
Study Group - *Madhyamakavataranama*

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དབུ་མ་ལ་འདུག་པ་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་བཞུགས་སོ། །

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Generate the motivation of bodhicitta thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and in order to do so I am now going to listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice as much as possible'.

Last time we talked about how the 'only' in mind-only emphasises mind, and cuts off a permanent self as creator or an external creator and so forth, thus emphasising mind as being the creator of the world.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.3.2. Synchronicity of Object and Mind in Existence and Non-existence

*For those following that very point of worldly beings
Five aggregates exist according to worldly convention.
If one asserts the generation of the transcendental wisdom
of suchness,
For such a yogi those five don't exist.*

*If form doesn't exist, don't hold mind to exist;
Even if mind exists, don't hold form as non-existent.
The Buddha taught these in the Wisdom Method Sutra
As concomitant in abandoning, and in the Abhidharma.*

*Despite destroying the way of the two truths
Your substance, because of rejection, won't be established.
Therefore, because of the view's way, phenomena aren't
generated
As such from the beginning but should be known as worldly
generation.*

The commentary in *Mirror* says,

We have to say, '*if external form doesn't exist, don't hold mind to exist; even if mind exists, don't hold form as non-existent*' - because for those following that very point, the presentation of worldly beings, the five aggregates exist according to worldly convention and if one asserts the non-conceptual generation of the transcendental wisdom of suchness, then for such a yogi those five don't exist.

Take the subject '*these five aggregates*' - they are concomitant with each other in existence and non-existence - because the Buddha taught them in the sutra elucidating the method of the perfection of wisdom as concomitant with each other in abandoning inherent existence, and in the Abhidharma teachings he taught them from the point of view of their individual or general characteristics.

Take the subject '*your, the Mind Only's, inherently established other-powered substance*' - it won't be established though destroying the way of the two truths, not existing ultimately but existing in an illusory manner - because of rejection by valid cognition.

Because of the way mentioned before, phenomena aren't generated as suchness from the beginning but should be known as worldly nominal generation. In order not to degenerate the two truths, nominal existence without ultimate existence needs to be accepted.

Synchronicity of object and mind in existence and non-

existence refers to being concomitant in not existing inherently, and in existing nominally.

When the **Mind Only** say that form doesn't exist they mean that external form is non-existent, so that has to be specified. At the same time they assert that consciousness exists inherently.

This is the point of view that the **Prasangika** debate. They say that this point of view of having a lack of external form, and at the same time having an intrinsically existing consciousness is invalid because of the synchronicity of object and mind in existence and non-existence.

Here the line of reasoning about the synchronicity of object and mind in existence and non existence used by the Prasangika is to state that the object is the external object and the mind is the object possessor, and that they are concomitant in not existing inherently, or ultimately, and at the same time they are concomitant in existing nominally.

Regarding these first two lines of the first verse,

*For those following that very point of worldly beings
Five aggregates exist according to worldly convention.*

Illumination:

How do the five aggregates such as the aggregate of external form and so forth exist through worldly convention for those who abide according to the ordinary worldly presentation?

What this means is that the worldly way is to accept things without investigation or analysis - that's how phenomena are posited conventionally. The root text talks about 'that very point of worldly beings', which means the presentation of worldly beings as just accepting things without investigation and analysis. That's how things that exist conventionally exist. In such a way the first two lines show nominal, conventional, illusory existence.

The next two lines are,

*If one asserts the generation of the transcendental wisdom
of suchness,
For such a yogi those five don't exist.*

Just as the first two lines establish nominal existence, the second two lines establish the lack of ultimate existence. They do so by referring to the point that we already mentioned previously, where if illusory conventional phenomena appear to the transcendental wisdom realising suchness directly, then they would exist ultimately. So the absence of illusory conventional phenomena to the transcendental wisdom is the ultimate truth, the lack of ultimate existence.

So the first two lines show the synchronicity of object and mind in nominal existence, and the second two lines show the synchronicity of object and mind in not existing ultimately.

The first line of the second verse is, '**If form doesn't exist, don't hold mind to exist;** If external form doesn't exist then don't assert the mind to exist. Just because one holds mind to exist, don't hold external form as a non-existent.

Even if mind exists ultimately or inherently it is still unsuitable to hold external form as non-existent. The reason for this line of reasoning is that there is total synchronicity between object and mind in existence and non-existence.

Having employed this reasoning, Chandrakirti says that the synchronicity of object and mind in existence and non-existence is also supported by scriptural reference.

Proof Using Sutras

In the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* the Buddha showed that the five aggregates are concomitant in having abandoned or in lacking inherent existence. So the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* refute inherently existent five aggregates.

In the *Abhidharma* class of teachings the five aggregates are explained as being concomitant in existing either from the point of view of their specific characteristics, or their general characteristics. The *Abhidharmakosa*, or *Treasury of Higher Knowledge*, states that one should meditate on the close placement of mindfulness after having identified the specific and general characteristics of the object. In English the four close placements of mindfulness are often translated as the four foundations of mindfulness, which is a mistranslation¹.

The Four Close Placements of Mindfulness

1. Placement on Body

The first close placement is the placement of the mindfulness on the body. Here one can meditate on the general characteristics of the body such as its impermanence of the body, the pervasive suffering nature of the body, or the empty and selfless nature of the body as stated in the lines saying,

Everything compounded is impermanent,
Everything contaminated is suffering,
Everything is empty and selfless.

Those lines describe the general characteristics of, for example, the body. When one places one's mindfulness on the impermanence of, or the suffering nature of the body, one meditates on the general characteristic of the body. One can also meditate on an actual specific characteristic of the body, such as the body being in the nature of aggregates and the derivatives of aggregates, or the impurity of the body.

2. Placement on Feeling

The second of the four close placements of mindfulness is the placement of mindfulness on feeling. This is meditating on feeling as being in the nature of experience, which is that which defines feeling.

3. Placement on Mind

The third close placement is the placement of mindfulness on mind. Here the specific characteristic is the characteristic of focusing on the object.

4. Placement on Dharmas

The fourth close placement is the placement on dharmas. Here dharmas refer to the various virtuous and non-virtuous mental factors, and the placement on dharmas is placing one's mind on the individual specific characteristics of those mental factors.

One can meditate on the four close placements of mindfulness in a general way or in a specific way. So when one meditates on them in a **general** way then one always meditates on the general nature of the object such as the impermanence of the body, or the impermanence of feelings, or the impermanence of mind, or the impermanence of dharmas, here meaning the mental factors.

For example, we meditate on the impermanence of the body in conjunction with the line 'Everything compounded is impermanent', or we can meditate on the pervasive suffering nature of the body in conjunction with the second

line, 'Everything that is contaminated is suffering', or we can meditate on the empty and selfless nature of the body as stated in the third line, 'All phenomena are empty and selfless'.

One can also meditate on them in a more **specific** way. An example would be to meditate on the specific characteristic of the body in conjunction with meditating on the impure nature of the body. In such a manner one can meditate on each of the four objects of the four types of close placement of mindfulness in a general or specific way.

In the *Abhidharma* the five aggregates are explained from a specific point of view as well as from a general point of view. It explains how one meditates on them in both a specific as well as in a general manner. For example when we meditate on them in a specific way, we meditate on an individual specific characteristic or nature, like their specific identity. If meditating on the body being in the nature of impurity we would meditate on a specific characteristic of the body. Meditating on the body as being a combination of elements and derivatives of elements is also meditating on the specific nature of the body.

Despite destroying the way of the two truths

Your substance, because of rejection, won't be established.

Therefore, because of the view's way, phenomena aren't generated

As such from the beginning but should be known as worldly generation.

Mirror:

Take the subject '*your*, the Mind Only's, inherently established other-powered *substance*' - it *won't be established though destroying the way of the two truths*, not existing ultimately but existing in an illusory manner - because of *rejection* by valid cognition.

Because of the way mentioned before, *phenomena aren't generated as suchness from the beginning but should be known as worldly nominal generation*. In order not to degenerate the two truths, nominal existence without ultimate existence needs to be accepted.

Here the **Prasangika** say to the Mind Only, 'Having clearly shown through both logic as well through scriptural reference that object and mind are concomitant in existence and non-existence, even if you persist in destroying the way of the two truths your substance, truly existing consciousness, will still not be established, because it is completely rejected both by valid reasoning as well as by valid scriptural quotation'. We have already talked before about how in the Prasangika system there's no substantially existing phenomenon because they equalise it with true existence.

Therefore, because of the views that have already been explained, both through valid reasoning as well as with scriptural quotations, *phenomena are not generated* ultimately within suchness. This means that phenomena are not generated ultimately or inherently from the beginning, so they don't exist from beginningless times as being generated within suchness. Why? Because of all the reasons and quotations already given. They *should be known as worldly generation* meaning that they should be known as just being generated nominally.

'So for somebody like you, the Mind Only, who doesn't like to stay within the boundaries of the two truths and who likes to assert inherently existing consciousness while at the same time denying externally existing objects, then the

¹ *Tren-pa nyer-shag* refers to the close placement of wisdom on the body, feelings, mind and dharmas by mindfulness.

reason of the synchronicity of object and mind in existence and non-existence has to be explained’.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3. The Intent Regarding Mind Only in the Journey to Lanka Sutra

Here there are two major sub-outlines,

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1. Showing the teaching on mere mind without external object to be interpretive

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.2. Revealing the method for realising the definitive and interpretive meaning of the sutras

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1. Showing the Teaching on Mere Mind Without External Object To Be Interpretive

This has two sub outlines,

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1.1. Showing it to be interpretive through quotation

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1.2. Showing it to be interpretive through logic

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1.1. Showing It To Be Interpretive Through Quotation

Here there are two outlines again,

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1.1.1. Actual

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1.1.2. Showing other similar sutras also to be interpretive

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1.1.1. Actual

The teaching from the sutra, ‘external objects Appear but don’t exist; varieties appear to the mind’, To counter form for those intensely attached To form, is again purely interpretive.

This was taught by the teacher to be merely interpretive And logic validates it to be merely interpretive.

We have already showed with the *Sutra of the Tenth Bhumi* what the actual meaning of mind-only is, and we have shown that the teaching of mind-only is actually interpretative and not definitive. There is not only the *Sutra of the Tenth Bhumi* but there are also other sutras such as the *Journey to Lanka Sutra*.

The verse begins, ‘The teaching from the sutra’, and the sutra that it is referring to is the *Journey to Lanka Sutra*. The meaning of the *Sutra of the Tenth Bhumi* has already been explained, and now the teaching from the *Journey to Lanka Sutra*, ‘external objects appear but don’t exist; varieties appear to the mind, things like the body, possessions and places, I declare to be mere mind’, is explained.

Through the condition of being intensely attached to truly existent intrinsically beautiful form, attachment, anger and pride are subsequently generated without any freedom. Through these mental fabrications one generates lots of non-virtue and engages in actions that harm one’s virtue, lessen one’s merits, harm’s ones wisdom, and so forth. Different delusions are subsequently generated because of the inappropriate way of initially grasping at the object as being something intrinsically beautiful. In order to stop the generation of the delusions that would otherwise arise relative to this intrinsically existing beautiful external object, it makes sense to say that such an external object doesn’t exist. In actuality this intrinsically beautiful external object is non-existent. Generally of course external objects are existent, but the intrinsically beautiful external object with regard to which the delusion is generated is really non-existent.

The non-existence of external form was not a definitive teaching but it was an interpretative teaching for certain disciples. It is similar to the Buddha’s teaching on skeletons

and so forth, which was taught in order to abandon attachment to external objects for those who have strong attachment.

How does one know that this quote is merely interpretative and not definitive? The Buddha himself taught that the statement that there is no external existence, and that everything that is mere mind is merely interpretative. This is established from quotations such as, ‘there’s no external existence’ and ‘everything is mere mind’.

That this sutra is interpretative is also validated by logical reasoning. So through both logical reasoning as well as through quotation the sutras teaching that there’s no external object, and that everything is mere mind, are established to be merely interpretative.

3.5.1.1.1.2.2.2.3.3.1.1.2. Showing Other Similar Sutras Also To Be Interpretive

This scripture shows clearly that also other Sutras in that image are merely interpretive.

Mirror:

Take the subject ‘*other sutras in the image* explained earlier asserted to be definitive by the Mind Only’ - they are interpretive - because this quote ‘Similarly to the doctor giving medicine to the patient, the Buddha clearly taught sentient beings about mere mind’ shows clearly that they are merely interpretive.

This quote, ‘Similarly to the doctor giving medicine to the patient, the Buddha clearly taught sentient beings about mere mind’, shows the teachings on mere mind to be interpretative.

When a doctor prescribes medicine they prescribe it in accordance with the patient’s sickness. They are not medicines that the doctor would necessarily take for themselves, they are tailored to the patient’s problem. Likewise when the Buddha taught sentient beings he did not always teach what he knew to be true. Rather he tailored his teachings according to the needs of sentient beings.

This quote, ‘similar to the doctor giving medicine to the patient the Buddha clearly taught sentient beings about mere mind’, is an important quote that you should memorise. It shows very clearly that the teachings on mere mind are interpretative. So when it says,

This scripture shows clearly that also other Sutras in that image are merely interpretive.

‘this scripture’ refers to this quote. The ‘other sutras in that image’ are sutras that are in the image of teaching mere mind. These lines show all of them to be merely interpretive.

What it does here is show that the sutras accepted by the Mind Only to be definitive teachings are merely interpretative. The **Mind Only** definition of whether a teaching is interpretative or definitive is not related to the subject matter of the sutra, but it is related to whether or not the sutra can be taken literally. The Mind Only say that if a sutra can be accepted literally then it is a definitive teaching, and if the sutra cannot be taken literally then it is an interpretative teaching. They don’t make a distinction between definitive and interpretative from the point of view of subject.

There are four sutras accepted by the Mind Only as definitive. They are,

- The sutra showing the lack of external existence
- The sutra showing the existence of universal mind foundation

- The sutra defining the three identities, mental fabrications, other-powered phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena, as either truly existent or lacking true existence.
- The sutra teaching about the three final vehicles.

We can get to the actual words of the sutra next time.

After those four definitive teachings according to the Mind Only comes the explanation of their meaning. It is good for you to know which teachings are accepted by the Mind Only as definitive, and which they accept as interpretative.

Review

What are the dharmas shown here? You have to think back. This question has been asked many many times before. Think back to the lines of the homage about bodhicitta and non-dual awareness. The dharmas shown here are in that homage, which says roughly, 'the mind of compassion and non-dual awareness and bodhicitta are the causes of bodhisattvas'. What are the three dharmas shown here at this time?

It seems that you are very quiet now, and that you don't have much to say. When we are giving answers to you then you are very critical and have lots to say, but now there's not much coming forth. There was a Kagyu abbot who used to always ask Geshe Jhampa Tekchok after his classes, 'Geshe-la it is exactly as you said isn't it?', and Geshe-la said, 'Well if you already know that it is exactly as I said, then why do you ask?'

Is there a difference between bodhicitta in general and the bodhicitta mentioned here in the second line of the homage where it says, 'the mind of enlightenment is the cause of the conquerors' children'?

Student: Yes

What's the difference?

Student answer: Whether or not it is generated in dependence on meditating on the seven point cause and effect method.

Is there a bodhicitta that doesn't arise from meditating on the seven-point cause and effect method? It is not possible to posit a bodhicitta that has not been generated through meditating on the seven-point cause and effect method. Should you posit a bodhicitta that is generated through meditating on the method of exchanging self and others then there is no pervasion, because when you meditate on the method of exchanging self and other, the method of the seven-point cause and effect method is implicitly included in the method of exchanging self and others.

The distinction between bodhicitta in general and that posited in the opening lines of the homage is that the former is spontaneous. The latter hasn't got to the point of being generated spontaneously. Through continual meditation on the method for the generation of bodhicitta (seven-point cause and effect or exchanging self and others) one gains a strong experience of bodhicitta, but it is still created with mental effort, and it is not a spontaneous thought. Then there comes a time when the thought of bodhicitta is a natural part of one's mind without having to go through any mental process. It will just arise naturally within one's mind without having to remember the different types of reasons, or going through a mental process of creating it. You should know difference between these two types of bodhicitta.

It is the same with compassion, where we have the same two types. Initially the strong compassion that one generates is a created type of compassion. Then through continual

meditation that will become an integral part of one's mind and will arise spontaneously. Then just by seeing another sentient being great compassion will immediately arise within one's mind similarly to the compassion that arises naturally in the mind of the mother when she sees her only child being sick.

Who is the object of the homage of the *Introduction To The Middle Way*?

Student answer: Compassion

There are three reasons why great compassion is the object of homage. What are those?

Student answer: Important in the beginning, middle and end.

What is the analogy used for compassion that is important in the **beginning**? It is like the seed. When great compassion is generated in one's mind then one's Mahayana lineage is awakened at that time. Why is it like a seed? Great compassion is like the seed from which the different grounds and paths of the bodhisattva path grow. They grow from the seed of great compassion.

Why is compassion important in the middle? Compassion is important in the **middle** in order to increase the qualities of the grounds and paths. Without great compassion the qualities of the grounds and paths can't be increased. **Finally** great compassion is important so that the disciples can enjoy the fruit of complete enlightenment.

In order to become enlightened one needs to accumulate great merit, so one needs to engage in vast and difficult duties for the benefit of sentient beings. In doing those activities one always encounters ungrateful and vicious sentient beings with bad behaviour, and then if one lacks great compassion then it is very easy to fall from the path.

For example without compassion it would be very difficult for parents to bring up a child that is badly behaved. If the parents don't have compassion for the child it would be very easy to give up on the child. Compassion makes it possible to bear the disruptive and bad behaviour of the child, while continuing to try and bring it up in the best possible way for the child.

Here one definitely needs this compassion for the other in order for one's beneficial activities not to be harmed by the person, and so that one is not discouraged and so forth. Likewise when we work for sentient beings we need to have that compassion for others in order to not experience discouragement and so forth because of their difficult behaviour.

That's how you should look at the benefit of compassion. Without compassion then if others give us problems it really creates problems for us. However if we have compassion for them, then even though they might be difficult it doesn't create problems for us.

It is similar to the relationship between a patient and the nurse. The nurse needs to have lots of compassion for their patient otherwise the relationship between patient and nurse won't turn out very well. She needs to see that the patient is already there, they have an illness and they have to stay in hospital, so it is very important to have compassion for them.

For example, the nurse looks at the patient and thinks, 'Oh they are sick. No matter how much money they have, no matter how many relatives they have, or how many children, all that is actually of no benefit, because the patient is under the control of their sickness'. Viewing the person in

such a way helps greatly in generating compassion.

The patient, despite having a wealth of friends and so forth, still became sick. Their friends, relatives and money didn't help one bit in preventing them from becoming sick. Now they are in hospital they have to experience different suffering - they have to experience exactly what they don't want. They also lack what they want. For example in hospital you have to eat many things you don't like to eat. So the person is actually deprived of all of the external means for happiness that they previously had. They are completely thrown back on themselves and on their mind. If they have never taken care of their mind, and allowed it to degenerate, be negative and so forth and then at that point, because they have neither outer nor inner resources for happiness then they will become very miserable.

It's no surprise that old people often become very, very depressed, because all the external means that they used to rely upon for happiness have all gone. They can't enjoy those external means any more for many different types of reasons, and as they have never taken care of their mind they don't have any way to be happy. So of course they will be depressed. It's not surprising.

At such a time one will feel incredibly grateful towards those who show one kindness at such a difficult time. Then one will want to give all of one's money to that person. I heard a few weeks ago about somebody who gave eleven million dollars to a neighbour who took care of them during their last days.

Some people leave all their money to their dog or cat. That's not surprising because it's the dog or cat which usually gave them some happiness in their last years, when their children and so forth were nowhere to be seen.

Edited Version
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