

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Cultivate the bodhicitta motivation. That is, think that you are here to receive this profound teaching on the stages of the path, the lam rim, in order to achieve the highest enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Also cultivate the intention of putting this teaching into practice because it is only through putting the teachings into practice that one can achieve that highest enlightenment.

422.331.221.13 Ascertaining That They Are Not Truly The Same (cont)

In the previous teachings we saw all the logical faults that would result if we assert that the ‘I’ of the former life and the ‘I’ of the next life are truly one with each other. Many logical faults would also result if we also assert that these two ‘I’s are truly different from each other. First of all there is the fault that it would become impossible to remember the past and future life. Second is the fault of the karma which has been created being wasted. Thirdly, experiencing the result of the karma which one has not created.

1. The first problem is that if it were the case that the ‘I’ of the former life is truly different or separate from the ‘I’ of the next life it would become impossible to remember a past and future life. To see the logic of this fault we have to see that if the ‘I’ of the former life and the ‘I’ of the next life are inherently different, then the two ‘I’s would be completely unrelated, and so be two unrelated objects.

Generally speaking, the ‘I’ of the former life and the ‘I’ of the next life are in the same continuum, so it becomes possible for the ‘I’ of the next life to remember the ‘I’ of the former life, and vice versa. However if we say that the ‘I’ of the former life and the ‘I’ of the next life are truly different then, as completely unrelated objects they become two unrelated people. The two ‘I’s would become like the two different people named Jampa and Nyepas in the example given in the text.

Generally we say that Buddhas and sentient beings share the same continuum. Sentient beings share the same continuum with Buddhas in the sense that they have the potential to become Buddha. Likewise Buddhas share the same continuum with sentient beings in the sense that they have once been sentient beings.

When there is the same continuum a relationship exists, and we can talk of the cause and effect between the former continuum and the next continuum. If the ‘I’ of the former life and the ‘I’ of the next life were truly separate, they could not be the same continuum. Hence, there could not be any interrelationship between the two, in terms of a causal link between the harm or benefit they

receive. This is a brief discussion of the fault of not remembering the past and future life.

2. Secondly there is the fault that the karma which has already been created becomes wasted in the sense that it does not yield a result for the person who creates it. We are saying here that if the ‘I’ of the former life, and the ‘I’ of the next life are truly different continuums, then in a sense, the person or the ‘I’ who creates the karma is a different person from the ‘I’ who experiences the result of that karma. The person who creates the karma does not exist at the time of the result of that karma, and the person who experiences the result is not of the same continuum as the person who creates the karma. So from this point of view the karma which has been created becomes wasted.

3. The third fault is the fault of meeting with the result of karma which you have not created. Again, we are talking here of this ‘I’ of the former life and the ‘I’ of the next life as not sharing the same continuum, because they are truly different from each other. Consequently we can refuse to accept the objection that the ‘I’ who experiences the result, experiences the result of karma which he or she has not created.

Applying all the logical reasons we have discussed in the past two weeks shows the faults that would arise if the ‘I’ existed as inherently one with the aggregates. Working through all these examples of logical absurdities one then becomes very certain in one’s mind that the ‘I’ does not exist inherently as one with the aggregates. Ascertaining this definitive knowledge should be done experientially not just intellectually. If one gains this definitive knowledge, then it is said one has ascertained what we call the point of ascertainment, which is the lack of being truly one.

422.331.221.14 Ascertaining That They Are Not Truly Different

Then of course we consider the fourth point of analysis, Ascertaining The Lack of Being Truly Many. It is necessary to ascertain this point because, even though one has established in one’s mind that the ‘I’ cannot exist as truly one with the aggregates, the ‘I’ could still exist inherently, as it could be existing as truly different from them. Therefore one has to meditate on this fourth point.

Earlier, at the second point of analysis, one ascertained the point of pervasion, understanding that if the ‘I’ exists inherently then there are only two possibilities for that inherent existence, either truly one or truly many. Now, having become very sure and certain that the ‘I’ does not exist as truly one, the only way that the ‘I’ can exist inherently is by existing as truly many, or truly different

from the aggregates.

Nagarjuna's text *The Root of Wisdom* says that to say that the 'I' and the aggregates are inherently or truly different means that the 'I' and the aggregates would be completely unrelated entities. That is to say, if the 'I' exists inherently, then as all the aggregates exist inherently, so the 'I' and the aggregates are unrelated.

If the 'I' and the aggregates are unrelated entities, then it has to be possible to identify the 'I' outside the aggregates, or independently of them. In other words we have to be able to find the 'I' after we have put aside all the aggregates, one by one. If we put aside the aggregates of form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness, the 'I' should remain independent of those aggregates. As it is not possible to find the 'I' outside of, or independent of, the aggregates, this shows that the 'I' does not exist as truly, or inherently different from the aggregates.

To illustrate this the text uses the example of three animals, a goat, a sheep and an ox. As they are unrelated, if we put aside, say, the goat and sheep, we can still identify the ox. This is possible because the ox is completely different and unrelated to the others. If the 'I' and the aggregates were completely unrelated like these animals then it would have to be possible to be able to identify the 'I' after the five aggregates were eliminated one by one. After eliminating the form aggregate and so on, until all five were eliminated, the 'I' should be still remain. As this is not possible this shows that the 'I' is not truly or inherently different from the aggregates.

Even if we assert that the 'I' inherently exists as different from the aggregates many logical faults would arise.

1. If the 'I' and the aggregates were totally unrelated we could not say that, like the aggregates, the 'I' is subject to the process of birth, aging, illness and death. If the 'I' is completely unrelated to the aggregates the changes to the aggregates will not change the 'I'.

2. There also is the fault that if the 'I' and the aggregates were truly separate this would be completely contrary to convention or nominally accepted facts. For instance when we receive some harm, for example if someone hits our body, we say, "I received some harm". Likewise if someone benefits us with gifts then we say, "I received some benefit". This is because there is a relationship or link between the 'I' and the body, or aggregates. If we say that 'I' is inherently different from the aggregates then this link between 'I' and the aggregates would not exist. Logically, it would be contrary to what is nominally or commonly accepted to be the truth.

3. There is also the same fault with respect to the function of the karma which we discussed earlier. The fault in this case would arise in terms of karma which is created becoming wasted, and also meeting with the result of karma which one has not created.

4. If we say that the 'I' is inherently different or separate from the aggregates, there is also the fault that it would become possible for us to generate some sense of self identity, or some sense of 'I' based on some other object which is not one of our aggregates. We would be able to generate this thought of 'I' and identify myself, based on an object which does not belong to any of our five aggregates.

If we investigate further we can see a series of faults and absurd consequences from this position of asserting that the 'I' is inherently different from the aggregates. On the basis of this knowledge of all these logical faults that would be present if one maintained the view that this 'I' is inherently different from the aggregates, one finally concludes that it is impossible for the 'I' to exist as inherently different from the aggregates either. So, as we said before, we gain the knowledge with absolute certainty that the 'I' cannot truly exist as different from the aggregates. This is the point of Ascertaining The Lack of Truly Many.

Geshe-la strongly recommends that you refer to the commentary text, and other references. This is the kind of topic where you need to do a lot of thinking. You also need to develop a great deal of familiarity with the different terminology. Obviously this topic uses special terms not normally used in everyday English, so therefore it is important to become familiar with these different terms, and what each implies. That might help you to comprehend their meaning.

Not only do you have to understand these topics, but you also need to do a lot of meditation as well.

Now we shall have a question and answer session.

G: Wayne, do you think 'I' exists? Do you think 'I' is there?

S: Yes there is. 'I' is sitting here.

G: What of Chandrakirti, who said that you should negate and destroy this 'I' for it is the source of all the mental delusions. In fact the view of transitory collections is the source of all delusions. Seeing this 'I' a meditator destroys it. You gave an answer that 'I' exists, that 'I' is the one who is sitting there. If that is the case, then why does Chandrakirti say that we should negate and destroy the 'I'?

S: He was referring to the permanent partless independent 'I' which he says does not exist.

G: In other words you are saying that Chandrakirti is referring to the 'I' which is the object of negation, which needs to be refuted. However the 'I' exists. If 'I' exists, then the self exists?

S: Yes.

G: If the self exists then how is it that we say that all phenomena are selfless or 'I'-less, empty of 'I', empty of self?

S: They are empty of a certain type of self.

G: So you are making a distinction between an 'I' that actually, nominally, conventionally exists, right? Then you are also saying that there is an 'I' which nominally does not exist. Is that what you are saying?

S: Yes.

G: So there is 'I' which exists and 'I' which does not exist. Is this your position?

S: Yes

G: So 'I' is not a person? According to you there are two types of 'I' - the 'I' which exists and 'I' which does not exist, right? If you say that the next question is, don't you think the 'I' is a person? Isn't the 'I' a person?

S: Yes.

G: If 'I' is a person then there cannot be a person who

does not exist. Is that possible? So let's talk of you, Wayne. You are also saying that there is a Wayne that exists, and a Wayne that does not exist. Is that what you are saying?

S: There is a Wayne that exists, and an idea of Wayne that is false

G: So there is a Wayne that exists and a Wayne that does not exist? Now you are going a different way!

So there's one Wayne which your mother gave birth to and another one which your mother didn't give birth to. . . . He's just thinking about that!

G: Wayne, what is your definition of a person?

S: Something that has a mind.

G: In the West, there are some scholars who say that some plants have a mind. So you would say they are a person?

S: Yes.

G: Are there any plants which possess mind?

S: I cannot say there is no flower that is not a person.

G: So you can't say that they are not persons? Even the kids won't say that a plant is a person. There is a story about one master who, in his teaching, talked about the suffering that the radish goes through in its life. After that teaching all the listeners felt very sad and started to cry. I hope you are not one of those!

This master told in detail of the suffering that the radish goes through! When the plants are being cultivated they have to go through suffering: cold water is poured on them, they suffer from cold and when there is intense sun it is so hot. Then as they grow, people come and chop at them and they feel pain.

So you gave the definition of person, but it is very hard for you to actually give an example of who the person is.

S: Some people say that plants respond to kindness.

G: There is one school of tenets which proposes that certain plants have a mind. The reason that they give is that they go to sleep at night and when the sun rises they awaken. There are some modern scientists who believe that plants have minds, and they base their conclusions on the same kind of reason that this school of tenets gives. However we do not say that the plant has a mind or that a plant is a person. Of course scientists do not say that plants are people. But what of a consciousness, you say there is a consciousness? Does any scientist say that plants have consciousness?

S: Prince Charles might think so. He talks to his plants and plays music to them.

G: Some people say that it helps the plant grow better if you play good music or talk to them. As you say, some plants might respond to sound or whatever, but still we do not say that a plant is a person. Otherwise if plants were people then, as in the story of the radish, you have to think of the different types of birth of a person. A person might be born as a radish.

The next question is what are the five aggregates which are the basis of designation for the person?

S: Form, Feeling, Recognition, Karmic Formations, and Consciousness

G: The five aggregates are the appropriate basis on which to label a person. There is no plant with these five

aggregates. When we talk of the different types of person we can talk of a person in the formless realm. Of course there is a person there, but there is no aggregate of form.

The person is an 'I' which is merely labelled or designated on any of these five aggregates. That is the definition or the meaning of person.

The next question is about the person is the 'I' which is designated on any of five aggregates. So what is that 'I'? What is our understanding of the meaning of the 'I'?

S: The 'I' exists merely by convention through labelling the aggregates. It has no inherent existence by itself but is there by convention.

G: Yes it is. What you said is right. The question is really trying to be more specific about the reference of the 'I'. There's no doubt that there is an 'I' that exists. Conventionally there is 'I'. So to know that object which we can call 'I', we have to investigate the sense of 'I' that we generate within us. Within us we have some sense or thought of 'I' there, so we have to identify it. If we identify it, on what particular basis does that thought or sense of 'I' arise? That is the basis upon which you generate this thought of 'I' or sense of 'I' which is the 'I'.

When we generate this thought of 'I' we do not identify our body as the 'I', nor do we identify our hand or any other part of our body as the 'I', nor we do not identify that 'I' as our mind, or with our feeling or any of the other aggregates. Yet there is this thought of 'I' which arises within us, and there must be some base on which that thought arises. So if we say "what is that 'I'?", then the answer has to be that the 'I' is whatever the base is upon which we generate this thought of 'I'.

When we look at this glass, we have the thought "there is a glass". We do not have that thought "there is a glass with respect to other non-glass objects". When we look at it, there is something there which causes us to generate the thought of 'glass'. The base is there, and that is the glass.

The thought of a glass doesn't arise with respect to any objects but it only arises with respect to what we call a glass, an object of a particular shape which we see. When we look at the glass we generate the thought. When the thought arises there is some basis on which we generate the thought. There must be, otherwise there would be no reason to generate that thought. We cannot generate the thought of any other object. So therefore that basis on which we generate the thought of 'I' is like the example of the glass.

S: Perhaps the referent object of the thought 'I' is the basis on which we generate 'I'?

G: Yes. The base and the referent object are the same thing. There is some specific basis upon which we generate a thought of 'I', which is very much spontaneous. The continuation of that thought of 'I' is always very persistent, and always there. So if we identify or find the 'I', it is the base of that thought of 'I' which we generate.

With regard to this question of "what is the 'I'?" all the different schools of tenets have different answers.

According to Prasangika school of tenets, it is none of the five aggregates, not even consciousness. However they are the appropriate base upon which we generate the

thought of 'I'. That is an instance or example of 'I'. The base is not form or consciousness but it is one of the conditioned or compound phenomena called non-associated compound phenomena.

Whereas for the Madhyamika school of the Svatantrika, according to the master Bhaviviveka, the mental consciousness is the person because it is the mental consciousness which takes upon the life of the new body. The new life is the person. There are other schools which identify the continuum of the consciousness as the person, rather than the consciousness. Others identify the five aggregates as the person.

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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