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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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Lama Tsong Khapa said that everyone is certain to die, and then when they die they're certain to fall into the lower realms. Therefore one should recognise that one needs to rely on refuge with a strong mind. By wholeheartedly taking refuge in the Three Jewels one has to then practise the precepts of refuge, which is the practise of watching one's karma - avoiding negative dark actions and practising white positive actions.

The key to not falling into the lower realms is to practise the law of cause and effect correctly, which means practising white karma correctly and avoiding the non-virtuous karma correctly.

When one dies one doesn't become non-existent, and since one doesn't become non-existent at the time of death that means that one continues after the death. If one continues after death then there are only two possibilities, either one goes up or one goes down.

So one either takes rebirth in a happy realm or one takes rebirth in a suffering realm. In order to take rebirth in a higher realm one has to practise the ten virtuous actions, and avoid the ten non-virtuous actions. If you look at it in some detail that is really quite a difficult practice. One may be able to stop the actions of killing, stealing, and adultery but there are also other non-virtues that are actually quite difficult to give up. Then, recognising that one is in a danger of falling into a lower state of existence at the time of death, one should wholeheartedly go for refuge.

Everyone has to go through the process of death and rebirth so while one has the opportunity to do so, it pays to make some preparations for death. These preparations include actually remembering death. Without remembering one's death then one doesn't become inspired to practise the Dharma. Even if one does become inspired to practise the Dharma, without remembering death then one procrastinates, putting off one's practice of the Dharma to a later time. Even if one doesn't procrastinate about one's practise of the Dharma, one doesn't practise purely, or one doesn't complete one's practice. So there are many faults that occur if one doesn't remember death. If one investigates one's mental continuum then one will find there is a very great need for purification and for Dharma practice. If one investigates one's own mind it seems as if the only thing that is present within the mind is non-virtue and afflictions.

There can be two types of people. There are those who say, 'I'm a Dharma practitioner'. This person regards themselves as a Dharma practitioner but actually what is primarily in their mind is afflictions and non-virtue, and

not very much fear regarding the creation of non-virtue. There are others who, even though they say, 'I am not a Dharma practitioner', have within their mind a natural fear regarding the creation of non-virtuous karma. They're naturally very fearful about the creation of non-virtue and don't want to create non-virtue. If one wants to avoid rebirth in the lower realms, then one has to be like this and avoid the accumulation of non-virtuous karma.

Out of the three refuges the actual refuge is the Dharma refuge. At one's present level, the actual Dharma refuge is probably not yet generated in our mind. As a substitute for the actual Dharma refuge however, one can take refuge in the potential for virtue in one's mind. Within the mind there is a potential for being able to abandon non-virtues, for example one can abandon the action of killing. One prevents rebirth in the lower realms and attains rebirth in the higher realm, by abandoning the action of killing. However even if one takes rebirth in a higher realm one wants to have good conditions like a good material conditions and so forth. So one needs to practise generosity.

Here then, the practice of abandoning killing, and the practice of practising generosity become one's Dharma refuge. The Buddha said, 'My Dharma is the Dharma of non-violence and non-aggression'. So if someone practises aggression and is harmful to others, then that is not Dharma practice. That's what the Buddha said. Even if one has the status of a Dharma practitioner and is regarded as such, one won't be actually be a Dharma practitioner without following what the Buddha said.

One needs to make use of the potential of one's mind and abandon the ten non-virtuous actions, for example, lessening and stopping the intention to harm others. If one doesn't do so then it also gives the religion that one is practising a bad name. If one is regarded as a Dharma practitioner by some but one doesn't stop the action of harming others then other people will think, 'Oh, the negative actions of that person come about through the Dharma that they practise.

They don't realise that those people are not actually practising the Dharma. This is a very important point that brings lots of confusion into the life of many people. As a practitioner one thinks one practises the Dharma, but at the same time all one does is constantly engage in harming others. That is really the fault of the individual, not of the religion, and that is the same for Buddhism as well as for any other type of religion.

The Buddhadharma can be narrowed down to two points, which are basically abandoning giving harm to others, and benefiting others as much as one can. Those are the two essential points that contain the whole of the Buddhadharma, as Lama Tsong Khapa said, and as you have been told over and over many times.

Engaging in that practice of abandoning giving harm to others, while giving as much benefit as possible to others, will also create an atmosphere of peace and happiness within one's own mind. Then one will become internally more comfortable and happier, and on that basis one can also practise the Dharma even better.

Non-harmfulness is the essential Buddhist practice. If one

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has strong faith in non-harmfulness and then practises non-harmfulness and compassion then that becomes Buddhist practice.

Of course there's also the other view of Buddhist practice, which is that by first going for refuge to the Buddha then one practices the Buddhadharma. That is one view of what constitutes Buddhist practice. However I think that if someone has a strong faith in the practice of non-harmfulness and on that basis they abandon giving harm to others, then regardless of what religion they profess, that becomes a Buddhist practice.

One needs to improve the potential within one's mind. By doing so, then one lessens more and more the harmful side within one's mind. If one goes around disturbing the minds of other people then also one's own mind will naturally be disturbed. It is not possible for one's own mind to remain calm and peaceful if one is engaged in disturbing the minds of others. So one has to be considerate of others, and one has to abandon giving harm and trouble to others. In such a way one's own mind will develop peace and happiness.

So one needs to slowly, slowly improve and increase one's positive potential and the positive aspects of one's mind. One has this potential for improvement, and for virtue, and for positive thinking and so forth, and this potential is like an inner friend, or a conducive condition or one's refuge. By applying these methods, and by viewing harmful and disturbing thoughts as one's enemy, then one improves and increases the virtuous and positive aspects within one's mind.

It is important that one constantly engages in the practice of purification and investigation, because it is always possible for the harmful side of the mind to arise. At the beginning one may investigate one's mind and decide to change and to purify one's mind but then if one doesn't continue to check up on and purify one's mind, then pride, competitiveness, jealousy and so forth arise again. One started to practice the Dharma but then one begins to feel, 'Oh, now I have become quite a good Dharma practitioner already', or one generates jealousy, or one generates a competitive attitude to others and so forth. One has to take care and to purify. By progressing slowly, slowly in this way then the mind will improve.

We have been talking about the benefits of teaching emptiness and receiving teachings on emptiness. Lama Tsong Khapa said that both the teacher and the student should possess the appropriate qualities, and have a good motivation. He is speaking first of all of the teacher having a good motivation for teaching the Dharma and the student also having a good motivation for listening to the Dharma. Then the teacher should teach the subject correctly, and the student should understand the subject correctly. If those conditions come together then there's great merit created both for the teacher, as well as for the disciple.

First of all, it is important that one generates a virtuous and a good motivation, and then one needs to understand the subject.

## THE SIXTH GROUND, 'MANIFEST'

Last time we reached sixth chapter, the sixth mind generation 'Manifest'. That chapter was subdivided into four main subdivisions, and third division had five subdivisions. Of those five subdivisions we have finished four, and now comes the fifth subdivision, which is the explanation of the suchness of dependent arising.

### 3. Explaining the Suchness of Dependent Arising

#### 3.5. The Way Suchness of Dependent Arising Is Explained

According to *Illumination*<sup>1</sup>, this has three subdivisions: how the ultimate meaning is explained through scripture; establishing the meaning of scripture through reasoning; explaining the divisions of the emptiness so established.

In *Mirror*<sup>2</sup> the first subdivision found in *Illumination*, 'how the ultimate meaning is explained through scripture', isn't present.

##### 3.5.1. How the Ultimate Meaning Is Explained Through Scripture<sup>3</sup>

Explaining the meaning of suchness through scripture again has two outlines: stating how suchness is explained through scripture; identifying what is discordant with knowing suchness.

##### 3.5.1.1. Stating How Suchness Is Explained Through Scripture

Which quote is used here? It is a quote from the *Sutra Of The Ten Bhūmis*.

It says,

*If the fifth ground bodhisattva enters the sixth ground they do so through entering the ten equalities of phenomena. Those ten are:*

1. the equality of all phenomena as signless,
2. the equality of all phenomena as lacking characteristic,
3. likewise the equality of not having generation,
4. of not being generated,
5. of being isolated,
6. of being eternally pure,
7. of lacking elaboration,
8. of lacking acceptance and of lacking rejection,
9. the equality of all phenomena being like an illusion, a dream, a shadow, an echo, the reflection of a moon on water, a reflection of form, and an emanation;
10. the equality of all phenomena not being the two, phenomena and non-phenomena.

*If one thus thoroughly realises the nature of all*

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

<sup>2</sup> HH the First Dalai Lama, Gyalwa Gedun Drub, *Mirror Clearly reflecting the Meaning of the Madhyamakavatara*.

<sup>3</sup> As it is based on *Illumination* this numbering will therefore vary a little from that distributed on page 2 of the *Mirror, Sixth Mind Generation* booklet.

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*phenomena one will subsequently attain the sixth bodhisattva ground Manifest through sharp and concordant forbearance.*

1. The first of the ten equalities is the equality of all phenomena as signless. The various types of conventional signs such as the different colours of yellow, blue, and so forth are all equally absent in the face of the arya's meditative equipoise. They equally don't appear to the arya's equipoise, and this absence of conventional phenomena to the arya's equipoise is emptiness.

2. The equality of all phenomena lacking characteristics. Even though conventionally they have various types of characteristics such as being impermanent and so forth, ultimately they all equally don't have any characteristics.

This is all just being gone through very briefly and later it will be elaborated upon more extensively.

3. The third characteristic that all phenomena equally lack generation means that in the future they won't be generated. So they lack a future generation.

4. The equality of all phenomena not being generated - they haven't been generated in the past and in the present.

5. The equality of isolation means the lack of inherent existence. So it refers to the equality of lacking inherent existence, or being isolated from inherent existence.

6. The quality of being eternally pure. Being eternally pure means phenomena are pure from the beginning, and that there has not been a time when phenomena didn't lack inherent existence. Sometimes one might get the idea that the lack of inherent existence is something that has to be first established, maybe through scripture, through quotations, or that it has to be something that is established through reasoning. One might then think, 'Oh, first phenomena were inherently existing, and then when one applied reasoning, all at once they started to lack inherent existence'. It is not like that. Phenomena are pure eternally, meaning they lack inherent existence from beginningless time.

7. The equality of lacking elaboration means the lack of conventional elaboration in the arya's meditative equipoise. So the absence of conventional elaboration within the arya's meditative equipoise is also emptiness.

8. The eighth equality is the equality of the lack of that which is to be accepted and the lack of that which is to be rejected or abandoned. This of course means there is nothing inherent to be accepted or rejected.

For example there are things that have to be accepted such as the Truth of the Path and the Truth of Cessation. So when it says, 'the equality of the lack of that which is to be accepted', it doesn't mean that that there's nothing that has to be accepted. Likewise when it talks about the absence of that which has to be rejected, there are plenty of things that have to be abandoned. In the first two Noble Truths we have different types of sufferings, and also the causes of suffering such as the different afflictions, and the different types of karma that were created through those afflictions and then the sufferings that follow those karmas. They are all things that have to be abandoned.

Again and again in different texts you will find statements saying, 'There is nothing to be accepted and there is nothing that has to be rejected'. What this means is that there's nothing inherent to be accepted, and that there is nothing inherent to be rejected.

9. The ninth equality refers to the equality of all phenomena lacking inherent existence. Even though here in the verse it refers to the equality of all phenomena being like an illusion, being like a dream, being like a shadow etc. etc., it doesn't mean that illusion, dream, and so forth are the same. What it means is that all phenomena are like an illusion, or are like a dream, and so forth. So the ninth equality is the equality of all phenomena lacking inherent existence.

10. The tenth equality is the equality of everything being neither of the two - functioning phenomena and non-functioning phenomena. This does not refer to just phenomena and non-phenomena, but to functioning phenomena and non-functioning phenomena.

Functioning phenomena and non-functioning phenomena refer to compounded phenomena and non-compounded phenomena. Generation means that something compounded is generated. If it has come about through the aggregation of causes and conditions, then it has been generated, and so it is a functioning phenomena. Likewise if something is non-compounded it hasn't been generated, which means it exists but it didn't come about through the aggregation of causes and conditions. So therefore it is a non-generated phenomena or a non-functioning phenomena.

The equality of generation and non-generation or functioning phenomena and non-functioning phenomena means that there is no inherent generation, and there's no inherent non-generation. There is generation and non-generation, but there's no inherent generation and no inherent non-generation.

That completes a definition of the ten equalities. There are different explanations of the ten equalities, one explanation follows the teaching of Asanga and another explanation follows the teaching of Nagarjuna. However the teaching of Asanga of the ten equalities relates the Mind-Only<sup>4</sup> point of view. The explanation that has just been given was according to the Prasangika point of view following the lineage of Nagarjuna.

Next time we will continue with the next outline which is identifying the opposite of suchness. This means identifying the object of negation. It's not an outline that is present in the root text but it is present in *Illumination*.

The text that we are studying is called *Entering the Middle Way*. In general the Middle Way refers to that which abides freely from the two extremes - the extreme of eternalism and the extreme of nihilism. That is what is called the Middle Way.

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<sup>4</sup> This refers to the four schools of tenets: Vaibashika, Sautrantika, Mind-Only, and Prasangika

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The middle or the centre is the middle between the two extremes - the extreme of eternalism and the extreme of nihilism. The middle way is when one doesn't fall into either of those two extremes.

The **extreme of eternalism** refers to the eternity of inherent existence, which means that things exist from their own side, not depending on the imputing mind. The mind that grasps at phenomena as existing from their own side, not depending on the imputing mind, is called the eternalistic view. This eternalistic view it is basically true grasping. However if one has true grasping that doesn't necessarily mean that one has fallen into the extreme of eternalism, because there are high-level bodhisattvas who still have true grasping within their continuum, but they haven't fallen into the extreme of eternalism.

To fall into the extreme of eternalism the person actually needs to accept that view. We previously talked about the different types of true grasping. Here it is actually the true grasping that is generated in the person's continuum through acceptance. The person has fallen to the extreme of eternalism when they accept true existence. Just having true grasping doesn't mean that the practitioner has fallen into the extreme of eternalism. The object of the view of eternalism is true existence or inherent existence, existence from its own side, and not being dependent on the mind.

The other extreme view is **view of nihilism**. Here the nihilism is a view of denial or negation. Negating or denying the existence of cause and effect, denying the existence of the Three Jewels and so forth would be called nihilism.

If one falls into either of those two extremes it is really like falling into an abyss. If one negates or denies the existence of cause and effect, if one denies the existence of the Three Jewels then it is really like falling into an abyss, because we'll fall into the abyss of the lower realms through our actions. Likewise if one falls into the extreme of eternalism one won't be able to attain pure wisdom. So, in order to be able to practice pure method and wisdom one has to take care not to fall into either of those two extremes.

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First generate the virtuous motivation of bodhicitta by thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings. For that purpose I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible.'

### 3.5.1. *The Way the Perfect Meaning Is Shown in the Scriptures (cont.)*

#### 3.5.1.1. *Stating How Suchness is Explained Through Scripture*

Last time we started with the outline talking about the way the perfect meaning is shown in the scriptures. Here it is important to note that it doesn't say that the perfect meaning is established through scriptures, but only that it is shown through scriptures. If it were *established* through scriptures then it wouldn't be a hidden phenomena<sup>1</sup>. If it were to be established, meaning proven, through scripture, then that would mean that emptiness is a very hidden phenomena.

Even though there are many quotes in the sutras of the Buddha that show emptiness, why does it specifically quote this part from the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* here? Well, the reason for that is because this part of the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* deals with how the sixth ground bodhisattva meditates on emptiness by way of meditating on the ten equalities.

#### 3.5.1.2. *Identifying What Is Discordant With Knowing Suchness*

Having first shown how emptiness is explained in the scriptures, Lama Tsong Khapa now goes about proving that emptiness, which is shown in the scriptures.

*In order to understand that phenomena lack true existence, one first needs to know what true existence means, and one also needs to know what grasping at true existence means.*

We always talk so much about emptiness, selflessness, the absence of inherent existence and the absence of true existence, but in order to understand it one needs to approach this very logically. In order to identify what the lack of true existence is, or what the lack of inherent existence is, one needs to know what true existence actually is, and what inherent existence actually is. In

order to arrive at the lack of true existence one needs to negate true existence. So in order to be able to negate true existence one needs to know what true existence means.

We arrive at the lack of true existence by negating true existence. In order to be able to negate true existence we first need to identify its mode of appearance. That is the logical way of approaching it.

Likewise in order to understand emptiness one needs to arrive at an understanding of the absence of inherent existence by negating inherent existence, and in order to be able to negate inherent existence one needs to know what inherent existence actually constitutes. One needs to know how phenomena would exist if they were to exist inherently, and the grasping at inherent existence.

Without understanding first what true existence means, and what the grasping of true existence means, one won't be able to arrive at the lack of true existence. In support of this *Illumination* gives this quotation from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, where it says,

*Without understanding the imputed object  
One won't apprehend its non-existence*

*Here the imputed dharma refers to the dharma that is imputed by true grasping, so it refers to true existence. Without knowing what true existence means one won't be able to apprehend the absence of it. Without knowing the imputed phenomena - true existence - one won't apprehend the absence of that imputed phenomena.*

This is a very important quote to keep in mind, because without identifying the object of negation then one won't be able to arrive at the concept of emptiness. It's like that with any type of negative phenomena. For example if one wants to identify the absence of 'vase', then in order to know whether vase is absent or not so as to arrive at an 'absence of vase', one first needs to know what object one is looking for. So first one has to identify very clearly what the vase is, and then one can go around looking in different places to see whether or not there is an absence of vase.

Without knowing 'vase' in the first place one cannot say whether or not there is an absence of vase. In order to be able to definitely say that there is no vase, there one needs to first know what a vase is. Likewise, in order to be able arrive at an understanding of the absence of true existence one needs to first know what true existence means. What would be the mode of true existence, and how would true existence exist?

**First** one contemplates the meaning and implications of true existence. How phenomena appear as true, and how the true grasping apprehends its object. Thus one first has to get a very clear image of the object of negation.

**Secondly**, having generated this very clear image of true existence one then has to clear to one's mind and engage in the ultimate analysis on emptiness, and arrive at an absence. One doesn't arrive at an absence of phenomena, but one arrives at the absence of the object that one has already understood. That is, one arrives at the absence of true existence. In such a way one is then protected from falling into the extreme of nihilism, or into the extreme of externalism.

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<sup>1</sup> **Manifest objects** are those that initially can be understood by an ordinary person through direct perception.

**Hidden objects** have to be understood initially by an ordinary person through a factual inferential cognisor.

**Very hidden phenomena** have to be understood initially by an ordinary person through a inferential cognisor based on belief.

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## Innate True Grasping and Intellectually Acquired True Grasping

The first line of that quote from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, 'without understanding the imputed object' refers to identifying the imputed object of true-grasping. This true-grasping isn't the intellectually acquired true grasping but it refers to the innate true grasping that is present in the heart of all sentient beings. Intellectually acquired true grasping cannot act as the root for cyclic existence, so therefore understanding the absence of its object would not cut the root of existence. In order to cut the root of existence, one needs to identify the object of the innate true grasping.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that identifying intellectually acquired true grasping and its object is not sufficient. One needs to concentrate on the innate true grasping that has been with oneself since beginningless times, and that exists uninfluenced by intellectually acquired views in the continuum of all sentient beings. Identifying that innate true grasping and the apprehended object of that innate true grasping is a very important point. If one doesn't identify innate true grasping and its object, then even though one will eliminate the object of negation, it won't harm in any way the innate true grasping that has come from beginningless lifetimes. Then all one's efforts will become completely meaningless.

Here of course it refers to the intellectually acquired true grasping, but sometimes I also say it can be applied to the intellectually acquired self-grasping that is present in the lower tenets, for example, the intellectually acquired view of a person being self-sufficient substantially-existent and so forth.

Understanding the absence of the apprehended object of such an intellectually acquired true grasping won't harm the innate true grasping in any way. One needs to identify the apprehended object, which is true existence or inherent existence, and then one needs to identify true grasping, which is the apprehender grasping at inherent existence. Then one needs to do an analytical meditation and arrive at the absence of the apprehended object, but one needs to do that in relation to oneself. There's not much point in doing an analytical meditation on emptiness by taking other people as one's object of meditation. One needs to do it in relation to oneself. Here Lama Tsong Khapa says that if one only meditates on the negation of external objects, then the benefit from one's meditation will be extremely limited. So one focuses on oneself and one's aggregates.

The same goes for other meditations such as meditation on impermanence. If one only reflects on impermanence in relation to external objects and one never relates impermanence to oneself, and if one just talks very smartly and cleverly about the meaning of impermanence without relating it to oneself, then the benefits for one will be extremely limited. The real benefit of meditation starts when one actually understands one's own impermanence.

Then *Illumination* says,

*If one can identify the object of negation according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika as well as according to the Prasangika Madhyamika point of view then one will*

*know the difference between those two very well.*

Therefore it goes on to explain those two views.

### The Object of Negation

There is a twofold division of the object of negation into the object of negation of the path, and the object of negation of analysis.

### Object of Negation of the Path

The object of negation of the path refers to afflicted obscurations, and obscurations to knowledge.

To free oneself from those two obscurations one has to generate the path within one's mental continuum. The only way one can free oneself from those two obscurations is by generating the path, therefore they're called the objects of negation of the path. **Afflicted obscurations** refers to afflictions and their seeds as we have mentioned before, and **obscurations to knowledge** refers to the mere imprints of the afflictions.

### Object of Negation of Analysis

The object of negation of analysis is the object of negation of ultimate analysis. Here we have the wrong grasping, and the object that is being apprehended.

Lama Tsong Khapa refers to true grasping and true existence, and both are the objects of negation by analysis, of ultimate analysis. Why? For example, Take the subject 'sprout': it follows that it lacks true existence, because it is dependent arising. Here, what is being directly negated is true existence. But implicitly, by negating true existence one also negates the grasping at true existence. By refuting the object 'true existence' through analysis, then also one implicitly refutes the grasping at that object - true grasping. That's why both true grasping, as well as the true existence, are the objects of negation of analysis. The main object of negation of analysis, of course, is true grasping.

In order to explain how one negates the grasping when one negates the object, Nagarjuna used the example of a man seeing an illusory woman. Just by seeing an illusory woman, which is an emanation of maybe the Buddha or someone else, and without knowing it is an illusion, he generates attachment in his continuum, and thinks, 'Oh, there is a woman over there'. When the person, for example the Buddha, who is doing the emanating recognises that, and then changes the emanation into something else, then that grasping stops because the apprehended object has been changed to something else. Since the object is not there anymore then the grasping also stops. That is just how the mind functions.

First of all you have the object, the illusory woman, then when that man sees the illusory woman a grasping is generated in his mind, 'Oh, there is a woman over there'. So there's a grasping that there's actually a woman there. Then if one changes the object of that grasping to something else then the grasping and the attachment that comes with the grasping will also disappear.

If one can understand the absence of the apprehended object of true grasping, then the true grasping will also disappear. This shows how the mind works. If one is in such a situation it can help to just switch the mind to another object. Just changing the object of the mind will

also change the mind itself. That's also useful to know and keep in mind. Of course, one knows that it's just an emanation not existing from its own side.

The next two outlines are: Identifying true grasping according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika point of view, and then Identifying true grasping according to the Prasangika Madhyamika tenet.

### 3.5.1.2.1. Identifying True Grasping According to the Svatantrika Madhyamika Tenet

This has three subdivisions: Identifying true existence and true grasping, Showing what is true and false according to worldly perception with the example of illusion; and Relating that example to the actual meaning.

#### 3.5.1.2.1.1. Identifying True Existence and True Grasping

##### True Existence

Here there's an identification of the objects of negation according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika point of view based on the text *The Appearance of Madhyamika* by Kamalashila. By showing explicitly how things exist conventionally, then it implicitly shows that ultimate existence is the object of negation.

As quoted in *Illumination, The Appearance of Madhyamika* says,

*The opposite of existing conventionally is that which obstructs the understanding of the lack of true existence.*

True grasping obstructs, or hides, the lack of true existence, and it also obstructs the understanding of true existence. That's why true grasping is called 'the all obscuring mind, the concealer' etc., conventional mind and so forth<sup>2</sup>. There are various translations for it.

In *The Appearance of Madhyamika* Kamalashila gives this quote from the sutras,

*Functioning phenomena are generated conventionally and don't exist ultimately. Whatever is mistaken regarding the lack of inherent existence is obscuring reality.*

The object of negation, according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika point of view, is existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness. This is the measure true existence and the mind that grasps at that is called true grasping. According to the Svatantrika, inherent existence exists is valid, but existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness, is the object of negation.

If we reflect on the measure of how something exists ultimately, and if we reverse that, then we arrive at how something exists conventionally. It is that which is posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

The object of negation, that which is not posited by an

uncontradicted awareness but which exists from its own side through its uncommon mode of existence, is non-existent. One can understand that something that is not posited by an uncontradicted awareness is not an existent phenomenon. So therefore everything exists in a reverse way. Everything exists as being posited by an uncontradicted awareness. So there's nothing that doesn't exist as being not posited by an uncontradicted awareness, or, everything is posited by an awareness that is not contradicted.

What is meant by 'an uncontradicted awareness' in, 'everything exists being posited by an uncontradicted awareness'? It means an awareness that is not contradicted by other valid cognisers. It means an awareness that is unmistaken to either the inherent existence of the appearance, or to the inherent existence of the determined object.

For example in relation to **non-conceptual awarenesses** such as the eye consciousness apprehending blue, the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is the mind that posits blue, and the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is unmistaken with regard to the inherent appearance of blue. There's the appearance of inherent blue to the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, and this appearance is a valid appearance. Therefore it is a non-conceptual awareness that is non-contradicted.

For **conceptual awarenesses**, such as the conceptual thought apprehending 'vase', the conceptual thought apprehending 'vase' is unmistaken with respect to the inherent existence of the determined object 'vase'. A self-characterised vase or inherently existent vase is the determined object of the conceptual thought apprehending 'vase'. Any other type of valid cogniser does not contradict it. Therefore, here the conceptual thought apprehending 'vase' is also an uncontradicted awareness.

Regardless of whether or not awareness is uncontradicted, there are two possibilities: it can be either a non-conceptual awareness or a conceptual awareness. A **non-conceptual awareness** has to be unmistaken with regards to the appearance of inherent existence. **Conceptual awarenesses** have to be unmistaken regarding the inherent existence of the determined object in order to be uncontradicted.

The Svatantrika Madhyamika say that even though on the one hand all phenomena are imputed by an uncontradicted awareness, (and now you know what an uncontradicted awareness is), on the other hand they still have an intrinsic existence. So there's still an inherent existence from the object's side. So the Svatantrika Madhyamika combine both phenomena - being posited by awareness, as well as existing from their own side. Whereas the Prasangika Madhyamika say that there is no existence from the object's side at all. Phenomena are merely posited by awareness, but there's no existence from the object's side at all. That is the difference between the Prasangika and Svatantrika system. Knowing the difference makes the object of negation according to the Prasangika system very clear.

The reason why the Svatantrika Madhyamika say that, even though phenomena are posited by an

<sup>2</sup> Etymology of conventional truth: The Tibetan word translated as 'conventional' actually means all obscuring. True grasping is the all-obscuring mind. Conventional truth is the truth appearing as true to the conventional or all obscuring mind, which is true grasping.

uncontradicted awareness they still have existence from their own side, is because the basis upon which the object is imputed has intrinsic existence. That is, it has existence from its own side, or inherent existence. So they say that at the time of analysis, at the time of ultimate analysis on the basis of imputation there is inherent existence to be found. That's why everything is inherently existent, why everything has intrinsic existence, or existence from its own side.

The Prasangika Madhyamika completely negate that, and they say that even on the basis of imputation, there is no inherent existence to be found at the time of analysis, and that one should be satisfied with that. Phenomena are completely imputed by the mind alone, meaning that from the side of the objects there's absolutely no existence. Phenomena are completely imputed only by the mind itself. There's no inherent existence to be found, even on the basis of imputation.

The Svatantrika Madhyamika say that on the basis of negation, inherent existence can be found at the time of analysis. Therefore, they say, there is something that can be found on everything at the time of analysis, so everything is inherently existent. Or, to use synonymous terms, they say that everything is inherently existent, existent from its own side, findable at the time of analysis, intrinsically existing and so forth.

This is a point that has to be contemplated. According to the Prasangika Madhyamika point of view, both Svatantrika Madhyamika as well as the Prasangika tenets say that the person is imputed in dependence upon the five aggregates.

The Prasangika say that, even though the person is imputed in dependence upon the basis of the aggregates, that doesn't mean that the aggregates have to exist from their own side. One could, however, query how anything can be imputed on aggregates that don't exist from their own side. First of all one can't even think of the 'I', or the self without thinking of the aggregates. So one has to always bring to mind the aggregates in order to bring to mind the 'I'. Thus one can comprehend that maybe the 'I' is labelled on the aggregates.

However the aggregates are also merely imputed, which is much more difficult to understand. The aggregates are a collection of parts that are also an imputation on a collection of parts, which can fulfil, and therefore conventionally function. So that is very difficult to comprehend. Saying that the basis of imputation also lacks true existence, or inherent existence, is the subtlety of the Prasangika system.

### **The Term 'Ultimate'**

Regarding the term ultimate there are two possibilities.

1. Ultimate can be applied to the three types of wisdom that understand emptiness, which are listening, contemplation, and meditation.
2. Ultimate is also applied to the object of negation, existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding.

### **Intellectually Acquired True Grasping**

There are different parts to the wisdom realising emptiness such as its ascertainment of emptiness, its ascertainment in general, its appearance and so forth. Its realisation of emptiness is completely unmixed with any conventional appearance. The absence of conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness is emptiness. The presence of conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness is true existence, the object of negation. The grasping at conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness is intellectually acquired true grasping.

The wisdom that realises emptiness is a wisdom that generally realises everything. The wisdom that realises emptiness understands all ultimate and conventional phenomena. Therefore one can't say that the absence of conventional appearance to the wisdom realising emptiness would be emptiness, because that wouldn't be correct. That is because conventional phenomena do appear to the wisdom that realises emptiness. So one has to narrow it down, so that within that part that realises emptiness there is no appearance of conventional existence. That absence of conventional appearance is emptiness, and the opposite, conventional appearance to that part that ascertains emptiness of the wisdom realising emptiness, is true existence, and grasping at that is the intellectually acquired true grasping. That's intellectually acquired true grasping and its object.

### **Innate True Grasping**

So then we have also the innate true grasping. The object of the innate true grasping is existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

Did all that go down?

The Svatantrika Madhyamika accept this combination that on the one hand phenomena are posited by the uncontradicted awareness, and on the other hand they also exist from their own side. Why? They exist, so they accept both of those features.

The Prasangika Madhyamika, however negate the second feature. They say that phenomena are only posited by the imputing mind, and nothing exists from its own side.

#### **3.5.1.2.1.2. Showing What Is True and False According to Worldly Perception with the Example of Illusion**

The second outline then starts to explain the Svatantrika point of view with the metaphor of an illusion. An illusion comes about both through the mind that apprehends it, as well as in dependence upon the basis of the illusion. There is a substantial basis for the illusion. By reflecting upon this metaphor of the illusion, then one will be able to comprehend the Svatantrika Madhyamika point of view more easily.

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

*Edited Version*

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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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18 March 2003

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Initially generate a virtuous motivation for listening to the teaching thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings and therefore I'm now going to listen this profound Dharma. I'm going to combine my practice of listening to the teaching with patience (particularly the patience that can bear the heat), thinking that by personally experiencing the problem of heat, may the suffering of heat by all sentient beings be eliminated.' If one looks at experiencing the suffering of heat from the point of view of purifying lots of karma, then it becomes beneficial.

We mentioned last time that the meaning of existing conventionally is to be posited by an uncontradicted awareness. The phenomenon that is posited by an uncontradicted awareness exists conventionally. Therefore the opposite, existing from its own side out of its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness, becomes the measure of ultimate existence, and is the subtle object of negation, the apprehended object of true grasping.

Such terms as ultimate existence, existence from its own side, existing perfectly, being naturally established and so forth are synonymous. For example, 'being naturally established' doesn't mean that phenomena don't have a nature. We say that the subtle object of negation will be naturally established, so 'naturally established' means to be established by nature. That the object of negation is non-existent doesn't mean that phenomena don't have a nature.

### 3.5.1.2.1.1.2. Explaining True and False Existence with the Metaphor of Illusion and the Illusionist

Now we come to the second outline, which is explaining true and false existence with the metaphor of illusion and the illusionist. The example of the illusion is praised as a metaphor for understanding the difference between being posited by awareness, and not being posited by awareness.

When a magician creates an illusion with a mantra, there are three types of person: first of all there is the magician himself, there is the person who is in the audience from the beginning, and then there is the person who comes late.

- ∞ The magician still has the appearance of the basis of the illusion as a horse or an elephant, but he doesn't believe in that appearance.
- ∞ The people who are in the audience from the beginning, whose eyes are affected by the mantric substance, will perceive the basis of the illusion as a horse or an elephant, and they will believe in that

appearance.

- ∞ For the late-comer, whose eyes aren't affected by the mantric substance, there will be neither the appearance of a horse or an elephant, and nor will there any belief in them.

To the eye-consciousness of the people whose eyes are affected by the mantric substance, the piece of wood that is the basis for the illusion really appears as a horse or an elephant to their minds. If you think about that, then you can get some idea of what it means to be posited by awareness. In this example we can understand the particular Svatantrika point of view, where phenomena are posited through awareness, but at the same time they exist inherently.

On the one side we have the eye that is affected by the mantric substance, and therefore the mistake arises in the eye-consciousness, which perceives the basis for the illusion as a horse or an elephant. At the same time the basis for the illusion really appears to be a horse or an elephant. So here we have the basis for the illusion that really appears mistakenly as a horse or elephant, and the eye-consciousness that really mistakenly apprehends that basis for the illusion as being a horse or an elephant.

This is the specific Svatantrika point of view. If one were to say that the appearance of the horse and the elephant would only come about through the tainted eye-consciousness, there wouldn't be any mistaken appearance from the side of the object. What would follow is that the object could appear to everyone as a horse or an elephant. The Svatantrika say that in order to exist, objects have to be posited by an uncontradicted awareness. Existing through being posited by an uncontradicted awareness negates existence not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

This uncontradicted awareness doesn't have to be a valid cogniser. A valid cogniser goes directly to the nature of the object, and understands the nature of the object, and in such a way counteracts the mistaken conceptions regarding the object. Here, however, the uncontradicted awareness is positing the object. So the existence is being posited by an uncontradicted awareness that negates existence not being posited by uncontradicted awareness.

As said by Lama Tsong Khapa in the *Essence of Eloquent Speech*, feelings, recognitions and so forth aren't posited by awareness imputing names, but they are posited by uncontradicted awareness. Here the meaning is that the Svatantrika Madhyamika reject the Prasangika point of view that phenomena are posited by the imputing awareness at a time of no-analysis and investigation. That is rejected, and instead phenomena are being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

When phenomena are posited by an uncontradicted awareness, then at the same time they inherently exist from their own side, as in the example of the illusionist. On the one side is the eye-consciousness affected by the mantric substance that mistakenly perceives a horse or an elephant, but at the same time there is the inherent appearance of the basis of the illusion, which is the piece of wood. Those two have to come together.

Regarding appearances, there are appearances that

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concord with the mode of abiding, and appearances that don't concord with the mode of abiding. Here for example, the appearance of a horse or an elephant doesn't concord with the mode of abiding, because there's actually only a piece of wood. But then there are other types of appearances where there's no discrepancy, or where a phenomenon appears and it is actually reality.

For the **magician** there is the appearance of the horse and elephant, because their eye consciousness is affected by the mantric substance, but there is no grasping at them. Why? Even though there is the appearance of a horse or elephant because their eye-consciousness is affected by the mantric substance, they know that it is only an illusion, therefore they don't grasp at it.

The **audience** has both the appearance of the horse or elephant, and they grasp at them as a horse or elephant as well. They have the appearance because their eye-consciousness is affected by the mantric substance, and they have the grasping because they don't know that it is just an illusion.

The **late-comer** has neither the appearance nor the grasping. Their eye-consciousness is not affected by the mantric substance, and therefore they don't have the appearance of a horse or elephant. Since there is no appearance, there is also no grasping, because the grasping depends on the appearance.

That is the metaphor of the illusion, and now the next outline applies it to the actual meaning.

### 3.5.1.2.1.1.3. Applying the Example to the Meaning

**A person who has realised emptiness conceptually** via a mental image is like the magician who has the appearance of true existence, but doesn't have the grasping.

Such a person, who has realised emptiness conceptually via a mental image has realised that phenomena don't exist the way they appear, and therefore even though phenomena appear to them as true, they don't grasp at that appearance. In that respect they are like the magician. Just as the magician's eye-consciousness is affected by the mantric substance, the mind of the person who has realised emptiness conceptually is affected by the imprints of true grasping. Because of the imprints of true grasping, phenomena appear to their mind as existing truly, but they don't grasp at that appearance.

**Ordinary individuals** who haven't realised emptiness have both the appearance of phenomena as existing truly, and they also grasp at that appearance. They have both because they are bound by true grasping. Why are they still bound by true grasping? It is because when they analyse whether or not a path and results are truly existent, then they haven't been able to go beyond true grasping. That is the meaning of being bound by true grasping.

The **meditative equipoise of an arya being** has neither the appearance of true existence nor a grasping at true existence. It is untainted by the imprints of true grasping. First of all there is no appearance of true existence to that meditative equipoise, and there is also no grasping because their wisdom is a wisdom realising emptiness.

I think that's enough regarding the object of negation according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika.

According to the Svatantrika Madhyamika what is the subtle object?

Student: True existence

Of course the object of negation according to the Svatantrika is true existence. The Svatantrika refute true existence, and they accept inherent existence, existence from its own side, natural existence and so forth. So true existence is the subtle object of negation. It is the object of negation of analysis. However if we don't really know the meaning of true existence, or how something would have to exist if it were truly existent, then we wouldn't be able to get a clear mental image of the object of negation, and then we wouldn't be able to realise emptiness. So one has to get a clear image of the object of negation, and one has to know the measure of what would make something truly existing.

What is the measure of whether something exists truly or not?

Student: Permanent and unchanging

You are going in the right direction but something has to be added to that. [student answer unclear] We just talked about it a minute ago, when we talked about the metaphor of the illusion. We talked about the object of negation quite a lot.

Student: An object existing from its own side out of its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

That's correct. Existing from its own side out of its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness is true existence and the grasping at that is true grasping.

### The Measure of Whether Something Exists Ultimately

What are the two measures of ultimate existence?

There are two ways to take the measure of whether something exists ultimately.

1. The first one is existing from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.
2. The second is the presence of conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness by the wisdom realising emptiness. The wisdom realising emptiness ascertains emptiness, and within that ascertainment of emptiness is conventional appearance. A conventional appearance to the ascertainment of emptiness within the wisdom realising emptiness would be the measure of ultimate existence, and the absence of conventional appearance to the ascertainment of emptiness within the wisdom realising emptiness would be the absence of ultimate existence.

To the wisdom realising emptiness there is conventional appearance, but there's no conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness by the wisdom realising emptiness. That is the difference.

Within the wisdom realising emptiness one has both establishment as well as ultimate. They are both there,

but there is no ultimate establishment, because there is no conventional appearance to the ascertainment of emptiness. In general, within the ascertainment of the wisdom realising emptiness there is conventional appearance, but within the ascertainment of emptiness there is no conventional appearance.

So did you understand that? That's an important point that needs to be understood well.

It's important to understand the way of the Svatantrika well, and also to understand the difference between the Prasangika and the Svatantrika. The Svatantrika say that phenomena are posited by an uncontradicted awareness, but at the same time they are inherently existent. While the Prasangika say that phenomena are merely labelled by conception, and being merely labelled by conception negates inherent existence. Being posited by an uncontradicted awareness negates true existence, but it doesn't negate inherent existence. It negates true existence, because if a phenomenon were to be posited through their own power from their own side, then they would be truly existent.

Both the Svatantrika and the Prasangika say that phenomena are merely labelled but there is a different meaning given to the 'merely' in each instance.

According to the Prasangika the 'merely' means that phenomena are merely labelled on the object, and that negates existence from the object's own side. Being merely labelled according to the Prasangika means being merely labelled on the object by conception. There's nothing else apart from that.

According to the Svatantrika the 'merely' negates phenomena existing only from their own side. The Svatantrika Madhyamika don't negate existence from its own side, but they negate existence only from its own side. So the 'merely labelled' according to the Svatantrika negates existence only from the object's side. That is the difference according to the Svatantrika and the Prasangika.

We are within the outline establishing emptiness through reasoning. The object of negation is explained initially, because without clearly identifying the object of negation one will not be able to understand emptiness. Now we move onto the object of negation according to the Prasangika.

### 3.5.1.2.2. Object of Negation According to the Prasangika

Even though the metaphor of the illusion can also be interpreted according to the Prasangika point of view, it is specifically recommended to explain the Svatantrika point of view. To explain the Prasangika Madhyamika point of view, the metaphor of the appearance of the rope as a snake is particularly recommended.

We can go slowly, slowly with this. There are two outlines here: the presentation of being posited through the power of conception and, easily understanding the reversal of that which is grasping at true existence.

#### 3.5.1.2.2.1. The Presentation of Being Posited Through the Power of Conception

Initially it gives a quote from the sutra requested by the

arya Upali where it says,

*Various pleasing objects such as flowers with open blossoms,  
Superior golden houses,  
There is no creator for those,  
They are posited by conception,  
The words are by conception.*

What it means is that without labelling the object there will be no object. That's how one has to think about it. In order to get the object one needs to label the object.

Regarding the metaphor of the rope appearing as a snake, the rope is of a colour similar to the colour of a snake, and is coiled up like a snake, and the light is poor. At that time the thought, 'This is a snake' is generated within the mind.

When that thought, 'This is a snake' has been generated then the person has labelled the rope as a snake. Even though the rope is labelled as a snake, there is no snake existing in any part of the rope. That is the meaning of the object existing differently from the way it appears to exist. So the rope is labelled as 'snake', but within the parts of the rope there's no snake to be found anywhere.

There is no snake to be found anywhere in any of the parts of the rope. Likewise in dependence upon the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, we generate the thought of 'I', and 'mine'. In dependence upon the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, then the thought 'mine' is generated. Here, what actually happens is that in dependence upon the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, one then labels 'I'.

We have the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, then in dependence upon the basis of imputation, thoughts of 'mine' and 'I' arises. That is when 'I' and 'mine' are labelled, but then when we look for that 'I' it cannot be found. When we look for that imputed 'I' within the six spheres, which are the four elements plus space and consciousness, then we cannot find the 'I' within any of those six spheres; we cannot find the 'I' within the collection of those six spheres; and also we cannot find the 'I' as being separate from that collection of the six spheres.

This is like the snake not being findable in any part of the rope. The thought, 'This is a snake' is generated when the snake is being labelled, is like the way the thought 'I' and 'mine' arises, when the 'I' and 'mine' is labelled. In the example when we look for the snake on the basis of the rope we cannot find the snake either in any of the parts, or as a collection, or separately. Likewise one cannot find the 'I' in any of the six spheres, one cannot find the 'I' in the collection of the six spheres, and one cannot find the 'I' separately from them. Separately from the six spheres one can't hope to find any 'I'. There is some slight difference between the example and the meaning, because the 'I' exists in actuality while the snake doesn't exist in actuality. The 'I' does exist in dependence upon the collection of the five aggregates, while the snake doesn't exist on the rope. So that is that difference between the metaphor and the meaning.

The meaning of 'being merely labelled by conception' is that at the time of non-investigation and no-analysis the

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object exists, but then when one investigates and looks for the object it cannot be found in any of the parts, it cannot be found within the collection of the parts, and it cannot be found separately from them, but it still exists.

That is the meaning of being merely labelled, existing only nominally, or existing only in name. At the time of no-analysis and non-investigation the object exists, for example, when one says, 'Now I'm going into the city', there is the self that is going into the city. Then if we actually start to investigate where that self exists, 'Is it in which one of the spheres? In which one of the aggregates is it? Is it one of them? Is it a collection? Does it exist separately?' then it cannot be found at the time of analysis. Likewise the bases of imputation, here the six spheres, also just exist in mere name nominally, and then on that one labels 'I'.

The difference between the Svatantrika and the Prasangika is that according to the Prasangika the basis of imputation also doesn't exist inherently. According to the Svatantrika the basis of imputation has to have inherent existence, while the Prasangika say that also the basis of imputation exists only nominally in mere name.

One has to really put this into practice. Just being able to intellectually give the meaning of 'true existence' is not of very much benefit. One has to actually contemplate and meditate on the meaning of the object of negation and then do the analytical meditation looking for the object of negation. By doing this analytical meditation looking for the object of negation then one arrives at the absence of the object of negation, and on the basis of having done the first step, having identified the object of negation, one also then understands that the grasping at phenomena as existing from their own side, true grasping, is a wrong awareness. Then we arrive at that point in the meditation where one understands that the object of negation is unfindable, and that grasping at the object of negation is a wrong awareness. Since it is a wrong awareness because its object is non-existent, it can be opposed by the wisdom that realises the absence of the apprehended object.

It is very difficult to comprehend that the basis of imputation also lacks inherent existence. However one has to put the meditation into practice, and not think, 'Oh this is something too difficult for me to understand'. When walking or sitting down then there is the thought, 'I'm sitting down', or 'I'm walking', and at that time there is the appearance of truly existent 'I'. At those times one needs to analyse how the 'I' appears, and then identify this appearance of a truly existent 'I'. This can only happen by applying the meditations to oneself. One can't counteract true grasping by reflecting on the selflessness of another person. One won't realise emptiness by trying to identify the object of negation in another person's continuum. One needs to relate it to oneself.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavataram*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པོ།

25 March 2003

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Generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and 'for that purpose I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

### 3.5.1.2.2. Identifying the Object of Negation According to the Prasangika Point of View

This is done by way of first showing how phenomena are merely labelled by conception, and then grasping at the reverse of that is true grasping.

#### 3.5.1.2.2.1. How Phenomena are Labelled by Conception

The metaphor of the misapprehension of the rope as a snake is used to show how phenomena are merely labelled by conception. Maybe you have had the experience of misapprehending something that wasn't a snake as a snake. There comes a time when, having focussed on the coiled rope that is in colours slightly similar to the colours of a snake, the thought arises within the person's mind, 'That is a snake'. At that time the mind has labelled the rope as 'snake'. But if one looks for it, the snake is not established in any of the parts of the rope, and neither is it present in the collection of the parts of the rope.

Likewise in dependence upon the basis of the five aggregates the thought 'I' arises and one has labelled 'I'. However if one looks at whether the 'I' can be found within any of the parts of the five aggregates, or within the collection of the five aggregates, then it is unfindable. If one thinks about it, the basis of imputation also cannot be found at the time of analysis. That is because it doesn't exist from its own side or inherently.

One important difference between the metaphor and the actual meaning is that even though the 'I' is labelled in dependence upon a basis it is able to perform a function. The snake is also merely labelled on a basis, but the snake is not able to perform any type of function. The snake is non-existent in reality, and so it is not able to perform any type of function on the basis of the rope, while the 'I' is able to perform all kinds of functions on the basis of the five aggregates. So on the basis of the five aggregates then the 'I' performs various types of functions and actually exists. That is the difference.

The 'I' cannot be found in the aggregates, in the collection of the aggregates, separately and so forth, but still conventionally there is the 'I' that is labelled in dependence on the basis of the aggregates, which can also perform various types of functions in dependence on the basis of the aggregates. We all know that the 'I' engages in the various types of actions, and so it is also the basis for accumulating karma and so forth. Apart from this mere 'I' there is no other example of the self. When we say that the mere 'I' is the only example of the self, the 'mere' eliminates any of the aggregates being the 'I'. The 'I' is merely labelled in dependence upon the aggregates, and from the side of the aggregates no 'I' exists in any way there. That's why one says that the 'I' exists in mere name.

#### 3.5.1.2.2.2. Showing How grasping at the Reverse of Merely Labelled by Conception is True Grasping

## Two Types of Self-Grasping

Grasping at phenomena as not being posited by the power of the mere label is true grasping. We said that phenomena are actually posited through the mere power of the label, and so grasping at the reverse, grasping at phenomena as not being posited through the power of the mere label or name, is true grasping.

Grasping at phenomena as not being posited through the power of the mere name is innate true grasping, innate grasping at ultimate existence, innate grasping at phenomena to be perfectly established, innate grasping at phenomena being established through their own entity, innate grasping at phenomena being inherently established, innate grasping at phenomena being naturally established, and so forth.

Of those six objects of grasping the first three, true existence, ultimate existence, and perfectly established existence are not accepted by the Svatantrika Madhyamika, but the last three, being established through its own identity, being inherently established, being naturally established are accepted by the Svatantrika Madhyamika.

Similarly to the Svatantrika Madhyamika, the term 'ultimate' is here also applied to the three wisdoms realising emptiness arising through listening, contemplation, and meditation. Also the two ways of positing ultimate existence are the same. The existence of conventional phenomena within the realisation of emptiness by the wisdom realising emptiness is regarded as ultimate existence. So if there was the presence of conventional phenomena within the realisation of emptiness by the wisdom realising emptiness, then that would be one measure of ultimate existence. Grasping at that is **intellectually acquired true grasping**. The second way of positing ultimate existence is the grasping at phenomena as not being posited through the force of name and label. Grasping at that is **innate true grasping**.

Having initially understood how the person is merely labelled in dependence upon the aggregates, then one can also apply that understanding of being merely labelled to other phenomena. Everything that exists is selfless. The self that all phenomena are empty of is existence not coming about through the power of the label. In other words existing from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being merely labelled by conception. Those two things are the same, and they are the measure of the self that is being refuted.

For example the person not posited through the power of the label would be the self of person. The person's emptiness of not being posited through the force of the label is the selflessness of person.

The object of negation is the same regardless of whether it is negated on the basis of the self, or on the basis of phenomena. In the Prasangika system there is no difference in subtlety between the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena. If the object of negation is negated on the basis of the self, then it is the **selflessness of person**. If existence not coming about through the force of the label is negated on the basis of phenomena then it is the **selflessness of phenomena**. So there is no difference in subtlety between selfless of person and selflessness of phenomena. However because of the difference of the basis, it is said that the selflessness of person is easier to realise than the selflessness of phenomena.

Concerning the object of negation *Illumination* gives a quote from Chandrakirti's commentary on the *Four Hundred Verses on Madhyamika* by Aryadeva. It says:

*What is called the self is the nature not depending upon other phenomena.*

*The absence of that is selflessness.*

So what is called the self is the nature of phenomena that

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doesn't exist in dependence upon something else, and the absence of that is selflessness.

Then it says:

*That selflessness by way of the division of phenomena and person is divided into the selflessness of phenomena and the selflessness of person.*

It goes on to say that through the division of phenomena and person then two selflessnesses are explained. These two selflessnesses are not differentiated through the object of negation but they are differentiated by the basis of negation.

We have now completed the two types of self-grasping.

### The View of the Transitory Collections

What is the view of the transitory collections? The view of the transitory collections is a particular type of self-grasping. The definition is, *an afflicted wisdom (discriminative awareness) grasping at the 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum to be inherently existing.*

The object of the innate view of the transitory collections needs to be 'I' or 'mine', and the thought 'I' or 'mine' needs to be generated naturally within the awareness. That thought is only generated with regard to oneself, and is not generated with regard to others.

The innate grasping at the person contained within the continuum of others as being inherently existing is innate self-grasping at person, but is not the innate view of the transitory collection. The view of the transitory collection has a twofold division into the view of the transitory collection thinking 'I', and the view of the transitory collection thinking 'mine'. Transitory collection refers to the aggregates.

Of the two views of the transitory collection, grasping at inherent 'I' and grasping at inherent 'mine', the grasping at inherent 'mine' is actually also a grasping at an inherent 'I'.

The view of the transitory collection grasping at 'mine' to inherently exist actually grasps at the mere 'mine' to inherently exist. It doesn't grasp at any of the examples that are 'mine', such as the aggregates, or the various sense powers, like the eye, ears, and so forth to inherently exist. That's not what is meant. What it means is that it grasps at the mere 'mine' to be inherently existing, which is also self-grasping at person because one can't grasp at 'mine' without grasping at 'I'. The word 'I' is expressively contained within the word 'mine'.

As it says here, the view of the transitory collection needs to be a natural thought that thinks 'I', which arises from the depth of one's mind. When we ask, 'What is the 'I'?' it is the object of that naturally arising thought thinking 'I' according to my opinion. The 'I' is the focal object of the naturally arising view of the transitory collections thinking 'I'. Within the mind there is a naturally arising thought that thinks 'I', and the object of that thought is the mere 'I'. It isn't a thought of 'Oh the body is the 'I'', or that various aspects of the mind such as the feelings and so forth are 'I', or that some limb of the body is 'I'. It's just the mere thought thinking 'I', and the object of that thought is the mere 'I'.

Then it goes onto say what was said before, that the view of the transitory collections having focussed on the 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum, grasps them as inherently existing. So the view of the transitory collections grasps at the 'I' and 'mine' within one's own continuum to be inherently existing, and it doesn't grasp at the various examples that are 'mine', such as the eyes, ears, aggregates, and so forth to be inherently existent.

It also adds in the definition that it is an afflicted wisdom. If you say that if it is wisdom there is a pervasion that it is virtue, then you have to make the thesis that afflicted wisdom is not wisdom. You can analyse whether or not there could be such a

thing as an afflicted wisdom.

It's important that you get a clear mental image of what grasping at the self of phenomena means, and what the grasping at the self of person means. For there you go to the particular self-grasping at person that it the view of the transitory collection.

If you have a good grasp at those subjects then that is a very good preliminary basis from which one then can understand the rest of the text.

So self-grasping is that which causes one to remain in cyclic existence.

As it says here from the *Seventy Stanzas on Emptiness*:

*Grasping at the functioning phenomena  
Generated from causes and conditions to be a perfectly  
existing,  
Was taught by the Buddha to be ignorance.  
From that the dependent twelve links arise.*

The grasping at phenomena to be ultimately established is the ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence. From that the ignorance that is the grasping at the self of person arises, and from that the dependent twelve links arise.

Grasping at the self of phenomena is regarded as the root of cyclic existence because it is like the seed of cyclic existence. From that arises the self-grasping at person, and then from that arise the twelve dependent links. Within the twelve dependent links the first link is the link of ignorance, which refers only to the self-grasping at person. One can't posit self-grasping at phenomena to be an integral part of that first link. The first link is always self-grasping at person.

In order to reverse that ignorance one needs to see that phenomena are empty of the way they are apprehended by that ignorance. Then one sees selflessness - suchness appears to the mind. In order to oppose the ignorance one needs to see that phenomena are empty of the way ignorance apprehends the object.

Ignorance apprehends the object to exist from its own side, to exist inherently. The self-grasping at a person grasps at the person as existing from its own side, not being merely labelled by conception. In order to oppose the ignorance that is the self-grasping at person, one needs to realise that the person is actually empty of the way it is being apprehended by that ignorance, which means that it is empty of existence from its own side. The person is empty of inherent existence not being labelled by conception.

As it says in the *Four Hundred Stanzas*:

*If one sees the selflessness of the object,  
The seeds of existence will cease*

Then it gives another quote from another part of the *Four Hundred Stanzas*:

*Therefore by destroying ignorance  
One will likewise destroy all afflictions.  
Because ignorance is the root of all afflictions,  
destroying the root ignorance will also destroy all  
afflictions.*

*If one sees the dependent arising  
Ignorance won't arise.*

*Because the object of negation is the opposite of  
dependent arising, it is independent existence,  
existence independent of something else.*

*By seeing dependent arising  
Ignorance won't arise.*

*Therefore one should concentrate all one's efforts only  
on that  
That is my advice.*

So is there a difference in the presentation in the object of negation according to the Svatantrika and according to the Prasangika? Did you see some difference there?

First of all what is the measure of the object of negation according to the Svatantrika?

Student: Existing from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

What is the measure of the object of negation according to the Prasangika?

Student: Existence from its own side not being merely labelled by conception.

If you think about those two objects of negation what is the difference? Is one subtler than the other? One can say that the difference in subtlety comes about because the Svatantrika assert inherent existence while the Prasangika refute inherent existence. So how does it come that one is subtler than the other?

Student: The Svatantrika say that there is still part of the base, projecting from the mind. The Prasangika say that it is all imputation.

The Svatantrika say that something exists from that side of the basis of imputation. If one thinks about that in conjunction, for example, with the self, the 'I', it does make certain sense to say that the basis upon which the 'I' is labelled exists from its own side. Saying that there is intrinsic existence in the basis on which the 'I' is labelled brings a certain comfort to mind. If one says that not only is the 'I' merely labelled on the basis, but also that the basis is merely labelled then that makes it subtler. Then the understanding becomes more refined and it is more difficult to arrive at that understanding. How something can be labelled on a basis that is also itself merely labelled?

Its very important then to reflect upon the difference between those two points of view, trying to understand the Svatantrika point of view, what the meaning of uncontradicted awareness is, what it means to be posited by an uncontradicted awareness and then trying to understand the difference between the points of view of the Svatantrika and the Prasangika.

Having identified the object of negation we then have the grasping at the object of negation. So how do the Svatantrika identify that grasping and how do the Prasangika identify that grasping at the object of negation?

In general of course you have true existence and both intellectually acquired grasping as well as innate grasping, but that's not what I mean here. The Svatantrika classify the grasping at true existence as self-grasping at phenomena, while for the Prasangika grasping at true existence can be either self-grasping at person or self-grasping at phenomena depending on the focal object. For the Svatantrika, having already previously identified the grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially-existent as self-grasping at person, the grasping at true existence is self-grasping at phenomena. That shouldn't be confused.

According to the Svatantrika there is a difference in subtlety between the self-grasping at person and self-grasping at phenomena, and in the Prasangika system there is no difference in subtlety.

We have identified the object of negation according to the Prasangika. What do the Prasangika call the grasping?

Student: View of the transitory collections

First of all the grasping is self-grasping. So then how many self-grasplings are there?

We have the two types of grasping, self-grasping at phenomena and self-grasping at person, and correspondingly we have the two types of selflessness, the selflessness of person and selflessness of phenomenon. What is the difference between the

self-grasping at person and the view of the transitory collection?

Student: Self-grasping can also refer to the grasping at person that is not one's own continuum, whereas the view of the transitory collections refers specifically to the 'I' in one's own continuum.

Is there a self-grasping at a person that takes for example the eye or the ear as its object?

Student: No, because the mere mind that is the observer of 'mine' is not the observer of the eye.

Very good. So do we also have the intellectually acquired self-grasping and the innate self-grasping?

Student: Intellectually acquired self-grasping is abandoned on the path of seeing.

Are you sure? What does it mean to be an intellectually acquired true grasping? The innate self-grasping is the self-grasping that arises naturally within the mental continuum. When we talk about intellectually acquired true grasping, how is it intellectually acquired?

Student: Through adherence to tenets.

This term *tenzin kuntak* that is translated as 'intellectually acquired true grasping' literally means the totally imputed self-grasping. (Here for this debate maybe we can say intellectually generated self-grasping<sup>1</sup>.) If it is true grasping that is intellectually generated by a tenet then is there a pervasion that it is intellectually generated true grasping?

If there's no pervasion then give an example where there's no pervasion. Give an example of something that is intellectually generated by a tenet, but which is not an intellectually generated true grasping.

What about the subject 'the grasping at the person to be a self-sufficient substantially-existent'? The grasping at the person to be a self-sufficient substantially-existent is classified by the lower tenets as self-grasping. In a way it is intellectually generated as self-grasping by the lower tenets. However it is not an actual intellectually generated self-grasping because there is also an innate grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially-existent. So if it is intellectually generated as self-grasping by a lower tenet then there's no pervasion that it is an intellectually generated self-grasping. Take the subject grasping at the person being a self-sufficient substantially-existent, it is intellectually generated as self-grasping by the lower tenet, but it is not an intellectually acquired or generated self-grasping.

What is the ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence?

Student: The initial ignorance that is the root of cyclic existence is the self-grasping at phenomena.

The sequence of the self-grasplings that are generated is that initially the self-grasping at phenomena is generated, and then only subsequently self-grasping at the person. When the selflessnesses are realised they are reversed, and the selflessness of person is easier to realise than the selflessness of phenomena. The sequence of generation of the self-grasplings is that first the self-grasping at phenomena is generated, and that is the root of cyclic existence, and then subsequently the self-grasping at person is generated.

If you think about it, the 'I' cannot appear to the mind without the aggregates first appearing to the mind. So the appearance of the 'I' or the self to the mind will always initially depend on the aggregates first appearing to the mind. The 'I' cannot appear to the mind without the aggregates appearing to the mind first. Therefore when the aggregates initially appear to the mind one grasps at those aggregates to exist truly, and that is the self-

<sup>1</sup> This debate seems to deal more with Tibetan semantics that fall away in the English translation.

grasping at phenomena that is initially generated. Subsequently the 'I' appears to the mind, and then one grasps at the 'I' to be inherently existing, and that is the self-grasping at person, which is has been generated second.

So did you understand that a little bit?

It is my understanding that because the aggregates appear first to the mind and the 'I' appears subsequently, that the grasping at the aggregates to exist truly is also generated first, and the grasping at the 'I' to exist truly is generated second. Of course one has to relate this to one's own aggregates and 'I', and one doesn't relate it to the grasping at another person's aggregates and 'I'. Of course for another person to appear to our mind the aggregates of that person also have to appear to our mind initially. Then in dependence upon that appearance of the aggregates the other person appears to our mind. Here one has to really relate the sequence to one's own aggregates and self.

One has to understand very well that the two self-grasplings are generated subsequent to one another. Initially the self-grasping at phenomena is generated, and then the self-grasping at person is generated, and there is no difference in subtlety between the two self-grasplings. It is easier to realise the selflessness of person than it is to realise the selflessness of phenomena. There is no difference in subtlety between the two types of selflessness, and the selflessness of person is easier to realise than the selflessness of phenomena.

That's very important, and so one has to contemplate it. Thinking about it will be very beneficial for one's mind.

#### Review

Who is the author of the *Introduction to the Middle Way, the Entering the Middle Way*.

Students: Chandrakirti.

Out of the two categories, words of the Buddha or commentary, which one is *Entering the Middle Way*?

Student: Commentary.

Into which of the three baskets of teachings does *Entering the Middle Way* fall?

Student: Abhidharma.

Why does it belong to the Abhidharma basket?

Student: Because the subject is wisdom.

The term basket is used here because a basket is a vessel of various things. The things that are the different teachings of the Buddha are contained within one particular vessel. So one can talk about a basket. When we talk about a basket of the inner teachings, then we talk about the basket of the teachings that oppose the root of cyclic existence - self-grasping. Here 'inner' refers to inner consciousness, so the teachings that oppose self-grasping are called the basket of the inner teachings.

This text *Entering the Middle Way* belongs to the Abhidharma basket. The central teaching is emptiness, but then that is surrounded by teachings on the whole path to enlightenment. Here we have the three dharmas of ordinary individuals, the ten bodhisattva grounds, the ten perfections, the union of calm abiding and special insight, the resultant buddha ground and so forth. So one shouldn't think that it is an empty vessel, as there are quite a few things in it.

Maybe the study group could join the debating class on Sunday. There you could debate what we have discussed over the last four Tuesdays. What do you think of that? I think it is very beneficial to debate those topics.

Next week is discussion group. Try to discuss properly and don't be timid or self-doubting, thinking, 'Oh my question is too stupid or not profound enough', or 'My answer is too stupid or not profound enough'. Don't be timid like that.

In the monastery when the monks debate there are those who

always sit very quietly and timidly, and never say anything'. They don't generate any wisdom, and they don't get anywhere. Those who get up and debate whatever comes into their mind become very knowledgeable over time, even though its not one hundred percent accurate initially. At the beginner's stage one should be very argumentative and give many 'no pervasions' and 'reason not established'. Of course when the monks become more senior then it's more appropriate to be less argumentative, but at the beginning it is actually the beneficial thing to do.

If one is always very forthright saying what one thinks, then one generates new insights and wisdom because two viewpoints collide, and then from that new insights are generated.

One can quite often find that those monks who just sit there and listen and never get up to debate will find that when they have to get up, at examination time they don't know how to debate. What they say will also be different from the Geshes, and they will clap their hands when they don't say anything, or then they will say things and 'not clap their hands, or they will first clap their hands and after stamp their feet.

When you are clapping your hands you shouldn't be just waving your hands around meaninglessly. The gesture with the left hand means closing the door to the three lower realms, and with the gesture with the right hands one should meditate on pulling sentient beings out from the lower realms into the higher realms. One should do those gestures with those intentions.

The objective of debating is to oppose ignorance and we have to refute that ignorance.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson*

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*Edited Version*

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## Tara Institute Study Group 2003 - 'Entering the Middle Way'

# DISCUSSION

BLOCK: 1

WEEK: 5

ASSIGNED: 1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2003

### 1\_1 (4<sup>th</sup> March)

1. Briefly review the general outline of Chandrakirti's text up to the 6<sup>th</sup> Chapter, and its relationship with the 'grounds' of a Bodhisattva.
2. Why did Lord Buddha teach four different schools? Discuss the purpose of the 'tenets' within teachings on emptiness.
3. The fourth ground becomes 'skilled' in the thirty-seven features of enlightenment and the fifth ground in the four noble truths. What is it that the sixth ground becomes skilled in? Why is the sixth ground Bodhisattva superior in qualities than the fourth and fifth ground Bodhisattvas?

### 1\_2 (11<sup>th</sup> March)

4. If the object of negation existed, what would it be like? Why is there such a big deal about identifying this object of negation?
5. The object of negation according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika is; '*existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.*' Describe what does each element mean, and what makes this definition unique to the Svatantrika.
6. How do the Svatantrikas get away with rejecting true existence, ultimate existence, and perfectly established existence, and at the same time accepting inherent existence, natural existence, and existence of its own identity?

### 1\_3 (18<sup>th</sup> March)

7. What is the object of negation for the Prasangikas? Is it an extension of the svatantrikas definition, does it oppose the svatantrikas view, or is it something different. Highlight the subtle difference in the way these two groups define true grasping.
8. What teaching is conveyed in the example of the magic show?

### 1\_4 (25<sup>th</sup> March)

9. Which of the two self-graspings is the root of samasara? In what sequence are they generated, and in what sequence are they realised?
10. The definition of the view of transitory collections is: "**an afflicted wisdom that grasps at the (mere) 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum to be inherently existing.**" Discuss the elements of this definition, and what each part eliminates.
11. According to the Prasangika, what is the difference in subtly between the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena? What is the difference in the Svatantrika group?

**Tara Institute Study Group 2003 - 'Entering the Middle Way'**

**EXAM**

NAME:

BLOCK: **1**

WEEK: **6**

ASSIGNED: **8<sup>TH</sup> APRIL 2003**

MARK:

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1. It is said that realizing the *ten equalities* are the means of advancing from the fifth to the sixth bodhisattva ground. They are said to be like synonyms in that by understanding the meaning of each of them, you arrive at the same outcome, i.e. understanding emptiness. Explain one of these 'equalities', and highlight a common misperception that it may address. [3]

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2. What are the two extremes the 'middle way' is free from? Provide an example for each. [4]

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3. What are two qualities that a student needs in order to benefit from a teaching on emptiness? [2]

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4. Why is it important to identify what is true existence in order to realise emptiness? [3]

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5. What is it that the Svatantrikas deny when they talk about emptiness? [3]

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6. Highlight the main difference between the Svatantrika and the Prasangika versions of emptiness? [4]

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7. Describe what type of being (ie. level of emptiness understanding) the audience member, the magician, and the latecomer represent in the example the magic show. [3]

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8. The Svatantrika and Prasangika schools both say that phenomena are merely labelled on the object. Explain the difference between their use of the word 'merely'. [4]

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9. What is similar between *a)* the process of thinking of a snake on the basis of a rope, and *b)* the process of thinking 'mine' and 'I' on the basis of the five aggregates? What is different? [5]

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10. How do the Prasangikas define the object of negation? [3]

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11. Is it true that, after analysis and investigation, the Prasangikas assert that nothing exists, not even the basis of imputation? Explain. [2]