

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Try to cultivate the bodhicitta motivation by thinking that the reason for listening to these lam rim teachings is to achieve the highest enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Also generate the thought of putting these teachings into practice in order to achieve this final goal.

## **422.31.221.12 Ascertaining the Pervasion: Determining the Full Set of Possibilities**

We now turn to the second point of analysis, Ascertaining The Pervasion.

### **The Underlying Logic of the Point**

We have identified the referent object, or the object of negation, which is this innate conception of ‘I’ within oneself. Keeping this object of negation (this self or ‘I’ which is said to exist inherently in our mind), we now try to investigate further. If this self or ‘I’ exists inherently, then it should either exist as an entity truly one with its basis of designation (which is the aggregates), or the entity of the negated self should be truly separate from the aggregates, (as a plural object, or be many with the aggregates). That is, if the negated self is not truly one with the aggregates, then it must be different from them. Try to see that if it exists inherently, this self or ‘I’ should exist as either one or many with the entity of aggregates. There is no third way for it to exist.

One of the main reasons why there is no other way for the negated self or ‘I’ to exist is because, in general, any object of existence falls into two categories: it is either a singular object or it is one of many plural objects. Using this criteria there is no third category of existence. Ascertaining this point of pervasion means that if this person (this self or ‘I’) exists inherently or truly, it must necessarily be either one with, or different from the basis of designation, the aggregates.

### **Why This Point Must Be Properly Understood**

Without carefully Ascertaining The Pervasion so that you are completely convinced that the object of negation must truly exist as either one or many, then doubts may still remain that the ‘I’ or self is empty of inherent existence. This is because one may think one has grasped the idea that something is neither truly one with the aggregates nor many (separate from the aggregates), but there is still room for doubt in one’s mind as to whether the ‘I’ might exist inherently. Without properly and thoroughly realising this second point of pervasion the reasons given here do not by themselves automatically refute the inherently existing self. To Ascertain the Pervasion, one must be absolutely certain and convinced that if the self or ‘I’ exists inherently, then it must exist as either one or many. There is no other way for it to exist.

It has to be very clear - if the self has inherent existence

then it must exist as one or many. Having ascertained the pervasion one must have an absolute knowledge that there is no other possible way for this inherent self to exist. If it exists inherently it must be one with the aggregates or different from them.

Having ascertained the pervasion the following two points of analysis are applied. Can the self exist as one? Can it exist as many? As the point cannot withstand reasoning and logic it can then be established fully and with absolute certainty that it is completely irrational to assert that this inherent ‘I’ exists as one or many. Knowledge of the last two points of analysis enables one to easily establish that the ‘I’ or self cannot exist, and is empty of inherent existence. To give an analogy: you lose a cow and know that there are only two possible locations where that cow might be. If it is absolutely clear that there are only two locations, and if you go to them both and the cow is not at either place, then it naturally leads to the conclusion that the cow cannot be found. This second point of Ascertaining the Pervasion is therefore the basis on which the understanding of how the ‘I’ (or self) is empty of inherent existence is established.

Knowledge of this point of Ascertaining the Pervasion is not gained merely through reading, learning and intellectual knowledge. Rather, it has to be gained through meditative experience. Through this one comes to the conclusion that the only possible way for that negated self (which is the inherently existent self) to exist, is as one or as many. Once this definitive knowledge is gained experientially, one moves onto the third point of analysis.

## **422.331.221.13 Determining That They Are Not Truly the Same**

The third point of analysis, is the lack of being truly one. Having concluded that if the ‘I’ exists inherently, then it must be either one with or different from the aggregates, we consider here whether this inherently existing ‘I’ can exist as an entity which is truly one with the aggregates.

Saying that the inherently or truly existing ‘I’ is one with the aggregates means that they are one inseparable entity. The question arises of how two different objects can be the same entity without being one in terms of the ultimate truth. Such is possible in terms of the false conventional truth. However in terms of the ultimate truth, then it has to be the case that when we say two things are the same entity, it means that the way they appear to the mind must accord with the way they exist in reality. In another word they must be one. With respect to the false conventional truth this is not necessary. Therefore, it is possible for two things to be

same entity, but not the reverse.

### **The Absurd Consequences Of This View**

If, we say that this 'I' is truly one with the aggregates many logical faults and absurd consequences would follow. In the lam rim text three main absurd consequences are pointed out. They are:

1. If we assert that the 'I' and the aggregates are truly one, then there is no purpose in ascertaining the self as being separate from the aggregates.
2. Each person would have many selves.
3. The 'I' or self must also become subject to production and disintegration.

1. The first absurd consequence is that if we say the 'I' (or the self) and the aggregates were truly one, it would follow that the whole idea of ascertaining that the 'I', (or the self) as something different from the aggregates becomes meaningless and pointless.

Generally, one purpose of talking about the 'I' (or the self) is to refer to the 'I' (or the self) that goes from one life to another, discarding one body and taking on another body. However when we say that the 'I' (or the self) is truly one with the aggregates, it logically has to be the case that there is no purpose in the ascertaining that the 'I' is something separate or different from the aggregates.

When we say "my body" or "the body of oneself", or the "aggregates of oneself" then of course, if the self and the aggregates were one it would sound as if we were meaning to say "the aggregate of the aggregate" or "the self of the self", or "the I of I" or "the aggregate of the aggregate" which is meaningless.

Obviously if we say that the 'I' is one with the aggregates, then many other problems and inconsistencies would arise in our assertions.

The 'I' which takes on the body or aggregates is the agent or the subject, whereas aggregates are the objects. So if the 'I' were one with the aggregates, the subject and object would become one.

If the 'I' is the possessor and the aggregates are the possessed, then the possessor and the possessed become one.

If the 'I' is the main body, and the aggregates are the parts, then the body and its parts become one.

If we say the 'I' and the aggregates are one, we end up with all of these absurd conclusions.

2. The second main absurdity is that if the 'I' (or the self) and the aggregates were one, it would also follow that since there are many aggregates, each person would have many selves. The problem here is that there are five aggregates, so according to this line of argument there should be five types of self. Conversely, if there is only one self, then we would have to say that there must be only one aggregate.

There are many other problems if we explore this fault of the self having many selves. For instance, if the 'I' and the aggregates were one, it makes no sense to say "I was conceived in my mother's womb". Likewise if the aggregates and the I are one, our biological stages of development after conception, from the embryo onwards makes no sense, because the 'I' is not a physical thing that slowly develops. As the text says, just as the self

goes to the next life, the body and so on would also have to go to the next life.

When we talk about our mind being dominated by desire and hatred, we say that the self, or the 'I' has the desire and hatred. Likewise, when the body experiences heat, cold, hunger or thirst, we say that it is the 'I' which feels these things. If the 'I' and the aggregates are truly one, it is pointless to say "I feel hot" or "I feel cold", and so on. All of these expressions become purposeless. In essence if the 'I' and the aggregates are truly one, they become one in all respects.

3. The third absurdity is that if the 'I' and the aggregates were one, then just like the aggregates, the 'I' will be subject to production and disintegration. The source of this discussion of objections come from Nagarjuna's text, *The Root of Wisdom*.

Regarding this, it is said that the third logical problem of the 'I' being subject to production and disintegration arises because if it is asserted that the 'I' and the aggregates are truly one, then in terms of relative or nominal truth, we can say the 'I', like the aggregates, is subject to production and disintegration. In other words the self arises and disintegrates.

In relation to this third absurd consequence of the self being subject to production and disintegration, three main problems would arise if the 'I' and aggregates were truly one.

1. If the 'I' and the aggregates were one, it would also follow that the self is produced and disintegrates just as the form aggregate of the body is produced and disintegrates. The way we distinguish the change from production to disintegration, is when the continuum of the aggregates ceases to exist, in other words when the form body disintegrates. Likewise we would have to say the continuum of the self must also cease to exist and disintegrate when the form aggregate ceases its continuum.

2. We can also raise a question of the relationship of the 'I' with its aggregates in terms of whether the 'I' of past and future lives is truly different from the aggregates. If we say that the 'I' of past and future lives is truly one with the aggregates, and in a past life we were born as an animal, and in the present life we are born as human, it would follow that what we experienced in our past life as an animal should also exist in this human life. Likewise, whatever happiness we enjoy in our human life must have also existed in the former animal life.

3. There is also a problem if we say the former 'I' and the current 'I' are truly different from the aggregates. The problem that arises is that the 'I' of the former life and the 'I' of the present life would become completely two separate beings.

If we say the 'I' of the former life is truly different from the aggregates then it becomes impossible for anyone to remember their former life. There are also problems with respect to the way the law of karma functions, for instance, the result of karma being exhausted, or whether you will experience the result of karma which you have not created. We shall discuss these problems more in the teaching next week.

When you read Pabongka's lam rim text, *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, you will find that the approach seems

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different from the one taken here, but in essence it covers exactly the same points as we have just discussed.

Geshe-la also gave a weekend course on this topic recently, so study that if you get a chance, because for that course Geshe Doga used Lama Tsong Khapa's *The Medium Stages of the Path* as his main source. This might add to what you have learned here based on Pabongka's text.

Generally, these investigations on the subject of emptiness are based on the Four Points of Analysis. This is the main instruction of Lama Tsong Khapa's *The Medium Stages of the Path*, which is considered to be the most detailed and quintessential instruction on this subject.

Also as mentioned in the past, Baso Trichen who was one of the four student disciples of Lama Tsong Khapa, referred to Lama Tsong Khapa's teachings on emptiness which were based on these Four Points of Analysis. Baso Trichen, who was the brother of Khedrup Je, said that the Four Points of Analysis as taught in Lama Tsong Khapa's *The Medium Stages of the Path* is an experiential analysis which is based on the teacher's own meditative experience, and it is a guide which is based on the student's own progress and experience in meditation. Therefore it is considered to be a very special instruction.

Also there are so many sutras, such as the *Diamond Cutter Sutra* and many other texts that emphasise the benefits of meditating on, or hearing, or just saying the word emptiness. This is a good reason for us to consider ourselves as extremely fortunate to hear these teachings. Geshe-la said that to have the opportunity to teach the topic to other people is very fortunate. It is said that even if we do not fully understand what we are learning, there are tremendous benefits.

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

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Transcribed from the tape by Majola Oosthuizen

Edited by Adair Bunnett and Alan Molloy

Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy