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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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11 May 2004

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Generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings and for that purpose I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible.

Out of the two selflessness, the selflessness of phenomena and the selflessness of person, we have completed establishing the selflessness of phenomena through logic. Now comes the second point, establishing the selflessness of person through logic.

### 3.5.1.2. ESTABLISHING THE SELFLESSNESS OF PERSON THROUGH LOGIC

With regard to the two selflessnesses *Introduction to the Middle Way* explains the selflessness of phenomena first, because the selflessness of phenomena is the more difficult one to understand. So they are explained from the point of view of the grade of difficulty. However, when actually **meditating** on the two selflessnesses the sequence is reversed. One initially starts out by meditating on the selflessness of person and then progresses to the selflessness of phenomena.

The sequence of generation of the two types of **self-grasping** is that first the self-grasping at phenomena is generated, and then the self-grasping at the person. That is shown this quote from *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, 'As long as there is grasping at the aggregates, there will also be grasping at self'. However the way one meditates on abandoning the two types of self-grasping is that one initially meditates on the selflessness of person.

There is a quote from *The King of Concentrations Sutra* where it says, 'Initially one comes to know the nature of the self and from that one comes to know the nature of everything. By seeing the selflessness directly, then one is able to see the Dharmakaya as well'. This quote shows that one initially starts out by meditating on the selflessness of person. Then, by knowing the nature of the self, one also knows the nature of all sentient beings.

The topic, Establishing the Selflessness of Person Through Logic is divided into three major outlines.

3.5.1.2.1. Showing that those wishing for liberation initially need to refute the self as being inherently established

3.5.1.2.2. The way of refuting that 'I' and 'mine' are inherently established

3.5.1.2.3. Showing how the analysis comparing the self and the chariot is also relevant for other phenomena<sup>1</sup>

### 3.5.1.2.1. Showing That Those Wishing for Liberation Initially Need to Refute the Self as Being Inherently Established

*Seeing with awareness that all afflictions and faults arise*

*From the view of the transitory collections, And having realised the self to be its object, Yogis strive to negate the self.*

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'Yogis aspiring towards liberation'

There is a particular purpose for using the subject 'yogi'. One shouldn't think of oneself as just an ordinary person engaging in ordinary activities; you can think of yourself as a yogi aspiring towards liberation.

there is a reason why they strive to negate the self as inherently established - because *seeing with awareness that all afflictions* such as attachment etc. *and all faults* such as birth, aging, sickness and death *arise from the view of the transitory collection, and* because of *having realised the self to be* the focal *object* of this transitory view, they wish to abandon the transitory view.

This explains the outlook of someone who is aspiring to liberation.

Yogis wish to engage suchness and wish to abandon all the faults of the afflictions. Everybody would like to realise emptiness, and would also like to abandon the faults of the delusions.

Those yogis who wish to engage emptiness and abandon all the faults of the afflictions look into the reason why one is wandering around cyclic existence. They investigate the root cause for wandering around cyclic existence, which is the profound way of generating renunciation. Here Chandrakirti talks about actually meditating on renunciation, and the most profound way of generating renunciation is to investigate the root of samsara. It is the way of the practitioners with sharp faculty.

Having investigated the root of cyclic existence, yogis then find that the thought of 'I' and 'mine', the mind that arises in the aspect of 'I' and 'mine', is the root of all the other mental afflictions such as attachment, anger, and so forth, and it is also at the root of the different sufferings that one experiences in cyclic existence, such as birth, aging, sickness and death. As long as one is in samsara one has to experience the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death because they are part of the package of being in cyclic existence - there is no way that one can get out of being born, becoming old, becoming sick and dying. Those four are really what causes us suffering and problems. At the root of both the mental afflictions and the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death, are the thoughts that are in the aspect of 'I' and 'mine'. Thoughts of 'I' and 'mine' are two afflicted discriminating awarenesses, and these two types of afflicted wisdom grasp at inherent existence.

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*Mirror* it is 3.5.1.2.3. The way of refuting the inherent existence of both self and 'mine'.

<sup>1</sup> This is the heading used in *Illumination* and the *Self Commentary*. In

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So in short, the view of the transitory collections that is an afflicted wisdom grasping at an inherently existent 'I' and 'mine' is seen to be at the root of the mental afflictions and their faults, and the various sufferings. All of these are seen as the effect of the view of the transitory collections. One comes to know that if one wishes to abandon all the faults and problems then one needs to abandon the view of the transitory collections. And the elimination of the view of the transitory collections comes about through understanding that the focal object of the view of the transitory collections lacks a quintessential nature.

Only by reflecting in such a way on the faults and disadvantages of the transitory view will one generate the wish to be free from that transitory view. Without seeing its faults and disadvantages one won't generate the wish to become free from the transitory view.

If one is a person possessing wisdom then one will see the need to abandon the view of the transitory collections, by recognising that it is a distorted awareness, and that the self is non-existent in the way it is apprehended by the transitory view.

By seeing that the self does not exist the way it is apprehended by the transitory view, those with wisdom will recognise the need to abandon the transitory view as it is explained in the *Praise to the Sphere of Dharma*, and also in the *Four Hundred Verses*,

*When one sees the need to abandon the view of the transitory collections then one investigates the basis for the projection of the transitory view.*

One has to investigate the focal object, the basis for the determined object of the transitory view. By investigating the focal object of the transitory view then one will come to realise the mere 'I' or the mere 'self'. One will come to realise that the transitory view is an object possessor of the 'I', and the object is the 'I'.

Upon understanding that one needs to abandon the view of the transitory collections in order to abandon all faults and problems, then subsequently one comes to understand that one needs to comprehend that the focal object of the transitory view lacks any quintessential nature.

That's why yogis initially investigate the self that is the object of the self-grasping, and that's why yogis initially investigate whether or not the self that is the object of the self-grasping possesses any quintessential nature. Through negating the inherent existence of that self then one can abandon the transitory view, and in such a way eliminate or reverse all faults and problems. Therefore, for yogis the analysis of the 'I' of the self is the method for attaining liberation.

### **The Focal Self and the Apprehended Self**

As verse 6.120 says,

*Seeing with awareness that all afflictions and faults arise  
From the view of the transitory collections,  
And having realised the self to be its object,  
Yogis strive to negate the self.*

Here one should not confuse the self in the third line with the self in the fourth line.

The self in the third line is the mere self that is the focal object of the innate self-grasping, which is not to be abandoned. The self of the fourth line is the object of negation, the inherently existent self.

We have the self-grasping at the person, which is the innate self-grasping at person that is directed at the focal object of the self or the 'I'. But then it misapprehends that 'I', that self, and apprehends it as inherently existent. That's how we have the self that is the focal object, and the apprehended self, the inherently existent self.

This can also be applied to all other types of true-grasping or self-grasping, for example the grasping at a truly existent vase. Here we have the self-grasping, which is directed at the focal object of vase, but then it misapprehends the focal object of vase and apprehends it as a truly existent vase. The object that is to be negated is the apprehended object, which is a truly existent vase. By negating the apprehended object, a truly existent vase, then one can counteract the grasping at truly existent vase, and counteract true-grasping.

There's a quote from *The Compendium of Deeds*, where it says,

*If a person intensely realises emptiness, then since they have cut off the root, no affliction at all will arise in that person's continuum*

In *The Sutra of the Arya Tathagata*, it says,

*Shive Lodro (the name of the student that is being addressed, which means peaceful wisdom) for example it is like this, if one cuts off the root of the tree then the branches, the leaves and the twigs will all dry up. Likewise Shive Lodro, if one completely pacifies the view of the transitory collections then all the main and close afflictions will be pacified.*

Here in this quote it talks about afflictions and close afflictions. When he first talks about afflictions, that refers to the six root delusions of anger, attachment, ignorance, pride, doubt and wrong view, and then when he talks about the close afflictions he talks about the various secondary afflictions or secondary delusions such as wrath, resentment, spite, jealousy and so forth.

Since all the powerful sages agree with the idea laid out above, that the transitory view is at the root of all problems and that one initially needs to deal with the transitory view. There doesn't need to be any doubt that that is what one has to set out to do.

First one needs to know the different faults of cyclic existence very thoroughly, and think about them. Then one needs to identify self-grasping, 'I'-grasping, as the root of all those faults.

If one wishes to abandon the transitory view, then by engaging unmistakably in the method for abandoning the transitory view, which is ascertaining the view of selflessness that can negate the determined object of the transitory view. If one is asked whether all of that is necessary only for Mahayana practitioners and not for Hinayana practitioners then the answer is 'no'. All of that is relevant for all types of practitioners whether they are hearers or solitary realisers, practitioners or Mahayanists - they all need to engage in that practice of initially refuting the apprehended object of the transitory view.

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## Meditating on the Twelve Interdependent Links

Initially there is the ignorance that grasps at the inherently existent self, then through that ignorance one accumulates karma, and from the accumulation of karma comes the dependent link of consciousness, and then from the dependent link of consciousness the different types of sufferings, birth, aging, sickness and death and so forth develop. So by initially reflecting upon the different faults and sufferings of cyclic existence, and after having understood them investigating their main cause, this then brings one to the transitory view. Upon investigating the transitory view and its object one then can ascertain that the apprehended object is non-existent. One comes to realise the non-existence of the apprehended object. Then one has to familiarise one's mind with that realisation of the lack of the apprehended object, one has to continuously meditate on it, absorbing one's mind into the lack of the apprehended object.

1. One can meditate on the afflicted twelve interdependent links in the sequential manner starting out with ignorance, and how ignorance is the root cause for karma, then how karma becomes the cause for the dependent link of consciousness and so forth, going through all the twelve dependent links.

2. One can also meditate on the twelve purified dependent links in a sequential manner thinking how if there's no ignorance then there is no karma, if there is no karma there is no consciousness, and if there's no consciousness then all the other links fall away.

3. You can also meditate on them in the reverse way: in order to reverse the sickness and death then one has to reverse birth, to do that one has to reverse consciousness, and to do that that one has to reverse karma, which means that one has to reverse ignorance. In brief they are the ways of meditating on the twelve interdependent links.

## The Root of Cyclic Existence

We referred to the quote from Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* before, where it says,

*For as long as there is grasping at the aggregates  
There will also be 'I' grasping.  
If there is a self-grasping there is karma  
And from karma there is birth and so forth.*

This quote actually states that the root of cyclic existence is self-grasping at phenomena. However in *Introduction to the Middle Way* the transitory view is stated as being the root of cyclic existence. So here a point is brought up, 'Well don't we have two contradictory statements here?'. However, since those two types of grasping possess the same mode of apprehending the object, there is no fault with positing either one as the root of cyclic existence.

Here we have a situation where two types of grasping are posited as the root of cyclic existence. For these two positions to be mutually exclusive those two types of grasping would have to have a different mode of apprehending the object. However since those two types of grasping possess the same mode of apprehending the object, namely apprehending inherent existence, there is no fault with those two statements. So those two positions are not mutually exclusive.

In the Prasangika system we have the situation where the two types of self-grasping are not differentiated through the mode of apprehension. So the mode of apprehension - the apprehension of inherent existence - is exactly the same. What is different is the focal object.

In the lower tenets do the two types of self-grasping possess a different mode of apprehension or not? Here we are talking primarily about the Mind Only and the Svatantrika-Madhyamika because the Hinayana tenets such as the Sautrantika don't accept self-grasping at phenomena anyway. So is the mode of apprehension the same for the lower tenets?

*Students: It is different.*

How are they different?

*Student: The Mind Only see the selflessness of phenomena as subject-object's lack of different substance, and they see the emptiness of person as the lack of a person that is a self-sufficient substantially existent.*

In the Mind Only system the two types of self-grasping possess different objects and also possess different modes of apprehension, and the same also applies to the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka system. In the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka system the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantially existent is the self-grasping at person, and the grasping at truly existent aggregates is the self-grasping at phenomena.

In the Prasangika-Madhyamaka system however, even though there are two focal objects, the mode of apprehension is the same.

Next time we can go onto the definition and divisions of the view of the transitory collections.

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*Edited Version*

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Generate your motivation well thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, so I have to attain enlightenment and for that purpose I am going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

### 3.5.1.2.1. Showing That Those Wishing for Liberation Initially Need to Refute the Self as Being Inherently Established (cont.)

This heading is very important to contemplate because it explains the way one is induced into, and kept in, cyclic existence. This is a very important point to consider, because it helps one to generate a stable renunciation. Sometimes when we meditate on renunciation, we only think about the obvious great sufferings and the obvious great adverse conditions that we encounter. The renunciation that we generate through that is not really all that stable. If we look into the situation at greater depth, relating it back to the original source of self-grasping, then we understand that this self-grasping that apprehends reality in a distorted manner can be overcome with an antidote, and then our renunciation will be much more profound and stable.

We can also remember this point when we are in a situation where mental afflictions arise very strongly and we start to doubt our practice. Despite having worked on one's mind for a long time, all at once strong mental afflictions can arise again within the mind. At such a time it is good to relate that to the root of self-grasping, and to remember that the reason one is experiencing this strong upwelling of mental afflictions is because one has not overcome the root of self-grasping. One is experiencing these problems because one has not decided to view self-grasping as the enemy and has not overcome it with an antidote. Relating this experience of strong mental afflictions back to the root of self-grasping in such a manner will be beneficial, and one will not lose one's courage and strength of mind.

Even just doubting whether emptiness is the nature of reality shakes the foundations of cyclic existence. Even for somebody who has not got a lot of merits, and who merely generates some doubt regarding the empty nature of cyclic existence, that doubt will shake the foundations of cyclic existence. If someone actually generates an understanding of emptiness, not necessarily a realisation, then that is much more effective. So one should definitely generate some understanding, if not a realisation, of what emptiness means. Those practitioners who are of sharp faculty will base all their other practices on their understanding of emptiness - they will base their practice of refuge, their practice of bodhicitta and so forth on that

understanding.

The distorted mind, the self, appears to be totally independent and existing from its own side. If one is able to comprehend that the self doesn't exist in such a way, and generate some understanding of emptiness then that will calm down the mental afflictions. When one comes to understand that the self does not exist totally independently, out of itself, then that will pacify afflictions.

### What is true grasping?

True-grasping is *an awareness that grasps at its object as truly existent*.

True-grasping has the two-fold division into a) the self-grasping at person and b) the self-grasping at phenomena.

a) Self-grasping at a person is *an awareness that grasps at true existence upon having focussed on the object of the self*. Self-grasping at person has a further two-fold division into intellectually acquired and innate self-grasping.

1. **Innate self-grasping at person** is with us from birth. It is the self-grasping at person that arises naturally within one's mental continuum and has been with us since beginningless time. The root of cyclic existence is the innate self-grasping at person.

2. **Intellectually acquired self-grasping at person** is a self-grasping at person that is intellectually acquired through the study of certain tenets that propound such a self.

b) Self-grasping at phenomena is *an awareness that having focussed on phenomena as differentiated from person, then grasps at its object as inherently existent*. Here we also have a two-fold division into intellectually acquired and innate self-grasping at phenomena.

Last time we said that the transitory view is the root of all sufferings. The transitory view is a type of self-grasping at person. Now we have to look the difference between the transitory view and self-grasping at person. The grasping at the 'I' contained within one's own continuum as inherently existent, is an example for both transitory view as well as self-grasping at person. The grasping at the 'I' contained within another person's continuum as inherently existent is an example for a type of grasping that is only self-grasping at person, but not a transitory view.

### The Transitory View

If it is the transitory view there is a pervasion that it is self-grasping at person. However, if it is self-grasping at person, there is no pervasion that it is a view of the transitory collections. The definition of the view of the transitory collections, in short the transitory view, is *an afflicted wisdom that, having focussed on the 'I' or 'mine' within one's own continuum, then grasps at the 'I' as inherently existent*.

In his *Self Commentary* Chandrakirti identifies the transitory view as an afflicted wisdom grasping at the 'I' and 'mine' of one's own continuum as inherently existent. This brings up a point of debate. First of all, by

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identifying the view of the transitory collections as afflicted wisdom, Chandrakirti has eliminated primary consciousness as a transitory view. This means that if it is a transitory view then it has to be a mental factor. A primary consciousness that grasps at an inherently existent 'I' and 'mine' couldn't be a transitory view. For it to be a transitory view, it has to be an afflicted wisdom, so it has to be a mental factor.

There are two views regarding afflicted wisdom. One view is that if it is wisdom it has to be a mind that is concordant with reality and an afflicted wisdom is not concordant with reality, so therefore it cannot be wisdom. The other view is that one simply says if it is wisdom, it doesn't have to be concordant with reality and one can give as an example the transitory view. So there is a point that is debated, You can analyse for yourself what you think the correct view is.

One definitely has to say if it is a transitory view, it has to be an afflicted wisdom. These notions of 'I' and 'mine' are specifically of an inherently existent 'I' and 'mine', thinking that there is an inherently existent 'I' from its own side, and that there is a 'mine' from its own side. These notions of 'I' from its own side and 'mine' from its own side are the two primary causes of all problems and sufferings.

If one investigates the source of all the problems in the world, they specifically come from the thoughts of an inherently existent 'I' and an inherently existent 'mine'. Because of grasping very strongly at an intrinsic 'I' and an intrinsic 'mine', then fights start, and one ends up with a bleeding head. The cause for the wounds and cuts on one's head is a very strong notion of an intrinsic 'I' and an intrinsic 'mine'.

The transitory view apprehends the intrinsic 'I' and intrinsic 'mine', and therefore it starts this psychological chain reaction of desire and anger, being attached to what makes 'I' happy, and becoming angry at what bothers that 'I' and makes it unhappy. By being aware that this transitory view grasps at an object that is actually non-existent, that it misapprehends reality, that the objects that it apprehends - the inherently existent 'I' and the inherently existent 'mine' - do not actually exist, then one lessens this very strong grasping at intrinsic 'I' and 'mine'. So basically what one is doing is reflecting on the nature of emptiness, through which one then lessens the very strong grasping.

The **focal object** of the transitory view is the 'I' and the **aspect** of the transitory view is inherently existent 'I', and we can relate this to the two lines of verse 6.120 of the root text where it says,

*And having realised the self to be its object,  
Yogis strive to negate the self.*

'Having realised the self to be its object', refers to the self that is the focal object of the transitory view, which is the mere 'I' that exists. Then having focused on the mere 'I', the transitory view arises in the aspect of an inherently existent 'I', which is the non-existent 'I'. If you ask, 'Does the 'I' exist?' the answer is 'Yes'. Does it exist inherently? The answer is 'No'. That's why yogis try to negate the inherently existent self that is apprehended by the transitory view. So the transitory view arises in the aspect

of an inherently existent self, and an inherently existent self is apprehended. Does that inherently existing self exist? No. So one has to negate the inherently existent self, and by negating an inherently existent self one arrives at the absence of that self, which is emptiness.

We have said that the view of the transitory collections, grasping at an inherently existing 'I' and 'mine', is self-grasping at person. Now comes another point of doubt. We said that if it is a transitory view, it has to be self-grasping at person, so the transitory view grasping at an inherently existent 'mine' is self-grasping at person. Does this mean that 'mine' is the 'I'. We said that what makes a grasping a self-grasping at person is self-grasping at person. What makes a grasping a self-grasping at phenomena is when it is a grasping at the inherent existence of a phenomenon as distinguished from person.

This is important because 'mine' is not the person, 'mine' is a phenomenon. But is it a phenomenon that is distinguished from person? No. That's why when one grasps at it as inherently existent, even though it is a phenomenon it doesn't become self-grasping at a phenomenon, because it is not a phenomena that is distinguished from person. It is a phenomenon but not a phenomenon distinguished from person.

Why does grasping at the inherent existence of 'mine' become self-grasping at person? It is because the word 'mine' directly expresses 'I'. When 'mine' is expressed 'I' is expressed, so by grasping at 'mine', one grasps at 'I'. Here, when one talks about 'mine', one shouldn't confuse 'mine' with that which is mine. When it says that the view of the transitory collections grasps that inherently existent 'mine' that doesn't mean that it grasps at that which is mine as inherently existent. It says that it grasps at 'mine' as inherently existent. That is an important difference, because the view of the transitory collections doesn't grasp at the things, such as the eyes, faculties and so forth that are mine, as inherently existent, but it only grasps at 'mine' as inherently existent. The word 'mine' doesn't express any of the examples that are mine, but it only expresses mere 'mine', and within the expression of mere 'mine', 'I' is expressed; Therefore by grasping at 'mine', one also grasps at 'I'. So by grasping at an inherently existent 'mine', one also grasps at an inherently existent 'I'.

### **3.5.1.2.2. The Way of Refuting That 'I' and 'Mine' Are Inherently Established**

This is divided into two parts.

3.5.1.2.2.1. Refuting an inherently existent 'I'

3.5.1.2.2.2. Refuting inherently existent 'mine'

#### **3.5.1.2.2.1. Refuting that the Self is Inherently Established**

This has six sub-headings.

3.5.1.2.2.1.1. Refuting a self that is of different nature from the aggregates as mentally fabricated by non-Buddhist schools

3.5.1.2.2.1.2. Refuting the notion of some Buddhists that the aggregates are the self

3.5.1.2.2.1.3. Refuting the remaining three, basis and dependent and so forth

3.5.1.2.2.1.4. Refuting a person that is a substantial existent and that can't be described as being that itself or other

3.5.1.2.2.1.5. Presentation of how the self is merely labelled in dependence upon the aggregates, together with an example

3.5.1.2.2.1.6. The self being posited in such a way has the quality of easily abandoning extreme ideas

#### **3.5.1.2.2.1.1. Refuting a Self That Is of Different Nature from the Aggregates, as Mentally Fabricated by Non-Buddhist Schools**

##### **3.5.1.2.2.1.1.1. Expressing the Position of the Opponents**

The 'I' has been identified as the focal object of the transitory view as stated in the line 'and having realised the self to be it's object'. So the self has been identified as the object of self-grasping. Now the text goes into the different ways the self is misapprehended. First it goes into the ways non-Buddhist schools misapprehend the self, and then, of course, it refutes those mistaken notions.

Here we first state the Samkya position regarding the self, and then the Vaisheshika position regarding the self.

##### **3.5.1.2.2.1.1.1.1. Expressing the Samkya<sup>1</sup> Position**

The root text says,

*An engaging self, a permanent phenomenon that isn't the creator,  
Lacking qualities and action, is fabricated by the heathen.*

The Samkyas have this notion of a self that has five qualities - it is engaging, it is permanent, it isn't the creator, it lacks qualities and action.

1. They say that the self is engaging because when the self is in cyclic existence then it is engaging happiness and suffering.

2. It is a permanent phenomenon. According to the Samkyas, in the process of attaining liberation everything absorbs into the universal principle. When the practitioners are able to absorb everything into the universal principle, then the only thing that is left is this self-sufficient self that is permanently abiding, and that's why they say the self is permanent.

3. They say that the self isn't the creator. What this means is that it isn't the creator of effects, which they refer to as expressions.

4. The self lacks qualities. The qualities it refers to here are the qualities of particles, darkness and heartstrength. They relate those three qualities to suffering, ignorance and happiness respectively. They say the self lacks those three qualities of suffering, ignorance and happiness.

5. The self also lacks action. What they mean is that since the self pervades everything the self is not the agent for the coming and going of phenomena, the coming and going of existence and so forth. Why? Because the self is all-pervading.

We can find this Samkya view described in the text called *Precious Garland of Tenets*<sup>2</sup>. There it explains the Samkya view of how one can obtain liberation by following the sequence of the twenty-five objects of knowledge. Please read that up, then we don't have to go through it here, which would take quite a long time. The Samkyas propound a self that is of a different nature from the aggregates, and they say that it possesses the five features listed above. In Buddhism, no self of a different nature from the aggregates is posited.

##### **3.5.1.2.2.1.1.1.2. Expressing the Vaisheshika<sup>3</sup> position**

The Vaisheshika position is not greatly different from the Samkya position, which is why the root text says,

*In dependence upon small small differences  
The heathens split into different schools.*

The Vaisheshikas say the self is an engaging permanent phenomenon, the creator, endowed with qualities and lacks action. So they agree with the Samkyas that the self is engaging, and they also agree with the self being a permanent phenomenon. However they disagree with regard to the points of creator and quality. The Vaisheshikas say that the self is a creator and the self is endowed with qualities.

Of course we could just express those two non-Buddhist views and leave it there, but Chandrakirti doesn't just leave it there. He refutes those views.

##### **3.5.1.2.2.1.1.2. The refutation**

The root text says,

*Because of being separated from generation, like a mule's foal,  
Such a self does not exist, and  
It is unsuited to be the basis of 'I'-grasping.  
It also isn't asserted to exist in an illusory manner.*

*Whatever its features, all of them,  
Shown by the heathen in treatise upon treatise  
Are contradicted by their own reason of non-generation.*

*Therefore all those features do not exist.*

*Therefore no self exists apart from the aggregates,  
Because without aggregates its apprehension is not established.*

*It also isn't posited as the basis of worldly beings 'I'-grasping-*

*Awareness, because one views the self even without knowing.*

*Whoever, staying as an animal for many aeons  
Even they don't see this non-generated permanent.  
One can also see the hold of 'I'-grasping over them.*

*Then, there is absolutely no self apart from the aggregates.*

We can leave it here for tonight.

## **Review**

Why should someone who wants to attain liberation first

<sup>2</sup> See *Cutting Through Appearances* by Geshe Llundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, pp. 158-165.

<sup>3</sup> Particularists

<sup>1</sup> Enumerators

engage in refuting self-grasping?

*Student: It's because self-grasping is the root of cyclic existence.*

Why is self-grasping of person the root of cyclic existence?

*Student: Because it generates the basis for the mental afflictions.*

But the aggregates also form the basis for the mental afflictions, that's why they are called the contaminated aggregates.

*Student: The contaminated aggregates are contaminated as the result of previous ignorance.*

Then also the self itself is the basis for the mental afflictions, because it is the basis for the 'I'-grasping for the self-grasping. So it's the source of the root of cyclic existence.

Why do those seeking liberation have to understand the selflessness of person first?

*Student: In order to generate renunciation.*

*Student: It is easier to realise the selflessness of person than the selflessness of phenomena.*

We are asking why someone who is striving for liberation has to initially comprehend the selflessness of person. Where do those two meet? Why is it so significant that someone who wants to attain liberation has to initially comprehend the selflessness of a person. Of course, when we talk about the sequence of meditation, one initially meditates on selflessness of person because it is easier. But that is a slightly different subject. I am asking why someone striving for liberation specifically has to comprehend the selflessness of person first.

We can find the answer to that in the homage at the beginning *Introduction to the Middle Way* where it says,

*Starting grasping at self initially naming 'I'  
Generating attachment for phenomena named  
'mine'*

*Praise to whatever becomes compassion for  
migrators*

*Traversing without freedom, like a bucket in a  
well*

We can grasp the answer if we look at *the twelve links of dependent origination*, where the very first link is the link of ignorance. The dependent link of *ignorance* is the link that initiates the whole chain reaction of all the subsequent links of *karma, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, becoming, birth, ageing and death*. Without that very first link of ignorance, all subsequent links will fall away.

What is the meaning of true-grasping?

*Student: Belief that the 'I' and 'mine' exist truly.*

Are you sure that is the definition of self-grasping?

An awareness that grasps at its object as truly existent is the accurate definition. If we just relate it to grasping a truly existent 'I' and 'mine', then what happens to the grasping at the truly existent vase for example? Grasping at a truly existent vase is not grasping at a truly existent 'I' or 'mine'. How many types of self-grasping do we have?

*Student: Two*

What are those two?

*Student: Self and phenomena.*

So what does it mean when we say 'person'? Does the person exist or not?

*Student: The person exists.*

What is the meaning or definition of person

*Student: The mere 'I' labelled on any of the five aggregates,*

What are those five aggregates?

*Students: The five aggregates are form, feeling, recognition, compositional factors and consciousness.*

The five aggregates turn up time and again, so they are very useful to know. What is the meaning of the self-grasping at phenomena?

*Student: Grasping at the existence of phenomena not having the focal object of person.*

We mentioned before that 'mine' is not the person, but that the grasping at an inherently existent 'mine' is self-grasping at person.

*Student: If you grasp at your country as inherently existent would that be an example of a self-grasping phenomena?*

Grasping at one's own country as being inherently existent would be self-grasping at phenomena.

*Student: Is object of negation for intellectually acquired and innate self-grasping the same or different?*

The object of negation, the inherently existent self, appears to both intellectually acquired self-grasping as well as innate self-grasping. Through mistaken tenets intellectually acquired self-grasping establishes the inherently existent self to be valid according to that person's view. Innate self-grasping naturally grasps at the inherently existent self. Inherent existence appears to both of these types of self-grasping.

The object of negation is divided into the object of negation of analysis and the object of negation of a path. For example, true existence would be an analytical object of negation. Why? Take the subject 'a person' - it lacks true existence - because it is a dependent arising. In dependence upon that reason, what is being negated is true existence, and what is being established is the lack of true existence. The predicate is the lack of true existence, and through the reasoning of dependent arising what is being negated is true existence. That is why it says that true existence is the analytical object of negation, while the grasping at true existence is negated by the path. The path is that which acts as the antidote against the grasping itself. The logic refutes true existence and the wisdom, the path that is generated, acts as the antidote to the grasping.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernie Wright*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavataramana*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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25 May 2004

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Generate a virtuous motivation of bodhicitta please, thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment so that I can achieve the welfare of all sentient beings. In order to be able to do that I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

It is very important that one always precedes one's action with a virtuous motivation. Then, even if one engages in an unsuitable action, with a virtuous motivation there is at least some merit to be gained by that - depending of course on the strength of the motivation.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.1. Refuting a Self That Is Of Different Nature From the Aggregates As Mentally Fabricated By Non-Buddhist Schools

#### 3.5.1.2.2.1.1.1. Expressing the Position Of the Opponents (cont.)

Last time we talked about the non-Buddhist views of the self of the Vaisheshikas and the Samkyas, which each have their own version of a self that is endowed with five characteristics.

#### 3.5.1.2.2.1.1.2. The refutation

This outline deals with refuting those ideas of self. The root text begins with,

*Because of being separated from generation, like a mule's foal, Such a self does not exist, and It is unsuited to be the basis of 'I'-grasping. It also isn't asserted to exist in an illusory manner.*

Basically what is being refuted here is a permanent, solitary, independent self. If we analyse the different non-Buddhist positions on the self then we find that they all posit this permanent partless independent self that is of a different nature from the aggregates. They think it is **permanent** because they think it doesn't change moment by moment; they assert that it exists **independently**, meaning that it is independent of causes and conditions; and separately from the aggregates and that's why they assert it to be **solitary**.

When the self that is asserted by those non-Buddhist schools is refuted, then essentially what one refutes is a self that is of a different nature from the aggregates. In Buddhism there is no Buddhist school that posits such a self.

Mirror:

Take the subject 'such a self, as mentally fabricated by the heathen' - *it doesn't exist* in suchness - *because of being separated from generation, like the foal of a mule.*

'It is also unsuited to be the basis of 'I'-grasping' refers to what we said the other day about the self that is propounded by the non-Buddhist schools not being suitable to be even the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping. We talked about the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping, and the aspect of the innate 'I'-grasping, and we said that the focal object has

to be the existent self.

Mirror:

Out of the focal object and the aspect of the innate 'I'-grasping, such a self *is* also *unsuited to be the basis* that is the focal object, because it is not generated.

Take the same subject - *it also isn't asserted to exist in an illusory manner* - because of not being nominally established by valid cognition.

You can see here that the 'it' refutes the self that is asserted by the non-Buddhists to be non-existent, both ultimately as well as in the conventional illusory manner. The last line of the root text says, 'it also isn't asserted to exist in an illusory manner'. Because it doesn't exist in an illusory manner as well as in an ultimate manner it is therefore unsuited to be the focal object of 'I'-grasping.

The line 'Because of being separated from generation like a mule's foal' uses the example of a mule's foal, which is non-existent. The self asserted by the non-Buddhists is non-existent just like a mule's foal, because it is separated from generation, meaning it is not generated. Therefore because it is separated from generation it doesn't exist ultimately. It also does not exist in an illusory manner, because it is not established by valid cognition. Therefore it is not the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping.

The above verse refutes the entity of the self that is asserted by the non-Buddhists. Then the root text goes on to refute the characteristics of the self asserted by the non-Buddhists.

*Whatever its features, all of them, Shown by the heathen in treatise upon treatise Are contradicted by their own reason of non-generation. Therefore all those features do not exist.*

Mirror:

*All of the features of the self that is asserted by the heathen do not exist, because whatever the features of the self shown in the treatises of the Enumerators and in the treatises of the Particularists are, they are contradicted by their own reason of non-generation.*

The non-Buddhists accept the self as not being generated, so here their own acceptance of the reason of non-generation of the self actually harms their own position of a self that possesses the five attributes (which we went through last week).

Next the root text says,

*Therefore no self exists apart from the aggregates, Because without aggregates its apprehension is not established. It also isn't posited as the basis of worldly beings' 'I'-grasping- Awareness, because one views the self even without knowing.*

If the self were to exist in a nature apart from the aggregates then it should be possible to apprehend this self without apprehending the aggregates as well. However one can't make the self an object of mind without making the aggregates an object of mind.

You have to think about the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping and whether the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping is the permanent, single, independent self, or whether the focal object of the 'I'-grasping is the mere 'I'. We

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have already said that actually the permanent, single, independent self is non-existent, but if we try to establish that from the point of view of analysing whether or not such a permanent, single, independent self could be the focal object of the innate 'I'-grasping, then one will generate some understanding. If such a permanent, single, independent self of a different nature from the aggregates were to exist then one should be able to make that self an object of mind without making the aggregates an object of mind.

This permanent, single, independent self is asserted as being unrelated to the aggregates. When we say that the self that is posited by non-Buddhists is unrelated to the aggregates, one can also relate that to being intrinsically unrelated to the aggregates.

There is *no self* that *exists* in nature apart from the aggregates, because one cannot apprehend the self without making the aggregates an object of mind. *It also isn't posited as the basis of worldly beings' 'I'-grasping-awareness, because one views the self even without knowing that particular self.*

If a permanent, single, independent self were to exist then it would have to be the focus of worldly beings' 'I'-grasping. However that is not the case, because we can find that there is 'I'-grasping in the continuum of sentient beings who don't know about such a permanent, single, independent self.

So this self that is of a different nature from the aggregates isn't even posited as the focal basis of the innate 'I'-grasping-awareness of worldly beings, because one views the self even without knowing that particular self.

*Whoever, staying as an animal for many aeons  
Even they don't see this non-generated permanent.  
One can also see the hold of 'I'-grasping over  
them.*

*Then, there is absolutely no self apart from the  
aggregates*

Even those beings who remain in samsara for many eons as animals don't see this non-generated permanent self. However, one can see the hold of 'I'-grasping over those beings. Even though they don't perceive this non-generated, permanent self they still are under the hold of 'I'-grasping.

The outline that we have just been through explains how there is no self of a nature different from the aggregates, which is a very important point to contemplate. By refuting this notion of the self that is asserted by the non-Buddhists, then one also implicitly refutes the self that is of a different nature from the aggregates.

Now, try to meditate for a minute and try to look within yourself for the actual focal object, the focal basis for the thought that thinks 'I' for the 'I'-grasping? On the one hand there's definitely a focal object for the innate 'I'-grasping, however if one sits down and looks for that focal object it disappears - it can't be found at the time of analysis.

### **3.5.1.2.2.1.2. Refuting the Notion Of Some Buddhists That the Aggregates Are the Self.**

Here we have five sub-outlines,

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1. Showing proofs harming the assertion that the aggregates are the self

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.2. Offering proof that shows these assertions are invalid

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.3. Showing other proof contradicting those asserting the aggregates to be the self

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.4. Explaining the intent behind teaching that the aggregates are the self

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.5. Showing the other systems to be unrelated

### **3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1. Showing Proofs Harming the Assertion That the Aggregates Are the Self**

This has two sub-outlines,

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. Actual

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. Refuting attempts at damage control by the Realists

#### **3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1. Actual**

This has two sub-outlines,

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1.1. Stating the assertion

3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1.2. The refutation of those assertions

#### **3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.1.1. Stating the Assertion**

We have already refuted a self that is of a different nature from the aggregates. So the next step is to refute the idea that the aggregates are the self.

*Because a self apart from the aggregates isn't  
established*

*Aggregates alone are the focus of self-view.*

*Some assert all five aggregates as the basis*

*Of self-view, some assert mind alone.*

After having refuted that the self is of a different nature from the aggregates, some Buddhist schools think, 'Oh, then the aggregates must be the self'. Here there are different ideas with regard to the aggregates being the self. Some Buddhists assert that all five aggregates are the basis of the self-view (the aggregates are the self), while other Buddhists assert that mind alone is the basis of the self-view. There is a particular sub-school of the Vaibhashika, the Sammitiya Vaibhashika school and within that sub-school we can find these different views.

*Mirror:*

*Different Sammitiya Vaibhashikas assert, 'The  
aggregates alone are the focus of the self-view  
because a self apart, i.e. of a different nature, from  
the aggregates isn't established'.*

Here 'self-view' refers to the view of the transitory collections. This school says, 'The transitory collections refers to the aggregates; the collection is the collection of the aggregates and the aggregates are impermanent so they are transitory. They say that it's called the view of the transitory collections because it focuses on the aggregates. Therefore the aggregates are the focus of the self-view, and that's why the aggregates are the self.

As we just said, since there's no self that is of a different nature from the aggregates then the aggregates are the self, and as such form the focus of the transitory view, the view of the transitory collections.

Of those Sammitiya Vaibhashikas who assert the aggregates as the focus of the self-view, some assert that all five aggregates are the basis of the self view.

*Mirror:*

*Out of those Buddhists some, the Sammitiya  
Vaibhashika, assert all five aggregates as the basis  
of self-view [self-image] because the Tathagata  
taught, 'Oh Bhikkhu, whatever practitioner of  
virtue or whatever Brahmin, their gaze perfectly  
following, thinking, 'Ah the self, their gaze follows  
perfectly the five aggregates alone''.*

Based on this quote they assert that the five aggregates are the focus of the self-view. Really, this quote is their only reason for assuming that the five aggregates are the focal object of the self-view.

Then there are other Sammitiya Vaibhashikas who assert that mind alone is the self. They base this view on two quotes from the sutras which say, 'Oneself is one's protector; who else would be one's protector; by subduing oneself well; the sages attain higher status,' and 'Subduing the mind is good; subduing the mind brings forth happiness'. They say if one looks at those two quotes then it becomes obvious that the Buddha talks about subduing the mind and subduing the self in the same context. Sometimes the Buddha talks about subduing the self, and sometimes he talks about subduing the mind. So they say that what he is really referring to is same thing, therefore, they say, the mind is the self.

Knowing these two quotes and their relationship is also very important. By subduing the mind then the person also becomes subdued and through that the person attains happiness. Similarly one can also relate the two quotes with the quote<sup>1</sup> where it says that the mind is the source of one's happiness. There's no way to attain happiness if one doesn't subdue the mind. If one subdues the mind then the self also becomes subdued, and the subdued mind is a happy mind. Why? Because the subdued mind induces the happy mind.

If the mind is subdued then the self will also be happy, and with an unsubdued mind then the self won't be happy. If one looks at it from this point of view then the corollary of these two quotes is that if oneself is unhappy it is really because one's mind is unsubdued, and one can't really blame anybody else for one's unhappiness. So the reason for meditating is to subdue the mind so that the self can be happier.

At this point there is also another debate. At one stage Bhavaviveka gave the mental consciousness as the example of the person. That becomes a little bit confusing because in Bhavaviveka's school the mental consciousness of course is a substantially existent, while the person is an imputed existent. Bhavaviveka refutes the person as a self-sufficient substantially existent, so how then can he give the mental consciousness as an example for the person? The reason is that while on the one hand saying that in general the person is only an imputed existent, there can be instances of the person that are a substantial existent.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.2.1.2. The Refutation Of Those Assertions

Then comes the refutation of these assertions, and we have these two verses,

*If the aggregates are the self then,  
Since they are many, the self becomes many.  
The self becomes substantial, and looking at it,  
Since engaging substance, doesn't become distorted.  
When passing beyond sorrow the self definitely gets cut  
off  
One moment before passing beyond sorrow  
Generation and disintegration. Because no agent, no  
fruit.  
Others will experience that accumulated by another.*

1. *If the aggregates are the self then* it follows that *the self becomes many* - because the self and the aggregates are one and *they*, the aggregates, *are many*.

If the self were to be intrinsically one with the aggregates, then the self actually would have to become many. Why? Because the aggregates are many.

2. Take the subject '*self*' - it follows *it becomes a substantial* existent - because the aggregates are the self. It contradicts the view of the Sammitiya Vaibhashika themselves, which is that while the aggregates are a substantial existent, the self is an imputed existent.
3. Take the subject 'the view of the aggregates' - it follows it *doesn't become distorted* - because of being an object possessor *engaging substance*.

In the Prasangika-Madhyamaka system there's no substantially established self, indeed there's no substantially established existence at all, because substantially established existence is synonymous with the object of negation. So an object-possessor engaging something that is substantially existent would have to be an undistorted object-possessor.

4. It follows that *when passing into nirvana* without remainder *the self definitely gets cut off* - because at that time the aggregates get cut off.

According to all the **other tenets apart from the Prasangika**, first nirvana with remainder is attained, and then nirvana without remainder (when one leaves behind the contaminated form body) is attained. According to the **Prasangika**, first the nirvana without remainder is attained and then nirvana with remainder. This is because they relate 'remainder' to the remainder of the appearance of true existence. In meditative equipoise there is no remainder of true appearance, and in the post-meditational period there is the remainder of true appearance.

5. It follows that *one moment before passing into nirvana* the self *generates and disintegrates* out of its own nature - because the self and the aggregates are one and the aggregates generate and disintegrate out of their own nature.

Sometimes this can also be related to the self being intrinsically one with the aggregates. All those faults occur on the one side by just the aggregates were the self, but then one can relate those faults to the case if the self were intrinsically one with the aggregates.

6. It follows that karma has *no* relation to its *fruit* - *because* there is *no* self that can function as the *agent*.

If there were an intrinsically existing self, and intrinsically existing karma, then they become two unrelated phenomena. As such, the self then couldn't then act as the agent for the karma. Here we might remember back to when we said that if the cause exists inherently, then because it is completely unrelated to the effect, it has no relationship to the effect at all. Another fault is that it would generate all types of effect all the time. Maybe you remember that point.

If the self exists inherently then it cannot act as the agent for karma, and it also couldn't experience the fruit of that karma later. Karma created by one person would be experienced by another person. Remember the faults of inherent existence. If the self exists inherently and creates karma, and then a subsequent moment of self were experiencing the results of that karma, it would be like one person experiencing karma that was actually created by a completely different person.

You have to think about it from the point of view of being totally unrelated. If something exists inherently then it is totally unrelated to anything else. If the self exists inherently then it is unrelated to anything else, so it becomes another person. If the self exists as intrinsically one with the aggregates as these tenets assert then the self exists

<sup>1</sup> Not quoted here

intrinsically, and if it were to exist intrinsically then it would actually have to exist totally independently of anything else. Then one would arrive at the case that the karma created by one person would be experienced by another person.

We have talked a lot about how the law of cause and effect becomes unworkable if it were to exist inherently. We said that normally the karma is always experienced by the person that creates it. So, for example, Max can't experience the karma that is created by Peter. However, if cause and effect were to exist inherently then cause and effect become totally unrelated, and then Max would experience the karma that was actually created by Peter.

You have to remember these points that we talked about before when we explained why cause and effect can't exist inherently, and think about them. Then next time, if it is still not clear, we can explain it in greater depth.

### Views of the Transitory Collection

The **common view of the transitory collection** is the grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent after having focussed on the 'I' and 'mine' contained within one's continuum. In the sutras this view of the transitory collection grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially existent after having focussed on the 'I' and 'mine' in one's continuum is explained again and again. The common view of the transitory collection is the view of the transitory collection according to the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka and below. While the **uncommon view of the transitory collection** is the grasping at inherent existence having focussed on the 'I' and 'mine' in one's own continuum, which is seen as an afflicted wisdom, and this is the Prasangika view.

### Imputed Existents and Substantial Existents

*Student: Could you explain a bit more about the debate on Bhavaviveka's point that the person is sometimes an imputed existent and sometimes as a substantially existent*

Bhavaviveka asserts the person as being an imputed existent, but at the same time he asserts that the mental consciousness is an example for the person, and the mental consciousness is a substantial existent. So that's where the debate comes. According to Bhavaviveka, from the point of view of the self-isolate of person, person is an imputed existent, but if you posit a particular instance of person, such as the mental consciousness, then it is also acceptable to say that that instance of the person is a substantial existent.

In the **Prasangika** system everything that exists is an imputed existent, there is no such thing as a substantial existent. In the **lower tenets**, of course, we have both types of existence - things that are a substantial existent, and phenomena that are an imputed existent. According to the lower tenets the person is always an imputed existent, and some of them posit the mental consciousness as an example for the person. The mental consciousness is a substantial existent, so there seems to be a contradiction there. The only tenet without that contradiction is the **Mind Only**, who posit the universal mind foundation as an example for the person - they assert that the universal mind foundation is also an imputed existent.

According to the **lower tenets**, the definition of a **substantially existent** is *an object that, when making it an object of mind doesn't require making something else to be made an object of mind as well*. If, in order to make it an object of mind, one needs to make something else an object of mind, then it is an **imputed existent**. And the person is an imputed existent because in order to make the person an

object of mind one needs to make the aggregates an object of mind. The reason why consciousness is a substantial existent is because making consciousness an object of mind doesn't depend upon making something else an object of mind. We have already said this many times before but now you got an extra one for free!

### Relating It Back To Yourself

You should analyse the view of the transitory collection in your mind and analyse the mode of perception of that view. Then analyse whether or not the object of that view exists. If it were to exist the way it is apprehended then how would it have to exist, and does it exist the way it is apprehended. In such a way one generates some understanding of emptiness. If one doesn't do that then even though one always says, 'emptiness', 'emptiness', there won't be any understanding.

A very good meditation is to contemplate one's transitory view and self-grasping, and how the self-grasping leads to the other mental afflictions such as attachment and anger, which then leads then to further problems. This will enable you to understand this psychological chain-reaction leading back to the original cause - the transitory view. You have to beat the self-grasping with the hammer of wisdom realising selflessness.

According to Shantideva a person who can confront their own self-grasping and go about beating it up is a truly courageous person. As for beating up other people - there is not very much courage needed there.

Self-grasping has given us innumerable problems from lifetime to lifetime, and also temporarily in this life. So it is very important to be able to overcome it by sitting down, and then slowly, slowly analysing its nature, its way of apprehending and so forth. Then one can really get some understanding of emptiness. By overcoming the inner enemy of self-grasping, then the outer enemy will not be able to harm one.

As Shantideva said, 'If one tries to vanquish all one's outer enemies then that is an impossible task. But by vanquishing the inner enemy of self-grasping then one has implicitly vanquished all outer enemies, because they will not be able to harm one<sup>2</sup>. For example is it still possible to have an outer enemy when you have abandoned anger? What do you think?

Anger is that which transforms a friend into an enemy. When one generates anger the person who one moment ago was a friend is now an enemy. By looking at it in this way one can understand the disadvantages of anger. For example we can see that sometimes when people sit down to have a meal together they are quite cordial and friendly at the start of the meal, but then something happens and an argument erupts, and sometimes they start to throw the plates at each other. Sometimes you go to sleep together as friends but then when you wake up in the morning you start to abuse each other. There are many stories like that - it is not just made up.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson*

*Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett*

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*Edited Version*

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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavatarama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

དབུ་མ་ལ་འདུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་པོ།

1 June 2004

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Generate the virtuous motivation of bodhicitta, thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment in order to accomplish the welfare of all sentient beings and for that purpose I am now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I am going to put it into practice. To that end I am going to view self-grasping as the enemy, recognising that self-grasping doesn't have the slightest benefits, but only disadvantages for myself and others'. As long as one doesn't view self-grasping as the enemy and doesn't overcome it, one will not be able to achieve the aim of attaining enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings.

Chandrakirti has done likewise, viewing self-grasping as nothing but an enemy. If we follow Chandrakirti's example then we cannot go wrong because Chandrakirti is a valid being, and if we follow his example then we too will become a valid being. One should view oneself as a student of Chandrakirti thinking, 'I am going to be a good student of Chandrakirti in this life and in all future lives', making prayers in that regard.

The sequence we went through is that initially a self that is of different entity from the aggregates, as asserted by the different non-Buddhist schools, was refuted. After having refuted a self that is of a different entity from the aggregates, then Chandrakirti moved on to refute a self that is the aggregates, which is posited by certain Buddhist schools. Their view is that either the aggregates in general are the self or that the five aggregates are the self, or that the aggregate of primary consciousness is the self.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.1.2. The Refutation Of Those Assertions

*If the aggregates are the self then,  
Since they are many, the self becomes many.*

**Mirror:**

*If the aggregates are the self then it follows that the self becomes many - because the self and the aggregates are one and they, the aggregates, are many.*

The Sammitiya-Vaibashika don't actually accept that the self and the aggregates are one. What they do accept is that the self and the aggregates are of intrinsically one nature. They posit an intrinsically existing self, they posit intrinsically existing aggregates, they posit that the self and the aggregates are of one nature, and they posit that the self and the aggregates are intrinsically of one nature.

1. If two things are intrinsically of one nature, then they have to be one, and that's how one arrives at this consequence that there are many selves because there are

many aggregates. If the aggregates and the self were one, then since there are many aggregates there would have to be many selves. The key point that determines this consequence is that the self and the aggregates are intrinsically of one nature.

2. The same reasoning can also be applied to the assertion that the aggregate of primary consciousness is the self, because within the aggregate of primary consciousness we have six types of primary consciousness. The reasoning is the same - as there are many types of primary consciousness it follows that there would also have to be many selves.

The next two reasonings are,

*The self becomes substantial, and looking at it,  
Since engaging substance, doesn't become distorted.*

3. As we have said, in the **Prasangika** system there is no phenomenon that is a substantial existent. They say that if it exists then it is necessarily an imputed existent. In the **lower tenets** we have both phenomena that are substantial existents and phenomena that are imputed existents. They say that the 'I' is an imputed existent and the aggregates are a substantial existent. If the self and the aggregates were one then we would have the consequence that since the aggregates are the self and since they are a substantial existent, then it would follow that the 'I' is also a substantial existent.

4. If the self were to be a substantial existent then viewing a self that is a substantial existent wouldn't be distorted. Rather, it would actually be an accurate observation.

How this reasoning helps us to realise the selflessness of person is because an inherently existing self is the subtle object of negation. If we refute that the aggregate of primary consciousness (an example for the self) is of inherently one nature with the self we refute the subtle object of negation. The reasoning that we employ is that there would have to be many selves because there are many aggregates. If the self exists inherently and the aggregates exist inherently, and the self is inherently of one nature with the aggregates, then they have to be indistinguishable one. If they were completely one, then we would get the mistake that since there are many aggregates there would have to be many selves. By refuting that there are many selves one refutes the inherently existent self.

5. Thinking about the implications of being inherently one or different, and then refuting the self as being inherently of one nature with the aggregates, will definitely become a way to negate inherent existence. Those implications are also important for the following reasons.

*When passing beyond sorrow the self definitely gets cut off*

When passing beyond sorrow, the self definitely gets cut off. Why? Because at that time the aggregates get cut off and the aggregates are the self. So again there is the same reasoning that self is intrinsically of one nature with the aggregates, and therefore when the aggregates are cut off, then the self also has to be cut off. The Vaibashika tenets, including the Sammitiya-Vaibashika,

assert that at the time of passing beyond sorrow without remainder, the aggregates are actually cut off. So there is the view that the person who attains nirvana without remainder will not take rebirth any more, because if one has to take rebirth it would have to be done through the power of karma and afflictions.

6. The next reasoning is,

*One moment before passing beyond sorrow  
Generation and disintegration....*

If the self and the aggregates were to be intrinsically of one nature, then one moment before passing beyond sorrow there would be intrinsic generation and disintegration. Of course, there is disintegration and generation before passing into nirvana - the self is generated, the self disintegrates, the aggregates generate and disintegrate. However, if the self and the aggregates were of intrinsically one nature the consequence is that there would be intrinsic generation and disintegration before passing into nirvana. However, there is no intrinsic generation and disintegration.

7. ... *Because no agent, no fruit.*

*Others will experience that accumulated by another.*

*Mirror:*

It follows that karma has *no* relation to its *fruit* - *because* there is *no* self that can function as the *agent*.

The aggregates and the self are momentary. This means that they are changing moment by moment. According to the Sammitiya-Vaibashika view and to the **Realist** view in general, the process of momentary changing is an intrinsic process of changing - it changes out of its own nature from one entity into the next. That's where the **Prasangika** see the problem. They say there cannot be a change from one moment to the next out of its own entity, because that would mean that those early and later moments of self, for example, would be totally unrelated. As such, the karma that is created by the earlier moments of self could not be experienced by the later moments of self, and we would arrive at the fault that the karmic potential would just dissipate by itself without result.

If they were intrinsically generated and disintegrated, then the earlier moments of self and the later moments of self would become totally unrelated. Since the later moments of self are completely unrelated to the earlier moments, they could not experience the karmic effects of the karma created by the earlier moments of self. Because of this we would have the mistake that karma would just dissipate by itself without effect. That is one mistake.

As I have mentioned before, when we think about past and future lives, we establish their existence by using the reasoning that the earlier and later moments of self lack intrinsic existence. Therefore they can have a relationship, and therefore there can be a continuity of self. If the early and later moments of self existed out of their own nature, then they would have to be totally unrelated and there could be no continuity of self. Then there could be no past and future lives. It would become impossible for the later moments of self to remember what the earlier moments of self experienced and what

they did, and it would become impossible for the later moments of self to experience the karmic effects created by the earlier moments of self.

9. If the Realists asserted that the later moments of self experience the karmic effects created by the earlier moments of self, despite the earlier and later moments of self being generated out of their own nature, then that would be the equivalent to saying that the karma that is created by one person could then be experienced by a completely different person.

### Summary of the faults concerning karma

In summary we have three distinctive faults posited.

1. If the earlier and later moments of self were generated out of their own nature, then the later moments of self would be completely unrelated to the previous life.

2. The karma that is created by the earlier moments of self would lose its potential, so even though the karma is created, there would be no effect.

3. If, despite all the things said above, one says that the karma created by the earlier moments of self is experienced by the later moments of self, then we would get the fault of karma that is created by one person could then be experienced by a complete different person.

You know that the karma that is created by one individual has to be experienced by the same individual. We don't have the situation where the fruits of the karma created by one person are then experienced by another - that's not how it works. The karma that is created by one person also has to be experienced by that person, which can only come about if the earlier and later moments of the person form one continuum, which can only come about if they don't exist from their own side. By relating the selflessness of person to cause and effect in this way, one's understanding will become more profound. The karma created by an earlier moment of the self can only be experienced by the later moment of the self if those earlier and later moments of self form a continuity, and they can only form a continuity if they don't exist from their own side. If they exist from their own side then we get the fault that karma that is created by one person can be experienced by a completely different person.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.2. Refuting attempts at damage control by the Realists

*If, 'There is not fault if existing as continuum in suchness',  
The faults of a continuum were pointed out during the  
earlier investigation.*

*Therefore the aggregates and the mind are unsuitable as  
self.*

*Mirror:*

The Realists say, 'Even though the earlier and later moments are different from each other out of their own nature, because they *exist as* one *continuum in suchness* there is *no fault*'.

That is their attempt at damage control.

Then Chandrakirti says, 'This is invalid. *The faults of something inherently different forming a continuum were pointed out earlier*'

You remember the different discussions we had about

intrinsic earlier and later moments forming a continuum, and how that was not possible because intrinsic earlier and later moments are totally unrelated. This was the focus of the debates relating to two people called Jampa and Nyerbai. That is something that has been discussed in great detail.

Chandrakirti says here that the Realists argument is invalid, and that the reasons have all been pointed out earlier.

It follows that *the aggregates and the mind are unsuitable* to be the *self* because if they were then there would be the faults of meeting karma not created, and the karma created dissipating.

Regarding those different assertions of the aggregates being the self and the mental aggregate being the self, we have already heard that the focal object of the 'I'-grasping is the mere 'I'. If we analyse our way of thinking, then we will find that this innate thought thinking 'I' does not arise in relation to the aggregates, and does not arise in relation to the mental aggregate. It only arises in relation to the mere 'I'. The focal object of the innate mind thinking 'I' has to be the mere 'I'. It doesn't arise in relation to anything else, and this mere 'I' then cannot be found at the time of analysis, it cannot withstand analysis. Reflecting in this way will also be conducive for one's understanding. The focal object of this innate awareness thinking, 'I' cannot withstand analysis, and the more one looks for it, the more it seems to be unfindable. This of course is also related to their appearance to our mind. To our mind the appearance of the focal object of mere 'I' is mixed with the object of negation, the intrinsic 'I'.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.2.2. Offering proof showing that the assertion is invalid

The assertion referred to in this heading is that the self is inherently of one nature with the aggregates. This outline offers proof showing that this assertion is invalid. If the self were inherently of one nature with the aggregates, then it would have to be one with the aggregates. So by showing that the self is not one with the aggregates, one refutes that the self is inherently of one nature with the aggregates.

*Because the worlds not having an end etc.*

Take the subject 'the aggregates' it follows they aren't the self, because if the aggregates were the self, then the self and the worlds would have an end and so forth, which they don't have.

This relates to the *fourteen unpredicted views* by the Buddha. They are given this name simply because the Buddha did not explain them. For example, the definition of non-virtuous karma is *being predicted by the Buddha and abiding within the family of having a black karmic effect*. The definition of virtuous karma is *being predicted by the Buddha and abiding within the family of having a white karmic effect*. What we refer to as neutral karma is literally unpredicted karma. In this context unpredicted means to be neither virtuous nor non-virtuous. But in the context of the *fourteen unpredicted views* unpredicted means that the Buddha didn't say anything with regard to those fourteen views and not that they can't be non-virtuous. The reason he

didn't answer when asked those question was because they were asked either on the assumption that a self of person existed, or the questioner wasn't ready to receive the answer from the point of view of a merely labelled self.

The fourteen unpredicted views are:

- 1-4. *The worlds have an end, they have no end, they have both, they have neither.*
- 5-8. *The worlds are permanent, impermanent, both or neither.*
- 9-12. *A tathagata exists after death, doesn't exist after death, both or neither.*
13. *The body and the life force are truly existent one*
14. *They are truly existent different.*

Why didn't the Buddha answer those questions? The **first reason** is because a non-Buddhist was asking the question from the point of view of the self of person. Where is the relationship between the worlds and the self of person? It is that the worlds are that which the self of person engages. The self of person is the object of negation, which non-Buddhists propound as existent, and the worlds are that which is engaged by the self of person. Since the self of person is non-existent, the worlds are not really that which is engaged by the self of person. Therefore it is not a relevant question. The question is based on a non-existent, so that's why the Buddha didn't answer it. This reasoning relates to all fourteen questions.

The **second reason** the Buddha did not give an answer even from the point of view of the illusory merely labelled 'I' is because the questioner was not a suitable vessel for it to be explained.

The non-Buddhist tenet called the Carvaka, which does not accept past lives and future lives, holds the view that the worlds do have an end. The Samkya, which we also discussed before, believe that there are future lives. They hold the view that the worlds don't have an end. But in all those cases, because the question is based on the belief in this self of person, the Buddha didn't answer.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.2.3. Showing other proof contradicting those asserting the aggregates to be the self

Here those asserting the aggregates to be the self will be refuted from the point of view of the path. Previously they were refuted from the point of view of the basis, where what was analysed was the basis. Now what will be analysed is the path.

*When your yogis see selflessness  
Phenomena definitely become non-existent.  
Because of that, at this time, when abandoning the  
permanent self  
Your mind or aggregates are not the self.  
Your yogis, by seeing selflessness  
Don't realise the suchness of form and so forth,  
And because of engaging forms etc. upon focus, attachment  
etc.  
Is generated. There is no realisation of their identity.*

Mirror:

Chandrakirti states, 'According to *you*, Sammitiya-Vaibashika it follows that *when yogis see selflessness* directly, the *phenomena* of the aggregates

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*definitely become non-existent* - because the aggregates are the self'.

The reason given is that the aggregates are the self. Here, because the aggregates are the intrinsically existing self, and because when realising selflessness directly while on the path of seeing one sees directly the absence of the intrinsically existent self, then logically one should also see the absence of the aggregates. Therefore, if the aggregates were the intrinsic self then the aggregates should become as non-existent as the intrinsic self.

**Chandrakirti** says to the Sammitiya-Vaibashika, 'According to your point of view a yogi who realises selflessness directly should realise the absence of the aggregates, because according to you the aggregates are the inherently existent self'. Of course the absence of an inherently existent self is something that the Prasangika accept, but it is not something that the **Vaibhashikas** accept. That is the real point of saying that 'They realise the absence of the aggregates because they realise the absence of the inherently existent self.

To this, the Sammitiya Vaibhashika reply, 'There is no fault because when the yogis realise the absence of a permanent, single, independent self'.

The Sammitiya-Vaibashika say 'The yogi doesn't realise the absence of a nominal self, the yogi only realises the absence of a permanent, solitary, independent self, and therefore your fault is non-existent'. According to the Vaibashika, when the yogi realises selflessness he only realises the absence of a permanent, solitary, independent self. He doesn't realise the absence of the self that is the basis for a cause and effect.

The **Prasangika** say that when the yogi realises selflessness, then he actually realises the absence of the Vaibashika's nominal self that is the basis of cause and effect. Why? Because the nominal self that is asserted as the basis for cause and effect by the Vaibashika is asserted to be findable at the time of analysis.

The **Vaibashika** say that the nominal self that is the basis for karmic cause and effect is findable at the time of analysis, and that it is not negated by the wisdom realising selflessness on the path of seeing. But the **Prasangika** say, 'On the path of the path of seeing the yogi realises the absence of the nominal self that is the basis of cause and effect as asserted by you. Why? Because your nominal self is findable at the time of analysis, but anything that is asserted as findable at the time of analysis is realised to be non-existent by the path of seeing. The actual nominal self is unfindable at the time of analysis'. This is a subtle point made by Lama Tsong Khapa in his explanation.

Here the opponent is not satisfied with a self that cannot be found at the time of analysis. They think that there has to be something more to the self. Therefore they say the self has to be findable at the time of analysis. But findability at the time of analysis and inherent existence and intrinsic existence are the same according to the Prasangika, and are therefore the object of negation. That's why the Prasangika say the path of seeing realises the absence of anything that is findable at the time of analysis and therefore it also realises the absence of self

that is findable at the time of analysis.

One thing to understand is that the grasping at a permanent solitary independent self is a purely intellectual grasping, not an innate grasping. That is an important point to understand. Even though the Sammitiya-Vaibashika realise the absence of a permanent solitary independent self, they still seem to have this notion that there is a self that is a substantial existent in one way or another. When they say that the path of seeing realises the absence of a permanent, solitary, independent self, that's their object of negation and they don't go any deeper. There is lots of debate about this particular view of the Sammitiya-Vaibashika.

One has to meditate on these different things and not just of say, 'That's something the Vaibashika don't accept', or 'That's something that the Vaibashika accept'. One has to meditate for oneself, refuting the inherently existent 'I'. Think about it. If the 'I' were to be inherently one with the aggregates, then it would have to be really completely one, and then that would lead to the fault of there having to be many 'I's', and since there are not many 'I's' then the 'I' cannot be inherently one with the aggregates and so forth. It has to be related to one's understanding.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernie Wright  
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# DISCUSSION

BLOCK: 3  
WEEK: 5

ASSIGNED: 8<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 04

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1. Verse 120 says "the yogi strives to refute the self". Explain. What self? Which self is to be abandoned and which self is to be left alone?
2. Why should one want to become free from the transitory view? Why is it the origin of all the various types of sufferings?
3. At which link in the 12 dependent links can you break out?
4. What thought could generate real renunciation?
5. Define true grasping. In addition, describe the two types of self-grasping at person.
6. Why do those seeking liberation have to understand the selflessness of person first?
7. What is it about this self that the Samkyas proclaim – make it devoid of birth – like the foal of a mule?
8. Describe, from the point of view of a non-Buddhist – a self that is separate from the five aggregates?
9. After establishing that the self is not apart from the aggregates, some Buddhist schools conclude that the self must be then connected to the aggregates. What is wrong with this logical conclusion? Outline two simple ways to prove that the self cannot be the five aggregates?
10. How might the assertion of a truly existing self disrupt the workings of karma? What are the 'three distinctive faults' concerning karma?
11. What is the focal object for the thought that thinks "I" grasping? How would one meditate on it?
12. Assuming the self is the aggregates, when you reach nirvana (without remainder), and your aggregates are cut off – who is it then that reached nirvana?
13. Why did the Buddha refuse to answer the questions of the 'fourteen unpredicted views'?
14. Why is the grasping at a permanent solitary independent self a purely intellectual grasping, and not an innate grasping?



**Tara Institute Study Group 2004 - 'Introduction to the Middle Way'**

**EXAM**

BLOCK: **3**  
WEEK: **6**  
ASSIGNED: **15<sup>TH</sup> JULY 04**

TOTAL MARKS **/23**

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1. Define true grasping. In addition, describe the two types of self-grasping at person. [3]

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2. How can having the view of *transitory collections* be the cause for all your problems? [4]

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3. "... *having realised the self to be its object, yogis strive to negate the self.*" Explain the difference between the self that is to be rejected, and the self that is to be left alone. [2]

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4. Why do those seeking liberation have to understand the selflessness of person first? [2]

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5. Describe, from the point of view of a non-Buddhist – a self that is separate from the five aggregates? [3]

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6. After establishing that the self is not apart from the aggregates, some Buddhist schools conclude that the self must be then connected to the aggregates. What is wrong with this logical conclusion? Outline two simple ways to prove that the self cannot **be** the five aggregates? [4]

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7. How might the assertion of a truly existing self disrupt the workings of karma? [2]

8. Why did the Buddha refuse to answer the questions of the 'fourteen unpredicted views'?  
[3]