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# Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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6 April 2004

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Please generate the virtuous motivation of bodhicitta as usual.

## 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.3.3.1.1.2. Showing Other Similar Sutras Also To Be Interpretive

Last time we started with the verse that reads,

*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.*

These other similar sutras are: the sutra that shows the lack of external existence, the sutra that shows the existence of a universal mind foundation, and the sutra that discerns the true and non-true existence of the three identities.

The sutra that explains the lack of external existence and the sutra that explains the existence of a universal mind foundation were covered earlier in the text. If you remember back, earlier in the text one verse starts with the question, 'what example is there for a consciousness without external object'. That is the point where the sutra explaining the lack of external objects is covered. Likewise when the text later talks about universal mind foundation the sutra that explains the existence of a universal mind foundation is also covered. The sutra that is now going to be covered is the sutra that discerns the true and non-true existence of the three identities.

## 3.5.1.1.1.2.2.3.3.1.2. Showing It To Be Interpretive Through Logic

*That consciousness is eliminated if there is no object of knowledge*

*Is easily discovered, the buddhas taught*

*Since consciousness is refuted if there is no object of knowledge*

*I initially endeavour to refute objects of knowledge.*

Four sutras are regarded by the Mind Only as definitive sutras: the sutra that explains the lack of external existence, the sutra that explains the existence of a universal mind foundation, the sutra that discerns the true and non-true existence of the three identities, and the sutra that teaches three final vehicles. The reason why Chandrakirti in his root text and *Self-Commentary* refutes only the first three sutras as definitive and doesn't

actually endeavour to also refute the fourth sutra as definitive is because in the *Compendium of All Sutras*<sup>1</sup> it is already clearly refuted.

## The Four Definitive Sutras of the Mind-Only

### 1. Sutra Showing the Lack of External Objects

From *Elucidating the Intent of the Sutras*: 'Whatever is an object possessing form that is engaged by the concentration of the Destroyer With Qualities Gone Beyond - why is it described to be different from mind, or isn't it different?' To this the Destroyer With Qualities Gone Beyond replies, 'Jampa, it isn't different. If it is asked why, consciousness is set apart by being mere knowledge of the object, I say'.

### 2. Sutra Showing A Universal Mind Foundation

From *Elucidating the Intent of the Sutras*: 'The taken consciousness is profound and subtle, all seeds fall like a water stream, if conceptualised as self - this is unsuitable I say, I don't show this to the childish'.

### 3. Sutra Discerning The True And Non-true Nature Of The Three Identities According To The Mind-Only

From the chapter requested by Dondam Yangdag Phag in *Elucidating the Intent of the Sutras*: 'If it is asked what lacks quintessential characteristics, it is the characteristic of mental fabrication. If it is asked why, it is because it is posited through name and sign and doesn't abide through its own characteristic<sup>2</sup>. Therefore it is called 'Lacking quintessential characteristics' and so forth'.

This sutra discerns the inherent and non-inherent existence of the three identities.

### 4. Sutra Teaching Three Final Vehicles

From *Elucidating the Intent of the Sutras*: 'Those singularly progressing towards peace don't completely awaken to highest perfect enlightenment, even if they have the help of all the buddhas and possess the essence of enlightenment ...'

Chandrakirti then establishes those four sutras to be interpretative through scriptural quotation as well as through logic.

## Establishing Those Four Sutras To Be Interpretive Through Other Quotations

### 1. Sutra Showing The Teaching On Mere Intrinsic Consciousness Lacking An External Object To Be Interpretive

From the *Journey to Lanka Sutra*: 'Similarly to the doctor giving medicine to the patient, the Buddha clearly taught sentient beings about mere mind'.

This sutra shows that the teaching about mere mind was only meant to be interpretative. Similarly to the doctor giving medicine to the patient according to their sickness, the Buddha taught sentient beings about mere mind, without that necessarily being his personal viewpoint.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Compendium of All Sutras* was composed by by Nagarjuna

<sup>2</sup> Inherent

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## 2. Sutra Showing The Teaching On A Universal Mind Foundation To Be Interpretive

In the *Journey to Lanka Sutra* the Buddha teaches that all sentient beings possess a permanent, stable and immutable tathagata essence endowed with the thirty-two marks, which is clad in aggregates, spheres and sources, outshined by anger, attachment and ignorance, and tainted by over-conceptualisation, similarly to a precious jewel being clad in stained cloth. That it is permanent means it doesn't change, that it is stable means that it is always there, and being immutable means here to exist eternally since beginningless times.

By showing this teaching of the *Journey to Lanka Sutra* on the tathagata's essence to be interpretive the teaching from the *Elucidating the Intent of the Sutras* on a universal mind foundation is also shown to be interpretive.

This teaching of the *Journey to Lanka Sutra* on the tathagata's essence is shown to be interpretive by the subsequent lines in the *Journey to Lanka Sutra*<sup>3</sup> where the Buddha says, 'Lodroe Chenbo (Great Intelligent One), my teaching on the tathagata's essence isn't the same as the heathens asserting as self, Great Intelligent One, the Ones Gone Thus, the arhats, the perfectly enlightened buddhas taught the meaning of words such as emptiness, perfect end, gone beyond misery, unborn, signless, wishless and so forth, as tathagata's essence'.

When the Buddha taught the tathagata's essence he had in mind the three doors to liberation - emptiness, signlessness and wishlessness - i.e. the selflessness of phenomena. The reason for teaching in such a way was to lead to suchness gradually the childish students afraid of selflessness, those grasping at the views of the heathen, and those who were habituated in those views.

How does establishing the teaching on the tathagata's essence as interpretive establish the teaching on a universal mind foundation as interpretive?

From *Placing the Solid Ornament*: 'The universal basis of various grounds, as well the virtue tathagata's essence, with the word 'universal basis' the tathagata's essence, is shown by the tathagatas, even though the essence is known as universal basis, those with grasping awareness don't know it'.

This and other quotes from the *Journey to Lanka Sutra* show that the Buddha taught the universal mind foundation with the tathagata's essence in mind. Even though one was taught as permanent while the other was taught as impermanent, they are the same from the point of view of their implicit meaning, since the Buddha taught the universal mind foundation with the tathagata's essence in mind. Therefore by establishing the teaching on the tathagata's essence as interpretive, the teaching on a universal mind foundation is also established as interpretive.

The emptiness of the mind is the foundation of all the grounds and paths because it is their main meditation

object. That is why it is referred to as universal mind foundation. The tathagata's essence is also referred to as virtue. Why? Because the mind that meditates on emptiness is a virtuous mind.

How the sutra that teaches a permanent, truly existent tathagata's essence shown to be interpretive is by showing that all phenomena are empty, i.e. that all phenomena lack true existence. Showing that all phenomena lack true existence directly contradicts the teaching on a truly existent essence and it directly shows it to be interpretive. By showing that teaching to be interpretive the teaching on the universal mind foundation is also shown to be interpretive.

In the commentary it states that emptiness alone is expressed by the words 'universal mind foundation' in order to accord with the nature of all phenomena.

We say it in brief that the hidden intent of the teaching on the universal mind foundation is the emptiness of the mind, and the purpose of the teaching was to subdue the students that had a disposition for the Mind Only point of view. How it is shown to be interpretive is that one establishes that there is only a six-fold collection of primary consciousness and no seventh or eighth kind of consciousness.

The hidden intent of the teaching on a permanent, stable, truly existent tathagata's essence is the three doors to liberation - i.e. the selflessness of phenomena - and the purpose of the teaching is to gradually lead to emptiness those disciples who are afraid of selflessness, those grasping at the views of the heathen, and those who were habituated in those views

So you can see that the sutra of the tathagatas' essence and the sutra of the universal mind foundation have a different hidden intent, they have a different hidden subject, they have a different purpose, and they were taught for different types of students.

## 3. Sutra Showing The Sutra Discerning The True And Non-true Nature Of The Three Identities According To The Mind-Only To Be Interpretive

From the *Journey to Lanka Sutra*: 'Great Intelligent One, I am showing that the meaning of emptiness, non-generation, non-disintegration and lack of inherent existence is conveyed in the sutras of all buddhas'.

By teaching that all phenomena are empty, that they lack inherent generation, disintegration, and so forth, the *Journey to Lanka Sutra* shows the teaching on the inherent and non-inherent existence of the three identities to be interpretive. How? Because it shows that the ultimate, the final or the actual thought of the Buddha is that all phenomena lack intrinsic existence. By showing that the final thought of the Buddha is that all phenomena lack inherent existence it shows very clearly that the teaching that mental fabrications lack inherent existence while other-powered phenomena and thoroughly-established phenomena are inherently existent is interpretive.

We have now gone through the four sutras that are held by the Mind Only to be definitive, and then we have gone through the three sutras Chandrakirti used to establish

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<sup>3</sup> Actually the whole section can be found in Chandrakirti's *Self-Commentary* under the same outline. The other quotes are also there.

the first three to be merely interpretive.

After showing those three sutras to be interpretative through scripture then they are shown to be interpretative through logic.

### 3.5.1.1.2.2.3.3.1.2. Showing It To Be Interpretive Through Logic

*That consciousness is eliminated if there is no object of knowledge*

*Is easily discovered, the buddhas taught.*

*Since consciousness is refuted if there is no object of knowledge*

*I initially endeavour to refute objects of knowledge.*

*Mirror:*

There is a reason why the Buddha initially refuted external objects of knowledge - because it is easy to **refute** ultimately existing **consciousness if there is no external object of knowledge. The buddhas taught it is easily discovered that truly existing consciousness is eliminated if there is no external object of knowledge.**

By refuting external objects of knowledge not only one also refutes truly existing external objects of knowledge, and then that makes it easier to refute truly existent consciousness.

### 3.5.1.1.2.2.3.3.2. Revealing the Method for Realising the Definitive and Interpretive Meaning of the Sutras

*Having comprehended the sutra's story in such a way,*

*Any sutra with a content explaining non-suchness should be interpreted, having been taught and realised as interpretive,*

*And with emptiness content should be known as definitive.*

*Mirror:*

*In such a way should the definitive and interpretive be known, having comprehended the story of the sutras - because any sutra with a content explaining mainly the illusory non-suchness should be interpreted, having been taught and realised as interpretive, and those with an emptiness content should be known as definitive.*

In the **Prasangika** system if a sutra has a primary explicit subject of emptiness then it is a definitive sutra. If a sutra has a primary explicit subject of illusory conventional truth then it is an interpretive sutra. That is what is shown in this verse. So here any sutra with content explaining non-suchness should be interpreted, and sutras with a primary explicit content of emptiness content should be known as definitive.

Whereas the **Mind Only** definition of a definitive sutra is a sutra that can be taken literally, and a sutra that can't be taken literally is an interpretative sutra.

In the **Svatantrika-Madhyamika** system, Bhavivika gives the definition of a definitive sutra as a sutra that can be taken literally and which has the primary explicit subject of emptiness. So he adds that it has to be taken literally. A sutra having the primary explicit subject of illusory conventional truth or which can't be taken literally is an interpretative sutra.

In the topic of refuting the generation from the four extremes<sup>4</sup> we have now refuted generation from self and generation from other. Now we move onto refuting generation from both.

### 3.5.1.1.2.3. Refuting Generation from Both

*Generation from both also isn't in the nature of logic because*

*The faults already explained rain down upon it.*

*It doesn't according to the world, it also isn't posited as suchness*

*Because proof that it is generated from each is non-existent.*

The Hindu tenet that asserts generation from both is the Jain school, which is still a living school. The literal translation of the word means 'those without clothes'. Those who follow the Jain school go around naked. That is because they feel if one wears clothes then indirectly one is harming sentient beings, because the clothes have to come from somewhere, and insects are harmed in the production and preparation of the cloth. They are so strict that they use a special broom to wipe the path in front of them so that they don't kill any insects.

*Mirror:*

The Jain assert, 'A vase is generated from self since it is generated from clay, and it is generated from other since it is generated from a stick, string and so forth.

Take the subject 'vase' - **generation from both also isn't in the nature of logic - because the faults already explained rain down upon it. It, the subject 'generation from both', doesn't exist according to the world, and it also isn't posited as suchness - because proof that it is generated from each of self and other is non-existent.**

They say a vase, for example, is generated from both self and others, and therefore they say that the faults associated with generation from self and other individually don't apply to them.

### 3.5.1.1.2.3. Refuting Generation from Neither

Even though there are more verses of the root text it is actually not very difficult.

In the next two classes we will attempt to finish the rest of the major topic, establishing the selfless of phenomena, which will take us up to the start of establishing the selflessness of person. That's what you can use for the exam.

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*Edited Version*

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<sup>4</sup> Heading 3.5.1.1.1. Refutation of the four-fold generation