

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལྷན་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



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Generate the motivation that the purpose of studying this lam-rim teaching is to achieve the state of Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. Along with this, also generate the thought, ‘I shall put this teaching into practice’.

## 422.331.222.12 The View of the Selflessness of Inherent Existence of Consciousness

We continue the teaching with the topic of the lack of inherent existence of consciousness.

Consciousness is defined as something that is luminous and knowing.

In terms of the specific functions that consciousness performs, we have a primary mind and a secondary mind. The primary mind perceives the entity or the nature of objects. The secondary mind perceives the specific characteristics of the objects perceived by the primary mind.

**Primary consciousness** is generally subdivided into six types: the eye sense consciousness, the ear sense consciousness, the nose sense consciousness, the tongue sense consciousness, the body sense consciousness and the mental sense consciousness.

The **secondary mind** is further subdivided into 51 types of mental factors and are grouped into the following categories.

- Five omniscient, all-present or all-pervading mental factors
- Five determining mental factors
- Eleven virtuous states of mind
- Six root mental delusions
- Twenty secondary mental delusions
- Four flexible mental factors

You can find detailed lists of each of these mental factors in the relevant sections of the text.

We have to find out how, in reality, even consciousness does not exist inherently. If we examine the way our consciousness appears to exist to our mind, then it seems to exist in the way the object of negation appears to our mind. To our mind, consciousness seems to have an existence of its own. It seems to have an independent existence from its own side, as if we can find the consciousness within itself.

In reality however, consciousness is an object that is merely designated by the mind upon the basis that is made up of the many moments of consciousness. It is something that is designated by the mind upon a collection of many former moments and later moments of consciousness.

The way that the consciousness appears to exist in our mind is a delusion. Therefore in order to negate, or refute that kind of appearance of our consciousness we have to first clearly identify the way the consciousness appears to our mind. It appears as if it has an inherent or an independent existence. In order to negate that inherent existence of consciousness, we can apply the reasoning of the lack of one or many, as we do when negating the existence of any other object.

### The Object of Negation

When we say consciousness, we are referring to collection of various momentary seconds of consciousness. Here a part means a momentary part. If consciousness exists inherently it should be either one with all those momentary parts, or different from all those parts.

### Establishing the Pervasion

To make this clear, consider the consciousness within the continuum that we possess today. This refers to all the moments of consciousness we possess during the whole day, from the morning to evening. Therefore if we are saying that our consciousness of today has inherent existence, then this means that it has to be inherently either one with, or different from, all the many moments of consciousness which we have during the day. It follows that it has to be either one with, or different from, the consciousness of this morning, and the consciousness of this evening.

It is important to see that consciousness is not identifiable with just one single moment. It is always broken up into many different moments of consciousness. Think about how consciousness consists of these many moments, and about how within even an hour it can be broken into many seconds. Within that hour our consciousness has gone through as many changes as there are seconds.

As a side issue to the main thrust of the teaching, it is also very effective here to raise our awareness of death and impermanence through contemplating time. Think of life as a clock, and how we cannot stop that clock, and how second by second we are changing. In this way we increase our awareness of death and impermanence. As a true practitioner you are supposed to be aware of the death and impermanence of your life from one second to the next.

### Establishing the Lack of One

Here we are concerned about what logical faults would arise if we say that today’s consciousness is inherently existent. If today’s consciousness is one with all its momentary parts, which are this morning’s and this evening’s consciousnesses, there is an obvious immediate problem. When we talk of this morning’s consciousness and this evening’s consciousness together, these are plural objects, not a singular one. Likewise, when we say that today’s consciousness is one with all its momentary parts this also refers to plural objects. There would also be the problem that this morning’s consciousness would become the evening’s consciousness and vice versa.

### Establishing the Lack of Many

Likewise there are also problems that arise if you say today’s consciousness inherently exists, and is different from its parts, that is from this morning’s consciousness, and from this evening’s consciousness.

First of all the implication is that today’s consciousness becomes totally unrelated to the morning’s consciousness and this evening’s consciousness. If it is an independent entity or object, then it has to be possible for us to find today’s consciousness independently of this morning’s, and this evening’s, consciousness. By isolating the moment of the morning’s consciousness, and the moment of the evening’s consciousness, we would have to be able to identify that today’s consciousness remains. All these logical problems are unavoidable if we assert that consciousness exists as many.

Based on the reasoning of the lack of one or many, that is to say that the consciousness does not truly exist as one with, or different, from all these momentary parts, then we ascertain the lack of true or inherent existence of consciousness.

This knowledge of the lack of inherent existence of

consciousness should in turn bring knowledge about how consciousness exists conventionally. Consciousness conventionally exists as just something merely designated by mind, because apart from the gathering of the various momentary parts of consciousness, there is no consciousness. Therefore the existence of consciousness is no other than something labelled or designated upon those collections of various momentary parts of consciousness. All the things that are relative, the way consciousness functions, cause and effect - all these relative truths are based on the fact that consciousness is a dependent truth.

### **422.331.222.13 The View of the Selflessness of Non-Associated Compound Phenomena**

The next topic is the lack of inherent existence of non-associated compound phenomena.

#### **Object of Negation**

Time is an example of non-associated compound phenomenon. Here we have to realise that time is also empty of inherent existence. We all know that a year is made up of twelve months.

#### **Establishing the Pervasion**

If time exists inherently then it follows that if a year exists inherently it is either one with twelve months or it is different from twelve months. In either case we can see the same logical inconsistencies.

#### **Establishing the Lack of One**

It is ridiculous to say that a year is one with twelve months, because a 'year' would then sound like a set of plural objects. Likewise 'twelve months' would sound like a singular object.

#### **Establishing the Lack of Many**

Of course if a year is inherently existent because it is different from those twelve months, then the same problems arise. An obvious problem is that if we isolate the twelve months then we have to find the year independent of those twelve months, and that is not possible.

Thus we negate that time is inherently existent. With this negation we gain the affirming knowledge that time is no other than something designated upon its basis by a valid mind. For instance, a year is designated upon the basis of twelve months. So utilising the same reasoning of the lack of one or many, we can deduce the lack of inherent existence of all objects.

### **422.331.222.2 The View of the Selflessness of Non-Compounded Phenomena**

Next we consider whether permanent or non-compounded phenomena are also empty of inherent existence. The truth of cessation is an example of a permanent phenomenon. When you say truth of cessations you can talk in terms of cessation of the obstruction to liberation from cyclic existence, or obstruction to omniscient mind.

#### **Object of Negation**

Likewise space is a permanent phenomenon, and it too lacks inherent existence. Space is generally defined as an absence of obstruction and contact. There is a space in front of us in which we can move our hand side to side, and there is the space that an aeroplane flies through from one place to another. Obviously, if there is an obstruction in the space around you, then you cannot move through it. This space is not inherently existent because it is also a dependent phenomenon. It is a dependent arising in the sense that it does not exist by itself.

Space is more than a state lacking obstruction and contact. It is also described by the three dimensions (height, width and depth) which includes the four cardinal directions. So we can say space can be merely labelled or designated upon the space created by the different directions, north, south, east and west.

We do not say that space has a particular shape however we do know that space has the four cardinal points. That is probably so we can draw a map to arrive at the right destination.

*At this point there was a discussion about exactly identifying the four*

*directions of the world. A student brought in a globe.*

Geshe-la says that as a follower of Vasubhandu, he is one of those who does not accept that the world is in that shape!

#### **Establishing the Pervasion**

The point is that space depends upon its parts, which include the four directions. Therefore if we say space exists inherently then we have to consider whether it is one with its dimensions, including the four directions, or if it is different from its component parts. Space has no other qualities apart from its components.

#### **Establishing the Lack of One**

If you say space is one with its parts, then again there is this problem of either the space sounding like a group of plural objects, and the list of the four directions (east, west and so on) sounding like one singular object.

There is also the problem that if space is one with all those four directions then the sun would have to rise from all directions - that is to say, when the sun rises from the east it also has to rise from the west. Likewise when it sets in the west it also has to set in the east. None of this makes sense.

#### **Establishing the Lack of Many**

If space exists inherently, and if it is different from its parts then again you have to be able to locate this space independently of all those parts (including the four cardinal directions, and height). It is not possible to identify space independently of the parts.

#### **Is Emptiness Empty?**

We also have to consider whether even emptiness itself exists inherently, because there are some who doubt this; they state that emptiness has an inherent existence. One sutra says that those who assert that forms and other phenomena are truly existent are many, while those who assert the true existence of emptiness are very few. The fact is that even emptiness is also empty of true existence.

There is no emptiness apart from the specific phenomena that are the basis of that emptiness. Therefore we can also talk of the different types of emptiness in terms of the different bases of the emptiness. We have to realise that if there is no basis of emptiness, which is not empty of true existence, then it is impossible to have an emptiness that is not lacking in true existence. For example if a form does not exist truly, it is impossible for the emptiness of that form to exist truly.

Geshe-la says that some people say that a place like Singapore or Malaysia is very hot because it is near the equator. In Victoria in Bendigo is also very hot, but in winter it is very cold. Why? Tibet is at a very high altitude; it is the highest country. How do you define Tibet as the highest? From its height above sea level. Because of the height of Tibet, some Tibetans believe that this gives China a good strategic base to extend their power, making it easier to conquer all other countries that are lower.

Next week you have a discussion night. The compulsory question is to explain the meaning of the following verse from 'Nagarjuna's *Fundamental Wisdom*'<sup>1</sup>

I prostrate to the Perfect Buddha,  
The best of teachers who taught that  
Whatever is dependently arisen is  
Unceasing, unborn,  
Unannihilated not permanent,  
Not coming, not going,  
Without distinction, without identity,  
And free from conceptual construction

It is the first verse and is an expression of homage. Geshe-la thinks it is a very important part of Nagarjuna's work. It is very beneficial to learn it by heart, and try to understand its

<sup>1</sup> From the *Commentary to the Fundamental Wisdom* translated by Jay L. Garfield

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meaning.

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