name:

Block:7

Mark:

Week: 6 (16 December 2009)

1.a) Give the next syllogism relating to things lacking inherent existence.[3]

b) Give Shantideva's examples in relation to the syllogism. [2]

2. The two examples are to be used to understand which point? [2]

3. Using the sprout as the example explain 'emptiness enhancing the understanding of interdependent origination' and 'interdependent origination enhancing the understanding of emptiness. [4]

4.What does 'non-affirming negation' mean? [2]

5. What is one of the main points Geshe la emphasizes regularly when presenting the technique of meditation? [2]

6. Doing a dedication involves dedicating ones past, present and future merits."In whatever virtuous practice one engages in, one must be able to apply these forms of dedication and in particular to secure the three main factors." What are these three factors and what do they mean? [6]

7. What are the six types of consciousness and their corresponding objects? [6]

8.How do we begin to relate to the profundity and effectiveness of this presentation? [4]

9.a) What point does verse 42 emphasize? [2]

b) Here what does 'alternately' refer to? [2]

10. Doubts or impediments arise as the meditator analyses the nature of the reality of phenomena at increasing levels of subtlety. The first doubt is whether or not the conventional levels of phenomena appear as being merely imputed and merely labeled during the state of meditative equipoise. Do they appear as being merely imputed and merely labeled to the meditator? The second doubt is that if they don't appear as being merely imputed and merely labeled, then do things appear as being totally non-existent to the meditator? How are these doubts eliminated? [4]