

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་ལྔ་པ་



6 June 2000

Make sure that you cultivate the proper motivation.

Review of Previous Teaching

In the previous teaching, we discussed the topic of identifying the object of negation in some detail. These are the essential points that we should know:

- We should know how to find and recognise the object of negation that we need to identify.
- The object of negation which we need to identify refers mainly to the inherently existent self which appears to, and is apprehended by, an innate conception of ‘I’ within us.
- In order to identify the object of negation, we need to investigate how the ‘I’ (or one) exists, and what its status of reality is to this innate conception of ‘I’. This innate conception of ‘I’ grasps at ‘I’ or ‘mine’ as being inherently existent, or existing by way of its own character. It is interesting to note here that this innate conception of ‘I’ within one’s own continuum is an example of the wrong view of transitory collection. Hence, the object of negation refers to the inherent existence of, or existence by way of its own character, of ‘I’ or ‘mine’ or the person. It also refers to the object of apprehension of the innate conception of self or wrong view of transitory collection.
- The way we distinguish between the wrong view of transitory collection and the self-grasping of person is that if something is the wrong view of transitory collection, it must necessarily be self-grasping of person, but not vice versa. The point is that the wrong view of transitory collection refers only to the conception within one’s own continuum which grasps at the inherent existence of ‘I’ and ‘mine’, or in other words the self-grasping of person within one’s continuum. The conception of an inherent ‘I’ and ‘mine’ within the continuum of other beings is an instance of self-grasping of person, but not of the wrong view of transitory collection.
- We should also note that the wrong view of transitory collection, which is the innate self-grasping of person within one’s own continuum, is also the main reference of Ignorance, which is the first of the Twelve Dependent Originations. Put another way, the Ignorance of the Twelve Dependent Originations mainly refers to the self-grasping of person within one’s own continuum.
- We have also studied the difference between the two selflessnesses, the selflessness of person and of phenomena. The difference is their basis. Although the basis is different, the self which is negated by

these two types of selflessness is the same. The entity which exists by its own power, or which exists inherently, is called the self, and it is this self which is negated by selflessness. When this independent self entity is negated in the person, it is the selflessness of person, and when it is negated in other phenomena, it is the selflessness of other phenomena.

Investigating the Innate Self-grasping of Person

When searching for this object of negation, the very first thing to do is to try to recognise the way this innate conception of ‘I’ or self-grasping of person within one’s own continuum arises. Then, try to investigate how this innate conception arises, based on, or in dependence upon the person, i.e. oneself, or the ‘I’.

Then the next thing is to investigate the way that this self-grasping apprehends the self (the ‘I’ or person), and how this self appears to one’s self-grasping. Investigating in this way, what you will find is that the way that the self appears to that self-grasping is that the self appears to exist from its own side, in the sense of existing within, or from the aggregates. That is, the self appears to have an existence from the side of either the body, or the mind, or from both inseparably, rather than the self being imputed onto aggregate/s by mind and name. It is said that this kind of innate self-grasping of person exists in all creatures, even within the continuum of tiny ants. The perception of the way that the self exists from its own side is also so natural and instinctive in those tiny ants that they experience it in their dreams.

Types of Sense of ‘I’

We all have a sense of ‘I’ or self-identity. Generally speaking, there are three types of the sense of ‘I’ that can be identified, in terms of the different views of the ‘I’.

1. The first type of sense of ‘I’ is within the continuum of a person with realisation of emptiness. With a sense of ‘I’ she views the ‘I’ as just mentally imputed and, not existing inherently or truly. Here the ‘I’ is perceived as qualified with the emptiness of inherent existence.
2. The second type of the sense of ‘I’ is within the continuum of an ordinary being, whose view is not influenced by any schools of tenets. He would have a sense of ‘I’, which is just a perception of the conventionally existent ‘I’. With that sense of ‘I’, he does not view the ‘I’ as being an inherent existence nor does he view it as having a non-inherent existence. The ‘I’ that he views exists conventionally, and is the ‘I’, which performs all nominal activities. It is the reference of the ‘I’, when we say “I walk” or “I talk”. So, he perceives the ‘I’ without it being

qualified as existing truly or not.

3. The third type of sense of 'I' is within continuum of an ordinary being whose mind is influenced by the views of the schools of tenets. Her sense of 'I' actually views the 'I' as being inherent or true existence, and this we call the self-grasping of person. So, she perceives the 'I' as qualified with an inherent or true existence.

How to Recognise the Innate Sense of 'I'

As said before, first we need to try and recognise within us this innate conception or sense of 'I' which is the self-grasping of persons. Even though this sense of 'I' or self-grasping is very deeply rooted and ingrained in our mind, it is not always very obvious to us. It becomes very obvious under certain circumstances, but not so under other conditions.

When meditating on identifying the object of negation, it is said that sometimes, when you relax yourself into a peaceful state of mind and body, this sense of 'I', will suddenly pop up within your mind. If this sense of 'I' does not show up by itself, then you have to try to mentally create the conditions to make it manifest within your mind, and become obvious to you.

You have to create the appropriate mental conditions by thinking of events of your life where there are strong emotions of joy or undesirability. When you think of times you were very happy or you achieved what you wanted to achieve, you feel happy, and generate a sense of the 'I' which says "I feel happy". Alternatively, you could remind yourself of an unpleasant situation in your life, for instance a situation which made you very irritated and angry. Then you will feel bad, and generate within you a sense of 'I' which experiences unhappiness, and which may say "I can't tolerate that, I will get revenge, I hate that..." In this way you let that sense of 'I' arise, and feel it.

Having manifested this strong and obvious sense of 'I', it is said that at the same time it is very important to keep the mind very relaxed and calm. Keep remembering the reason why you are engaged in this meditation. You have made this sense of 'I' arise to investigate and find out what mode of existence the 'I' seems to have to this sense of 'I', and what mode of existence the 'I' seems to have in reality.

That vivid sense of 'I' should now be left somewhere in the corner of your mind, where it is still noticeable to your mind. Then employ the discriminating wisdom part of your mind to investigate how the 'I' appears and exists to the sense of 'I' within you. Does the 'I' exist from the aggregates collectively or individually? Does it exist within the mind and body together, or individually? Is it inseparable from one or both? In fact, to that sense of 'I', the 'I' seems to exist inherently, to exist by way of its own character, to exist independently from any other phenomena. This kind of entity of inherent self existence in the person is negated in selflessness of person, and this is the object of negation here.

Geshe-la said that at the last weekend course, he gave an intensive teaching on this same topic. He says that he has to confess that it must be that he is aging, because he cannot remember what he has said here, and what he said in the weekend course.

The Importance of Recognising the Object of Negation

It is said that unless you correctly identify this object of negation there is no way that you can realise this view of selflessness or emptiness. Also, the next three points of analysis would not mean much, or be of any help in realising this view of selflessness. As said before, it is important to try, over and over again, to investigate and observe how the 'I', or the self, exists to one's sense of 'I'.

In order to observe this sense of 'I', one has to feel it very strongly and clearly, and this means allowing this sense of 'I' to be manifested within oneself. This sense of 'I' is so deep and so familiar to us that sometimes, after engaging in meditation, when we fully relax our mind and ourselves, we can have a sudden experience of this sense of 'I'. There are other times when this sense of 'I' becomes so obvious to us. If you are doing nothing and then suddenly somebody says something very harsh and unpleasant, you become very disturbed and upset. If you look within yourself there is this sense of 'I' which says, "How dare he say such a thing to me; there is no way I can tolerate that!" Likewise, if you hear some good news, again this sense of 'I' suddenly arises and is very obvious. Similarly when you feel so proud about something you have done or achieved, there is a sense of 'I' which has the strong feeling "This success is all because of me, and is the outcome of what I have done". Under such circumstances, the sense of 'I' becomes so very obvious.

In order to identify this object of negation, one has to recognise this sense of 'I' within one, and then check and investigate how this 'I', which feels so overjoyed or feels so annoyed or whatever, exists to one. It is said that the way the 'I' exists to the conception or sense of 'I', and the way this conception grasps at it is similar to the way visual forms exist to our eye-sense-consciousness. It is so obvious when we perceive a visual object with our eye sense consciousness - it is as if that object exists over there from its own side. In the same way, it is said, if we investigate we can find how the 'I' appears to exist from its own side, without depending upon any other phenomena. It appears to have some kind of existence by its own force and power.

We mentioned earlier how the eye-sense-consciousness perceives the visual object form as if it existed from its own side. Regarding this the Prasangika or Middle Way School of Consequence says that all the sensual consciousnesses of sentient beings are incorrect consciousnesses, in the sense that they are all under the influence of the latency of ignorance and have an appearance of true existence. However, all the Schools of Tenet below Prasangika do not assert the appearance of true existence to any sense consciousnesses. With respect to mental consciousness, the Prasangika School claims that the only mental consciousness of a sentient being which is not affected by the latency of ignorance, is the mind that directly realises or cognises emptiness. All other mental consciousnesses of sentient beings are said to be incorrect consciousness, in the sense of being affected by the latency of ignorance.

The Advantages of Meditating on the Object of Negation

With knowledge about the sense of 'I', and how the 'I' or

self is misconceived by this sense of 'I', it can also be very clearly understood, if one checks, how this sense of 'I' is the root of cyclic existence, and how it serves as the source of all the troubles and problems in life.

Once this object of negation is clearly identified, it then becomes possible to make some progress towards the realisation of selflessness by going through the next three points of analysis.

It is also good to try to understand that this meditation is still effective even if one does not gain any definite understanding of emptiness now. It can plant the seeds in one's mind, which can help one to quickly gain this understanding of emptiness in the future.

It is said that the fortunate being who just hears the sound of the word 'emptiness', can be so moved that tears come to their eyes, and their hair stands on end. Of course, these tears are not the expression of sadness, but the expression of tremendous joy from hearing the sound 'emptiness'. In fact, Chandrakirti's text *Supplement to the Middle Way* says that even for ordinary beings just hearing about the emptiness gives such a lasting joy and interest, and so much so, that tears come to their eyes, and the hair on their body stands on end. Such a being is the perfect vessel for hearing this teaching on emptiness, and has the seed of the mind of the state of highest enlightenment.

This teaching is all about the necessary qualifications of the right vessel for hearing this teaching on emptiness. Even though we may not be perfectly qualified, it is said that those beings who have a genuine interest and motivation to hear and learn about emptiness, and those who have not weakened their commitment to their spiritual guru, are also the right vessel for emptiness. Hopefully, we fit into that second type of vessel.

If you have received the teaching on Chandrakirti's text, *Supplement to the Middle Way* in the past, it is also good to study it again, as it is a very useful adjunct to this teaching. Try, as much as possible, to understand the meaning of emptiness so that you can have some knowledge of it when you hear the word 'emptiness'. Then when we recite the Heart Sutra, and when we say "there is no form, no eye, no ear" and so forth, we shall have some understanding of what we are saying. Your understanding will help your meditation.

Note for the teaching of 30 May 2000.

The notes made reference to the Reasoning of One and Many. Translator Sandup Tsering points out that this should read Reasoning of One or Many. You may wish to adjust your notes.

We apologise for any inconvenience.

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

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Note on authentication

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