
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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Initially generate a virtuous motivation for listening to the teaching thinking, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings and therefore I'm now going to listen this profound Dharma. I'm going to combine my practice of listening to the teaching with patience (particularly the patience that can bear the heat), thinking that by personally experiencing the problem of heat, may the suffering of heat by all sentient beings be eliminated.' If one looks at experiencing the suffering of heat from the point of view of purifying lots of karma, then it becomes beneficial.

We mentioned last time that the meaning of existing conventionally is to be posited by an uncontradicted awareness. The phenomenon that is posited by an uncontradicted awareness exists conventionally. Therefore the opposite, existing from its own side out of its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness, becomes the measure of ultimate existence, and is the subtle object of negation, the apprehended object of true grasping.

Such terms as ultimate existence, existence from its own side, existing perfectly, being naturally established and so forth are synonymous. For example, 'being naturally established' doesn't mean that phenomena don't have a nature. We say that the subtle object of negation will be naturally established, so 'naturally established' means to be established by nature. That the object of negation is non-existent doesn't mean that phenomena don't have a nature.

3.5.1.2.1.1.2. Explaining True and False Existence with the Metaphor of Illusion and the Illusionist

Now we come to the second outline, which is explaining true and false existence with the metaphor of illusion and the illusionist. The example of the illusion is praised as a metaphor for understanding the difference between being posited by awareness, and not being posited by awareness.

When a magician creates an illusion with a mantra, there are three types of person: first of all there is the magician himself, there is the person who is in the audience from the beginning, and then there is the person who comes late.

- The magician still has the appearance of the basis of the illusion as a horse or an elephant, but he doesn't believe in that appearance.
- The people who are in the audience from the beginning, whose eyes are affected by the mantric substance, will perceive the basis of the illusion as a horse or an elephant, and they will believe in that

appearance.

- For the late-comer, whose eyes aren't affected by the mantric substance, there will be neither the appearance of a horse or an elephant, and nor will there any belief in them.

To the eye-consciousness of the people whose eyes are affected by the mantric substance, the piece of wood that is the basis for the illusion really appears as a horse or an elephant to their minds. If you think about that, then you can get some idea of what it means to be posited by awareness. In this example we can understand the particular Svatantrika point of view, where phenomena are posited through awareness, but at the same time they exist inherently.

On the one side we have the eye that is affected by the mantric substance, and therefore the mistake arises in the eye-consciousness, which perceives the basis for the illusion as a horse or an elephant. At the same time the basis for the illusion really appears to be a horse or an elephant. So here we have the basis for the illusion that really appears mistakenly as a horse or elephant, and the eye-consciousness that really mistakenly apprehends that basis for the illusion as being a horse or an elephant.

This is the specific Svatantrika point of view. If one were to say that the appearance of the horse and the elephant would only come about through the tainted eye-consciousness, there wouldn't be any mistaken appearance from the side of the object. What would follow is that the object could appear to everyone as a horse or an elephant. The Svatantrika say that in order to exist, objects have to be posited by an uncontradicted awareness. Existing through being posited by an uncontradicted awareness negates existence not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

This uncontradicted awareness doesn't have to be a valid cogniser. A valid cogniser goes directly to the nature of the object, and understands the nature of the object, and in such a way counteracts the mistaken conceptions regarding the object. Here, however, the uncontradicted awareness is positing the object. So the existence is being posited by an uncontradicted awareness that negates existence not being posited by uncontradicted awareness.

As said by Lama Tsong Khapa in the *Essence of Eloquent Speech*, feelings, recognitions and so forth aren't posited by awareness imputing names, but they are posited by uncontradicted awareness. Here the meaning is that the Svatantrika Madhyamika reject the Prasangika point of view that phenomena are posited by the imputing awareness at a time of no-analysis and investigation. That is rejected, and instead phenomena are being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

When phenomena are posited by an uncontradicted awareness, then at the same time they inherently exist from their own side, as in the example of the illusionist. On the one side is the eye-consciousness affected by the mantric substance that mistakenly perceives a horse or an elephant, but at the same time there is the inherent appearance of the basis of the illusion, which is the piece of wood. Those two have to come together.

Regarding appearances, there are appearances that

concord with the mode of abiding, and appearances that don't concord with the mode of abiding. Here for example, the appearance of a horse or an elephant doesn't concord with the mode of abiding, because there's actually only a piece of wood. But then there are other types of appearances where there's no discrepancy, or where a phenomenon appears and it is actually reality.

For the **magician** there is the appearance of the horse and elephant, because their eye consciousness is affected by the mantric substance, but there is no grasping at them. Why? Even though there is the appearance of a horse or elephant because their eye-consciousness is affected by the mantric substance, they know that it is only an illusion, therefore they don't grasp at it.

The **audience** has both the appearance of the horse or elephant, and they grasp at them as a horse or elephant as well. They have the appearance because their eye-consciousness is affected by the mantric substance, and they have the grasping because they don't know that it is just an illusion.

The **late-comer** has neither the appearance nor the grasping. Their eye-consciousness is not affected by the mantric substance, and therefore they don't have the appearance of a horse or elephant. Since there is no appearance, there is also no grasping, because the grasping depends on the appearance.

That is the metaphor of the illusion, and now the next outline applies it to the actual meaning.

3.5.1.2.1.3. Applying the Example to the Meaning

A person who has realised emptiness conceptually via a mental image is like the magician who has the appearance of true existence, but doesn't have the grasping.

Such a person, who has realised emptiness conceptually via a mental image has realised that phenomena don't exist the way they appear, and therefore even though phenomena appear to them as true, they don't grasp at that appearance. In that respect they are like the magician. Just as the magician's eye-consciousness is affected by the mantric substance, the mind of the person who has realised emptiness conceptually is affected by the imprints of true grasping. Because of the imprints of true grasping, phenomena appear to their mind as existing truly, but they don't grasp at that appearance.

Ordinary individuals who haven't realised emptiness have both the appearance of phenomena as existing truly, and they also grasp at that appearance. They have both because they are bound by true grasping. Why are they still bound by true grasping? It is because when they analyse whether or not a path and results are truly existent, then they haven't been able to go beyond true grasping. That is the meaning of being bound by true grasping.

The **meditative equipoise of an arya being** has neither the appearance of true existence nor a grasping at true existence. It is untainted by the imprints of true grasping. First of all there is no appearance of true existence to that meditative equipoise, and there is also no grasping because their wisdom is a wisdom realising emptiness.

I think that's enough regarding the object of negation according to the Svatantrika Madhyamika.

According to the Svatantrika Madhyamika what is the subtle object?

Student: True existence

Of course the object of negation according to the Svatantrika is true existence. The Svatantrika refute true existence, and they accept inherent existence, existence from its own side, natural existence and so forth. So true existence is the subtle object of negation. It is the object of negation of analysis. However if we don't really know the meaning of true existence, or how something would have to exist if it were truly existent, then we wouldn't be able to get a clear mental image of the object of negation, and then we wouldn't be able to realise emptiness. So one has to get a clear image of the object of negation, and one has to know the measure of what would make something truly existing.

What is the measure of whether something exists truly or not?

Student: Permanent and unchanging

You are going in the right direction but something has to be added to that. [student answer unclear] We just talked about it a minute ago, when we talked about the metaphor of the illusion. We talked about the object of negation quite a lot.

Student: An object existing from its own side out of its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.

That's correct. Existing from its own side out of its uncommon mode of abiding, not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness is true existence and the grasping at that is true grasping.

The Measure of Whether Something Exists Ultimately

What are the two measures of ultimate existence?

There are two ways to take the measure of whether something exists ultimately.

1. The first one is existing from its own side through its uncommon mode of abiding not being posited by an uncontradicted awareness.
2. The second is the presence of conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness by the wisdom realising emptiness. The wisdom realising emptiness ascertains emptiness, and within that ascertainment of emptiness is conventional appearance. A conventional appearance to the ascertainment of emptiness within the wisdom realising emptiness would be the measure of ultimate existence, and the absence of conventional appearance to the ascertainment of emptiness within the wisdom realising emptiness would be the absence of ultimate existence.

To the wisdom realising emptiness there is conventional appearance, but there's no conventional appearance within the ascertainment of emptiness by the wisdom realising emptiness. That is the difference.

Within the wisdom realising emptiness one has both establishment as well as ultimate. They are both there,

but there is no ultimate establishment, because there is no conventional appearance to the ascertainment of emptiness. In general, within the ascertainment of the wisdom realising emptiness there is conventional appearance, but within the ascertainment of emptiness there is no conventional appearance.

So did you understand that? That's an important point that needs to be understood well.

It's important to understand the way of the Svatantrika well, and also to understand the difference between the Prasangika and the Svatantrika. The Svatantrika say that phenomena are posited by an uncontradicted awareness, but at the same time they are inherently existent. While the Prasangika say that phenomena are merely labelled by conception, and being merely labelled by conception negates inherent existence. Being posited by an uncontradicted awareness negates true existence, but it doesn't negate inherent existence. It negates true existence, because if a phenomenon were to be posited through their own power from their own side, then they would be truly existent.

Both the Svatantrika and the Prasangika say that phenomena are merely labelled but there is a different meaning given to the 'merely' in each instance.

According to the Prasangika the 'merely' means that phenomena are merely labelled on the object, and that negates existence from the object's own side. Being merely labelled according to the Prasangika means being merely labelled on the object by conception. There's nothing else apart from that.

According to the Svatantrika the 'merely' negates phenomena existing only from their own side. The Svatantrika Madhyamika don't negate existence from its own side, but they negate existence only from its own side. So the 'merely labelled' according to the Svatantrika negates existence only from the object's side. That is the difference according to the Svatantrika and the Prasangika.

We are within the outline establishing emptiness through reasoning. The object of negation is explained initially, because without clearly identifying the object of negation one will not be able to understand emptiness. Now we move onto the object of negation according to the Prasangika.

3.5.1.2.2. Object of Negation According to the Prasangika

Even though the metaphor of the illusion can also be interpreted according to the Prasangika point of view, it is specifically recommended to explain the Svatantrika point of view. To explain the Prasangika Madhyamika point of view, the metaphor of the appearance of the rope as a snake is particularly recommended.

We can go slowly, slowly with this. There are two outlines here: the presentation of being posited through the power of conception and, easily understanding the reversal of that which is grasping at true existence.

3.5.1.2.2.1. The Presentation of Being Posited Through the Power of Conception

Initially it gives a quote from the sutra requested by the

arya Upali where it says,

*Various pleasing objects such as flowers with open blossoms,
Superior golden houses,
There is no creator for those,
They are posited by conception,
The words are by conception.*

What it means is that without labelling the object there will be no object. That's how one has to think about it. In order to get the object one needs to label the object.

Regarding the metaphor of the rope appearing as a snake, the rope is of a colour similar to the colour of a snake, and is coiled up like a snake, and the light is poor. At that time the thought, 'This is a snake' is generated within the mind.

When that thought, 'This is a snake' has been generated then the person has labelled the rope as a snake. Even though the rope is labelled as a snake, there is no snake existing in any part of the rope. That is the meaning of the object existing differently from the way it appears to exist. So the rope is labelled as 'snake', but within the parts of the rope there's no snake to be found anywhere.

There is no snake to be found anywhere in any of the parts of the rope. Likewise in dependence upon the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, we generate the thought of 'I', and 'mine'. In dependence upon the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, then the thought 'mine' is generated. Here, what actually happens is that in dependence upon the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, one then labels 'I'.

We have the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, then in dependence upon the basis of imputation, thoughts of 'mine' and 'I' arises. That is when 'I' and 'mine' are labelled, but then when we look for that 'I' it cannot be found. When we look for that imputed 'I' within the six spheres, which are the four elements plus space and consciousness, then we cannot find the 'I' within any of those six spheres; we cannot find the 'I' within the collection of those six spheres; and also we cannot find the 'I' as being separate from that collection of the six spheres.

This is like the snake not being findable in any part of the rope. The thought, 'This is a snake' is generated when the snake is being labelled, is like the way the thought 'I' and 'mine' arises, when the 'I' and 'mine' is labelled. In the example when we look for the snake on the basis of the rope we cannot find the snake either in any of the parts, or as a collection, or separately. Likewise one cannot find the 'I' in any of the six spheres, one cannot find the 'I' in the collection of the six spheres, and one cannot find the 'I' separately from them. Separately from the six spheres one can't hope to find any 'I'. There is some slight difference between the example and the meaning, because the 'I' exists in actuality while the snake doesn't exist in actuality. The 'I' does exist in dependence upon the collection of the five aggregates, while the snake doesn't exist on the rope. So that is that difference between the metaphor and the meaning.

The meaning of 'being merely labelled by conception' is that at the time of non-investigation and no-analysis the

object exists, but then when one investigates and looks for the object it cannot be found in any of the parts, it cannot be found within the collection of the parts, and it cannot be found separately from them, but it still exists.

That is the meaning of being merely labelled, existing only nominally, or existing only in name. At the time of no-analysis and non-investigation the object exists, for example, when one says, 'Now I'm going into the city', there is the self that is going into the city. Then if we actually start to investigate where that self exists, 'Is it in which one of the spheres? In which one of the aggregates is it? Is it one of them? Is it a collection? Does it exist separately?' then it cannot be found at the time of analysis. Likewise the bases of imputation, here the six spheres, also just exist in mere name nominally, and then on that one labels 'I'.

The difference between the Svatantrika and the Prasangika is that according to the Prasangika the basis of imputation also doesn't exist inherently. According to the Svatantrika the basis of imputation has to have inherent existence, while the Prasangika say that also the basis of imputation exists only nominally in mere name.

One has to really put this into practice. Just being able to intellectually give the meaning of 'true existence' is not of very much benefit. One has to actually contemplate and meditate on the meaning of the object of negation and then do the analytical meditation looking for the object of negation. By doing this analytical meditation looking for the object of negation then one arrives at the absence of the object of negation, and on the basis of having done the first step, having identified the object of negation, one also then understands that the grasping at phenomena as existing from their own side, true grasping, is a wrong awareness. Then we arrive at that point in the meditation where one understands that the object of negation is unfindable, and that grasping at the object of negation is a wrong awareness. Since it is a wrong awareness because its object is non-existent, it can be opposed by the wisdom that realises the absence of the apprehended object.

It is very difficult to comprehend that the basis of imputation also lacks inherent existence. However one has to put the meditation into practice, and not think, 'Oh this is something too difficult for me to understand'. When walking or sitting down then there is the thought, 'I'm sitting down', or 'I'm walking', and at that time there is the appearance of truly existent 'I'. At those times one needs to analyse how the 'I' appears, and then identify this appearance of a truly existent 'I'. This can only happen by applying the meditations to oneself. One can't counteract true grasping by reflecting on the selflessness of another person. One won't realise emptiness by trying to identify the object of negation in another person's continuum. One needs to relate it to oneself.

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