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## Study Group - *Madhyamakavatanama*

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Generate a virtuous motivation thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment for the welfare of all sentient beings and for that purpose I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching. Then I'm going to put it into practice as much as possible.

Out of the two selflessness, the selflessness of phenomena and the selflessness of person, we have completed establishing the selflessness of phenomena through logic. Now comes the second point, establishing the selflessness of person through logic.

### 3.5.1.2. ESTABLISHING THE SELFLESSNESS OF PERSON THROUGH LOGIC

With regard to the two selflessnesses *Introduction to the Middle Way* explains the selflessness of phenomena first, because the selflessness of phenomena is the more difficult one to understand. So they are explained from the point of view of the grade of difficulty. However, when actually **meditating** on the two selflessnesses the sequence is reversed. One initially starts out by meditating on the selflessness of person and then progresses to the selflessness of phenomena.

The sequence of generation of the two types of **self-grasping** is that first the self-grasping at phenomena is generated, and then the self-grasping at the person. That is shown this quote from *Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, 'As long as there is grasping at the aggregates, there will also be grasping at self'. However the way one meditates on abandoning the two types of self-grasping is that one initially meditates on the selflessness of person.

There is a quote from *The King of Concentrations Sutra* where it says, 'Initially one comes to know the nature of the self and from that one comes to know the nature of everything. By seeing the selflessness directly, then one is able to see the Dharmakaya as well'. This quote shows that one initially starts out by meditating on the selflessness of person. Then, by knowing the nature of the self, one also knows the nature of all sentient beings.

The topic, Establishing the Selflessness of Person Through Logic is divided into three major outlines.

3.5.1.2.1. Showing that those wishing for liberation initially need to refute the self as being inherently established

3.5.1.2.2. The way of refuting that 'I' and 'mine' are inherently established

3.5.1.2.3. Showing how the analysis comparing the self and the chariot is also relevant for other phenomena<sup>1</sup>

### 3.5.1.2.1. Showing That Those Wishing for Liberation Initially Need to Refute the Self as Being Inherently Established

*Seeing with awareness that all afflictions and faults arise*

*From the view of the transitory collections, And having realised the self to be its object, Yogis strive to negate the self.*

*Mirror:*

Take the subject '*Yogis* aspiring towards liberation'

There is a particular purpose for using the subject 'yogi'. One shouldn't think of oneself as just an ordinary person engaging in ordinary activities; you can think of yourself as a yogi aspiring towards liberation.

there is a reason why they strive to negate the self as inherently established - because *seeing with awareness that all afflictions* such as attachment etc. *and all faults* such as birth, aging, sickness and death *arise from the view of the transitory collection, and* because of *having realised the self to be* the focal *object* of this transitory view, they wish to abandon the transitory view.

This explains the outlook of someone who is aspiring to liberation.

Yogis wish to engage suchness and wish to abandon all the faults of the afflictions. Everybody would like to realise emptiness, and would also like to abandon the faults of the delusions.

Those yogis who wish to engage emptiness and abandon all the faults of the afflictions look into the reason why one is wandering around cyclic existence. They investigate the root cause for wandering around cyclic existence, which is the profound way of generating renunciation. Here Chandrakirti talks about actually meditating on renunciation, and the most profound way of generating renunciation is to investigate the root of samsara. It is the way of the practitioners with sharp faculty.

Having investigated the root of cyclic existence, yogis then find that the thought of 'I' and 'mine', the mind that arises in the aspect of 'I' and 'mine', is the root of all the other mental afflictions such as attachment, anger, and so forth, and it is also at the root of the different sufferings that one experiences in cyclic existence, such as birth, aging, sickness and death. As long as one is in samsara one has to experience the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death because they are part of the package of being in cyclic existence - there is no way that one can get out of being born, becoming old, becoming sick and dying. Those four are really what causes us suffering and problems. At the root of both the mental afflictions and the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death, are the thoughts that are in the aspect of 'I' and 'mine'. Thoughts of 'I' and 'mine' are two afflicted discriminating awarenesses, and these two types of afflicted wisdom grasp at inherent existence.

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*Mirror* it is 3.5.1.2.3. The way of refuting the inherent existence of both self and 'mine'.

<sup>1</sup> This is the heading used in *Illumination* and the *Self Commentary*. In

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So in short, the view of the transitory collections that is an afflicted wisdom grasping at an inherently existent 'I' and 'mine' is seen to be at the root of the mental afflictions and their faults, and the various sufferings. All of these are seen as the effect of the view of the transitory collections. One comes to know that if one wishes to abandon all the faults and problems then one needs to abandon the view of the transitory collections. And the elimination of the view of the transitory collections comes about through understanding that the focal object of the view of the transitory collections lacks a quintessential nature.

Only by reflecting in such a way on the faults and disadvantages of the transitory view will one generate the wish to be free from that transitory view. Without seeing its faults and disadvantages one won't generate the wish to become free from the transitory view.

If one is a person possessing wisdom then one will see the need to abandon the view of the transitory collections, by recognising that it is a distorted awareness, and that the self is non-existent in the way it is apprehended by the transitory view.

By seeing that the self does not exist the way it is apprehended by the transitory view, those with wisdom will recognise the need to abandon the transitory view as it is explained in the *Praise to the Sphere of Dharma*, and also in the *Four Hundred Verses*,

*When one sees the need to abandon the view of the transitory collections then one investigates the basis for the projection of the transitory view.*

One has to investigate the focal object, the basis for the determined object of the transitory view. By investigating the focal object of the transitory view then one will come to realise the mere 'I' or the mere 'self'. One will come to realise that the transitory view is an object possessor of the 'I', and the object is the 'I'.

Upon understanding that one needs to abandon the view of the transitory collections in order to abandon all faults and problems, then subsequently one comes to understand that one needs to comprehend that the focal object of the transitory view lacks any quintessential nature.

That's why yogis initially investigate the self that is the object of the self-grasping, and that's why yogis initially investigate whether or not the self that is the object of the self-grasping possesses any quintessential nature. Through negating the inherent existence of that self then one can abandon the transitory view, and in such a way eliminate or reverse all faults and problems. Therefore, for yogis the analysis of the 'I' of the self is the method for attaining liberation.

### **The Focal Self and the Apprehended Self**

As verse 6.120 says,

*Seeing with awareness that all afflictions and faults arise  
From the view of the transitory collections,  
And having realised the self to be its object,  
Yogis strive to negate the self.*

Here one should not confuse the self in the third line with the self in the fourth line.

The self in the third line is the mere self that is the focal object of the innate self-grasping, which is not to be abandoned. The self of the fourth line is the object of negation, the inherently existent self.

We have the self-grasping at the person, which is the innate self-grasping at person that is directed at the focal object of the self or the 'I'. But then it misapprehends that 'I', that self, and apprehends it as inherently existent. That's how we have the self that is the focal object, and the apprehended self, the inherently existent self.

This can also be applied to all other types of true-grasping or self-grasping, for example the grasping at a truly existent vase. Here we have the self-grasping, which is directed at the focal object of vase, but then it misapprehends the focal object of vase and apprehends it as a truly existent vase. The object that is to be negated is the apprehended object, which is a truly existent vase. By negating the apprehended object, a truly existent vase, then one can counteract the grasping at truly existent vase, and counteract true-grasping.

There's a quote from *The Compendium of Deeds*, where it says,

*If a person intensely realises emptiness, then since they have cut off the root, no affliction at all will arise in that person's continuum*

In *The Sutra of the Arya Tathagata*, it says,

*Shive Lodro (the name of the student that is being addressed, which means peaceful wisdom) for example it is like this, if one cuts off the root of the tree then the branches, the leaves and the twigs will all dry up. Likewise Shive Lodro, if one completely pacifies the view of the transitory collections then all the main and close afflictions will be pacified.*

Here in this quote it talks about afflictions and close afflictions. When he first talks about afflictions, that refers to the six root delusions of anger, attachment, ignorance, pride, doubt and wrong view, and then when he talks about the close afflictions he talks about the various secondary afflictions or secondary delusions such as wrath, resentment, spite, jealousy and so forth.

Since all the powerful sages agree with the idea laid out above, that the transitory view is at the root of all problems and that one initially needs to deal with the transitory view. There doesn't need to be any doubt that that is what one has to set out to do.

First one needs to know the different faults of cyclic existence very thoroughly, and think about them. Then one needs to identify self-grasping, 'I'-grasping, as the root of all those faults.

If one wishes to abandon the transitory view, then by engaging unmistakably in the method for abandoning the transitory view, which is ascertaining the view of selflessness that can negate the determined object of the transitory view. If one is asked whether all of that is necessary only for Mahayana practitioners and not for Hinayana practitioners then the answer is 'no'. All of that is relevant for all types of practitioners whether they are hearers or solitary realisers, practitioners or Mahayanists - they all need to engage in that practice of initially refuting the apprehended object of the transitory view.

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## Meditating on the Twelve Interdependent Links

Initially there is the ignorance that grasps at the inherently existent self, then through that ignorance one accumulates karma, and from the accumulation of karma comes the dependent link of consciousness, and then from the dependent link of consciousness the different types of sufferings, birth, aging, sickness and death and so forth develop. So by initially reflecting upon the different faults and sufferings of cyclic existence, and after having understood them investigating their main cause, this then brings one to the transitory view. Upon investigating the transitory view and its object one then can ascertain that the apprehended object is non-existent. One comes to realise the non-existence of the apprehended object. Then one has to familiarise one's mind with that realisation of the lack of the apprehended object, one has to continuously meditate on it, absorbing one's mind into the lack of the apprehended object.

1. One can meditate on the afflicted twelve interdependent links in the sequential manner starting out with ignorance, and how ignorance is the root cause for karma, then how karma becomes the cause for the dependent link of consciousness and so forth, going through all the twelve dependent links.

2. One can also meditate on the twelve purified dependent links in a sequential manner thinking how if there's no ignorance then there is no karma, if there is no karma there is no consciousness, and if there's no consciousness then all the other links fall away.

3. You can also meditate on them in the reverse way: in order to reverse the sickness and death then one has to reverse birth, to do that one has to reverse consciousness, and to do that that one has to reverse karma, which means that one has to reverse ignorance. In brief they are the ways of meditating on the twelve interdependent links.

## The Root of Cyclic Existence

We referred to the quote from Nagarjuna's *Precious Garland* before, where it says,

*For as long as there is grasping at the aggregates  
There will also be 'I' grasping.  
If there is a self-grasping there is karma  
And from karma there is birth and so forth.*

This quote actually states that the root of cyclic existence is self-grasping at phenomena. However in *Introduction to the Middle Way* the transitory view is stated as being the root of cyclic existence. So here a point is brought up, 'Well don't we have two contradictory statements here?'. However, since those two types of grasping possess the same mode of apprehending the object, there is no fault with positing either one as the root of cyclic existence.

Here we have a situation where two types of grasping are posited as the root of cyclic existence. For these two positions to be mutually exclusive those two types of grasping would have to have a different mode of apprehending the object. However since those two types of grasping possess the same mode of apprehending the object, namely apprehending inherent existence, there is no fault with those two statements. So those two positions are not mutually exclusive.

In the Prasangika system we have the situation where the two types of self-grasping are not differentiated through the mode of apprehension. So the mode of apprehension – the apprehension of inherent existence – is exactly the same. What is different is the focal object.

In the lower tenets do the two types of self-grasping possess a different mode of apprehension or not? Here we are talking primarily about the Mind Only and the Svatantrika-Madhyamika because the Hinayana tenets such as the Sautrantika don't accept self-grasping at phenomena anyway. So is the mode of apprehension the same for the lower tenets?

*Students: It is different.*

How are they different?

*Student: The Mind Only see the selflessness of phenomena as subject-object's lack of different substance, and they see the emptiness of person as the lack of a person that is a self-sufficient substantially existent.*

In the Mind Only system the two types of self-grasping possess different objects and also possess different modes of apprehension, and the same also applies to the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka system. In the Svatantrika-Madhyamaka system the grasping at the person as a self-sufficient substantially existent is the self-grasping at person, and the grasping at truly existent aggregates is the self-grasping at phenomena.

In the Prasangika-Madhyamaka system however, even though there are two focal objects, the mode of apprehension is the same.

Next time we can go onto the definition and divisions of the view of the transitory collections.

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*Edited Version*

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