

# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

16 August 2016

As usual let us spend some time in meditation.

(Pause for meditation)

Now, generate the bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings.

## 2.1.2. Refuting objections of no-need and no ability regarding emptiness

### 2.1.2.2. DEFENDING ONE'S POSITION

#### 2.1.2.2.1. Refuting Realists such as the Sautrantika in general

##### 2.1.2.2.1.2. Refuting harm through quotations

###### 2.1.2.2.1.2.3. Refuting that one is in contradiction

###### 2.1.2.2.1.2.3.1. Refuting that they are not even established as illusory

The last line of the earlier verse and the first line of the next verse is presented.

7d. *If said to be contradictory even with the illusory;*

8a. *The yogis are not at fault in the illusory*

The commentary first presents the argument of the opponent:

Argument: Even on the illusory level, it would be contradictory for compounded phenomena to be impermanent because in the world functionality in the morning is renowned to also exist permanently in the evening. There is no contradiction ...

The **Sautrantikas'** argument here is that, besides impermanence being doubtful in an ultimate sense, even at an illusory or conventional level, it would be contradictory for compounded phenomena to be impermanent. The reason presented here for that argument is *because in the world functionality in the morning is renowned to also exist permanently in the evening*. This is indeed how we normally think. For example, when we meet someone again we think, 'This is the same person I saw earlier'. And when we refer to things, we treat the thing that we perceive now as the same thing that we saw earlier.

Normally, if we meet someone later in the day after having seen them that morning, we would say, 'I saw you this morning'. This means that we perceive and believe that the person we see now has not changed in any way from the person we saw in the morning. We make these comments because our perception is that nothing has really changed. But on the subtler level of impermanence, things are changing moment by moment. From the point of view of subtle impermanence, we are seeing someone newly and fresh at every moment, thus you are not seeing the same person you saw in the morning. The person you saw in the morning has already ceased and what you are seeing now is a new continuum of the person.

This reminds me, on an occasion of a visit I made to Geshe Loden's centre, one official guest – who was not a Buddhist – came up to me and said, 'I saw you last year and you were very jovial and happy. And this year I see you again, and you haven't changed a bit. You are the same jovial, happy person'. And he thanked me, saying 'I really appreciate that you are here'. Others have even made comments to me such as, 'You look the same, even after twenty years!' [*laughter*] So that shows the normal perception of how things don't seem to change.

The commentary then presents what serves as the answer:

Answer: Although forms and the other sense objects are renowned in the world as permanent, the fault that their impermanence is not established by prime cognition does not exist, because they are established as impermanent and so forth, i.e. suffering, empty and selfless by the illusory nominal prime cognition of yogis.

The answer presented here is suggesting that what the opponent is saying is true on one level: from a worldly point of view, that is indeed how we normally perceive things. *Although forms and the other sense objects are renowned in the world as permanent* indicates the perception of an ordinary being – that the objects they perceive are permanent. However, the **Madhyamikas** respond that *the fault that their impermanence is not established by prime cognition does not exist*, or is not true. This means that the way ordinary beings perceive things as being permanent does not contradict or nullify the prime cognition that perceives impermanence. That is the point. This is because forms and so forth are established as *impermanent, suffering, empty and selfless by the illusory nominal prime cognition of yogis*. These yogis have the prime cognition that perceives them as being impermanent and so forth.

The next argument is then presented:

Argument: This is in contradiction to the statement that seeing impermanence and the other characteristics is to see it as such.

The remaining lines of verse 8 that serve as an answer show there is no contradiction.

8bcd. *It is seen as such in comparison to the world.*

*Otherwise the thought of a woman's impurity*

*Would be harmed by the world.*

Answer: It is the mere assertion that in comparison to the grasping by worldly beings at purity, happiness, permanence and a self, that this is seen as such.

Here *this is seen as such* refers to seeing the world as being pure, happy and permanent and with a self, when in reality it is not like that. The **Madhyamikas** assert that merely seeing impure things to be pure, suffering as happiness, and impermanent things as permanent, is just in accordance with how they are perceived by worldly beings.

The commentary continues:

Otherwise, if being renowned by the world would be the measure for prime cognition, then it would follow that the yogi meditating on impurity, who has gained conviction regarding the impurity of the woman's

body, would be harmed by the worldly grasping at the purity of the woman's body.

Thus, if the measure of prime cognition were to be how it is perceived by worldly beings, then it would follow that when the *yogi* who is *meditating on impurity* or the imperfections of the body to the point where they have *gained the conviction regarding the impurity of a woman's body* (for a female *yogi* it would be the other way round), that prime cognition would be harmed by *the worldly grasping at the purity of the woman's body* and so forth. But the *yogi's* perception is not nullified or contradicted by the worldly perception.

The main point is that, just because the worldly perception of things is renowned and accepted as normal, that doesn't harm yogic prime cognition. The example given here is that of a *yogi* meditating on the impurities of the body - such as a male or female body - indeed all contaminated bodies including the impurity of one's own body. An ordinary being perceives the body - males in regard to a woman's body, women in regard to a male's body - as being completely pure and clean, with no imperfections or faults. However, a *yogi* who has meditated and developed a conviction about the impurities of the body will perceive it otherwise: he or she will see the impure body in its natural state, with its natural faults and imperfections. Thus, just because something is renowned as being pure in the worldly view doesn't mean that it is actually pure, likewise just because in the worldly view things are seen as permanent, it doesn't mean that they are actually permanent and so forth.

#### **2.1.2.2.1.2.3.2. Refuting that the build-up of the accumulations would be invalid**

The argument presented here is an objection to the Madhyamika assertion that things lack inherent existence. According to the **Realists**, if things lack inherent existence then one cannot possibly establish the functionality of karmic cause and effect and establish anything within the existence of samsara and liberation.

Argument: If there is no inherent existence, it contradicts the explanation that one accumulates merit through making offerings and such to the conquerors.

This is an objection expressed by the Sautrantikas. We need to pay close attention to the following presentations - which are presented in the format of a debate - questions and answers between the Madhyamikas and the lower schools. The ninth chapter of this text by Shantideva is renowned as the chapter that presents emptiness. The correct view of emptiness is established by eliminating all the hypothetical objections and doubts of the lower schools. Thus one comes to gain the correct understanding of the view of emptiness. At the same time, on a practical level, Chapter 9 also presents many logical reasons to establish the validity of the cause and effect of karma.

We need to pay particular attention to the lower schools' point of view where they say that if things lack inherent existence one can't establish the cause and effect sequence of karma. If things do not exist inherently, they argue,

how can you posit the functionality of the cause and effect sequence of karma?

What is being established in this chapter - very meticulously, logically and profoundly - is the functionality of the cause and effect sequence of things and events, not in spite of, but precisely because of their lack of inherent existence. This is the unique position of the **Prasangika Madhyamaka school**: things perform their function, and the cause and effect of karma is established, because they lack true existence. So while both Sautrantika and Prasangika agree upon the functionality of things, the unique position of the Prasangika is that they lack inherent existence.

The lower schools' views are in accord with our normal worldly perception. The presentations here can gradually help us understand how things exist while lacking inherent existence. If we spend ample time thinking about these points carefully and get a sense of the uniqueness and validity of the Prasangika presentation, we will gain a much deeper and more profound understanding of emptiness.

In the following passages the opponents argue that, according to the Prasangika view, one cannot establish samsara or nirvana; this is subsequently refuted. The refutation establishes that samsara and nirvana exist while lacking inherent existence. The essence of this refutation is presented in the *Heart Sutra* with the passage 'form is empty, emptiness is form'. This is a profound point and I have presented the meaning over a hundred times. I have explained it many times because it is the essential point regarding the correct view. So we need to get a really good, sound understanding of this point.

In fact, these are the essential points to understand if we wish to meditate on emptiness. It is extremely important to gain the understanding of how the deed, action and performer all equally lack inherent existence; understanding this is essential.

When we engage in meditation practice with this understanding our practice will indeed become a means to enhance our wisdom. The mind will become sharper, and we will gain more - and more profound - insights. Whereas if we are not careful and just focus on an object and try to develop a single-pointed focus on it - in other words, if we don't have a clear basis for gaining a profound understanding of the object we are focusing on - it can actually become a cause for the mind to become duller, rather than becoming sharper. If that were to occur, it would be a real pity if one has spent so much time and energy in the meditation, but it has resulted in the mind becoming duller. We need to be really careful about these points.

In order to succeed in our practice and achieve our goals we must have the aid of both method and wisdom. The need for both method and wisdom is presented in the Middle Way text, the *Madhyamakāvātāra*, in the verse that gives the analogy of a crane that can fly and migrate far beyond the ocean with the aid of both wings. If one of the wings is injured or maimed, it could not possibly make that long-distance journey. In this analogy, the ocean is the ocean of samsara. In order to cross over the ocean of samsara to reach the pristine state of enlightenment, we

need the two wings of method and wisdom. Both are needed. Neither method nor wisdom alone is sufficient.

After the argument is presented, then comes the first two lines from the verse:

*9ab. Merits from the illusory like conqueror  
Equal the ones from a truly existent.*

Answer: There is no contradiction. That one accumulates merit through making offerings to the conquerors that are illusory-like and lack true existence is just like your assertion that one accumulates merit through making offerings to a truly existent conqueror. Regardless of whether they are suitable to exist truly or not, one accumulates merit in accordance with the object.

The commentary shows that the preceding argument doesn't hold ground. According to the **Madhyamika's** position, *one accumulates merit through making offerings to the conquerors that are illusory-like and lack true existence*; while they appear to be truly existent to ordinary perception, they in fact lack any true or inherent existence. Thus, if one makes offerings to the conquerors who are illusory-like, one will still receive merit. It is similar to the **Sautrantika's** assertion that one accumulates merit through making offerings to a truly existent conqueror.

The last line of the commentary presents a really succinct point, which is *regardless of whether they are suitable to exist truly or not...* In other words, you, the **Sautrantika**, say that they exist truly and we, the **Madhyamika**, say that they don't exist truly, but regardless of who is right or wrong here, the fact remains that *one accumulates merit in accordance with the object*, that is, a holy object. So by making offerings, one can definitely accumulate merit. This is an essential point to keep in mind for our own practice.

#### 2.1.2.2.1.2.3.3. Refuting that taking rebirth would be invalid

This is again according to the lower schools' position. Their argument is that if, for example, sentient beings are illusory, how could they take rebirth? The next two lines under this heading are:

*9cd. If sentient beings are like an illusion,  
Then how can they be reborn after death?*

The commentary first presents the Realists' position, which is:

Argument: If sentient beings are like an illusion and lack true existence then, just like the illusory sentient being does not regenerate after disintegration, how are they reborn upon death?

That commentary presents the answer in relation to the meaning of the next verse:

Answer: We do not accept that sentient beings and illusions are the same in each and every aspect, but we accept that they are the same in existing truly or not. If the fault only relates to that, since you also accept dreams and illusions to be false, then your question is like asking if the basis for deception appears as a horse, then why doesn't it appear as a donkey.

The Prasangika **Madhyamika** position is that things and events, particularly sentient beings, are illusory-like, in

that while they lack true existence, they appear as being truly existent or inherently existent. Insofar as they do not exist in the way they appear, they are like illusions of conjured horses and elephants. When an illusionist conjures horses and elephants, they appear yet they do not actually exist. This is the analogy used here.

The **Realist** opponent says, *If sentient beings are like illusions like you say and lack true existence, then just like an illusory sentient being does not regenerate after disintegration, how are sentient beings reborn upon death?* This argument is very clever and intelligent because it is effectively saying that, after the magician's spell wears off the conjured horses and elephants do not recur again. Once the illusion has disappeared, it won't recur. This is a fact. In using that reasoning, the Realists are saying: therefore, if sentient beings were like illusions, they couldn't be reborn again after death just like an illusory sentient being doesn't regenerate after the illusion ceases. The answer to this is that they are not exactly the same.

In essence what the **Sautrantikas** are saying is that just as an illusion would not reappear or re-establish again after it disappears, likewise sentient beings being would not be reborn again after death. Their argument is presented here as a rhetorical question: 'How could they be reborn after death if they were an illusion?'

The **Madhyamikas** respond: *we do not accept that sentient beings and illusions are the same in each and every aspect, but we accept that they are the same in existing truly or not.* Further, they say that 'If the fault only relates to that, since you also accept dreams and illusions to be false, then your question is like asking if the basis for deception appears as a horse, then why doesn't it appear as a donkey?' In this case the basis for deception is a horse, not a donkey. The magician has not cast a spell to see a donkey – the spell produces only the illusion of a horse.

So while the basis for the illusion (in this case a horse) is seen, because the spell to see a donkey has not been cast, the illusion of a donkey is not seen. So the Prasangika are saying, your question regarding how sentient beings can be reborn if they are like an illusion, is similar to asking, 'How come an illusory donkey is not seen when one sees an illusory horse, since they are both similar in being an illusion? According to your question, it would imply that when one sees the illusory horse one would have to also see an illusory donkey!'

This will become clearer as we go further into the text.

So the next verse, which relates to this is:

*10abc. For as long as the conditions come together.  
For that long even the illusion exists  
Just because of a long continuity?  
Sentient beings are truly existent?*

The commentary further explains:

Thus, for falsities, as long as the conditions are present, for that period of time the illusion exists.

As presented here, all illusory truths are presented as falsities because the definition of a truth is that **if there is no discrepancy between what appears and what actually exists, then it is a truth. Whereas if there is discrepancy between what appears to you and its actual existence, it is false.** Therefore, all illusory phenomena

are said to be falsities because there is a discrepancy in how they appear and how they actually exist – or they appear as truly existent, but in fact lack true existence; or they appear as inherently existent but in fact lack inherent existence. Therefore, for all falsities such as illusions, for as long as the conditions are present, then for that period of time the illusion exists.

To conclude the earlier paragraph of the commentary:

Similarly, for as long as the conditions of ignorance and so forth are complete, sentient beings will take rebirth.

This is the answer being presented by the Madhyamika.

The next counter argument from the **Realists** is:

Argument: It is not the same, as sentient beings exist from beginningless time.

What is being presented here is that while an illusion doesn't last for long, sentient beings in fact have existed from beginningless time. So because of their duration, say the Realists, you cannot say that sentient beings are like illusions. In other words, the argument is that because sentient beings have existed from beginningless time and thus for a long duration, it cannot be established that they are unreal like an illusion. Illusions are not true, argue the Realists, because they are very short-lived. That is what is being presented here.

The **Madhyamika** answer to that is:

Answer: It follows it is invalid to assert the distinction that sentient beings exist truly merely because they exist for a long time, and that illusions are false because they exist for a short while; if that was the case, then one would need to also accept a difference in the true and untrue existence of dreams and illusions as they have a difference in length.

Thus, if the criteria for something to be true or false were dependent on duration, then even illusions and dreams have different durations. Some illusions may last for a short while, but some can last for much longer. So, according to your, i.e. the Realists', assertion, the delusions that last for longer would be true, and the ones that lasted for a short time would be false. As the commentary further explains:

For in dreams, there are remembrances of an eon or just one day and so forth.

In dreams you might have a remembrance of a whole eon or just one day. Thus you Realists would have to assert that the dream of a long period of time, say, over one eon, would be true, and the dream about just one day would be untrue. But that is absurd and could not be the case.

#### **2.1.2.2.1.2.3.4. Refuting that the division into virtue and negativity would be invalid**

Here the argument from the **Realists** against the Madhyamikas is:

Argument: If they are like an illusion in that they lack inherent existence, then that would contradict that the killing and the like of sentient beings are negativities.

What they are saying is that if sentient beings are like an illusion, then you would not create negative karma by engaging in the act of killing them.

The verse which relates to this reads:

**11. The killing and the like of an illusory being  
Is not a negativity because there is no mind.  
Relative to those endowed with an illusory  
mind  
Merits and negativities arise.**

Answer: Regarding the killing and the like of an illusory person, if one pierces them with a weapon with the intent to kill on the basis of perceiving it as a human and the like, then one creates the negativity of action, but there is no actual karma of killing as it does not possess mind.

An illusory person would not be an actual person, but a magical illusion that appears like a person. If one pierced this illusory person with a weapon with the intent to kill on the basis of perceiving it as human, then one creates the negativity of action. This is a good point to keep in mind; while there is negative karma created in relation to engaging in the action of piercing this illusory human with the intent to kill, there is no actual killing. So one does not incur the karma of killing, as that object does not possess a mind. Because it is not an actual person, there is no act of killing. This is because the negative karma of killing is only complete when that person's life force has been severed. But the life force cannot be severed from an illusory person because as there is no consciousness there is no life force present.

The concluding statement presents a significant point:

By benefiting sentient beings endowed with an illusory mind, such as humans and so forth, one creates merit, and by harming them, one creates negativity.

Then the next argument is presented:

Argument: For those being the same in lacking inherent existence, how can there be a difference in generating a mind or not?

So the **Realists** then argue that, if you Madhyamikas say an illusory person and an actual person are the same in lacking inherent existence, how come one has a mind and one doesn't have a mind? How does that difference come about?

The verse relating to that is:

**12. Since mantras and the like do not possess the  
power  
An illusory mind does not arise.  
The illusion that arises from manifold  
conditions  
Is also manifold.**  
**13ab. That one condition can do it all  
Is totally non-existent anywhere.**

The commentary related to this reads:

Answer: Because the illusory substances and mantras cannot generate an illusion with mind, the illusory horse and elephant do not have mind. The illusion that arises from various conditions also appears in various ways. The 'also' does not eliminate sentient beings.

That one needs various conditions for various results is because it is impossible for one condition to generate all results. That one condition cannot generate all results is totally non-existent anywhere.

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What is being presented here in the commentary is that illusory substances – here, the word ‘substance’ would include medicines and mantras – cannot generate an illusion with regard to the mind. So the illusory horse and elephant do not have mind. In order for the magician to conjure horses and elephants, certain conditions have to be intact. It is said that the magician uses certain substances which, if used upon objects, will cause illusions to appear. Or it could be mantras. It is said that some magicians use mantras, which in the West we would call spells. When a spell is put on the people watching the spectacle, their eyes will see illusions. So the illusion is due to these conditions, such as the substances of medicines and spells, which are used by the magician to conjure the horses and elephants. These substances, however, do not have the power to produce a mind in the conjured illusions.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

*Transcript prepared by Su Lan Foo*  
*Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine*  
*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*  
*Edited Version*

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Thus, while a magician has the power to perform a magical illusion, he or she does not have the power to make mind or consciousness. If, through substances, mind and consciousness were to be able to be made, then by now scientists would have made many new minds. If, through spells or the power of mantras, it were possible to make minds, then magicians and yogis would have produced many beings. But that is not possible. This is a very significant point.

So while illusory substances such as the medicines and the mantras are the conditions for generating an illusion, they are not the conditions to produce a mind. And the reason why a mind cannot be produced is that the specific cause for a mind or consciousness is lacking. When the specific cause is lacking, that particular result cannot be produced. Mind has its own substantial causes for it to exist, which is a previous moment of mind. When the substantial cause for a mind is lacking, a mind cannot be produced. Therefore, mind does not exist in an illusion.

Furthermore, the commentary says:

The illusion that arises from various conditions also appears in various ways.

So there are various types of illusions – such as horses and elephants – because of the various types of causes, such as the different substances of medicines and mantras. However, while the different types of illusions are produced by different causes, one cause cannot possibly produce many different results.

Then the commentary continues:

The ‘also’ does not eliminate sentient beings. That one needs various conditions for various results is because it is impossible for one result to generate all results. That one condition can generate all results is totally non-existent anywhere.

The significant point here is that just because there is a cause for an illusion to arise and various causes for various types of illusions to arise, the notion that one cause can produce many results – such as an illusion, as well as a mind – is completely absurd; it is not possible.

What we take as personal instruction here is that, if we wish to experience certain types of result, we have to create the corresponding causes. It is not possible to obtain various results from just one cause.

## Homework

## Answers

Block: 3 Week: 1 (16 August 2016) Assigned: 23/8/2016

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1. 'The [Sautrantikas'] argument here is that, besides [impermanence] being doubtful in an ultimate sense, even at an illusory or conventional level, it would be contradictory for compounded phenomena to be impermanent'. How do the Madyamikas respond to this argument?

2. The next argument is then presented:

Argument: This is in contradiction to the statement that seeing impermanence and the other characteristics is to see it as such.

Here *this is seen as such* refers to seeing the world as being pure, happy and permanent and with a self. How do the Madyamikas respond ?

3. We need to pay particular attention to the lower schools' point of view where they say that if things lack inherent existence one can't establish cause and effect sequence of karma. If things do not exist inherently, they argue, how can you posit the functionality of the cause and effect sequence of karma?

4. Give the definition of a truth and the definition of a falsity.

**Homework****Answers**

**Block: 3 Week: 1** (16 August 2016) **Assigned: 23/8/2016**

**1. 'The [Sautrantikas'] argument here is that, besides [impermanence] being doubtful in an ultimate sense, even at an illusory or conventional level, it would be contradictory for compounded phenomena to be impermanent'. How do the Prasangika respond to this argument?**

The answer presented here is suggesting that what the opponent is saying is true on one level: from a worldly point of view, that is indeed how we normally perceive things. *Although forms and the other sense objects are renowned in the world as permanent* indicates the perception of an ordinary being – that the objects they perceive are permanent. However, [the Madhyamikas] respond that *the fault that their impermanence is not established by prime cognition does not exist*, or is not true. This means that the way ordinary beings perceive things as being permanent does not contradict or nullify the prime cognition that perceives impermanence. That is the point. This is because forms and so forth are established as *impermanent, suffering, empty and selfless by the illusory nominal prime cognition of yogis*. These yogis have the prime cognition that perceives them as being impermanent and so forth.

**2. The next argument is then presented:**

**Argument: This is in contradiction to the statement that seeing impermanence and the other characteristics is to see it as such.**

**Here *this is seen as such* refers to seeing the world as being pure, happy and permanent and with a self. How do the Madhyamikas respond ?**

The remaining lines of verse 8 that serve as answer show there is no contradiction.

*8bcd. It is seen as such in comparison to the world.  
Otherwise the thought of a woman's impurity  
Would be harmed by the world.*

Answer: It is the mere assertion that in comparison to the grasping by worldly beings at purity, happiness, permanence and a self, that this is seen as such.

Here *this is seen as such* refers to seeing the world as being pure, happy and permanent and with a self, when in reality it is not like that. [The Madhyamikas] assert that merely seeing impure things to be pure, suffering as happiness, and impermanent things as permanent, is just in accordance with how they are perceived by worldly beings.

The commentary continues:

Otherwise, if being renowned by the world would be the measure for prime cognition, then it would follow that the yogi meditating on impurity, who has gained conviction regarding the impurity of the woman's body, would be harmed by the worldly grasping at the purity of the woman's body. Thus, if the measure of prime cognition were to be how it is perceived by worldly beings, then it would follow that when the *yogi* who is *meditating on impurity* or the imperfections of the body to the point where they have *gained the conviction regarding the impurity of a woman's body* (for a female yogi it would be the other way round), that prime cognition would be harmed by *the worldly*

*grasping at the purity of the woman's body* and so forth. But the yogi's perception is not nullified or contradicted by the worldly perception.

The main point is that, just because the worldly perception of things is renowned and accepted as normal, that doesn't harm yogic prime cognition. The example given here is that of a yogi meditating on the impurities of the body, such as a male or female body – indeed all contaminated bodies including the impurity of one's own body. An ordinary being perceives the body – males in regard to a woman's body, women in regard to a male's body – as being completely pure and clean, with no imperfections or faults. However, a yogi who has meditated and developed a conviction about the impurities of the body will perceive it otherwise: he or she will see the impure body in its natural state, with its natural faults and imperfections. Thus, just because something is renowned as being pure in the worldly view doesn't mean that it is actually pure, likewise just because in the worldly view things are seen as permanent, it doesn't mean that they are actually permanent and so forth.

**3. We need to pay particular attention to the lower schools' point of view where they say that if things lack inherent existence one can't establish cause and effect sequence of karma. If things do not exist inherently, they argue, how can you posit the functionality of the cause and effect sequence of karma?**

What is being established in this chapter – very meticulously, logically and profoundly – is the functionality of the cause and effect sequence of things and events, not in spite of, but precisely because of their lack of inherent existence. This is the unique position of the Prasangika Madhyamika: things perform their function, and the cause and effect of karma is established, because they lack true existence. So while both Sautrantika and Prasangika agree upon the functionality of things, the unique position of the Prasangika is that they lack inherent existence.

**4. Give the definition of a truth and the definition of a falsity.**

As presented here, all illusory truths are presented as falsities because the definition of a truth is that **if there is no discrepancy between what appears and what actually exists, then it is a truth. Whereas if there is discrepancy between what appears to you and its actual existence, it is false.** Therefore all illusory phenomena are said to be falsities because there is a discrepancy in how they appear and how they actually exist – or they appear as truly existent, but in fact lack true existence; or they appear as inherently existent but in fact lack inherent existence. Therefore, for all falsities such as illusions, for as long as the conditions are present, then for that period of time the illusion exists.



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## Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

23 August 2016

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As usual, let us engage in our regular meditation practice.

[meditation]

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will engage in, and listen to the teachings and put them into practice well'. This is very meaningful.

I understand that the seminar on Sunday went very well, so I am very glad about that. It seems that there were quite a few participants, including some who might have been quite new to the topic. So it was good on two levels: for those who hear about it for the first time, and for others to refresh and deepen their understanding.

I consider that sharing our knowledge and benefitting others in this practical way is real Dharma. Indeed, the optimum purpose of our studies is to put them into practice to benefit others. It's not that we are lacking the ability to benefit others. We do have the ability, so to actually utilise that ability to benefit others would be very meaningful.

As Geshe Chengawa presented, the Dharma comes down to two main points: benefitting others and not harming others. Last year these points were presented as part of practising patience as a way to benefit others. We need to incorporate the practice of patience into our practice of not harming others, and particularly when benefitting others. There might be occasions where others may not appreciate our attempts to benefit them, or they might retaliate with some sort of harm. When this happens patience is indispensable so that we don't become daunted and give up the intention to benefit others. So we definitely need to practise patience. The entire teachings of the Buddha, either when combined into the Three Baskets - vinaya, sutra and abhidharma - or sutra and tantra, come down to these two essential points: benefitting others and not harming others.

It is essential that we make every effort, to the best of our ability, to benefit others and not harm others, and to incorporate this into our daily lives. Familiarising ourselves with these sentiments, and reminding ourselves of them again and again is essential. We become familiar with this practice by actually putting it into practice in whatever way we can. It is through the familiarity with benefitting others in accordance with our capacity and ability that we are actually able to put it into practice. Right now many of us have the ability and potential to benefit others, but our lack of familiarity with that attitude prevents us from actually benefitting others. Likewise, we have the ability to refrain from harming others, but because we are not familiar with that, we find ourselves engaging in harming others. We will be able to utilise our abilities to benefit others, to the best of our

capacity, and refrain from harming others when we familiarise ourselves again and again with this practice. We really need to pay attention to this point.

As I mentioned earlier, in essence benefitting others and not harming others is Dharma practice. I really feel that ultimately all Dharma can be combined into these two aspects, and thus we need to ensure that every practice we do is integrated with these two essential points. In the Vinaya sutra, the Buddha mentioned that the person who harms others is not a person who practises virtue. So we need to keep that in mind. If one considers oneself to be someone who practises virtue, then one needs to refrain from harming others at all costs. We need to remind ourselves of these passages from the sutras again and again.

In Shantideva's very meticulously presented text that we have been studying, you will recall that there are passages where Shantideva quotes the Buddha as saying: "Benefiting sentient beings is in turn benefiting me; harming sentient beings is in turn harming me". This is essential advice from the Buddha. If we respect the Buddha then the best way to honour him, as the Buddha himself mentioned, is to benefit other sentient beings. The best way to refrain from showing disrespect to the Buddha is by refraining from harming and not respecting other sentient beings. This is really profound and practical advice for us to put into practice, which is the best way to remember the kindness of the Buddha.

These sentiments, which were presented by the Buddha himself, illustrate the great compassion that the Buddha has for all beings. He does not discriminate between sentient beings - indeed his only intention is to benefit them all. The Buddha reached this state of infinite compassion for all beings as a result of having familiarised himself with these attitudes prior to actually reaching the state of buddhahood. These are the attitudes that he familiarised himself with as a trainee on the path, and achieving buddhahood is a result of having perfected these positive attitudes of wishing to benefit all beings and not harm any living being. Reaching the state of having infinite compassion for all beings is a result of the practices that the Buddha engaged in as a trainee on the path.

What we need to learn from this is that it is exactly the same for ourselves. If we now, to the best of our ability, really develop these attitudes (wishing to benefit other sentient beings and not harm any sentient being even in the slightest way) and put them into practice, then, as we perfect these attitudes, and as they become more and more a part of our way of thinking, it will be possible to reach the state where that is our sole intention. Then we will be able to confidently say: "if you harm others, then that is equivalent to harming me" and "if you benefit others, then that is equivalent to benefiting me". These are actual states of mind that can be developed.

As Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in all of his texts on the stages of the path - the great treatise, and the middling and small treatises on the stages of the path to enlightenment - the practice for a beginner is to avoid one negativity at a time and engage in one virtuous deed at a time. They will accumulate to the point of completely abandoning all negativities and achieving all supreme

qualities. This indicates that setting a very high goal of wishing to achieve the state of enlightenment and focusing only on the end result, while neglecting to actually engage in these small practices now, is completely missing the point. If we wish to achieve that state of enlightenment in the future, then the only way for a beginner trainee is to engage in this practice of accumulating virtues one at a time, and abandoning negativities one at a time.

### **2.1.2.2.1.2.3.5. Refuting that the distinctive individual understanding of samsara and nirvana would be invalid**

Here the commentary reads:

The Madhyamika accept that there is no ultimate birth or death, that the lack of inherent existence is natural liberation, and that the birth, death and so forth established by karma and afflictions are cyclic existence.

This presents the **Madhyamika** view that the lack of inherent existence of all aspects of cyclic existence such as birth, sickness, aging and death is *natural liberation*. Thus, the term natural liberation refers to the *lack of inherent existence of birth, sickness, ageing and death, and so forth*. These conditions are *established by karma and afflictions* and this is what is referred to as *cyclic existence* or *samsara*.

In the text each of the other schools of Buddhist thought present their arguments to refute this assertion of the Madhyamika. Earlier the arguments of the Vaibhashika (Realists) were presented and refuted. Here, the objections of the Sautrantika (the followers of sutra) are being presented and refuted. Next the views of the Cittamatra (Mind Only) schools will be presented and refuted. As I have already covered the teachings on the tenets, it would be good for you to refer to those teachings as a way to understand the particular assertions of these proponents - the Realists, the followers of sutra, the Mind Only school and then the Madhyamika or Middle Way school, which has two sub-schools - the Autonomist or Svatantrika and the Consequentialist or Prasangika schools.

In relation to the Madhyamika assertion of natural nirvana and cyclic existence, the commentary then says: Regarding this a **Sautrantika** opponent argues ...

The argument is presented in the following lines of the root text:

*13cd. If nirvana is the ultimate,  
And samsara the illusory,*

*14. Then also the Buddha would circle,  
What would be the point of the bodhisattva's  
practice?*

Then the commentary explains the meaning of this verse, which is the argument of the Sautrantikas:

If the ultimate or natural liberation is actually liberation, then although the emptiness of inherent existence of cyclic existence is ultimate liberation, the continuity of circling, that is in an illusory way, through birth and death, is cyclic existence. In that case, there would be a common basis for cyclic existence and liberation, which would mean that even buddhas circle in cyclic existence. If that were the case, then it would be pointless for bodhisattvas to practise

the bodhisattva trainings in order to attain enlightenment.

What the **Madhyamika** propose is that the lack of true existence of samsara - which includes birth, sickness, ageing and death - is the natural abiding nirvana, or liberation. This means that from time immemorial samsara has always existed in the nature of the naturally abiding liberation. That is because samsara has always lacked true and inherent existence.

The **Sautrantika** argument is: *if the ultimate or natural liberation is actually liberation - this is in relation to the Madhyamika's assertion that the lack of true or inherent existence of samsara is the naturally abiding liberation - then although the emptiness of inherent existence of cyclic existence is ultimate liberation, the continuity of circling (in an illusory way) through birth and death, is cyclic existence*. Thus, *there would be a common basis for cyclic existence and liberation, which would mean that even buddhas circle in cyclic existence*. If that were the case then it would be pointless for bodhisattvas to practise the bodhisattva trainings in order to attain enlightenment. This is the argument presented by the Sautrantika.

The **Madhyamikas** explain that there is a difference between naturally abiding nirvana and the nirvana that is obtained as a way of abandoning the adventitious defilements.

The key point to be understood here is whether or not natural liberation is actual liberation. And what is being explained is that naturally abiding nirvana or liberation is not the actual liberation that is obtained through having practised the path and abandoned the defilements. Thus, the argument presented by the Sautrantika is not feasible.

As an answer to the Sautrantika the text says:

*Answer: There is no such fault because ...*

These lines from the root text are presented:

*14cd. If the continuity of the condition is not cut off,  
Then the illusion will also not be reversed.*

*15ab. If the continuity of the condition ceases  
Then it will not arise even conventionally.*

The commentary then explains the meaning of these lines:

...there is a difference between natural liberation and the liberation purified of the adventitious. The natural liberation does not depend on meditating on the path because it is the suchness of all, irrespective of whether one meditates on the path or not.

The liberation free from the adventitious stains needs to be attained by ceasing to take rebirth in cyclic existence through the continuity of birth and death. Although it lacks inherent existence, if one does not cease the continuity of the conditions, one cannot even reverse an illusion, not to mention cyclic existence. If one does cut the continuity of the conditions of ignorance and so forth, then cyclic existence will not even arise in an illusory way.

The answer begins with *there is a difference between what is referred to as natural liberation and the liberation that is purified of the adventitious defilements*.

That is followed by the explanation that *natural liberation does not depend on meditating on the path because it is the suchness or nature of all, irrespective of whether one meditates*

on the path or not. This implies that the natural liberation is something that has always abided. If there was a beginning to cyclic existence, then from the very beginning naturally abiding nirvana would be present at all times, because that is its very nature.

Then the text explains further that *the liberation that is free from the adventitious stains needs to be attained by cutting off the taking of rebirth in cyclic existence through the continuity of birth, ageing, sickness and death.*

The commentary further explains that *although it, meaning the continuity of birth and death and so forth, lacks inherent existence, if one does not cut, or stop, the continuity of the conditions, one cannot reverse even an illusion.*

What is being meticulously presented here is that although cyclic existence lacks inherent existence that does not nullify the fact that one will experience the sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing and death. Unless and until the continuity of those conditions of birth, sickness, ageing and death are completely stopped, one will have to continuously experience these sufferings. When it says that *one cannot reverse an illusion, not to mention cyclic existence* this means that for as long as the conditions for an illusion are there, the illusion will appear. The only way for an illusion to disappear is when the conditions for the illusion cease to exist. Cyclic existence is exactly the same: birth, sickness, ageing and death will remain for as long as the conditions for them to be regenerated remain. Lacking inherent existence doesn't mean that one will not experience the consequences of the conditions that were created earlier.

*Adventitious stains* refers to all the delusions; delusions are referred to as being adventitious because they are not one entity with the mind itself. This means that when the proper conditions are in place, they will cease to exist. The analogy that is given to portray adventitious delusions is clouds in an otherwise clear sky. With the conditions of strong wind, even dark and heavy clouds will be blown away, and the natural clear sky will become apparent again. Likewise, when the conditions for the delusions are abandoned, then the pure nature of the mind will become apparent. This is to be understood.

Next the text says: *if one does cut the continuity of the conditions of ignorance and so forth, then cyclic existence will not even arise in an illusory way.* This implies that, leaving aside 'ultimately', samsara will not be present even 'as illusory' or 'conventionally' when the conditions for samsara are eliminated.

Then the concluding statement reconfirms the refutation of the Sautrantika objections.

The earlier objection needs to be answered by making a distinction between ultimate liberation and liberation ...

Here *liberation* is the state of being free from the delusions through engaging in the path. That is actual liberation.

... rather than answering it in any other way because the opponent accepts that the buddhas do not circle and that sentient beings do.

#### 2.1.2.2. Refuting the Mind Only in particular<sup>1</sup>

This is presented in two sections:

1. Expressing the view
2. Refuting it

##### 1. EXPRESSING THE VIEW

This refers to the view of the **Mind Only**

*15cd. If even the mistaken is non-existent  
What takes the illusion as its object?*

Thus they are objecting:

*Mind Only:* If all phenomena lack inherent existence and even the mistaken consciousness apprehending the illusion does not exist, then what is the mind of which the illusion becomes the object of? As it does not exist, even the illusion becomes non-existent.

The **Madhyamika** answer is:

*Answer:* This again is the debate that if it exists, it has to exist inherently.

The argument of the **Mind Only** school is that *if all phenomena lack inherent existence and even the mistaken consciousness apprehending the illusion does not exist, then what is the mind of which the illusion becomes the object?* Because the Madhyamika assert the lack of inherent existence and true existence, the Mind Only school says that *if all phenomena lack inherent existence as you propose, then even the mistaken consciousness apprehending the illusion does not exist.*

What one needs to understand from this objection is that the Mind Only school assert that the mind exists inherently and that there is no external existence. Because the Madhyamika assertion that all phenomena lack inherent existence harms the their own assertion that the mind exists inherently, the Mind Only argue that if all phenomena lack inherent existence, as the Madhyamika claim, *then the mistaken consciousness apprehending the illusion also does not exist.* If that is the case, they say *then what is the mind of which the illusion becomes the object of?*

For the Mind Only school, if the mind apprehending the illusion does not exist inherently, then that is the same as saying that it doesn't exist. Thus they say, according to the Madhyamika, if the apprehending mind *does not exist*, then *even the illusion would have to be non-existent.*

The commentary presents a brief answer from the Madhyamikas pointing out that the reason for the Mind Only School objection *again comes down to the argument that if it exists, i.e. if things exist, it has to exist inherently.* The Mind Only argue that if all phenomena doesn't exist inherently, then that would mean that the mind (which they in fact believe exists inherently) also doesn't exist. If the mind that apprehends the illusion does not exist inherently, then by default one would have to say that what has been apprehended (the illusion itself) also does not exist. That is the absurdity that the Mind Only school presents.

##### 2. REFUTING IT

This refers to refuting the previous argument of the Mind Only school that if the mind apprehending the illusion

<sup>1</sup> This explanation contains many subdivisions so to simplify things the numbering restarts here. It will return to the overall numbering structure at verse 30, which is the beginning of the next major heading.

does not exist inherently, then that would imply that the illusion itself does not exist. The refutation is presented in these two subdivisions:

2.1. Similar counter argument

2.2. Refuting the answer

### 2.1. Similar argument

The counter argument by the **Madhyamikas** uses a similar argument to the one presented earlier by the Mind Only:

*16ab. When for you the illusion is non-existent,  
At that time, what becomes the object?*

The commentary explains:

If the object held by you, the Mind Only, existed in the way it appears when it is held, i.e., as an outer object, then it would exist externally. In that case, that is similar to an illusion and the mind taking it as its object, become non-existent. If it does not exist in the way it appears, it does not exist inherently, and in that case, according to you, it would have to be non-existent. If there is no apprehended illusory object appearing as an external object, at that time what is taken as an object at that time? Even the apprehenders of the five objects of forms, sounds and so forth become non-existent.

The counter argument begins with the Mind Only assertion that there is no outer or external object: The Madhyamika argue - *If the object held by you, the Mind Only, existed in the way it appears when it is held as an outer object, then it would exist externally. In that case, it is similar to an illusion and a mind taking it as its object being non-existent.*

The **Mind Only** argument is that if the mind didn't exist inherently then the illusion itself would not exist.

So, the **Madhyamikas** present a similar counter argument: In saying that things do not exist externally, you would also be implying that they don't exist.

The commentary further explains: *If it does not exist in the way it appears, it does not exist inherently, and in that case, according to you, it would have to be non-existent.* This is the point. *If there is no apprehended illusory object appearing as an external object, at that time what is taken as an object at that time? Even the apprehenders of the five objects of forms, sounds and so forth become non-existent.*

So the counter argument turns on the **Mind Only** argument asserting that if things were to lack inherent existence, and if the mind apprehending an illusion lacks inherent existence, then the illusion itself would be non-existent.

Similarly, the **Madhyamika** say, if you say there's no external existence, then the mind apprehending these external objects such as sounds, forms and so forth, would also be non-existent; you say that they do not exist externally, yet they are perceived as being external objects.

### 2.2. Refuting the answer

This is subdivided into two:

2.2.1. Expressing the view

2.2.2. Refuting it

#### 2.2.1. Expressing the view

*16cd. In case: "It exists in another way,*

*The aspect is mind itself."*

The **Mind Only** say:

*Mind Only:* Although it does not exist in the very way it appears, as an external object, it exists in a different way, because the aspects of form and the like are the substance of mind itself.

The Mind Only are saying that *it does not exist in the way that it appears.* Just as the Madhyamika would say that things appear as existing inherently but do not exist in that way, the Mind Only are saying that *it does not exist in the very way that it appears, as external objects.* While things like forms, sounds and so forth appear as being external objects, they do not exist in that way. *They exist in a different way, because the aspects of form and the like are the substance of the mind itself.* So the Mind Only assertion is that form does not exist externally, rather it is a partial substance of the mind itself. Thus the Mind Only School, unlike the Madhyamika, would not say that the consciousness apprehending form arises in relation to form, but rather the consciousness apprehending form arises from seeing another partial imprint of the mind itself appearing as form. Therefore what appears as being form or sounds and so forth (the external five sense objects) are actually a similar substance to the mind, arising from the same imprint, and one partial aspect of that substance appears as these five sense objects, so that is how it appears.

In essence the Mind Only school asserts that forms and so forth do not exist externally, but rather they are a substance of the mind itself.

#### 2.2.2. Refuting it

The refutation of the Mind Only position is subdivided into two sections.

2.2.2.1. The non-dual mind is not seen by anything

2.2.2.2. Refuting a self-knower through the answer to the question

##### 2.2.2.1. THE NON-DUAL MIND IS NOT SEEN BY ANYTHING

The non-dual mind refers to the **Mind Only** assertion that there's no duality in what is being apprehended and the apprehender, basically the subject and object. They say that there is a non-duality of subject and object because both are aspects of the mind itself.

The **Madhyamika** response is that if a non-dual mind were to exist it would have to be seen by a consciousness, but it is not seen by any consciousness.

*17ab. When the mere mind is an illusion,  
At that time what is seen by what?*

The commentary reads:

If at a time when the mere mind appears like an illusion, and it does not exist as an external object, what prime cognition sees the mind that lacks external existence? There is nothing that sees it.

As clearly presented here, *if at a time when the mere mind appears like an illusion, and it does not exist as an external object then what prime cognition sees the mind that lacks external existence?* The answer to this rhetorical question, by default, also refutes the self-knower.

## 2.2.2.2. REFUTING THE SELF-KNOWER THROUGH THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

The argument of the **Mind Only**:

*The Mind Only argue:* Consciousness can be of two types: In the aspect of being directed outwards and in the aspect of only being directed inwards. The latter is the self-knowing direct perception. All consciousnesses are the object of that self-knower.

Following on from the earlier question, *what prime cognition sees the mind that lacks external existence?*, the Mind Only School present their position that *consciousness can be of two types: a consciousness in the aspect of being directed outwards and perceiving things that appear as external phenomena, and a consciousness in the aspect of only being directed inwards.*

Of these two types of consciousnesses, *the latter is the self-knowing direct perception.* This assertion of a self-knowing consciousness – a consciousness that knows itself – is one of the unique presentations of the Mind Only school. For them, *all consciousnesses are the object of the self-knower.*

What has to be clarified is that it is not as if two separate consciousnesses are posited by the Mind Only. Rather it's the same consciousness that has two aspects: one aspect that focuses externally or outwardly, and one aspect that focuses inwardly. In other words, one aspect of the consciousness apprehends objects and the other aspect apprehends the subject, or the mind itself.

Saying that there are *two types* of consciousness may sound like there are two different consciousnesses, but in fact one consciousness is posited as functioning in two different ways. *The latter, the consciousness in the aspect of only being directed inwards is the self-knowing direct perception* and all consciousnesses appear to that.

This is refuted by the **Madhyamika** under the following four headings:

2.2.2.2.1. Refuting this with quotation

2.2.2.2.2. Refuting this with logic

2.2.2.2.3. Refuting the arguments for the existence of a self-knower

2.2.2.2.4. Refuting that imputed objects are based on truly existent functionalities

### 2.2.2.2.1. Refuting this with a quotation

This section starts with the statement by the **Madhyamika**:

It is not feasible for this very mind to experience and know itself in a non-dual manner.

Then these lines are presented:

*17cd. Even the protector of the worlds said  
That mind does not see mind.*

*18ab. The edge of a knife does not cut itself  
It is the same for mind.*

The commentary explains that:

Even the protector of the worlds stated this in the *Sutra of the Precious Crown Ornament*, with examples such as the edge of the knife cannot cut that very knife itself, and that mind does not see mind.

This relates to the **Mind Only** assertion of self-knowing mind. Their definition of the self-knowing mind is an initial, infallible cogniser that is free from conceptuality, bears the aspect of an apprehender and only looks

inward. So it is a cogniser that only looks inward which means it only apprehends the mind itself; free from conceptuality means it apprehends the mind in a non-dualistic manner. So, they posit the self-knower that is neither a primary consciousness nor a mental factor. It exists like a separate entity from the mind, whose only function is to be merely aware of the mind.

The Mind Only assert that the self-knower experiences the mind in a non-dual manner. We covered the Mind Only view when I taught the tenets, so you can refer to earlier notes and transcripts.

As I have explained previously, the self-knower is asserted as a cogniser that apprehends itself in a non-dual manner, however it is not a mind that perceives non-duality, for the only mind that can perceive non-duality is the wisdom realising emptiness. As the self-knower is not a mind realising emptiness or suchness, it therefore cannot actually perceive or realise non-duality.

As explained in the commentary, *even the protector of the worlds stated this in the Sutra of the Precious Crown Ornament with examples such as the edge of the knife cannot cut the very knife itself, and similarly, the mind does not see mind.*

The commentary then further explains the meaning of this analogy:

For example, just like the edge of the blade no matter how sharp, cannot cut itself in any way, and similarly the mind cannot see the mind.

Those who accept a self-knower accept that the very apprehending aspect knows itself. As there is not even one atom of difference in the arising aspect of the knower and that known, they need to accept them as one without any extra other part.

If that is the case, the **Madhyamika** say:

If one accepts such a self-knower, then one needs to accept examples such as that the blade of the knife cutting itself, or that prime cognition comprehends the object of comprehension independently of such an object.

This quotation from the *Sutra of the Precious Crown Ornament* refutes the Mind Only position.

### 2.2.2.2.2. Refuting this with logic

This is subdivided into two:

2.2.2.2.2.1. Refuting the example

2.2.2.2.2.2. Refuting the meaning

#### 2.2.2.2.2.1. Refuting the example

Here there are two examples, the first of which is the example of candlelight.

The lines of verse relating to this are:

*18cd. If, 'It is like a candle  
Perfectly illuminating itself.'*

*19. The candle light is nothing to be illuminated  
Because darkness does not obscure.*

After these lines, the **Mind Only** argument is presented:

*Argument:* Just as the candlelight perfectly illuminates itself and other objects, in the same way does the consciousness know itself and others.

The **Madhyamika's** answer to that is:

*Answer:* The example is not established because the candlelight is not illuminated by itself. It does not

---

need to and cannot illuminate itself. Otherwise, darkness should also obscure itself and others, which is not valid. If darkness obscured darkness, then one could not see darkness, just as one cannot see the vase covered by a cloth. One should try to extensively understand these arguments, in the way they are outlined in the *Root Wisdom*.

Although it is not in fact the case, the **Mind Only** say that *just as the candlelight perfectly illuminates itself and other objects, in the same way consciousness knows itself as well as others*. They use the analogy of candlelight to assert that the consciousness knows itself as well as others.

Then the **Madhyamika** refute that, by saying: *The example is not established*. The example you use cannot be established, *because the candlelight is not illuminated by itself*. So the very example that you present is not valid or established, because candlelight does not illuminate itself. It does not need to and it cannot illuminate itself.

If a candle could illuminate itself, then by default you would have to say that *darkness should also obscure itself*, which is absurd. *If darkness obscured darkness, then one could not see darkness, just as one cannot see the vase covered by a cloth*. Indeed, if a vase is covered by a cloth, then you cannot see it because it is obscured by the cloth. So if darkness obscured itself that would imply one could not see darkness because it is obscured. That is absurd.

The commentary concludes with: *one should try to extensively understand these arguments in the way they are outlined in the Root Wisdom*. The seventh chapter of this text contains a few verses that explain these analogies.

The second example is the example of the crystal, which we can cover in our next session.

If you pay attention, and read up on this topic and try to understand the views of the proponents, then it becomes a bit clearer. Otherwise at first glance it might seem hard to understand.

This will become clearer as we go further into the text.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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**Homework**      **Answers**

Block: 3    Week: 2 (23 August 2016)    Assigned: 30/08/2016

1. The Sautrantika argument is: *if the ultimate or natural liberation is actually liberation – this is in relation to the Madhyamika's assertion that the lack of true or inherent existence of samsara is the naturally abiding liberation – then although the emptiness of inherent existence of cyclic existence is ultimate liberation, the continuity of circling (in an illusory way) through birth and death, is cyclic existence. Thus, there would be a common basis for cyclic existence and liberation, which would mean that even buddhas circle in cyclic existence. If that were the case then it would be pointless for bodhisattvas to practise the bodhisattva trainings in order to attain enlightenment. So, this is the argument presented by the Sautrantika.*

**The key point to be understood here is whether or not natural liberation is actual liberation. Explain the difference.**

The **Sautrantika** argument is: *if the ultimate or natural liberation is actually liberation – this is in relation to the Madhyamika's assertion that the lack of true or inherent existence of samsara is the naturally abiding liberation – then although the emptiness of inherent existence of cyclic existence is ultimate liberation, the continuity of circling (in an illusory way) through birth and death, is cyclic existence. Thus, there would be a common basis for cyclic existence and liberation, which would mean that even buddhas circle in cyclic existence. If that were the case then it would be pointless for bodhisattvas to practise the bodhisattva trainings in order to attain enlightenment. So, this is the argument presented by the Sautrantika.*

The **Madhyamikas** explain that there is a difference between naturally abiding nirvana and the nirvana that is obtained as a way of abandoning the adventitious defilements.

The key point to be understood here is whether or not natural liberation is actual liberation. And what is being explained is that naturally abiding nirvana or liberation is not the actual liberation that is obtained through having practised the path and abandoned the defilements. Thus, the argument presented by the Sautrantika is not feasible.

As an answer to the Sautrantika the text says:

*Answer:* There is no such fault because ...

These lines from the root text are presented:

**14cd. If the continuity of the condition is not cut off,  
Then the illusion will also not be reversed.**

**15ab. If the continuity of the condition ceases  
Then it will not arise even conventionally.**

The commentary then explains the meaning of these lines:

...there is a difference between natural liberation and the liberation purified of the adventitious. The natural liberation does not depend on meditating on the path because it is the suchness of all, irrespective of whether one meditates on the path or not.

The liberation free from the adventitious stains needs to be attained by ceasing to take rebirth in cyclic existence through the continuity of birth and death. Although it lacks inherent existence, if one does not cease the continuity of the conditions, one cannot even reverse an illusion, not to mention cyclic existence. If one does cut the continuity of the conditions of ignorance and so forth, then cyclic existence will not even arise in an illusory way.

The answer begins with *there is a difference between* what is referred to as *natural liberation and the liberation that is purified of the adventitious defilements.*

That is followed by the explanation that *natural liberation does not depend on meditating on the path because it is the suchness or nature of all, irrespective of whether one meditates on the path or not.* This implies that the natural liberation is something that has always abided. If there was a beginning to cyclic

existence, then from the very beginning naturally abiding nirvana would be present at all times, because that is its very nature.

## **2. Although cyclic existence lacks inherent existence that does not nullify the fact that one will experience the sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing and death. Why?**

Then the text explains further that *the liberation that is free from the adventitious stains needs to be attained by cutting off the taking of rebirth in cyclic existence through the continuity of birth, ageing, sickness and death.*

The commentary further explains that *although it, meaning the continuity of birth and death and so forth, lacks inherent existence, if one does not cut, or stop, the continuity of the conditions, one cannot reverse even an illusion.*

What is being meticulously presented here is that although cyclic existence lacks inherent existence that does not nullify the fact that one will experience the sufferings of birth, sickness, ageing and death. Unless and until the continuity of those conditions of birth, sickness, ageing and death is completely stopped, one will have to continuously experience these sufferings. When it says that *one cannot reverse an illusion, not to mention cyclic existence* this means that for as long as the conditions for an illusion are there, the illusion will appear. The only way for an illusion to disappear is when the conditions for the illusion cease to exist. Cyclic existence is exactly the same: birth, sickness, ageing and death will remain for as long as the conditions for them to be regenerated remain. Lacking inherent existence doesn't mean that one will not experience the consequences of the conditions that were created earlier.

*Adventitious stains* refers to all the delusions; delusions are referred to as being adventitious because they are not one entity with the mind itself. This means that when the proper conditions are in place, they will cease to exist. The analogy that is given to portray adventitious delusions is clouds in an otherwise clear sky. With the conditions of strong wind, even dark and heavy clouds will be blown away, and the natural clear sky will become apparent again. Likewise, when the conditions for the delusions are abandoned, then the pure nature of the mind will become apparent. This is to be understood.

Next the text says: *if one does cut the continuity of the conditions of ignorance and so forth, then cyclic existence will not even arise in an illusory way.* This implies that, leaving aside 'ultimately', samsara will not be present even 'as illusory' or 'conventionally' when the conditions for samsara are eliminated.

Then the concluding statement reconfirms the refutation of the Sautrantika objections.

The earlier objection needs to be answered by making a distinction between ultimate liberation and liberation...

Here *liberation* is the state of being free from the delusions through engaging in the path. That is actual liberation.

... rather than answering it in any other way because the opponent accepts that the buddhas do not circle and that sentient beings do.

## **3. So the Mind Only assertion is that form does not exist externally, rather it is a partial substance of the mind itself.**

**Give the Madyamika refutations using analogies.**

The Mind Only are saying that *it does not exist in the way that it appears.* Just as the Madhyamika would say that things appear as existing inherently but do not exist in that way, the Mind Only are saying that *it does not exist in the very way that it appears, as external objects.* While things like forms, sounds and so forth appear as being external objects, they do not exist in that way. They *exist in a different way, because the aspects of form and the like are the substance of the mind itself.* So the Mind Only assertion is that form does not exist externally, rather it is a partial substance of the mind itself. Thus the Mind Only School, **unlike the Madhyamika, would not say that the consciousness apprehending form arises in relation to form,** but rather the consciousness apprehending form arises from seeing another partial imprint of the mind itself appearing as form. Therefore what appears as being form or sounds and so forth (the external five sense objects) are actually a similar substance to the mind, arising from the same imprint, and one partial aspect of that substance appears as these five sense objects, so that is how it appears.



In essence the Mind Only school asserts that forms and so forth do not exist externally, but rather they are a substance of the mind itself.

This relates to the **Mind Only** assertion of self-knowing mind. Their definition of the self-knowing mind is an initial, infallible cogniser that is free from conceptuality, bears the aspect of an apprehender and only looks inward. So it is a cogniser that only looks inward which means it only apprehends the mind itself; free from conceptuality means it apprehends the mind in a non-dualistic manner. So, they posit the self-knower that is neither a primary consciousness nor a mental factor. It exists like a separate entity from the mind, whose only function is to be merely aware of the mind.

The Mind Only assert that the self-knower experiences the mind in a non-dual manner. We covered the Mind Only view when I taught the tenets, so you can refer to earlier notes and transcripts.

As I have explained previously, the self-knower is asserted as a cogniser that apprehends itself in a non-dual manner, however it is not a mind that perceives non-duality, for the only mind that can perceive non-duality is the wisdom realizing emptiness. As the self-knower is not a mind realising emptiness or suchness, it therefore cannot actually perceive or realize non-duality.

As explained in the commentary, *even the protector of the worlds stated this in the Sutra of the Precious Crown Ornament with examples such as the edge of the knife cannot cut the very knife itself*, and similarly, *the mind does not see mind*.

The commentary then further explains the meaning of this analogy:

For example, just like the edge of the blade no matter how sharp, cannot cut itself in any way, and similarly the mind cannot see the mind.

Those who accept a self-knower accept that the very apprehending aspect knows itself. As there is not even one atom of difference in the arising aspect of the knower and that known, they need to accept them as one without any extra other part.

If that is the case, the **Madhyamika** say:

If one accepts such a self-knower, then one needs to accept examples such as that the blade of the knife cutting itself, or that prime cognition comprehends the object of comprehension independently of such an object.

This quotation from the *Sutra of the Precious Crown Ornament* refutes the Mind Only position.

#### **2.2.2.2.2. Refuting this with logic**

This is subdivided into two:

2.2.2.2.2.1. Refuting the example

2.2.2.2.2.2. Refuting the meaning

##### **2.2.2.2.2.1. Refuting the example**

Here there are two examples, the first of which is the example of candlelight.

The lines of verse relating to this are:

**18cd. If, 'It is like a candle  
Perfectly illuminating itself.'**

**19. The candle light is nothing to be illuminated  
Because darkness does not obscure.**

After these lines, the **Mind Only** argument is presented:

*Argument:* Just as the candlelight perfectly illuminates itself and other objects, in the same way does the consciousness know itself and others.

The **Madhyamika's** answer to that is:

*Answer:* The example is not established because the candlelight is not illuminated by itself. It does not need to and cannot illuminate itself. Otherwise, darkness should also obscure itself and others, which is not valid. If darkness obscured darkness, then one could not see darkness, just as one cannot see the vase covered by a cloth. One should try to extensively understand these arguments, in the way they are outlined in the *Root Wisdom*.

Although it is not in fact the case, the **Mind Only** say that *just as the candlelight perfectly illuminates itself and other objects, in the same way consciousness knows itself as well as others*. They use the analogy of candlelight to assert that the consciousness knows itself as well as others.

Then the **Madhyamika** refute that, by saying: *The example is not established*. The example you use cannot be established, *because the candlelight is not illuminated by itself*. So the very example that you present is not valid or established, because candlelight does not illuminate itself. It does not need to and it cannot illuminate itself.

If a candle could illuminate itself, then by default you would have to say that *darkness should also obscure itself*, which is absurd. *If darkness obscured darkness, then one could not see darkness, just as one cannot see the vase covered by a cloth*. Indeed if a vase is covered by a cloth, then you cannot see it because it is obscured by the cloth. So if darkness obscured itself that would imply one could not see darkness because it is obscured. That is absurd.

# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

30 August 2016

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: 'For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well'. When we develop this strong motivation from the depths of our heart then our actions become most purposeful.

As well as generating a positive motivation, it is also good to engage in regular meditation practice to help settle the mind. A settled, more focused mind is an essential tool for whatever other practice or virtuous activity we wish to engage in, because that activity becomes more meaningful when the mind is focused.

## Refuting the Mind Only in particular

### 2.2.2.2 REFUTING THE SELF-KNOWER THROUGH THE ANSWER TO THE QUESTION

#### 2.2.2.2.1 Refuting the example (cont.)

##### Refuting the example of the crystal

- 19cd. *Unlike a crystal, blue does not depend  
On something else to be blue;*
20. *Likewise, some are seen to depend on others,  
And yet some are also not.  
That which is not blue cannot produce itself  
As blue out of its own nature.*

One needs to understand that the debates presented here are specifically between the proponents of the Mind Only school and those of the Madhyamika school who are refuting each other's positions.

The example being particularly refuted here is one used by the **Mind Only** school to assert a self-knower. The Mind Only school is asserting that there is a self-knower because, when the mind apprehends blue – when we recall having seen blue in the past – that recollection that one has seen blue is proof that there is a self-knower. This is because, at the time of seeing blue, it is the self-knowing mind that apprehends the mind perceiving the colour blue, and this allows you to remember that you have seen the object blue at the same time as the object possessor, which is the mind that perceives blue.

The **Madhyamika** school refute that by saying that one doesn't need to have a self-knower to remember the mind apprehending blue, as well as the object blue itself. Rather, this is remembered through the connection formed at the time of perceiving blue. Because of the connection that was made earlier between the object possessor, or the mind that perceives blue, and the object blue, one can now recall having seen blue.

These assertions and debates are very meticulous ways of explaining how the mind works. For example, when we perceive something, how is it perceived? How does memory work? How do we recall or recollect things? Each of the schools has its own presentation, and it is by analysing and looking into these different presentations that one gets a

clear understanding of how the mind works. This is a really significant point, and it is debated meticulously here.

So the Mind Only school uses the example of a crystal to present a self-knower. The Madhyamikas refute that, as presented, with the above verses. The subsequent argument initially presented by the **Mind Only** school is:

Argument: That the white crystal is generated as blue through the force of the basis is in dependence on other, rather than through its own nature.

The example presented in this argument by the Mind Only school is that of a clear crystal. When a clear crystal is placed on a blue base, that crystal will appear blue when one looks at it. If it is placed on a yellow base, the crystal will appear to the eye consciousness as yellow. Likewise, if it is placed on a red base, it will appear red, and so forth. The analogy rightly shows that the colour of the clear crystal – that which is reflected – is dependent on the colour of its base. That is quite clear.

The Mind Only argument further says:

The blue of the lapis lazuli is blue out of its own nature, and not in dependence on others. Likewise, the knowing of forms and so forth exists in dependence on the other mind, but the knowing of mind by mind itself exists independently from some separate knower.

The **Madhyamika's** refutation of this assertion of the Mind Only school is presented:

Answer: It follows that the example of the blue of the lapis lazuli being generated as blue independently from something else is not valid because blue does not by its own self generate itself in the nature of blue, which it would need to in order not to be generated from a cause as blue.

So the Madhyamika refute this assertion by saying that the blue in the lapis lazuli is not produced by itself and it doesn't exist by its own nature, because if that were the case, it would need not need to depend on, or be generated by a cause. So what is being presented in the answer is that because the colour blue in the lapis lazuli is dependent on causes, it cannot be generated by itself, by its own nature.

The Mind Only school uses the assertion that 'the blue of the lapis lazuli arises from its own nature' as an example of the mind knowing itself. But the Madhyamikas refute that by showing the absurdity of blue arising by itself, without having to depend on causes.

Although the Cittamatrins (Mind Only) are not claiming that the blue of the lapis lazuli does not depend on causes – they wouldn't assert that – the Madhyamikas are saying that if blue *were* to exist by its own nature, from its own side, then logically it would have to be the case that it could not depend on causes. So the Madhyamikas are refuting the Mind Only by default, saying that if you accept that something exists from its own side or by its own nature, then that would imply that it does not depend on causes.

The Mind Only school, of course, with its own system of logic, is presenting quite a meticulous argument by saying that, just as the blue colour of lapis lazuli exists by its own nature and doesn't depend on something else, similarly, the mind knows itself and doesn't have to depend on something else. This is on the basis of the Mind Only school asserting that there is true existence or existence by its own nature.

As I have presented previously many times, the Mind Only assert that dependent phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena exist truly, while imputed

phenomena do not exist truly. This is presented in the teachings of the tenets, so you should apply that understanding here.

#### 2.2.2.2.2 Refuting the meaning

21. *If the statement, 'the candle flame illuminates'  
Is made upon knowledge by consciousness,  
Then the statement 'awareness is luminous'  
Is made upon knowledge by what?*

If one says, 'Although the candle does not illuminate itself, but rather it merely illuminates', and says likewise 'it is known by consciousness' then, in that case, consciousness does not illuminate itself. Instead one has to say 'consciousness merely illuminates'. By which different substance is consciousness known that you make this statement? This is invalid.

When the **Mind Only** school asserts *although the candle does not illuminate itself*, this is in relation to the earlier **Madhyamika** refutation that, if light illuminates itself, this would imply that dark obscures itself, and that would be absurd. Now the Mind Only proponents are saying, 'OK. We accept that the candle does not illuminate itself - it merely illuminates. So that is the nature of the candle light, it merely illuminates.' Then they ask the Madhyamikas: *By which different substance is consciousness known that you make this statement? This is invalid.*

They further state:

If it would be known by a consciousness of different substance, it would become infinite. Hence, it is not known by self or by another.

Here, the **Mind Only** school is asserting a counter argument to the Madhyamika position by saying that, if you assert a different substance, or a different mind that knows the mind, and you say that the mind doesn't know itself, then that different substance that knows the mind would need a different substance to know that, and a further substance to know that, and so on. So there would be the fault of infinite regression and the absurdity would be that the mind is not known by itself nor by another.

In other words, the Mind Only school is saying that there would be nothing to know the mind; the mind would not be known if it is not known by itself and not known by another. This is what is presented next, and subsequently refuted by the Madhyamika.

22. *To remark about it being illuminated or not illuminated,  
When it is not seen by anything,  
Is pointless even though expressed,  
Like the poise of a barren woman's daughter.*

The argument is saying:

As there is no knower seen by any consciousness, then although one may make statements regarding whether consciousness is illuminated or not, they are meaningless as the basis for the distinction is not established by prime cognition. If it is impossible for the daughter of a barren woman to exist, then it is meaningless to talk about her poise.

Here, the Mind Only school is saying, 'You Madhyamikas may refute us by saying that consciousness does not illuminate itself and so forth, but according to you, making statements about whether consciousness is illuminated or not is meaningless, as the basis for the distinction is not established by prime cognition'. The analogy presented here is like making comments about a daughter of a barren woman.

The literal analogy given is that of a mule. Apparently mules cannot have offspring. Thus, the absurdity being presented here is that, if the daughter of a barren woman doesn't even exist, then to talk about her poise, such as her looks, shape and elegance is meaningless.

#### 2.2.2.3 REFUTING THE ARGUMENTS FOR THE EXISTENCE OF A SELF-KNOWER

Here there are three sub-headings:

2.2.2.3.1 Example of how memory is generated even though there is no self-knower

2.2.2.3.2 Refuting other reasons used to establish a self-knower

2.2.2.3.3 Refuting that other-knowers would be impossible if there were no self-knower

As a response to the Mind Only school's reasoning for the existence of a self-knower through examples, the **Madhyamika** presents another example to refute that there is a self-knower. As mentioned earlier, if there is no self-knower, there wouldn't be other knowers as well, so the Madhyamika refute this by showing the impossibility of a self-knower.

##### 2.2.2.3.1 Example of how memory is generated even though there is no self-knower

The **Mind Only** school presents this verse:

- 23ab. *If there is no self-knower,  
How can one remember consciousness?*

Mind-Only: If there is no self-knower, then how could there be recollection of the object possessor consciousness? There cannot be.

If one can infer the experience through the reason of recollection, and the recollection when one thinks, 'I previously saw blue' comes subsequent to the experience, then, when one says, 'I saw blue', one establishes the experience of the object through the recollection of the object, and that very experience of the object is the apprehension of blue.

The reasoning that refutes other possibilities as to what is it that experiences the apprehension of blue also establishes the self-knower.

The Mind Only proponents assert: *If there is no self-knower, then how could there be recollection of the object possessor consciousness? There cannot be.* They are arguing that without a self-knower, how could one remember that one has seen something? An object possessor is the consciousness that apprehends the object. What I explained earlier is now being presented here.

The Mind Only school argue: *If one can infer the experience through the reason of recollection and the recollection when one thinks, 'I previously saw blue' comes subsequent to the experience, then, when one says, 'I saw blue', one establishes the experience of the object through the recollection of the object, and that very experience of the object is the apprehension of blue.*

They further state:

When one says, 'I saw' one establishes the experience of the object possessor through the sign of the recollection of the object possessor, and that experience of the object possessor is the self-knower.

This is how the Mind Only proponents assert a self-knower.

That which serves as an answer by the **Madhyamikas** is in the last two lines of the verse:

- 23cd. *One remembers in relation to the experience of something else,  
Like the poison of a rat.*

Madhyamika: The memory of the object possessor does not establish the self-knower. If the apprehension of blue experiences the other object of blue then, when one says, 'I previously saw this blue', the memory of the object possessor is generated from the memory of the relation between the object and the object possessor. It is not generated from the experience of the object possessor, just like the marmot does not experience the poisoned bite at the time but does remember it later.

For example: When the marmot in winter is bitten by a rat, although the poison of the rat enters its body, it only experiences the bite and not the poison. Later, when it wakes up due to hearing thunder, it remembers that at the time of the bite it had been poisoned, but without having earlier experienced the poison at the time.

Then the analogy is further explained:

The marmot being bitten is similar to the experience of the object by the apprehension of blue. Being poisoned at the same time as the bite is like the experience of the object possessor at the time of holding the object. That the object possessor does not experience itself at this time is like the non-experience of poison at the time of being bitten. Subsequently remembering the bite is like remembering the object. The memory of the object possessor through the memory of the object, along with the object possessor not having experienced itself earlier, is like the memory of the poison through the power of merely remembering being bitten, and without having experienced being poisoned at the time.

First of all, the Madhyamika asserts that the memory of the object possessor does not establish the self-knower. *If the apprehension of blue experiences the other object of blue then, when one says, 'I previously saw this blue', the memory of the object possessor is generated from the memory of the relation between the object and the object possessor. It is not generated from the experience of the object possessor ...*

This is in relation to the **Mind Only** assertion that one recollects by experiencing the object possessor the mind knowing itself. The **Madhyamika** says this is not the case. The analogy presented here is *just like the marmot does not experience the poisoned bite at the time, but does remember it later.* The marmot is an animal that hibernates in the winter. I think what is translated here as a rat may be more like a small mouse that has a poisonous bite.

*When the marmot in winter is bitten by a rat [or a small poisonous mouse], although the poison of the mouse enters its body it only experiences the bite and not the poison.* This refers to the fact that, when it is hibernating, the marmot would experience the pain of the bite, but would not yet experience the actual poison transmitted with that bite. That hasn't taken effect on the marmot's body, so it doesn't actually know that yet. It only experiences the bite and not the poison. Later, when it wakes up due to hearing thunder, it remembers that it had been poisoned at the time of the bite, although it had not experienced the poison at that time.

A marmot is an animal that hibernates underground for about six months a year in the winter months, so when another small animal like a poisonous rat or mouse bites it, apparently it has an awareness of the bite because of the pain of the bite. It experiences the pain of the bite, but because the poison has entered its body but has yet to be activated, the poison remains dormant. Later, when Spring comes along and the thunderstorms wake up the hibernating

animal, at the time the marmot wakes up the poison apparently gets activated, and that is when it feels the actual pain and suffering of the poison.

So although the poison entered the marmot's body at an earlier time, it was not experienced at that time because the poison had not yet been activated. Later, however, when it wakes up and experiences the pain of the poison being activated and spreading throughout its body, it feels the pain and then has the recollection, 'I was poisoned when I was bitten earlier'. Even though it doesn't recollect having been poisoned earlier, due to the delayed effect it now has a recollection that it must have been poisoned earlier. This is an analogy to show how recollection or remembrance comes about.

We can all relate to this example. We might have been out in some wilderness area and something might have stung us and we thought, 'Something has bitten me'. It could be a poisonous animal, like a rat or a mouse, but initially we would only experience the pain of the sting or the bite, and not pay much attention to it and move on. But then, later, after the poison starts to spread, the actual pain of the poison is felt. Even though one may have forgotten about the bite, later one will think that the poison is very painful and one can feel it spreading over a greater area, such as up one's leg.

So even though one would not have known at the time of the bite that one had been poisoned, later on, because of the pain spreading and knowing that it is the effect of the poison, one would reflect, 'I must have been poisoned earlier'.

The text refers to the marmot waking up due to hearing thunder and remembering that at the time of the bite it had been poisoned, but without having experienced the poison at that time. This analogy is basically refuting that there has to be a self-knower: that even though at the time one didn't know one had been poisoned, later one has the recollection of this.

The analogy is explained as follows: The marmot being bitten is similar to the experience of the object by the apprehension of blue; the experience of the bite itself is analogous to the experience of the object by the consciousness perceiving blue at that time.

Being poisoned at the time of the bite and not knowing one has been poisoned is like the experience of the object possessor – that which perceives the blue – at the time of holding the object, which in this case is the colour blue. The object possessor does not experience itself at this time, just like the poison is not experienced at the time of being bitten. So in this analogy, the object possessor not experiencing the poison at the time of being bitten shows how one does not need a self-knower to remember the object possessor. Subsequently remembering the bite is like remembering the object, the memory of the object possessor through the memory of the object – *the memory of the object possessor through the memory of the object, along with the object possessor having earlier experienced itself, is like the memory of the poison through the power of merely remembering being bitten, and without at the time having experienced being poisoned.*

The analogy is elaborately explained to show how there is no need to have a self-knower in order to remember the object possessor at a later time. Gyaltsab Je gives the following statements:

This reasoning to establish memory without a self-knower appears to me as having been composed by a fully qualified scholar, and as excellent. It seems it has

not been adopted correctly by those practising the words of the *Introduction to the Trainings*.

Actually these would be the words of Lama Tsong Khapa himself, recorded in notes taken by Gyaltsab Je Rinpoche. So it is actually Lama Tsong Khapa who is saying this. The final statement here is:

Because in general the answer given to, 'it is incorrect that the later consciousness remembers because the earlier consciousness did not experience itself', is 'the pervasion is not established', it says that the assertion, 'the *Introduction to the Trainings* does not refute a nominal self-knower' is not the position of the great bodhisattva.

#### 2.2.2.3.2 Refuting other reasons used to establish a self-knower

24. *If, 'It can illuminate itself because That endowed with other conditions can see.' By applying the formulated eye balm, The vase is seen, but not the eye balm.*

Mind-Only: Having accomplished the mind of calm abiding, one can see the mind of others, then one can illuminate one's mind as one's object. For example, like being able to see the close mountain if one can see the far away needle.

Answer: Although one can see underground treasures such as vases by applying the substance made out of a medicinal eye balm, one does not see the eye balm itself. This reason harms the position of the self-knower, and does not support it.

Further: It is explained like this because, as they are the same in arising from the same illuminating cause, it follows that not only are that illuminating and that illuminated not established as one, they are certainly also not established as of one entity. This is so because at the time when the underground vase is seen due to applying the medicinal eye balm created through a secret mantra for seeing underground treasures, not only is the illuminated vase not one with the illuminating eye balm, they also do not become one entity.

Hence, not only is it unsuitable as a reason establishing a self-knower, it harms the existence of a self-knower.

The **Mind Only** are saying that, having established calm abiding and with other conditions such as achieving the higher mental concentrations, then due to acquiring clairvoyance, one is able to know others' minds. If one can know others' minds, which in comparison to one's own mind are external and far away, then one can definitely assert that one knows one's own mind which is close. The example given here is like being able to see a nearby mountain if one can see a needle far away in the distance.

So the **Madhyamika** then refute this example that the Mind Only use, which is that if you can see something far away, then by default that would imply one could definitely see what is near. The Mind Only use that example to assert, therefore, that there is a self-knower. The Madhyamika's counter-argument to establish that the Mind Only school assertion is not valid is:

Answer: Although one can see underground treasures such as vases by applying the substance made out of a medicinal eye balm ...

This eye balm is a substance that is a combination of medicinal plants and the mantras recited over it. It is said that when one applies the eye balm to one's eyes, it enables

one to see treasures underground. Although the treasures underground are seen, one does not see the eye balm itself.

So the Madhyamika present a meticulous example here. If the Mind Only say that if something far away is seen, then by all means one has to see something near, then how about a situation where one applies this eye balm to the eyes to see treasures underground? One would be able to see the underground treasures, but not the eye balm itself. This is a very good example.

This reason harms the position of the self-knower, and does not support it.

Further: It is explained like this because, as they are the same in arising from the same illuminating cause, it follows that not only are that illuminating and that illuminated not established as one, they are certainly also not established as of one entity.

The analogy is further explained:

This is so because at the time when the underground vase is seen due to applying the medicinal eye balm created through a secret mantra for seeing underground treasures, not only is the illuminated vase, ...

... illuminated vase meaning here a vase that is clearly seen ...

... not one with the illuminating eye balm, they also do not become one entity.

Hence, not only is it unsuitable as a reason establishing a self-knower, it harms the existence of a self-knower.

In relation to the analogy presented earlier, the Madhyamika says to the Mind Only that not only is it unsuitable as a reason to establish a self-knower, it actually harms the existence of a self-knower. So what the Mind Only asserts as being an example harms the very assertion of a self-knower.

#### 2.2.2.3.3 Refuting that other-knowers would be impossible if there would be no self-knower

The Mind Only school then says that if there was no self-knower, it would be absurd to know other external phenomena. This is what the Mind Only school uses as a counter-argument and will be refuted next.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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## Homework

Block: 3 Week: 3 (30 August 2016) Assigned: 6/9/2016

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1. The example being particularly refuted here is one used by the Mind Only school to assert a self-knower. The Mind Only school is asserting that there is a self-knower because, when the mind apprehends blue – when we recall having seen blue in the past – that recollection one has seen blue is proof that there is a self-knower. How do the Madhyamika School refute the assertion of a self-knower?

2. What is the Mind Only assertion regarding blue in lapis lazuli, and how do the Madhyamika refute this assertion?

3. The text refers to the marmot waking up due to hearing thunder and remembering that at the time of the bite it had been poisoned, but without having experienced the poison at that time. Explain this analogy and which experience it is analogous to.

4. So the Madhyamika then refute this example that the Mind Only use, which is that if you can see something far away, then by default that would imply one could definitely see what is near. Explain and give the Madhyamika refutation

**Homework****Answers**

**Block: 3 Week: 3** (30 August 2016) **Assigned: 6/9/2016**

**1. The example being particularly refuted here is one used by the Mind Only school to assert a self-knower. The Mind only school is asserting that there is a self-knower because, when the mind apprehends blue – when we recall having seen blue in the past – that recollection one has seen blue is proof that there is a self-knower. How do the Madhyamika School refute the assertion of a self-knower?**

The example being particularly refuted here is one used by the **Mind Only** school to assert a self-knower. The Mind Only school is asserting that there is a self-knower because, when the mind apprehends blue – when we recall having seen blue in the past – that recollection one has seen blue is proof that there is a self-knower. This is because, at the time of seeing blue, it is the self-knowing mind that apprehends the mind perceiving the colour blue, and this allows you to remember that you have seen the object blue at the same time as the object possessor, which is the mind that perceives blue.

The **Madhyamika** School refute that by saying that one doesn't need to have a self-knower to remember the mind apprehending blue, as well as the object blue itself. Rather, this is remembered through the connection formed at the time of perceiving blue. Because of the connection that was made earlier between the object possessor, or the mind that perceives blue, and the object blue, one can now recall having seen blue.

**2. What is the Mind Only assertion regarding blue in lapis lazuli, and how do the Madhyamika refute this assertion?**

The example presented in this argument by the Mind Only school is that of a clear crystal. When a clear crystal is placed on a blue base, that crystal will appear blue when one looks at it. If it is placed on a yellow base, the crystal will appear to the eye consciousness as yellow. Likewise, if it is placed on a red base, it will appear red, and so forth. The analogy rightly shows that the colour of the clear crystal – that which is reflected – is dependent on the colour of its base. That is quite clear.

The Mind Only argument further says:

The blue of the lapis lazuli is blue out of its own nature, and not in dependence on others. Likewise, the knowing of forms and so forth exists in dependence on the other mind, but the knowing of mind by mind itself exists independently from some separate knower.

The **Madhyamika's** refutation of this assertion of the Mind Only school is presented:

Answer: It follows that the example of the blue of the lapis lazuli being generated as blue independently from something else is not valid because blue does not by its own self generate itself in the nature of blue, which it would need to in order not to be generated from a cause as blue.

So the Madhyamika refute this assertion by saying that the blue in the lapis lazuli is not produced by itself and it doesn't exist by its own nature, because if that were the case, it would need not need to depend on, or be generated by a cause. So what is being presented in the answer is that because the colour blue in the lapis lazuli is dependent on causes, it cannot be generated by itself, by its own nature.



The Mind Only school uses the assertion that ‘the blue of the lapis lazuli arises from its own nature’ as an example of the mind knowing itself. But the Madhyamikas refute that by showing the absurdity of blue arising by itself, without having to depend on causes.

Although the Cittamantrins (Mind Only) are not claiming that the blue of the lapis lazuli does not depend on causes – they wouldn’t assert that – the Madhyamikas are saying that if blue *were* to exist by its own nature, from its own side then, logically, it would have to be the case that it could not depend on causes. So the Madhyamikas are refuting the Mind Only by default, saying that if you accept that something exists from its own side or by its own nature, then that would imply that it does not depend on causes.

The Mind Only school, of course, with its own system of logic, is presenting quite a meticulous argument by saying that, just as the blue colour of lapis lazuli exists by its own nature and doesn’t depend on something else, similarly, the mind knows itself and doesn’t have to depend on something else. This is on the basis of the Mind Only school asserting that there is true existence or existence by its own nature.

**3. The text refers to the marmot waking up due to hearing thunder and remembering that at the time of the bite it had been poisoned, but without having experienced the poison at that time. Explain this analogy and which experience it is analogous to.**

The text refers to the marmot waking up due to hearing thunder and remembering that at the time of the bite it had been poisoned, but without having experienced the poison at that time. This analogy is basically refuting that there has to be a self-knower: that even though at the time one didn’t know one had been poisoned, later one has the recollection of this.

The analogy is explained as follows: The marmot being bitten is similar to the experience of the object by the apprehension of blue; the experience of the bite itself is analogous to the experience of the object by the consciousness perceiving blue at that time.

Being poisoned at the time of the bite and not knowing one has been poisoned is like the experience of the object possessor – that which perceives the blue – at the time of holding the object, which in this case is the colour blue. The object possessor does not experience itself at this time, just like the poison is not experienced at the time of being bitten. So in this analogy, the object possessor not experiencing the poison at the time of being bitten shows how one does not need a self-knower to remember the object possessor. Subsequently remembering the bite is like remembering the object, the memory of the object possessor through the memory of the object – *the memory of the object possessor through the memory of the object, along with the object possessor having earlier experienced itself, is like the memory of the poison through the power of merely remembering being bitten, and without at the time having experienced being poisoned.*

**4. So the Madhyamika then refute this example that the Mind Only use, which is that if you can see something far away, then by default that would imply one could definitely see what is near. Explain and give the Madhyamika refutation**

The **Mind Only** are saying that, having established calm abiding and with other conditions such as achieving the higher mental concentrations, then due to acquiring clairvoyance, one is able to know others’ minds. If one can know others’ minds, which in comparison to one’s own mind are external

and far away, then one can definitely assert that one knows one's own mind which is close. The example given here is like being able to see a nearby mountain if one can see a needle far away in the distance.

So the **Madhyamika** then refute this example that the Mind Only use, which is that if you can see something far away, then by default that would imply one could definitely see what is near. The Mind Only use that example to assert, therefore, that there is a self-knower. The Madhyamika's counter-argument to establish that the Mind Only school assertion is not valid is:

Answer: Although one can see underground treasures such as vases by applying the substance made out of a medicinal eye balm...

This eye balm is a substance that is a combination of medicinal plants and the mantras recited over it. It is said that when one applies the eye balm to one's eyes, it enables one to see treasures underground. Although the treasures underground are seen, one does not see the eye balm itself.

So the Madhyamika present a meticulous example here. If the Mind Only say that if something far away is seen, then by all means one has to see something near, then how about a situation where one applies this eye balm to the eyes to see treasures underground? One would be able to see the underground treasures, but not the eye balm itself. This is a very good example.

This reason harms the position of the self-knower, and does not support it.

Further: It is explained like this because, as they are the same in arising from the same illuminating cause, it follows that not only are that illuminating and that illuminated not established as one, they are certainly also not established as of one entity.

The analogy is further explained:

This is so because at the time when the underground vase is seen due to applying the medicinal eye balm created through a secret mantra for seeing underground treasures, not only is the illuminated vase,...

...illuminated vase meaning here a vase that is clearly seen...

...not one with the illuminating eye balm, they also do not become one entity.

Hence, not only is it unsuitable as a reason establishing a self-knower, it harms the existence of a self-knower.

In relation to the analogy presented earlier, the Madhyamika says to the Mind Only that not only is it unsuitable as a reason to establish a self-knower, it actually harms the existence of a self-knower. So what the Mind Only asserts as being an example harms the very assertion of a self-knower.

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# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

6 September 2016

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Based on the motivation we generated during the refuge and bodhicitta prayers, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice. [meditation]

Let us generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will engage in the practice of listening to the Mahayana teachings, and then put them into practice well.

Generating such a motivation, even for a few moments, will definitely establish very strong positive imprints in our mind.

Just as we have attempted in our short meditation session it is essential to incorporate meditation into our daily life.

## Accumulating virtue and reducing familiarity with non-virtue through meditation<sup>1</sup>

The literal meaning of meditation is to familiarise the mind with a virtuous object. So focusing on a virtuous object is the actual meditation practice. The reason why we find it so hard to actually engage in a proper meditation practice is because we are controlled by our thoughts, and these thoughts are in turn controlled by the delusions. That is why we find it very hard to maintain a focus on virtuous objects.

When we understand meditation practice in this way then we are able to incorporate the essential aspects of the path such as the four noble truths, the two truths and so forth into that practice. Indeed, when we realise how distracted our mind is, we can see how meditation practice reminds us of the first two noble truths – the truth of suffering and the truth of origination.

When we are able to maintain our focus on a virtuous object, then due to that familiarity we will be inclined to focus more and more on virtuous objects, even in our daily life. At a beginner's level however, we find that our minds are very easily influenced by non-virtuous objects, and that it is extremely difficult to maintain a focus on a virtuous object. Focussing on non-virtuous objects seems spontaneous and natural as it doesn't require any effort, and maintaining a focus on a virtuous object is very hard, like leading an old horse. This is because one's mind has become habituated to focussing on non-virtuous objects and distractions. That pattern has to be reversed, and the only way to do that is by putting an effort into really maintaining our focus on a virtuous object.

Then we will gradually find that our mind is more and more inclined to focus on virtuous objects as opposed to focusing on non-virtuous objects, and this indicates that the meditation practice has begun to take root within us. To reach our goal, we need to develop more and more familiarity with focussing on the virtuous objects at our everyday level. If someone has meditated for a long time and still finds it very hard to focus on virtuous objects, then

that goes to show that they have actually been missing the point, and there have not yet been any positive results from their meditation.

When we apply a correct understanding within the meditation practice itself, then it can serve as an optimum means to be able to accumulate more virtue and positive karma. That is what we really need to aim for. If we don't understand how meditation helps us to engage in virtue consistently, then even if we focus on an object for a certain period of time in meditation, we will find that when we come out of meditation we will go back to a completely distracted mind that is focussed on non-virtuous objects. Then the meditation practice really hasn't served much of a purpose.

Being able to maintain a focus on a virtuous object for even half an hour is very difficult now, because of our lack of true familiarity with the practice. And even if we are able to remain focused on an object without distraction for a while, we find ourselves still following distractions when we come out of our meditation. So our meditation practice hasn't served its ultimate purpose.

In simple terms, what we are intending to acquire for our wellbeing is the accumulation of virtue, and to reduce our familiarity with non-virtue and with creating non-virtuous karma. The way to achieve that is by becoming more and more familiar with focussing on virtue. When we are able to maintain a focus on virtue, then the conducive conditions for personal wellbeing will naturally be acquired. Of course we will see the benefit of this in this life, but we are also preparing for our future lives.

If we find ourselves engaging more and more in virtue, then we are naturally creating the causes to acquire favourable conditions in our future lives. Whereas if we find ourselves accumulating more non-virtue, then we are distancing ourselves from good conditions, not only in this life, but in our future lives as well. This, in simple terms, is what the outcome will be. Since we want good conditions, not only in this life but also in our future lives, we need to ensure that we actually engage in the ways and means to achieve that. This is how we need to understand meditation practice.

## Incorporating understandings gained from the teachings into meditation practice

Understanding meditation in its entirety ensures that, from the very beginning, our meditation practice hits the mark of being an aid to accumulating virtue. On that basis we can then incorporate our meditation practice into all other aspects of our understanding of the teachings. When we understand that meditation practice encompasses the entire Dharma, then we will be able to relate to many other aspects of the teachings that we have studied to that practice. For those who have not done much study, meditation will be limited to focussing the mind on one object. Of course that in itself brings some solace to their mind as they get some peace and benefit from their meditation. But they will not be able to expand that understanding to the entire range of the teachings.

Whereas we here have all received many teachings, which encompass the entire range of the teachings on the extensive path, as well as the profound path. The extensive path of the teachings such as karma, the four noble truths, as well as the entire stages of the path can all be incorporated into our meditation practice. Likewise, when we incorporate into our meditation practice our understanding that, while practices such as the six perfections and so forth exist conventionally,

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<sup>1</sup> These headings are not part of the structure of the headings in the commentary.

they lack inherent existence and are thus empty of true existence, then that includes the profound teachings of the Buddha.

When we keep in mind this really expansive view of how meditation practice ultimately encompasses the full range of the teachings, then we will see much more value in the meditation practice that we do. Also, when we familiarise ourselves with this practice and develop a more focussed mind, then that serves as the basis for achieving the highest level of concentration, which is calm abiding. As explained in the teachings, when calm abiding is achieved, then one is able to focus single-pointedly on any virtuous object for as long as one wishes. When the focus is placed on one virtuous object it will be as firm as a mountain, and when expanded one will be able to apply it to all virtuous objects.

This is how we need to understand the value of meditation practice.

### **Overcoming attachment and anger through meditation**

Furthermore, if our meditation practice doesn't incorporate an understanding of karma, then we've completely missed the point of the teachings. Our practice is based on incorporating an understanding of how our karma works. If our meditation practice serves as a means to prevent one from acting upon non-virtuous negative states of mind such as anger, then it has taken root. But if one claims to be a meditator, and succumbs to anger as soon as the conditions for anger arise, then one has completely missed the point again. The teachings also explain that all the teachings of the Buddha can be incorporated into a means for overcoming negative states of mind such as anger, and attachment.

Likewise it is really essential that our meditation practice hits the mark of overcoming attachment. As the great masters have explained in very succinct and concise teachings, if one finds the meditation on seeing the imperfections of an object doesn't work to overcome attachment, then that is a sign that one is still holding onto the object of attachment from the depths of one's heart. If within the depths of one's heart one still grasps at the object as being appealing, then no matter how much one tries to focus on the imperfections of the object, one will find it doesn't work to overcome the attachment. If it doesn't take much at all to remember the object of attachment as being appealing, then that is a clear sign that one has been grasping at it for a very long time. That is why it doesn't take much effort for the attachment to surface. According to the advice of these great masters, when we meditate on the imperfections of an object, we need to attempt to really generate a true sense of understanding of the natural imperfections of the object, from the depths of our hearts. Only then does it become an antidote.

As I've mentioned previously, the very succinct advice that the Sakya Pandita offers is that attempting to meditate without hearing the teachings first is like trying to climb a rocky cliff without any fingers.

### **Both method and wisdom are necessary**

Each of the five paths has two different stages; meditative equipoise and post-meditative equipoise. Why are both meditative equipoise and post-meditative equipoise stages needed?

As explained earlier, meditative equipoise is where one applies a particular antidote to overcome the delusions; whilst the post-meditative equipoise state is where one

applies the technique to other practices such as listening, and engaging in the practice of the remaining perfections as a way to purify negativities and accumulate merit. If only meditation were a sufficient cause for enlightenment, then there would be no need for a post-meditative state. Even on the tenth *bhumi* or ground, there is still the distinction between the state of meditative equipoise and post-meditative equipoise. That is because, even on the final ground, merit still has to be accumulated as a means to overcome the subtlest imprints of the delusions. Just as on the previous grounds, the bodhisattva on the tenth ground needs to come out of their meditative equipoise in order to accumulate further merit, and then finally goes back into meditative equipoise focussing on emptiness, and thus obtains enlightenment within that final state of meditative equipoise.

This clearly shows that both merit and wisdom are required in order to achieve the state of enlightenment. As Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in a text he composed, 'In the beginning I engaged in extensive listening, in the middle all the teachings appeared as instructions, and in the end I put them into practice day and night. I dedicate this to the flourishing of the Buddha's teachings'.

The great Kadampa masters have explained that the way to engage in practice is through extensive listening to the teachings, contemplating the meaning and then finally this is incorporated into the practice of meditation as a way to acquire wisdom. As mentioned earlier, without having received instructions through hearing it is futile to try to engage in a practice, as one will not be able to achieve much in the way of results. So we need to understand the importance of the combination of all of these aspects.

I've mentioned a few points that we need to really keep in mind. Essentially the practice one engages in should ultimately subdue one's mind and make it kinder and more gentle. That is why we engage in our studies and in personal practice. It is what I attempt to do regularly, and the message I'm giving to you is that I see it as being essential. The study that we are engaged in is really profound. As a technique to help subdue the mind, one could say that there's no greater text than the one we're studying. If it doesn't work to subdue your mind then I can safely say nothing else could.

I'm not implying that you are not already making attempts to put it into practice. All I'm doing is encouraging you to further enhance your intentions and practice to ensure that your study and practice is fruitful. That is all I am concerned about. So you should not think that I'm reprimanding you, or saying that you're not doing well. I'm just encouraging you. In presenting the teachings over all these years I feel that I have given you the material to work on. Now I'm encouraging you to actually use it as a way to gain some benefit from that.

As a way of complimenting you on your positive efforts I can tell you of the person who attended a seminar one or two years ago. He went to the morning session where he found that people were presenting in a very nice and gentle manner. People showed great understanding and knowledge, which they presented very clearly in a very kind manner. He was very impressed and very pleased with that, and when he shared that with me, that in turn made me feel very happy. The seminars have improved a lot in the way they've been conducted and how information is shared and so forth. That, in itself, shows that there have been positive improvements.

### 2.2.2.2.3.3. Refuting that other-knowers would be impossible if there were no self-knowers

This is subdivided into two:

#### 2.2.2.2.3.3.1. Actual

2.2.2.2.3.3.2. Refuting that the illusory workings of the mind are inexpressible as being the very mind or other from it

#### 2.2.2.2.3.3.1. Actual

This section begins with the argument:

*Argument:* If there is no self-knower, then there is no memory, and therefore the experience of objects and the consciousnesses of seeing, listening and the like become non-existent.

The argument that is presented here by the **Mind Only** school is an argument against the Madhyamika who do not assert a self-knower. The Mind Only argue that *if there is no self-knower, then there is no memory, and therefore the experience of objects and the consciousnesses of seeing, listening and the like, the five sense consciousnesses, would all be non-existent.* This is their argument.

25. *Just as the consciousnesses of seeing and listening,  
Are not to be refuted here,  
That which becomes the cause of suffering,  
The formulation of true existence, is to be refuted.*

Then the commentary explains the verse, which serves as an answer by the **Madhyamikas**.

*Answer:* The reason conventionalities of sight by eye consciousness, hearing by ear consciousness and knowing by mental consciousness are not something to be abandoned is because they do not need to be abandoned as suffering is not generated merely through them, and also arhats possess these nominalities. They cannot be abandoned, because this would have to happen either through logic or through quotation, which would in turn also have to be refuted. If these are refuted, it is a mistake because one would adopt a nihilistic view.

Thus, because the formulation of these phenomena as truly existent is the cause of suffering, that becoming the cause of suffering is that which is to be abandoned, as it is the root of cyclic existence. If one does not reverse the root of cyclic existence, one does not stop cyclic existence, and because the true-grasping at forms, sounds and the like is shown to be the root of cyclic existence, it clearly shows that hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena.

The assertions made by the Karakpas and the like, that while the mere appearance to the sense consciousnesses are not objects of negation, but that if they are held as permanent or impermanent, existent or non-existent and so forth, then they are objects of negation, is a comeback response of the Chinese Abbot.

It first explains that *conventionalities of sight by eye consciousness, visual objects that are seen by the sight consciousness, hearing by ear consciousness and knowing by mental consciousness are not to be abandoned conventionally.* In other words, on a conventional level these consciousnesses are not to be abandoned. The reason, as Gyaltab Je explains, is that *suffering is not generated merely through them, and also arhats possess these nominalities.* Saying that conventionalities of sight by eye consciousness, hearing and so forth are not to be abandoned carries the implication that they do need to be abandoned as truly existent. That is the point.

In saying that the *arhats possess these nominalities*, the commentary is explaining again that, on a conventional level, arhats have not abandoned a nominal eye consciousness, ear consciousness, and so forth, but that they have abandoned them as truly existent.

Then the commentary further says, *they cannot be abandoned, because this would have to happen either through logic or through quotation, which would in turn also have to be refuted.* What is being explained here is that if they are to be abandoned nominally, then it would have to be either through logic or through quotation. If they were abandoned *through either logic or quotation*, then the logic and the quotation themselves would also have to be abandoned because they are nominally existent. So this absurdity is being presented.

As explained further, *if these are refuted, either conventionally or nominally, it is a mistake because one would have to adopt a nihilistic view.* In other words, refuting the conventionalities of the sense consciousnesses would be adopting a nihilistic view.

If you relate this explanation to its context in the text, then you will derive an understanding of the logic being presented here.

The commentary further explains that *because the formulation of these phenomena as truly existent is the cause of suffering, that becoming the cause of suffering is that which is to be abandoned, as it is the root of cyclic existence.* This is the main point: it is the causes of cyclic existence that have to be abandoned.

The succinct point being presented here is that *if one does not reverse the root of cyclic existence, one does not stop cyclic existence.* Furthermore, *because true-grasping at forms, sounds and the like is shown to be the root of cyclic existence, it clearly shows that hearers and self-liberators realise the selflessness of phenomena.* These points were presented previously. The reason why hearers and self-liberators have to realise the selflessness of phenomena, is because without gaining that realisation they cannot overcome the very root of cyclic existence.

The reasons presented here are points to really think about, and apply on a personal level. That is *because the formulation of these phenomena as truly existent is the cause of suffering, and that becoming the cause of suffering is that which is to be abandoned.* If one wishes to overcome suffering, then the cause of suffering, which is grasping at true existence, has to be overcome. Cyclic existence is within the mental continuum of all living beings. So it is the grasping at true existence within one's own mental continuum that is the root cause of cyclic existence.

The way to overcome the root of cyclic existence within one's own mental continuum is by gaining the realisation of the lack of inherent existence, i.e. selflessness. As grasping at a true self is the root of cyclic existence, the realisation of selflessness within one's own mental continuum is the means to overcome the very root cause of cyclic existence.

This is really the essential point. As we gain a clearer understanding of what selflessness is, and as our correct understanding increases, then we move closer to achieving the goal of overcoming the root of cyclic existence. Conversely, if we befriend grasping at true existence within our own mental continuum, by making it feel welcome and comfortable, then we are never going to be able to overcome grasping at true existence. If we don't ensure that our practices become the means to overcome grasping at true existence, then they could actually strengthen that grasping. For some this actually happens – rather than reducing

grasping at a truly existent self, the grasping increases. So we need to be careful and protect ourselves from that.

I think the rest of the commentary can be understood without further explanation.

2.2.2.2.3.3.2. *Refuting that the illusory workings of the mind are inexpressible as mind itself or other from it*

The first two lines of verse relating to this read:

**26ab.***If, 'There is no illusion apart from mind  
And I do not hold them as not being separate'.*

Then the commentary presents the **Mind Only** assertion:

*Mind Only:* Because there is no outer existence there is no illusion, i.e., forms and the like, of different substance from the mind. And because of the earlier fault of 'at that time what is seen by what?', I do not hold them as not being separate.

The **Mind Only** say, *because there is no outer existence there is no illusion, i.e., forms and the like, of different substance from the mind.* So therefore they are not different substance from the mind, and *because of the earlier fault which was raised as 'at that time what is seen by what?', I do not hold or assert them as not being separate* as well.

Then the next four lines of verse present the **Madhyamika's** answer:

**26cd** *If it is a functionality, then how is it non-other?  
If asserted to be non-other, then there is no  
functionality.*

**27ab.***Just as illusions, though untrue, are  
The perceived object, perceivers are too.*

The commentary says:

*Madhyamaka:* If forms and the like exist truly, they need to be true in the way they appear. In that case, as they appear as outer objects, they need to exist as outer objects. If they are outer functionalities, then how are they not of different substance from mind itself? It follows they are.

The **Mind Only** respond to that saying:

*Mind Only:* They are not of different substance.

Then the **Madhyamika** further reason:

*Madhyamaka:* It follows there is no true phenomenon because appearances are accepted to be false, and they do not exist in a different way. Although the illusions of forms and the like, which appear as outer objects but do not exist truly, are that perceived by the mind, and likewise, although the six consciousnesses are that which perceives, they are the same in not existing truly.

Therefore, the earlier fault of, 'If even the mistaken is non-existent' does not apply to the **Madhyamaka**, and this method would suit you, the **Mind Only**, well too.

The way of refuting the **Mind Only** assertions is by turning their own assertions back on them. The **Mind Only** school asserts that *forms and the like exist truly*, while the **Madhyamika** say that things lack true existence.

The **Madhyamika** counter the **Mind Only** argument by saying that if they do *exist truly, they need to be true in the way that they appear*. According to the **Madhyamika**, the criteria for something to be true is that it exists as it appears. If it does not exist in the way that it appears then it is false. So the **Madhyamikas** are reasoning with the **Mind Only** system, saying that *if form and the like exist truly, they need to be true in the way they appear. In that case, because they appear as outer objects, they need to exist as outer objects*. So the **Madhyamikas**

are saying: 'If you say that they are true, then it would have to exist in the way that they appear, and since they appear as outer objects, then they would have to be outer objects. And according to you, **Mind Only**, that would be an absurdity, because you assert them as being one with the mind.

Furthermore, *if they are outer functionalities, then how are they not of a different substance from the mind itself?* So the **Madhyamikas** are arguing that there is a contradiction in that if they are outer functionalities or outer phenomena, then how could they be one with the mind itself as you **Mind Only** assert. Because using your own logic it follows that they have to be separate.

Then the **Mind Only** respond saying, *they are not of different substance*.

The **Madhyamikas** say that *it follows there is no true phenomenon because appearances are accepted to be false, and they do not exist in a different way*.

Furthermore, *although the illusions of forms and the like, which appear as outer objects but do not exist truly, are that perceived by the mind, and likewise, although the six consciousnesses are that which perceives, they are the same in not existing truly*. The main point is that according to the **Madhyamika** both the perceiver and that which is perceived are the same in existing conventionally, and the same in not existing truly.

The concluding statement is that, *therefore, the earlier fault of, 'If even the mistaken is non-existent' does not apply to the Madhyamika, and this method would suit you, the Mind Only, well too*. So, the **Madhyamika** say, the fault, *if even the mistaken is non-existent*, does not apply to us in accordance with what we assert. Then the **Madhyamikas** conclude by saying to the **Mind Only**, 'It would actually suit you well if you were to adopt this understanding'.

2.2.2.2.4. *Refuting that imputed objects are based on truly existent functionalities.*

What is being refuted here is one of the fundamental assertions of the **Mind Only** school, which is that all imputed phenomena have to have a truly existent base. They say that without a truly existent base, other imputed objects such as space and so forth cannot exist. That is the assertion that is being refuted here.

What the **Mind Only** school assert is that dependent phenomena, also translated as other-powered phenomena, have to rely on a truly existent base for their existence.

The **Madhyamika** say that the very term *other-powered* or *dependent phenomena* itself indicates that they have to depend on others for their functionality. Therefore they cannot be truly existent.

Both schools are referring to the same basis, that of other-powered or dependent phenomena, which are all things within samsara and nirvana. The **Mind Only** school say that all things within samsara and nirvana are dependent on a basis which is truly existent, and that is what is being refuted or negated by the **Madhyamika** school in this part of the text.

The first lines of verse under this heading read:

**27cd.***If, 'Cyclic existence is based on functionalities,  
Otherwise it would become like space',*

**28ab.***If non-functionalities are based on  
functionalities*

*How can they perform an action? Then under  
this verse the Mind Only assertion is  
presented:*

*Mind Only*: The false and imputed phenomena of cyclic existence and beyond are each based on a truly existent functionality, because everything deceptive is based on a truly existent basis. For example, even when a tree stump is mistaken for a human the tree stump itself exists truly. Likewise, cyclic existence is based on a truly existent basis. If it were not, then it would become a non-functionality, like space.

The meaning of this debate is put forth in the *Compendium of Trainings* like this, and to explain it in any other way is not the meaning.

Then the **Madhyamikas** respond to that:

*Madhyamaka*: If the false non-functionalities of samsara and nirvana depend on a truly existent basis of deception, then how could they produce the results of bondage and liberation? It follows they could not - because the truly existent basis does not exist. This reason is put forth in the *Compendium of Deeds*.

As quite clearly presented here, the **Mind Only** say that *the false and imputed phenomena of cyclic existence and beyond are each based on a truly existent functionality, because everything deceptive is based on a truly existent basis*. Even what is deceptive has to have a truly existent basis.

The example that they use to illustrate the point is: *even when a tree stump is mistaken for a human, the tree stump itself exists truly*. When you see a tree stump in the distance it may appear as if there is a human there, which is a deceptive appearance. However the basis of that deceptive appearance, which is a tree stump, actually does exist. They say that this is a sign that it exists truly. Another example that is also used in the teachings is a striped rope that appears to be a snake. Again, they say that while the appearance of a snake is deceptive the striped rope does actually exist. Therefore, they say, that is a reason why things exist truly.

With that illustration they then say, *likewise, cyclic existence is based on a truly existent basis. If it were not, then it would become a non-functionality, like space*. So they consider space as a non-functional phenomenon.

The **Madhyamikas** reply that *if the false non-functionalities of samsara and nirvana depend on a truly existent basis of deception, then how could they produce the results of bondage and liberation? It follows they could not - because the truly existent basis does not exist. This reason is put forth in the Compendium of Deeds*. So this meticulous reasoning is presented in the *Compendium of Deeds*.

Then come these two lines of verse:

**28cd. Your mind becomes completely isolated,  
Without any support.**

This is the actual reasoning that is presented.

The commentary explains:

According to your Mind Only system the mind becomes an isolated self illuminating self-knower, without the supportive distortion into apprehender and apprehended and the like. This follows because, since you accept the appearance of object and object-possessor as being distant as not existing the way it appears, there is no outer existence, and because the appearances of forms and so forth as consciousness were refuted earlier. In this case the appearances of forms and such become objects distinct and unrelated to consciousness, and although the appearances of forms are tainted, they cannot taint the substance of consciousness.

This is actually quite a clear explanation if you go through it slowly. Basically, the **Mind Only** are saying that apprehender and apprehended are one and there is no distinction between them. However, according to the **Madhyamika** system of course there is a distinction. So that is what is being presented in this explanation.

So the next verse under the same heading is:

**29. When the mind is devoid of that perceived  
Everyone will have gone thus.  
In that case, what is the benefit  
Of that imputed as mere mind?**

The commentary explains:

If this is accepted: It follows that when the mind is free from the dualistic appearance of apprehender and apprehended, then all sentient beings become thus gone ones and effortlessly attain liberation - because all minds are free from the appearances of apprehender and apprehended.

If however one accepts this position, then it follows that there is not the slightest need to comprehend the lack of apprehender and apprehended as being of different substance, which is labelled mere mind, in order to achieve the omniscient transcendental wisdom.

The explanation is that *it follows that when the mind is free from the dualistic appearance of apprehender and apprehended, then all sentient beings become thus gone ones and effortlessly attain liberation*. According to the **Mind Only** system the apprehension of form and the mind apprehending form being of different substance is the grasping to self of phenomena. So according to them, if things did exist externally then this is how it would have to exist, i.e. apprehender and apprehended being distinct and of different substance. Thus, they assert that the apprehender and apprehend are devoid of being distinct.

So the **Madhyamikas** are saying: at the time *when the mind is free from the dualistic appearance of apprehender and apprehended*, then all sentient beings by default would already be *thus gone ones* or enlightened buddhas *effortlessly*, and *attain liberation - because, according to you, Mind Only, all minds would have be free from the appearances of apprehender and apprehended*. Since, according to you *all minds are free from the appearances of apprehender and apprehended*, then this would mean that sentient beings are effortlessly and spontaneously liberated. Again according to the Mind Only, form and the apprehension of form being devoid of being different substance, is the selflessness of phenomena. Thus the **Madhyamikas** conclude: *then it follows that there is not the slightest need to comprehend the lack of apprehender and apprehended as being of different substance, which is labelled mere mind, in order to achieve the omniscient transcendental wisdom*.

We can conclude here for the evening. Once you are able to apply the logical reasoning in its proper place then it will be easy to understand and read the text. It just requires the application of logic.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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Edited Version*

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## Homework

## Answers

Block: 3 Week: 4 (6 September 2016) Assigned: 13/9/2016

1. ... 'Whereas we have all received many teachings, which encompass the entire range of the teachings on the extensive path, as well as the profound path.' Explain the meaning of the extensive path, as well as the profound path

Understanding meditation in its entirety ensures that, from the very beginning, our meditation practice hits the mark of being an aid to accumulating virtue. On that basis we can then incorporate our meditation practice into all other aspects of our understanding of the teachings. When we understand that meditation practice encompasses the entire Dharma, then we will be able to relate many other aspects of the teachings that we have studied to that practice. For those who have not done much study, ~~then~~ meditation will be limited to focussing the mind on one object. Of course, that in itself brings some solace to their mind as they get some peace and benefit from their meditation. But they will not be able to expand that understanding to the entire range of the teachings.

Whereas we have all received many teachings, which encompass the entire range of the teachings on the extensive path, as well as the profound path. The extensive path of the teachings such as karma, the four noble truths, as well as the entire stages of the path can all be incorporated into our meditation practice. Likewise when we incorporate into our meditation practice our understanding that, while practices such as the six perfections and so forth exist conventionally, they lack inherent existence and are thus empty of true existence, then that includes the profound teachings of the Buddha.

When we keep in mind this really expansive view of how meditation practice ultimately encompasses the full range of the teachings, then we will see much more value in the meditation practice that we do. Also, when we familiarise ourselves with this practice and develop a more focussed mind, then that serves as the basis for achieving the highest level of concentration, which is calm abiding. As explained in the teachings, when calm abiding is achieved then ~~at that stage~~ one is able to focus single-pointedly on any virtuous object for as long as one wishes. When the focus is placed on one virtuous object it will be as firm as a mountain and when expanded one will be able to apply it all virtuous objects.

So This is how we need to understand the value of meditation practice.

**3. The argument that is presented here by the Mind Only school is an argument against the Madhyamika who do not assert a self-knower. The Mind Only argue that *if there is no self-knower, then there is no memory, and therefore the experience of objects and the consciousnesses of seeing, listening and the like, the five sense consciousnesses, would all be non-existent.***

It first explains that *conventionalities of sight by eye consciousness, visual objects that are seen by the sight consciousness, hearing by ear consciousness and knowing by mental consciousness are not to be abandoned conventionally.* In other words, on a conventional level these consciousness are not to be abandoned. The reason, as Gyaltsab Je explains, is that *suffering is not generated merely through them, and also arhats possess these nominalities.* Saying that conventionalities of sight by eye consciousness, hearing and so forth are not to be abandoned carries the implication that they do need to be abandoned as truly existent. That is the point.

In saying that the *arhats possess these nominalities*, the commentary is explaining again that on a conventional level, arhats have not abandoned a nominal eye consciousness, ear consciousness, and so forth, but that they have abandoned them as truly existent.

Then the commentary further says, *they cannot be abandoned, because this would have to happen either through logic or through quotation, which would in turn also have to be refuted.* What is being explained here is that if they are to be abandoned nominally, then it would have to be either through logic or through quotation. If they were abandoned *through either logic or quotation*, then the logic and the quotation themselves would also have to be abandoned because they are nominally existent. So this absurdity is being presented.

As explained further, *if these are refuted*, either conventionally or nominally, *it is a mistake because one would have to adopt a nihilistic view.* In other words, refuting the conventionalities of the sense consciousnesses would be adopting a nihilistic view.



4. 27cd. If, 'Cyclic existence is based on functionalities,  
Otherwise it would become like space',  
28ab. If non-functionalities are based on functionalities  
How can they perform an action?

Explain this verse.

As quite clearly presented here, the **Mind Only** say that *the false and imputed phenomena of cyclic existence and beyond are each based on a truly existent functionality, because everything deceptive is based on a truly existent basis.* Even what is deceptive has to have a truly existent basis.

The example that is they use to illustrate the point is: *even when a tree stump is mistaken for a human, the tree stump itself exists truly.* When you see a tree stump in the distance it may appear as if there is a human there, which is a deceptive appearance. However the basis of that deceptive appearance, which is a tree stump, actually does exist. They say that this is a sign that it exists truly. Another example that is also used in the teachings is a striped rope that appears to be a snake. Again, they say that while the appearance of a snake is deceptive the striped rope does actually exist. Therefore, they say, that is a reason why things exist truly.

With that illustration they then say, *likewise, cyclic existence is based on a truly existent basis. If it were not, then it would become a non-functionality, like space.* So they consider space as a non-functional phenomenon.

The **Madhyamikas** reply that *if the false non-functionalities of samsara and nirvana depend on a truly existent basis of deception, then how could they produce the results of bondage and liberation? It follows they could not - because the truly existent basis does not exist. This reason is put forth in the Compendium of Deeds.* So this meticulous reasoning is presented in *Compendium of Deeds*.

**5.a )For the MindOnly what is the realisation of the lack of self of phenomena and what do the Mind Only assert as the grasping at self of phenomena?**

The explanation is that *it follows that when the mind is free from the dualistic appearance of apprehender and apprehended, then all sentient beings become thus gone ones, and effortlessly attain liberation.* The point being made here is that according to the **Mind Only** system the apprehender and the apprehended are one. For them, realising that the apprehender and apprehended are one and not distinct is actually the realisation of the lack of a self of phenomena. The assertion of the Mind Only is that having a dualistic appearance of apprehender and apprehended is grasping at the self of phenomena.

**b)What is the Madyamika's reply to that assertion?**

# Shantideva's Bodhisattvacharyavatara

༄༅། །བྱང་ལྷན་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤོང་པ་ལ་འདུག་པ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

13 September 2016

As usual let us spend some time for our meditation practice. (*meditation*)

We can now generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: for the sake of all mother sentient beings, I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose, I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

## 2.1.2. Refuting objections of no need and no ability regarding emptiness

### 2.1.2.2. DEFENDING ONE'S POSITION (CONT.)

#### 2.1.2.2.3. Refuting the argument that the path realising emptiness has no use or purpose for a Madhyamaka<sup>1</sup>

This is subdivided into two:

##### 2.1.2.2.3.1. Argument

##### 2.1.2.2.3.2. Answer

This is the continuation of the debate between the Mind Only and Madhyamika schools. The main point of disagreement is that the **Mind Only** proponents assert that there is no external existence, while the **Madhyamika** proponents assert that there is external existence. That is the basis of the argument between the two.

Specifically, Mind Only proponents assert that the subject and object – for example, form and the consciousness apprehending that form – are one in nature, not separate or distinct. Madhyamikas, on the other hand, would say that there *are* external forms and so forth that are perceived as existing and functioning externally.

When we mention Madhyamika here, we are specifically relating to the **Prasangika-Madhyamika**, i.e. Consequentialist Middle Way School. We make a distinction here because the Madhyamika School also includes the Svatantrika-Madhyamika school, amongst whom there are those who assert external existence.

This presentation in debate form is a useful way of understanding the subject we are studying. At a personal level, it enhances our intelligence or wisdom by increasing our ability to reason and analyse things.

Within the four different schools of Buddhist tenets in general, and within the Middle Way School in particular, we consider ourselves to be followers of the **Prasangika-Madhyamika** or **Consequentialist** system. If we do indeed hold that we are followers of the Prasangika-Madhyamika, then we need to understand the logical reasoning that characterises this system. We must really understand what it means, what its assertions are, and how its proponents use logic to assert their views.

Within the four Buddhist schools of tenets, proponents of the Mind Only School and the Madhyamika or Middle

Way School are followers of the Mahayana tradition, i.e. the Great Vehicle. We need to understand that the proponents of the four schools of tenets are differentiated by the different views they hold, whereas the distinction between the Theravada or Lower Vehicle, and the Mahayana or Greater Vehicle is based on the respective followers' conduct and practices.

Within the Mahayana, there is also the Perfection of Wisdom Vehicle and the Tantra Vehicle and the distinction here is again not based on views, but rather on the practices of each vehicle.

### 2.1.2.2.3.2.1. Argument

30. *Although knowing it to be like an illusion*

*How can the afflictions be opposed?*

*Even the creator himself*

*Generates attachment for the illusory woman.*

This verse is the argument presented by the **Mind Only**. The commentary then explains this verse:

*Mind-Only:* Although you may comprehend that all phenomena lack inherent existence, like an illusion, it will only cause exhaustion if it serves no purpose with regard to abandoning the afflictive and other obscurations. Even if it is asserted to serve a purpose, how can it reverse the afflictions? It follows it cannot – because one who can see that even the creator of the illusory woman, who realises it to be empty of an external woman, generates attachment by thinking of the illusory woman as something suitable to be enjoyed, and one has nothing beyond the initial realisations of emptiness through listening and contemplation.

When the **Mind Only** say, *Although you may comprehend that all phenomena lack inherent existence, like an illusion, this is referring to the Prasangika-Madhyamika's* unique assertion that all phenomena lack inherent existence. Both the **Svatantrika-Madhyamika** and **Mind Only** schools, on the other hand, assert that there is inherent existence.

Here, the Mind Only proponents are debating the Prasangika-Madhyamika assertion that things lack inherent existence, saying *it serves no purpose with regard to abandoning the afflictive and other obscurations*. In other words, the Mind Only are saying to the Madhyamika, "Your assertion that things lack inherent existence and are like an illusion cannot help abandon the afflictive and other obscurations, so what purpose does it serve? Since it doesn't serve any purpose, then making such an assertion and gaining that understanding merely causes exhaustion. There is no point."

What follows next is a meticulous argument presented by the **Mind Only** School. It is good to get a sense of how they prosecute their argument after having said that, if the Madhyamika view that things lack inherent existence doesn't serve any purpose, then it is merely a cause of exhaustion. The Mind Only continue to argue that: "If it is asserted that the Prasangika-Madhyamika view serves a purpose *then how can it reverse the afflictions?* How can this assertion that things lack inherent existence and are like an illusion reverse the afflictions?"

Then the Mind Only School presents an example to illustrate that this view could not bring about the result of abandoning the afflictions: *It follows it cannot – because one who can see that even the creator of the illusory woman, who*

<sup>1</sup> This heading was introduced on 26 July 2016. The heading numbering returns to the sequence used in the chapter as a whole.

realises it to be empty of an external woman, generates attachment by thinking of the illusory woman as something suitable to be enjoyed ... In simple terms, the Mind Only School is arguing that, when a male magician or illusionist conjures, for example, a beautiful woman, while the magician or illusionist may know it is an illusion, that doesn't prevent him from developing attachment to the illusion when he sees it as a very attractive and beautiful woman. Attachment and the desire to enjoy that illusion as if it were a real woman would still arise. Thus the **Mind Only** School is presenting a meticulous argument, saying that whilst the magician knows he is seeing an illusion, that doesn't prevent the afflictions, such as attachment, from arising, so the **Prasangika-Madhyamika** view that things are like an illusion does not serve a purpose, in terms of overcoming the afflictions.

The Mind Only proponents further argue that Prasangika-Madhyamika proponents have *nothing beyond the initial realisations of emptiness through listening and contemplation*.

In other words, the Mind Only is saying: "Your [Prasangika-Madhyamikas'] realisation of emptiness is nothing more than what you have gained from just hearing and contemplating, but lacks the realization gained from meditating. Your presentation of emptiness is merely based on listening and contemplating. Thus your presentation of emptiness cannot overcome the afflictions."

The **Prasangika-Madhyamika** School's answer is presented in the following three subdivisions.

#### 2.1.2.2.3.2. Answer

This has three sub-divisions:

2.1.2.2.3.2.1. The reason why the illusionist generates attachment

2.1.2.2.3.2.2. Showing that meditating on the wisdom realising emptiness can overcome the afflictions and their imprints

2.1.2.2.3.2.3. Showing that one will receive the perfect complete result of abandonment.

The first part of the Prasangika-Madhyamika's answer responds to the Mind Only School's argument that the illusionist would still develop attachment to the illusory woman.

This answer can also help us understand how we develop attachment towards other objects. If one goes through the explanation slowly and tries to understand the point, the explanations given here are actually not too difficult to comprehend. For many of you to whom I have previously presented these teachings, this is basically a way to refresh these points.

2.1.2.2.2.1. *The reason why the illusionist generates attachment.*

The verse relating to the first part of the answer is:

31. *The creator has not abandoned the afflictive imprints  
Regarding objects of knowledge.  
Hence, when seeing them  
The imprints of emptiness are weak.*

And the commentary explains: The illusionist that is the creator of the illusion has not abandoned in the slightest the afflictive imprints, i.e. true-grasping, with regards to the object of knowledge which is the illusory woman. Because they grasp at true existence, when they see the object, the imprints of realising emptiness are weak, and as a result they generate attachment.

If someone were to answer, 'The earlier has not abandoned the afflictions because his realisation of the illusory woman being empty of being a woman is only a partial emptiness, but in my system they are abandoned because the pervasive emptiness is realised', then this answer would be invalid.

Realising that the illusory woman is empty of being a woman is not a partial realisation of emptiness in relation to the subtle object of negation. If one has identified the object of negation, and then realised its non-existence on one phenomenon, then one can also understand it on other phenomena. This can be understood as explained in other places.

Thus in general, with regards to mistaken perceptions, to stop the non-conceptual mistaken perception of falling hairs due to the vitreous humour, it is not enough for the mental consciousness to understand the absence of falling hairs, which by itself does not stop the appearance of falling hairs. Rather one needs to clear the disease from the eye.

With regards to conceptual mistaken perceptions such as the grasping at the mottled rope as a snake due to adventitious conditions, the mere realisation of the rope will stop the mistaken perception. One does not need to meditate longer on this understanding.

Even the buddhas do not see a beginning of true grasping in the continuum of all migrators. The mental continuum has been intimately acquainted with true grasping since beginningless time; it is as if it has been 'baked in' to the continuum. Without even mentioning the seeds, just to stop coarse manifest self-grasping, it is not enough to merely realise the lack of true existence. Even if one realises the lack of true existence directly, it only abandons the intellectually acquired afflictions and their seeds, but not the innate ones. For that reason, the manifold presentation of the path of having to meditate for a long time on the path of meditation and the like was taught.

It is accepted that the conclusion of the realisation of emptiness is the elimination of the afflictions, and the realisation of emptiness can bring this about, but not immediately. It is not accepted that the afflictions need to be eliminated immediately upon the realisation of emptiness. The statement, 'How is that needed?' contains the answer.

The illusionist who creates the illusion of a woman has not abandoned the afflictive tendencies of true-grasping with regards to the object of knowledge of the illusory woman, and grasps at that object as truly existent. Hence, when he sees the illusory woman as empty of being a woman his imprints of realising emptiness are weak, and he does not have the ability to harm true-grasping as he does not possess anything that contradicts true-grasping.

The afflictive tendencies can refer to true-grasping, its seeds or the obscurations to knowledge, but here it is the earlier.

In showing the earlier Mind Only hypothetical statement as invalid, the **Prasangika-Madhyamika** proponents explain that realising the illusory woman as empty of being a woman is not a partial realisation of emptiness, in relation to the subtle object of negation. The point here is that earlier, when the Mind Only School presented the argument against the Prasangikas, they assumed the Prasangikas were asserting that the illusory woman was empty of the external woman, meaning that emptiness is the object not being an external woman.

The Prasangika School is now refuting this, saying that realising the illusory woman as being empty of an external woman is not, according to their view, even a partial emptiness. Earlier, the **Mind Only** School had argued that seeing the illusory woman as being empty of an actual external woman in itself would not overcome attachment and the other afflictions. Now the **Prasangikas** are saying that *the illusory woman being empty of an external woman is not even a partial emptiness* in relation to the object of negation.

The Prasangikas further explain that when the actual object of negation is realised in relation to one phenomenon, one can also realise it in relation to other phenomena, as explained in other places. Here, 'other places' refers to other texts. As you will recall, Aryadeva's *Four Hundred Verses* clearly explains that when the emptiness of one object or phenomenon is realised then, without needing much further investigation and reasoning, when that realisation is applied to all other objects, the emptiness of all other objects can be realised.

The commentary continues: *Then, in general with regard to mistake perceptions, to stop the non-conceptual mistaken perception of falling hairs due to the vitreous humour ...* The latter refers to an eye condition involving the vitreous humour in the eyeball. When someone sees falling hairs when in fact there is no falling hair, then that is an example of a non-conceptual mistaken perception.

The commentary says that, in order to overcome that non-conceptual mistaken perception, it is not enough for the mental consciousness to understand the absence of falling hairs. In other words it is not enough to think, "Although I see falling hairs, there are no actual falling hairs". Just that thought alone will not prevent the mistaken perception of falling hair. To overcome that non-conceptual mistaken perception, one has to actually cure the disease, for example, by taking some medicine or applying ointment that can stop the mistaken perception of seeing falling hairs. So it is not only a matter of the mind knowing that the perception is mistaken.

Having presented mistaken perception in relation to non-conceptual perception, the **Prasangika** then present conceptual mistaken perception, using the example of grasping at the mottled rope as a snake due to adventitious conditions. Due to adventitious conditions here means immediate conditions. As explained in the teachings, there are three immediate conditions required for a rope to be seen as a snake: the rope itself must be mottled, which means it has a pattern that makes it look like a snake; it is coiled like a snake; and the time of the day is such that it prevents you from seeing it clearly from a distance, for example, at dusk. So, under those conditions, a mottled rope could appear as a snake.

So, although initially one might feel fear as a result of seeing the object as a snake, all that is needed to overcome that mistaken perception is the mere realisation that it is a rope. One does not need to meditate longer on this understanding.

These examples show that both non-conceptual and conceptual mistaken perceptions can be overcome. If the non-conceptual mistaken perception is due to a condition like an eye disease, then all that is required to prevent the non-conceptual mistaken perception is to cure that eye disease. With a conceptual mistaken perception, all that is required to remove that mistaken conception is to understand, for example, that the object is actually a rope and not a snake.

As the **Prasangikas** explain further: *Even the buddhas do not see a beginning of true grasping in the continuum of all my migrators.* So while the Mind Only School asserts that there is true existence, according to the Prasangika, the grasping at true existence is what is to be overcome or abandoned. This abandonment, grasping at true existence, has existed within the mental continuum since beginningless time. Even the buddhas cannot see the beginning of this grasping at true existence within the mental continuum of sentient beings.

As the commentary further explains, the mental continuum has been intimately acquainted with grasping at true existence since beginningless time. *It is as if it is 'baked in' to the continuum.* The original Tibetan word translated as 'baked' can also mean well-ripened - in other words, it is as if self-grasping has become inseparable from the mind itself. So, leaving aside the prospect of overcoming the seed of self-grasping, even to just stop the coarse manifestation of self-grasping, it is not enough to merely realise the lack of true existence. This is the point being made here. Even overcoming the grosser or coarser manifest levels of self-grasping cannot be done just by the mere realisation of the lack of true existence.

Further, while it is not enough to merely realise the lack of true existence, to even stop the coarser manifestations of self-grasping, the commentary says: *Even if one realises the lack of true existence directly, it only abandons the intellectually acquired afflictions and their seeds, but not the innate ones.*

The conclusion here is that, *for this reason, the manifold presentation of the path of having to meditate for a long time on the path of meditation and so forth was taught.* When one attains the path of seeing on the five paths, that is when one gets the direct realisation of emptiness; the lack of inherent existence is realised at that point. However, as mentioned here, the initial direct realisation of emptiness can only overcome the intellectually acquired afflictions, but it doesn't overcome the innate ones.

Therefore, even after realising emptiness directly on the path of seeing, one has to go further. When reaching the path of meditation, even meditation itself is divided into nine different stages. All of these stages on the path of meditation relate to different levels of overcoming the subtle afflictions.

We can accept that the conclusion of the realisation of emptiness is the elimination of the afflictions completely. The **Prasangika-Madhyamika** proponent is saying here: "I

accept the conclusion that, having meditated on the realisation of emptiness – after having initially realised it directly, then further meditating on it again and again, perfecting that understanding of directly realising emptiness, and removing subtler levels of the afflictions gradually – at the end of this, there is a total elimination of the afflictions. That is what I accept.”

Thus the Prasangikas are asserting that the realisation of emptiness brings about the elimination of the afflictions, *but not immediately*: *It is not accepted that the afflictions need to be eliminated immediately upon the realisation of emptiness*. This a counter-argument to the Mind Only School’s earlier assertion that when the illusionist merely sees the illusory woman as empty of actually being an external woman, that doesn’t help to overcome the afflictions, specifically attachment to the illusory woman. So the Prasangika proponent is saying here: “I never stated that realising emptiness initially will immediately overcome all afflictions. It has to be further developed.”

This is a very important point. We can take it as a personal instruction because, leaving aside the debate with the Mind Only School, we definitely have this thought: “If I gain some understanding of emptiness, I might be able to really overcome all my afflictions and all my problems”.

In relation to the meaning of these lines: *The creator has not abandoned the afflictive imprints. Regarding objects of knowledge, the object of knowledge is the illusory woman. The commentary explains the Prasangika view that: The illusionist that creates the illusion of a woman has not abandoned the afflictive tendencies of true-grasping with regards to the object of knowledge of the illusory woman, and grasps at that object as truly existent. Hence, when he sees the illusory woman as empty of being a woman his imprints of realising emptiness are weak, and he does not have the ability to harm true-grasping as he does not possess anything that contradicts true-grasping. The afflictive tendencies can refer to true-grasping, its seeds or the obscurations to knowledge, but here it is the earlier*. This means that when we talk about the imprints of grasping at true existence, it can refer to the obscurations to knowledge, but here it is referring to the actual tendency to grasp at things as truly existent.

So the part of the Prasangika’s response is:

2.1.2.2.3.2.2. *Showing that meditating on the wisdom realising emptiness can overcome the afflictions and their imprints.*

When one gains an understanding of the topic from the outline itself, one can comprehensively understand the presentation. Here, the sub-heading ‘Showing that meditating on the wisdom realising emptiness can overcome the afflictions and their imprints’ is the next part of the Prasangika response to the Mind Only School’s earlier assertion that the illusionist still has attachment to the illusory woman while realising it to be empty. Here, the Prasangika School argues that meditation on the wisdom realising emptiness can gradually overcome the afflictions.

This section is further sub-divided into two:

2.1.2.2.3.2.2.1. General presentation

2.1.2.2.3.2.2.2. Specific presentation

#### 2.1.2.2.3.2.2.1. General presentation

32. *Meditating on the imprints of emptiness  
Abandons the imprints of phenomena;  
Meditating on that called ‘completely non-existent’  
Subsequently abandons even that.*

The commentary explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

By meditating on the imprints of emptiness, i.e. realising the lack of inherent existence of functionalities, the imprints of grasping at functionalities as truly existent are abandoned. By meditating on that called ‘completely non-existent’, i.e. by meditating on the lack of true existence as lacking true existence, subsequently even the true-grasping at the lack of true existence is abandoned.

If one only abandons the coarse object of negation, then one needs to subsequently abandon true existence, because true-grasping will only be abandoned from the time one has attained the cessation of the subtle object of negation from the point of view that true existence means an existent that does not exist as merely being posited by name. This will be explained later.

*By meditating on the imprints of emptiness, i.e. realising the lack of inherent existence of functionalities, the imprints of grasping at functionalities as truly existent are abandoned.* The mistaken conception to be abandoned is holding on to true existence. Thus, one meditates on the opposite, which is the lack of true existence, or lack of inherent existence. Meditating on the lack of inherent existence, and familiarising the mind with the lack of inherent existence through further meditation, will overcome the imprint of grasping at functionalities, of thinking that they are truly existent.

The next part is: *By meditating on that called ‘completely non-existent’, i.e. by meditating on the lack of true existence as lacking true existence, subsequently even the true-grasping at the lack of true existence is abandoned.* So even grasping at the lack of true existence can be abandoned through the meditation as well.

#### 2.1.2.2.3.2.2.2. Specific presentation

33. *When it is said that nothing exists  
The investigated functionality is not observed.  
At that time the non-functionality lacks a basis,  
How can it linger before one’s awareness?*

The commentary explains this:

When it is said that any functionality lacks true existence, if the investigated functionality existed truly, it should be observable, but it is not. Therefore, when it is realised as lacking true existence, then the truly existent non-functionality lacks a truly existent basis. As a result, how could the refuted true existence then linger before one’s awareness? As there is no suchness without subject, if the lack of true existence existed truly, it would have to be established as the nature of the subject, but that has already been refuted as being in the nature of true existence.

The first sentence of the commentary is quite clear. If a functionality – a thing or event – existed truly, then when it is investigated, it should be observable, i.e. one should be able to observe its true existence. But this is not the case. That, in itself, proves that things lack true existence.

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*Therefore, when it is realised as lacking true existence, then the truly existent non-functionality lacks a truly existent basis. This is contradicting the earlier point where the **Mind Only** School asserts that even something that is false has to have a true basis. However, according to the **Prasangika** School, even the basis lacks true existence – the very basis of the lack of true existence itself lacks true existence. As a result, how could the refuted true existence then linger before one’s awareness? Being a rhetorical question, this is saying it cannot, there is nothing left that is truly existent when the very basis also lacks true existence.*

If you pay attention and read these sections carefully, it should become clearer.

For the older students, the explanations presented here would be quite apparent and clear, because they have studied them previously so many times, and I have explained them many times before. So if you still don’t get much of an understanding by reading it now, then the earlier explanation has not served much purpose.

However, for the newer students, of course, this topic initially appears to be quite complicated and perhaps difficult to comprehend right away. But you can refer to other teachings that present explanations such as, if something exists truly, how does it exist and why does it lack true existence? This is explained in *The Heart Sutra* and you can read commentaries on *The Heart Sutra* that explain this topic, as well as other commentaries and texts, including other commentaries on this text itself. By reading different explanations, one can get a more comprehensive understanding.

Also, the earlier teachings I gave on the tenets present the different assertions of the different schools, and thus they can become clear in one’s mind.

This is where the older students can help out the newer students. If newer students have any questions or doubts, you need to approach older students so that they can share their knowledge and understanding. That is assuming that the older students are not still fumbling with their misunderstanding! *[laughter]*

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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## Homework Answers

Block: 3 Week: 5 (13 September 2016) Assigned: 20/9/2016

### 1. a) What is the Mind Only argument with regards to the magician and the illusory woman/

In simple terms, the Mind Only School is arguing that, when a male magician or illusionist conjures, for example, a beautiful woman, while the magician or illusionist may know it is an illusion, that doesn't prevent him from developing attachment to the illusion when he sees it as a very attractive and beautiful woman. Attachment and the desire to enjoy that illusion as if it were a real woman would still arise. Thus the **Mind Only** School is presenting a meticulous argument, saying that while the magician knows he is seeing an illusion, that doesn't prevent the afflictions, such as attachment, from arising, so the **Prasangika-Madhyamika** view that things are like an illusion does not serve a purpose, in terms of overcoming the afflictions.

The Mind Only proponents further argue that Prasangika-Madhyamika proponents have *nothing beyond the initial realisations of emptiness through listening and contemplation*.

In other words, the Mind Only is saying: "Your [Prasangika-Madhyamikas'] realisation of emptiness is nothing more than what you have gained from just hearing and contemplating, but lacks the realization gained from meditating. Your presentation of emptiness is merely based on listening and contemplating. Thus your presentation of emptiness cannot overcome the afflictions."

### b) Give the Madhyamika's initial response to this argument?

In showing the earlier Mind Only hypothetical statement as invalid, the **Prasangika-Madhyamika** proponents explain that realising the illusory woman as empty of being a woman is not a partial realisation of emptiness, in relation to the subtle object of negation. The point here is that earlier, when the Mind Only School presented the argument against the Prasangikas, they assumed the Prasangikas were asserting that the illusory woman was empty of the external woman, meaning that emptiness is the object not being an external woman.

The Prasangika School is now refuting this, saying that realising the illusory woman as being empty of an external woman is not, according to their view, even a partial emptiness. Earlier, the **Mind Only** School had argued that seeing the illusory woman as being empty of an actual external woman in itself would not overcome attachment and the other afflictions. Now, the **Prasangikas** are saying that *the illusory woman being empty of an external woman is not even a partial emptiness* in relation to the object of negation.

### 2. Explain non-conceptual mistaken perception and conceptual mistaken perception, with the use of analogies.

The commentary continues: *Then, in general with regard to mistake perceptions, to stop the non-conceptual mistaken perception of falling hairs due to the vitreous humour...* The latter refers to an eye condition involving the vitreous humour in the eyeball. When someone sees falling hairs when in fact there is no falling hair, then that is an example of a non-conceptual mistaken perception.

The commentary says that, in order to overcome that *non-conceptual mistaken perception*, it is not enough for the mental consciousness to understand the absence of falling hairs. In other words it is not enough to think, "Although I see falling hairs, there are no actual falling hairs". Just that thought alone will not prevent the mistaken perception of falling hair. To overcome that non-conceptual mistaken perception, one has to actually cure the disease, for example, by taking some medicine or applying ointment that can stop the mistaken perception of seeing falling hairs. So, it is not only a matter of the mind knowing that the perception is mistaken.

Having presented mistaken perception in relation to non-conceptual perception, the **Prasangika** then present *conceptual mistaken perception*, using the example of *grasping at the mottled rope as a snake due to adventitious conditions*. *Due to adventitious conditions* here means immediate conditions. As explained in

the teachings, there are three immediate conditions required for a rope to be seen as a snake: the rope itself must be mottled, which means it has a pattern that makes it look like a snake; it is coiled like a snake; and the time of the day is such that it prevents you from seeing it clearly from a distance, for example, at dusk. So, under those conditions, a mottled rope could appear as a snake.

So, although initially one might feel fear as a result of seeing the object as a snake, all that is needed to overcome that mistaken perception is the mere realisation that it is a rope. One does not need to meditate longer on this understanding.

These examples show that both non-conceptual and conceptual mistaken perceptions can be overcome. If the non-conceptual mistaken perception is due to a condition like an eye disease, then all that is required to prevent the non-conceptual mistaken perception is to cure that eye disease. With a conceptual mistaken perception, all that is required to remove that mistaken conception is to understand, for example, that the object is actually a rope and not a snake.

**3. Then the Madyamika respond to the part of the Mind Only argument that states ‘Thus your presentation of emptiness cannot overcome the afflictions, specifically attachment to the illusory woman.’ Explain the Madyamika response.**

Thus the Prasangikas are asserting that the realisation of emptiness brings about the elimination of the afflictions, *but not immediately: It is not accepted that the afflictions need to be eliminated immediately upon the realisation of emptiness.* This is a counter-argument to the Mind Only School’s earlier assertion that when the illusionist merely sees the illusory woman as empty of actually being an external woman, that doesn’t help to overcome the afflictions, specifically attachment to the illusory woman. So the Prasangika proponent is saying here: “I never stated that realising emptiness initially will immediately overcome all afflictions. It has to be further developed.”

This is a very important point. We can take it as a personal instruction because, leaving aside the debate with the Mind Only School, we definitely have this thought: “If I gain some understanding of emptiness, I might be able to really overcome all my afflictions and all my problems”.

In relation to the meaning of these lines: *The creator has not abandoned the afflictive imprints Regarding objects of knowledge,* the object of knowledge is the illusory woman. The commentary explains the **Prasangika** view that: *The illusionist that creates the illusion of a woman has not abandoned the afflictive tendencies of true-grasping with regards to the object of knowledge of the illusory woman, and grasps at that object as truly existent. Hence, when he sees the illusory woman as empty of being a woman his imprints of realising emptiness are weak, and he does not have the ability to harm true-grasping as he does not possess anything that contradicts true-grasping. The afflictive tendencies can refer to true-grasping, its seeds or the obscurations to knowledge, but here it is the earlier.* This means that when we talk about the imprints of grasping at true existence, it can refer to the obscurations to knowledge, but here it is referring to the actual tendency to grasp at things as truly existent.

**4. Explain verse 33.**

*33. When it is said that nothing exists  
The investigated functionality is not observed.  
At that time the non-functionality lacks a basis,  
How can it linger before one’s awareness?*

The commentary explains this:

When it is said that any functionality lacks true existence, if the investigated functionality existed truly, it should be observable, but it is not. Therefore, when it is realised as lacking true existence, then the truly existent non-functionality lacks a truly existent basis. As a result, how could the refuted true existence then linger before one’s awareness? As there is no suchness without subject, if the lack of true existence existed truly, it would have to be established as the nature of the subject, but that has already been refuted as being in the nature of true existence.



The first sentence of the commentary is quite clear. If a functionality – a thing or event – existed truly, then when it is investigated, it should be observable, i.e. one should be able to observe its true existence. But this is not the case. That, in itself, proves that things lack true existence.

*Therefore, when it is realised as lacking true existence, then the truly existent non-functionality lacks a truly existent basis.* This is contradicting the earlier point where the **Mind Only** School asserts that even something that is false has to have a true basis. However, according to the **Prasangika** School, even the basis lacks true existence – the very basis of the lack of true existence itself lacks true existence. *As a result, how could the refuted true existence then linger before one's awareness?* Being a rhetorical question, this is saying it cannot, there is nothing left that is truly existent when the very basis also lacks true existence.