

their own side, is a really profound understanding that helps to reduce delusions such as attachment and anger. Thus we really need to become familiar with this understanding. Whenever we have a strong delusion such as anger or attachment, it is good for us to analyse how the object appears to us—its qualities of beauty or its negative attributes and faults. If it is an object of anger or attachment, how does it appear to us? It appears as if it exists from its own side, and because it appears so vividly as existing truly from its own side, we feel a strong emotion of either attachment to an appealing object, or anger towards a repulsive or unappealing object. If one considers how the very object does not exist from its own side, then the strong negative emotions of attachment and anger, in relation to that object, can definitely be reduced.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama emphasised this point in one of his recent teachings. He said that scientists are actually proving that things do not exist from their own side. His Holiness went on to explain how one scientist working in the area of psychology found that when one becomes intensely angry with an object, only about five to ten percent of the anger was evoked by the negative attributes of the object, while the other ninety percent came from one's own mind and attitudes. His Holiness said that scientists are now proving that when we see the negative attributes of something that is mostly a projection of our own mind, rather than existing from the object's side. So we can say that the Prasangika view that things do not exist entirely from their own side, has been scientifically verified.

His Holiness went on to explain that we can definitely train our mind to understand that strong attachment or anger towards an object is based upon a false perception, and that by overcoming such a misconception we can definitely reduce anger, attachment and so forth. You will recall this from the teachings you have heard. It is indeed an important point that we need to keep in mind.

Another point to keep in mind is that (as mentioned in the teachings) even though a bodhisattva may perceive a beautiful and appealing object, such as a beautiful person, their wisdom prevents any attachment from arising in their mind. As the teachings explain, not even a fraction of attachment arises in the bodhisattva's mind due to the wisdom realising emptiness. This is in contrast to how we relate to an appealing or beautiful object. When we see a beautiful object, what do we experience? Do we experience strong attachment? If we experience strong attachment then that is because we lack the wisdom. So developing wisdom is crucial if we are to overcome a negative mind.

2.2.2.1.2.1. Refuting an inherently existent person through a fivefold analysis

We first need to understand the misconception we have that apprehends a person existing inherently or from their own side. That is the misconception that we need to overcome and refute. The method of refutation is explained in the outline itself: refuting an inherently existent person through a fivefold analysis. So the fivefold reasoning serves as a means to refute inherent existence of persons.

82. *The aggregates are not the self, they are not in it,
It is not in them, without them it is not,
It is not mixed with the aggregates like fire
and fuel.
Therefore how could the self exist?*

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

Furthermore, when analysed through the five-fold analysis, the self cannot be found to be one with the aggregates.

The commentary explains how the person does not exist from its own side, in and of itself. Yet again, I remind you to beware of misinterpreting this to refer to negating the actual self of a person. This is something that you need to recall every time you come across the presentation of selflessness in the teachings. There is the conventional self of a person, which does exist, and the self of a person that is to be negated, which is an inherently existent self of a person. One must be careful to maintain that distinction and not confuse the two.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

If the aggregates and the self were one, the following faults would incur:

If the self existed inherently with the aggregates, then it would have to be either one with the aggregates or separate from them. It could not exist in any other way. Therefore the logic one needs to understand is that if the self were to exist inherently based on something, then it has to exist either inherently as one with or different from that thing. There is no other way for it to exist.

As mentioned earlier the object of refutation is an inherently existent self, a self that exists in and of itself without depending on anything else. Such a self of a person does not exist.

Then Gyaltsab Je further expands on the contradictions implicit in an inherent self:

The self would have to be impermanent; there would have to be many selves; it would not be possible to remember past rebirths and so forth.

The first fault is that *the self would have to be impermanent*. Again, we must be careful not to confuse the type of self being referred to here. Of course, a conventional self of a person exists and is impermanent, so that is not what is being negated. Here, the self to be negated is an inherently existent self. So, if the inherently existent self were actually one with the aggregates then since the aggregates are impermanent, that would mean that the inherently existent self would also have to be impermanent, which is an absurdity.

The second fault is that *there would be many selves*. If the self and the aggregates were to be inherently one, then just as there are five aggregates, there would have to be five selves. Alternatively, because there are six elements, there would have to be six selves, which is another absurdity. There cannot be five or six different individuals within the one entity of a person.

The commentary then introduces an analogy:

The self does not depend on the aggregates, in the same way as an object placed on a table depends on the table.

If an object is placed on a table, then the object is dependent on the existence of a table. Without a table you couldn't have an object on a table. But if you separate them, they become separate entities, which do not depend on each other. The self and the aggregates are not like that—you cannot separate the self from the aggregates and have two separate entities.

With respect to the self and the aggregates Gyaltsab Je further explains:

Nor do the aggregates depend on the self ; if that was the case, then that would have to be perceived [by a valid mind] but it is not. The self is not perceived [by a valid mind] as a single entity completely unrelated to the aggregates ; if it did the fault of perceiving a self which does not possess any aggregates would occur.

This explains that even though the self and the aggregates have been refuted as being a dependent (the self) and being depended upon (the aggregates), if one were to conclude that the self is a completely separate entity, that would be a fault as well. It would imply that the self can exist in its own right without having any relationship at all with the five aggregates. Thus, a person that is a single entity and completely separate from the five aggregates cannot be perceived.

As the commentary further explains:

The self and the aggregates are not inexpressibly and inseparably mixed together like fire and a log either, where it is not possible to distinguish between its own and another entity, because all things are pervaded with an entity of being itself [one] or another [different].

Having refuted the earlier absurdities, if one were to then conclude that the aggregates and the self were inseparably one, then that would also be an absurdity! In the analogy given here, the log is the fuel for the fire. Another example is the inseparable oneness of water and milk when they are mixed together. After you pour water into the milk you cannot separate the water from the milk. They become inseparably one, and you cannot say 'this is the water part' or 'this is the milky part' because they are completely mixed together. Similarly, with fire and the piece of wood that serves as its fuel, when the log is on fire you cannot distinguish a separate log from the fire. You cannot say 'this is the log and that is the fire', because when they are burning they are the one entity. These analogies illustrate how the aggregates and the self are not inseparably one and indistinguishable.

Gyaltsab Je concludes by stating:

Thus, how could the self be inherently existent? It is not, for when analysed through the five-fold analysis it can not be found to be so.

In conclusion, the self could not possibly be inherently existent. If it were to be, then you would have to find it when you searched for it. However, when analysed with the five-fold analysis one has to conclude that an inherently existent self cannot be found at all. So *how could the self be inherently existent?* refers to the self that is the object of negation, which is the inherently existent self, and not the conventional self that does exist. That is what we need to understand.

2.2.2.2. SELFLESSNESS OF OTHER PHENOMENA

This section is has two main sub-divisions:

2.2.2.2.1. Refuting an inherently existent form aggregate

2.2.2.2.2. Applying the refutation to the remaining aggregates

In the past I have extensively explained what selflessness of other phenomena means. It is good to relate the explanation of the selflessness of other phenomena to the selflessness of person. Understanding the selflessness of other phenomena is based on examining how such a self would exist if it was to be inherently existent. If there was an inherently existent self of other phenomena, how would that self exist? It is by the process of refuting an inherently existent self of

phenomena, that we understand the selflessness of phenomena other than the person.

As is regularly mentioned in the teachings, it is good for us to be able to immediately relate to the meaning of 'selflessness of other phenomena' when we first hear the term. Then when 'self of other phenomena' is presented, you will understand what the term means. Self of other phenomena is something to be negated, but what does 'self of other phenomena' actually mean? If there was an inherently existent self of the aggregates for example, how would they have to exist?

2.2.2.2.1. Refuting an inherently existent form aggregate

This section has four sub-divisions:

2.2.2.2.1.1. Refuting inherently existent dependent arising [elements]

2.2.2.2.1.2. Refuting inherent existence of evolutes [or derivatives] of the elements

2.2.2.2.1.3. Applying the refutation to other phenomena

2.2.2.2.1.4. Refuting inherently existent space

2.2.2.2.1.1. Refuting inherently existent dependent arising [elements]

This heading is further sub-divided into four:

2.2.2.2.1.1.1. They are not established as one or many

2.2.2.2.1.1.2. Therefore the elements are not inherently existent

2.2.2.2.1.1.3. Absence of inherent existence of composites

2.2.2.2.1.1.4. Refuting proof for inherent existence

2.2.2.2.1.1.1. *They are not established as one or many*

This sub-division relates to the elements not being established as one or many. If the elements were to be inherently existent, then they would have to be inherently existent as either one or as many. The verse that relates to this first sub-division is:

83. *The three elements are not earth, they are not in it,
It is not in them, without them it is not,
Since this also applies to each.
The elements like the self, are false.*

Regarding the meaning of the verse, Gyaltsab Je explains:

The three elements are not one with earth, because there would be the fault of the earth element possessing the defining characteristics of the other three elements.

This refers to the refutation of the four elements as being an inherently existent one. If the four elements were to be an inherently existent one, then they would have to be inseparably one with each other. For example, if the four elements were an inherently existent one, then the elements of wind, water and fire would have to be one with the earth element. If that was so, the fault would be that the earth element would possess the defining characteristics of the other three elements. Thus the defining characteristics of wind (light and motility) water (wet and cohesion) and fire (hot and burning) would also have to apply to the earth element as well. But clearly, the earth element is not hot and burning or light and it does not possess motility. That is how the absurdity of the elements being one is explained.

Gyaltsab's commentary then further explains:

Also the defining characteristics themselves would become distorted. The three elements do not depend on earth and earth does not depend on them. However without the three, earth cannot abide on its own.

Having refuted the elements as being an inherently existent one, the alternative—that they are inherently existent separate or different—is now refuted.

The commentary then concludes with this syllogism:

Take the subject, the elements—like the self they are also false—because when analysed through the fourfold analysis, they cannot be found [to exist inherently].

Just as an inherently existent self was established as being false, so too the four-fold analysis shows that the elements (such as the water element) cannot be found to exist inherently. Thus they are also false.

2.2.2.2.1.1.2. *Therefore the elements are not inherently existent*

The verse that relates to this is:

84. *Earth, water, fire and wind
Individually do not inherently exist.
When any three are absent, an individual one
does not exist
When one is absent, the three also do not exist.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse: in this way:

Thus, the elements do not exist inherently, because each of them does not exist from its own side. That is because when any three of the four elements—earth, water, fire and wind—are absent, the individual element doesn't exist, and when one is absent then the other three cannot exist as well.

The lack of inherent existence of the elements is presented through the co-relationship of the four elements. If the elements were to exist inherently, then each would have to exist from its own side without depending on anything else. That in turn implies that each of the elements would not depend on the other elements and that each would thus exist in and of itself, from its own side, without relating to the other elements. But that is not possible. Whenever there is one element, the other elements also exist. They cannot be completely separated from each other, i.e. they cannot exist from their own side without relating to the others. These points are actually quite easy to follow.

2.2.2.2.1.1.3. *Absence of inherent existence of composites*

This is further sub-divided into three:

2.2.2.2.1.1.3.1. *Contradiction of inherent existence and dependence of composites*

2.2.2.2.1.1.3.2. *Refuting an answer to that*

2.2.2.2.1.1.3.3. *Dispelling further debate*

2.2.2.2.1.1.3.1. *Contradiction of inherent existence and dependence of composites*

Here an inherently existent composite is negated by explaining how it depends on other factors. If there was an inherently existing composite then it would have to exist without relating to or depending on anything else. The absurdity of negates an inherently existent composite.

The relevant verse is:

85. *If when three are absent, an individual one does
not exist
And if when one is absent, the three also do not
exist,
Then each itself does not exist.
How could a composite be produced?*

As Gyaltsab Je states in his commentary:

The individual elements do not exist inherently, because if three of the elements are absent then any one individual element cannot exist on its own...

This similar to what presented earlier. Individual elements do not exist inherently because if three of the elements are absent, then the remaining element could not exist on its own. If they were inherently existent, then they could not depend on or relate to the other elements. If one element were to exist on its own, it would do so without the other elements being present. However that is not the case. Gyaltsab's commentary continues:

... and if one—like the fire element—is absent then all other three can't exist; therefore how can the combination of all four elements contribute to the production of an inherent composite, they cannot; because each one doesn't exist from its own side.

One needs to understand the logic being used here. As the four elements cannot exist inherently, there is no possibility that a composite of the four elements could exist inherently, because a 'composite' is a conglomerate of the four elements. If each individual element lacks inherent existence, then naturally the composite of the four elements also has to lack inherent existence. The composite of the four elements lacks inherent existence by default, because each individual element of the composite lacks inherent existence. That is the logic that is used.

2.2.2.2.1.1.3.2. *Refuting an answer to that*

The relevant verse is:

86 *Otherwise, if each itself exists,
Why without fuel is there no fire?
Likewise why is there no water, wind, or earth
Without motility, obstructiveness or cohesion?*

This verse is an answer to an opponent of the earlier presentation. If that opponent says 'each of them exists from its own side and therefore a composite does exist from its own side' the commentary explains that the response is:

If you [an opponent to our system] say that because each of the four individual elements exists from their own side, there must be an inherently existent composite;

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute

their own side either, because they do not exist individually from their own side.

The commentary then further posits another objection from the lower schools:

If you say, wherever there is earth for example, the other elements are there from their own side as well, because their characteristics are there;

The position of the lower schools is that if the characteristics of the four elements exist from their own side, then the individual elements would also have to exist from their own side. The characteristics of each of the four elements are: earth is hard and obstructive, water is wet and moistening, fire is hot and burning and wind is light and moving.

The lower schools say that if the characteristics themselves exist from their own side, then naturally the elements would also have to exist from their own side too. The lower Buddhist school systems use this logic to clearly acknowledge the presence of these characteristics. However, they say, if earth does not exist from its own side then its characteristics of being hard and obstructive also cannot exist from their own side.

Clearly the earth does have characteristics. But for the lower Buddhist schools, since earth and the other elements exist from their own side they assert that the characteristics also have to exist from their own side. Thus if earth itself does not exist from its own side, then it would not be possible for the characteristics of earth to exist as well. So they say to the Prasangika, 'as you agree that the elements such as earth have their own characteristics, this implies that earth itself exists from its own side'. That position is refuted in the next verse:

**89. *If it is the case that they do not themselves exist individually,
But where there is one, the other three exist,
Then if unmixed, they are not in one place,
And if mixed, they do not themselves exist individually***

In explaining the meaning of the verse, Gyaltsab Je says:

If they do not individually exist by themselves but wherever there is one, the others exist there as well. In that case, do the four elements exist inherently being mixed together or [inherently] unmixed? The latter is not possible, because being unmixed they cannot be in the one place.

If they are not mixed or combined then they couldn't be in one place together, and therefore saying that they are unmixed contradicts the logic of them being together in one place.

The commentary then refutes the second point made in the verse:

The first instance is not possible either, because if mixed they cannot themselves exist individually.

Here, the refutation is that if they are inherently mixed, then they could not themselves exist individually. If they are mixed inherently it would not be possible to posit individual elements. That is how the position of the lower schools is refuted.

The next verse relates to another assertion made by the lower Buddhist schools:

**90. *The elements do not themselves exist individually,
So how could their own individual characters exist?***

What do not themselves individually exist cannot predominate.

Their characters are regarded as conventionalities.

This is positing another objection by the lower Buddhist schools. Gyaltsab Je explains:

How could the individual characteristics exist from their own side? They do not because the individual elements do not exist from their own side. If you say when they are mixed some elements have predominance over others, therefore predominance within their characteristics is also observed;

In response to that view, our system says:

However, even though there is predominance when they are mixed, they are not predominant from their own side, because individually they do not exist from their own side.

First of all it is obvious that when the elements are combined, within that combination there could be one element that is more predominant. For example if you mix colours, the resulting hue will be influenced by the predominant colour. Likewise when the elements are mixed, then depending on the intensity of each element, one could be more predominant than the others. Although this is true, the element could not be predominant from its own side. Why? Because individually, they do not exist from their own side. Since individually they don't exist from their own side, when they are mixed and one is predominant, the predominance cannot exist from its own side.

Having refuted that position, another objection is raised. As the commentary reads:

If you say, this goes against the *Abhidharma sutra* which individually presents the characteristics of the four elements;

Here, the lower system is saying to the Prasangika, 'If, in relation to the four elements, you claim that things do not exist from their own side, then that would go against the *Abhidharma sutra*, which clearly presents the individual characteristics of the elements'. As mentioned previously, the characteristics of the earth are that which is hard and obstructive, the characteristics of water are that which is wet and moistening, the characteristics of fire are that which is hot and burning and the characteristics of wind are that which is light and moving. These characteristics of the elements are clearly presented in the *Abhidharma sutra*. So according to the lower Buddhist school system, the Prasangika are contradicting the presentation in the sutra.

In refuting that objection, Gyaltsab Je explains:

It does not [go against the *Abhidharma sutra*] because the characteristics of the elements are presented as conventional existence - merely nominated and labelled and not existing from their own side.

The Prasangika system says that the *Abhidharma sutra* does indeed present the characteristics of the four elements individually; however those characteristics define the conventional existence of the four elements, meaning that they are merely nominated and labelled by conception. So the four elements are conventionally existent, but do not have the characteristics of elements that exist from their own side.

2.2.2.2.1.2. Refuting inherent existence of evolutes [or derivatives] of the elements

[Trans: Other translations use 'derivatives from the elements']

The elements themselves are the basis, and the derivatives arise from the four elements. This section is a refutation of the inherent existence of the derivatives of the elements.

With respect to this, the first two lines of verse 91 read:

*91ab. This mode [of refutation] is also to be applied
To colours, odours, tastes, and objects of touch;*

As Gyaltsab Je explains:

All colours, odours, tastes and tangible objects also lack inherent existence, because the same refutation that applied earlier to the elements can also be applied here.

Just as the individual elements were refuted as being inherently existent, likewise the derivatives of the elements (colour, odours, taste and tangible objects and so forth) also lack inherent existence, and the same logic that was applied in verse 83 can also be applied here.

As the commentary states:

Here you can also apply [just as in verse 83] 'The three forms are not tangible objects, they are not in it', and so forth.

2.2.2.2.1.3. Applying the refutation to other phenomena

This heading is sub-divided into two:

2.2.2.2.1.3.1. Actual application

2.2.2.2.1.3.2. Sources for the emptiness of inherent existence

2.2.2.2.1.3.1. Actual application

This heading is covered in the remainder of verse 91 and in verse 92, which read:

*91cd. Eye, consciousness, and form;
Ignorance, action, and birth;*

*92. Agent, object, and action,
Number, possession, cause and effect,
Time, short and long, and so forth,
Name and name-bearer as well.*

Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of these lines:

The categories such as eye, consciousness and form; ignorance, karma and rebirth; agent, task and action; numbers such as one and so forth; possessor and possessed that comes from meeting; cause and effect; time; short and long; forms such as round and square; name and name-bearer such as thing and that which possesses a function (just like the self), when analysed, are found to be false.

Just as the self is analysed and found not to exist from its own side, so too when these categories presented in the verse are analysed, they are also found to be false, meaning they are found to lack existence from their own side. So this section is specifically related to the refutation of other phenomena as being inherently existent. Just as the self, when analysed, is found to lack inherent existence, and is thus false and not true, likewise all of the categories presented here are also found to be false.

2.2.2.2.1.3.2. Sources for the emptiness of inherent existence

This outline is sub-divided into four:

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.1. All phenomena as empty of inherent existence

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.2. Explanation

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.3. Stating proofs

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.4. No fault of falling to a view of annihilation

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.1. All phenomena as empty of inherent existence

93. Earth, water, fire and wind

Long and short, subtle and coarse,

*As well as virtue and so forth are said by the
Subduer*

To be ceased in the consciousness [of reality].

[Trans: The literal translation of the Tibetan words reads 'thin and thick' instead of 'subtle and coarse'.]

As the commentary reads:

Earth, water, fire and wind; long and short; thin and thick; virtue, non-virtue and that which is non-specified (also meaning neutral), they all lack any inherent establishment, because if they did then it would have to be perceived by the arya bodhisattva who is in meditative equipoise, but rather to their consciousness or in the face of their perception these all cease. This is said by the Subduer, Buddha Shakyamuni.

It is essential that these points, which I have explained in detail during previous teachings, are understood. The main point being made is that all of the phenomena listed here lack any inherent establishment but exist conventionally.

If they were to actually exist inherently, then they would have to be perceived by an arya bodhisattva in meditative equipoise. In the face of the perception of an arya in meditative equipoise, all of these phenomena are said to cease. That is what Buddha Shakyamuni explained. The fact that they cease in the face of the perception of an arya in meditative equipoise, shows that they do not exist inherently. If they were to exist inherently, they would have to be perceived by the arya being who is in meditative equipoise.

One needs to understand these further points, which were also explained in earlier teachings: The non-appearance of conventionality to an arya being in meditative equipoise is said to be emptiness. That is because; only ultimate reality appears to an arya being in meditative equipoise. That which appears in the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise is ultimate reality, and that which does not appear or ceases is conventional reality.

So if conventional existence were to appear, it would then have to appear as ultimate reality or emptiness. The very fact that conventional existence does not appear to their consciousness is reason that conventional existence is false and referred to as relative or conventional existence; they are in the category of relative truth and not ultimate truth. Only the ultimate reality of existence appears to the arya being who is in meditative equipoise. As explained in the teachings, in the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise, the only appearance is emptiness. So, this needs to be understood.

From this logic one also needs to understand that in the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise, the non-existence or ceasing of conventionality is posited as emptiness. This also implies that in the face of the perception of an Arya being in meditative equipoise, conventionality is the object of negation. So, this two-fold aspect to the logic needs to be understood well.

Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute

28 September 2010

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

ཨ་མ་རྒྱལ་པོ་ལྷོ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

5 October 2010

Maintaining the motivation from the refuge and bodhichitta prayer that we have just recited, we will now engage in our meditation practice. [Meditation]

We can set the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: In order to benefit all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put them into practice well.

Rather than leaving the motivation as mere words, if we could actually generate that thought and determination in our mind, even for a few minutes, then through that familiarity, we will slowly be able to put it into practice. In that way one can become a good Dharma practitioner by integrating the practice into one's personal life, rather than just explaining it to others.

The chant leader needs to be aware that with some chants there may be times where beginning the chant with the first word of the verse or stanza will interfere with the balance between the number of words and the entire melody. So in order to maintain the synchronisation of words and melody the chant leader traditionally starts with an 'ohhhhhhh...'. However beginning the chant with the first word seems to work with the verse we use in the meditation. [Geshe-la chants] That is how it would traditionally be chanted.

2.2.2.2. SELFLESSNESS OF OTHER PHENOMENA

2.2.2.2.1. Refuting an inherently existent form aggregate

2.2.2.2.1.3. Applying the refutation to other phenomena

2.2.2.2.1.3.2 Sources for the emptiness of inherent existence

In this section the four sub-divisions are:

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.1 All phenomena as empty of inherent existence

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.2 Explanation

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.3 Stating proofs

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.4 No fault of falling into a view of annihilation

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.2 Explanation

The corresponding verse reads:

94. *Earth, water, fire and wind
Do not have a chance
In the face of that indemonstrable
consciousness
Complete Lord over the limitless.*

In studying this text it is really worthwhile to pay attention to the structure of the outlines, and the way in which each verse relates to its heading. At a glance, some verses may seem repetitive, but each is tackling the different subtle doubts that others may have. Nagarjuna's presentation is particularly conducive for beginners like

us, so it is good to remember Nagarjuna kindness in doing that.

In this verse, *consciousness* refers to the consciousness of an arya being in meditative equipoise directly realising emptiness, which was explained in detail last week. It is *indemonstrable* in the sense that it cannot really be described to others. For example, if you describe a lump of molasses as 'sweet', you are not able to describe the actual experience of that sweetness. Another person would have to taste it to know what the experience of sweetness is like. It is in that sense that the consciousness directly realising emptiness is said to be indemonstrable.

In his commentary, Gyaltsab Je explains the verse thus:

To that consciousness, which knows itself but is indemonstrable to others, and which is the complete lord over limitless existence, earth, water, fire and wind do not find any location in the face of its perception, because it doesn't perceive them in the slightest.

As was explained in our last session, the particular consciousness (which is the wisdom realising emptiness directly by an arya being in meditative equipoise) is indemonstrable, in that it cannot be explained with words and is not fathomable by other ordinary consciousnesses. To that indemonstrable consciousness, elements such as *earth, water, fire and wind do not find any location*, meaning that they cease to exist. As previously explained, seeing the ultimate reality of phenomena means not seeing them conventionally. Therefore conventional existence in the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise is the object of negation.

The verse from Nagarjuna that we chant before the teaching includes a salutation to the Buddha explaining that his mind is free from all fabrications.¹ *Without distinction*, relates to having removed all fabrications, while *without identity* refers to the state of abiding in the peace of nirvana. Both of those terms actually present emptiness.

The main point of this presentation is to identify the particular consciousness of an arya being who is in the meditative equipoise that directly perceives emptiness. For that consciousness all fabrications cease, and all conventional appearances also cease. Therefore not seeing conventional existence or conventional phenomena is said to be the ultimate seeing, or the seeing of emptiness. These are points that we need to really understand.

As mentioned previously, in the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise, the conventional appearance is seen to as non-existent. And if conventionality was to appear, then that would be the object of negation. In directly realising emptiness the arya being has completely negated all the objects of negation, so therefore there is no appearance of conventionality.

¹ I prostrate to the perfect Buddha
The best of teachers, who taught that
Whatever is dependently arisen
Is unceasing, unborn, unannihilated, not permanent,
Not coming not going,
Without distinction, without identity
And free from conceptual obstruction.

This explanation also relates to the following verse, which reads:

95. *Here long and short, subtle and coarse,
Virtue and non-virtue,
And here names and forms
All are ceased.*

This verse is referring to all aspects of form or conventional existence. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

In the face of the perception of an arya who is in meditative equipoise [directly perceiving emptiness], long and short thick and thin virtue and non-virtue, name and forms have all ceased and are thus empty of inherent existence...

In brief all composite or compounded things are assumed to be empty of inherent existence. Gyaltsab Je then explains why they are empty of inherent existence:

...because if they were established inherently then they would have to be ultimate reality, and thus would have to be perceived in meditative equipoise.

This implies that because they are not perceived in meditative equipoise, they are therefore empty of inherent existence. Because of the fact that phenomena are not perceived in meditative equipoise those phenomena are empty of inherent existence.

The logic here is based on the fact that only ultimate reality is perceived by an arya being in meditative equipoise. So if conventional phenomena were to be perceived, they would have to be ultimate reality, however that is not the case. It is said that the ultimate reality of all existence is perceived by an arya being in meditative equipoise. Thus the ultimate reality of ourselves is also perceived by the arya being. So in that sense it is said that there is no ultimate reality that is not perceived by an arya being in meditative equipoise.

We also need to relate this point to the explanation that has been presented many times before. If conventional phenomena were to appear to the arya being in meditative equipoise then there would be the fault of their meditative wisdom having dualistic appearance. However, as explained previously, there is no dualistic appearance whatsoever to the wisdom directly realizing emptiness. To that wisdom realising emptiness all three dualistic appearances i.e. the dualistic appearance of the subject and object being separate, the dualistic appearance of true existence, and the dualistic appearance of conventional existence or conventionality, completely cease.

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.3 Stating proofs

96. *All those that earlier appeared to consciousness
Because of not knowing that (reality)
Will later cease for consciousness in that way
Because of knowing that (reality).*

This verse is presented in order to remove any doubt about whether phenomena actually cease to exist. Although phenomena cease to exist to the perception of an arya being in meditative equipoise, they do not cast off actual existence. This verse addresses such doubts. As Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

[If you ask] when conditioned phenomena fall apart to that indemonstrable consciousness, at that point do conditioned phenomena cease to exist?

Here *indemonstrable consciousness* refers to the wisdom directly realising emptiness in meditative equipoise. To that query the commentary responds:

[Answer] That is not the case. Primordially existent absence of inherently existent production, means that even though the lack of inherent existence of conditioned phenomena has always been there from the beginning, it has been obscured by ignorance, like for example someone with cataracts having blurred vision.

This explains that although conditioned phenomena have ceased to appear to that particular consciousness, the conditioned phenomena themselves do not cease to exist. What does cease is *the inherent existence of the conditioned phenomena*, the lack of which has existed *from the beginning*.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

In the case of ordinary beings, they are not able to see [the lack of inherent existence], but to the consciousness of an arya who has realised emptiness, the lack of inherent existence of things, which has existed from the beginning, are seen as interdependent originations and empty of inherent existence. It is because they know this ultimate reality of phenomena directly, that all conditioned phenomena have ceased to exist for their consciousness, and are not seen in the face of perception by an arya's meditative equipoise.

This is specifically refuting doubts about how conditioned phenomena have ceased for the indemonstrable consciousness of an arya being. The others understand this to mean that things completely cease to exist, i.e. it seems as if existent things are being said to be non-existent. However that is not the case. There is no assertion that something that existed before is seen to be non-existent later. Rather, the lack of inherent existence has always existed in the past, but has not been comprehended by ordinary beings.

The example used to explain this is a person with cataracts who is unable to see an object clearly. Even though an object is present a person with cataracts cannot see it clearly, and in the worst case cannot see it at all. If the question is, 'because it is not seen by the person who has cataracts, does that mean that the object does not exist?', then, the answer is 'no', that is of course not the case'. Just because the person cannot see something because of blurred vision doesn't mean that the actual object does not exist. Similarly, the lack of inherent existence has always existed in the past, but has not been seen by ordinary beings because of their ignorance.

The commentary then states:

It is the case that conditioned phenomena have always been empty of inherent existence from the beginning, but only seen later. It is not the case that things existed inherently before and are later seen to lack inherent existence. Otherwise, meditative equipoise would serve as means to destroy things

and also the fault of not perceiving ultimate reality would occur.

This is in response to the main objection of the opponents, which is that if the inherent existence of conditioned phenomena existed previously, and is now seen to be non-existent by an arya being in meditative equipoise, then the wisdom realising emptiness by the arya being would become a cause to actually destroy the phenomena. But that is not the case. The wisdom realising emptiness does not actually destroy phenomena which existed before, rather, it destroys the perception of inherent existence that has always been present in the past. Thus, it is not the case of phenomena being destroyed by an arya being who realises emptiness.

**97. All these phenomena of beings
Are seen as fuel for the fire of consciousness.
They are pacified through being burned
By the light of true discrimination.**

Gyalsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of the verse:

All these phenomena of beings i.e. object of knowledge and the consciousness that perceives them, are seen as fuel for the meditative fire of consciousness, because they are completely burned.

All phenomena fit into the two categories of objects of knowledge and the consciousness that knows them, which are included in the phrase *all these phenomena of beings*.

The verse is structured as a syllogism. The first line *all these phenomena of beings* is the subject; the predicate is *are seen as fuel for the [meditative] fire of consciousness*, which particularly relates to the arya being's meditative equipoise; and the reason is because *they are completely burned*. Thus the phenomena of beings are like fuel for the meditative consciousness, because they are completely burned or consumed by it.

If we were to take this syllogism literally, we would misinterpret the meditative fire of consciousness as actually burning all phenomena, which doesn't make sense. Thus *all these phenomena* refers to the appearance of true existence of phenomena, and with respect to the consciousness, it relates to all fabrications of perceiving true existence. That is what is burned or consumed by the consciousness realising emptiness.

The commentary then explains the manner in which they are burned, with the analogy of light:

They are burned by the light of the discriminating awareness truly seeing ultimate reality, which pacifies all dualistic appearances.

Here the analogy of light refers to the *discriminating awareness of truly seeing ultimate reality*, which is what *pacifies all dualistic appearances*. Here one can specifically relate dualistic appearance to the dualistic appearance of conventional and ultimate reality as being completely separate and unrelated entities, which is said to be the worst of the dualistic appearances.

When the commentary refers to *pacifies all dualistic appearances*, then that includes removing both the obscurations that perceive true existence, and the very

imprints of those obscurations. So the wisdom realising emptiness of an arya being in meditative equipoise not only removes deluded obscurations, but also removes the obscurations to omniscience. Thus one needs to understand that gaining the wisdom directly realising emptiness is not only a means to free oneself from samsara and obtain liberation, but it is also the essential and ultimate means for achieving enlightenment, as it serves as an antidote to overcome the very imprints of dualistic appearances.

One needs to understand the analogy used in this presentation. The wisdom realising emptiness is presented as being like a fire or light that burns and consumes things. When the analogy is applied to the meaning of the wisdom realising emptiness, it is the fire or light that consumes or pacifies all obscurations, i.e. deluded obscurations as well as the obscurations to omniscience.

So when we relate this to ourselves, we can understand the purpose and why we need to obtain the wisdom realising emptiness. The ignorance of grasping at the self is the cause of all our delusions, and thus the cause of all our negative states of mind. Therefore we need to overcome that ignorance of grasping at the self, which we cannot do without gaining the realisation of emptiness. In this way we will definitely be inspired to develop this very precious wisdom realising emptiness.

Whenever we engage in the practice of Dharma, we need to relate it to the understanding of emptiness on a more personal level. Whatever the level of our practice of Dharma, we must always bring it back to the main point, which is that the whole purpose for engaging in the practice of Dharma is to subdue and pacify our very unruly state of mind. We have all experienced the shortcomings of an unruly mind, and that is what needs to be pacified. From the very outset, in whatever practice we engage, we need to remind ourselves that the purpose for our Dharma practice, study or meditation is to subdue our own mind. Then we will then be able to direct our practice towards that end.

It is necessary for us to subdue our own mind. Saying that others have to be pacified and subdued doesn't work without first subduing our own minds. We can assist others only when our own mind is subdued, so it is our responsibility to work on our own mind first.

It is very beneficial for us to relate our practice to Lama Tsong Khapa's advice. He said that the most revered Buddha Shakyamuni is the one who is free from all faults, who has acquired all qualities, and who has reached the state of omniscience. The great Buddha didn't just manifest from above and come down to the Earth. Achieving the state of buddhahood is not some sort of power that is bestowed upon you.

Rather it is a gradual process from the state of being an ordinary being, and then engaging in the practice of removing negative states of mind one at a time, and acquiring or adopting the qualities one at a time. Through that one eventually achieves the state of completely abandoning all negativities and acquiring all good qualities, and thus becoming omniscient. That advice is really profound, because it is based on the level we are at

now. The way to follow the path that leads to the state of omniscience, is to adopting one single good quality and avoiding one negativity at a time.

This advice from Lama Tsong Khapa was included in his explanation of cessation and the path. He explained that cessation and the path are not something out there, that you just make reference to, pay respect to, and then obtain some time later. It is only by removing negativities and acquiring the qualities now, at whatever level one is at, that one will achieve cessation and the path within one's own mental continuum.

There is a definite connection between ourselves and an enlightened being. If an enlightened being was a primordial being already free from all faults and with all good qualities, then that would definitely be an unattainable state for us. As we are not free from all faults and have not obtained all good qualities, we wouldn't have any hope of achieving enlightenment! But, when an enlightened being is described as a being who has acquired those qualities from a very ordinary state, then that gives us hope and encouragement, because it shows us that there is a connection between our own state now and the state of reaching enlightenment.

This is the ultimate reasoning in Buddhism—that buddhahood or enlightenment is possible for every individual being, and that everyone has the 'buddha potential'. This is based on the reasoning that enlightenment is attained through the process of removing one fault at a time, and acquiring one quality at a time. This shows that even at our level buddhahood is possible, as removing one fault at a time is manageable, and acquiring one quality at a time is also manageable. So we definitely have that potential!

On a more subtle level, this also shows us that the so-called faults or delusions are adventitious and not in the nature of one's mind. Therefore they can be separated from our mind. Delusions are not the same entity as our mind, and because they are adventitious we can therefore remove them from our mind. The same principle applies to the acquisition of qualities; by further developing our potential we can achieve all qualities.

In fact that every individual has the capacity to free the mind from the stains of the delusions is, in itself, the reason why all living beings have a buddha nature, and therefore the potential to become enlightened. This sound reasoning can really encourage us.

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.4 No fault of falling into a view of annihilation

This section presents a refutation of the fault of being nihilistic. According to the lower schools, the explanation that conditioned phenomena cease to that indemonstrable consciousness, makes it sound as if the Prasangika are have nihilistic views. Here, the Prasangika explain they do not have the fault of being nihilistic.

98. *The reality is later ascertained
Of what was formerly imputed by ignorance.
When a thing is not found,
How can there be a non-thing?*

In explaining the meaning of the verse, Gyaltsab Je first states the objection:

[Objection] In that case you have asserted that everything does not exist, and thus you become a nihilist.

Then the commentary presents the answer:

[Answer] That is not so. Afflictive ignorance previously imputed inherent existence where there is no inherent existence. Later on, having delineated the emptiness of inherent existence, one ascertains suchness and realises the mode of abiding of things. But there is no fallacy of deprecating things even in the slightest.

This is explaining that inherent existence was imputed by afflictive or deluded ignorance. Thus one needs to really understand that the fault lies with the afflictive ignorance, which is the cause for perceiving things as existing inherently. As explained here, *later on, having delineated the emptiness of inherent existence, one ascertains suchness and realises the mode of abiding of things*. The lack of inherent existence is perceived when one gains the realisation of emptiness. Thus when the lack of inherent existence is perceived, it is a negation of a view that existed in the past, and not a negation of the actual existence of phenomena. Hence there is no fault of falling into the extreme of nihilism.

Then a further objection is raised:

[Objection] By refuting inherently established things, you actually establish inherent existence.

The answer to that is:

[Answer] When things are not found to exist inherently how can that establish a non-thing to exist inherently? It is not possible, for without the reliant there can not be reliance.

This point was presented earlier in the text. In response to the presentation of the lack of inherent existence, this query arises: is selflessness (or the lack of inherent existence) itself inherently existent? If a phenomenon is presented as lacking inherent existence then maybe the lack of inherent existence itself exists inherently? This doubt is presented to eradicate any possibility of inherent existence, under any circumstances. So this is really a very meticulous and precise way of presenting the teachings.

We can also understand this point in relation to, for example, a vase. When a vase is presented as lacking inherent existence, one can immediately relate to the possibility of the inherent existence of the vase also being empty of inherent existence.

2.2.2.2.1.4 Refuting inherently existent space

Compounded phenomena have been presented as being empty of inherent existence. This may lead to a doubt as to whether 'non-things' (i.e. existent phenomena that are not things) may be inherently existent or not. This verse contains a refutation of that doubt:

99. *Because the phenomena of forms
Are only names, a space too is only a name.
Without the elements how could forms exist?
Therefore even name-only does not exist.*

In presenting the meaning of this verse Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

If you say that uncompounded space is inherently established: that is not so, because space is merely a name and does not exist inherently. That is because the negation of space which is the phenomena of forms are only names.

If you say obstructive form is inherently established: there is no way for form to exist inherently, because the elements are not established inherently. Even mere names are not established inherently, because that which possesses a name is not established inherently.

The lack of inherent existence of the elements was presented earlier, so there is no need to go into further explanation, as the commentary is quite clear.

2.2.2.2.2 APPLYING THE REFUTATION TO THE REMAINING AGGREGATES

The first aggregate is the form aggregate. As the inherent existence of form has been refuted, the refutation of the inherent existence of the remaining aggregates is now presented.

*100. Feelings, discriminations, compositional factors,
And consciousnesses are to be considered
Like the elements and the self.
Thereby the six constituents are selfless.*

The five aggregates are form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness. A person who possesses all five aggregates is referred to as a form being, or a being in the form realm; a being in the formless realm is a being who does not have the first (form) aggregate, but who has the other four aggregates.

As Gyaltsab Je explains in his commentary:

The aggregates of feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness, just like the elements and self, are considered as empty of inherent existence. The same logic presented previously, such as the reasoning of neither one nor many harms their inherent establishment. Thereby, just like the person, the six constituents are also selfless.

C. PRESENTING THE NAME OF THE CHAPTER

This is the first chapter of Precious Garland which presents high status and definite goodness.

The commentary concludes with:

This completes the commentary to the first chapter of the *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, entitled 'An explanation of high status and definite goodness'.

We will now do the Tara Praises, which is a very significant practice for our overall well-being. The Tara practice presents Tara as a combination of the guru, the saviour, and the deity. Tara is an unfailing friend when one is unwell, and someone upon whom one can rely, like a doctor. So Tara is the saviour in every way.

When we rely on other beings there is no certainty. In difficult times ordinary beings may fail us, but when we rely on Tara (who is an enlightened being), she is an unfailing guide, friend and companion at all times. That is the significance of doing the Tara practice. As the practice says: 'by taking the manifestation of my guru, please grant me all the blessings; by taking the

manifestation of the deity, please grant me all attainments; by taking the manifestation of a protector, please grant me protection, well-being, and all needs and conditions for my practice' and so forth. So if we rely on Tara with those intentions in mind, then it becomes very meaningful.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama has also mentioned, a devout Christian has complete faith in God and when they entrust themselves entirely into Him, they get benefit from that total reliance. If, as practitioners of Buddhism, we have a similar attitude of complete reliance on our guide and saviour, who is an enlightened being, it will definitely bring us the greatest benefit.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland

འཇམ་དཔལ་གྱི་རིན་པོ་ལུ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

12 October 2010

With a good motivation we can engage in the meditation practice as usual. [Meditation]

We may only have limited time in which to meditate here, but with familiarity with the practice, you can spend more time doing the meditation at home.

We need to familiarise ourselves with the practice of developing love and compassion many times over. Even during one day, we need to think about love and compassion several times, contemplate it, and meditate on it again and again. This is how we become more familiar with love and compassion, and thus make it more stable within our own hearts.

The essence of the Buddha's teachings comes down to developing bodhichitta, which is based on love and compassion. We have that basis of love and compassion within ourselves now, so it's really only a matter of strengthening it and making it firmer and more stable so that it becomes the basis on which to develop bodhichitta. The only way to do that is to familiarise ourselves with it again and again.

As we contemplate and meditate on love and compassion, we will also notice an immediate benefit, which is that the mind becomes calmer and more peaceful. While we are thinking about generating love and compassion, the other delusions definitely subside. Thus developing love and compassion is an antidote for overcoming delusions.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERWOVEN EXPLANATION OF THE CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS AND HIGH STATUS

This chapter has three sub-divisions.

- A. Cause and effect of definite goodness
- B. Cause and effect of high status
- C. Cause and effect of definite goodness

I am not sure if 'interwoven' has the same meaning as the Tibetan word *pelma*. The Tibetan term *pelma* has the connotation of something that comes between two other similar things. In this chapter, the explanations on 'high status' comes in between the two explanations of 'definite goodness', so that's how 'interwoven' has to be understood in relation to the context of this chapter.

Before we go into sub-divisions and explanations in the text, what does 'definite goodness' mean?

Student: Liberation and enlightenment.

That is correct, but it is good to be more specific. You need to incorporate the literal meaning of definite goodness, which was explained earlier.

If the result is definite goodness, i.e. liberation and enlightenment, then what are the causes?

Student: The realisation of emptiness.

What does 'high status' refer to?

Student: A human rebirth or higher.

More specifically, you can say it refers to the happy or fortunate rebirths.

As the main topic is the cause and effect of definite goodness and high status, it is worthwhile to bring to mind the specific causes of each of those two results. The first chapter listed a number of specific causes for high status. As part of our practice it will be of personal benefit to bring to mind the specific causes, and then to reflect on, and contemplate them.

When we bring the topics of the teachings to mind and really contemplate them, we will find that there is no lack of topics for meditation. In fact we might not have enough time even if we meditated all day and night! So, bringing these topics to mind and contemplating them is, in itself, a form of meditation.

Contemplating the teachings one has heard and then meditating on them is the way to gain realisations. The unique method that was presented by Atisha is to first hear the teachings, then to contemplate or analyse what one has heard, and then meditate on that meaning. Indeed, without meditation there is no possible way to gain realisations. So in order to gain realisations we have to meditate—that is clear. However in order to meditate one needs to firstly know what to meditate on, and this is where the hearing and the analysing process comes into play. We must first hear the instructions about the topics on which we are to meditate, then we can think about them or analyse them, and through that process we will gain a clear object on which to meditate

A. CAUSE AND EFFECT OF DEFINITE GOODNESS

The two sub-divisions of this heading are:

1. Refuting extreme views
2. Difficulty of realising the profound

1. REFUTING EXTREME VIEWS

This is sub-divided into three categories:

- 1.1. Recalling the former explanation through another example
- 1.2. Actual refutation of extreme views
- 1.3. Therefore the four extremes were not taught

1.1. Recalling the former explanation through another example

Here we can see the unique nature of this presentation. We have already covered quite a bit of the topic in the first chapter, so here we are directed to recall the main points of that earlier presentation, which is done by using another example. Here, *former explanation* particularly refers to the presentation of the lack of inherent existence, which is the essence of chapter one. Thus, the first lines of this chapter reads:

101. *Just as when a banana tree
With all its parts is torn apart, there is nothing,
So when a person having the [six] constituents
Is divided, it is the same.*

*102ab. Therefore the Conquerors said,
"All phenomena are selfless."*

In explaining this quite simple analogy Gyaltsab Je's commentary reads:

Just as if you were to search for the essence [solid core] of a banana [plantain] tree within all its parts by peeling away the bark, you will find nothing.

For those who are not familiar with the structure of a banana tree, if you peel away the outer layer of bark, there is similar layer underneath. And if you peel that second layer away, the third layer is the same, and so you never seem get to the core of the actual tree. This is a very clear analogy, about which Gyaltsab Je wrote:

Similarly, when a person having the six constituents is divided and searched for within all its parts, you will not find even an atom of an inherently established essence.

When you search for the person within their six constituents, you will not find even an atom of inherent existence that can establish an inherently existent person.

The commentary then quotes from a sutra:

*Just as you would not find any essence,
In the inside or the exterior,
Of a watery plantain tree,
After having searched for its essence;
Likewise, know that all phenomena are the same.*

This verse is simply presenting the analogy that was presented earlier. The main point is that this is presenting the lack of inherent existence again, specifically the lack of inherent existence of a person. The analogy is quite clear. We label a banana tree as being solid, but when we look for a solid core under the bark we will not find the essence of that tree. Likewise with a person—if the person were to exist inherently then you would have to find it on one or all of the six constituents, which is the basis of imputation. However when you search for a person amongst the six constituents, you will not find an inherently existent person anywhere. Using the reasons that were presented earlier is a way of reminding us of the lack of inherent existence.

As I have mentioned many times before, it is really worthwhile to spend some time investigating and questioning our view of what we consider a person to be. Normally when we relate to a person, we have an instinctive notion that the person really exists out there from their own side. We grasp at this misperception and really believe it. So the purpose of all the logic that is being presented in the teachings is to challenge our incorrect perception.

Normally, we don't even question our perception and we totally believe in it. When we see a person they appear to exist solidly from their own side. And we don't really question that, because we totally believe in that apparent existence. However as the teachings present, if a person were to exist solidly from their own side i.e. inherently, then we would have to find them if we were to search for them. There is no other place to search for a person other than on the basis of imputation of the person, which is the six constituents. And when we search for a person

amongst the six constituents, we cannot find the person anywhere.

The Lam Rim teachings present another analogy to illustrate our false perceptions. When you see your horse galloping, the moment you perceive the horse you have a total conviction that that is your horse out there, which exists from its own side. You have an instinctive notion—'that galloping horse is my horse'. But again, if we were to search for the horse within its basis of imputation, then there is no really truly existent horse as we think of it. Normally, without analysis, there is no question that that the horse running out there exists from its own side independently and solidly. So if the horse or the person were actually to exist from their own side, truly and inherently, then where is such a person, and where is such a horse? This manner of investigation really challenges our perceptions and views.

As previously mentioned in the teachings, contemplating whether the person exists within the six constituents involves investigating each individual constituent, such as the earth element, the water element and so forth, and then the collection of those constituents. As the teachings tell us: the individual constituents are not the person, nor is the collection of the constituents the person. Then you are left with the conclusion that you really cannot find a solid and inherently existent person. Your investigation thus leads to gaining the view of emptiness. After analysis and thought one arrives at the conclusion: 'I really can't find a solid, inherently and truly existent person'. Following the investigation, one should just sit with the conclusion that there is no inherently and solidly existing person. When this method is perfected then it becomes the actual view realising the emptiness of the person.

Coming to that conclusion, thinking about it for a while. and then meditating on that is said to be an incredibly powerful practice. It can purify so much negative karma, as well as collect an extensive amount of merit. So rather than merely accepting it with an intellectual and literary understanding, it is really worthwhile to actually contemplate it and think about it in this way.

1.2. Actual refutation of extreme views

This has three sub-divisions:

- 1.2.1. Absence of inherent existence of self and selflessness
- 1.2.2. Absence of inherent existence of existents and non-existents
- 1.2.3. Dispelling an objection that not teaching an end to cyclic existence is wrong

Some of these points were covered earlier however the following explanations go into a bit more detail.

1.2.1. Absence of inherent existence of self and selflessness

This is presented in the following lines:

- 102cd. Since this is so, all six constituents
Have been delineated as selfless for you.*
- 103. Thus neither self nor non-self
Are to be apprehended as real.
Therefore the Great Subduer rejected
Views of self and of non-self.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of these lines:

The reason and suitability of presenting persons and the six constituents and all else as selfless to you O King,...

This is making reference to the fact that the person and the aggregates or the six constituents are selfless. Nagarjuna is saying to the king, 'I have a reason for presenting the person and the six constituents as being selfless'.

... [it] is because the Conqueror said that all phenomena are selfless, and that they do not exist inherently

Nagarjuna quotes the Buddha's words on selflessness because he knows that as the king has faith in the Buddha and is a follower of the Buddha, he can use quotes from the Buddha as a valid source on the topic of selflessness. By presenting the view of selflessness as the Buddha's teachings, Nagarjuna is also implicitly validating the authenticity of the source. Doing that shows that selflessness is not something that Nagarjuna made up himself, but that it actually comes from the authentic source of the Buddha's own words. When the commentary says *because things do not exist inherently* it is referring to all the logic and reasons for the lack of inherent existence that were presented earlier.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary further explains:

It is because of this reason that non-things are also said to lack inherent existence.

Earlier, objects or matter were presented as lacking inherent existence. The logic being presented here is that if 'things' lack inherent existence, then by default the opposite, 'non-things', would also have to lack inherent existence.

The commentary continues:

The reason why the Buddha, the Great Subduer, whose three doors are not stained by even the subtlest faults, rejected the view of self and non-self as inherently existent is because the view holding self or non-self as being inherently established is a perverse view.

The Buddha is described here as the Great Subduer. That is because his three doors are not stained, i.e. the body, speech and mind of the Buddha are not stained by even the subtlest faults. Thus the Buddha is free from all adversities and faults. This establishes the Buddha as a valid being. Thus the fact that the Buddha rejected the view of self and non-self as inherently established, is yet another reason presented to the king, which supports the non-inherent existence of self and non-self.

Gyaltsab Je concludes this section saying:

That is because as presented earlier, self and non-self cannot not be perceived as being inherently established.

1.2.2. Absence of inherent existence of existents and non-existents

This heading sub-divided into two:

1.2.2.1. Actual explanation

1.2.2.2. Reason for not answering in any of the four extremes

1.2.2.1. ACTUAL EXPLANATION

This heading is explained in two verses the first of which is:

*104. Sights, sounds, and so forth were said by the Subduer
Not to be true and not to be false.
If from one position its opposite arises,
Both do not exist in fact*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je says:

The reason why the Buddha taught that the six objects such as sights and sounds are not established as true or as false is because both are not established ultimately.

Two of the six objects, sights and sounds, are explicitly presented here. The others are taste, smell, tactile and mental sense objects. In brief, all six objects are not established as true or false because sights and sounds etc. are not established ultimately.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

If you say that by refuting its true existence their non-existence is established or that their false existence would be inherently established, because true and false are mutually exclusive; that is not so. It has already been established that there are no inherently existent things and no inherently existent trueness. Thus there are no inherently existent non-things and no inherently existent falseness, because the latter exist only in relation to the former.

The opponents say: when you present things as being empty of inherent existence, then the opposite of that, which is falseness, would truly exist. They are using a perverse logic, because the two things are seen as mutually exclusive. But it doesn't work that way.

*105. Thus ultimately this world
Is beyond truth and falsity.
Therefore the Subduer does not assert
That it really exists or does not.*

As Gyaltsab's commentary explains:

Thus the reason why the Subduer does not assert ultimately established existence or non-existence is because, as with the reasons presented earlier, ultimately this world is beyond truth and falsity.

1.2.2.2. REASON FOR NOT ANSWERING IN ANY OF THE FOUR EXTREMES

As this is a presentation of what I have previously explained, it should be quite easy to follow.

The relevant verse is:

*106. [Knowing that] these in all ways do not exist,
How could the All-Knower say
They have limits or no limits,
Or have both or neither?*

In explaining the meaning of this verse Gyaltsab Je asks:

How could the Omniscient-One say that the self and the world have limits [an end] or no limits [no end], or have both or neither? He didn't because

the self and the world, in all ways, are not inherently existent.

When the Buddha was asked questions about whether there is a beginning or an end to the self, or whether there is a beginning or end to the world, he remained silent because the questions were asked on the basis of an assumption that the self and the world and so forth are inherently existent. So the Buddha didn't answer these questions because that would only confirm the assumption of inherent existence. Later on the text explains why the people who asked such questions are not suitable vessels.¹

1.2.3. Dispelling an objection that not teaching an end to cyclic existence is wrong

This heading has two sub-divisions:

1.2.3.1. Objection

1.2.3.2. Answer

1.2.3.1. OBJECTION

The first of the two verses in this subdivision is

*107. Innumerable buddhas have come,
And likewise will come and are here at
present.
There are zillions of sentient beings,
And in addition the buddhas intend to abide
in the three times.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je first presents the objection:

It was not appropriate for the Omniscient One not to teach about the beginning and end of the world. Because innumerable buddhas have come in the past, likewise they will come in the future, and as each of the zillions of sentient beings residing at present become enlightened, there will be zillions of buddhas who will lead even more beings to liberation. And in addition, for the purpose of leading sentient beings to liberation, the buddhas intend to abide in the three times.

The query relates to the past buddhas and the future buddhas yet to come. The logic used is that after current sentient beings have become enlightened, they will be able to liberate even more sentient beings, until there are no more to liberate, so therefore there must definitely be an end to samsara. Thus, says the argument, as there must be an end to samsara, the Buddha most definitely should have presented that fact. The objection is continued in the next verse:

*108. The extinguishing of the world in the three
Times does not cause it to increase,
Then why was the All-Knower silent
About the limits of the world?*

Gyaltsab Je explains:

Because it is not possible for sentient beings which did not exist in the past to be [newly] born, there is no increase in the number of sentient beings; the extinguishing of sentient beings and abiding in the three times is not a cause for the increasing of the sentient being's worlds. Thus, why didn't the Omniscient One teach on the beginning and end of

sentient beings, when a great number in the past have been extinguished and there has been no increase?

The response to that objection is in the next verse:

1.2.3.2. ANSWER

This heading has three sub-divisions.

1.2.3.2.1. Example for the absence of inherent existence of the world's production and cessation

1.2.3.2.2. Example for the absence of inherent existence of going and coming

1.2.3.2.3. Things are only nominally imputed

1.2.3.2.1. Example for the absence of inherent existence of the world's production and cessation

Here there are two further sub-divisions:

1.2.3.2.1.1. The profound as what is secret for non-receptacles

1.2.3.2.1.2. Actual example

1.2.3.2.1.1. The profound as what is secret for non-receptacles

The relevant verse is:

*109. That which is secret for a common being
Is the profound doctrine,
The world as like an illusion,
The ambrosia of the Buddha's teaching.*

This presents the answer to the previous objection. As Gyaltsab explains in his commentary:

Ordinary beings grasp onto things as being truly established and deprecate [deny] suchness; when such unsuitable vessels combined the extremes into fourteen categories and posed them as questions to the Buddha, it was appropriate for the Buddha not to give an answer. That which is a secret for common unsuitable vessels is the profound doctrine. That is because the world is like an illusion in so far that it doesn't exist inherently as it appears. This is the essential ambrosia [nectar] of the Buddha's teaching, which is not seen by those bound by ordinary perceptions.

As was explained previously, the main point here is that the beings who posed questions to the Buddha regarding whether or not there is an end to samsara, strongly held on to the view of inherent existence. Thus they are not suitable vessels for the Buddha to present an appropriate answer. Such an answer would have been that the end of cyclic existence lies in overcoming the misconception of inherent existence. However those posing the questions were not ready to hear about the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, and wouldn't have been able to cope with it, which is why the Buddha did not provide an answer.

As mentioned in previous sessions the fact that the Buddha did not give an answer is a clear indication that the Buddha is an omniscient being. The Buddha had no intention of misleading them, so he didn't answer the questions. In fact, not answering was a sufficient response for them. That is how it is to be understood. The essential point of this explanation lies in these words: *the world is like an illusion in so far that it doesn't exist inherently as it appears. This is the essential ambrosia [nectar] of the Buddha's teaching. This is the profound main point.*

¹ The teaching of 31 October 2006 gave a detailed list of the fourteen questions the Buddha refused to answer.

1.2.3.2.1.2. Actual example

The actual example is provided in the next two verses. The explanations of these verses can be brief because we have covered most of these points before. Also additional explanations lie further ahead in the text.

**110. *Just as the production and disintegration
Of an illusory elephant are seen,
But the production and disintegration
Do not really exist.***

**111. *So the production and disintegration
Of the illusion-like world are seen,
But the production and disintegration
Do not ultimately exist.***

As Gyaltsab Je's commentary presents:

Just as an illusory elephant may appear to be born and die, in reality it has no true birth and death. Likewise even though there is appearance of inherent existence, it is empty just like an illusion. Thus even though there is an appearance of birth and death in this world, ultimately there is no birth and death.

As an illusory elephant could be seen to be born and to die, but in reality that illusory elephant has not been born and will not die, because it does not exist as a real elephant. Similarly, even though inherent existence appears to exist, just like an illusion there is ultimately no real inherent birth and death. Inherent existence cannot be found anywhere.

Gyaltsab Je's commentary continues:

Furthermore, just as the spectators who are under the magician's spell have the apprehension of conjured horses and elephants as actually existing on stage, likewise ordinary beings, who don't have any understanding of emptiness, have the apprehension of things existing inherently, and don't have any concept of things being empty of inherent existence.

This has also been presented in earlier teachings. The analogy used is when a magician conjures up an elephant; the spectators see an elephant that they totally believe exists. However even though it appears to the spectators it is an illusory elephant that does not really exist. The fact that it appears to the spectators doesn't validate it as being real. Similarly, although inherent existence appears to ordinary beings, there is no actual inherent existence.

Though there is the appearance of the conjured horses and elephants to the magician himself, he knows they don't exist in fact. Likewise for ordinary beings who have the conceptual understanding of emptiness and to the arya beings below the seventh bodhisattva ground, there is the appearance of all things as being inherently established and they have the manifest grasping of true existence. However for the arya beings who have obtained the eighth bodhisattva ground and above, there is not even that grasping. Just like the spectators who are not affected by the magician's spell do not even have the appearance of the conjured horses and elephants, likewise in the face of a trainee arya who is in meditative equipoise,

there is no appearance of any conventional realities. This is to be understood.

This is an essential point to keep in mind. As the commentary explains, when a magician conjures up horses and elephants, the spectators perceive the elephants and horses as existing on the stage from their own side. There is no question in the spectators' minds about whether or not there are horses and elephants on the stage. They are perceived as being right there!

It is the same for ordinary beings who do not have an understanding of emptiness. To them things appear as existing inherently, and they have no doubt in their mind about whether or not things exist inherently. An ordinary being totally believes in the appearance of inherent existence.

In this analogy, the spectators, who have been subject to the spell, and who totally believe in the existence of the elephants, are analogous to ordinary beings, who have a perception of, and total belief in, inherent existence.

The magician himself also perceives the elephants and horses that he has created with his spell, but he does not believe that there are actually elephants and horses present, because he conjured them up himself. So even though the magician is also under the spell of seeing them, he does not believe in their existence. Thus the magician is analogous to both ordinary beings who have a conceptual realisation of emptiness, and arya beings to whom inherent existence still appears but don't believe in it.

As explained in the teachings, those on the seventh bodhisattva ground and below have the realisation of emptiness, along with the perception of inherent existence, but once they reach the eighth ground inherent existence will not appear to them at all.

In the analogy, spectators who come late to the magician's show, and who have not been affected by the spell, will not see the conjured elephants or horses and therefore will not believe in them. This is an analogy for the face of the perception of an arya being who is meditative equipoise, where there is no appearance whatsoever of conventionality or of inherent existence, as well as no projection of inherent existence.

Of course the analogy and the meaning applied to it have been presented many times previously to the older students, and it is good to gain a really firm understanding of the analogy and its meaning.

Here the analogy is presenting three types of beings:

- ∞ Those who have both the perception of the appearance as well as the belief in that.
- ∞ Those who perceive the appearance of the illusion but do not believe in it.
- ∞ The third type of person does not need to see the illusion, nor do they believe in the illusion.

When those three types of beings in the analogy are related to the appearance of inherent existence:

- ∞ There is the ordinary being who has both the appearance of inherent existence and the belief in it, which they grasp at.

- ∞ There is the being who has a conceptual and actual direct realisation of emptiness of an arya, but who is not in meditative equipoise. Such beings have the appearance of inherent existence but don't have the grasping or apprehension of it, because they don't believe it.
- ∞ There is an arya being who is in meditative equipoise who has neither the appearance nor the apprehension of inherent existence. In the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise all three types of dualistic appearance completely cease, so therefore they don't have any inherent appearance. But of course the arya buddha has neither the appearance nor the apprehension of inherent existence at all times.

As you will be aware, the next session will be a discussion session. Again I urge you to really try to conduct the discussion in such a manner as to really learn something and benefit from it as well.

The points to discuss are for example, the essential points about the earlier analogies and their related meanings. Becoming more familiar with the 'magician' analogy and understanding it better is really beneficial. Also important is the lack of inherent existence and how that applies to phenomena such as the self. If we ask whether a self exists, then the answer is yes, the self of a person does exist. So, what is lacking is an inherently existent self. Do the aggregates or other phenomena exist? Yes they do exist. So what is lacking? The aggregates and phenomena lack inherently existent aggregates or phenomena.

The more we really consider and contemplate these points, the more likely it is that we will be able to subdue our seemingly unshakable, unruly and self-centred mind. No matter what practice we do, it seems as if we continue to regard our self-centred and unruly mind as most precious, thus whatever practice we do, it doesn't really affect that self-centred mind.

That is because we have not really come to the main point. So if we were to really consider these points about the lack of inherent existence, and the lack of true existence of the self, beginning with one's own individual self, then that will actually start to subdue our unruly mind. When the truth of that dawns upon us, we will loosen that grip of self-centredness.

I also say jokingly that if we can start to alter that self-centredness and go beyond it, then samsara can be quite an enjoyable place! Otherwise samsara is not all that enjoyable, and no matter what we do, something will always be unpleasant, and samsara itself will be unpleasant.

I have no doubt that you will have a good discussion, but nevertheless I am urging you to carry a good motivation into the discussion. That motivation basically should be along the lines of 'what is the best way I can benefit or serve others? May the discussion serve as a means to benefit others'. If those who have more knowledge share it with others with a good motivation, you will actually gain merit of presenting the teachings.

If those who ask the questions, ask in a nice way (as opposed to a challenge) they will get more information. Thus, with such an open mind and attitude one will definitely get the benefit. Although this benefit is profound, on a more practical level, having a good discussion with an open mind and a harmonious feeling, will improve our relationship with others, and thus the camaraderie will be stronger.

Following your good discussion you can also have a good exam in the following week.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© **Tara Institute**

Discussion**19 October 2010****Week: 1 (21 September 2010)**

1. Give the definition of a person from the Prasangika point of view. Explain what this definition means. [4]
2. What faults would incur if the aggregates and the self were one? [4]
3. Give the syllogism (subject, predicate and reason) relating to the elements. [3]

Week: 2 (28 September 2010)

4. Why does Gyaltsab Je say, '....., according to you (lower Buddhist school systems) there would have to be fire without fuel. ' ? [3]
5. What are the characteristics of the four elements? [4]
6. Another objection is raised where the lower system is saying to the Prasangika, 'If, in relation to the four elements, you claim that things do not exist from their own side then that would go against the Abhidharma sutra, which clearly presents the individual characteristics of the elements.' Give the Prasangika's refutation. [4]

Week: 3 (5 October 2010)

7. In the verse by Nagarjuna that we recite (Homage to the Root Wisdom) what do 'without destruction' and 'without identity' refer to? [4]
- 8.a) If conventional phenomena were to appear to the Arya being in meditative equipoise, what would be the fault? [2]
- b) What are the three dualistic appearances that cease for the wisdom realising emptiness? (pg. 2, just above verse 96) [3]
9. Explain the analogy of the person with cataracts in relation to the wisdom realising emptiness. [4]
10. Verse 97 is structured as a syllogism. Explain the meaning. [4]

**'All these phenomena of beings
Are seen as fuel for the fire of consciousness
They are pacified by being burned
By the light of true discrimination.'**

Week: 4 (12 October 2010)

11. Explain how the analogy of the plantain or banana tree works in relation to emptiness. [2]
12. 'Becoming familiar with the Magician analogy and understanding it better is really beneficial.' Describe the three types of beings in this analogy and how they are related to the appearance of inherent existence. [6]

Discussion points not on the exam

Page 6: 'The points to discuss are for example, the essential points about the earlier analogies.....'

14.Also important is the lack of inherent existence and how that applies to phenomena such as the self.....
15. Why is it that no matter what practice we do, we continue to regard our self-centred and unruly mind as precious?

Exam

Name:

Mark:

Week: 6

Block: 6 (26 October 2010)

1. Give the definition of a person from the Prasangika point of view. Explain what this definition means. [4]

2. What faults would incur if the aggregates and the self were one? [4]

3. Give the syllogism (subject, predicate and reason) relating to the elements. [3]

4. Why does Gyaltsab Je say, '....., according to you (lower Buddhist school systems) there would have to be fire without fuel. ' ? [3]

5. What are the characteristics of the four elements? [4]

6. Another objection is raised where the lower system is saying to the Prasangika, 'If, in relation to the four elements, you claim that things do not exist from their own side then that would go against the Abhidharma sutra, which clearly presents the individual characteristics of the elements.' Give the Prasangika's refutation. [4]

7. In the verse by Nagarjuna that we recite (Homage to the Root Wisdom) what do 'without distinction' and 'without identity' refer to? [4]

8.a) If conventional phenomena were to appear to the Arya being in meditative equipoise, what would be the fault? [2]

b) What are the three dualistic appearances that cease for the wisdom realising emptiness? (pg. 2, just above verse 96) [3]

9. Explain the analogy of the person with cataracts in relation to the wisdom realising emptiness. [4]

10. Verse 97 is structured as a syllogism. Explain the meaning. [4]

**'All these phenomena of beings
Are seen as fuel for the fire of consciousness
They are pacified by being burned
By the light of true discrimination.'**

11. Explain how the analogy of the plantain or banana tree works in relation to emptiness. [2]

12. 'Becoming familiar with the Magician analogy and understanding it better is really beneficial.' Describe the three types of beings in this analogy and how they are related to the appearance of inherent existence. [6]