

incompatibility, when there is a common basis of accepting the reasoning, then it will be accepted. This can be interpreted in two different ways, either it can mean that reasons which pertain to other tenets which have a similar view to our system, are accepted and appropriate; such as the reasoning in the syllogism, a vase lacks true existence, because of being interdependent. Another way of interpreting that, is the reasons that are accepted in our system, as well as the opponents system, are appropriate.

...there is no incompatibility, since they pertain where both protagonists' tenets are similar.

This is where the reasons as presented in the text are accepted.

1.2.1.3.2. SINCE EMPTINESS EXISTS, ITS OPPOSITE, TRUE EXISTENCE, IS NOT FEASIBLE

The verse that relates to this outline is the following:

*When there is nothing that is not empty, 382
How can emptiness be so?
When the one does not exist,
Why should the antidote exist?*

The assertion in relation to this verse is the following:

Assertion: You proponents of emptiness accept the entity of emptiness, and since emptiness is not feasible unless it relies on non-emptiness, things are truly existent.

As mentioned previously, the counter-argument they use basically refers to this fact. According to them 'while you establish emptiness, it has to rely on non-emptiness. It cannot be established unless it relies on non-emptiness.' *Non-emptiness* here refers to true-existence, the opposite of the lack of true existence, is true existence or inherent existence. So this is their counter-argument.

As the commentary presents the answer in relation to the verse:

Answer: It follows that the existence of emptiness does not establish its opposite, that there is true existence.

If emptiness were truly existent, truly existent things as its basis would be feasible, but as there is nothing that is not empty of true existence, how can emptiness be truly existent?

When that which is being characterised is presented as being empty of inherent existence or lacking inherent existence, the doubt arises about the characteristics themselves, whether they could have some inherent existence or not. His Holiness also explained in detail in the recent teachings that just as that which is being characterised is empty of inherent existence, likewise the characteristics are also empty of inherent existence. The equations on both sides have to be thoroughly established to remove that doubt, since the doubt does arise.

Then as the commentary further reads:

Its basis cannot possibly be truly existent. Why, when the basis does not have true existence, would the antidote negating it be truly existent?

This also relates to the presentation of the assertions and the refutations made earlier in relation to the base and that which is based upon it, or that which is characterised and the characteristics of that which is being characterised.

The basis or that which is based upon it, or that which is being characterised and the characteristics being equally empty, was presented earlier. Here again the text emphasises those points.

Then the commentary quotes from the *Fundamental Wisdom*:

*If the slightest thing were not empty
Emptiness would have some existence*

Then as well, the *Two Truths* says:

*Since the object of negation is non-existent,
The negation clearly does not exist as [its own]
reality.*

At this point, His Holiness also having quoted from this, raised the question of who the composer of the Two Truths was, whether it was Yeshe Nyingpo or not. His Holiness was checking with the Geshe who said Yeshe Nyingpo was the composer. His Holiness was also referring to Geshe Tashi Tsering and myself. His Holiness also mentioned, in relation to another doubt about the different types of reasoning, establishing the fundamental nature of things and so forth, the different characters and how to explain the nature, karma and so forth. His Holiness was referring to a discussion on this we had last year in New Zealand, and was asking what the conclusion had been. In relation to that discussion we had last year in New Zealand, I was trying to present the conclusion, but His Holiness said, 'okay, lets leave it for now because it might just confuse us more' [laughter]

1.2.2. Refuting adherence to theses which fall into extremes

That is sub-divided into two:

1.2.2.1. Actual refutation

1.2.2.2. Refuting the justification

1.2.2.1. ACTUAL REFUTATION

This is sub-divided into three:

1.2.2.1.1. Refuting that the non-thesis is a thesis

1.2.2.1.2. Refuting proof that there are truly existent things

1.2.2.1.3. Showing that everything is equally free from extremes

1.2.2.1.1. REFUTING THAT THE NON-THESIS IS A THESIS

This relates to what is translated here as 'thesis'. The specific Tibetan word 'chog' is more like an in accordance. According to the Tibetan word here 'chog' and 'chog me' relates to 'accordance' and 'discordance'. Basically, it relates to what is translated as 'thesis' and 'non-thesis'. The 'non-thesis' refers to the establishment of lack of inherent existence, lack of true existence, and the 'thesis' here, refers to the bases of negation of true existence. Again it is similar to the earlier counter-argument about when lack of inherent existence is established, the opposite of that which is true existence also has to be established.

Answer:

*If there were a thesis, absence of the thesis 383
Would in entity be a thesis,
But where there is no thesis
What can be the counter-thesis?*

The opponents' assertion is:

Assertion: Since there is not even the slightest emptiness, it cannot constitute one's thesis. Nevertheless by accepting the absence of a system of one's own as one's system, one is asserting a thesis. Since there is no thesis, which does not depend on a counter-thesis, truly existent things – the counter-thesis – exist.

The answer is:

If we had any thesis of existence by way of a thing's own entity, the absence of a thesis would in entity be a thesis existent by way of its own entity.

While the thesis of non-inherent existence or lack of true existence is established, that does not mean that that thesis itself is truly existent.

The following explanation makes it clear, as it reads in the commentary:

However since we do not have any thesis of existence by way of a thing's own entity, a counter-thesis dependent upon that is also impossible.

The opponent's counter argument is for example, to use an analogy with directional sides of an object; when the eastern directional side of an object is established, the opposite of that side, as not being the eastern directional side is also established. Similarly the opponents use these reasons as a counter-argument, and say *if you were to establish lack of inherent existence or emptiness, then the opposite of that which is true existence, would also have to be established*. However our system clearly states that what is being established lacks any inherent or true existence, so anything counter to that cannot be established in any way as being truly existent either.

However since we do not have any thesis of existence by way of a thing's own entity...

So there is no thesis which establishes a thing existing by way of its own entity, existing from its own side, so a counter-thesis dependent upon something which exists from its own side, is impossible. That's what is basically being established.

Continuing on:

Moreover all theses concerning truly existent things have already been refuted above.

Clearly all the previous verses negating true existence have been established.

Furthermore it clarifies the remaining part of the explanation in the commentary:

Thus if the absence of a thesis does not exist by way of its own entity, what truly existent thing could constitute the counter-thesis?

This being a rhetorical question, it means that it couldn't.

Neither thesis nor counter-thesis have even an atom of true existence. By this we refute truly existent emptiness as our system, which should not, however, be interpreted as showing that we have no system.

What is being clearly established here is that when the thesis of lack of inherent existence is established, it doesn't mean that nothing exists. It doesn't mean that we are establishing a thesis, which indicates that nothing exists, that there is nothing. In other words emptiness

does not imply that there is no thesis, where nothing is being established

1.2.2.1.2. REFUTING PROOF THAT THERE ARE TRULY EXISTENT THINGS

That is sub-divided into three:

1.2.2.1.2.1. It is not feasible that there is true existence on the grounds that specific functional things are truly existent

1.2.2.1.2.2. Refuting the four extremes by reasoning

1.2.2.1.2.3. Not even the smallest particle of true existence can be observed

1.2.2.1.2.1. It is not feasible that there is true existence on the grounds that specific functional things are truly existent

Answer:

How can fire be hot,

384

When things do not exist?

This was refuted above: it was said

That even hot fire does not exist.

The opponents use a counter-argument giving examples of what we conventionally call 'the nature' of something. Such as hot being the nature of fire; sweetness being the nature of molasses. These are explained as being in the nature of an entity. Using that as an example the opponents say 'since hot is the nature of fire, then that characteristic or nature should be truly existent'. Similarly sweetness, being the nature of molasses, must be truly existent.

Thus their assertion is the following:

Assertion: There are truly existent things, because specific things like fire and so forth [truly] exist.

The word *truly* is missed out as according to the Tibetan text.

Both us, and the opponents, would agree that hot is the nature of fire, as sweetness is the nature molasses. However that does not indicate that the entity of hot exists from its own side or is inherently existent in fire. Even though we would say that hot is the nature of the fire.

The meaning of the verse is explained in the commentary:

How can fire be hot by way of its own entity? It cannot, for there are no truly existent things. Above it was said that even hot fire does not exist inherently. As it says in the stanza 341

The nature of fire being hot and that being dependent on fuel was clearly explained in the earlier verse. So what is being reiterated here is that fire is that which burns, and because fire has the characteristic of burning, it also has the nature of being hot. However having the nature of being hot does not come about independent of anything else, because fire depends on fuel. Without fuel there can't be fire. So just as fire and fuel are interdependent, the nature of fire being hot is also dependent on fuel, as it does not arise independently.

The nature of fire being hot is not such that heat exists independently with fire. Fire itself would then exist independently in the nature of being hot. It does not exist this way as it depends on fuel to burn. It is in combination with fuel that the fire is in the nature of being hot and burning. Without fuel there can't be fire.

Study Group – *Aryadeva's 400 Verses*

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

8 July 2008

As usual we sit with a fresh mind that is free from external distraction, and try to bring it inward. Then from within a focused state of mind we generate a positive motivation such as, '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'.

1.2.2.1.2.3. Not even the smallest particle of true existence can be observed

What this outline indicates is that let alone big things, even the smallest particle does not have true existence.

For the following reason, too, it is incorrect to assert true existence:

When there is nowhere, even in particles, 386
A truly existent entity, how can it occur?
Even for Buddhas, it does not exist.
Thus it is irrelevant.

The commentary quotes from an earlier stanza:

As explained in the context of [stanza 305],
This also applies when one examines
Whether particles have parts.

As was explained earlier the opponents assert a partless particle as an instance of a truly existent phenomenon. According to our system a particle that has no parts and which is a complete separate entity that does not depend on anything else, is non-existent. There are no such partless particles as even the tiniest particle is dependent on its directional parts. So, as it is a dependent arising, even the tiniest particle cannot be truly existent, or an independently existent phenomenon.

The commentary further explains:

If there were a truly existent entity, it should be observable even in extremely small things such as particles, but it is not observable. How can truly existent production occur for that which does not exist anywhere?

As explicitly explained here, if there were a truly existent entity, then it would have to be found when searched for. However when investigated, even the tiniest particle cannot be seen as being truly existent. The rhetorical question, "How can truly existent production occur for that which does not exist anywhere?" implies that since truly existent phenomena cannot be found to be existent anywhere, there could not be any instances of a truly existent production.

As the commentary further reads:

It is totally incorrect to accept as existent that which is non-existent to the perception of Buddhas, the sun-like radiance of whose consummate understanding of the suchness of things dispels all darkness of ignorance.

First of all, the qualities of the Buddha are explained with an analogy of the rays of the sun, and the way they dispel darkness. Just as darkness is immediately dispelled wherever the sun's rays hit the Earth, likewise the radiance of the buddhas, which is the quality of the Buddha's omniscient mind, radiate forth in order to help sentient beings remove their ignorance, which is analogous to darkness. The sun-like radiance of the Buddha, removes all the darkness of ignorance from the minds of sentient beings.

This explanation of the Buddha's quality also relates to the literal meaning of the word *sang gye* in Tibetan. These two syllables connote Buddha, the Enlightened One or Awakened One, but each syllable has a specific connotation. *Sang* has the connotation of completely dispelling, implying dispelling all ignorance and negativity from the mind. *Gye* has the connotation of proliferation, implying the proliferation of all qualities. Thus the two syllables connote an enlightened being who has dispelled all ignorance and proliferated all qualities.

The commentary then relates this explanation of an enlightened being, or a buddha, to the meaning of the verse: even an enlightened being or buddha who has the highest qualities, does not see true existence or inherent existence in any phenomena.

Using the meaning of the verse, it concludes that if there is no instance at all of inherent or true existence of any phenomenon, even for an enlightened mind, then that rules out any possibility of there being an instance of true existence at any other time.

The commentary concludes:

Asserting true existence is thus unrelated to any feasible thesis.

When it says, 'asserting true existence is thus unrelated to any feasible thesis' this relates to refuting certain views of opponents who assert that 'there is no true existence from the Buddha's perspective, however in general one must accept that there is true existence'. As the commentary explains, true existence cannot be established under any circumstance.

In relation to the meaning of 'buddha' explained earlier, the Sanskrit word 'buddha' literally translates as either 'awakened' or 'blossomed', (sometimes the analogy of a lotus is used) just as a lotus, although born from a muddy pond, blossoms into a beautiful flower, likewise the Buddha's mind blossoms from the darkness of ignorance. However the Tibetan word *sang gye* has a further connotation. It includes the aspect of dispelling all darkness as well as the proliferation or accomplishment of all possible good qualities.

As most of you were at His Holiness' teachings recently, you would remember that His Holiness explicitly pointed out that the Tibetan translations of the text are not only very authentic, but that certain words or terms also carry a very deep meaning. As His Holiness explicitly mentioned, with the word *sang gye*, the Tibetan translators took it a bit further than the meaning of the one syllable in Sanskrit, in order to bring a more profound meaning to the word 'buddha'. So using these two syllables *sang gye* is good for us to get a further understanding of what Buddha means.

As His Holiness also mentioned, the Tibetan translations are such that by following the literal meaning of the words, even an ordinary person can actually develop an understanding of their meaning. So the Tibetan language uses very meaningful terms to explain the Dharma.

His Holiness really emphasised this point, and it seems very true. An old lady came to see me during the teachings, saying that she had been reading sutras but couldn't really understand anything much. In fact trying to read the sutras just made her sleepy because she missed the point. However after coming to the teachings for just two weeks she could understand much of the their meaning. This goes to show that the language itself makes a difference in presenting the meaning of the teachings. Tibetan is really quite unique in that sense of presenting very deep meaning. So this is good news for those who are inspired to learn Tibetan (*laughter*).

It is appropriate to say that without the Tibetan language and texts, it would be quite hard to really get the subtle meanings of the teachings, because Sanskrit is no longer commonly used. Also many of the original Sanskrit texts have been lost. Whereas there has been a successful Tibetan translation of most Sanskrit texts, not only the texts themselves, but the commentaries, and further commentaries on those texts also exist in Tibetan. Thus the actual root text, and the commentaries of those root texts composed by other Indian masters, as well as Tibetan commentaries are all intact in the Tibetan language. At this time and age, it seems that this is the only means to really gain an understanding of the teachings.

When someone who knows Tibetan and who knows the Dharma a bit is able to literally translate from the Tibetan into English, for example, then that seems to present a good sound teaching.

I have heard from other Tibetan scholars who are in Japan that there are earlier commentaries that were translated into Japanese. However they are in an older style of Japanese script and cannot be translated into modern Japanese without knowing some Chinese. Therefore, those texts cannot possibly be translated from modern Japanese into English or any other language for that matter without knowing Chinese. So these very old and ancient texts cannot be used now as they are not accessible to the common people.

1.2.2.1.3. SHOWING THAT EVERYTHING IS EQUALLY FREE FROM EXTREMES

That is subdivided into two.

1.2.2.1.3.1. Actual meaning

1.2.2.1.3.2. Inappropriateness of asserting differentiations of truly existent and not truly existent with regard to any phenomenon

1.2.2.1.3.1. Actual meaning

*If they are not twofold, how can
Anything have an existent entity? 387
If that is reasonable to you also,
Why raise further arguments?*

As the commentary explains:

If there is no twofold division of phenomena into truly existent and not truly existent, what, such as

particles and so forth, could have a truly existent entity...

As mentioned earlier, as even the tiniest particles lack true existence there can be no distinction between phenomena as being truly existent and others as being not truly existent. That is because even the smallest particle and so forth cannot have any true existence.

...since all forms of true existence have been precluded?

This rhetorical question indicates that nothing can have a truly existent entity. This relates to the verse where it says 'if they are not twofold how can anything have an existent entity?' There is another interpretation: according to some other commentaries 'they are not twofold' can also mean that phenomena can be divided into permanent and impermanent phenomena, and so any true existence of either permanent or impermanent phenomena cannot be seen. However we relate to the explanation that is given here in this text.

In relation to the last two lines of the verse the commentary read:

If for the very reasons we have explained, it is appropriate for you too to accept the system which has eliminated the two extremes, why do you cling to the thesis of true existence and raise further arguments against us?

Here again our system is pointing out to the opponents 'having heard all the reasons and explanations that eliminate the two extremes that we have given, then why do you still hold on to theses of true existence and raise these arguments to us?' As there are obvious good reasons explaining the absence of true existence, it shows the absurdity of the opponents still holding on to their views and still trying to argue against the Madhyamika view.

1.2.2.1.3.2. Inappropriateness of asserting differentiations of truly existent and not truly existent with regard to any phenomenon

If any reasoning could disprove the thesis concerning emptiness of true existence, we would be convinced, but since things cannot be proved truly existent, you should accept only our thesis.

*Regarding the non-functional [aspect] of all things, 388
Differentiations are inappropriate.
That which is seen in all substantial entities
Is not differentiable.*

What our system is pointing out here is that the opponents attempt to disprove our thesis concerning emptiness without any sound reasoning. What our system is basically saying is 'If you were to give some sound reasoning to disapprove the thesis of emptiness then we could accept that, be convinced and there would be no arguments. But besides not being able to provide any good reasons to disprove the thesis of emptiness, you have no good reasons to prove anything to be truly existent'.

'That being the case the only option left is for you to accept our thesis, which is the thesis that explains a lack of inherent or true existence - the thesis of emptiness.'

The commentary further explains the meaning of the verse:

If the nature of internal and external things were truly existent, they would not depend on causes and conditions.

That things depend on causes and conditions has been proved many times.

Also differentiations of truly existent and not truly existent are inappropriate with regard to the absence of truly existent things. There are no differences in the entity of space, because it is a mere absence of obstructing form. Similarly regarding emptiness of true existence, the nature seen in all substantial entities,

What is being further explained is that if internal and external things were truly existent then the conclusion would be that they do not depend on causes and conditions. But clearly things do depend on causes and conditions, which indicates that things could not be truly existent. Furthermore a differentiation between truly existent and not truly existent is inappropriate. The analogy that is given is that just as the entity of space as a 'mere absence of obstructing form' pertains to every part of space, likewise emptiness of true existence pervades all existent phenomena.

The essential point that is presented here, as it has been presented earlier, is the point that reads, 'if the nature of internal and external things were truly existent, they would not depend on causes and conditions'. This point is really the crux of the teachings. Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings explicitly state that when one gains an understanding of interdependence it should help one to understand the lack of inherent or true existence, which is emptiness, while thinking about how things lack true existence or inherent existence should enhance the understanding of interdependence.

If we were to take a vase, for example, it is very important that when we gain an understanding of the specific relationship of interdependence and emptiness, we extend that to gain an insight into the crux of the teachings on emptiness. If things were truly existent then one should understand how that implies that things would not be dependent on causes and conditions. The very assertion of true existence implies an entity that is independently existent, where 'independently existent' means existing from its own side, and by its own right. That in turn implies not depending or relating to anything else, which then implies that it does not relate to any causes or conditions for its existence. That is essentially what is being negated.

For example, when one considers how a vase is dependent on causes and conditions, in other words when one thinks about the vase and how it is made, how it comes into existence due to certain causes, then that very understanding should enhance the understanding that the vase is empty of true existence or inherent existence, because it depends on causes and conditions. Likewise permanent phenomena such as space, also dependent on directional parts for its existence, thus they are interdependent originations.

Thus when thinking about the interdependent nature of something, one gains an insight into the emptiness of that phenomenon. Likewise when one contemplates the vase as being empty of inherent or true existence, and uses that as a reason to establish that it lacks independent existence and is therefore dependent on causes and conditions, then that understanding enhances contemplation on the lack of inherent or true existence of the vase. That then enhances the understanding of the vase as being interdependently existent, or establishing interdependent origination of the vase.

When we relate that to all internal and external phenomena, which covers all existence, this is a point that one should keep in mind. As explained in the teachings it is a very important point for gaining insight into the emptiness of all phenomena. So through this training and understanding we gain further insights into emptiness. Let us use a more contemporary example such as this clock to test your own understanding. If someone were to present the clock and say that it is dependent on causes and conditions, then does that help to enhance the notion that the clock must therefore lack true existence or inherent existence? Just mentioning that the clock is dependent on causes and conditions should help to instill the notion that therefore the clock must lack inherent or true existence.

Likewise if the clock is presented as being a phenomenon that lacks inherent or true existence, then that should help to instill the notion that therefore the clock must exist by depending on causes and conditions. In other words its interdependence, or the interdependent origination of the clock must be understood.

If, after thinking about the clock's interdependent existence, one is still doubtful about the clock's lack of inherent existence then one has missed the point. If, after thinking about the lack of inherent existence of the clock, one starts to wonder about the interdependent origination of the clock, then one has also missed the point.

Lama Tsong Khapa clearly and explicitly mentioned in teachings such as the *Three Principals of the Path* that if one does not gain an understanding of emptiness when one thinks about interdependent origination and vice versa then one has not fully understood the Buddha's intent. On the other hand, when one sees that these two understandings enhance each other then one has grasped the full intention of the Buddha. Even though this has been mentioned many times previously I will go over it again now.

The main point, as presented in Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings is that we should understand how emptiness and interdependence enhance each other. If one actually misses that point then the great fault that could arise is that one will not have the right view of emptiness. If one does not have that profound insight into the relationship between interdependence and emptiness then the fault that would arise is that despite claiming that one has a profound understanding of emptiness, one may actually neglect the observance of karma, cause and effect. If the observance of the laws of cause and effect is neglected, then that will be a great danger for oneself and others.

In relation to the specific explanation in the commentary that reads, 'there are no differences in the entity of space, because it is a mere absence of obstructing form', the analogy that is used is space. For example, although a vase, a pot, a glass and other kinds of objects, are all hollow they are clearly different, one being a vase and another being a pot, another being a glass and so forth. However the space within the hollowness of these objects is exactly the same in having the entity of mere absence of obstructing form, which is the definition of space.

One cannot differentiate the entity or nature of space within these different objects. Even though the objects are different, the space within them is the same insofar as it is a mere absence of obstructing form. Likewise, as mentioned here in the commentary, 'regarding emptiness of true existence the nature seen in all substantial entities is the same'. Using that analogy, what is being explained is that even though there may be different entities of phenomena or different existing objects, they all are in the same nature of lacking true existence or inherent existence, regardless of whether they are permanent or impermanent phenomena. So in that way they are exactly the same.

Then the commentary quotes from a stanza that was explained earlier:

[Stanza 191] says:

Whoever sees one thing,
Is said to see all.
That which is the emptiness of one
Is the emptiness of all.

The explanation of this verse was given earlier, so you should already understand it. As explained previously, one must not misinterpret these lines. They do not indicate that the emptiness of one phenomenon is the emptiness of all other phenomena. That is not what is being indicated. Rather, what is being mentioned here is that when one understands the emptiness of one phenomenon then that understanding of the emptiness of the one phenomenon is the equivalent of seeing the emptiness of all phenomena. That is, by using the same logical reasoning one will also be able to see the lack of inherent existence or true existence in other phenomena as well.

Also, in relation to the previous analogy of space, when one sees the emptiness of certain phenomena one is seeing the mere absence of true existence or inherent existence. Emptiness is a non-affirming negation: what is being negated within that phenomenon is mere true existence, or inherent existence. That mere negation of inherent or true existence is the same for any phenomenon. When one realises emptiness of any phenomenon one is negating the true or inherent existence of that phenomenon. In his recent teachings, His Holiness, quoted from other teachings such as *Root Wisdom* by Nagarjuna and so forth to explain this point.

In order to further emphasise the point the commentary quotes from a sutra:

Sutra says, "Whoever has come to know the non-functional with regard to functional things has no attachment to functional things." There are no distinctions of truly existent and not truly existent with regard to any phenomenon whatsoever.

It is good to take note of the nature of this presentation. First logical reasons are used and then to back up those logical reasons a quote from the sutras is used. The citation from a sutra is used to back up the logical reasons that have been given. This is, in fact, the approach to debate in the monasteries: the debate formula is based on logical reasons and when one presents the main logical point in debate it is considered to be very skilful when there is a sound citation to back up that logical reason. If there is an authentic citation from a sutra to back up logical reason then that becomes the complete formula of authentic debate.

1.2.2.2. REFUTING THE JUSTIFICATION

There are two sub-headings:

1.2.2.2.1. Appropriateness of accepting the thesis of emptiness of true existence if it is not accepted the appropriateness of giving a reply but not being able to do so¹

1.2.2.2.2. Difficulty of finding a thesis refuting emptiness of true existence

1.2.2.2.1. APPROPRIATENESS OF ACCEPTING THE THESIS OF EMPTINESS OF TRUE EXISTENCE IF IT IS NOT ACCEPTED THE APPROPRIATENESS OF GIVING A REPLY BUT NOT BEING ABLE TO DO SO

Basically this outline is saying 'our system has presented sound reasons to accept the thesis of emptiness of true existence. It would be appropriate that you either accept that thesis based on the reasons that we present, or if you don't accept it then it would be appropriate that you give a reply saying why my reasons are not good'.

Challenge: After first analyzing, you should either accept emptiness or make a reply.

Objection: It would be appropriate to make a reply if the slightest thing were accepted as truly existent, but since according to you everything is non-existent, how can any reply be made?

What the opponents are saying is, 'if you were to accept something, as being truly existent, then it is appropriate to give a reply to you, but since you accept nothing how can I give you a reply?' What is missing from the translation is 'if you were to say I do not give a reply because you don't accept anything how can any reply be made?'

If owing to non-existence you claim 389
No reply is made to the other's thesis,
Why should you not also prove
Your own thesis which is refuted by reasons?

The commentary then explains the meaning of the verse, which is an answer to the objection:

If you claim that no reply is made to the Mādhyamika thesis because everything is non-existent, why should it not also be proper to prove your own thesis which is refuted by the reasons that prove emptiness? Since one cannot refute another's thesis without proving one's own, yours has become non-existent.

What is being specifically explained here is 'you have not proven your own thesis first. How then can you disprove ours without proving your own thesis? So therefore your

¹ The text does not list the heading in full.

Study Group – Aryadeva's 400 Verses

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

15 July 2008

As usual we set a positive motivation for receiving the teachings such as, 'In order to benefit all sentient beings we need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will listen to the teachings and put it into practise well'.

1.2.3. Showing parity of reasoning with regard to true existence or lack of true existence

1.2.3.1. Both emptiness of true existence and true existence are either equally established or not established merely by words

1.2.3.2. Mere designation as truly existent will not make it so

1.2.3.3. If there were true existence because ordinary people use the verbal convention that things are truly existent, then being conventionally existent they could not exist as their own suchness

1.2.3.1. BOTH EMPTINESS OF TRUE EXISTENCE AND TRUE EXISTENCE ARE EITHER EQUALLY ESTABLISHED OR NOT ESTABLISHED MERELY BY WORDS

This indicates that if things can be established merely by words, then there is no difference between establishing true existence and the lack of true existence.

If just by saying "They exist" 391
Things really did exist,
Why should they not also be non-existent
Just by saying "They do not exist"?

What this verse is basically refuting relates to the earlier assertion by the opponents, where we said, 'Not only do you not have any sound reasons to prove the establishment of true existence, you don't have any good reasons to refute our establishment of the lack of true existence'. The opponents replied that in worldly convention, it is known to be easy to refute others views without giving any reasons. Thus the main point is that the opponents have not given any valid reasons to refute our system's establishment of the lack of inherent existence, nor have they given any valid reasons to establish true existence. This is followed by our system saying, 'If your reasons for true existence were to rely on things being established by mere words, then that is also not feasible'. The commentary explains the verse as follows:

If even without reasoning, but merely by saying the words "They exist," things existed as their own suchness, why should their emptiness of true existence not also be established merely by our saying the words "They do not exist truly"? The reasoning is the same in all respects. Therefore, rejecting assertions regarding the two extremes, we both should firmly establish the textual system free from all fabrications which asserts non-existence of the two extremes.

The main point being raised here specifically relates to the opponents' lack of reasons that establish true existence. If by mere words 'they exist' you can establish true existence, then would it not be the same in our own case? Why wouldn't merely saying 'they do not exist' also establish the lack of true existence?

Whilst in our system, rather than being mere words, there are many sound reasons that establish the lack of true existence. Therefore, the commentary says, rather than giving baseless reasons it is better that we both establish the textual system that gives sound reasoning free from all fabrications, which asserts the non-existence of the two extremes.

1.2.3.2. MERE DESIGNATION AS TRULY EXISTENT WILL NOT MAKE IT SO

This further refutes the establishment of true existence. The opponents say that true existence is established by convention when one says 'things truly exist', and this is refuted by our system, which points out that mere designation of something as truly existent does not make that thing truly existent, and thus truly existent phenomena are not feasible. What our system is basically saying is neither mere words nor mere designation is sufficient to establish or prove true existence.

There is a story about a discussion between two people. One of them owned a male horse that had a rather big belly, so he claimed that his horse was pregnant. The other person reasoned, 'How could your horse be pregnant? It is a male horse!' To which the horse owner replied, 'Well it may be a male horse, but still it is pregnant'. Besides insisting that his horse was pregnant, he had no good reasons to prove it. Of course we know that it is feasible to refute a male horse being pregnant, but the horse owner was a bit stubborn and wouldn't accept facts. The point of this story is that the reasoning used by the opponents of our system is similar to that—they insist that things are truly existent, but they have no good reasons to prove it.

Our system is pointing out that using mere words or mere designation is not a valid reason to establish true existence. Thus our system is basically saying, 'If you claim that true existence is established, then you must give sound reasons to support your claim. Likewise if you refute our position that there is a lack of true existence, then you have to give good and valid reasons to refute us. Without valid reasons, your refutations are not feasible'.

Assertion: If things do not exist ultimately, the designation "things exist" is incorrect and as unreasonable as terming a barren woman's child existent.

Answer:

If a thing is not non-existent 392
Because the term "existent" is ascribed,
Neither is it existent
Because the term "existent" is applied.

The opponent's assertion, which is more of a counter argument is if according to your system, things do not exist ultimately, then how can you say 'things exist', it would be the same as 'terming a barren woman's child existent'. In our system however, even though we establish that things do not exist ultimately, that does not negate the existence of phenomena. It does not mean that things do not exist.

Their assertion indicates that the opponents fail to understand the meaning behind our statement, and so therefore their counter argument is, if things do not exist according to you, then that is as unreasonable as saying 'a child of a barren woman exists'.

In explaining the meaning of the verse, the commentary reads:

If things do not lack true existence because the designation "they are and exist" is ascribed, neither are

they truly exist because the designation "they exist truly" is applied.

The commentary clarifies our view, 'According to your system merely because the designations "they are" and "exist" are ascribed to things, you say things do not lack true existence. With that same line of reasoning, neither could things be truly existent merely because the designation "they exist truly" is applied. So, if you claim that things could not lack true existence merely because the designation that "they exist" is ascribed, then likewise when you say things are truly existent: just because you ascribe the term "truly existent", it does not mean that they become truly existent either. Things cannot exist truly'.

In our system, when we say that things 'lack true existence', we are not denying the actual existence of things. In fact by proving that things 'lack true existence', it establishes the real mode of existence of things, so rather than negating the existence of phenomena, it actually establishes the true nature of things. Whereas when you ascribe 'true existence' to something, it is not as if just designating 'true existence' actually makes things to truly existent'.

The commentary gives this analogy:

Calling someone with good eyesight blind or someone with a short life long-lived does not make them so.

The analogy explains that when someone actually has good eyesight, just giving the designation 'they are blind' does not make them blind. Likewise just giving someone the designation 'long-lived' does not make them live long. Similarly, when you designated things as 'truly existent', that does not establish things as truly existent.

The commentary further reads:

Besides, if things could be accomplished by words alone, it would be just as reasonable to accept that they lack true existence as to think they are truly existent.

The main point being made here is that mere designation will not make something to be so. Thus mere designation of true existence upon phenomena, will not establish things to be truly existent. It is similar to describing a person with good sight as being blind: mere designation will not establish that person as blind.

Furthermore, as it explains in the commentary, 'if things could be accomplished just by giving the term or by words alone' then 'it would be just as reasonable to accept that they lack true existence as to think they are truly existent'. So if you establish true existence merely because the term 'things are truly existent' is given, then you would have to also accept the 'lack of true existence' because that can also be established as a term. In that case you would have to face the absurdity of accepting that things are both 'truly existent' as well as 'lacking true existence'.

1.2.3.3. IF THERE WERE TRUE EXISTENCE BECAUSE ORDINARY PEOPLE USE THE VERBAL CONVENTION THAT THINGS ARE TRULY EXISTENT, THEN BEING CONVENTIONALLY EXISTENT THEY COULD NOT EXIST AS THEIR OWN SUCHNESS

The main point of the outline, which is in the meaning of the next verse, is that if things were truly existent because ordinary people use that verbal convention, then that would imply that even ordinary beings would be able to see the true nature of things, which has to be the lack of inherent existence. But that, of course, cannot be the case.

Another's assertion: Words do not reveal an object's entity. If they did, one's mouth would burn when saying "fire" or be full when saying "pot." Therefore we assert that

ordinary people all have means of expression and terms for that which is being expressed which do not touch an object's own entity.

This is an assertion that is established by a different opponent. What this opponent is establishing is that words themselves do not actually reveal the actual entity of the objects. If they did, then saying the word 'fire', for example, would cause your mouth to burn. Likewise if you said that a pot was round and big, then your mouth would be full when you say those words.

That opponent concludes, 'Therefore we assert that ordinary people all have means of expression and terms for that which is being expressed which do not touch an object's own entity'.

Answer:

*If everything is a convention
Because expressed by ordinary people,
How can anything which exists
As [its own] suchness be a convention?*

393

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Supposedly things all exist inherently and as conventions because ordinary people speak of them by means of words which do not touch their entity. But how can anything that exists inherently, existing as its own suchness, be a convention? It could only be ultimately existent.

The main point being made here is that if, because of convention, things actually existed inherently, i.e. exist as their own suchness, then that would imply that ordinary beings could actually perceive the reality, suchness, or emptiness of things.

If phenomena were to be ultimately existent, then by seeing the ultimate existence of the phenomena an ordinary person would attain liberation. If an ordinary person actually saw the ultimate reality of things, then in fact they would not be an ordinary person. The way to achieve liberation is by realising the ultimate reality of phenomena, and it is only a yogic perception that sees the ultimate reality of phenomena. 'So according to you if ordinary beings were to touch the reality, or see the suchness of phenomena by mere convention then that would imply that ordinary beings have yogic perception, and therefore they could not be ordinary beings.'

Therefore, as it mentions here in the commentary, 'how can anything that exists inherently, existing as its own suchness, be a convention?' A convention is that which is seen or perceived by ordinary beings. This rhetorical question implies that 'anything that exists inherently as its own suchness, could not be a convention'.

1.2.4. Refuting non-existence as the thesis

That is subdivided into two:

1.2.4.1. Refuting that negation of truly existent things makes things utterly non-existent

1.2.4.2. As there are no truly existent things that which is non-functional cannot be truly existent either

1.2.4.1. REFUTING THAT NEGATION OF TRULY EXISTENT THINGS MAKES THINGS UTTERLY NON-EXISTENT

In their counter arguments the opponents have asserted that our system negates 'existence' because we claim that things 'lack true existence'. Therefore what is being established here is that the negation of 'truly existent things' does not make things 'non-existent'.

Assertion: Since you deny that things have true existence, things are non-existent.

That is the opponent's counter argument to the Madhyamika point of view.

Answer:

*If things are non-existent because
Things all do not exist, 394
In that case it is incorrect that all theses
Concern the non-existence of things.*

The first two lines of the verse are the opponent's assertion. The commentary explains their meaning in this way:

If even the slightest thing is non-existent because things are not truly existent...

The commentary then explains the last two lines:

...it is incorrect that all Mādhyamika theses concern the non existence of things through refutation of previously existent truly established things...

What is being established here is that when the Madhyamika thesis establishes the non-inherent existence of things it is not 'through the refutation of previously existent or truly established things'. That is, it is not as if truly existent phenomena which once existed are now being negated. That is not how our system establishes the lack of true existence.

...for there has never been any true existence."

In relation to the opponents' assertion or counter argument about our system establishing the lack of true existence, or things lacking true existence, the opponents are saying that if you establish or claim things lack true existence then, in fact, you are implying that things do not exist.

In negating the opponents' point of view, what our Madhyamika system is saying is that when our system establishes the lack of true existence it is not as if an earlier existing truly existent phenomena is being negated. That is not the case. This will become clearer in the next verse, which explains this point with an analogy – it is not like the non-existence of a vase after it has disintegrated. The way that the non-existence of a vase is established, is by the disintegration of an earlier existing vase. But this is not the case when the lack of true existence of phenomena is established. It is not as if an earlier truly existent phenomenon is negated to establish the lack of true existence of that phenomenon.

The commentary concludes by saying 'for there never has been any true existence'. To rephrase this point, when the Madhyamika system establishes the lack of true existence of phenomena by negating truly existent things, it sounds to the opponents as if our system is saying that things do not exist. That is because, they see and believe in things as existing truly. What our system basically is pointing out is, that in establishing the lack of true existence we are not negating existing phenomena.

1.2.4.2. AS THERE ARE NO TRULY EXISTENT THINGS THAT WHICH IS NON-FUNCTIONAL CANNOT BE TRULY EXISTENT EITHER

*Since a thing does not exist 395
A non-thing cannot exist.
Without a thing's existence,
How can a non-thing be established?*

Earlier assertions by the opponent say that if you establish a thing then the opposite of that, a non-thing, has to be also established. A thing and a non-thing are opposites, so when you establish one the other has to be also established. What our system is pointing out is that this is not the case. It is not

as if establishing the lack of true existence of things establishes a non-functional thing as being truly existent.

As the commentary explains the verse:

Since truly existent functional things, the object of negation, do not exist their non-functional negation cannot be truly existent.

We can relate this to the syllogism, 'A vase is not truly existent, because it is an interdependent origination'. What this establishes is the lack of inherent existence of a vase. The opposite of the thesis is a truly existent vase, and this is what needs to be negated. If we relate this to, for example, a thing, then a thing's lack of inherent existence is established with a similar syllogism. Although the thesis establishes the lack of inherent existence of a thing, the opposite is not established, i.e. the true existence of a thing is not established to be existent. In fact true existence is what is being negated. Our system says, 'When a thing is established as lacking inherent existence or true existence, the opposite is also implied, i.e. a non-thing is also implied to lack inherent or true existence'.

With the syllogism 'a vase does not have true existence, because it is an interdependent origination' the subject is the vase; the predicate is the lack of inherent existence; and the reason is because it is an interdependent origination. So the thesis that is being established is the lack of inherent existence of a vase, and the opposite of that, the inherent existence of a vase, is what is to be negated. Thus establishing that the vase lacks inherent existence does not imply that a non-vase or an opposite of that is something that is truly existent.

In the world a completely disintegrating thing is said to be non-functional. In keeping with this, a completely disintegrated pot would not be feasible if the pot had never existed.

It was explained earlier that when a disintegrated pot is established, the pot would have had to exist earlier. Without the pot or vase having existed earlier you cannot talk about its disintegration. Likewise how could the non-functional be truly existent when there are no truly existent functional things?'

What is being established in relation to this analogy is:

Thus how could the non functional be truly existent when there are no truly existent functional things? The existence of a dependent thing is not feasible without that on which it depends.

If there are no truly functional things to begin with, then how could the non-functional exist? Here 'non-functional' relates to actual truly existent things. How can truly existent things be existent, if truly existent phenomena didn't exist in the first place?

The main point in relation to the analogy is that if a pot has never existed previously, then a disintegrated pot could not exist. Likewise if there are no truly existent functional things, then non-functional or truly existent things could not be truly existent, since there have never been any truly existent functional things.

1.2.5. Refuting that things are not empty because analogies and reasons to establish emptiness exist

That is subdivided into two:

1.2.5.1. Showing the invalidity in the form of absurd consequences [of asserting that] there is true existence because there are reasons

This is basically saying that it is absurd to establish true existence on the basis of the reasons that establish emptiness.

1.2.5.2. Showing the invalidity in the form of absurd consequences [of asserting that] things are not empty because there are analogies

This relates to the absurdity of saying that there is true existence because there are analogies that show that things are empty.

1.2.5.1. SHOWING THE INVALIDITY IN THE FORM OF ABSURD CONSEQUENCES [OF ASSERTING THAT] THERE IS TRUE EXISTENCE BECAUSE THERE ARE REASONS

Assertion: In order to prove emptiness you must adduce reasons. Thus since the reasons exist, things are not empty, for like the reasons everything else is also truly existent.

Answer:

*If things are not empty because
They are empty by virtue of reasons,
The thesis would not be distinct from the reasons,
And thus the reasons would not exist.* 396

The opponents actually use the same syllogism formula to establish their assertions as our system does. A syllogism has a subject, a predicate and a reason, and these three modes establish the syllogism. Although the opponents accept the use of a syllogism to establish something, they differ from us in that the subject, and the predicate, as well as the reason, are all accepted as being truly existent. As all three modes are truly existent for them, then whatever reason they establish has to be established on the basis of things being truly existent. Thus, as they say in the assertion above, 'for like the reasons everything else is also truly existent'.

To rephrase the main point of the opponents' counter-argument in the above assertion, they are basically saying to the Madhyamika system, 'The very fact that you say that there is a reason to establish the lack of inherent existence is proof that there is true existence'. This is because for them the subject, the predicate and the reasons of any syllogism they use to establish something are established as being truly existent. 'So', they say, 'the very fact that you assert that there is a reason to establish emptiness shows the fact that things cannot be empty, and that things are actually truly existent'.

The verse refutes that argument, and its meaning is explained thus:

If things were not empty because emptiness of true existence is established through reasons, and the thesis and reasons were inherently distinct, they would be unrelated.

What our system is establishing is that if the reasons were truly existent then they would be unrelated to the subject and the predicate. In other words the thesis that is the combination of the subject, the predicate, and the reason, would be unrelated. So, as the commentary continues:

If the thesis were not inherently distinct from the reason but inherently one with it, they would have to be one and therefore what is to be proved could not be understood by depending on the reason.

If they were inherently distinct then they would be unrelated, which means that the reason could not serve as a sound reason to establish the thesis. If the thesis and the reasons were one then 'what is to be proved could not be understood by depending on the reason'. That is because they are one.

Then it follows that there are no correct reasons, since the fallacy of there being no reasons arises when one asserts truly existent things.

'Therefore according to your assertions there could not be any valid reasons. The syllogism cannot be used to prove anything. The fallacy is that no reasons can arise when one asserts truly existent things.'

Our system is actually throwing back their own argument, saying, 'If the three modes—the subject, the predicate and the reasons—were actually truly existent, there would be the fault of being either inherently one or inherently separate, and so therefore there could not actually be a sound reason to establish truly existent things. So according to your own assertions you cannot establish truly existent things'. The conclusion, as the commentary reads is:

Therefore all phenomena are established as lacking inherent existence.

1.2.5.2. SHOWING THE INVALIDITY IN THE FORM OF ABSURD CONSEQUENCES [OF ASSERTING THAT] THINGS ARE NOT EMPTY BECAUSE THERE ARE ANALOGIES

Assertion: Since there are analogies for emptiness of inherent existence, such as the reflection and so forth, everything else, like those analogies, exists and is not empty.

Answer:

*397. If things are not empty because
There are analogies for emptiness,
Can one say, "Just like the crow,
So too the self is black"?* 397

In refuting the assertion the commentary gives this explanation of the verse.

Is the analogy related or unrelated to the reason's meaning?

There are two questions here: is the analogy related or unrelated to the meaning of the reason?

The first has already been precluded by the reasoning which refutes truly existent reasons. In the second case, if the meaning is established through an analogy unrelated to the reason, is one able to say, "Just as the crow is black, so too is the self," because they are alike in being functional things?

What is being explained here is that an analogy is always given to back up any syllogism. So our system is asking the opponent, 'is the analogy related or unrelated to the reasons? If it is related, then the reasoning that refutes truly existent reasons has already precluded it'.

In the second case, one could not establish an analogy that is totally unrelated to the reason. If that were to be the case, then as mentioned here, can one say, 'Just as the crow is black so too is the self'? That is, could one use the analogy that because the crow is black, one is also black? In this analogy the crow and oneself have the commonality of being functional things, but just using that reason cannot establish that 'because the crow is black I am black too'. That does not serve as a sound analogy, because it is totally unrelated to the reason.

One should be able to do so. Yet an analogy, merely by virtue of its existence, is not suitable as an analogy for true existence.

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne
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the person and aggregates, because those objects relate to us on a personal level.

Relating to the referent object in terms of person and aggregates, explains something of who we are. Thus when we read this text and study and contemplate its meaning, we should try to relate to it on a personal level. By reminding oneself that, 'the whole purpose of study, is for me to try to understand the true nature of myself and my aggregates. If we fail to do that, and retain the misconception of holding onto the referent objects of conception of true existence (here the person and the aggregates), then for as long as we hold on to the referent objects of conceptions of true existence, that will be the cause for us to wander in samsara over and over again. There will be no possibility of achieving liberation and ultimately enlightenment, for the sake of other beings. Therefore one must definitely overcome the misconception of having a truly existent self and aggregates'. In that way we relate the study to our main purpose and goal: 'If I'm not able to refute the referent objects of conceptions of true existence, then I will be stuck in samsara for ever, so I must develop the sound understanding of emptiness'.

In order to grasp the lack of inherent existence of person and phenomena (specifically our aggregates), one must first of all identify the actual object of negation. That means really scrutinising the person and thinking about how the person would exist if it did have an inherently existent self. Likewise if phenomena were to have an inherently existent self then how would they exist? By clearly identifying the object of negation, as one begins to see the absurdity of an inherently existent person and phenomena, one will begin to grasp the true meaning of emptiness. When one has understood and perceived that an inherently existent self of person and phenomena are actually not possible, and that they are completely contrary to how they appear to our ordinary senses, then one has actually touched the point about the lack of inherent or true existence.

In order to grasp an understanding of the lack of inherent existence of person and phenomena (in this instance the aggregates), one must first have a sound understanding of how an inherently existing person would have to exist. That is the main point of the teachings.

Another important point to understand is this: As other texts explain, it is the case of focusing on one object, but apprehending it in a completely different manner. What is being pointed out, is that the referent object in both perceptions, that of true existence as well as that of lack of true existence, are the same. But the way the object is apprehended is different. So the difference is not in the focusing or perception of the object but rather in how the object is being apprehended.

To clarify further, based on the same object—a person—the perception of inherent existence apprehends the person as being inherently or independently existent, existing from its own side. Whereas the perception of the lack of inherent existence of the person, apprehends the person as interdependently arisen, rather than being independently or truly existent. So, when one understands that while the perceived object is the same, the apprehension is completely different (i.e. things don't

exist truly as apprehended by the wrong conception, but that things do lack true existence as apprehended by the right view), then one has understood the meaning of that phrase, which is an important and crucial point.

Then the commentary quotes this sutra:

Sutra says, "All phenomena are empty in that they do not exist inherently" and so forth.

The commentary further reads:

Accordingly, this was written to teach lack of inherent existence, which does not contradict the acceptance in our system of all dependently arising phenomena.

Of course this point has been explained in detail earlier, however the main point relating to the quotation from the sutra is that while things lack inherent existence, the appearance or the conventional existence does not negate the interdependent arising of phenomena and things.

1.2.7. Showing that conceptions of extremes of existence are erroneous

According to some of the Buddhist schools, the consciousness itself is truly existent, while objects do not exist at all. That is what is being referred to as 'erroneous'.

Among our own sectarians, Vijñaptivādins [the Sanskrit word for one of the Mind-only schools] and all those who have not understood the actual meaning of the scriptures assert that consciousness is truly existent, and that external objects do not even exist conventionally. This is therefore shown to be wrong for both are alike in existing conventionally but not ultimately.

*To say one exists and the other does not
Is neither reality nor the conventional.
Therefore it cannot be said
That this exists but that does not.*

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The main point is that both the consciousness, or the subject, and external objects are alike in existing conventionally. Likewise, both the consciousness and external objects do not exist ultimately. So they are also the same in lacking ultimate existence.

As the commentary further explains:

To say that one exists and the other does not is not a presentation of reality, since both do not exist ultimately and are not ultimate truths. Nor is it a presentation of the conventional, since both exist conventionally and are conventional truths.

To say that external objects do not exist conventionally is contrary to worldly views. It would be absurd to deny the perceptions of ordinary people, who hold that external objects exist.

Furthermore:

Therefore all five aggregates exist conventionally but not ultimately, and so it cannot be said that mind and mental factors exist truly while external objects do not even exist conventionally.

One way of defining conventional reality is 'that which exists to ordinary beings without a thorough analysis'. When things are perceived without scrutiny, then that is conventional existence. However the main point being made here is that basically you cannot establish that mind and mental factors exist truly while external objects do not exist conventionally, as that would go against even worldly conventions.

As the commentary concludes:

Thus Madhyamikas, too, accept both external objects and consciousness as they are known in the world.

Therefore the Madhyamikas too accept external objects and consciousness, as they are known conventionally. Madhyamikas establish conventional existence as things being merely labelled by terms and designation as they appear to worldly beings.

1.2.8. Impossibility of refuting through reasoning that which is free from extremes

When assertions regarding true existence of things and so forth have been thoroughly refuted in this way, it is impossible to state any refutation of the assertions regarding emptiness.

What is being explained is that the assertions regarding true existence have been thoroughly refuted with many reasons and analogies and so forth. Also, as mentioned previously, for the opponents 'it has been impossible to state any refutation of the assertions regarding emptiness'.

The assertion by the opponents is:

Assertion: Even though we are unable to answer you at present, you will receive an answer—there will be those who make great effort on behalf of the Tathagata's teaching.

The opponents say, 'Even though we are not able to answer it, in the future there will be those who are really earnest in the Buddha's teachings who will challenge and answer you'. In a way they are sort of threatening our own system [*laughter*] by saying, 'I may not have been able to answer you now, but there will be others who will make great effort on behalf of the Tathagata's teaching. So, those who really scrutinise and study the Buddha's teachings will find an answer to present to you'.

Answer: That is a futile hope! If we held a faulty thesis, it could be refuted by proving its converse.

As an answer our system says, 'That is a futile hope', the Tibetan word is more like a false hope. The reason why it is a futile or false hope is that if the thesis on emptiness were to have some error or fault and could be refuted in any way, then it would not be a futile or false hope. If there were some fault, then even though the present opponents are not able to present refutations or counter-arguments to refute the thesis of emptiness, it might be true that later on it could be contradicted. However that is a 'futile hope', because it cannot be refuted.

Thus the last verse in the text says:

*Against one who holds no thesis that [things] 400
Exist, do not, or do and do not exist,
Counter-arguments cannot be raised
No matter how long [one tries].*

As the commentary states:

No Mādhyamikas hold the erroneous theses that things are inherently existent, that even the slightest thing is non-existent, that non-things are inherently both existent and non-existent, or neither.

This rules out all four possibilities of an erroneous belief being held by any Madhyamika, in particular the Prasangika Madhyamika.

No matter how long one tries, no counter-arguments can be raised.

Since all possible erroneous views in relation to these extremes are not, and will never be, held by the Prasangika Madhyamika, there will be no time in the future when refutations against the thesis of emptiness can be raised.

The commentary then presents this analogy to illustrate the likelihood of a counter-argument raised in the future:

You should understand that refuting skilled proponents of emptiness [referring to the Prasangika Madhyamika point of view] is as impossible as drawing pictures in space or causing space pain by beating it with an iron bar.

The summarising stanza by Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is:

The sun's light dispels all darkness.
Darkness has no power to destroy the sun's light.
The correct view destroys all extreme conceptions,
Banishing any opportunity for controversy.

The meaning of this stanza is quite clear. What is being presented with the analogy is that just as 'the sun's light dispels all darkness' and 'darkness has no power to destroy the sun's light', likewise 'a correct view' of emptiness 'destroys all extreme conceptions banishing any opportunity for controversy'. Here 'controversy' means not leaving any opportunity to raise any counter-arguments against that view.

2. Presenting the name of the chapter

This is the sixteenth chapter from the Four Hundred on the Yogic Deeds, showing how to meditate on settling [the procedure between] spiritual guides and students.

This heading is sub-divided into two:

- 2.1. Presenting the author who composed the text
- 2.2. Presenting the translators of the text

2.1. Presenting the author who composed the text

This concludes the Treatise of Four Hundred Stanzas on the Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas from the mouth of Aryadeva, the spiritual son at the Exalted Naga's feet.

The commentary explains:

This concludes the explanation both of the great trailblazer and Bodhisattva, the Master Aryadeva's work Four Hundred Stanzas on the Yogic Deeds of Bodhisattvas...

2.2. Presenting the translators of the text

...and of its commentary by the Master Candrakirti. It was translated from the Indian into the Tibetan language in the temple of Ratnaguptavihāra in the center of the glorious Kasmiri city of Anupamapura by the Indian abbot Sūksmajana, son of the Brahmin Sajjana from the paternal line of the Brahmin Ratnavajra and by the Tibetan translator Batsap Nyimadrak...

Then Gyel-tsap Rinpoche concludes with these stanzas:

May the one predicted by the Conqueror who attained
the supreme state,
As well as Aryadeva and the glorious Candrakirti,
Who most clearly elucidated Nagarjuna's good system,
Rest victoriously on the crown of our heads.
May the one predicted by the Conqueror who attained
the supreme state,
As well as Aryadeva and the glorious Candrakirti,
Who most clearly elucidated Nagarjuna's good system,
Rest victoriously on the crown of our heads.

Unable to bear misinterpretations of this system
 Through the misconceptions of those who follow their
 own presuppositions,
 Who lack the flawless eye of reasoning
 And ignore the textual systems of the great trailblazers,
 I have explained the words and meaning of this text
 simply,
 Commenting in a clear, unconfused and complete way
 On the paths that mature the mind and bring about
 release
 For all people with a Mahayana disposition.
 Since Aryadeva's thought is hard to ascertain
 And my mind is poor, my acquired knowledge weak,
 May my spiritual guides and deities
 Forgive whatever errors there may be.
 Through any immaculate virtue created by my efforts
 To illuminate the good Madhyamika path free from
 extremes,
 May all transmigrators, bound in the prison of worldly
 existence,
 Attain the peerless happiness of liberation.
 May I, too, in all future lives never be separated
 From a spiritual guide of the supreme vehicle,
 And through fully entering this path by listening
 thinking and meditating,
 May I obtain the state of an omniscient Conqueror.

That dedication should be quite clear.

Why Gyel-tsap Rinpoche composed his commentary

In conclusion Gyel-tsap Rinpoche, the author of the commentary, explains:

This Essence of Good Explanations, Explanation of the "Four Hundred" was written at the insistence of Lama Namkasangbowa who cherishes his precious precepts and holds the three sets of vows, and of Lama Draksengwa exceptionally tireless in bearing the responsibility of spreading the Subduer's teaching, they urged me again and again from Upper DoKam with lavish and repeated flower-like offerings. It was written also at the insistence of Kunga Sengge of Dzaytang, a great holder of the three sets of teachings who has heard the texts of sūtra and tantra many times, and at the insistence of numerous other holders of the three sets of teaching.

Later on the commentary mentions:

This was made possible by the kind explanations received directly from the noble, venerable and holy Rendawa Shonnulodro...

This indicates that Gyel-tsap Je actually received the teachings from his own master Geshe Rendawa Shonnulodro, who was actually a Sakya lama. Geshe Rendawa was one of the main gurus of Lama Tsong Khapa, who considered him to be one of the most kind teachers.

The 'mitgsema', which is the four-line praise to Lama Tsong Khapa, was actually composed by Lama Tsong Khapa himself in praise of his teacher Rendawa. The last line originally read: *To Jetsun Rendawa, at your feet I make requests.*

When Lama Tsong Khapa offered this four line praise to his master, Rendawa said, 'This praise doesn't suit me, its best for you' and offered it back, changing the last line into Losang Dragpa which is Lama Tsong Khapa's name. That's why now it reads, *To Losang Dragpa, at your feet I make requests.*

Then, the commentary continues:

Rendawa Shonnulodro, great follower of the Conqueror, with consummate understanding especially that all external and internal dependently arising things are like the reflection of the moon in water, and from the great omniscient one in this time of degeneration, whose prayer to hold the excellent teaching of the Conqueror is perfectly accomplished, the glorious and good foremost precious Losang-drakba [i.e. Lama Tsong Khapa]. They are the father and son, the dust beneath whose feet I have long and respectfully venerated.

Then it says¹:

It was written at Drokriwoche Gandenambar-gyelwayling by the logician and fully ordained monk Darma-rinchen

The place where it was composed was Ganden Monastery.

That concludes the text.

I really appreciate those who have come to the teachings to the end. It has been a great opportunity for me to have read the teachings, and the commentaries, and to present it to the best of my ability. Using Gyel-tsap Darma Rinchen's commentary as a basis, I referred to other commentaries, such those of as Jetsun Rendawa and Chandrakirti. To have been able to read the other commentaries and studied them a bit has actually also been fortunate for me. So in that way it has been of mutual benefit.

Of course, this teaching by Gyal-tsap Rinpoche is a very extensive and clear teaching. It is quite unlike other teachings as it illustrates the points of emptiness very clearly.

Prior to becoming a disciple of Lama Tsong Khapa Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is said to have been a great scholar from the Sakya tradition. When Gyel-tsap Rinpoche first came into the presence of Lama Tsong Khapa, he came with an intention of debating with him, as he saw Lama Tsong Khapa as a peer. He had come a long distance carrying his essential things on his back, and while still carrying his sack he sat on the throne next to Lama Tsong Khapa, indicating that he was on the same level.

But as he started to hear Lama Tsong Khapa teach, he began to develop some understanding of the wisdom of Lama Tsong Khapa. That lessened Gyal-tsap's pride and so he moved down below the seat, and in the end he was actually sitting on the floor [*laughter*]. Even though he came as someone to compete with Lama Tsong Khapa, he later became his disciple and was appointed to be first throne-holder in the Ganden tradition after Lama Tsong Khapa. It is said that having initially sat on Lama Tsong Khapa's throne was in a way an auspicious sign for him to actually become the throne-holder after Lama Tsong Khapa passed away.

Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is known as a great scholar and this is clearly seen throughout his works. He composed only eight commentaries, but those eight are really very clear and precise explanations of particular texts. His commentary on the *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* is known as a

¹ This is in accordance with the order of the sentences presented in the original Tibetan.

very clear and precise commentary and it is now widely used. There is his commentary on the *Prajnaparamita*, as well as the Valid Cognition text, which is also used today by the Sakyas as a text to study logic. As well there are other commentaries on *Gyu-lama*, which is the sublime mental continuum—the teachings on Buddha nature. All his commentaries are very clear, and very well illustrated and explained.

Gyel-tsap Rinpoche is accepted as the emanation of Chenrezig. Therefore, of course, all of his texts would understandably be very profound and clear explanations. In fact Lama Tsong Khapa and his two disciples are seen as emanations of the three main lineage deities—Lama Tsong Khapa being the emanation of Manjushri, Gyel-tsap Rinpoche the emanation of Chenrezig, and Kedrub Rinpoche the emanation of Vajrapani. The statues and drawings of Kedrub Rinpoche depict him as having more wrathful form: his eyes are quite wide and he is fierce looking, indicating that he is an emanation of Vajrapani.

Next Tuesday will be Discussion Night and after that there will be the exam as usual. The exam will coincide with my retreat session, and so I will not be able to come to the exam as my schedule is quite strenuous. The following Tuesday, 12 August, I intend to leave for seminar participants to prepare their presentations. We will begin the new subject on 19 August.

It's good for everyone to read the text prior to actually receiving the teaching. If one does some reading in preparation, then there will be some benefit. Whether or not you actually develop a new understanding from my presentation is not as relevant as trying to develop some understanding by reading and preparing by oneself. That is the main way to get the benefit from the teaching.

In the presentation of the text, first there are the preliminaries, and then it talks about the calm abiding and how to achieve it. That is followed by the topic of special insight. Some texts present the object of meditation first and then later how to meditate, i.e. the subject matter of special insight into emptiness is explained first followed by how to achieve calm abiding. The main point is that there is a particular type of presentation used in the text. That is presenting the view first, then how to achieve calm abiding later. The other approach is practising how to meditate first and then finding the right view. It is good to understand these two different techniques; if you recall, His Holiness also mentioned these particular points in Sydney.

Everything has gone very well for this study, and I would like to thank everyone again. Most of you have come quite consistently, and of course some have missed a few times due to unforeseen circumstances – family matters or whatever. Maybe in some cases there has been laziness, but in any case most of you have come, and I thank you very much.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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DISCUSSION (29.07.08) Block 1 2008**Week: 1 (1 July 2008)**

1. The opponents assert that if the lack of inherent existence is established then the opposite of that, which is true existence, is also established.

a) Give the analogy that the opponents use to back up this assertion.[2]

b) Give our school's refutation.[2]

2. The opponents use a counter argument giving examples of what we conventionally call the 'nature' of something as proof that it is truly existent. Such as hot being the nature of fire; sweetness being the nature of molasses. Give our systems refutation of this counter argument.

3. a) What is 'The King of Reasons' [2]

b) Explain 'The Diamond Sliver Reason'[2]

Week: 2 (8 July 2008)

4. The opponents assert a partless particle as an instance of truly existent phenomena. Give our system's refutation. [4]

5. a) What does the Sanskrit word 'Buddha' mean?[2]

b) Give the literal meaning of the Tibetan word for Buddha, 'Sang gye'. [2]

6. Give the definition of space. How does this relate to emptiness?[4]

Week: 3(15 July 2008)

7.a) What is the difference between ascribing "true existence" or "lack of true existence" to phenomena". Give an analogy to support our system's view on this.[4]

b) "If phenomena were to be ultimately existent, then by seeing the ultimate existence of phenomena an ordinary being would attain liberation" Explain why this is not possible.[2]

8. What is the fault in the opponent's assertion about the subject, predicate and reason of the syllogism being accepted as truly existent?[4]

9. How does an analogy work in relation to the syllogism?[2]

Week: 4 (22 July 2008)

10. What was Aryadeva's main purpose in composing this text? How is this purpose pursued?[4]

Exam

Name:

Block: 4

Mark:

Week: 6 (5 August 2008)

1. The opponents assert that if the lack of inherent existence is established then the opposite of that, which is true existence, is also established.

a) Give the analogy that the opponents use to back up this assertion. [2]

b) Give our school's refutation. [2]

2. The opponents use a counter argument giving examples of what we conventionally call the 'nature' of something as proof that it is truly existent. Such as hot being the nature of fire; sweetness being the nature of molasses. Give our systems refutation of this counter argument. [2]

3. a) What is 'The King of Reasons' [2]

b) Explain 'The Diamond Sliver Reason'[2]

4. The opponents assert a partless particle as an instance of truly existent phenomena. Give our system's refutation. [4]

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10. What was Aryadeva's main purpose in composing this text? How is this purpose pursued? [4]