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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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། དབྱུང་མ་ལ་འཇུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱུང་བ་བཞུགས་པོ། །

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While reciting the four line refuge and bodhicitta prayer, it is good to also meditate on its meaning, and generate the correct motivation within one's mind. In the first two lines one generates refuge, which will transform one's practice into a Buddhist practice. Then in the third and fourth line one generates bodhicitta, which transforms one's Buddhist practice into a Mahayana practice.

While reciting this prayer, it's good to keep these motivations in mind and generate them. It's also good to keep in mind that the generation of bodhicitta prevents one from falling into a lower path.

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

#### **3.5.1.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1.2. Division of Conventional Truth Based on Worldly Perception**

Last time we started to talk about the two-fold division of truth into conventional truth and ultimate truth. Then we had the further two-fold division of conventional truth into accurate and distorted according to worldly perception.

Here the distinction into accurate and distorted is made according to worldly perception. However this is not a division into accurate conventional truth and distorted conventional truth because there's no such thing as an accurate conventional truth.

There's no division of conventional truth into accurate conventional truth and distorted conventional truth, and there's also no division of conventional truth into accurate conventional truth and distorted conventional truth according to worldly perception. There's only the division of conventional truth into accurate and distorted in according to worldly perception.

We said that the division of conventional truth into accurate and distorted is made in dependence upon worldly perception. We said that in general worldly perception refers to a person who is an ordinary individual, and the ordinary individual can be further subdivided into ordinary individuals who are not proponents of tenets, and ordinary individuals who are proponents of tenets. Within the tenet proponent category we have those tenet propounders who have generated the correct view of the Middle Way in their mental continuum and those who haven't. When we talk about the worldly perception, we refer to an ordinary tenet propounder who hasn't generated the central view.

There is a debate about whether or not true-grasping is a distorted conventional object possessor. However it is not a distorted conventional object possessor because in order

to understand that true-grasping is a distorted awareness one needs to realise emptiness. We said that the division of conventional truth into accurate and distorted is made in relation to worldly perception, in other words to the perception of a person who hasn't realised emptiness. A person who hasn't realised emptiness cannot establish true-grasping as a distorted object possessor, so they cannot establish it as a distorted conventional truth. One can only do that with the realisation of emptiness.

### **Realising Conventionality**

In order to realise an object to be conventional truth one needs to eliminate that object as true. Why? Because one needs to realise that the way the phenomena exists is false. And in order to establish that phenomena's existence as false one needs to establish the discrepancy between the appearance and the existence of the phenomenon. This means that one needs to establish that the phenomenon exists differently from the way it appears. So one needs to establish that even though the phenomenon appears as truly existent, it doesn't actually exist in that way.

Therefore it is said that a conventional valid cognisor cannot establish a phenomenon as a conventionality - it cannot establish a phenomenon as a conventional truth. Why? Because one needs to first realise the emptiness of that phenomenon in order to be able to understand that that phenomenon is a conventional truth. That is the meaning of saying that a conventional valid cognisor does not establish phenomena to exist conventionally.

In order to understand subtle conventionality or subtle nominal existence, which are the same, one needs to first understand the emptiness of the object. If out of an understanding of the emptiness of the object one understands the functionality of the object, then one understands the subtle nominal existence, or the subtle conventionality, of the object.

We can all realise that the glass is a functionality; that it performs a function; that is a coarse conventionality. Understanding the functionality of the cup depending upon the emptiness of the cup is more subtle. So if, arising from an understanding of the emptiness of the cup you understand that the cup can perform a function, then you understand subtle nominal truth. Without understanding emptiness we cannot understand subtle nominal truth or subtle conventionalities.

### **Accurate and Distorted Object Possessors According to Worldly Perception**

According to worldly perception there is a division of conventional truth into the two categories of accurate and distorted object possessors. That was the content of the verse that we dealt with last time:

*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.*

Here the general assertion is that if it is an object possessor generated in dependence upon faculties that

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are untainted by adventitious misleading causes, then it is an accurate object possessor, and if it is an object possessor that is generated in dependence upon faculties that are tainted by adventitious misleading causes, then it is a distorted object possessor. That's just a general presentation. Now we need to check up on whether there is a pervasion to that assertion, or whether it is just a general assertion.

If it is an object possessor tainted by adventitious misleading causes, is there a pervasion that it is a distorted object possessor according to worldly perception? The answer is no.

One instance where there is no pervasion is the intellectually acquired self-grasping at the person, as well as the intellectually acquired self-grasping at phenomena. The intellectually acquired grasping at the person as truly existent, and the intellectually acquired grasping at phenomena as truly existent are object possessors that are tainted by adventitious misleading causes, but according to worldly perception they aren't distorted.

The adventitious misleading causes here are the mistaken tenets that propound true existence, in dependence upon which this intellectually acquired true-grasping was generated. However intellectually acquired true-grasping is not a distorted object possessor according to worldly perception. Why? Because worldly perception does not recognise intellectually acquired true-grasping to be distorted.

I have already explained on previous occasions what intellectually acquired true-grasping is. It is an object possessor tainted by adventitious misleading causes - tenets that assert true existence. However according to worldly perception intellectually acquired true-grasping is not distorted. Worldly perception is the perception of a person who hasn't realised emptiness. So to the mind of a person who hasn't realised emptiness true-grasping is not distorted. Rather it is accurate.

The other side that we have to check up on is that if it is an object possessor that isn't tainted by adventitious misleading causes, is there a pervasion that it is accurate according to worldly perception?

One instance where there's no pervasion is the innate grasping at the person as being a self-sufficient substantially-existent. Coarse innate self-grasping would be one instance where there's no pervasion. Coarse innate self-grasping is not tainted by adventitious misleading causes but it is not accurate according to worldly perception because a person who hasn't realised emptiness can realise that the person is not a self-sufficient substantially-existent. So worldly beings can realise coarse selflessness, and therefore to worldly beings coarse self-grasping is not accurate. However it is not tainted by the adventitious misleading cause of the innate grasping.

That is something that you have to think about and contemplate, otherwise you will get confused. Last time we went through the list of various adventitious misleading causes. You have already understood them, so now have to contemplate those points.

## Definitions

1. **Distorted object possessor according to worldly perception** - *a consciousness that can be realised as a wrong consciousness by a nominal valid cognisor in the continuum of a person who hasn't realised emptiness.*
2. **Accurate object possessor according to worldly perception** - *a consciousness that can't be realised as a wrong consciousness by a nominal valid cognisor in the continuum of a person who hasn't realised emptiness.*
3. **Distorted object according to worldly perception** - *a conventional object that can be realised as existing differently from the way it appears by a nominal valid cognisor in the continuum of a person who hasn't realised emptiness.*
4. **Accurate object according to worldly perception** - *a conventional object that can't be realised as existing differently from the way it appears by a nominal valid cognisor in the continuum of a person who hasn't realised emptiness.*

The root verse that deals with the definition of objects is:

*That held by the six faculties that are unharmed  
As well as realised by worldly beings  
Is true solely according to worldly beings. The rest  
Is presented as wrong solely according to worldly beings.*

This verse deals with accurate and distorted objects according to worldly perception.

*Mirror:*

Take the subject 'form *that is held by the six faculties unharmed* by adventitious misleading causes *as well as* being *realised by worldly beings*' - *it is true solely according to worldly beings*, - *because before they have realised emptiness they can't realise that it lacks the existence it appears to have.*

Here it talks about an object such as form, which is held by one of the six faculties unharmed by adventitious misleading causes, and which is also realised by worldly beings. Such an object is a true object only according to worldly beings. Why? Because before they have realised emptiness they can't realise that it lacks the existence it appears to have.

Take the subject '*the rest*, such as the reflection in the mirror etc.' - *it is presented as wrong solely according to worldly beings* - *because before having realised emptiness they can realise that it lacks the existence it appears to have.*

We said before that a distorted object possessor according to worldly perception, for example innate coarse self-grasping, has to be understood to be distorted by a person who hasn't realised emptiness. For example, grasping at permanent sound, or grasping at the person as self-sufficient substantially-existent are examples of a distorted object possessor according to worldly perception. Worldly beings can understand those two types of grasping to be distorted.

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Perceptions such as the reflection of the actual form, or the perception of the white conch shell as yellow because of jaundice and so forth, are all distorted perceptions according to worldly perception. Why? Because worldly beings can understand them to be distorted. Without having understood emptiness one can realise that the basis for the illusion is not the actual object, or that the conch shell is actually white and not yellow, or that the reflection in the mirror is not the actual form and so forth. That can all be understood without having realised emptiness and that's why they're distorted according to worldly perception.

Having presented accurate and distorted object possessors according to worldly perception, one then moves on to the presentation of accurate and distorted objects according to worldly perception.

### **Accurate and Distorted Objects According to Worldly Perception**

The six objects of the six types of consciousness are all regarded as accurate according to worldly perception. Those six objects are form, sound, smell, taste, tactile sensations, and one that is called phenomena's source. The source of phenomena is a category that includes all the other phenomena that are not included in the five sensory objects. Forms are perceived by the visual consciousness, sounds are perceived by the audio consciousness, smells are perceived by the smell consciousness, tastes are perceived by the taste consciousness, and tactile sensations are perceived by the tactile consciousness. All other types of objects are perceived by the mental consciousness, and they are contained within this category called the source of phenomena.

All those six types of phenomena are regarded as accurate according to worldly perception. Why? Because worldly beings cannot realise them as existing differently from the way they appear. So they cannot realise them as being false, and therefore cannot negate them to be true. Therefore according to worldly perception those phenomena are accurate phenomena, because according to them they exist in the way they appear to exist.

One can only understand that those phenomena don't exist in the way they appear if one has understood emptiness. So the understanding of emptiness is a prerequisite for understanding that those phenomena don't exist the way they appear. As long as one doesn't understand that those phenomena don't exist in the way they appear to exist, they will be accurate to that person's mind. Therefore all those phenomena are accurate objects according to worldly perception.

It is OK to say that the form's emptiness is the non-existence of form's way of appearance.

For example the eye-consciousness can understand that a conch shell is white, so the white conch shell can be realised by an eye-consciousness and the eye-consciousness can realise form. The eye-consciousness doesn't realise the impermanence of the form, but the impermanence of the form appears to the eye-consciousness together with the form. So the form and the form's impermanence both appear to the eye-

consciousness. There is no appearance of the form's impermanence separate from the appearance of form. So the form's impermanence cannot appear separately from the form. When the form appears to the eye-consciousness then also the form's impermanence appears to the eye-consciousness. However the eye-consciousness only realises form, it doesn't realise the form's impermanence.

That completes accurate objects.

According to worldly perception distorted objects would be objects such as the reflection of form in the mirror, the mirage that appears as water, or the illusory elephant and horse that appear as an actual elephant and horse. A worldly being can understand that the reflection in the mirror isn't the form it appears to be. For that one doesn't need to understand emptiness.

One doesn't need to understand the emptiness of the reflection to understand that there is a discrepancy between the appearance of the reflection as form and its non-existence as that form. But if you understand the discrepancy between appearance and existence of the reflection then you understand the emptiness of the reflection. However we don't need to understand the emptiness of the reflection in order to understand the discrepancy between its appearance as a form, and its non-existence as that form. Therefore it is a distorted object according to worldly perception.

Likewise one doesn't need to realise emptiness in order to understand that the mirage isn't water even though it appears as such, and you don't need to realise emptiness in order to understand that the illusory horse and elephant are not a horse or elephant even though they appear as such. So all of those objects are therefore distorted according to worldly perception.

You can see that according to worldly perception the process of deciding what is distorted and what is true for objects is very similar to deciding what object possessors are distorted and what are accurate.

### **3.5.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.1.3. Showing the Mistaken Determined Object to be Non-existent Even Conventionally.**

This heading derives from the last line of the previous verse which read,

*The rest is presented as wrong solely according to worldly beings.*

Here it is now explaining how what is wrong according to worldly beings is completely non-existent, and the root verse gives various examples.

*That envisioned like nature by non-Buddhists  
Strongly influenced by the sleep of not knowing  
And whatever illusions, mirages and so forth are  
conceived to be  
All that is solely non-existent even according to  
worldly beings.*

In the lines 'That envisioned like nature by non-Buddhists strongly influenced by the sleep of not knowing,' the sleep of not knowing refers to ignorance, the various types of wrong extreme views, the views of nihilism and the views of eternalism.

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Actually the Tibetan word for 'non-Buddhist' has the connotation of someone who is really afflicted by and thrown about by the extreme views of nihilism and eternalism.

The great nature-like principal envisioned by non-Buddhists, that are strongly influenced by the sleep of not knowing, refers to the various concepts that those non-Buddhist schools fabricate such as the great all-encompassing principle possessing the six characteristics of being all pervading, unchanging and so forth, which we mentioned that last time. That's one object that's mentioned here. The horses and so forth that are imputed on the illusions, mirages, and so forth, refers to the horses and elephants imputed on the illusions, the water imputed on the mirages, and also all the other mistaken objects already mentioned, such as form imputed on a reflection and so forth. All of that is solely non-existent even according to worldly beings because they aren't nominally established by a valid cognition.

What it means is that even though those different ideas appear to the different conceptual thoughts that envision them, that think them up, nominally the determined object of those thoughts is completely non-existent. What is the determined object of those mental fabrications? For example the great nature-like principal, the water on the mirage, the horse on the illusion and so forth. All of those these are the determined objects of distorted consciousnesses. So therefore they are non-existent. Determined objects of distorted consciousnesses appear to those consciousnesses, but just because they appear to those consciousnesses doesn't mean that they actually exist. For example true existence appears to true-grasping, but that doesn't mean that true existence exists.

Just because something appears to a certain consciousness doesn't make that object existent. That's basically all it's saying here.

Maybe that's enough for tonight.

Next week is discussion group, so try to have a good discussion.

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*Edited Version*  
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