
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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15 April 2003

You have to cultivate the good motivation of bodhicitta for listening to the teaching.

3.5. The Explanation of the Suchness of Dependent Arising

Now we are at the fifth outline, which has two sub-outlines: the way emptiness is explained in the scriptures; and the way that emptiness is established by valid reasoning, the first sub-outline of which was identifying the object of negation. That we have completed. The second sub-outline is the way that emptiness is established by valid reasoning.

3.5.2. The Way Emptiness is Established by Valid Reasoning

This outline has two sub-outlines: establishing the selflessness of phenomena through reason; and establishing the selflessness of person through reason.

3.5.2.1. Establishing the Selflessness of Phenomena through Reason

Establishing emptiness by reasoning has the two sub-outlines of firstly establishing the selfless of phenomena by reasoning, and then establishing the selflessness of person by reasoning. That sequence is the sequence of the *Introduction to the Middle Way*¹ and it is done from the point of view of explaining the more difficult one of the two selflessnesses first. Of the two types of selflessnesses, the selflessness of person is easier to realise than selflessness of phenomena. So here, from the point of view of explaining the more difficult one first, the selflessness of phenomena is explained first. Some also say that it is done from the point of view of the sequence in which the self-grasping is generated, but here we say that it is done from the point of view of explaining the more difficult one of the two selflessnesses first.

When we establish those two selflessnesses through reasoning what should happen is that in our mind we should generate some mental image, 'Oh, that is what selflessness is!'

It is very important to keep in mind and understand very well that there is no difference in subtlety between the two selflessnesses. There's no difference in subtlety between the selflessness of person and the selflessness of phenomena even though there is a difference in the difficulty grade of realising each of them. The selflessness of phenomena is more difficult to realise than

the selflessness of person. However there is no difference in subtlety between the two, because there's no difference in subtlety regarding the object of negation.

The grasping at the person that is differentiated from phenomena as being truly existent is the self-grasping at person, and grasping at phenomena that are differentiated from person as truly existent is self-grasping at phenomena.

In order to realise the selflessness a person one needs to realise the lack of an inherent 'I'. So one needs to realise the person's lack of inherent existence. In order to realise the selflessness of phenomena one needs to realise the aggregates' lack of inherent existence. Even though there is no difference in subtlety between the two, first one realises that the 'I' lacks inherent existence, and then one realises that the basis of the 'I', the aggregates, lack inherent existence. It would be very difficult to realise the aggregates as lacking inherent existence without first realising that the 'I' lacks inherent existence, because the aggregates are the basis.

Likewise out of 'I' and 'mine' one can't realise 'mine' as lacking inherent existence if one hasn't first understood the 'I' to lack inherent existence. So realising the 'I's' lack of inherent existence is easier, and realising the aggregates' lack of inherent existence is more difficult. Without realising the 'I's' lack of inherent existence one won't be able to realise the lack of inherent existence of 'mine'.

One can also look at it from the point of view of the basis, so that the basis of 'I' is more easily understood than the basis of the aggregates. The 'I' appears very easily through the aggregates to the mind.

Regarding the sequence in which one meditates on the two selflessness first one meditates on the lack of inherent existence of oneself, and then one meditates on the aggregates' lack of inherent existence.

Types of Reasoning

There are five types of reasoning that establish selflessness. There are also four types of consequences that you can go through in discussion.

1. The **reasoning of one and many**, investigating the nature of the object: Take the subject 'sprout', - it lacks inherent existence - because it is neither inherently one nor inherently many.
2. The **diamond sliver reasoning**, investigating the cause of the object: Take the subject 'sprout', - it lacks inherent generation - because it is not generated from any of the four extremes. These four extremes are generation from self, generation from other, generation from both and generation from neither. We will go into that in more detail later.
3. The **reasoning of the existence and non-existence of generation and cessation**, investigating the effect of the object: Take the subject 'sprout', - it lacks inherent generation - because it isn't inherently generated at the time of its cause, nor is it inherently not generated at the time of its cause.
4. The reasoning of the **four possibilities of generation and cessation**, investigating both the cause and the effect

¹ Translator's note: This is an alternative name for *Entering the Middle Way* that I might use more often. I apologise for any confusion.

of the object: Take the subject 'sprout', - it lacks inherent generation - because multiple causes don't inherently generate only one effect, multiple causes don't inherently generate multiple effects, one cause doesn't inherently generate multiple effects, and one cause doesn't inherently generate only one effect.

5. The **king of reasoning**, the reason of dependent arising: Take the subject 'sprout', - it lacks inherent existence - because it is dependent arising.

Contemplating those reasonings in a relaxed and easy manner will turn the mind inwards, and even though you might not generate a realisation of emptiness it will place a very good imprint on your mind. Actually realising emptiness can be difficult, but at least doing the meditation will place very good imprints on your mind.

The Diamond Sliver Reasoning

Out of the five reasonings, Chandrakirti concentrated on the diamond sliver reasoning, and elaborated on that reasoning. The diamond sliver reason refutes the inherent existence of functionalities. Out of permanent and impermanent phenomena, the diamond sliver reasoning refutes functionalities as being inherently existent. This diamond sliver reasoning is based on the verse of Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom* that reads,

*Not from self, not from other,
Not from both, not without causes;
Whatever phenomenon and wherever,
Their generation never exists.*

Out of the ten equalities Chandrakirti focussed on the lack of inherent existence of compounded phenomena.

The first reason for doing so is that once one has realised that compounded phenomena lack inherent existence, then understanding that non-compounded phenomena lack inherent existence is very easy.

The other reason is that compounded phenomena are the main point of dispute between the different tenets, whether phenomena are truly existent or not, whether they are inherently existent, or non-inherently existent. Some tenets posit true existence because a cause can generate an effect, while other tenets use the same reason (a cause can generate an effect) to posit the lack of inherent existence. So compounded phenomena are the main focus of debate between the tenets about whether something exists inherently or not. It is very difficult to counteract the wrong view grasping at compounded phenomena to exist truly. For those tenets who assert true existence, the wrong view holding compounded phenomena as truly existent is the more difficult one to oppose. Once that wrong view has been opposed, then the other types of true grasping are more easily negated.

The outline we are discussing, Establishing Selflessness of Phenomena by Reasoning, has four sub-outlines: refuting generation from the four extremes on the basis of both truths; refuting opposition to that negation; the way the extreme view is refuted by interdependent generation, and identifying the fruit arising from investigation.

3.5.2.1.1. Negating Generation from the Two Extremes on the Basis of Both Truths

This has three sub-outlines: asserting the thesis of the lack of inherent generation; showing the proofs that establish that through reasoning; and the meaning of having refuted generation from the four extremes².

3.5.2.1.1.1. Asserting the Thesis of the Lack of Inherent Generation

Here we have the root text of *Entering the Middle Way*, which reads,

*It doesn't arise from itself, how could it from other?
Also not from both, how could it have no cause?*

Mirror says:

Consider the subject 'sprout': it doesn't arise from itself and how could it arise from inherently existing other. It also isn't generated from both self and other, and how could it be generated without cause, which it isn't. Because these extremes are refuted with the reasoning outlined below.

This is based on the verse from *Root Wisdom* mentioned above. What it does here is to merely present the thesis of the lack of inherent generation, and it does so by saying that phenomena are not generated from any of the four extremes. They are not generated from **self**, they are not generated from **other**, nor from **both**, or from **either**. It arrives at this being the premise of the lack of inherent generation by saying that if it were to be inherently generated, then it would have to be generated from one of those four extremes. So it would have to be generated from self, or from other, or from both, or from neither. Therefore the lack of generation from the four extremes becomes the premise of the lack of inherent generation.

1. Extreme of Generation from Self

Of those four extremes the extreme of generation from self is asserted by an Indian tenet called *Trang-chen-pa*, which is, I believe, also known as the Samkhya. Here generation from self doesn't mean the self of the self of person or the self of phenomena. That is not the self that is referred to here. Generation from self means generation from itself.

This tenet asserts that cause and effect are of one nature, and they assert that the effect exists at the time of the cause. So they assert that cause and effect are of one nature, and also that they are simultaneous.

2. Extreme of Generation from Other

The second extreme is asserted by all other Buddhist tenets apart from the Prasangika Madhyamika. They assert that an inherently existent effect is generated from an inherently existent cause. So generation from other means generation from an inherently existent other, or different, cause, and then an inherently existent effect is generated.

² Geshe-la is following the outlines from *Illumination*, which are more elaborate, and sometimes differ slightly in words from the outlines in *The Mirror*.

3. Generation from Both

The generation from both is also asserted by the Samkhya.

4. Generation from Neither

Generation from no cause is asserted by the tenet is called in Tibetan *Kyang-penpa*. That means 'projecting a long distance'. So in this context it means that the tenet projects a long distance from enlightenment - they place themselves very far away from enlightenment.

It is not as if the *Kyang-penpas* say that all effects are generated without cause. They do accept that there are effects that have a cause, but they say there are certain effects that don't have a cause. For example they say that the thorns on very beautiful flowers don't have any cause, because there's not really any particular reason why thorns grow on the beautiful flower. Of course they don't accept future lives.

Following that sequence, then first the generation from self is refuted, then generation from other, then generation from both, and then generation from neither.

The Order of Refuting the Parts

When we refute the generation from the four extremes the sequence is that first we refute generation from self, then generation from other, then generation from both, and finally generation from neither.

The generation from the four extremes can be summarised into generation depending upon causes, and generation without cause. The first three are generation depending upon causes and the last one is generation without cause.

Generation from no cause is refuted last because the person who asserts generation from no cause is of extremely dull mental faculty, and this generation is also the weakest of the four. Generation from both depends upon generation from self, as well as generation from other, so by refuting those two generations, then generation from both is also refuted easily. Out of generation from self and generation from other, generation from self is refuted first because it is a branch of refuting generation from other.

Generation from self is refuted first because it is a branch of the refutation of generation of other. Generation from self and generation from other are refuted before generation from both because generation from both is a combination of the first two. Having refuted generation from self and other generation from both is easily refuted. Generation from neither is refuted last because the people that hold that view are extremely dull, and also it is a very weak wrong view that also generates less wrong views.

The reasoning of the lack of generation from the four extremes is called the diamond sliver reason. So taking the subject 'sprout': it lacks inherent generation, because it lacks generation from the four extremes, is called the diamond sliver reasoning.

This reasoning is called the diamond sliver reasoning because here diamond refers to a particular type of diamond. I'm not aware of the western name at the

present moment, but one sliver of that diamond can cut or destroy even very big mountains and continents such as Mt. Meru. Likewise, similarly to just one sliver of this special diamond being able to destroy even Mt. Meru, this reasoning can completely destroy the apprehended object of true grasping. That's why it's called the diamond sliver reason.

Affirming and Non-affirming Negations

The thesis that is being presented here has to be negation. It can't be just any negation, but it has to be a non-affirmative negation. The name 'emptiness' or the name 'suchness' that doesn't explicitly convey a non-affirming negation. But when we say 'the lack of true existence' or 'the lack of inherent existence' that conveys a non-affirming negation. A non-affirming negation means there is just the lack of something, and nothing else is posited as a substitute in place of the object of negation. When we say 'the lack of true existence' that's really all that should appear to the mind - the lack of true existence, just that lack, that absence, the negation of true existence, and nothing else. That's a non-affirming negation.

Emptiness is a negation, and of the different types of negation it is a **non-affirming negation**, meaning that when we understand the lack of true existence then nothing else should appear to the mind. There was once a *geshe* who asserted that he had seen blue emptiness. That can be the danger if you meditate on space-like emptiness and you say, 'Oh then emptiness is all blue because the space is blue'. If you don't understand the significance of emptiness being a non-affirming negation then you can make that mistake of coming to believe you might have seen blue emptiness. Of course during meditation many kinds of individual experiences happen. That person probably meditated on space like yoga and we don't know that person's realisation.

However emptiness is a non-affirming negation, meaning that other phenomena apart from emptiness cannot appear to the mind. For example, we have the lack of true existence, which is a non-affirming negation. But if we say a non-truly existent then that is an affirming negation. Here existent is placed in the void left by the object of negation.

A non-affirming negative means there's nothing substituted, so you have just a mere negation of the object of negation, and there's nothing substituted within that lack. While you have an affirming negation if something is substituted into that absence of the object of negation, for example saying non-truly existing, or a non-truly existing phenomena.

Emptiness has to be a non-affirming negation. You negate true existence, and then you just keep that lack of true existence in the mind, and try to make that stable and clear.

Regarding **affirming negation** there is that statement, 'Fat Devadata doesn't eat during the day'. That is a negative statement. By explicitly saying that the fat Devadata doesn't eat during the day, then implicitly what do you understand?

Students: He eats at night.

When we say 'fat Devadata' then already we know that Devadata is a person who eats a lot, because otherwise he wouldn't be fat. So the statement, 'Fat Devadata doesn't eat during the day' implicitly affirms that he eats during the night, because first of all we know that because he is fat he is eating, and since there are only two times for eating, day and night, and as he doesn't eat during the day, then the only possibility is that he eats during the night. This an affirming negative, because it affirms something in place of that which is being negated. Emptiness is not like that. When we reflect on the lack of true existence there is explicitly nothing being affirmed and also implicitly there's nothing affirmed in place of object of negation. There's just a mere negation.

Outline Summary

Today described the outline of the two selflessnesses, establishing the selflessness of phenomena by reason and then establishing the selflessness of person through reasoning. The first one again had four sub-outlines, the first one of which was negating the generation from the two extremes on the two truths. That had three sub-outlines out of which we started with the first today, which was presenting the thesis of the lack of inherent generation. The thesis we presented was that phenomena lack generation from the four extremes - that phenomena are not generated from self, other, both, or neither. Next week we go to the outline dealing with showing the reasoning that establishes that thesis.

So if you look in Chandrakirti's *Self Commentary* then you will find that explained.

Learning the homage from *Entering the Middle Way* is very useful because there is lots to meditate on.

It's also very good to memorise that verse from Nagarjuna's *Root Wisdom*,

*Not from self, not from other,
Not from both, not without causes;
Whatever phenomenon and wherever,
The generation never exists*

The homage of *Root Wisdom* that we recite at the beginning of the teachings lists the eight cessations of dependent arising, like no generation, no ceasing and so forth. What it says is that there's no inherent generation, there is no inherent ceasing, there is no inherent going etc. One has to relate all of this to the lack of inherent existence.

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