

Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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24 February 2004

Generate a good motivation.

The **Mind Only** assert that the other-powered phenomenon of consciousness exists inherently, and that an other-powered inherently existing consciousness is established by the self-knower. The **Prasangika** say the self-knower is not necessary in order to establish consciousness, but that the consciousness is established through the object and realises itself. We talked about that the other day in the context of valid cognition and distorted consciousness.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.1.3. Refuting Self-knowers with Other Reasoning

*Consequently, if self-knowers are non-existent,
What apprehends your other-powered phenomenon?
Since agent, action¹ and activity aren't one,
This itself is unsuitable to apprehend that.*

The **Prasangika** ask the Mind Only, 'If self-knowers are non-existent then,

'What *apprehends your other-powered phenomenon*? It follows it isn't apprehended, because if it were established it would have to be apprehended by *self-knowers*, which are *non-existent*. It follows that this very self-knower *is unsuitable to apprehend that* consciousness because *agent, action, and activity are not one.*' (*Mirror*)

Here it is saying that not only is the self-knower refuted with the line of reasoning that uses memory, but also that the self-knower is untenable because of other reasonings.

'There is nothing that apprehends the other-powered phenomenon that is posited by you. There is nothing that apprehends that other-powered inherently existing consciousness, because the self-knower is non-existent.' Why? Because the Prasangika posit that if a self-knower were to exist then agent, action and activity would have to be one, but since they aren't a self-knower doesn't exist. This point should be contemplated very carefully.

In order to understand this reasoning we have to be familiar with the way the **Mind Only** posit the self-knower. In the context of the eye-consciousness then we have the apprehension of blue, which is relative to the focal object of blue. When we talk about that which is being experienced and that which does the experiencing, the eye-consciousness apprehending blue is that which is being experienced, and it is experienced by the self-knower. The self-knower is that which experiences the

apprehension of blue. When we posit something that is experienced and something that is doing the experiencing, then we really need to posit two objects that are completely different from each other.

In the Mind Only system we have the eye-consciousness that apprehends blue, and the self-knower that is generated from the immediately preceding instance of clear and knowing. The eye-consciousness is that which apprehends the object, which exists relative to the object, and the self-knower is posited from the point of view of the immediately preceding condition of a previous instance of clear knowing. Both are posited as two parts of the one clear and knowing. One clear and knowing has two parts, one part eye-consciousness, and one part self-knower. They are not really posited as two different objects, but at the same time they are posited as that which experiences and that which is being experienced.

The eye-consciousness is that which is being experienced by the self-knower, which is that which experiences the eye-consciousness. If we have something that is experiencing and we have something that is experienced, we are really talking about two different things. But the Mind Only don't really posit the self-knower as something completely different from the consciousness it is experiencing. So there is a contradiction there, which is how one arrives at the reasoning that if a self-knower were to exist then action, agent, and activity would have to be one, which they aren't. Here action refers to the object of the action, which is the eye-consciousness apprehending blue, the agent is that doing the experiencing, which is the self-knower, and then we have the activity of experiencing

The clarity of the candle flame cannot be posited apart from the candle flame. Similarly the clarity of light can't be posited apart from the light. When we switch on the light in the room then the room becomes clear. One can't really have one without the other. The Mind Only posit the self-knower in a similar way - the self-knower becomes one with the consciousness that it is doing the experiencing, in the same way that the clarity of the candle flame is really one with the candle flame itself. Just as one can't posit the candle flame without the clarity of the candle flame, we can't posit light without the clarity of the light. That's the way one has to think.

In the *Journey to Lanka Sutra*, the Buddha refuted the existence of a self-knower with an example saying that a knife or sword can't cut itself, and a thumb can't touch itself. You can feel other things with your thumb, but no matter how much you try it can't touch itself. These types of examples are used to show that a self-knower doesn't exist.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.1.4. Inherently Existing Other-Powered Phenomena Are Like the Foal of a Mule

We have already mentioned that the term *mosham* refers to a mule, and *mosham gi bu* refers to the foal of a mule, which is non-existent.

The root text reads:

*Should a non-generated unknown identity,
A natural other-powered phenomenon, exist;
This is unsuitable by whatever means, what harm
Is inflicted by the foal of a mule on others?*

¹ Refers to the object of the action; i.e. the agent is the woodcutter, the object of action is the wood and the activity is the cutting.

Examples like the foal of a mule, the horn of a rabbit, the horn of a horse, and so forth are used as examples for a non-existent. In Tibet the horn of a rabbit was very popular, while in India they quite often talked about the horn of a horse e.g. *Ornament of Madhyamika* uses the horn of a horse as the example for a non-existent. Have any of you seen a horse with horns?

There are various examples for a non-existent. Sometimes there is doubt about whether or not a horse with horns does actually exist. Once a Chinese king heard that a rabbit with a horn was sighted in his realm, so he ordered his people to catch it in order to show it to a famous Amdo Lama who had come to visit and teach. If a mule's foal were to exist then it would harm the conventional knowledge of others, such as the Mind Only etc., that it doesn't exist. But since it is non-existent no such conflict arises. Other-powered phenomena are similarly non-existent.

The crux of the matter here is that if an other-powered inherently existing consciousness were to exist then it would be like the existence of the foal of a mule.

Mirror:

My dear Mind Only, further, this other-powered phenomena *is unsuitable* to exist by whatever means, because, *what harm is inflicted by the foal of a mule?* It follows that would be a correct premise - because *an other-powered phenomenon with a non-generated unknown identity, a phenomenon established out of its own nature, exists.*

The **Prasangikas** say to the Mind Only, 'If, after the other-powered phenomenon that is generated from self, such as asserted by the Samkya, is refuted, and after the other-powered phenomenon that is generated from other is refuted, and after your proof for the existence of other-powered phenomenon, the self-knower is refuted as well, you still insist on positing an other-powered phenomenon, then you are completely in outer space and you are really holding onto an untenable position.

'My dear Mind Only, if you still insist on the existence of such other-powered phenomenon existing out of their own nature even though they are not generated inherently, and are actually in the nature of being completely unknown by valid cognition; if you still continue to insist the existence of such an other-powered phenomenon of which there is no knowledge by a valid cognition, the proof of which, a self-knower, has been refuted, which is refuted as generated from self or other, then what problem would there be with positing the existence of a mule's foal? Positing the existence of a mule's foal should not attract any debate or contradiction'.

Within the heading 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.2. Refuting Proof That Other-Powered Phenomena Exist Inherently, the first sub-heading was 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.2.1. Refuting Self-knowers the Proof for Other-powered Phenomena, which we have just now completed.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.2.2. Showing that the Mind Only system Doesn't Remain Within the Two Truths

The root text says,

***When other-powered phenomena don't exist
At all what becomes the cause of conventionalities?
According to others, through being attached to substance,
The whole presentation of conventional existence is lost.***

Mirror reads,

Take the subject 'inherently existing *other-powered phenomena*' - it follows that they don't become *the cause of illusory conventionalities* - because they *don't exist at all.*

It follows that *according to others*, the Mind Only, *the whole presentation of conventional existence is lost through being attached to the true existence of the substance of other-powered phenomena.*

Here it talks about being attached to substance. Substantially existing phenomena, which are the basis for illusory nominal existence in the other tenets, are non-existent in the **Prasangika** system. In the Prasangika system substantially existent, ultimately existent, truly existent, and so forth refer to the same thing. However one can't say that they are synonymous because in order to be synonymous they would have to be existent. In the Prasangika system if it exists then it is always an imputed existent, and it can never exist substantially. For the Prasangikas substantial existence equals true or ultimate existence, so it is something that doesn't exist.

In the **lower schools** if it is impermanent then it exists substantially. So it is not necessarily a substantial existent, but it can still exist substantially, e.g. the person. The lower schools make this distinction between existing substantially and being a substantial existent. Even though they use the same terminology as the Prasangika system, the meaning of being an imputed existent or being a substantial existent is different for the lower schools.

If making it an object of awareness depends upon making another phenomenon an object of awareness then it is **an imputed existent**. If making it an object of awareness doesn't depend upon making another phenomenon an object of awareness then it is a **substantial existent**.

The lower schools, the Svatantrika and below, say that something can exist substantially without being a substantial existent, e.g. the person. In the **Prasangika** system, there is no such thing as existing substantially or being a substantial existent. If it exists then it's always an imputed existent, and there is no difference between being a substantial existent or existing substantially, but their definition of what an imputed or a substantial existent is varies from the lower schools.

As it says in the root text, the **Mind Only** assert that the consciousness is an inherently existent other-powered phenomenon that exists substantially, and as such can be the cause for the illusory conventional world. They say, 'Since no such phenomenon exists then what would become the cause of conventionalities according to you'? Because the Mind Only posit other-powered phenomena as ultimately existing objects they have strayed from the **ultimate** truth. Also, the whole presentation of **illusory**²

² The Tibetan word *kundzob* is mostly translated as 'conventional', but

conventional nominal existence is lost because of being attached to the true existence of the substance of other-powered phenomena.

So the Mind Only don't remain within the two truths - they stray from the two truths. That is because they assert an inherently existing consciousness that lacks external objects. First of all, because of asserting an inherently existent consciousness they assert an ultimately existing, truly existing consciousness, and that makes them stray from the ultimate truth. Secondly, asserting a lack of external objects makes them stray from the conventional illusory truth.

The **Prasangika** say to the Mind Only, 'You don't remain within the boundaries of the two truths, you have strayed from them by asserting an inherently existing consciousness that lacks external objects. First of all by asserting an inherently existent consciousness you assert an ultimately existing truly existent consciousness and that makes you stray from the ultimate truth, and by doing that you don't remain within the boundaries of ultimate truth. You stray from the conventional illusory truth because you deny external objects. So by denying external objects you deny nominal conventional existence and in such a way you deny the illusory truth. Conventionally or nominally we say 'I'm eating', 'I'm drinking', 'I'm doing this', or 'I'm doing that'. There are many types of activities of the self that relate to external objects, and by denying these external objects then you deny conventional truth, the conventional illusory world. In such a way then the presentation of the illusory world is completely lost. If there were no external existence then lots of the things that conventionally, nominally exist would be lost'. What do you think? *[laughter]*.

If it were as the Mind Only posit, then because of being attached to truly existing substantial existence, the whole presentation of the conventional illusory world would be lost.

Student question: I want to ask you how can you apply this current teaching to daily life. For example it is hard for me to see the connection between understanding that there's no self-knower or there's no other-powered phenomenon with decreasing mental afflictions. How does it connect?

By establishing the non-existence of a self-knower and by establishing the non-existence of other-powered phenomena one establishes the lack of inherent existence. The Mind Only assert inherently existent consciousness, saying that at the time of analysis there is this aspect of clear knowing that can be found, which is consciousness. They establish this through the self-knower. By refuting the self-knower and inherently existing other-powered phenomena one refutes inherently existent consciousness.

Grasping at inherently existent consciousness is self-

grasping. So by refuting the inherently consciousness one lessens that self-grasping. All of this leads up to the next outline, which is that in order to attain liberation one needs to follow Nagarjuna's path. If one strays from Nagarjuna's view then one will not be able to attain liberation. We will go that through next time.

By asserting inherently existent consciousness one asserts ultimately existing, truly existent consciousness. In doing so one strays from ultimate truth. By denying external existence one also denies nominal conventional illusory truth, because conventionally we have many different types of feelings that are generated upon contact with external objects. By denying those external objects then we also deny illusory conventional truth. The main method for attaining liberation is the wisdom that realises selflessness. However all the lower tenets assert some type of inherently existing self and they assert selflessness as something that exists ultimately. By doing this they can't attain liberation. So that is a hurdle that has to be overcome.

We also have to also relate it to ourselves. When they say that the person exists inherently what do they really mean? They mean that when the person is looked for at the time of analysis there is something that can be found - there is an instance of a person that can be found. They say there has to be some instance of person findable, such as the universal mind-foundation, the stream of mental consciousness and so forth. By then negating that with the Prasangika reasoning one arrives at a correct understanding of selflessness. One has to relate that to one's own practice and one's own understanding of selflessness. One has to relate it to one's meditation on selflessness.

Not all the lower tents assert a self-knower. For example Bhavaviveka in his commentary on the two truths refutes the self-knower in the same way as Chandrakirti does. But then there are those schools that assert a self-knower, such as the Mind Only and so forth. Their reason for doing so is basically because they say that there is something findable at the time of analysis. They say that at the time of analysis ultimately some instance of person or the object has to be findable. That's why we have these different presentations of the universal mind foundation as an example of the person, or of the mental consciousness as an example for the person, and so forth.

Understanding this helps one's own understanding of selflessness. When they posit an inherently existent consciousness, they say that the self-knower establishes inherently existent consciousness. Why does a self-knower exist? Their proof is because we are able to remember the object possessor. They have their own sequence of reasoning and establishing their point of view, which was refuted point by point by Chandrakirti. In such a way one refutes the reasoning why consciousness should exist inherently. One has to relate it to one's own practice.

Did you understand the point about why one strays from the ultimate truth if one posits ultimate existence? What is ultimate truth? Ultimate truth is the lack of ultimate existence, so the lack of inherent, ultimate existence is ultimate truth. By positing ultimate existence then one

this is actually a mistranslation as the word *kundzob* literally means all-obscured. As such it should express a discrepancy between appearance and existence and that is why I have chosen the word illusory, which seems to do the trick just fine. All-obscured doesn't sound nice to me. If you feel uncomfortable with illusory then I am happy to revert to plain old 'conventional', but then I fear you miss out on the full meaning of the Tibetan word. However, Geshe-la said you should be comfortable with the use of the word illusory in this new context.

strays from ultimate truth.

This table's lack of inherent existence is ultimate truth, its ability to perform functions is the table's conventional illusory truth, and the table's ability to perform functions while being empty of inherent existence is its subtle conventional illusory truth. By denying external existence then we deny nominal conventional existence such as internal feelings and so forth generated through the contact with external objects.

That's the way you have to think about it. When one asserts ultimate existence then one strays from the ultimate truth and when one denies external existence then one denies nominal conventional truth. The two truths are something that should be considered very carefully.

By trying to generate some understanding of emptiness in this life then in the next life the realisation of emptiness will come much more easily.

Student question: I have a friend who is dying, and I'm not sure of his religion. If he doesn't believe in the bardo and future rebirth and believes in the Christian concept of heaven and hell can attain rebirth in one of these two?

I'm not sure if there is a separate hell that is reserved for Christians. In general religions are important at death to make it easier to give up grasping, and to die in a virtuous state of mind, which facilitates a good next life.

In the Christian tradition one can go to heaven by having faith in god, and if there is no faith one goes to the hell realms. So there is some idea of the next life. They don't accept rebirth but do accept going to heaven or hell.

Student question: Doesn't rebirth contradict the lack of inherent existence?

They don't contradict each other, because when you go to a next life there's a lack of inherent existence. We already went over all those points. If something were to exist inherently then it either wouldn't be generated at all, or it would be generated from each and every cause, or it would have to be generated already at the time of the cause, and the cause would have to exist also at the time of the effect. Then there were all those different types of faults associated with inherent existence. We said that basically something can't be generated properly if it exists inherently. There are different types of fallacies if something were to exist inherently. We've already been through this. If something lacks inherent existence it can be generated.

If happiness were to exist inherently then we wouldn't need to experience any suffering, if suffering were to exist inherently then we would only experience suffering. The fact that there are conditions for happiness and suffering shows that there's a lack of inherent existence.

Student question: What is it that goes to the next life that lacks inherent existence?

The 'I' and the consciousness go to the next life. The self that came down through previous lifetimes is with us now and existed before we were named. Then there's the self that exists after we were named. We have this

presentation of those two selves.

When for example we just think in terms of just 'I' without thinking, 'I such and such', at that time it's not in the context of any particular name. It is this 'I' that goes from life to life. There is also the other situation where for example we introduce ourselves to somebody and then we say, 'I'm such and such'.

Student question: If karma is carried on the imputed 'I' and we realise that the imputed 'I' is not there, is there not a fine line between falling into nihilism and enlightenment?

I have said before that one needs to be very careful to distinguish between non-existence and non-inherent existence. We have talked about that a lot. When we say 'I don't exist inherently' that doesn't mean I don't exist. If you say that lack of inherent existence is non-existence then you fall into nihilism.

Student question: If you carry an imputed 'I' are you still under the influence of cause and effect? Once you realise emptiness do you still fall within the law of cause and effect?

There different stages. An ordinary individual, i.e. not an arya, having realised emptiness still falls within the law of cause and effect. However there will be a decrease in accumulation of projecting or throwing karma for that individual. Ordinary individuals create projecting karma on the belief in the appearance of inherent intrinsic existence. Having realised emptiness, even though there is the appearance of inherent intrinsic existence, one realises that there is a discrepancy between what appears and what really exists, because one doesn't believe that appearance. One creates less projecting karma because of that.

I have told you before the story of the student who practised a mistaken meditation on emptiness, meditating on everything being completely non-existent. He believed he was meditating on emptiness and he got benefit from that. It really gave him some happiness and bliss just to meditate on everything as being completely non-existent.

Here the idea of the practitioner is that one tries to go beyond the feelings of happiness and suffering that are generated because of attractive or unattractive encounters and appearances of external forms. By stopping external forms from appearing to the mind one also stops the generation of pleasant and unpleasant feelings. Here of course the person has not really stopped the appearance of true existence, but they have stopped the appearance of external form to their mind, which brings a certain type of benefit with it.

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