

# 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་བཅའ་བཅུ་དཔལ་



25 July 2000

As a motivation for listening to the teachings one should generate bodhicitta, the altruistic mind of aspiring to achieve enlightenment to benefit all other sentient beings. You should make sure that in pursuing these teachings there is no self-interest, and only the goal of benefiting others. The way to do that is through these teachings on the stages of the path to highest enlightenment.

## 422.331.222 The Selflessness Of Phenomena

These teachings continue with the topic of the selflessness of all phenomena. This is done under two sub-headings:

1. The View of the Selflessness of Compounded or Conditioned Phenomena
2. The View of the Selflessness of Uncompounded Phenomena

Compounded phenomena are those phenomena which exist because various causes and conditions have been gathered, whereas uncompounded phenomena do not depend upon the gathering of any causes and conditions. That is the only difference between compounded and uncompounded phenomena.

### 422.331.222.1 The View of the Selflessness of Compounded or Conditioned Phenomena

As to the view of selflessness of compounded phenomena, there are three sub-headings relating to the three types of compounded phenomena: form, consciousness and neither form nor consciousness, which is called unassociated compounded phenomena.

#### 422.331.222.11 The View of Selflessness of Form

We begin with the teaching on the selflessness of form. One of the sutras says that you should understand that other phenomena lack inherent existence in the same way as you realised the lack of inherent existence of the person.

It is not necessary to use a different logic reasoning from the one used to establish the lack of inherent existence of the self. The same method of reasoning is applied to examine this selflessness or emptiness of form.

Aryadeva's text *The 400 Verses* says that,

The knower of one phenomena  
is the knower of all phenomena.  
The emptiness of one phenomena  
is the emptiness of all.

Here the implication is that it is easy to understand the emptiness of any other phenomena or object, if one has first gained an understanding of emptiness with respect to one object, or phenomena. When it says the 'knower of one phenomena is the knower of all', the actual meaning is that someone who has realised the emptiness of one phenomena on the basis of one object, will understand the emptiness of all other phenomena very easily. Having the capacity to easily understand the emptiness of all other phenomena does not literally mean that

somebody who has realised emptiness on the basis of one object has also realised the emptiness of all other phenomena. Rather, it refers to their potential capacity to realise the emptiness of all other phenomena.

To gain an understanding of how we lack the qualities of inherently existing as an independent entity, we applied the reasoning of the four essential points in our meditations. We apply this same process of analysis here. That is, when we meditate on the emptiness of forms<sup>1</sup> such as sound, smell, taste and tangible objects (that is, all phenomena other than our own self), we have to think in the same way as we did when we analysed our own self.

### The Object of Negation

The most important thing is to identify what we call the object of negation. That is because the realisation of emptiness or selflessness means refuting the object of negation. Here that refers to the particular form being analysed. We all have the experience of perceiving forms like sounds, smells, tastes and tangible objects and we all have the experience of perceiving them as being very beautiful or ugly and so on. When we perceive some beautiful or ugly form we have to check how that form seems to exist to our mind.

As ordinary beings whose mind is affected by the veil of ignorance, our mind perceives forms as if they existed from their own side. They do not appear to our mind as being dependent upon our mind. In other words they do not appear as being dependent upon the designation, by name and by our mind. Rather they seem to exist from their side. They appear to our mind as having an independent existence, without depending on any cause and conditions or any other phenomena.

This kind of existence of the various forms which appear to our ignorance-affected mind, is the object of negation. That is what we have to refute in order to realise emptiness, or to realise the lack of inherent existence of the forms we perceive. Having recognised our misconception about the way a form exists within our mind, we then have to check, as we did in our analysis of the selflessness of the person, how that form appears to our mind. The kind of existence it has in our mind is that of appearing to have an inherent or independent existence.

By applying the reasoning of the Lack of One or Many one ascertains the pervasion. That is to say, if a form exists inherently then the

<sup>1</sup> Ed. To simplify the explanation, from here on the term form should be taken to mean: forms, sounds, smells, tastes and tangible objects

only way for it to exist is for it to inherently exist as either one or many. Then one checks the logical consequences or faults that would arise from the perceived form being one object. Similarly what logical faults would arise if the perceived form exists as many, or as multiple objects?

#### **The Reasoning of Dependent Arising**

If desired, one can also apply the reasoning of dependent arising to see how this reasoning can also help one to negate an inherently existent form. The reason why nothing exists inherently is because the existence of everything is dependent upon other phenomena. The 'other' refers to the causes and conditions, or parts or branches of the phenomena.

Time also lacks inherent existence. We say it is dependent upon other phenomena which are the different moments of time - the early, previous, former and the later moments. Time is all these different moments, which together make time. There is no time without those moments.

#### **The Basis Of Designation**

There is nothing which exists inherently, so in reality everything is merely designated. From that point of view everything is merely designated by mind and name, and all phenomena are dependent arisings. Yet as we have just discussed, when our mind actually perceives any object, then we see it as if it exists as an independent entity, as if the way it appears to be is existing by itself. We do not see that object as a dependent arising, in the sense that it is something that is designated upon some other suitable object of designation. We do not see that there is some other phenomena there, and that what we perceive is something designated upon that.

When we perceive an object we perceive it as an independent entity, and not as something separate from the other phenomena, in the sense of the other phenomena upon which it is designated. To give an example of somebody who has not gained this view of ultimate true nature of the phenomena, consider the situation of watching a horse race as an owner, or as one who has placed a huge bet on a particular horse. When they watch the race all the owner or the gambler perceive is 'their' physical horse. Apart from the body of 'their' horse, they do not see any other horse. Yet that physical horse itself is not the horse, for it is something which is merely designated upon its body and other aggregates.

Likewise, when we perceive any other object such as a vase, it has a very concrete appearance in our mind. The perception of that vase is so real and concrete. When we examine where this perception of this very real and concrete vase comes from, we find that it comes from the basis of designation. In other words, the perception of the vase depends upon the parts of the vase upon which the vase is designated. However in our mind when we perceive this vase, the designated vase and the other phenomena upon which vase is designated are one.

#### **Ascertaining the Pervasion**

Let us consider a vase as an example of a form to analyse the emptiness of inherent

existence. If we apply the four essential points, we should first identify the object of negation, and then try to establish the point of pervasion. As said before, this is if the vase exists inherently or truly in the same way that it appears to our mind, then it should exist either as one with, or different from all its parts, or the basis of designation.

As a designated object the vase depends upon the basis of designation, which are the parts of the vase, for instance its particular shape, its base, its beak or mouth. The point of pervasion is that it must be either one with all those parts which are the basis of designation, or it must be different from all those parts. There is no other way it can exist. By ascertaining the pervasion one should be very certain that there is no other way for the vase to exist inherently. Generally speaking, a vase as an object, should exist either as a singular object, or as multiple objects. There is no other third possibility. Likewise if it exists inherently, it must also either exist inherently as one, or as different from its parts.

#### **Does It Exist As One?**

If it exists as one, then what does that mean? If you say the vase exists inherently as one object, that implies that it is one with all its parts, the basis of designation, which of course does not make sense. As the vase has many different parts it doesn't make sense to say that they all are one. Nor does it make any sense to say that the vase has only one part.

#### **Does It Exist As Many?**

If it doesn't exist as one with these parts, so now can it exist as different from all its parts? Here too, one needs to know the implications of seeing it as inherently existing as different from its parts. This is that it is totally independent, and totally unrelated to any other object. It is an independent entity. If it is true that there is such a vase, existing as an independent entity, then it has to be possible to find it by isolating all the parts of the vase. In other words by leaving aside all the parts of the vase, we have to be able to find a vase. This is not possible.

Just like this example of vase, all other types of form do not exist independently. They are not in a sense self-existent for they are dependent upon other phenomena. For any object to exist, there has to be a basis of designation, and every object is something which exists as a merely designated object. Everything we perceive has a basis of designation upon which it has to depend. Because it is dependent upon that basis of designation, that means it does not exist independently, which then proves that it does not exist inherently.

#### **The Relativity Of All Objects**

In general without analysing whether an object exists inherently or not, it is considered that as an object of knowledge a vase is a singular object. When we say it is one object we are not saying the vase is one inherently, or that it exists as a singular object from its own side. Rather it is one, but it is still dependent upon other phenomena - its parts. In fact the very

---

concept of One or Many is relative.

Likewise in general if we take two different objects like for instance a vase and a pole, then they are clearly plural objects. However because they are many does not prove that they exist inherently. The vase is different from the pole and vice versa. They are different from each other, but they are also still dependent upon other phenomena. Generally when we talk about the various objects in terms of one or many, or being the same or different these are all relative in the sense that they are all interdependent. When we analyse whether the vase is inherently one or many, logical problems arise if we say it exists as one. If we say it exists as many, or is plural, there are also logical problems.

We leave tonight's teaching here. Next week we shall continue with the selflessness of consciousness, which basically follows the same reasoning process. If you have understood the one process of the four points of analysis, in particular the reasoning of the lack of one or many based on any one object, then you can apply the same reasoning to any other object. However, it would be good if before the next teaching, you go over Pabongka's commentary text. This will make it easier to understand the teachings. After that there is the heading of the Measurement Of Having Gained Special Insight. So there is not much left to cover on this topic.

© *Tara Institute*

---