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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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Please generate a virtuous motivation as usual, thinking, 'I have to attain complete enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings. In order to be able to accomplish that aim I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching, and then I'm going to put it into practice'.

### 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.2.3. Showing that the Refutation of the Mind Only Tenet Isn't Contradictory to the Scriptures (cont)

The **Mind Only** have tried in various ways to establish that there is an inherently existing consciousness without external object, and these arguments have all been refuted by the **Prasangika**. The last one we did was countering the **Mind Only** assertion that refuting an inherently existent consciousness lacking an external object is contradictory to scripture.

### 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.1.2.1.3. Showing that the Refutation Doesn't Negate Meditation on Impurity

This was also refuted by the **Prasangika**, who said that accepting an inherently existent consciousness lacking an external object contradicts saying that one is able to meditate on impurity.

The **Mind Only** say that if there is no inherently existent consciousness that lacks an external object, then meditation on impurity wouldn't be possible, the perception of a liquid as blood and pus wouldn't be possible, and the perception of the reflection as form, of the mirage as water and so forth wouldn't be possible.

That argument is then refuted by the **Prasangika**, who say that should the consciousness that meditates on the environment as being filled by skeletons exist inherently, then it wouldn't be necessary to depend upon the instructions of the teacher in order to be able to meditate in such a way. Everyone would be able to engage in that meditation, even those who haven't received instructions from a teacher.

At this point we arrive at the lines of the root text referring to a stream of water being perceived as a stream of blood and pus by hungry ghosts, and this brings us to a widely debated point. The text *Illumination* makes the point that positing the awareness of a preta as an example of an inherently existent consciousness lacking an external object is invalid.

It says in the text called *Being Endowed With Validity* that there are three different perceptions of a vessel that is filled with liquid: it is perceived by gods as filled with nectar, by humans as being filled with water, and by pretas as being filled with blood and pus. What this is saying is that there can be different individual valid perceptions of the same object. However that particular

text doesn't go into much further detail.

There is a upasaka called the Virtuous Upasaka, who elaborates on the quote from *Being Endowed With Validity* a little further. He says that the functionality of the stream of water is perceived in the three different ways by pretas, animals, humans and gods through the power of the ripening of powerful individual karmas. As a result it is perceived in different ways: the pretas perceive the stream of water as being pus and so forth; animals such as fish and so forth perceive the stream of water as their residence, or their world; humans perceive that stream of water as being clear and refreshing water that can be used for drinking and also for bathing and so forth; while the gods who are absorbed into the stimulus of infinite space will perceive the stream of water as space, as they have eliminated the recognition of form.

*Illumination* initially explains an example, and then it elucidates the meaning from the example.

### Example

The example that it initially gives is as follows: a piece of iron is heated in a fire to the point where it is red hot and indistinguishable from the fire. Then one presses that piece of iron on one's hand, which has been anointed with water blessed with a mantra received as an oral instruction from one's teacher. The resulting sensation arises in the aspect of coolness and freshness, and not in the aspect of hot and burning. A person whose hand hasn't been anointed with the blessed water will experience a sensation in the aspect of hot and burning. So when the red-hot iron touches the blessed hand one part of its tangibility is cool.

Here we have two tactile consciousnesses that are being generated; one is generated in the aspect of hot and burning and the other one is generated in the aspect of being cool and fresh. Likewise we have two objects of touch, the heat and the coolness. Both exist on the object of the red-hot iron, and both types of tactile consciousness perceiving them also exist. They don't contradict each other as one part of the tangibility is transformed into coolness for the time it is touched by the blessed hand. It is also said that those two tactile consciousnesses are both valid consciousnesses. What is established by one valid consciousness does not negate what is experienced by the other valid physical consciousness, as the object of one isn't the object of the other.

Here one has to make a distinction. It does not mean that the hot and burning that is experienced by the person whose hand is not blessed by the mantra, becomes cool and fresh for the person whose hand is blessed by the mantra. That would be a misunderstanding, and in that case then one valid cognition would eliminate the other valid cognition. What it means is that both tactile stimuli are there on the basis of the iron. There are two parts to the tactile stimulus of the iron, and that's how those two valid cognitions come about.

### Meaning

Similarly to the example of the iron, on the basis of the stream of water one part of the stream of water is generated as pus and blood through the previously

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accumulated karma of the pretas, and another part of the stream of water is generated as water that can be used for washing and so forth through the ripening of previously accumulated karma of the humans. Both are parts of that one water stream, and that's why one can have two valid cognitions regarding the same object, and why those two valid cognitions don't cancel each other out.

The example is similar here to the meaning, so the example and the meaning are concomitant.

### **Doubt**

Then a doubt is voiced. These various perceptions by different beings of that water stream are all valid cognitions. So the perception by the preta of the water stream as being filled with blood and pus, the perception of the animals that live in the water such as fish and so forth perceiving the water as their residence or even their world, the perception of the humans of the water stream as that which can be drunk, which is refreshing, which can be used for washing and so forth, and by the gods absorbing into the recognition of limitless space as being space, are all said to be valid cognitions and that's where the debate comes about.

Actually we have already refuted the doubt that is being voiced, because we have already said that we are not actually talking about one single object being perceived in different ways by these different valid cognitions. If one were to say that then it would indeed mean that the valid cognitions would be meaningless, because it would mean that there was a common basis between nectar, blood and pus, and water. If there's only one singular object that is the object of those three valid perceptions, then that would mean that the blood and pus is perceived by the gods as nectar, which means that there would have to be a common basis between the blood and pus and the nectar. However we have already said that there are these different parts.

That is the doubt that is being voiced: if there is one singular object then there would be a common basis between blood and pus and nectar and so forth, which would render valid cognitions as meaningless. In order to clarify that doubt then *Illumination* first gives an example, which is then related to the meaning.

### **The Example**

The example refers to the situation where we have a piece of red-hot iron which is simultaneously touched by a person whose hand has been blessed with a mantra, and a person whose hand hasn't been blessed by a mantra. The experience of the person whose hand has been blessed by the mantra is cool, while the experience of the person whose hand hasn't been blessed by the mantra is hot and burning.

One part of the tactile stimulus of the iron forms the substantial cause and the blessed water acts as a conducive condition, and through the meeting of the substantial cause, a part of the tactile stimulus of the iron, and the conducive condition of the blessed water, one has the effect of a cool tactile stimulus. The effect of the cool tactile stimulus can only come about if the causes and conditions are complete. Whereas for the person whose hand has not been blessed by the water the consciousness

is generated in the aspect of hot and burning.

So we have two tactile stimuli of hot and cold, which both exist at that time on the basis of the iron. The hot temperature that is being experienced by the person whose hand has not been blessed by the mantra is not touched by the person whose hand has been blessed by the mantra.

Two temperatures exist, hot and cold. The person whose hand hasn't been blessed experiences the hot temperature, but the blessed hand does not experience the hot temperature. We have to think that both hands touched the red hot iron at the same time, and at that time on the iron two tactile stimuli are present - the stimulus of heat, and the stimulus of cold. Both tactile consciousnesses that are generated at that time are valid cognitions, and they don't cancel each other out because they have individual objects.

The tactile stimulus of coldness and freshness does not exist on the red-hot iron before the blessed hand touches it, and it also doesn't exist after the blessed hand has been removed from the red-hot iron. The tactile stimulus of coolness and freshness of the red-hot iron exists only when the blessed hand is touching it.

Here one makes the distinction that if it is a hot and burning tactile stimulus there is no pervasion that it is hot and burning, because when this hot and burning tactile stimulus is touched by the yogi's hand then even though it is still a hot and burning tactile stimulus, it is not hot for, and does not burn that yogi.

### **The Actual Meaning**

Following the explanation of the example its meaning is explained. The actual meaning refers to the situation of the stream of water being perceived in different ways by the different types of beings. Here *Illumination* says that when humans, gods, and pretas simultaneously look at a glass of water, there has to be the presence of the condition of powerful karma.

So we have this situation where there are three types of beings with powerful karma who look at a glass of water at the same time. The glass of water is not partless, so it has many parts.

- Through one part of the water acting as the substantial cause, and the powerful karma of the **god** acting as the conducive condition, the effect of nectar is generated.
- One part of the water will just appear as clean, clear and fresh water to the **human**.
- Because of their karma another part of the water in the glass is generated as blood and pus for the **pretas**.

So these individual objects of nectar, clear and fresh water, and blood and pus are all parts of the water that is in the glass, or as in the example, of the stream of water.

So we have these three valid perceptions of three different objects, which are all individual parts of the basic object, the glass of water. This is not saying that the nectar appears to the pretas as blood and pus, or that the blood and pus appears to the gods as nectar. If that were

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the case then one valid cognition would cancel out the other valid cognition. What is being said is that these three types of beings have valid cognition of individual parts of the basis liquid. It is the same here as the example of the red-hot iron where there were two parts present on the basic object.

It is important to know that the meaning refers to a situation where the basic object is being looked at by three types of beings. It refers to the actual time when the object is being looked at simultaneously by the three types of beings, and then through the conducive condition of the individual karmas individual parts of the basic object are generated as blood and pus, or as nectar, and are being perceived by the individual beings in those individual ways. When the gods are not looking at the water stream or when the pretas are not looking at the water stream or the glass of water, then there's no blood and pus and also there is no nectar. This is because of not meeting with the conducive condition of the karma. So you can see how there can be these three modes of perception with regard to the one object

There is more about this in Nagarjuna's *Letter*, where it says,

*For the pretas in spring  
Even the moon is hot; in winter even the sun is cold*

Because of the ripening of their karma, during summer the ordinarily cool and refreshing moon is hot for pretas. Again, one part of the tactile stimulus of the moon is, through the conducive condition of the non-virtuous karma of the pretas, generated as hot, and one part of the tactile stimulus of the sun during winter is generated as cold, again because of the conducive condition of the karma of the pretas. Then there are further examples such as not perceiving the fruits on trees because of one's karma, or pretas not perceiving rivers but only perceiving the dry river beds and so forth.

Of course for humans the experience of the moon is cool and refreshing, but again it is as before - there are two parts to the tactile sensation of the moon, one hot and one cool and refreshing, and part that is experienced as cool and refreshing by humans is experienced by the pretas as hot.

The tactile stimulus of the sun also has different parts. The warming part that is experienced in winter by humans is not experienced by the pretas who, through their karma, experience the sensation of the sun as cold.

Through the force of powerful karma, when pretas look at a tree bearing fruits they are not able to see the fruits and so forth. The pretas don't have a valid cognition of the fruits of the tree; they just have a valid cognition of the mere tree. Similarly while the pretas can't perceive the water in the stream they do have a valid cognition of the riverbed and all the stones and sand there, because of the force of their powerful karma. They can't perceive the water, so they don't have a valid cognition of the water.

#### **Four Things Beyond Comprehension**

The Tathagata said that,

1. The ripening of the karma of sentient beings is beyond comprehension.

2. The power of mantra and medicine beyond comprehension.

3. The power of a yogi's concentration is also beyond comprehension .

4. The psychic powers and magical emanations of Buddha are also beyond comprehension .

#### **Examples of Each**

1. As an example for the first we have the preta perceiving not the whole glass, or stream, of water, but only perceiving one part as blood and pus.

2. The power of the mantra blesses the hand and through its conducive condition one part of the tactile stimulus of the red-hot iron is generated as coolness and freshness, but only at the time when the blessed hand touches the red-hot iron. Through the power of mantra and medicine beings are able to fly in the sky.

3. Through the power of concentration comes, for example, the emanation of Samantabhadra's offerings which refers to the multiplying of offerings. Initially there are only two offerings, but from each of those two another pair emanates, and then from each of those two another pair emanates, and so forth, multiplying in such a way immeasurably.

We have already trained our mind to do this to a certain extent. One visualises Samantabhadra in each hand, each of which holds offerings in their hands; from those offerings one can visualise light rays emanating bearing Samantabhadras at their tips. Then from each of those light rays again emanate, having offerings at their tips, and from those offerings light rays emanate again bearing further Samantabhadras and so forth. In such a way the offerings are multiplied limitlessly.

One can also do the same with offering flowers. We emanate a flower offering, then visualise light rays emanating from that flower offering, where there are further flower offerings at the tip of those light rays. Then from each of those flower offerings light rays emanate again bearing further flower offerings, and so forth. In such a way we are able to multiply the offering limitlessly. This is referred to as the Samantabhadra offering, which is in relation to the immeasurable power of concentration.

4. The example of the powers of magical emanation of a buddha beyond comprehension is if a layperson with extensive virtues clad in white robes and so forth is naturally ordained by the Buddha.

This refers to a situation when a lay person clad in white robes and possessing a vast amount of merits, meets the Buddha, who says to that lay person, 'Come here', meaning, 'Come hither to this shore' or 'Become ordained'. This is ordination without an abbot, where that person's hair automatically falls off and their robes, and also their begging bowl and so forth automatically appear, and they are instantly transformed into a fully ordained monk. That person will immediately have the status of having been ordained for ten years, and so become an elder.

During the time of the Buddha this was how people become ordained. It was only later that the system of

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abbots and having monks present in a ritual was devised. This was so that as the Buddhadharma spread bhikkus could be ordained when the Buddha wasn't present, and also to make it possible to have ordained Sangha after the passing away of the Buddha. The role of the abbot was actually the caretaker of the monks, the one who looked after the monks.

### **3.5.1.1.1.2.2.1.2.2. Summary**

If all the above material were to be condensed, then one would say that its purpose has been to refute an intrinsically existing consciousness that is lacking external objects.

*In short, understand the meaning of saying  
'Similar to  
Objects of knowledge not existing, awareness also  
doesn't exist.'*

*Mirror:*

In short, try to *understand the meaning of saying  
'Similar to objects of knowledge not existing  
inherently awareness also doesn't exist  
inherently'*, because to have consciousness  
without object is incorrect.

Because the objects of knowledge and the consciousnesses exist relative to each other, then similarly to the object of knowledge not existing inherently, the awareness that perceives that object of knowledge also doesn't exist inherently.

### **3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2. Refuting Proof that Other-Powered Phenomena Exist Inherently**

This doesn't refute examples of the category of other-powered phenomena, but it refutes other-powered phenomena as inherently existing, and also the proof - self-knowers.

One can't say much more regarding pus and blood and so forth, but maybe that's enough for tonight. Actually there's a more elaborate explanation in relation to the text called *A Dose of Emptiness*. When I received that explanation I wrote it all down, but now it's all only darkness (*laughter*).

You have relate the whole thing to karma. One has to consider that point of karma very carefully, in that if one has merits then one is able to enjoy the water, but if one doesn't have the merits then one is not able to make use of the water. So one should rejoice in the fact that one has lots of merits.

*Transcribed from tape by Mark Emerson  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Tenzin Dongak*

*Edited Version*

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