

## Study Group - Bodhicharyavatara

༄༅། །བྱང་ཆུབ་སེམས་དཔའི་སྤོང་པ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་བརྒྱལ་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Generate a virtuous motivation for listening to the teachings thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings, and in order to achieve this aim I am now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I am going to put it into practice as much as possible'.

Last time we talked about the refutation of the self-knower, and the **Mind Only** view that if there is no self-knower then nominal existence is non-existent. The **Prasangikas** reply is that such is not the case. They say that even though objects lack true existence they can still exist nominally, and that what should be refuted is true-grasping of objects and object possessors, which constitutes the root of cyclic existence.

### 2.1.2.2.2.2.2.3.3. Refuting that if there is no self knower, there couldn't be an other-knower (cont.)

Refuting that it is inexpressible whether an illusion is one with or different from the mind

*If, 'There is no illusion apart from mind  
And that they are not different is also not true.  
If a phenomenon then how is it not other?  
If asserted not to be different then there is no  
phenomenon.* [26]

*Just as illusions, though non-true, are  
The perceived object, the perceivers are alike.* [27ab]

The **Mind Only** say there are no illusions, i.e. forms and so forth, that are of different substance from mind. 'And that they are not different is also not true' can have two meanings. It can mean 'the object is also not mind itself', or it can mean 'and they are not truly of one substance'.

To this the **Madhyamaka** reply that if the illusions of form and so forth, i.e. the objects and their object possessors, are truly existent phenomena, then how can these objects not be of different substance from their object possessors?

How one arrives at this conclusion is that if the object exists truly then it has to be of different substance. Why? Because if the object exists truly then it has to be true, and if it is true then it has to exist the way it appears.

Here one needs an understanding of false and true. Being **false** means not existing in the way it appears. That makes objects false. An object is **true** if it exists in the way it appears. So if the object exists truly then it has to be true. It follows that it has to exist in the way it appears. As the object appears as an external object it has to also exist in that manner. That is the consequence that the **Prasangika** see for the **Mind Only**.

Here the **Mind Only** reply that objects and object-

possessors are not of different substance. To this the **Madhyamaka** say, 'Then, in that case, they cannot exist truly, because in that case all appearances of outer objects are false. Objects do not exist the way they appear, and as such cannot exist truly. Just as illusory-like form and so forth are nominally that which is perceived, though not existing truly, the six types of mind can nominally be the perceivers, while not existing truly.

This connects up with what was said two verses ago, where the **Prasangika** were telling the **Mind Only** not to worry about refuting nominal existence, and saying that objects could exist still nominally even though they lack true existence.

### 2.1.2.2.2.2.2.4. Refuting that imputed existence is dependent on truly existent phenomena<sup>1</sup>

*If, 'Cyclic existence is based on phenomena,  
Otherwise it would become like space?' [27cd]*

*If non-phenomena are based on phenomena [28]  
How can they perform an action?  
Your mind becomes completely isolated,  
Without any support.*

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

### Three characteristics

This outline pertains to the very basic reason for which the **Mind Only** assert true existence. They feel that mental constructs need truly existent phenomenon for their basis. This is why they have the view of the three characteristics: dividing phenomena into other-powered phenomena, conceptual creations and thoroughly-established phenomena.

- The definition of *other-powered phenomenon* is a **phenomenon that arises in dependence on causes and conditions**.
- The definition of *conceptual fabrications* is a **phenomenon which is merely imputed by conceptual thought**.
- The definition of *thoroughly-established phenomena* is **the final object of a pure path**.

They say that of these three categories, other-powered, and thoroughly-established phenomena exist truly, while mental fabrications lack true existence. They do say, however, that all three exist from their own side.

You can see that this is not the uncommon view of the **Prasangika**, which equates intrinsic existence with true existence. Here the meaning of true existence is to be established out of its uncommon mode of abiding, which applies to thoroughly established phenomena as well as other-powered phenomena. Mental fabrications, however, don't exist out of their own uncommon mode of abiding, but exist out of a common mode of abiding. That is why they don't exist truly. The meaning of *existing out of a common mode of abiding* is that the object's mode of abiding is the mode of appearance to, and apprehension

<sup>1</sup> Last week it was expressed as Refuting that imputed objects exist truly.

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by, conceptual thought. Mental fabrications share their existence with the mode of apprehension by, and appearance to, the conceptual thought.

That is why they are mental fabrications - they don't really have anything from their own side, but they exist only within the apprehension by, and the appearance to, the conceptual thought.

Other-powered and thoroughly-established phenomena are said to not have this shared existence with conceptual thought. They exist out of their own uncommon mode of abiding.

### The basis of imputation

The idea is that truly existent other-powered phenomena act as the basis for mental fabrications. There is a nominal distinction made between the basis of imputation and the final basis of imputation. Other-powered phenomena in general are the basis of imputation for mental fabrications. The final basis of imputation refers to the valid cognition apprehending the object. So, for example, the valid cognition apprehending form would be the final basis of imputation for form, but it would not be the actual basis of imputation. You have to make a distinction between being the figurative basis of imputation and being the actual basis of imputation. The final basis of imputation is only referred to as the basis of imputation, but it is not the actual basis of imputation. For example, even though the valid cognition apprehending space is regarded as the final basis of imputation of space, it is not the actual basis of imputation of space.

For the **Mind Only** conventional existence does not make sense if it does not possess true existence as its basis. They say, for example, that liberation from cyclic existence, or bondage to cyclic existence would be impossible without true existence. They also feel that one couldn't posit the different paths such as the path of preparation and so forth without the basis of true existence. This highlights the uncommon feature of the **Prasangika**, where no true existence is needed at all.

The **Mind Only** say that false imputed phenomena such as cyclic existence and so forth need to have as their basis truly existent phenomena, just as the false phenomenon of the snake is imputed on the truly existent rope.

The **Mind Only** say that if there is not another truly existent phenomenon on which the mistaken appearance of cyclic existence is based, then there would be no phenomenon at all. The line 'otherwise it would become like space' refers to the deceptive appearance of cyclic existence being based on another truly existent phenomenon. If there were no other truly existent phenomena on which the mistaken appearance of cyclic existence is based, then the mistaken appearance of cyclic existence would be like space in that it would be a non-functionality. It would not be able to perform any function, and it would be completely meaningless to say that one could become liberated from, or take rebirth in, cyclic existence. Then comes the **Prasangika** response, which is a consequence that highlights the fault in the **Mind Only** position. If non-truly existent phenomena are based on truly existent phenomena then how can they perform actions? If non-truly existent false phenomena

such as cyclic existence and so forth, are based on truly existent phenomena that act as the basis for the deception, then how could effects such as bondage to cyclic existence and liberation from cyclic existence and so forth occur, since there would be no truly existent basis.

This is actually a reasoning that is mentioned in the *Compendium of Deeds*. Because cyclic existence is a false phenomenon it needs as its basis a truly existent. Only in that way can liberation from cyclic existence, the practice of the six perfections and so forth, happen. However since we have already said that it is a false phenomena, how could there be any true existence within the false phenomena? Since there is no true existence there within the false phenomena, true existence is not established by valid cognition. That is why there is no true existence. Can you see how the **Prasangika** use the fault that is present in the **Mind Only** view as the reason to refute that view?

The **Prasangika** say, 'Your viewpoint is a contradiction, asserting that true phenomena can act as the basis for false phenomena. That notion is an oxymoron. It doesn't work!' That is why they ask how the non-phenomena could perform any function.

In 'Your mind becomes completely isolated without any support' the **Prasangika** are speaking to the **Mind Only**. First of all you don't accept an outer object that is of different substance from consciousness, so there cannot be a consciousness that is not tainted by an object of different substance. If the object exists truly of one substance with the consciousness then a whole series of faults arise. For example, if you have a truly existent object then the object becomes completely unrelated to the consciousness. But since the **Mind Only** say that the object and the consciousness are of one substance it becomes like having an *unrelated one*. Then you have this situation of a completely unrelated one, where the object cannot taint the object possessor. In both cases there is no situation where the object possessor can actually be tainted - the grasping at subject and object being of different substance. That is why it says, 'Your mind becomes completely isolated'.

'According to your own point of view the mind becomes completely isolated. If you say that the object is of a truly existent one substance, then in that case the mind becomes completely isolated, because a truly existent object is actually completely unrelated to the mind. Even though you say it is one, it actually becomes a truly completely unrelated one. In that case the mind becomes completely isolated, without any support. Here 'support' is the negative support of self-grasping, referring to the confusion regarding object and object possessor being of different substance and so forth.

'In either case it is impossible for the mind to be tainted. Since the mind is completely devoid of any kind of appearance or perception that the object and object possessor are of different substance, then naturally all sentient beings would effortlessly be liberated and go to the state of enlightenment.

'If that is the case then what is the benefit of having the mental construct of *mere mind*? What would be the actual

benefit of the view of mere mind or mind-only, if that view actually leads to the conclusion that the mind cannot be tainted by anything? What you actually arrive at is the conclusion that the mind would naturally be pure. The mind would be devoid of the perception that the object possessor is of different substance, so naturally the mind would be pure, and so naturally and effortlessly everyone would go to liberation and enlightenment.

'This effort of forming the Mind Only view in order to attain liberation and enlightenment and practice the path becomes completely pointless if it just leads to the conclusion that actually the mind cannot be tainted by anything i.e. if it just leads to the conclusion that everybody would go naturally to enlightenment.'

### 2.1.2.3. REFUTING THE CONSEQUENCE THAT THE MIDDLE WAY HAS NO POWER<sup>2</sup>

2.1.2.3.1. The debate

2.1.2.3.2. Rebutting the debate

2.1.2.3.1. *The debate*

*Although knowing it to be like an illusion [30]  
How can the afflictions be opposed  
Even the creator himself  
Generates attachment for the illusory-like woman.*

The **Mind Only** say that realising that all existence lacks true existence and is illusory-like serves no purpose, and does not have the power to overcome mental afflictions.

The Mind Only ask, 'Does realising that all phenomena are like an illusion lacking true existence have any purpose? If it does not have any purpose then what point is there in mentioning it? If one says the main purpose is to overcome mental afflictions, then that is also incorrect, because the realisation of things being illusory does not have the power to overcome the mental afflictions. One can know that something is an illusion and still have mental afflictions about that illusion. For example, the creator of the illusion can himself generate attachment for the illusion of the woman that he has created thinking, 'Oh, I wish it was a real woman!'. Even though he knows that he himself created the illusion of the woman, it is still possible for him to generate attachment to that illusion. For that reason realising that everything lacks true existence like an illusion does not really overcome mental afflictions. Because your emptiness is only emptiness that arises through listening and contemplation it does not really have any power to overcome the afflictions.

Here the Mind Only are obviously criticising the Prasangika view of emptiness.

### Review

Why does one need to realise emptiness in order to overcome true grasping?

*Student: inaudible*

That is right. You cannot abandon true grasping without realising that the apprehended object of true grasping is not existent.

What kind of awareness is true grasping?

*Student: Mistaken.*

What makes it a mistaken awareness?

*Student: It misapprehends its focal object.*

Isn't there a common basis between mistaken consciousness and a valid cognition?

*Student: There is in the case of a conventional cogniser.*

Ah, and in the case of an ultimate valid cognition?

*Student: I'd have to say no.*

What about the inferential cogniser realising emptiness? If it is a conceptual thought then it is always a mistaken consciousness. So true-grasping is a wrong awareness, a distorted awareness. The wisdom realising emptiness is a valid cognition. So their mode of apprehension is directly opposed to each other.

The true-grasping holding the vase to be truly existent is a distorted consciousness. In order to understand that it is actually a distorted consciousness, and in order to oppose that, one needs to generate the wisdom that understands that the object is non-existent. Then the mode of apprehension of that wisdom is directly opposed to the mode of apprehension of true-grasping. It becomes the contradictory equivalent.

So we still have the problem of Wayne not understanding what blue is. Don't you have to say that when your eyes see blue then you see blue? If it realises an object such as blue or emptiness it doesn't have to be consciousness. It can be also the person. For example we say that arya beings realise emptiness directly. Why do we say this? Because they possess the wisdom that realises emptiness directly. Do you accept that?

*Student: Yes.*

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks*

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*Edited Version*

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<sup>2</sup> Ed: Geshe-la is using a text by Lama Tsong Khapa, where the heading outline is slightly different from that initially adopted. On February 22, there was a list of three sub-headings under 2.1.2. Refuting objections: 2.1.2.1. Refuting objections of worldly beings; 2.1.2.2. Refuting objections of hearers and 2.1.2.3. Refuting objections by Mind Only.

It would appear that in Lama Tsong Kapa's text Refuting objections of the Mind Only was a subset of 2.1.2.1. Refuting the objections of worldly beings, and that this heading is the second part of Refuting objections. However to keep the numbering consistent, we have utilised the number 2.1.2.3. for this heading.