
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བརྟུགས་པོ།

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First generate the virtuous motivation of bodhicitta by thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings. For that purpose I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible.'

3.5.1. *The Way the Perfect Meaning Is Shown in the Scriptures (cont.)*

3.5.1.1. *Stating How Suchness is Explained Through Scripture*

Last time we started with the outline talking about the way the perfect meaning is shown in the scriptures. Here it is important to note that it doesn't say that the perfect meaning is established through scriptures, but only that it is shown through scriptures. If it were *established* through scriptures then it wouldn't be a hidden phenomena¹. If it were to be established, meaning proven, through scripture, then that would mean that emptiness is a very hidden phenomena.

Even though there are many quotes in the sutras of the Buddha that show emptiness, why does it specifically quote this part from the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* here? Well, the reason for that is because this part of the *Sutra of the Ten Bhumis* deals with how the sixth ground bodhisattva meditates on emptiness by way of meditating on the ten equalities.

3.5.1.2. *Identifying What Is Discordant With Knowing Suchness*

Having first shown how emptiness is explained in the scriptures, Lama Tsong Khapa now goes about proving that emptiness, which is shown in the scriptures.

In order to understand that phenomena lack true existence, one first needs to know what true existence means, and one also needs to know what grasping at true existence means.

We always talk so much about emptiness, selflessness, the absence of inherent existence and the absence of true existence, but in order to understand it one needs to approach this very logically. In order to identify what the lack of true existence is, or what the lack of inherent existence is, one needs to know what true existence actually is, and what inherent existence actually is. In

order to arrive at the lack of true existence one needs to negate true existence. So in order to be able to negate true existence one needs to know what true existence means.

We arrive at the lack of true existence by negating true existence. In order to be able to negate true existence we first need to identify its mode of appearance. That is the logical way of approaching it.

Likewise in order to understand emptiness one needs to arrive at an understanding of the absence of inherent existence by negating inherent existence, and in order to be able to negate inherent existence one needs to know what inherent existence actually constitutes. One needs to know how phenomena would exist if they were to exist inherently, and the grasping at inherent existence.

Without understanding first what true existence means, and what the grasping of true existence means, one won't be able to arrive at the lack of true existence. In support of this *Illumination* gives this quotation from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, where it says,

*Without understanding the imputed object
One won't apprehend its non-existence*

Here the imputed dharma refers to the dharma that is imputed by true grasping, so it refers to true existence. Without knowing what true existence means one won't be able to apprehend the absence of it. Without knowing the imputed phenomena - true existence - one won't apprehend the absence of that imputed phenomena.

This is a very important quote to keep in mind, because without identifying the object of negation then one won't be able to arrive at the concept of emptiness. It's like that with any type of negative phenomena. For example if one wants to identify the absence of 'vase', then in order to know whether vase is absent or not so as to arrive at an 'absence of vase', one first needs to know what object one is looking for. So first one has to identify very clearly what the vase is, and then one can go around looking in different places to see whether or not there is an absence of vase.

Without knowing 'vase' in the first place one cannot say whether or not there is an absence of vase. In order to be able to definitely say that there is no vase, there one needs to first know what a vase is. Likewise, in order to be able arrive at an understanding of the absence of true existence one needs to first know what true existence means. What would be the mode of true existence, and how would true existence exist?

First one contemplates the meaning and implications of true existence. How phenomena appear as true, and how the true grasping apprehends its object. Thus one first has to get a very clear image of the object of negation.

Secondly, having generated this very clear image of true existence one then has to clear to one's mind and engage in the ultimate analysis on emptiness, and arrive at an absence. One doesn't arrive at an absence of phenomena, but one arrives at the absence of the object that one has already understood. That is, one arrives at the absence of true existence. In such a way one is then protected from falling into the extreme of nihilism, or into the extreme of externalism.

¹ **Manifest objects** are those that initially can be understood by an ordinary person through direct perception.

Hidden objects have to be understood initially by an ordinary person through a factual inferential cognisor.

Very hidden phenomena have to be understood initially by an ordinary person through a inferential cognisor based on belief.

Innate True Grasping and Intellectually Acquired True Grasping

The first line of that quote from the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, 'without understanding the imputed object' refers to identifying the imputed object of true-grasping. This true-grasping isn't the intellectually acquired true grasping but it refers to the innate true grasping that is present in the heart of all sentient beings. Intellectually acquired true grasping cannot act as the root for cyclic existence, so therefore understanding the absence of its object would not cut the root of existence. In order to cut the root of existence, one needs to identify the object of the innate true grasping.

Lama Tsong Khapa said that identifying intellectually acquired true grasping and its object is not sufficient. One needs to concentrate on the innate true grasping that has been with oneself since beginningless times, and that exists uninfluenced by intellectually acquired views in the continuum of all sentient beings. Identifying that innate true grasping and the apprehended object of that innate true grasping is a very important point. If one doesn't identify innate true grasping and its object, then even though one will eliminate the object of negation, it won't harm in any way the innate true grasping that has come from beginningless lifetimes. Then all one's efforts will become completely meaningless.

Here of course it refers to the intellectually acquired true grasping, but sometimes I also say it can be applied to the intellectually acquired self-grasping that is present in the lower tenets, for example, the intellectually acquired view of a person being self-sufficient substantially-existent and so forth.

Understanding the absence of the apprehended object of such an intellectually acquired true grasping won't harm the innate true grasping in any way. One needs to identify the apprehended object, which is true existence or inherent existence, and then one needs to identify true grasping, which is the apprehender grasping at inherent existence. Then one needs to do an analytical meditation and arrive at the absence of the apprehended object, but one needs to do that in relation to oneself. There's not much point in doing an analytical meditation on emptiness by taking other people as one's object of meditation. One needs to do it in relation to oneself. Here Lama Tsong Khapa says that if one only meditates on the negation of external objects, then the benefit from one's meditation will be extremely limited. So one focuses on oneself and one's aggregates.

The same goes for other meditations such as meditation on impermanence. If one only reflects on impermanence in relation to external objects and one never relates impermanence to oneself, and if one just talks very smartly and cleverly about the meaning of impermanence without relating it to oneself, then the benefits for one will be extremely limited. The real benefit of meditation starts when one actually understands one's own impermanence.

Then *Illumination* says,

If one can identify the object of negation according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika as well as according to the Prasangika Madhyamika point of view then one will

know the difference between those two very well.

Therefore it goes on to explain those two views.

The Object of Negation

There is a twofold division of the object of negation into the object of negation of the path, and the object of negation of analysis.

Object of Negation of the Path

The object of negation of the path refers to afflicted obscurations, and obscurations to knowledge.

To free oneself from those two obscurations one has to generate the path within one's mental continuum. The only way one can free oneself from those two obscurations is by generating the path, therefore they're called the objects of negation of the path. **Afflicted obscurations** refers to afflictions and their seeds as we have mentioned before, and **obscurations to knowledge** refers to the mere imprints of the afflictions.

Object of Negation of Analysis

The object of negation of analysis is the object of negation of ultimate analysis. Here we have the wrong grasping, and the object that is being apprehended.

Lama Tsong Khapa refers to true grasping and true existence, and both are the objects of negation by analysis, of ultimate analysis. Why? For example, Take the subject 'sprout': it follows that it lacks true existence, because it is dependent arising. Here, what is being directly negated is true existence. But implicitly, by negating true existence one also negates the grasping at true existence. By refuting the object 'true existence' through analysis, then also one implicitly refutes the grasping at that object - true grasping. That's why both true grasping, as well as the true existence, are the objects of negation of analysis. The main object of negation of analysis, of course, is true grasping.

In order to explain how one negates the grasping when one negates the object, Nagarjuna used the example of a man seeing an illusory woman. Just by seeing an illusory woman, which is an emanation of maybe the Buddha or someone else, and without knowing it is an illusion, he generates attachment in his continuum, and thinks, 'Oh, there is a woman over there'. When the person, for example the Buddha, who is doing the emanating recognises that, and then changes the emanation into something else, then that grasping stops because the apprehended object has been changed to something else. Since the object is not there anymore then the grasping also stops. That is just how the mind functions.

First of all you have the object, the illusory woman, then when that man sees the illusory woman a grasping is generated in his mind, 'Oh, there is a woman over there'. So there's a grasping that there's actually a woman there. Then if one changes the object of that grasping to something else then the grasping and the attachment that comes with the grasping will also disappear.

If one can understand the absence of the apprehended object of true grasping, then the true grasping will also disappear. This shows how the mind works. If one is in such a situation it can help to just switch the mind to another object. Just changing the object of the mind will

also change the mind itself. That's also useful to know and keep in mind. Of course, one knows that it's just an emanation not existing from its own side.

The next two outlines are: Identifying true grasping according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika point of view, and then Identifying true grasping according to the Prasangika Madhyamika tenet.

3.5.1.2.1. Identifying True Grasping According to the Svatantrika Madhyamika Tenet

This has three subdivisions: Identifying true existence and true grasping, Showing what is true and false according to worldly perception with the example of illusion; and Relating that example to the actual meaning.

3.5.1.2.1.1. Identifying True Existence and True Grasping

True Existence

Here there's an identification of the objects of negation according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika point of view based on the text *The Appearance of Madhyamika* by Kamalashila. By showing explicitly how things exist conventionally, then it implicitly shows that ultimate existence is the object of negation.

As quoted in *Illumination, The Appearance of Madhyamika* says,

The opposite of existing conventionally is that which obstructs the understanding of the lack of true existence.

True grasping obstructs, or hides, the lack of true existence, and it also obstructs the understanding of true existence. That's why true grasping is called 'the all obscuring mind, the concealer' etc., conventional mind and so forth². There are various translations for it.

In *The Appearance of Madhyamika* Kamalashila gives this quote from the sutras,

Functioning phenomena are generated conventionally and don't exist ultimately. Whatever is mistaken regarding the lack of inherent existence is obscuring reality.

The object of negation, according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika point of view, is existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness. This is the measure true existence and the mind that grasps at that is called true grasping. According to the Svatantrika, inherent existence exists is valid, but existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness, is the object of negation.

If we reflect on the measure of how something exists ultimately, and if we reverse that, then we arrive at how something exists conventionally. It is that which is posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

The object of negation, that which is not posited by an

uncontradicted awareness but which exists from its own side through its uncommon mode of existence, is non-existent. One can understand that something that is not posited by an uncontradicted awareness is not an existent phenomenon. So therefore everything exists in a reverse way. Everything exists as being posited by an uncontradicted awareness. So there's nothing that doesn't exist as being not posited by an uncontradicted awareness, or, everything is posited by an awareness that is not contradicted.

What is meant by 'an uncontradicted awareness' in, 'everything exists being posited by an uncontradicted awareness,?' It means an awareness that is not contradicted by other valid cognisers. It means an awareness that is unmistaken to either the inherent existence of the appearance, or to the inherent existence of the determined object .

For example in relation to **non-conceptual awarenesses** such as the eye consciousness apprehending blue, the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is the mind that posits blue, and the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is unmistaken with regard to the inherent appearance of blue. There's the appearance of inherent blue to the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, and this appearance is a valid appearance. Therefore it is a non-conceptual awareness that is non-contradicted.

For **conceptual awarenesses**, such as the conceptual thought apprehending 'vase', the conceptual thought apprehending 'vase' is unmistaken with respect to the inherent existence of the determined object 'vase'. A self-characterised vase or inherently existent vase is the determined object of the conceptual thought apprehending 'vase'. Any other type of valid cogniser does not contradict it. Therefore, here the conceptual thought apprehending 'vase' is also an uncontradicted awareness.

Regardless of whether or not awareness is uncontradicted, there are two possibilities: it can be either a non-conceptual awareness or a conceptual awareness. A **non-conceptual awareness** has to be unmistaken with regards to the appearance of inherent existence. **Conceptual awarenesses** have to be unmistaken regarding the inherent existence of the determined object in order to be uncontradicted.

The Svatantrika Madhyamika say that even though on the one hand all phenomena are imputed by an uncontradicted awareness, (and now you know what an uncontradicted awareness is), on the other hand they still have an intrinsic existence. So there's still an inherent existence from the object's side. So the Svatantrika Madhyamika combine both phenomena - being posited by awareness, as well as existing from their own side. Whereas the Prasangika Madhyamika say that there is no existence from the object's side at all. Phenomena are merely posited by awareness, but there's no existence from the object's side at all. That is the difference between the Prasangika and Svatantrika system. Knowing the difference makes the object of negation according to the Prasangika system very clear.

The reason why the Svatantrika Madhyamika say that, even though phenomena are posited by an

² Etymology of conventional truth: The Tibetan word translated as 'conventional' actually means all obscuring. True grasping is the all-obscuring mind. Conventional truth is the truth appearing as true to the conventional or all obscuring mind, which is true grasping.

uncontradicted awareness they still have existence from their own side, is because the basis upon which the object is imputed has intrinsic existence. That is, it has existence from its own side, or inherent existence. So they say that at the time of analysis, at the time of ultimate analysis on the basis of imputation there is inherent existence to be found. That's why everything is inherently existent, why everything has intrinsic existence, or existence from its own side.

The Prasangika Madhyamika completely negate that, and they say that even on the basis of imputation, there is no inherent existence to be found at the time of analysis, and that one should be satisfied with that. Phenomena are completely imputed by the mind alone, meaning that from the side of the objects there's absolutely no existence. Phenomena are completely imputed only by the mind itself. There's no inherent existence to be found, even on the basis of imputation.

The Svatantrika Madhyamika say that on the basis of negation, inherent existence can be found at the time of analysis. Therefore, they say, there is something that can be found on everything at the time of analysis, so everything is inherently existent. Or, to use synonymous terms, they say that everything is inherently existent, existent from its own side, findable at the time of analysis, intrinsically existing and so forth.

This is a point that has to be contemplated. According to the Prasangika Madhyamika point of view, both Svatantrika Madhyamika as well as the Prasangika tenets say that the person is imputed in dependence upon the five aggregates.

The Prasangika say that, even though the person is imputed in dependence upon the basis of the aggregates, that doesn't mean that the aggregates have to exist from their own side. One could, however, query how anything can be imputed on aggregates that don't exist from their own side. First of all one can't even think of the 'I', or the self without thinking of the aggregates. So one has to always bring to mind the aggregates in order to bring to mind the 'I'. Thus one can comprehend that maybe the 'I' is labelled on the aggregates.

However the aggregates are also merely imputed, which is much more difficult to understand. The aggregates are a collection of parts that are also an imputation on a collection of parts, which can fulfil, and therefore conventionally function. So that is very difficult to comprehend. Saying that the basis of imputation also lacks true existence, or inherent existence, is the subtlety of the Prasangika system.

The Term 'Ultimate'

Regarding the term ultimate there are two possibilities.

1. Ultimate can be applied to the three types of wisdom that understand emptiness, which are listening, contemplation, and meditation.
2. Ultimate is also applied to the object of negation, existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding.

Intellectually Acquired True Grasping

There are different parts to the wisdom realising emptiness such as its ascertainment of emptiness, its ascertainment in general, its appearance and so forth. Its realisation of emptiness is completely unmixed with any conventional appearance. The absence of conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness is emptiness. The presence of conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness is true existence, the object of negation. The grasping at conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness is intellectually acquired true grasping.

The wisdom that realises emptiness is a wisdom that generally realises everything. The wisdom that realises emptiness understands all ultimate and conventional phenomena. Therefore one can't say that the absence of conventional appearance to the wisdom realising emptiness would be emptiness, because that wouldn't be correct. That is because conventional phenomena do appear to the wisdom that realises emptiness. So one has to narrow it down, so that within that part that realises emptiness there is no appearance of conventional existence. That absence of conventional appearance is emptiness, and the opposite, conventional appearance to that part that ascertains emptiness of the wisdom realising emptiness, is true existence, and grasping at that is the intellectually acquired true grasping. That's intellectually acquired true grasping and its object.

Innate True Grasping

So then we have also the innate true grasping. The object of the innate true grasping is existence from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

Did all that go down?

The Svatantrika Madhyamika accept this combination that on the one hand phenomena are posited by the uncontradicted awareness, and on the other hand they also exist from their own side. Why? They exist, so they accept both of those features.

The Prasangika Madhyamika, however negate the second feature. They say that phenomena are only posited by the imputing mind, and nothing exists from its own side.

3.5.1.2.1.2. Showing What Is True and False According to Worldly Perception with the Example of Illusion

The second outline then starts to explain the Svatantrika point of view with the metaphor of an illusion. An illusion comes about both through the mind that apprehends it, as well as in dependence upon the basis of the illusion. There is a substantial basis for the illusion. By reflecting upon this metaphor of the illusion, then one will be able to comprehend the Svatantrika Madhyamika point of view more easily.

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Edited Version

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