

# Study Group - "Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལམ་གྱི་ལམ་གྱི་བཅའ་བུ་བཅུ་དཔལ་



30 May 2000

Cultivate the right motivation, understanding that the reason for taking this teaching, and engaging in this practice, is to achieve the state of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings.

## The Logical Proposition to be Tested

Of the two types of selflessness, the selflessness of person is explained first in the Lam Rim style teachings. Although there are various forms of reasoning that can be used to establish this ultimate view of the selflessness of person, here we are using the reasoning called Lacking Oneness and Many. This is the one which Lama Tsong Khapa explained extensively, specifically in the text *The Medium Stages of the Path*. The teaching on selflessness by applying this reasoning of Lacking Oneness and Many, is said to be the experiential explanation. When this reasoning is examined using the Four Points of Analysis as a basis, the formal logical statement (or syllogism) can be summarised as the person (or the subject of our study), is empty of true or inherent existence (the predicate), because it does not truly exist as one and many (the reason).

## 422.331.221.11 Identifying the Object of Negation

We will now explain this reasoning of Lacking Oneness and Many using the first of the Four Points Of Analysis - Identifying the Object of Negation.

Here the focus is on identifying the direct opposite of selflessness. In other words, what is that self which we are saying is selfless, or that the person is empty of, or which is not the person's mode of existence? That is the self which is the object of negation. In this analysis we are negating the self through applying the reasoning of Lacking Oneness and Many. As said earlier, this is one of the forms of reasoning that can be used.

## Two Types of Object of Negation

Generally speaking, we find that there are two types of object of negation.

The first is the object of negation of reasoning, which is something that is refuted by reasoning and logic.

The second is the object of negation of the path, which is something that is abandoned or eradicated by the spiritual path. The object of negation of the path refers to two types of obstruction: obstructions to liberation from cyclic existence, sometimes referred to as afflictive obscurations, and the obstructions to omniscient mind. As these two obstructions can be completely abandoned by the path, they are the object of negation of the path.

Of course when it comes to the meaning of these two types of obstructions the different schools of tenet have different views. For instance, according to Svatantrika

Madhyamika or Middle Way School of Autonomists, and as well the Mahayana School of Mind Only, the self-grasping of person is the obstruction to liberation, whereas the self-grasping of phenomena is the obstruction to omniscience.

However, according to the Middle Way School of Consequence or Prasangika Madhyamika, both types of self-grasping (of person and of phenomena) are obstructions to liberation. According to the Prasangika School, the obstructions to liberation principally include the two types of self-grasping and all the types of mental delusions, together with their seeds. However the obstructions to omniscience, according to Prasangika, are the latencies which are left behind by the two types of self-grasping, as well as by all the mental delusions.

To give some idea of how this school distinguishes between the latencies and seeds of delusions, the seeds of delusions are something that are capable of producing the delusions in the same continuum. Whereas, the latency of self-grasping or delusion is said to be some kind of propensity which can be a cause to bring about a misconception. For example, the misconception of true existence, which causes the appearance of true existence to arise in our mind, is the latency.

To understand this difference more clearly, think of the example of a poison, which is a by-product of some flower. When you talk of the seed of that poison, you refer to the seed of that particular flower, through which we can produce that poison. The poison has within it the force to cause hallucinations in the person who takes it. That force or capacity to produce the effect of hallucination is a bit like the latency of the two types of self-grasping.

We shall not go into further detail here, but if you want to do more study on the obstructions to liberation, then beside these two types of self-grasping, you can also study all the other types of delusions, which can be divided into the six types of root delusions, and the twenty secondary delusions and so forth.

## What Are We Trying to Establish?

To return to this object of negation reasoning, we started with this logical statement: the person (subject) lacks true existence (predicate) as both one and many (reason). What we are trying to establish with this thesis or assertion, is that the person is empty of true existence using the reason of Lack of One and Many. The object of negation is exactly the opposite to this thesis, which is the person's true existence.

You can talk of the object of negation of reasoning in

terms of both object and subject. When we take a person's true existence as the object of negation, then we are talking in terms of the objective object of negation. However if we take an ignorant mind which grasps at the true existence of person and phenomena, we are talking in terms of the subjective object of negation.

When you apply the reasoning of Lacking True Existence as One and Many, you are explicitly refuting person's true existence, which is the objective object of negation. At the same time, you are also negating the subjective object of negation.

In fact, if we absorb this syllogism, the logical statement which consists of Subject-Predicate-Reason, into our mind it can give the whole picture of what we are trying to establish. There are many valid reasons we can use. Whatever reason you apply, it is establishing something. Here the reason is to establish why the person is lacking true existence. Of course, we want to know why, or how, it establishes this lack.

We can say the person, or 'I', or self, is empty of true existence because it lacks true oneness and many. This reason is saying that anything which lacks true oneness or many must necessarily lack true existence. When you say this then conversely, it also implies that something which is truly existent must be either truly existent as one, or as many. There is no third possibility. This shows how you can understand the validity of the reason.

You can use dependent arising as a reason to establish that the person does not truly exist. In this case you are assuming that if something is dependent arising (meaning depending upon causes and conditions or its parts), it must necessarily be empty of true existence. Your reason also implies that if something exists truly, then it cannot be dependent arising for it should exist without depending on causes and conditions, or parts.

### **What Is the Object of Negation?**

The first thing one has to consider is the identification of the object of negation. When trying to identify the object of negation, you do not have to make some logical statement, or give some reason. It is essential to identify the object of negation because, as Shantideva said in his text, *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, without contacting the imputed object (the object of negation), its non-existence cannot be apprehended.

Before you are able to negate something you must first identify what is to be negated. This means identifying the self that is to be negated. The Lam Rim text uses the example of the target. Before you release the arrow, you must identify the target. Only after identifying the target can you direct the arrow. Otherwise it is not possible to hit the target. Likewise, to be able to apprehend a thief, you have to identify the thief very clearly.

According to the Middle Way School of Consequence, the terms 'the person is not truly existent', 'the person doesn't exist inherently', 'the person doesn't exist from its own side', 'by way of its own character', 'not existing ultimately' and 'not existing or not established truly', all have the same meaning. When we talk of identifying the object of negation, we are talking about identifying the opposite of all of the above terms.

If you say that the person is not truly existent, then you must identify 'true existence'. Likewise, if we say that the person exists inherently, then we must identify how the person exists inherently. Understanding all these terms means identifying the object of negation.

The scriptural source for identifying the object of negation is Chandrakirti's text *Explanation of 'Four Hundred Verses'*, *Four Hundred Verses* being a text by Aryadeva. In that text, Chandrakirti says that the self is that which is not dependent upon any other phenomena or any other things, but which exists inherently, or which is established by way of the object's own entity. This text is used as a scriptural source for identifying this object of negation. The same text also says that this self can be taught in terms of the self of person, and the self of phenomena.

Based on what is said of the object of negation in Chandrakirti's text, Lama Tsong Khapa's comments in his lam rim text, *The Medium Stages of the Path* that the self is something which we believe exists from its own side, having its own self sufficient mode of existence, not depending upon any conditions, and not depending on anything.

We have to gain some idea of this object of negation in our own mind, not just theoretically or intellectually but also practically and experientially. We need to try to identify what this object of negation is. If the person exists truly or inherently, what sort of existence would that person would have?

Examining the object of negation means finding if there is any object which is not dependent, which exists from its own side, in its own right, without depending on the designating or imputational mind, or name and terminology.

### **The Middle Way School of Consequence View**

According to the Middle Way School of Consequence, the existence of all phenomena is 'mere designation' or 'mere mental imputation'. Using the word 'mere' negates existence other than through mere designation by thought, or by name. This negates all existence from the phenomena's own side, or as existing from the side of the basis of designation.

When we think about things existing only as a 'mere designation' and as having no existence from their own side, this discredits their existence by themselves. When we think about that, it does not seem quite right. However what the School of Consequence is saying is that phenomena have no existence from their own side, or from the basis of designation. Phenomena do not exist from their own side in the sense that if you search for something, considering whether it can be identified from its parts as a whole, or from any particular part, or if it can be found within, or from the side of the basis of designation or imputation, it cannot be found. This unfindability of things is what the Prasangika school means when it says that things do not exist from their own side, and that their existence is mere designation.

It is also valid to think that if things exist from their own side, or from the side of the basis of designation, then they do not depend on the imputing mind or on the designating name or terminology. For instance, in the

case of a temple, if the temple exists from its own side, then it should be possible that from its own side it says 'I am a temple', and the mind that perceives it should naturally have the thought 'That is a temple'.

To cite the sutras on this as an example,

“Just as, for example, chariot is designated,  
To a collection parts,  
So, in dependence on the aggregates,  
Conventionally, a sentient being is named.”

The sutra also clearly says that when you talk of a person, it is something which exists by depending upon the aggregates.

The person is designated upon the aggregates of the person. That is why it says the person does not exist inherently, but rather exists as a mere designation. When it says the person is designated or imputed on the aggregates, what is to be considered is who designates the person? It is an imputing mind or designating name which designates the person onto the aggregates.

### **How Is The Person Designated Onto The Aggregates?**

The next thing to consider is how this process of designating the person onto the aggregates occurs. To understand this process of designation of the person by the imputing conceptual thought, you must consider how the spontaneous or innate thought of 'I', this mere self as a person, arises. When we consider it, this thought of 'I' arises in dependence upon aggregates. In other words it does not arise with regard to any kind of object. Hence aggregates are the basis for this thought to arise, and it would also follow that prior to generating the thought of 'I', the thought of aggregates is generated.

In other words, to identify this glass with a thought 'This is a glass', you must first recognise, and have the perception of part of the glass or the whole glass. Only after that do you have the thought of actually identifying the glass.

As we mentioned before, it is a matter of knowing the way this designating thought process works and why it is that we say everything is merely imputed by the imputing mind. Once you know how a person is designated on the aggregates and so on, then this understanding can be applied to all other objects as merely imputed.

The object of negation is true or inherent existence, meaning existing from its own side, without depending on causes and conditions or parts. Whatever object we consider, whether it is a person or a phenomenon (that is, an object other than person) the object of negation is the same in the sense of the lack of true or inherent existence of that object. The only difference is the basis of the object of negation. Similarly the only difference between the selflessness, the emptiness, of person and phenomena is the basis.

### **Divisions of Selflessness**

We said in past teachings that there is no difference in terms of subtlety between the two types of selflessness nor in terms of the negated self and phenomena. However there is a difference in terms of gaining the realisation of these two types of selflessness of person and phenomena. This is because there is a difference in terms of ease and difficulty of realising each.

We divided selflessness into two, person and phenomena. That is the most condensed division of emptiness. If we elaborate there are many ways of dividing selflessness or emptiness, for instance the sixteen emptinesses or eighteen emptinesses and so forth. The scriptural source for categorising into two types of selflessnesses is Chandrakirti's text, where he said that

In order to liberate migrating beings,  
the view of selflessness is taught.  
That selflessness is of two types,  
of person and of phenomena.

That is the end of the teaching. Now we shall recite the 21 Praises to Tara.

After we finished chanting the Tara Mantra, Geshe-la started laughing and recounted his memories of what Ribur Rinpoche said to him during the 1998 pilgrimage. The pilgrims were with Ribur Rinpoche and Lama Zopa Rinpoche reciting some prayers before releasing fish as part of performing the practice of saving lives. They chanted some Medicine Buddha mantras and then, as instructed by Ribur Rinpoche, Geshe Doga led the Tara mantra using the chanting which we had just used. Ribur Rinpoche said, "Oh that's just the usual chanting, nothing special". Geshe-la replied that he had "used the common one because I would like to be a sensible, wise person". At that Ribur Rinpoche laughed uproariously.

After we had completed the final dedication prayer, Geshe-la told us how, in Sera Monastery after the last debate session at night, the last dedication is the same as the dedication we had just done, 'jetsun lama...'. The younger monks who don't participate in the last session stay in the house. When they hear that last dedication they know that their teacher is on the way back, and they have to go inside and be on their best behaviour. So they quickly go into their room, and pretend to recite their prayers at the top of their voice.

---

**Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.**

---

© *Tara Institute*

#### **Note on authentication**

Transcribed from the tape by Vanessa Walsh  
Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy  
Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy