

# Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལམ་ལག་བཅུངས།



30 May 2000

Cultivate the right motivation, understanding that the reason for taking this teaching, and engaging in this practice, is to achieve the state of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

## The Logical Proposition to be Tested

Of the two types of selflessness, the selflessness of person is explained first in the Lam Rim style teachings. Although there are various forms of reasoning that can be used to establish this ultimate view of the selflessness of person, here we are using the reasoning called Lacking Oneness and Many. This is the one which Lama Tsong Khapa explained extensively, specifically in the text *The Medium Stages of the Path*. The teaching on selflessness by applying this reasoning of Lacking Oneness and Many, is said to be the experiential explanation. When this reasoning is examined using the Four Points of Analysis as a basis, the formal logical statement (or syllogism) can be summarised as the person (or the subject of our study), is empty of true or inherent existence (the predicate), because it does not truly exist as one and many (the reason).

## 422.331.221.11 Identifying the Object of Negation

We will now explain this reasoning of Lacking Oneness and Many using the first of the Four Points Of Analysis - Identifying the Object of Negation.

Here the focus is on identifying the direct opposite of selflessness. In other words, what is that self which we are saying is selfless, or that the person is empty of, or which is not the person's mode of existence? That is the self which is the object of negation. In this analysis we are negating the self through applying the reasoning of Lacking Oneness and Many. As said earlier, this is one of the forms of reasoning that can be used.

## Two Types of Object of Negation

Generally speaking, we find that there are two types of object of negation.

The first is the object of negation of reasoning, which is something that is refuted by reasoning and logic.

The second is the object of negation of the path, which is something that is abandoned or eradicated by the spiritual path. The object of negation of the path refers to two types of obstruction: obstructions to liberation from cyclic existence, sometimes referred to as afflictive obscurations, and the obstructions to omniscient mind. As these two obstructions can be completely abandoned by the path, they are the object of negation of the path.

Of course when it comes to the meaning of these two types of obstructions the different schools of tenet have different views. For instance, according to Svatantrika

Madhyamika or Middle Way School of Autonomists, and as well the Mahayana School of Mind Only, the self-grasping of person is the obstruction to liberation, whereas the self-grasping of phenomena is the obstruction to omniscience.

However, according to the Middle Way School of Consequence or Prasangika Madhyamika, both types of self-grasping (of person and of phenomena) are obstructions to liberation. According to the Prasangika School, the obstructions to liberation principally include the two types of self-grasping and all the types of mental delusions, together with their seeds. However the obstructions to omniscience, according to Prasangika, are the latencies which are left behind by the two types of self-grasping, as well as by all the mental delusions.

To give some idea of how this school distinguishes between the latencies and seeds of delusions, the seeds of delusions are something that are capable of producing the delusions in the same continuum. Whereas, the latency of self-grasping or delusion is said to be some kind of propensity which can be a cause to bring about a misconception. For example, the misconception of true existence, which causes the appearance of true existence to arise in our mind, is the latency.

To understand this difference more clearly, think of the example of a poison, which is a by-product of some flower. When you talk of the seed of that poison, you refer to the seed of that particular flower, through which we can produce that poison. The poison has within it the force to cause hallucinations in the person who takes it. That force or capacity to produce the effect of hallucination is a bit like the latency of the two types of self-grasping.

We shall not go into further detail here, but if you want to do more study on the obstructions to liberation, then beside these two types of self-grasping, you can also study all the other types of delusions, which can be divided into the six types of root delusions, and the twenty secondary delusions and so forth.

## What Are We Trying to Establish?

To return to this object of negation reasoning, we started with this logical statement: the person (subject) lacks true existence (predicate) as both one and many (reason). What we are trying to establish with this thesis or assertion, is that the person is empty of true existence using the reason of Lack of One and Many. The object of negation is exactly the opposite to this thesis, which is the person's true existence.

You can talk of the object of negation of reasoning in

terms of both object and subject. When we take a person's true existence as the object of negation, then we are talking in terms of the objective object of negation. However if we take an ignorant mind which grasps at the true existence of person and phenomena, we are talking in terms of the subjective object of negation.

When you apply the reasoning of Lacking True Existence as One and Many, you are explicitly refuting person's true existence, which is the objective object of negation. At the same time, you are also negating the subjective object of negation.

In fact, if we absorb this syllogism, the logical statement which consists of Subject-Predicate-Reason, into our mind it can give the whole picture of what we are trying to establish. There are many valid reasons we can use. Whatever reason you apply, it is establishing something. Here the reason is to establish why the person is lacking true existence. Of course, we want to know why, or how, it establishes this lack.

We can say the person, or 'I', or self, is empty of true existence because it lacks true oneness and many. This reason is saying that anything which lacks true oneness or many must necessarily lack true existence. When you say this then conversely, it also implies that something which is truly existent must be either truly existent as one, or as many. There is no third possibility. This shows how you can understand the validity of the reason.

You can use dependent arising as a reason to establish that the person does not truly exist. In this case you are assuming that if something is dependent arising (meaning depending upon causes and conditions or its parts), it must necessarily be empty of true existence. Your reason also implies that if something exists truly, then it cannot be dependent arising for it should exist without depending on causes and conditions, or parts.

### **What Is the Object of Negation?**

The first thing one has to consider is the identification of the object of negation. When trying to identify the object of negation, you do not have to make some logical statement, or give some reason. It is essential to identify the object of negation because, as Shantideva said in his text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, without contacting the imputed object (the object of negation), its non-existence cannot be apprehended.

Before you are able to negate something you must first identify what is to be negated. This means identifying the self that is to be negated. The Lam Rim text uses the example of the target. Before you release the arrow, you must identify the target. Only after identifying the target can you direct the arrow. Otherwise it is not possible to hit the target. Likewise, to be able to apprehend a thief, you have to identify the thief very clearly.

According to the Middle Way School of Consequence, the terms 'the person is not truly existent', 'the person doesn't exist inherently', 'the person doesn't exist from its own side', 'by way of its own character', 'not existing ultimately' and 'not existing or not established truly', all have the same meaning. When we talk of identifying the object of negation, we are talking about identifying the opposite of all of the above terms.

If you say that the person is not truly existent, then you must identify 'true existence'. Likewise, if we say that the person exists inherently, then we must identify how the person exists inherently. Understanding all these terms means identifying the object of negation.

The scriptural source for identifying the object of negation is Chandrakirti's text *Explanation of 'Four Hundred Verses'*, *Four Hundred Verses* being a text by Aryadeva. In that text, Chandrakirti says that the self is that which is not dependent upon any other phenomena or any other things, but which exists inherently, or which is established by way of the object's own entity. This text is used as a scriptural source for identifying this object of negation. The same text also says that this self can be taught in terms of the self of person, and the self of phenomena.

Based on what is said of the object of negation in Chandrakirti's text, Lama Tsong Khapa's comments in his lam rim text, *The Medium Stages of the Path* that the self is something which we believe exists from its own side, having its own self sufficient mode of existence, not depending upon any conditions, and not depending on anything.

We have to gain some idea of this object of negation in our own mind, not just theoretically or intellectually but also practically and experientially. We need to try to identify what this object of negation is. If the person exists truly or inherently, what sort of existence would that person would have?

Examining the object of negation means finding if there is any object which is not dependent, which exists from its own side, in its own right, without depending on the designating or imputational mind, or name and terminology.

### **The Middle Way School of Consequence View**

According to the Middle Way School of Consequence, the existence of all phenomena is 'mere designation' or 'mere mental imputation'. Using the word 'mere' negates existence other than through mere designation by thought, or by name. This negates all existence from the phenomena's own side, or as existing from the side of the basis of designation.

When we think about things existing only as a 'mere designation' and as having no existence from their own side, this discredits their existence by themselves. When we think about that, it does not seem quite right. However what the School of Consequence is saying is that phenomena have no existence from their own side, or from the basis of designation. Phenomena do not exist from their own side in the sense that if you search for something, considering whether it can be identified from its parts as a whole, or from any particular part, or if it can be found within, or from the side of the basis of designation or imputation, it cannot be found. This unfindability of things is what the Prasangika school means when it says that things do not exist from their own side, and that their existence is mere designation.

It is also valid to think that if things exist from their own side, or from the side of the basis of designation, then they do not depend on the imputing mind or on the designating name or terminology. For instance, in the

case of a temple, if the temple exists from its own side, then it should be possible that from its own side it says 'I am a temple', and the mind that perceives it should naturally have the thought 'That is a temple'.

To cite the sutras on this as an example,

"Just as, for example, chariot is designated,  
To a collection parts,  
So, in dependence on the aggregates,  
Conventionally, a sentient being is named."

The sutra also clearly says that when you talk of a person, it is something which exists by depending upon the aggregates.

The person is designated upon the aggregates of the person. That is why it says the person does not exist inherently, but rather exists as a mere designation. When it says the person is designated or imputed on the aggregates, what is to be considered is who designates the person? It is an imputing mind or designating name which designates the person onto the aggregates.

### **How Is The Person Designated Onto The Aggregates?**

The next thing to consider is how this process of designating the person onto the aggregates occurs. To understand this process of designation of the person by the imputing conceptual thought, you must consider how the spontaneous or innate thought of 'I', this mere self as a person, arises. When we consider it, this thought of 'I' arises in dependence upon aggregates. In other words it does not arise with regard to any kind of object. Hence aggregates are the basis for this thought to arise, and it would also follow that prior to generating the thought of 'I', the thought of aggregates is generated.

In other words, to identify this glass with a thought 'This is a glass', you must first recognise, and have the perception of part of the glass or the whole glass. Only after that do you have the thought of actually identifying the glass.

As we mentioned before, it is a matter of knowing the way this designating thought process works and why it is that we say everything is merely imputed by the imputing mind. Once you know how a person is designated on the aggregates and so on, then this understanding can be applied to all other objects as merely imputed.

The object of negation is true or inherent existence, meaning existing from its own side, without depending on causes and conditions or parts. Whatever object we consider, whether it is a person or a phenomenon (that is, an object other than person) the object of negation is the same in the sense of the lack of true or inherent existence of that object. The only difference is the basis of the object of negation. Similarly the only difference between the selflessness, the emptiness, of person and phenomena is the basis.

### **Divisions of Selflessness**

We said in past teachings that there is no difference in terms of subtlety between the two types of selflessness nor in terms of the negated self and phenomena. However there is a difference in terms of gaining the realisation of these two types of selflessness of person and phenomena. This is because there is a difference in terms of ease and difficulty of realising each.

We divided selflessness into two, person and phenomena. That is the most condensed division of emptiness. If we elaborate there are many ways of dividing selflessness or emptiness, for instance the sixteen emptinesses or eighteen emptinesses and so forth. The scriptural source for categorising into two types of selflessnesses is Chandrakirti's text, where he said that

In order to liberate migrating beings,  
the view of selflessness is taught.  
That selflessness is of two types,  
of person and of phenomena.

That is the end of the teaching. Now we shall recite the 21 Praises to Tara.

After we finished chanting the Tara Mantra, Geshe-la started laughing and recounted his memories of what Ribur Rinpoche said to him during the 1998 pilgrimage. The pilgrims were with Ribur Rinpoche and Lama Zopa Rinpoche reciting some prayers before releasing fish as part of performing the practice of saving lives. They chanted some Medicine Buddha mantras and then, as instructed by Ribur Rinpoche, Geshe Doga led the Tara mantra using the chanting which we had just used. Ribur Rinpoche said, "Oh that's just the usual chanting, nothing special". Geshe-la replied that he had "used the common one because I would like to be a sensible, wise person". At that Ribur Rinpoche laughed uproariously.

After we had completed the final dedication prayer, Geshe-la told us how, in Sera Monastery after the last debate session at night, the last dedication is the same as the dedication we had just done, 'jetsun lama...'. The younger monks who don't participate in the last session stay in the house. When they hear that last dedication they know that their teacher is on the way back, and they have to go inside and be on their best behaviour. So they quickly go into their room, and pretend to recite their prayers at the top of their voice.

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**Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.**

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### **Note on authentication**

Transcribed from the tape by Vanessa Walsh  
Edited by Adair Bunnnett and Alan Molloy  
Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy



qualified as existing truly or not.

3. The third type of sense of 'I' is within continuum of an ordinary being whose mind is influenced by the views of the schools of tenets. Her sense of 'I' actually views the 'I' as being inherent or true existence, and this we call the self-grasping of person. So, she perceives the 'I' as qualified with an inherent or true existence.

### **How to Recognise the Innate Sense of 'I'**

As said before, first we need to try and recognise within us this innate conception or sense of 'I' which is the self-grasping of persons. Even though this sense of 'I' or self-grasping is very deeply rooted and ingrained in our mind, it is not always very obvious to us. It becomes very obvious under certain circumstances, but not so under other conditions.

When meditating on identifying the object of negation, it is said that sometimes, when you relax yourself into a peaceful state of mind and body, this sense of 'I', will suddenly pop up within your mind. If this sense of 'I' does not show up by itself, then you have to try to mentally create the conditions to make it manifest within your mind, and become obvious to you.

You have to create the appropriate mental conditions by thinking of events of your life where there are strong emotions of joy or undesirability. When you think of times you were very happy or you achieved what you wanted to achieve, you feel happy, and generate a sense of the 'I' which says "I feel happy". Alternatively, you could remind yourself of an unpleasant situation in your life, for instance a situation which made you very irritated and angry. Then you will feel bad, and generate within you a sense of 'I' which experiences unhappiness, and which may say "I can't tolerate that, I will get revenge, I hate that..." In this way you let that sense of 'I' arise, and feel it.

Having manifested this strong and obvious sense of 'I', it is said that at the same time it is very important to keep the mind very relaxed and calm. Keep remembering the reason why you are engaged in this meditation. You have made this sense of 'I' arise to investigate and find out what mode of existence the 'I' seems to have to this sense of 'I', and what mode of existence the 'I' seems to have in reality.

That vivid sense of 'I' should now be left somewhere in the corner of your mind, where it is still noticeable to your mind. Then employ the discriminating wisdom part of your mind to investigate how the 'I' appears and exists to the sense of 'I' within you. Does the 'I' exist from the aggregates collectively or individually? Does it exist within the mind and body together, or individually? Is it inseparable from one or both? In fact, to that sense of 'I', the 'I' seems to exist inherently, to exist by way of its own character, to exist independently from any other phenomena. This kind of entity of inherent self existence in the person is negated in selflessness of person, and this is the object of negation here.

Geshe-la said that at the last weekend course, he gave an intensive teaching on this same topic. He says that he has to confess that it must be that he is aging, because he cannot remember what he has said here, and what he said in the weekend course.

### **The Importance of Recognising the Object of Negation**

It is said that unless you correctly identify this object of negation there is no way that you can realise this view of selflessness or emptiness. Also, the next three points of analysis would not mean much, or be of any help in realising this view of selflessness. As said before, it is important to try, over and over again, to investigate and observe how the 'I', or the self, exists to one's sense of 'I'.

In order to observe this sense of 'I', one has to feel it very strongly and clearly, and this means allowing this sense of 'I' to be manifested within oneself. This sense of 'I' is so deep and so familiar to us that sometimes, after engaging in meditation, when we fully relax our mind and ourselves, we can have a sudden experience of this sense of 'I'. There are other times when this sense of 'I' becomes so obvious to us. If you are doing nothing and then suddenly somebody says something very harsh and unpleasant, you become very disturbed and upset. If you look within yourself there is this sense of 'I' which says, "How dare he say such a thing to me; there is no way I can tolerate that!" Likewise, if you hear some good news, again this sense of 'I' suddenly arises and is very obvious. Similarly when you feel so proud about something you have done or achieved, there is a sense of 'I' which has the strong feeling "This success is all because of me, and is the outcome of what I have done". Under such circumstances, the sense of 'I' becomes so very obvious.

In order to identify this object of negation, one has to recognise this sense of 'I' within one, and then check and investigate how this 'I', which feels so overjoyed or feels so annoyed or whatever, exists to one. It is said that the way the 'I' exists to the conception or sense of 'I', and the way this conception grasps at it is similar to the way visual forms exist to our eye-sense-consciousness. It is so obvious when we perceive a visual object with our eye sense consciousness - it is as if that object exists over there from its own side. In the same way, it is said, if we investigate we can find how the 'I' appears to exist from its own side, without depending upon any other phenomena. It appears to have some kind of existence by its own force and power.

We mentioned earlier how the eye-sense-consciousness perceives the visual object form as if it existed from its own side. Regarding this the Prasangika or Middle Way School of Consequence says that all the sensual consciousnesses of sentient beings are incorrect consciousnesses, in the sense that they are all under the influence of the latency of ignorance and have an appearance of true existence. However, all the Schools of Tenet below Prasangika do not assert the appearance of true existence to any sense consciousnesses. With respect to mental consciousness, the Prasangika School claims that the only mental consciousness of a sentient being which is not affected by the latency of ignorance, is the mind that directly realises or cognises emptiness. All other mental consciousnesses of sentient beings are said to be incorrect consciousness, in the sense of being affected by the latency of ignorance.

### **The Advantages of Meditating on the Object of Negation**

With knowledge about the sense of 'I', and how the 'I' or

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self is misconceived by this sense of 'I', it can also be very clearly understood, if one checks, how this sense of 'I' is the root of cyclic existence, and how it serves as the source of all the troubles and problems in life.

Once this object of negation is clearly identified, it then becomes possible to make some progress towards the realisation of selflessness by going through the next three points of analysis.

It is also good to try to understand that this meditation is still effective even if one does not gain any definite understanding of emptiness now. It can plant the seeds in one's mind, which can help one to quickly gain this understanding of emptiness in the future.

It is said that the fortunate being who just hears the sound of the word 'emptiness', can be so moved that tears come to their eyes, and their hair stands on end. Of course, these tears are not the expression of sadness, but the expression of tremendous joy from hearing the sound 'emptiness'. In fact, Chandrakirti's text *Supplement to the Middle Way* says that even for ordinary beings just hearing about the emptiness gives such a lasting joy and interest, and so much so, that tears come to their eyes, and the hair on their body stands on end. Such a being is the perfect vessel for hearing this teaching on emptiness, and has the seed of the mind of the state of highest enlightenment.

This teaching is all about the necessary qualifications of the right vessel for hearing this teaching on emptiness. Even though we may not be perfectly qualified, it is said that those beings who have a genuine interest and motivation to hear and learn about emptiness, and those who have not weakened their commitment to their spiritual guru, are also the right vessel for emptiness. Hopefully, we fit into that second type of vessel.

If you have received the teaching on Chandrakirti's text, *Supplement to the Middle Way* in the past, it is also good to study it again, as it is a very useful adjunct to this teaching. Try, as much as possible, to understand the meaning of emptiness so that you can have some knowledge of it when you hear the word 'emptiness'. Then when we recite the Heart Sutra, and when we say "there is no form, no eye, no ear" and so forth, we shall have some understanding of what we are saying. Your understanding will help your meditation.

#### **Note for the teaching of 30 May 2000.**

The notes made reference to the Reasoning of One and Many. Translator Sandup Tsering points out that this should read Reasoning of One or Many. You may wish to adjust your notes.

We apologise for any inconvenience.

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13 June 2000

Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation by thinking that the reason for listening to these lam rim teachings is to achieve the highest enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Also generate the thought of putting these teachings into practice in order to achieve this final goal.

## 422.31.221.12 Ascertaining the Pervasion: Determining the Full Set of Possibilities

We now turn to the second point of analysis, Ascertaining The Pervasion.

### The Underlying Logic of the Point

We have identified the referent object, or the object of negation, which is this innate conception of 'I' within oneself. Keeping this object of negation (this self or 'I' which is said to exist inherently in our mind), we now try to investigate further. If this self or 'I' exists inherently, then it should either exist as an entity truly one with its basis of designation (which is the aggregates), or the entity of the negated self should be truly separate from the aggregates, (as a plural object, or be many with the aggregates). That is, if the negated self is not truly one with the aggregates, then it must be different from them. Try to see that if it exists inherently, this self or 'I' should exist as either one or many with the entity of aggregates. There is no third way for it to exist.

One of the main reasons why there is no other way for the negated self or 'I' to exist is because, in general, any object of existence falls into two categories: it is either a singular object or it is one of many plural objects. Using this criteria there is no third category of existence. Ascertaining this point of pervasion means that if this person (this self or 'I') exists inherently or truly, it must necessarily be either one with, or different from the basis of designation, the aggregates.

### Why This Point Must Be Properly Understood

Without carefully Ascertaining The Pervasion so that you are completely convinced that the object of negation must truly exist as either one or many, then doubts may still remain that the 'I' or self is empty of inherent existence. This is because one may think one has grasped the idea that something is neither truly one with the aggregates nor many (separate from the aggregates), but there is still room for doubt in one's mind as to whether the 'I' might exist inherently. Without properly and thoroughly realising this second point of pervasion the reasons given here do not by themselves automatically refute the inherently existing self. To Ascertain the Pervasion, one must be absolutely certain and convinced that if the self or 'I' exists inherently, then it must exist as either one or many. There is no other way for it to exist.

It has to be very clear - if the self has inherent existence

then it must exist as one or many. Having ascertained the pervasion one must have an absolute knowledge that there is no other possible way for this inherent self to exist. If it exists inherently it must be one with the aggregates or different from them.

Having ascertained the pervasion the following two points of analysis are applied. Can the self exist as one? Can it exist as many? As the point cannot withstand reasoning and logic it can then be established fully and with absolute certainty that it is completely irrational to assert that this inherent 'I' exists as one or many. Knowledge of the last two points of analysis enables one to easily establish that the 'I' or self cannot exist, and is empty of inherent existence. To give an analogy: you lose a cow and know that there are only two possible locations where that cow might be. If it is absolutely clear that there are only two locations, and if you go to them both and the cow is not at either place, then it naturally leads to the conclusion that the cow cannot be found. This second point of Ascertaining the Pervasion is therefore the basis on which the understanding of how the 'I' (or self) is empty of inherent existence is established.

Knowledge of this point of Ascertaining the Pervasion is not gained merely through reading, learning and intellectual knowledge. Rather, it has to be gained through meditative experience. Through this one comes to the conclusion that the only possible way for that negated self (which is the inherently existent self) to exist, is as one or as many. Once this definitive knowledge is gained experientially, one moves onto the third point of analysis.

## 422.331.221.13 Determining That They Are Not Truly the Same

The third point of analysis, is the lack of being truly one. Having concluded that if the 'I' exists inherently, then it must be either one with or different from the aggregates, we consider here whether this inherently existing 'I' can exist as an entity which is truly one with the aggregates.

Saying that the inherently or truly existing 'I' is one with the aggregates means that they are one inseparable entity. The question arises of how two different objects can be the same entity without being one in terms of the ultimate truth. Such is possible in terms of the false conventional truth. However in terms of the ultimate truth, then it has to be the case that when we say two things are the same entity, it means that the way they appear to the mind must accord with the way they exist in reality. In another word they must be one. With respect to the false conventional truth this is not necessary. Therefore, it is possible for two things to be

same entity, but not the reverse.

### The Absurd Consequences Of This View

If, we say that this 'I' is truly one with the aggregates many logical faults and absurd consequences would follow. In the lam rim text three main absurd consequences are pointed out. They are:

1. If we assert that the 'I' and the aggregates are truly one, then there is no purpose in ascertaining the self as being separate from the aggregates.
2. Each person would have many selves.
3. The 'I' or self must also become subject to production and disintegration.

1. The first absurd consequence is that if we say the 'I' (or the self) and the aggregates were truly one, it would follow that the whole idea of ascertaining that the 'I', (or the self) as something different from the aggregates becomes meaningless and pointless.

Generally, one purpose of talking about the 'I' (or the self) is to refer to the 'I' (or the self) that goes from one life to another, discarding one body and taking on another body. However when we say that the 'I' (or the self) is truly one with the aggregates, it logically has to be the case that there is no purpose in the ascertaining that the 'I' is something separate or different from the aggregates.

When we say "my body" or "the body of oneself", or the "aggregates of oneself" then of course, if the self and the aggregates were one it would sound as if we were meaning to say "the aggregate of the aggregate" or "the self of the self", or "the I of I" or "the aggregate of the aggregate" which is meaningless.

Obviously if we say that the 'I' is one with the aggregates, then many other problems and inconsistencies would arise in our assertions.

The 'I' which takes on the body or aggregates is the agent or the subject, whereas aggregates are the objects. So if the 'I' were one with the aggregates, the subject and object would become one.

If the 'I' is the possessor and the aggregates are the possessed, then the possessor and the possessed become one.

If the 'I' is the main body, and the aggregates are the parts, then the body and its parts become one.

If we say the 'I' and the aggregates are one, we end up with all of these absurd conclusions.

2. The second main absurdity is that if the 'I' (or the self) and the aggregates were one, it would also follow that since there are many aggregates, each person would have many selves. The problem here is that there are five aggregates, so according to this line of argument there should be five types of self. Conversely, if there is only one self, then we would have to say that there must be only one aggregate.

There are many other problems if we explore this fault of the self having many selves. For instance, if the 'I' and the aggregates were one, it makes no sense to say "I was conceived in my mother's womb". Likewise if the aggregates and the I are one, our biological stages of development after conception, from the embryo onwards makes no sense, because the 'I' is not a physical thing that slowly develops. As the text says, just as the self

goes to the next life, the body and so on would also have to go to the next life.

When we talk about our mind being dominated by desire and hatred, we say that the self, or the 'I' has the desire and hatred. Likewise, when the body experiences heat, cold, hunger or thirst, we say that it is the 'I' which feels these things. If the 'I' and the aggregates are truly one, it is pointless to say "I feel hot" or "I feel cold", and so on. All of these expressions become purposeless. In essence if the 'I' and the aggregates are truly one, they become one in all respects.

3. The third absurdity is that if the 'I' and the aggregates were one, then just like the aggregates, the 'I' will be subject to production and disintegration. The source of this discussion of objections come from Nagarjuna's text, *The Root of Wisdom*.

Regarding this, it is said that the third logical problem of the 'I' being subject to production and disintegration arises because if it is asserted that the 'I' and the aggregates are truly one, then in terms of relative or nominal truth, we can say the 'I', like the aggregates, is subject to production and disintegration. In other words the self arises and disintegrates.

In relation to this third absurd consequence of the self being subject to production and disintegration, three main problems would arise if the 'I' and aggregates were truly one.

1. If the 'I' and the aggregates were one, it would also follow that the self is produced and disintegrates just as the form aggregate of the body is produced and disintegrates. The way we distinguish the change from production to disintegration, is when the continuum of the aggregates ceases to exist, in other words when the form body disintegrates. Likewise we would have to say the continuum of the self must also cease to exist and disintegrate when the form aggregate ceases its continuum.

2. We can also raise a question of the relationship of the 'I' with its aggregates in terms of whether the 'I' of past and future lives is truly different from the aggregates. If we say that the 'I' of past and future lives is truly one with the aggregates, and in a past life we were born as an animal, and in the present life we are born as human, it would follow that what we experienced in our past life as an animal should also exist in this human life. Likewise, whatever happiness we enjoy in our human life must have also existed in the former animal life.

3. There is also a problem if we say the former 'I' and the current 'I' are truly different from the aggregates. The problem that arises is that the 'I' of the former life and the 'I' of the present life would become completely two separate beings.

If we say the 'I' of the former life is truly different from the aggregates then it becomes impossible for anyone to remember their former life. There are also problems with respect to the way the law of karma functions, for instance, the result of karma being exhausted, or whether you will experience the result of karma which you have not created. We shall discuss these problems more in the teaching next week.

When you read Pabongka's lam rim text, *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, you will find that the approach seems

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different from the one taken here, but in essence it covers exactly the same points as we have just discussed.

Geshe-la also gave a weekend course on this topic recently, so study that if you get a chance, because for that course Geshe Doga used Lama Tsong Khapa's *The Medium Stages of the Path* as his main source. This might add to what you have learned here based on Pabongka's text.

Generally, these investigations on the subject of emptiness are based on the Four Points of Analysis. This is the main instruction of Lama Tsong Khapa's *The Medium Stages of the Path*, which is considered to be the most detailed and quintessential instruction on this subject.

Also as mentioned in the past, Baso Trichen who was one of the four student disciples of Lama Tsong Khapa, referred to Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings on emptiness which were based on these Four Points of Analysis. Baso Trichen, who was the brother of Khedrup Je, said that the Four Points of Analysis as taught in Lama Tsong Khapa's *The Medium Stages of the Path* is an experiential analysis which is based on the teacher's own meditative experience, and it is a guide which is based on the student's own progress and experience in meditation. Therefore it is considered to be a very special instruction.

Also there are so many sutras, such as the *Diamond Cutter Sutra* and many other texts that emphasise the benefits of meditating on, or hearing, or just saying the word emptiness. This is a good reason for us to consider ourselves as extremely fortunate to hear these teachings. Geshe-la said that to have the opportunity to teach the topic to other people is very fortunate. It is said that even if we do not fully understand what we are learning, there are tremendous benefits.

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**Note on authentication**

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# Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

༄༅ ལམ་རིམ་རྣམ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



20 June 2000

Cultivate the bodhicitta motivation. That is, think that you are here to receive this profound teaching on the stages of the path, the lam rim, in order to achieve the highest enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Also cultivate the intention of putting this teaching into practice because it is only through putting the teachings into practice that one can achieve that highest enlightenment.

## 422.331.221.13 Ascertaining That They Are Not Truly The Same (cont)

In the previous teachings we saw all the logical faults that would result if we assert that the 'I' of the former life and the 'I' of the next life are truly one with each other. Many logical faults would also result if we also assert that these two 'I's are truly different from each other. First of all there is the fault that it would become impossible to remember the past and future life. Second is the fault of the karma which has been created being wasted. Thirdly, experiencing the result of the karma which one has not created.

1. The first problem is that if it were the case that the 'I' of the former life is truly different or separate from the 'I' of the next life it would become impossible to remember a past and future life. To see the logic of this fault we have to see that if the 'I' of the former life and the 'I' of the next life are inherently different, then the two 'I's would be completely unrelated, and so be two unrelated objects.

Generally speaking, the 'I' of the former life and the 'I' of the next life are in the same continuum, so it becomes possible for the 'I' of the next life to remember the 'I' of the former life, and vice versa. However if we say that the 'I' of the former life and the 'I' of the next life are truly different then, as completely unrelated objects they become two unrelated people. The two 'I's would become like the two different people named Jampa and Nyepas in the example given in the text.

Generally we say that Buddhas and sentient beings share the same continuum. Sentient beings share the same continuum with Buddhas in the sense that they have the potential to become Buddha. Likewise Buddhas share the same continuum with sentient beings in the sense that they have once been sentient beings.

When there is the same continuum a relationship exists, and we can talk of the cause and effect between the former continuum and the next continuum. If the 'I' of the former life and the 'I' of the next life were truly separate, they could not be the same continuum. Hence, there could not be any interrelationship between the two, in terms of a causal link between the harm or benefit they

receive. This is a brief discussion of the fault of not remembering the past and future life.

2. Secondly there is the fault that the karma which has already been created becomes wasted in the sense that it does not yield a result for the person who creates it. We are saying here that if the 'I' of the former life, and the 'I' of the next life are truly different continuums, then in a sense, the person or the 'I' who creates the karma is a different person from the 'I' who experiences the result of that karma. The person who creates the karma does not exist at the time of the result of that karma, and the person who experiences the result is not of the same continuum as the person who creates the karma. So from this point of view the karma which has been created becomes wasted.

3. The third fault is the fault of meeting with the result of karma which you have not created. Again, we are talking here of this 'I' of the former life and the 'I' of the next life as not sharing the same continuum, because they are truly different from each other. Consequently we can refuse to accept the objection that the 'I' who experiences the result, experiences the result of karma which he or she has not created.

Applying all the logical reasons we have discussed in the past two weeks shows the faults that would arise if the 'I' existed as inherently one with the aggregates. Working through all these examples of logical absurdities one then becomes very certain in one's mind that the 'I' does not exist inherently as one with the aggregates. Ascertaining this definitive knowledge should be done experientially not just intellectually. If one gains this definitive knowledge, then it is said one has ascertained what we call the point of ascertainment, which is the lack of being truly one.

## 422.331.221.14 Ascertaining That They Are Not Truly Different

Then of course we consider the fourth point of analysis, Ascertaining The Lack of Being Truly Many. It is necessary to ascertain this point because, even though one has established in one's mind that the 'I' cannot exist as truly one with the aggregates, the 'I' could still exist inherently, as it could be existing as truly different from them. Therefore one has to meditate on this fourth point.

Earlier, at the second point of analysis, one ascertained the point of pervasion, understanding that if the 'I' exists inherently then there are only two possibilities for that inherent existence, either truly one or truly many. Now, having become very sure and certain that the 'I' does not exist as truly one, the only way that the 'I' can exist inherently is by existing as truly many, or truly different

from the aggregates.

Nagarjuna's text *The Root of Wisdom* says that to say that the 'I' and the aggregates are inherently or truly different means that the 'I' and the aggregates would be completely unrelated entities. That is to say, if the 'I' exists inherently, then as all the aggregates exist inherently, so the 'I' and the aggregates are unrelated.

If the 'I' and the aggregates are unrelated entities, then it has to be possible to identify the 'I' outside the aggregates, or independently of them. In other words we have to be able to find the 'I' after we have put aside all the aggregates, one by one. If we put aside the aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness, the 'I' should remain independent of those aggregates. As it is not possible to find the 'I' outside of, or independent of, the aggregates, this shows that the 'I' does not exist as truly, or inherently different from the aggregates.

To illustrate this the text uses the example of three animals, a goat, a sheep and an ox. As they are unrelated, if we put aside, say, the goat and sheep, we can still identify the ox. This is possible because the ox is completely different and unrelated to the others. If the 'I' and the aggregates were completely unrelated like these animals then it would have to be possible to be able to identify the 'I' after the five aggregates were eliminated one by one. After eliminating the form aggregate and so on, until all five were eliminated, the 'I' should be still remain. As this is not possible this shows that the 'I' is not truly or inherently different from the aggregates.

Even if we assert that the 'I' inherently exists as different from the aggregates many logical faults would arise.

1. If the 'I' and the aggregates were totally unrelated we could not say that, like the aggregates, the 'I' is subject to the process of birth, aging, illness and death. If the 'I' is completely unrelated to the aggregates the changes to the aggregates will not change the 'I'.

2. There also is the fault that if the 'I' and the aggregates were truly separate this would be completely contrary to convention or nominally accepted facts. For instance when we receive some harm, for example if someone hits our body, we say, "I received some harm". Likewise if someone benefits us with gifts then we say, "I received some benefit". This is because there is a relationship or link between the 'I' and the body, or aggregates. If we say that 'I' is inherently different from the aggregates then this link between 'I' and the aggregates would not exist. Logically, it would be contrary to what is nominally or commonly accepted to be the truth.

3. There is also the same fault with respect to the function of the karma which we discussed earlier. The fault in this case would arise in terms of karma which is created becoming wasted, and also meeting with the result of karma which one has not created.

4. If we say that the 'I' is inherently different or separate from the aggregates, there is also the fault that it would become possible for us to generate some sense of self identity, or some sense of 'I' based on some other object which is not one of our aggregates. We would be able to generate this thought of 'I' and identify myself, based on an object which does not belong to any of our five aggregates.

If we investigate further we can see a series of faults and absurd consequences from this position of asserting that the 'I' is inherently different from the aggregates. On the basis of this knowledge of all these logical faults that would be present if one maintained the view that this 'I' is inherently different from the aggregates, one finally concludes that it is impossible for the 'I' to exist as inherently different from the aggregates either. So, as we said before, we gain the knowledge with absolute certainty that the 'I' cannot truly exist as different from the aggregates. This is the point of Ascertaining The Lack of Truly Many.

Geshe-la strongly recommends that you refer to the commentary text, and other references. This is the kind of topic where you need to do a lot of thinking. You also need to develop a great deal of familiarity with the different terminology. Obviously this topic uses special terms not normally used in everyday English, so therefore it is important to become familiar with these different terms, and what each implies. That might help you to comprehend their meaning.

Not only do you have to understand these topics, but you also need to do a lot of meditation as well.

Now we shall have a question and answer session.

G: Wayne, do you think 'I' exists? Do you think 'I' is there?

S: Yes there is. 'I' is sitting here.

G: What of Chandrakirti, who said that you should negate and destroy this 'I' for it is the source of all the mental delusions. In fact the view of transitory collections is the source of all delusions. Seeing this 'I' a meditator destroys it. You gave an answer that 'I' exists, that 'I' is the one who is sitting there. If that is the case, then why does Chandrakirti say that we should negate and destroy the 'I'?

S: He was referring to the permanent partless independent 'I' which he says does not exist.

G: In other words you are saying that Chandrakirti is referring to the 'I' which is the object of negation, which needs to be refuted. However the 'I' exists. If 'I' exists, then the self exists?

S: Yes.

G: If the self exists then how is it that we say that all phenomena are selfless or 'I'-less, empty of 'I', empty of self?

S: They are empty of a certain type of self.

G: So you are making a distinction between an 'I' that actually, nominally, conventionally exists, right? Then you are also saying that there is an 'I' which nominally does not exist. Is that what you are saying?

S: Yes.

G: So there is 'I' which exists and 'I' which does not exist. Is this your position?

S: Yes

G: So 'I' is not a person? According to you there are two types of 'I' - the 'I' which exists and 'I' which does not exist, right? If you say that the next question is, don't you think the 'I' is a person? Isn't the 'I' a person?

S: Yes.

G: If 'I' is a person then there cannot be a person who

does not exist. Is that possible? So let's talk of you, Wayne. You are also saying that there is a Wayne that exists, and a Wayne that does not exist. Is that what you are saying?

S: There is a Wayne that exists, and an idea of Wayne that is false

G: So there is a Wayne that exists and a Wayne that does not exist? Now you are going a different way!

So there's one Wayne which your mother gave birth to and another one which your mother didn't give birth to. . . . He's just thinking about that!

G: Wayne, what is your definition of a person?

S: Something that has a mind.

G: In the West, there are some scholars who say that some plants have a mind. So you would say they are a person?

S: Yes.

G: Are there any plants which possess mind?

S: I cannot say there is no flower that is not a person.

G: So you can't say that they are not persons? Even the kids won't say that a plant is a person. There is a story about one master who, in his teaching, talked about the suffering that the radish goes through in its life. After that teaching all the listeners felt very sad and started to cry. I hope you are not one of those!

This master told in detail of the suffering that the radish goes through! When the plants are being cultivated they have to go through suffering: cold water is poured on them, they suffer from cold and when there is intense sun it is so hot. Then as they grow, people come and chop at them and they feel pain.

So you gave the definition of person, but it is very hard for you to actually give an example of who the person is.

S: Some people say that plants respond to kindness.

G: There is one school of tenets which proposes that certain plants have a mind. The reason that they give is that they go to sleep at night and when the sun rises they awaken. There are some modern scientists who believe that plants have minds, and they base their conclusions on the same kind of reason that this school of tenets gives. However we do not say that the plant has a mind or that a plant is a person. Of course scientists do not say that plants are people. But what of a consciousness, you say there is a consciousness? Does any scientist say that plants have consciousness?

S: Prince Charles might think so. He talks to his plants and plays music to them.

G: Some people say that it helps the plant grow better if you play good music or talk to them. As you say, some plants might respond to sound or whatever, but still we do not say that a plant is a person. Otherwise if plants were people then, as in the story of the radish, you have to think of the different types of birth of a person. A person might be born as a radish.

The next question is what are the five aggregates which are the basis of designation for the person?

S: Form, Feeling, Recognition, Karmic Formations, and Consciousness

G: The five aggregates are the appropriate basis on which to label a person. There is no plant with these five

aggregates. When we talk of the different types of person we can talk of a person in the formless realm. Of course there is a person there, but there is no aggregate of form.

The person is an 'I' which is merely labelled or designated on any of these five aggregates. That is the definition or the meaning of person.

The next question is about the person is the 'I' which is designated on any of five aggregates. So what is that 'I'? What is our understanding of the meaning of the 'I'?

S: The 'I' exists merely by convention through labelling the aggregates. It has no inherent existence by itself but is there by convention.

G: Yes it is. What you said is right. The question is really trying to be more specific about the reference of the 'I'. There's no doubt that there is an 'I' that exists. Conventionally there is 'I'. So to know that object which we can call 'I', we have to investigate the sense of 'I' that we generate within us. Within us we have some sense or thought of 'I' there, so we have to identify it. If we identify it, on what particular basis does that thought or sense of 'I' arise? That is the basis upon which you generate this thought of 'I' or sense of 'I' which is the 'I'.

When we generate this thought of 'I' we do not identify our body as the 'I', nor do we identify our hand or any other part of our body as the 'I', nor we do not identify that 'I' as our mind, or with our feeling or any of the other aggregates. Yet there is this thought of 'I' which arises within us, and there must be some base on which that thought arises. So if we say "what is that 'I'?", then the answer has to be that the 'I' is whatever the base is upon which we generate this thought of 'I'.

When we look at this glass, we have the thought "there is a glass". We do not have that thought "there is a glass with respect to other non-glass objects". When we look at it, there is something there which causes us to generate the thought of 'glass'. The base is there, and that is the glass.

The thought of a glass doesn't arise with respect to any objects but it only arises with respect to what we call a glass, an object of a particular shape which we see. When we look at the glass we generate the thought. When the thought arises there is some basis on which we generate the thought. There must be, otherwise there would be no reason to generate that thought. We cannot generate the thought of any other object. So therefore that basis on which we generate the thought of 'I' is like the example of the glass.

S: Perhaps the referent object of the thought 'I' is the basis on which we generate 'I'?

G: Yes. The base and the referent object are the same thing. There is some specific basis upon which we generate a thought of 'I', which is very much spontaneous. The continuation of that thought of 'I' is always very persistent, and always there. So if we identify or find the 'I', it is the base of that thought of 'I' which we generate.

With regard to this question of "what is the 'I'?" all the different schools of tenets have different answers.

According to Prasangika school of tenets, it is none of the five aggregates, not even consciousness. However they are the appropriate base upon which we generate the

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thought of 'I'. That is an instance or example of 'I'. The base is not form or consciousness but it is one of the conditioned or compound phenomena called non-associated compound phenomena.

Whereas for the Madhyamika school of the Svatantrika, according to the master Bhaviviveka, the mental consciousness is the person because it is the mental consciousness which takes upon the life of the new body. The new life is the person. There are other schools which identify the continuum of the consciousness as the person, rather than the consciousness. Others identify the five aggregates as the person.

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# TARA INSTITUTE

## STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT -27 June. 2000

Covering discourses 30/05/2000 - 20/06/2000

- 1/ What is the object to be negated?  
Why is it important to identify this clearly?
- 2/ How does the process of designating the person onto the aggregates occur?  
How does the innate thought of 'I' arise?
- 3/ Discuss the different types of a sense of 'I' which can be identified
- 4/ When meditating on the object to be negated how may the sense of 'I' become obvious to you? What are the various techniques that can be used?
- 5/ Why is it so important to carefully Ascertain the Pervasion? What is the pervasion?
- 6/ What faults arise when we assert that the inherently existing 'I' is truly one with the aggregates?
- 7/ Discuss the consequences that result from saying that the former 'I' and the 'I' of the present life are two separate beings.
- 8/ How may we conclude that the 'I' cannot truly exist as being different from the aggregates?

### **Compulsory question**

- 9/ Why is it important to meditate on the union of calm abiding and special insight?

**YOU ARE IN GROUP**

# T A R A I N S T I T U T E

(Study Group Test)

4th July 2000

Answer any four from question no.1-6

Question no.7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

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1. What is the object of negation?  
Why is it important to identify this clearly?
1. Discuss the different types of a sense of “I” which can be identified.
1. Explain the essential point of Pervasion. What is the pervasion here?
1. What faults arise if we assert that the “I” is truly one with aggregates?
1. What faults arise if we assert that the “I” is truly different from with aggregates?
1. Explain how the meaning of emptiness is dependant arising, and dependant arising is emptiness.
1. (Compulsory)  
  
Why is it important to meditate on the union of calm abiding and special insight?