
Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

6 March 2001

As is always the case cultivate a proper motivation for engaging in this spiritual practice. Generate the genuine bodhicitta mind, which is the genuine aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Then think that it is to fulfil this aspiration of enlightenment that you are undertaking this study of Dharma, and will follow it up by putting the Dharma into practice.

Having cultivated the right motivation consider the situation in which you now find yourself. It is the best situation to be in, because you have all the suitable conditions for living your life, and for achieving any goal that you have in mind for your life. What a dreadful waste if this good situation and these good conditions are not used to advantage to achieve your goal. No one could have better or more suitable conditions than these.

One thing which is very clear is that whatever actions we have undertaken in our life, whether they are very mundane ones or spiritual ones, our hope and goal is to bring happiness in our life, and to solve all the problems or sufferings of our life. If we look further and think about it we realise that it is not enough to achieve only a temporary happiness, or a temporary relief from our problems and suffering.

We should try to realise that when we talk in terms of Dharma practice we understand that we are trying to achieve a permanent or everlasting state of happiness, as well as looking for a permanent solution to all the problems in life. Just being satisfied with achieving some temporary or immediate happiness, and the elimination of immediate sufferings, does not accord with Dharma practice.

If we decide to try to remove suffering permanently the only possible way is to cut the root cause of the suffering. If the root is not cut and harmed, then no matter how much we try [the branches keep growing and we have to keep cutting them back.] We cannot rid ourselves of our suffering. When we consider the root cause of suffering, or in other words consider what we have to do to achieve the everlasting state of happiness, then we realise that we have to achieve the state of liberation. To do that we have to overcome the root cause of all our sufferings.

When we consider the root cause of suffering then it comes down to some form of ignorance within us with respect to our view of the way things exist, the nature of the reality of things. We can realise the importance of clearly identifying exactly what that ignorance is. We call that ignorance 'self-grasping', a wrong view of self-grasping. If we examine that further, we can recognise that there is an ignorance of self-grasping in a gross form and in a subtle form and so on.

For this years study group we shall study the schools of tenets. Studying this topic is essential in order to be able

recognise all the different levels of self-grasping, and conversely to realise the wisdom of selflessness, which is the direct antidote to this self-grasping. We are trying to see that the final antidote to the root cause of all our suffering of our life is the wisdom realising selflessness.

Without studying a topic such as the schools of tenets, and meditating on this topic on selflessness, we cannot gain the realisation of selflessness. We have to make the effort to personally realise and therefore gain this wisdom of selflessness. Otherwise no matter how much progress we make in any other practices that we do, such as the practice of developing love and compassion for all beings and developing bodhicitta mind, without that wisdom we are not counteracting the root cause of suffering. Therefore we have to try to understand that all the other practices, such as generating bodhicitta and compassion, are the method which supports us in gaining this wisdom of selflessness.

As we study the schools of tenets we should realise that everything that we study here is all for our practice. It is important to always try to relate our learning to our practice, and also to apply even the learning of these tenets to counteract the delusions within our mind. If we approach the study of tenets in the right way - in a practical way - then we can see that the more we learn about the various schools of tenets, then the more we develop the faith in the Lord Buddha's teachings, and in his qualities.

In our study of the schools of tenets we shall learn of the various views asserted by different schools of tenets, and we shall see the reason why there are so many views. These various views in the Buddhist teachings show how skilful and kind the Lord Buddha is in guiding other beings.

We might think why did the Lord Buddha not just reveal the one view, which accorded with his own view. In the schools of tenets you find that there are many views which were taught by the Lord Buddha, but which did not necessarily represent the Buddha's own ultimate thought. He presented those different views because that is what is necessary for the listeners. The Buddha taught according to the need, or the spiritual temperament, or the spiritual predispositions of his listeners. He did not impose on others what he believed to be the truth. Rather he taught what accorded with, and which best suited the mentality of his listeners.

Not only that, but we also find as we study these schools of tenets that where there is a difference between the lower school and the highest school of tenets, it is essential for us to gain an understanding of the view of the lower schools in order to gain a complete understanding of the school above that. So all that we learn in the lower school helps us to understand the view of the higher schools.

As said before our approach is not just to stimulate our intellectual knowledge, so as to be able to teach, or to be able to talk about more belief systems to others. What is most important in making progress in our study is to see what we have learned as something to be applied to our practice. For example in terms of philosophical view, they help us to understand the right view that we should

hold, and the wrong view that we should overcome.

In Tibetan the term for 'tenet' consists of the two syllables *drup ta*. '*Drup*' means to establish and '*ta*' means the conclusion or the end. So *drup ta* or tenet means something which you establish in your mind after subjecting it to a vigorous analysis. It is the examination of subject matter using your reasoning power and scriptural sources, so that after going through all this in your mind you come to a conclusion that you believe is the truth.

Take for example the view of selflessness of person, which is a realisation whereby you clearly ascertain that the true nature of the person is that it is empty of inherent existence. To gain that kind of view in our mind we have mentally completed an analysis applying reasoning and scriptural sources, so that finally we overcome the misconceptions concerning the way the self or the person exists.

Not only that, but after gaining this view, when you become so certain that what you have realised is a truth, then you hold that view as a truth and you also become the promoter, or a proponent of that view. Then you can be called a proponent of a school of tenets.

Likewise we can talk in terms of whether this glass is permanent or impermanent. If you ask this question of yourself and conclude that it is impermanent, then in your mind you have to have some reason for your conclusion. Say that our reasoning is that because it is subject to momentary changes we conclude that this glass is an impermanent phenomenon or we may conclude the opposite. We have counteracted the thought or perception of the glass as being permanent. With such a realisation you can be proponent of a school of tenet. If you start to assert to others the view you have gained then you become a proponent of a tenet.

We are trying to follow the example of the Lord Buddha. We know about the Lord Buddha's skill in teaching others, and also what he actually taught. We know that the motivation behind his teachings was always the thought of love and compassion for other beings. The actual teachings were always something that was suitable and truly beneficial to others. Not only did the Buddha have the right motivation, but also it is said that even his outer gestures that the other people saw were also very delightful and pleasant for them.

We can use this example of the Buddha as a model for our daily life. Let alone putting the entire teaching of the Lord Buddha into practice, we can see the importance of even such a small quality such as the Buddha's outer gesture, and the expression that he showed to other beings. Practising like this is something that can completely change us into a very good person. This means that we always try to be watchful of our manner of speech and our actions. We should always check the effect of our words, or actions before we go ahead with them. Are they beneficial or harmful? If it is something beneficial then we use that speech; otherwise we should try to prevent ourselves from uttering those words.

Likewise we should also be watchful of our facial expressions and body language when we are interacting with others. In a way the practices of pleasant and

correct behaviour that we learn from the Buddha's teaching are something which accord with the codes of good conduct in which societies and worldly people believe. When we follow such a practice it can naturally transform our personality into something very good-natured. Also as a direct result of our actions and the manners that we show to others, we shall find more happiness and joy in our life.

Next week we shall start on the actual teaching.

© *Tara Institute*

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic

Edited by Adair Bunnnett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Alan Molloy

Study Group - "Buddhist Tenets"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

13 March 2001

For a short time, do your own meditation on whatever topic you wish. Just remember that it is important to establish the proper motivation when you start your meditation.

At the beginning of a teaching or practice, you hear quite often of the need to establish, or correct, your motivation. If you have already cultivated the right motivation, then of course there is no need for you to correct your frame of mind. Otherwise however, you need to establish the right motivation to correct your frame of mind. This means checking to see if there are any faulty states of mind present. Correcting your motivation means replacing those faulty states with the proper motivation. The best motivation is the bodhicitta motivation. It is the true aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all beings. Then, whatever your practice, it is to fulfil that aspiration of enlightenment.

As to the teachings, we are going to learn about the schools of Tenets. We are using the text, *The Explanations of the Principles of Tenets*, by the famous master Jetsun Choskyi Gyaltsan, which is a very popular source for studying the Tenets. Choskyi Gyaltsan is a very highly renowned master, who was known to have had direct visions of Manjushri.

Paying Of Homage

This text begins by paying homage to Manjushri, saying "I pay homage to Manjushri who is inseparable from my protector Guru". The purpose of paying homage at the beginning of a text to a very special deity, or to all the gurus, or as here, to all the Gurus as being inseparable from Manjushri, is to successfully complete the given task. It is also to prevent any obstacles, as well as presenting the special deities, or the object of refuge, which the author sees necessary, or important, for the composition of the particular text.

Generally speaking, by paying homage to special deity, there is the benefit of increasing one's merit. When merit is increased, then it naturally becomes easier to achieve whatever one is aspiring to achieve. It is said in one text that, "A person with enough merit will fulfil all his or her wishes".

The root text says, "I pay homage to the Guru, and all my excellent gurus, who are inseparable in nature or entity from the guru protector, Manjushri." In Tibetan, the term for paying homage is *chag tsal*. There are various meanings for these two words, *chag* and *tsal*. *Chag* refers to all the qualities of the objects of refuge, and *tsal* carries the implication of your wish to possess those qualities (of the objects of refuge). However from the point of view of secret mantra, the syllable *chag* refers to the non-dual union of bliss and emptiness, and *tsal* indicates your desire to achieve that wisdom.

The Tibetan term for guru, is *lama*. A lama is a spiritual teacher who instructs and guides you, for instance, on the four Noble Truths, or on what to practise and on what to abandon.

In Tibetan, Manjushri is *Jampal yang*. *Jam* means gentle, *pal* means endowed with, and *yang* means melodious. So *Jampal yang* means one who is endowed with the qualities of gentleness, and melodiousness. Manjushri has the quality of gentleness, in the sense that he is completely free from the roughness of delusions, or any non-virtues or negativities. Manjushri is called melodious because he possesses the sixty melodious qualities of speech. The *pal* indicates that Manjushri is endowed with the perfect qualities of perfect wisdom. In the root text, the gurus are also given the title *Jetsun*. *Je* which means noble, or excellent or supreme being. *Jetsun*, also has the implication of a navigator who directs one to the state of

liberation.

The text then explains the meaning of the term, Schools of Tenet. In Tibetan the word for tenet is *drup-ta*. It refers to a perfect view which you have established in your mind. Before you establish that view as a perfect final view, you have to expel all the wrong views that you might already have, through some process of conceptual superimposition. Having removed all these superimposed, mistaken views from your mind by applying various reasonings, you establish the correct view in your mind. Therefore you are a proponent of a tenet.

A tenet then, refers to a view that you have established within your mind. A proponent of a tenet, is one who advocates *drup ta*, or a view in the mind as an established conclusion.

The tenet or a *drup ta* which you have established in your mind, and which you now advocate to other people is something that you have developed through the long process of reasoning. You may also depend upon scriptural sources, but the main cause for developing this view is as a result of this long path of reasoning. From your own side, you examine and enter into a lot of examination and analysis and finally, on completion of this examination and analysis, you come to some conclusion. Then you know that you can rely on that conclusion as being one that is perfect. It is the end of your search for the truth.

There can be two types of proponent of a tenet, or *drup ta*: an insider proponent of a tenet, and an outsider proponent of a tenet. In other words, a Buddhist, and a non-Buddhist proponent. Here we are studying the proponents of Buddhist tenets.

1. Definition Of Tenets¹

The first heading refers to the definition. A proponent of a Buddhist tenet can be defined as a person who is a proponent of a tenet, and who accepts the Three Jewels, and nothing else, as the perfect object of refuge.

The Three Jewels, or the three objects of Refuge are the refuge objects of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. A proponent of Buddhist tenets does not accept any other form of object as a perfect object of refuge. A Buddhist is one, who from the depth of their heart, goes for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

Of course, we do not have time enough to discuss the three objects of refuge, but you can learn about them from the lam rim text. Generally speaking the way you, as a Buddhist, go for refuge to the Three Jewels, is that you recognise the Buddha as the perfect spiritual guide showing the perfect path of what to adopt, and what to discard in your spiritual practice. As a Buddhist you recognise the Dharma as the actual means that frees beings from cyclic existence, or the lower realms. Dharma is the actual means of achieving liberation. The Sangha are the companions, who assist one along the path, and who you recognise as a perfect model to follow on the path.

Here it is important to know the difference between a Buddhist and one who is not Buddhist. The distinction between Buddhists and others, is that Buddhists take refuge in the Three Jewels from the depth of their hearts. If one does not take refuge in these Three Jewels, then one is not qualified to be called a Buddhist. Without taking refuge, whatever form of spiritual practice that you do is also not a Buddhist form of practice. In other words, if you are not Buddhist your practice is not associated with your faith in the Lord Buddha as teacher, and in his word and his perfect, reliable and unflinching teachings. Because we take refuge in the Buddha as a perfect teacher, and because his teaching of Dharma is a perfect form of practice, then whatever practice we do relates to the words of the Buddha. For example the Buddha teaches us about moral

¹ Editor: This text has three main sections:

1. Definition
 2. Classification
 3. The Meaning of each Classification.
-

ethics, giving, and patience. You follow these teachings out of your faith in them as they are the word of the Buddha. So whatever practice you do, becomes the practice of Buddhism.

The Four Seals

In some texts, it is said that a proponent of Buddhist tenets is one who asserts the four seals of Buddhism. This definition also gives a very good understanding of who can be called a proponent of Buddhist tenets. These four seals are:

1. All products are impermanent.
2. All contaminated phenomena are sufferings in nature
3. All phenomena are empty and selfless.
4. Nirvana is peace.

These four lines show the four fundamental views of Buddhist thought. Therefore there is very good reason to say that one who advocates these four views, or four seals, is a proponent of Buddhist tenets. We shall go through each of these four very briefly.

1. All products are impermanent. This a very deep view, and something we do not normally seriously believe. Normally we lack this view, but if we think carefully, it is a view we need to understand. What impermanent normally means is that things change, moment-by-moment. When we say that all products are impermanent, we are saying that the nature of all products is impermanence. That is their truth. It is a truth of all products that they are impermanent, as they are subject to momentary changes. Although this is a truth we have to recognise and seize upon, it also takes some thought and contemplation about all products in order to reach this conclusion.

2. All contaminated objects are suffering. What are contaminated things? The term basically refers to things which are the products of the karma and delusions of beings. As well as contaminated things, it also refers to those objects which serve as the basis for creating the cause of future suffering and misery. Therefore when we contemplate the fact that all contaminated objects are suffering, we do not necessarily have to think that they are suffering in terms of emotional pain, or something torturing you. Rather, suffering means it has the nature of suffering, in the sense that it can serve as the basis to create the cause of suffering, to cause some painful experience or emotions. It takes a lot of knowledge to fully understand such a view, and realise that all products are impermanent, and all contaminated things are suffering. This knowledge is gained by utilising one's reasoning mind, as well as knowledge of scriptural texts.

3. All phenomena are empty and selfless. To understand why all phenomena are empty of a self takes a lot of analysis about the way things exist. The nature of the final mode of existence of all things is one of the ultimate views of the Buddha.

4. Nirvana is peace. This shows the final state of liberation, which is the result of following the Buddhist path, and fully developing knowledge of the nature of the view of all phenomena.

If you study them, these four seals of Buddhist view incorporate the four Noble Truths. For example the view that contaminated things are suffering implicitly indicates the truth of suffering, and the cause of suffering. Saying nirvana is peace explicitly indicates the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path to cessation.

Special Qualities

The special qualities of the teacher of the Buddhist tenets are that the teacher is one who has completely exhausted all faults, but who is endowed with all the excellent qualities.

The Buddha is the founder of Buddhism. The special quality of his teachings is that they are based on the principles of non-harmfulness, non-violence, and the value of cultivating loving kindness and compassion towards all other living beings.

There are also the special qualities with regard to the philosophical view of Buddhist teachings. It is a view that is

free from the perception of all phenomena as a permanent, singular and independent self. This view of all things as being empty of permanent, singular and independent self, is something which is a view common to all the proponents of Buddhist tenets.

2. Classification

The presentation of the proponents of Buddhist tenets begins with four sub-headings, which are the four schools of tenets. The reason four schools of tenets evolved is because of the interpretations by the later followers of the three wheels of Dharma - the three discourses given by the Lord Buddha.

The Buddha turned the first wheel of Dharma in Varanasi. It was on the four Noble Truths. The first two schools of tenets, the Vaibashika and the Sautrantika, are based on that turning of the wheel. The Buddha's second wheel of teachings took place on Vulture's Peak near Bodgayha. Basing their teaching mainly on this discourse the two Middle Way schools were developed. From the third wheel of teachings, evolved the school of tenets called the Chittamantrin, or the Mind-Only school of tenet.

Before we go any further, it is important to make a distinction between calling someone a proponent of a Buddhist tenet *drup ta*, and a practitioner of a vehicle, which in Tibetan is *theg pa*. There are two vehicles, the lesser vehicle and the greater vehicle, the lesser and greater *theg pa*.

The point of differentiation between the philosophical views presented by the respective schools of tenet is the difference between the views of each. That is, the basis of presentation of the tenets concerns philosophical views.

We divide the vehicles into the lesser vehicle, and the greater vehicle. Furthermore, the greater vehicle can be subdivided into the perfection of wisdom vehicle, and the vehicle of the secret mantra. So the classification of vehicles into different categories is based on the presentations of the deeds or the actions of each vehicle, not philosophical views. We do not differentiate the vehicles in terms of different views that each one presents, as we do with the various schools of tenet.

So to sum up, of the four schools of tenets, the first two schools are the two lesser schools of tenets, and the other two are the two greater schools of Buddhist tenets. The distinction between the lesser and the greater schools is based upon the presentation of the view of selflessness.

The two lesser schools of tenets primarily present the view of selflessness only in terms of the person. Whereas the two higher schools presents the view of selflessness in terms of, and can be distinguished by, their presentation of the selflessness of other phenomena.

Tonight we raised some important preliminary points. From next week we shall go directly onto explaining the meaning of the text on tenets.

Meditating On The First Seal

In terms of spiritual practice, when you contemplate the impermanence of all products, it is good to think about this statement:

- The end result of meeting is departing,
- The end result of accumulating is losing,
- The end result of rising, is falling down,
- The end result of birth is death.

Meditation on this can help our mind to become familiar with this truth, so that when all these things happen in our own life, we can see them as the nature of our life - that it is the nature of life that after meeting someone, we depart from that person. Then we become more able to accept things as they are. In our life there is a lot of the pain and suffering, and we find it very hard to cope with this. If we do a meditation such as this in a right way, it is a practice which is directly related to our life, and what we experience in it. So therefore it has the effect of bringing some change to our life, in terms of bringing more

peace, happiness, and satisfaction to our life.

© *Tara Institute*

Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

གྲུབ་མཐའི་རྣམ་གཞག་བཤམ་པ།

20 March 2001

Try to establish the bodhicitta mind. Use that mind as your motivation for listening to this teaching, and also the practice which you do after your study.

In previous sessions we learnt the definitions of the Buddhist schools of tenets. We also learned how these Buddhist schools of tenets can be classified into four sub-schools, and why there are only four them. What follows is a presentation of each of these schools of tenets.

3. Explaining the Vaibashika¹ System

བྱེ་བྲག་སྐྱོ་བའི་ལུགས་བཤམ་པ།

The first Buddhist school of tenets is the Vaibashika or the Particularist school of tenets, which is a lesser vehicle school of tenets.

3.1 Definition

We begin this by defining who is to be regarded as a proponent of the Particularist school of tenets. A proponent of this lesser vehicle of Buddhist tenets is one who does not assert the self-cognising or self-knowing consciousness, but who asserts that external objects are truly existent or established. This definition says that as a proponent of this school you do not assert self-knowing consciousness. However you do assert that external objects have a truly established existence. First of all we need to explain the meaning of these terms.

Self-knowing consciousness is obviously referring to some form of consciousness. Generally speaking *consciousness* means something which is clear and knowing. There are two aspects to clear and knowing. *Objective clear and knowing consciousness* is clear and knowing with respect to the perceived object. We can also talk about the *clear and knowing* in terms of the *subjective* mind itself, that is in terms of the consciousness knowing itself.

We can also talk about consciousness in terms of what it experiences. It experiences the perceived object. This is what consciousness perceives. In addition the experience that the consciousness perceives can be consciousness itself, which is the subject.

The different schools of tenets talk about consciousness in terms of the meaning of clear and knowing with reference to both the object and the subject, which is consciousness itself. This school of Particularists does not assert this so-called self-knowing consciousness.

What this school does assert is the existence of external objects. What are *external objects*? It means, for instance, the existence of a partless particle which is something this school of Particularists accepts. According to this school, anything which has an established base must be truly established. *Truly established* means that things exist autonomously, from their own side.

3.2 Classification

དབྱེ་བ།

Next is the subdivisions of this school. As you find in the root

text there are three subdivisions:

1. The Kashmiri Advocates
2. The Aparantakas or Under the Sun Advocates
3. The Magadhas or Central Advocates

The main three are given here, but in some other texts there are up to 18 subdivisions of the Particularists.

3.3 Etymology

In the root text there are two main reasons given for the name of this school. The first one is that proponents of this school use the text called *The Great Detailed Exposition* as their main scriptural source.

The other reason for their name is because proponents of this school assert the view that the three times, (the past, present and future times), are all momentary parts that can be substantially established.

As said before the main text for this school is the so-called *The Great Detailed Exposition*² which is a collection of texts on metaphysics, or knowledge and contains the meaning of all seven collections of the seven treatises on knowledge. According to the followers of the Particularist school, these scriptures are regarded as the actual word of the Buddha, or sutras. They were composed mainly by an arhat called Tchak shog Nyes pas, although many other arhats contributed to it, so it is a combined work. However, all the other schools above this one like the next school, the Sautantrika or Sutra school, do not accept that these seven collections of these treatises as sutras.

3.4 Method Of Asserting the Objects

The next main heading is the method of asserting the view on the object.

Generally speaking *object* refers to an object of the mind. To the subjective mind it is an object for the eye sense consciousness. So there is the object, and the subject which is the eye sense-consciousness. Here the *view on the object* means an object that has an existence.

Definition of a ‘thing’

In the root text there is a definition of the term *thing*, which is any phenomena able to perform a function. It is synonymous with *existent thing*, *existence* and the *object of knowledge*, according to this school. This means that this school is saying that anything that exists, or has an established base is also a thing, or in Tibetan *ngo po* [dngos po].

Later we shall learn that according to the Sutra school of tenets the term ‘thing’ or *ngo po* only includes those phenomenon which are subject to impermanence, and which are dependent upon causes and conditions and so on. This Particularist school says that all phenomenon are things, that they are existent, and that they are objects of knowledge.

It is important that we try to understand the stand point or view of whatever particular school of tenet that we are studying. There are so many different terms, and each school of tenets has a different interpretation of their meaning.

Here for instance, the definition of this term ‘thing’ is “a phenomena capable of performing a function”. Generally all the other schools only use the term ‘thing’ for those phenomena which are impermanent, and which are a produced thing. Generally, they do not say that unproduced things like permanent objects are classified as things, because they say that they are not capable of performing a function.

However according to this school of Particularists a permanent thing, like for example, an uncompounded object, such as uncompounded space, is a thing. As such it is capable of performing a function. So what is its function? This school says that it performs the function of allowing the air to move and to

¹ The terms Vaibashika, Great Exposition and Particularist are synonyms for the same school. They are used interchangeably.

² The Mahavibhāsa.

exist. They are saying that without space things such as the air cannot exist.

If we talk in terms of an empty cup, we can fill that cup with liquid because there is a space in the cup. This is saying that space as a phenomena performs some function. All objects even permanent phenomena, and the functions that they perform are able to serve as an object of consciousness. They can serve as a basis for consciousness to arise. From the point of view of serving as the basis for consciousness, all permanent phenomena can be called a 'thing'.

Definition of Existence

In studying the various tenets of Buddhist philosophy it is important to try to familiarise yourself with the various terms that are used, and the definitions of those terms that you find in the root text. The root text says that all phenomenon are existent. What is the definition of existence? Generally *existence* is defined as a phenomena which is established by a prime or valid cognition.

Valid or prime cognition refers to a valid mind which cognises an object. Whether something is existent or non-existent is a matter of whether that thing is an established truth to this valid or prime cognition. Of course to understand that we need to know what prime cognition means. Prime cognition is a mind which is new, and incontrovertible. These definitions of valid cognition now explain that if something is established by this prime cognition then it is a truth - it exists.

Prime cognition means a mind which is incontrovertible, in the sense that whatever object cognised by that mind exists in reality, in truth. In Tibetan valid cognition is *tshe ma*. We sometimes attach that term to a person, so we call the Lord Buddha a valid person, as in *tshe ma kye bo*. He is a valid person because whatever he said accords with reality, it accords with the truth.

Earlier when defining 'thing' we came across this term 'object of knowledge'. In Tibetan this is '*she ja*', and it is also quite a common term referring to existence, or to phenomena, or objects. An *object of knowledge* is a phenomena which is a suitable object of awareness for the mind.

We are going through these definitions very quickly here, but try to familiarise yourself with their meaning.

3.4.1 Types of Things

Having given the definition of a thing the root text refers to two types of things - permanent things and impermanent things.

3.4.1.1 Permanent and Impermanent

3.4.1.1.1 Permanent things In the root text the examples of permanent things are un compounded space and the two types of cessation - analytical cessation and non-analytical cessation.

Uncompounded space is a state which is a mere absence of obstruction and contact. The fact that you can move your hand freely in the space in front of you is because there is uncompounded space there. Aeroplanes are able to fly through the sky because they are unobstructed. When the plane passes through cloud formations there may be some experience of turbulence, because of contact within the cloud, whereas space is unobstructive and free of contact.

Analytical cessation refers to the state of cessation of having abandoned all the contaminated afflictions. When you achieve that analytical state of cessation, then whatever things you have abandoned you have permanently eliminated. The reason 'analytical cessation' is used is because it is the qualities which you attain through the force of analytical wisdom. Through this force you explore, for example, the wisdom realising the four Noble Truths. Through the force of thoroughly observing and analysing this truth, you can permanently eradicate afflictive emotions. That state of cessation is a permanent separation from the object of its abandonment.

Non-analytical cessation is also a state of cessation, but it is the state where although the object of abandonment is prevented from arising, it is not yet abandoned. Even though the object of abandonment no longer arises it is not yet completely abandoned, in the sense of not having been uprooted. Such a cessation is a non-analytical cessation because achieving it does not depend upon the type of analytical wisdom which you need to gain analytical cessation.

3.4.1.1.2 Impermanent Things This refers to any phenomena or object which is produced in the sense that it arises from its cause. Similarly then, any phenomena which is created is also something which is subject to a cause. Impermanent phenomena change from moment to moment.

3.4.1.2 Conventional and Ultimate Truth

The root text further classifies 'things' into two in terms of the two types of truth, conventional and ultimate truth. You might have heard in teaching that the two truths are the basis whereas method and wisdom are the path and the result are the two types of body, the Dharmakaya and Rupakaya. We shall discuss the two truths in the next teaching.

Before we finish I would like you to list the four seals of Buddhism:

1. All products are impermanent
2. All contaminated phenomena are suffering
3. All phenomena are empty/selfless
4. Nirvana is peace

When we engage in the study of Buddhist tenets or even when we engage in Buddhist practice, how much we progress and the knowledge we acquire is all a matter of our knowledge and practice of these four seals of Buddhism.

In terms of practice, if you develop a good awareness of the first seal, that all products are impermanent, then in your daily experience whatever things you perceive, or experience, or with which you come into contact you will have an awareness that the nature of things is impermanent. For example the nature of this glass is impermanent. If your awareness of this is always sustained, and if by accident the glass fell and broke into pieces you will see that as a demonstration of the impermanent nature of the glass and nothing else. It will not be a sudden major shock, or a sudden cause of dissatisfaction, or disappointment to the mind.

An awareness of impermanence with respect to all things, even those things which we cherish so much and to which we are so attached, can help us to reduce the amount of dissatisfaction we undergo when we are separated from, or lose those objects.

Of course in practice it is not always something very easy to stop worrying. However we can find an awareness of impermanence to be really effective in minimising the pain and suffering which results from such situations.

With the second seal that all contaminated phenomena are suffering, recall what Lama Tsong Khapa said that when he compared this samsaric life with the useless husks which we send in the air as chaff. Samsaric, worldly things are very appealing, and seemingly having some sort of meaning and essence. However in reality no matter how long we experience them we cannot find that meaning for which we are always looking. Quite often they have the opposite effect: the suffering that we experience is often the result of these samsaric things.

The third seal that all phenomena are empty and selfless is about gaining a realisation of selflessness. By gaining that realisation we are counteracting the ignorant self-grasping which is the root cause of the unending round of suffering that we undergo.

Of course 'nirvana is peace' shows the fruit or result which we can reach by gaining the wisdom of selflessness.

27 March 2001

Try to cultivate the proper motivation of wanting to achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Think that 'it is to fulfil this wish for enlightenment for all beings that I am listening to these teachings and I am determined to put them into practice'.

Before undertaking any action we should always try to make sure that we cultivate the correct motivation for undertaking that action. Then whatever actions we do throughout the day will be infused with the right motivation. If the motivation is something very wonderful and positive, then all the actions that follow become very positive and beneficial. Integrating our spiritual practice, and what we have learned about the Dharma, into our daily life means doing such things as trying to develop the habit of always trying to check one's mind before going ahead with implementing any action. Then every action that we do is very worthwhile, and so therefore our whole life becomes very worthwhile.

In the last teachings we discussed the definition of 'thing' which is something which performs a function.

3.4.1.2 The Two Truths

One way of subdividing all functioning things is into two truths - conventional truth and ultimate truth.

3.4.1.2.1 Conventional Truth

The root text first gives the definition of a conventional truth. [The Vaibashika's say] that a *conventional truth* is any phenomena which when physically destroyed, or mentally divided into its parts, the mind which apprehending that object is annihilated.

Examples of conventional truth

To understand the meaning of this definition of a conventional truth, consider whether this glass is a conventional or an ultimate truth. Can any of you give an explanation as to why they think this glass is a conventional truth?

As Ross Moore [one of the students in the class] has just explained, this glass is a conventional truth. According to the definition, a conventional truth is any object or phenomena which can be physically destroyed, as it would be if we dropped this glass onto the ground and it broke into pieces, or if we hit it with a hammer and smashed it into pieces, and as soon as that glass is physically destroyed, then we no longer have any thought of the glass. At the same time that the glass is destroyed, the thought of that glass in any mind apprehending it is also annihilated.

It is the same with any other object. Take one single whole page of a specific length. When you tear that paper into many pieces that single page of the paper will be gone, and no longer exist. At the same time the apprehending mind no longer has a thought of that single page, so it is a conventional truth. Likewise with a rosary of beads, if we remove all the beads from it then there is no longer a rosary, and no thought of it.

The text also gives the example of a piece of cloth. If we destroy it in the sense of physically separating every one of its threads, then the fabric will be completely destroyed. So we cannot have a thought of that fabric, because it has been physically destroyed.

If you mentally divide an object into pieces, then you no longer have a thought of the original object. You have annihilated the thought of the original object.

3.4.1.2.2 Ultimate Truth

conventional truth is any phenomena which when physically destroyed, or mentally divided into its parts, the mind which apprehending that object is cancelled. Next we consider ultimate truth, which is in fact the opposite to conventional truth. The definition of *ultimate truth* is any phenomena which when physically destroyed or mentally divided into pieces, does not cease to exist to the mind which apprehends the thought of that object.

Any phenomena must be either a conventional or an ultimate truth. It cannot be both because the definitions of each are the direct opposite of each other.

The *examples for ultimate truth* as given in the text include the directionally partless particle. The Vaibashika school assert that a partless particle is an ultimate truth in the sense that being directionally partless, it is not something we can destroy with a hammer; it is not something which is physically destructible. Furthermore, even mentally it is not possible for it to be divided into parts.

The other example is a kind of partless consciousness, a temporary partless moment of consciousness. For the same reason as for the partless particle, this form of partless consciousness also can not be destroyed, or mentally divided into parts. Another obvious example of an ultimate truth is uncompounded space.

A *directionally partless particle*, cannot be destroyed by using any equipment such as a hammer. Because it cannot be destroyed it fulfils that element of the definition of ultimate truth. Nor can it be mentally divided into parts because it has no parts.

When we talk of a *temporary partless moment of consciousness*. There is Of course no need to mention that consciousness cannot be destroyed physically. The reason why it cannot be mentally divided into parts is because by definition the Vaibashika assert that a partless moment of consciousness is a consciousness which exists without such

momentary parts.

For the sake of argument let us say that consciousness is a continuum of certain moments, like say, five moments. Here, consciousness consists of those five moments. So for that particular consciousness there is no consciousness apart from those five moments. In such a case we can mentally divide that consciousness, because mentally we can think of each of those five moments. If we then separate those moments there is no consciousness, so we cannot have the thought of consciousness.

However here, when we say 'partless moment of consciousness', we are talking of an existent consciousness not having any momentary parts, and which therefore cannot be mentally divided into parts.

The root text says that this school also asserts that the three times, the past, present and future, are a substantial entity. This means that they are saying that in the case of a pot, it exists in the past moment of that pot, and likewise it exists in the future moment of the pot.

3.5 Method of Asserting Object Possessors

The next heading in the text deals with object possessors, which is the subject. This is elaborated in terms of three types of object possessors:

3.5.1 A person

3.5.2 Consciousness

3.5.3 The terminology [used to describe the subjects]

3.5.1 The person as Object Possessor

Within the Vaibashika school the proponents of the various sub-schools all have a different answer when asked to define the term *person*. Some say that 'person' refers to all the five mental and psycho-physical aggregates. Others say 'person' refers to just the mind of a person. Yet others say that it refers to the mere collection of all the five aggregates. There are others who say that it refers to the mental consciousness of the person.

If we say that a person refers to the collection of five aggregates, then we need to know the name of those five aggregates. Can someone name them?

We come across these *five aggregates* of form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness very often in the teachings. In the teaching of secret mantra, these five can be manifested into five primordial Buddhas.

There has been much study of these five aggregates, including the *reasons for the order in which we list these five aggregates*. The usual order, as we said always, starts with form, then feeling and so on. Two different reasons are given for this order. One reason concerns the subtlety and the grossness of these five aggregates and the other reason relates to these five serving as a cause to stimulate mental afflictions.

In terms of the *causal order* of stimulating mental afflictions, it says that of the five, all beings have had the strong desire to

observe and perceive the aggregate of form since beginningless time. So that is why form is first.

Of the five aggregates our experience of form is the strongest one, and it is the initial one. Following our initial strong experience of perceiving a form, we perceive it as either something that is beautiful or ugly, or that as something appealing or not appealing. Depending on the initial experience of form to our senses, and to our perceptions, we generate feelings of pain, pleasure and so on.

Then, from the feeling that we experience in relation to our perception of form we generate discrimination. We can have a wrong sense of discrimination in relation to that object, which in turn induces delusions like strong desire or hatred. These mental afflictions are the compositional factors. Next on the list is consciousness. As a result of mental afflictions like desire or hatred, a mental consciousness arises which acts as a motivation, or a driving force, resulting in the undertaking of some action. So in terms of the order in which we develop afflictive emotions or afflicted phenomena this order from form to consciousness is the right order.

3.5.2 Consciousness as the Object Possessor

The next type of object possessor is consciousness. Here we are just going very briefly into this topic. All *consciousness* can be divided, into either a Valid Cogniser¹ or a Non-Valid Cogniser.

The *valid cogniser* can be further subdivided into Valid Direct Perception and Valid Inference.

3.5.2.1 *Valid direct perception* can be further divided into:

3.5.2.1.1 Valid Direct Sense Perceptions

3.5.2.1.2 Valid Mental Perception

3.5.2.1.3 Yogic Direct Perception

3.5.2.1.1 Valid Direct Sense Perceptions

One of the distinctive assertions of the Vaibashika is that they assert that the *valid direct sense perception* is not necessarily a consciousness. The example they give of something which is a valid cogniser but not a consciousness is the eye-sense power.

This school argues that a sense power like the eye-sense power is a very subtle eye organ. It says that the eye-sense power is one kind of form which actually visually perceives things. This school argues that if this eye-sense power does not perceive the visual object, then the eye-sense consciousness will not be able to visually perceive the object. That is because between the eye-sense consciousness and the visual object there is this eye-sense power. It is something like the wall of this building which is an obstruction that prevents our eye-sense consciousness from seeing anything outside of this room from within.

This school is saying that if this subtle form,

the eye-sense power, is also an obstruction then the eye-sense consciousness will not be able to perceive its objects. However, this eye-sense power actually sees the same object, and therefore it is not obstructing the eye-sense consciousness. So it cognises or perceives its object. However because the eye-sense power is a form it is not consciousness. Therefore this eye-sense power is a direct valid perception, or direct cognition but not consciousness.

3.5.2.1.3 Yogic Direct Perception

The second type of direct cogniser is yogic direct perception. This is a perception which is possessed only by a superior being such as an Arya. Yogic direct perception can be subdivided in terms of:

3.5.2.1.3.1 one which realises the subtle truth of the selflessness of a person

3.5.2.1.3.2 one which realises subtle impermanence

3.5.2.1.3.1 Yogic Direct Perception Which Realises The Subtle Truth Of The Selflessness Of A Person

For the direct yogic perception which realises or cognises the subtle selflessness of a person we need to know the definition of subtle selflessness according to this school. According to the Vaibashika, the *subtle selflessness* or *the subtle emptiness of a person* is either

3.5.2.1.3.1.1 a person's emptiness of having a permanent, singular and independent existence.

3.5.2.1.3.1.2 It is also the person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient.

3.5.2.1.3.1.1 The person's emptiness of having a permanent, singular and independent existence.

First of all we have to take note that of all the Buddhist schools of tenets. It is only this particular school which asserts a person's emptiness of having this permanent, singular and independent existence as a subtle selflessness of a person. All the other Buddhist schools of tenets, even those below [and including] the Svatantrika Madhyamika or Autonomous Middle Way school of tenets, assert that the person's emptiness of being permanent, singular and independent is only a gross, not a subtle form of selflessness of person. However according to all the schools below the Prasangika Madhyamika, the Consequence school of Middle Way, the person's emptiness of being substantially existent in the sense of being self-sufficient is a subtle selflessness of a person.

Take note also that this school asserts the person's emptiness of a permanent, singular and independent existence. However it is said that there are some non-Buddhist schools of tenets who assert that there is a person which has a status of being permanent, in the sense of not being subject to momentary changes, or in other words not subject to disintegrating from one moment to the next moment.

Whereas according to this Vaibashika

school the person is *not permanent* because it disintegrates from one moment to the next moment. According to this school the person is *not singular* or is empty of being singular in the sense that because it is dependent, it does not exist without depending upon its parts, so it is not singular in the sense of being partless. So this school does not assert that a person is an object which is partless, or without any part.

A person's existence is *not independent* in the sense that if something is independent then that means that it exists without depending upon causes and conditions. Therefore the person is empty of being permanent, partless and independent.

3.5.1.1.3 2. Yogic Direct Perception Which Realises Subtle Impermanence

The *subtle form of impermanence* usually means momentary changes, so subtle impermanence is something where the change which takes place in the object is a very gradual one from moment to moment. Whereas with *gross impermanence*, for example the impermanence of a glass, when you smash it with a hammer or just drop it on the ground we can easily perceive the its destruction.

Next week will be a discussion night, so there will not be a teaching. For the test [on the following week] the compulsory question will be one of the discussion night questions. I hope that everyone will make an input to the discussion so it goes really well and is beneficial for everyone.

Generally speaking this is a very good opportunity for you to study more about Buddhist tenets. Of course in the teaching we are going very quickly and [covering the topics] very briefly. Don't worry if the whole topic seems beyond you. Rather than being overwhelmed, make an effort to master one or two elements really well so that they will always be with you.

Use this teaching as an opportunity to exercise your intellect, to use your marvellous, reasoning mind. Utilising that sharp, reasoning and knowledgeable mind that you possess for this kind of topic is very worthwhile. I hope that everyone, despite all the difficulty in trying to get used to all these new topics, gives their best effort to this.

These are not just idle words, because I worked very hard when I studied these same topics. Compared to the hard work and the effort that the monks in the monastery put into learning this topic, the amount of effort people make here in studying is maybe not such a big deal.

© Tara Institute

Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic

Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Alan Molloy

¹ Cogniser and mind are synonyms for consciousness.