

Study Group - “Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Try to reinforce the bodhicitta mind that you have just generated, and strongly think that the reason you are receiving these teachings is to follow them, and put them into practice. The goal of following this practice is to achieve the state of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

Prerequisites For Realising Emptiness

The teachings on special insight mention the need to gather all the suitable conditions to realise emptiness, or the ultimate truth. These suitable conditions include:

1. Finding a perfect master, and receiving from him or her all the instructions on realising emptiness, completely and without any error.
2. Gathering enough merit, and also purifying all obstructions.
3. Praying to one's guru or spiritual guide, seeing the guru as being inseparable from one's special deity.

Engaging in the practice of guru yoga, seeing the guru as inseparable from one's favourite deity, is the practice one especially undertakes to gain the realisation of emptiness. For the realisation of emptiness, it is recommended to see the guru as inseparable from Manjushri, as Manjushri is the deity of wisdom, the manifestation of the wisdom of an enlightened being. Praying and relying on Manjushri indicates the special connection. It is just the same as seeing the guru as inseparable from Avalokiteshvara or Chenrezig if one's practice is to cultivate love and compassion, because Chenrezig is the embodiment of all the compassion of all the Buddhas. The implication here is that the realisation of emptiness will only occur when all the necessary suitable conditions are met, which in turn depends upon having created the right cause.

The Four Buddhist Schools Of Philosophy Or Tenets

There are four main Buddhist schools of tenets or philosophy in early Indian Buddhism. Each school of philosophy has its own presentation of the ultimate view of reality.

The Prasangika View of Emptiness

The view of emptiness presented by the Prasangikas or Consequence School is considered as the ultimate thought of the Buddha. It is also a unique view, in the sense that it illuminates not only how things exist in an ultimate sense, but at the same time, it explains how things exist conventionally or nominally. The Prasangika presentation of emptiness combines the teachings of both method and wisdom. It is said that the Prasangika view of emptiness is presented in such a way that the meaning of emptiness indicates the meaning of dependent arising, and the meaning of dependent arising indicates the meaning of emptiness.

The way the Prasangika school presents the meaning of emptiness is that things lack inherent existence. That is, they do not exist by way of the phenomena's own character. It is a view which clearly indicates that everything is empty of any existence that is not depending on any causes or parts, or the collection of causes and parts. When the view of emptiness is presented in this way, it naturally implies that things occur in dependence on dependent arising.

To the Prasangika school, the meaning of dependent arising is that things depend upon causes and conditions and parts, or

the collection of the causes and conditions and parts. That meaning of dependent arising automatically gives the meaning of emptiness. In this respect, the presentation of emptiness by the Prasangika school, i.e. the way the meaning of emptiness and dependent arising compliment one another, is said to be unique to that school of tenet. None of the other schools of tenets use this presentation.

These different schools of tenets are all based on the Buddha's teachings, yet each seems to offer a different explanation of what the Buddha taught on emptiness. Essentially this shows the Lord Buddha's quality and skill in guiding his followers. As the Buddha had clairvoyant powers he could read the minds of others. Through his supramundane qualities, the Buddha was also able to understand all the predispositions, mental aptitudes and mental capacities of all other beings. Therefore the Buddha taught the Dharma in a way that suited the varying requirements of his followers.

As a result, with regard to teaching the view of selflessness, there are four main schools of tenets. The Vaibashikas (the school of Particularists) and the Sautrantikas (the school of Sutras) are the two lesser schools of tenets. The two higher schools of tenets are the Cittamatrins, or the Mind Only School, and the Madhyamika, which is the Middle Way School.

The Two Lower Schools - Vaibashika and Sautrantika

The first view of selflessness which the Buddha taught, is that phenomena are empty of a substantially existent self, in the sense of self sufficiency. This view of emptiness is asserted by the two lower schools of tenets.

Cittamatin or Mind Only School

After that, the Buddha taught the second highest view, which is the view held by the Mind Only School. Here the Buddha distinguishes between those phenomena which exist truly, and those which are empty of such true existence. In fact, in the Cittamatin, or Mind Only school, all phenomena are divided into three categories.

1. Dependent phenomena or objects.
2. Fully established phenomena.

Both first and second categories are said to truly exist

3. Imputed phenomena. All the things which belong to this third category of imputed phenomena are said to be empty of true existence.

Madhyamika Middle Way School

Higher than this, is the Mahayana School of Middle Way, of which there are two sub-schools.

Svatantrika Middle Way School

Following after the Cittamatin view of selflessness, is the first [of the Middle Way schools], the Middle Way School of Svatantrika, the school of Autonomists which presents the view taught by the Buddha [on] selflessness. The view of selflessness presented by the Autonomists states that all phenomena are empty of true existence, however they exist inherently.

Prasangika Middle Way (Consequence) School

Finally Buddha taught that all things are empty even of inherent existence. That is the view presented by the School of

Consequence, or Prasangika Middle Way School. It reflects the final view of the Lord Buddha.

Which are the Authentic Commentaries?

In fact, anyone who seeks the state of liberation must realise the meaning of emptiness, which is also called suchness. To do this, one must depend upon the Buddha's teachings on the meaning of emptiness. Furthermore, the Buddha's teachings are difficult to understand directly. So it is important to follow the very authentic later commentaries on the Buddha's teachings.

The question is, of course, whose teachings should one follow to gain this understanding of the meaning of emptiness? If you read the lam rim commentary, you will see that two great masters are listed – Nagarjuna and Chandrakirti.

The Buddha himself prophesied that Nagarjuna would be the master who would spread the Buddha's teachings on the view of emptiness, and cause them to flourish. The glorious Chandrakirti is said to be the true holder of the view of emptiness, which was taught by Nagarjuna. In the lam rim commentary, it is emphasised that following the legacy of these two great masters is the only way to find the Middle View of emptiness. There is no hope of gaining this view of emptiness using any other way.

In *Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path*, Lama Tsong Khapa said that even though the glorious Chandrakirti had already attained a high level of Bodhisattva in some other pure land of Buddhas, he appeared in this world specifically to illuminate the import of Nagarjuna's teachings. Chandrakirti's authority to comment on the teachings of Nagarjuna, even Nagarjuna's commentaries on Tantra, is absolutely authentic, and there is no possibility whatsoever of any mistakes. That is what Lama Tsong Khapa said.

If Chandrakirti is the master we should rely upon to understand all of Nagarjuna's teachings and thoughts, and thereby to understand the teaching of the Lord Buddha, the next thing is how does Chandrakirti teach on selflessness? What basis does he use to teach emptiness, and what types of reasonings are employed to explain the meaning of emptiness?

The basis of Chandrakirti's teaching on emptiness is the person and all the parts of the person, such as their sense organs (their eyes, nose and so forth), and all those other phenomena that are included within the continuum of the person. These are used to define two types of self-grasping. Just as there are two types of selflessness, there are the two types of self-grasping – the self-grasping of person and self-grasping of phenomena. These two self-grasplings serve as the cause, which binds sentient beings to cyclic existence.

The person is the basis upon which self-grasping of person arises, and so it is the basis upon which to teach the selflessness of person. Self-grasping of person is some sense of 'I', 'I' and 'Mine', 'Me' which we innately experience deep within us at all times. Whereas the person's eyes, nose and so forth and other phenomena are the basis for generating self-grasping of phenomena, and so they are the basis upon which the view of selflessness of phenomena is taught.

The main reasons used to explain the meaning of emptiness are Refuting the Four Extremes Of Production, or Extreme Ways Of Arising. The other main reasoning taught by Chandrakirti is the Reason of Seven Aspects. By mainly using those two types of reasoning, these two views of a self [of persons] and of other phenomena are negated.

In the last teaching, we discussed the order of presentation of the two types of selflessness in the lam rim teaching. The selflessness of a person is presented first, because this order best suits meditation practice. The text also indicates that even though there is no difference between these two selflessnesses in terms of subtlety, there is a difference in terms of the ease of realising them: the selflessness of a person is easier to realise than the selflessness of other phenomena.

Regarding the order of realising the two types of selflessness,

Aryadeva's text *Four Hundred Verses* says that firstly beings eradicate the extreme view of denial or nihilism, the view which negates or denies the law of karma and its effects. After this, they eradicate the view of self-grasping of person, and then they eradicate the view of self-grasping of other phenomena.

As we said, in elaborating this view of selflessness of person, many types of logic are possible. However it is said that for the beginner, the reasonings of the lack of oneness and difference are the easiest means to understand the view of selflessness.

As we said last time Lama Tsong Khapa gave a detailed commentary on how these reasons of a lack of oneness and difference are elaborated into the four points of analysis. These four points of analysis are explained in detail in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Medium Exposition of the Stages of the Path*. Numerous followers of Lama Tsong Khapa also used this reasoning of the lack of oneness and difference in the four points of analysis as the main reasons to establish the view of emptiness.

Next week is discussion week. When we begin the teaching next time, we shall begin from the first point of analysis, which is identifying the object of negation.

Traditionally, when they come to this topic of ascertaining the object of negation, teachers pause in the teachings for a day or two. During this break the students are instructed to go and look for the self. Maybe you can go and do that.

Here the object of negation is the self which is conceived by the view of self-grasping of a person. We are referring to the experience of a sense of 'I', which we always feel strongly within ourself. When we talk of the self-grasping view, we are talking about this sense of 'I' which innately or spontaneously arises in us. Therefore, the way to identify this self, which is the object of negation (or what emptiness is empty of), is to try and sit in meditation, and as much as possible try to fully relax your body. Then try to observe this sense of 'I' which is within yourself. Then when you see that 'I', explore what kind of existence that 'I' or self has, and what its status is. That is the way to identify the object of negation.

In the lam rim commentary we are using, we are already up to the topic of identifying the object of negation. However before that the lam rim commentary includes a number of personal stories about the effort Lama Tsong Khapa made, and the stages he went through in his life as he tried to gain this view of emptiness. It would be beneficial if you could read that section.

Query: Is the sense of 'mine' also self-grasping of person?

Geshe-la: All phenomena can be divided into two, the person and all phenomena other than the person. All other phenomena mean all phenomena, which are not the person. The person and all that is included within the continuum of the person (eyes, nose etc) are the basis for teaching both the selflessness of person and the selflessness of all other phenomena. In the teachings we mentioned the parts of the person, like the eyes, nose and so forth. Of course these parts are included in the continuum of the person, but they are not the person. They are the bases of other phenomena, and they are the basis for teaching the selflessness of other phenomena.

Query: I thought the notion of 'mine' was an example of self of person, not self of phenomenon. I am distinguishing 'I' from 'mine'. I impute 'mine' and then I have the appearance of 'mine', and that is an example of the self of person and not the self of phenomena.

Geshe-la: As you said, it is the sense of 'mine', in that context which is also the self-grasping of a person. We talk of the different types of wrong view, one is the wrong view of the transitory collection, where we talk of the wrong view of 'I' and 'mine', and both are considered to be the self-grasping of a person, or the conception of the self-grasping of a person. This conception of 'I' or 'mine', is just 'mine' without qualifying that 'mine' with the specific ownership of the object, by saying 'my hand', 'my leg' and so forth. That is the conception of the self-

grasping of a person.

Next week is discussion week. For the compulsory question for the coming written text, you must explain the meaning of the verse from Bhavaviveka's text *Heart of the Middle Way*. Roughly translated the verse refers to the way in which the wild elephant of the mind, when it is tied to the pole of mindfulness and disciplined with the iron hook of alertness, can be fully tamed.

When we discussed the meaning of this verse in the teachings, there was also reference to the meaning of these words in Kamalashila's *Stages of Meditation*, where he commented on the analogy slightly differently from the way commonly known. Study these differences from your notes.¹

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¹ Editor: See Lam Rim class dated 16th November 1999
