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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

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### 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1. General Presentation of the Two Truths (cont)

#### 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1.1. The Two-fold Division of Truth

Last week we started with the two truths, and of the three outlines in *Mirror* we finished the first. According to *Illumination* there is an outline called presentations of the two truths from other sources between the first outline, the presentation of two-fold division of truth, and the outline called the division of conventional truth based on worldly perception.

We said that phenomena have two natures - conventional nature and ultimate nature - so we have conventional phenomena and ultimate phenomena. It's important that one contemplates the meaning of each of those two. We have already talked about that quite a lot.

#### Definition of the Two Truths

Last time we didn't give the definition of the two truths. The definition of **ultimate truth** is *the meaning found by a valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis that became a valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis with regard to that meaning*. We said last time that just saying 'the meaning found by a valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis' would not be enough. A valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis is an ultimate valid cognisor, a valid cognisor that has ultimate truth as its object.

The definition of a **conventional truth** is *the meaning found by a valid cognisor engaged in conventional analysis that became a valid cognisor engaged in conventional analysis with regard to that meaning*.

A vase is a conventional truth, isn't it? The vase's lack of inherent existence is the ultimate nature of the vase. That is ultimate truth. The valid cognisor understanding the valid cognisor realising vase is a valid cognisor engaged in conventional analysis, and the valid cognisor realising the emptiness of the vase is a valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis.

We said last time that just merely giving the definition of conventional truth as 'the meaning found by a conventional valid cognisor' is not enough. What has to be added is 'that became a valid cognisor engaged in conventional analysis with regard to that meaning'. So for example the valid cognisor realising 'vase' is a valid cognisor engaged in conventional analysis, and the object in regard to which it became a valid cognisor engaged in conventional analysis is the object 'vase'. So we have a conventional valid cognisor that realises 'vase', and that also became a conventional valid cognisor in relation to 'vase'.

Last time we said that the omniscient consciousness realising the vase's emptiness also realises 'vase'. The omniscient consciousness realising the vase's emptiness also realises the vase itself, but the omniscient consciousness realising the vase's emptiness is a valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis. With regard to which object did it become a valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis? It became a valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis with regards to the vase's emptiness. It didn't become a valid cognisor engaged in ultimate analysis in relation to the vase. Even though it realises 'vase' it didn't become an ultimate valid cognisor with regard to 'vase'.

Omniscient consciousness has two aspects, the omniscient consciousness realising suchness, and the omniscient consciousness realising the world of multiplicity. The omniscient consciousness realising the vase's emptiness is an omniscient consciousness realising suchness. The omniscient consciousness realising 'vase' is an omniscient consciousness realising the world of multiplicity.

We have this two-fold division of truth into ultimate truth and conventional truth and the basis for that division is objects of knowledge.

So objects of knowledge form the basis for the two-fold division of truth. The definition of an object of knowledge is *that suitable to appear as an object to awareness*. Objects of knowledge are something that is suitable to be the object of awareness.

#### Presentations of the Two Truths from Other Sources<sup>1</sup>

##### *Establishing the Two-fold Division of Truth from Scripture*

Shantideva lists in his *Compendium Of Trainings* the *Sutra of the Meeting between Father and Son* as a source for the presentation of the two truths.

This is a teaching that the Buddha gave to his father after manifesting complete enlightenment. His mother had already passed away but he went back to his home, met his father, and then gave his father this teaching. His mother actually took rebirth in the Realm of the Thirty-Three, and in order to repay the kindness of his mother the Buddha went to the Realm of the Thirty-Three in order to teach her the Dharma there.

*The Tathagatas comprehended both the conventional and the ultimate, limiting that to be known to conventional truth and ultimate truth. The Tathagatas have thoroughly seen, thoroughly understood and excellently actualised emptiness, therefore they are called the omniscient ones.*

This gives as the basis for the conventional and ultimate truth, 'that to be known', which became 'objects of knowledge'. 'That to be known' is also defined as conventional and ultimate truth. The way it is defined here also implies that there are no more divisions of truth other than those two.

That was a source sutra teaching on the two truths As root commentary we have this verse from the

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<sup>1</sup> The numbering used in these notes is based on that in *Mirror*. The headings used in *Illumination* are not numbered.

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*Bodhisattvacharyavataṛa*<sup>2</sup>:

*The conventional and ultimate  
Those are asserted as the two truths,  
The ultimate is not the object of awareness,  
Awareness is said to be conventional*<sup>3</sup>.

Here in the third line it says that the ultimate isn't an object of engagement by awareness. In the sutra it said that objects of knowledge are divided into conventional and ultimate, so it said that the ultimate is something that can be known. Here Shantideva is saying that the ultimate isn't an object of awareness. So some doubt could arise regarding this point.

When we look at these four lines from the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* the first two lines are very clear. They say, 'the conventional and the ultimate are asserted as the two truths', which gives the two-fold division of truth into conventional and ultimate.

There are mistaken interpretations of the third and fourth lines which say:

*The ultimate isn't the object of awareness,  
Awareness is taught to be conventional.*

One mistaken interpretation is that the first line of this pair states the thesis that the ultimate isn't the engaged object of awareness, and that the fourth line states the reason that establishes the thesis by saying, 'Because awareness is said to be conventional'. Saying that the third line is the thesis and the fourth line is the reason establishing the thesis is a wrong interpretation.

The accurate interpretation of this stanza is that the first two lines give the presentation of the two-fold division of truth, the third line gives the definition of ultimate truth, and the fourth line gives the definition of conventional truth.

The third line, 'the ultimate isn't the engaged object of awareness', shows the definition of ultimate truth in an implicit manner, by explicitly stating that ultimate truth isn't the direct object of dualistic awareness. So ultimate truth is not the direct object of dualistic awareness. By stating that explicitly, then implicitly one can understand that ultimate truth is that which is the direct object of non-dualistic awareness. The definition of ultimate truth is given here as ***'that which is realised by a direct valid cognisor realising it in a non-dual manner'***.

The fourth line, 'awareness is taught to be conventional', gives the definition of conventional truth in an explicit manner. ***That which is realised by a direct valid cognisor realising it in a dualistic manner*** is the definition of conventional truth here.

The two truths have been established here on the basis of quotation from the scriptures.

### ***Establishing of the Two-fold Division of Truth on the Basis of Logic***

After establishing that the division of truth into two is valid by through scripture, we now have to establish the division of truth into two through logic.

Here one has to establish that a two-fold division of truth is sufficient. This is done by understanding that being deceptive and non-deceptive are a dichotomy.

All phenomena are contained within either conventional truth or ultimate truth. One can understand this by understanding first of all that the nature of conventional truth is deceptive. Conventional phenomena exist differently from the way they appear - there's a discrepancy between their appearance and existence. So the nature of conventional phenomena is deceptive, whereas the nature of ultimate truth is non-deceptive, because ultimate phenomena exist in the way they appear.

Deceptive and non-deceptive are a dichotomy. By understanding that if something exists it can only be deceptive or non-deceptive, then one can understand that the two-fold division of truth into conventional and ultimate is sufficient. This is because if it exists it has to be either deceptive or non-deceptive - the two alternatives cancel each other out. By refuting something to be deceptive we establish it as non-deceptive and by refuting an object to be non-deceptive we establish it as deceptive. There is no third possibility. By understanding deceptive and non-deceptive to be a dichotomy then one can understand how the two-fold division of conventional truth and ultimate truth is sufficient for all objects of knowledge.

### ***One or Many***

A further point of analysis is whether the two truths are of one nature or of a different nature. The two truths are of one nature but they are of different isolates. Because they are of different isolates they are regarded as different. So the two truths are different from each other but of one nature. Actually the two truths are mutually exclusive. So since the two truths are mutually exclusive they are different. The definition of being mutually exclusive is ***being different as well as not having a common basis***. It is quite easy to understand that the two truths are of different isolates.

How can we understand that the two truths are of one nature? First of all if we think of the two truths in relation to consciousness, the clear and knowing part of consciousness is a conventional truth; that is the conventional side of consciousness. The consciousness' lack of true existence, or the consciousness' lack of inherent existence is the ultimate truth of a consciousness. That is the ultimate aspect of a consciousness. The conventional truth of consciousness and the ultimate truth of consciousness are of one nature because the clear and knowing part of the consciousness is the consciousness' lack of true existence. In such a way one can understand how the two truths are of one nature. Consciousness lacks true existence and is in the nature of clear and knowing at the same time.

The consciousness' lack of true existence is emptiness but if it is the consciousness' lack of true existence then there is no pervasion that it is emptiness.

According to *Illumination* we have reached the third outline, and according to *Mirror* we have reached the second outline.

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<sup>2</sup> *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 9, verse 2.

### 3.5.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1.2. Division of Conventional Truth Based on Worldly Perception

The division of conventional truth based on worldly perception doesn't divide conventional truth into accurate conventional truth based on worldly perception and distorted conventional truth based on worldly perception. Why? Because there is no such thing as an accurate conventional truth. If it is a conventional truth there is pervasion that it is distorted. Therefore the division given here is a division of conventional truth based on a worldly perception into accurate and distorted, but not into accurate conventional truth and distorted conventional truth. Why? Because if it is conventional truth it has to be distorted, as there's no such thing as an accurate conventional truth.

This two-fold division of conventional truth based on worldly perception into accurate and distorted can be further subdivided into accurate objects and accurate object possessors, and distorted objects and distorted object possessors.

#### Object Possessors

The next verse shows this division of conventional object possessors into accurate and distorted, based on worldly perception.

*Further, two types of false perception are posited  
Endowed with clear faculties and with faulty  
faculties;*

*Consciousnesses of those having faulty faculties  
are posited*

*As mistaken compared with consciousnesses with  
good faculties.*

They are false perceptions that are endowed with clear faculties, and those that are endowed with faulty faculties. Consciousnesses of those having false faculties are posited as mistaken when are compared with consciousnesses with good faculties.

*Mirror reads:*

*Take the subject 'false perception' - according to worldly perception alone two types, accurate and mistaken, are posited. There are the consciousnesses **endowed with clear faculties**, untainted by adventitious misleading causes, and there are the consciousnesses **endowed with faulty faculties**, tainted by adventitious misleading causes.*

*Take the subject '**consciousness of a person having faulty faculties** tainted by adventitious misleading causes' - it is **posited as mistaken compared with a consciousness with good faculties** that according to worldly perception isn't tainted by adventitious misleading causes - because it is a consciousness tainted by adventitious misleading causes.*

#### Worldly Perception

We said the two-fold division of conventional truth is based on worldly perception. There are two explanations of accurate and distorted according to worldly perception, the general explanation and the specific.

1. In general worldly perception refers here just in general to the perception of sentient beings that haven't reached the arya path - the perception of ordinary individuals. Here a consciousness is posited

as distorted according to worldly perception when its faculty is tainted by an adventitious misleading cause. If the consciousness is untainted by adventitious misleading causes then it is an accurate conventional consciousness according to worldly perception.

2. Specifically it is referring to the perception of ordinary individuals who haven't realised emptiness. Here a consciousness is accurate according to worldly perception if it is accurate to the perception of a person who hasn't realised emptiness.

#### General Explanation of Worldly Perception

The general explanation is that a consciousness that is tainted by adventitious misleading causes is regarded as a distorted object possessor, and a consciousness that isn't tainted by adventitious misleading causes is regarded as an accurate object possessor.

An **accurate consciousness**, for example the eye-consciousness apprehending yellow, is not tainted by adventitious misleading causes. Even though the yellow appears as existing inherently to that eye consciousness, the eye consciousness is not regarded as being tainted by adventitious misleading causes.

An **inaccurate consciousness**, for example the eye-consciousness to which white appears as yellow, is regarded as being tainted by adventitious misleading causes. If, for example, white appears as yellow to an eye-consciousness, then that eye-consciousness will be regarded as being tainted by adventitious misleading causes.

There are two possibilities for being tainted by adventitious misleading causes - either the physical faculties or the mental faculty is tainted by adventitious misleading causes.

For the physical faculty being tainted by adventitious misleading causes there are a further two possibilities. Being tainted by adventitious misleading causes that are either internal or external.

#### Inner Adventitious Misleading Physical Causes

An example of the physical faculties being tainted by inner adventitious misleading causes, is the physical eye being afflicted by a sickness called *rab-rib* in Tibetan, which can be caused by a swelling of the eye. One way of curing this disease in Tibet is by touching your eye with barley blessed by mantras. That will extract those dark spots from the eye. This particular eye disease causes one to see falling hairs where there are no hairs. If you have that sickness you will become very worried. The second example is when one has jaundice and the eyes are yellow. Because of this a white conch shell would appear as a yellow conch shell. The third example is when eating a Datura apple<sup>4</sup> one can see things that are not actually there, one sees things as yellow that aren't yellow and so on. Eating Datura causes the whole environment to appear as yellow. These examples are regarded as a

<sup>4</sup> Transcriber: The *Collins English Dictionary* says the Datura is 'any of the various chiefly Indian solanaceous plants of the genus *Datura*, such as the moonflower or the thorn apple, having large trumpet-shaped flowers, prickly pods, and narcotic properties'.

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contamination of the sense-consciousness by inner misleading adventitious causes.

### **Outer Adventitious Misleading Physical Causes**

Examples of outer misleading adventitious causes tainting the physical faculty is the mirror, the sound reflected in an empty cave, the combination of white sand and sun rays on a hot day or external mantric substances applied by the magician.

The combination of the mirror and the reflection in the mirror cause the visual-consciousness to mistake the reflection for the actual form. The sound reflected in the empty cave causes the audio-consciousness to hear the echo. Strong sun and white sand on a hot day cause the appearance of a mirage and the mantric substance causes the appearance of illusory elephants etc. to the eye-consciousness.

### **Mental Adventitious Misleading Causes**

Mental adventitious misleading causes that taint the mental faculty are, for example, mistaken tenets, mistaken reasons, or sleep.

An example of the mental faculty being tainted by mistaken tenets and reasons would be the mental consciousness of a person accepting sound to be permanent. Indian tenets such as the Particularists assert sound to be permanent by relying upon distorted types of mistaken reasons. Another example would be the mental faculty of a person accepting the Samkhya tenet asserting the great principle with features such as being partless, permanent, the agent of all actions and pervading all phenomena.

Asserting that sound is permanent is based on mistaken reason, so here the adventitious misleading cause is an inner one, and the faculty that is being tainted is the mental faculty. It is likewise with the acceptance of the great all-encompassing all-pervading principle.

The third example we all know. It is holding the dream elephant to be an actual elephant i.e. grasping at our dream world as being an actual reality. Here the faculty is the inner mental faculty and it is tainted by the inner misleading cause of sleep. When we wake up from a good dream we feel happy, and if we wake up from a bad dream we feel unhappy. That is because we believe the dream to be reality. Contemplating that can also be useful. Understanding those different points will help us to overcome some of our inner fears and worries, such as our superstitions and over-conceptualising thoughts.

All of this has been just a general presentation based on the outline general presentation of worldly perception, and a general presentation of what it means to be tainted by adventitious misleading causes, and not to be tainted by adventitious misleading causes. We can go into the specific explanation next time.

Is it possible for you to recite the homage of the *Madhyamakavatara*, the *Introduction to the Middle Way*?

It's good to put some effort into memorising that homage, because it turns up again and again during the teachings. You have already received the word commentary and you have also had the explanation and the verse received in printed form. So it's good to make an effort to memorise it.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson  
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