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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 thinking, 'I have to attain enlightenment in order to be able to achieve the welfare of all sentient beings. In order to do so I'm now going to listen to this profound teaching and then I am going to put it into practice'.

**3.5.1.2.2.1.6. The self being posited in such a way has the quality of easily abandoning extreme ideas (cont.)**

**3.5.1.2.2.1.6.2. Refuting objections**

Having established that the chariot is not findable in any of the seven ways one has refuted the inherently existing chariot. Then one has to refute that the chariot's parts exist inherently.

The **Realists** object saying, 'Even though the chariot is non-existent', meaning not findable in the seven ways, 'but the collection of its parts exists inherently'.

**Chandrakirti** replies that this is incorrect because,

*If the chariot doesn't exist, then at that time  
That possessing parts and its parts are non-  
existent,*

*For example, if a chariot is burnt the parts are  
non-existent,*

*Likewise awareness-fire burns the part-  
possessor and the parts also.*

The way the **Realists** arrive at their objection is that they say that even though the chariot is not findable, or non-existent, the parts of the chariot still do exist inherently. To this the **Prasangika** reply, 'Well, if there is no chariot then you also couldn't have any parts of the chariot'. **Chandrakirti** replies to the Realists, 'If the chariot doesn't exist inherently, then at that time that possessing parts and its parts also don't exist inherently'. Even though it literally says 'doesn't exist', one still has to add the 'inherently' there. Non-existent means that they also don't exist inherently.

The answer to the debate is basically in the first two lines. If the chariot doesn't exist inherently then that possessing parts and the parts don't exist inherently. First of all, if the chariot doesn't exist inherently then both the part-possessor and the parts don't exist inherently.

There is the case that after the chariot has been taken apart a person who is familiar with the chariot will perceive those parts as the parts of a chariot. Such a person will think, 'This is the wheel of a chariot' and so forth. Other people who are not familiar with what a chariot actually is will not relate those parts lying on the ground to a chariot. Therefore the parts lying on the ground are not the parts of the chariot any more. In order to have the parts of the chariot, one needs to have the chariot itself.

*Mirror:*

If the **fire** of the **awareness** realising emptiness **burns** the inherently existing **part-possessor** then the inherently existing **parts** also can't be seen, because at that time one realises the non-existence of inherently existing parts. **For example**, when the **chariot is burnt** its **parts are** also **non-existent**.

Here the analogy of a fire is being used. When it says 'when the chariot is burnt', this relates to seeing the intrinsically existing chariot as non-existent. It is an analogy for perceiving that the intrinsically existing chariot does not exist. At such a time the parts are also non-existent. When a chariot is burnt, the chariot's parts don't exist. Likewise with the perception of the lack of an inherently existent chariot, at the time of which there are also no inherently existent parts.

If the part-possessor doesn't exist inherently, then the parts also can't exist inherently. By refuting one the other is also refuted. The root text just uses the external burnt chariot as an analogy.

**3.5.1.2.2.1.6.3. Linking the labels and meaning of chariot and self**

*In dependence upon worldly conventions such as  
Aggregates, spheres and likewise sources  
The self is posited as user as well, and the  
Continual aggregates are activity; it is also an  
agent.*

The self should be understood in the same way as the chariot. The chariot exists in dependence upon its parts. Likewise the self also exists in dependence upon parts such as the aggregates, the spheres, the six sources and so forth. The aggregates are that which is continuously taken by the self. The user of the aggregates is that which takes the aggregates, and the aggregates are that which it is taken. It is similar to the chariot and its parts. The continual aggregates are the activity and the self is the agent. Similarly, in the case of the chariot the chariot is the agent, and the parts of the chariot are the action and activity. Likewise the self is the agent and the aggregates are the action and activity.

**3.5.1.2.2.1.6.4. Showing other qualities of accepting a self that is imputed dependently**

*Not being an existent phenomenon it is neither reliable  
Nor unreliable, it does not generate or  
disintegrate,  
It doesn't have permanence and so forth,  
It doesn't exist as thus or as other.*

Not being an existent phenomenon, the self is neither reliable nor unreliable. In strict Dharma terminology we talk about permanent phenomena and impermanent phenomena. In a more colloquial sense we refer to a person, for example, as being reliable or unreliable, or as being stable or unstable.

*Mirror:*

Something **is neither** inherently **dependent nor** inherently **independent**, **it does not generate or disintegrate** inherently, **it doesn't** intrinsically **have permanence and so forth**, and **it doesn't exist** inherently **as thus or other** - because of **not being** an inherently **existing phenomenon**.

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The self does not generate inherently, it doesn't disintegrate inherently, it doesn't have permanence and so forth. The 'so forth' at the end refers to not having both and also not having neither of those two.

When the self is realised as lacking inherent existence, then at that time the self possessing inherently existent impermanence or inherently existent permanence and so forth is also refuted. If the self is intrinsically impermanent, we arrive at a variety of faults. If the self is intrinsically permanent, we also arrive at a variety of faults. We have been through all of those faults before. For example, if the self is intrinsically permanent, then exactly the same self that existed in the past would have to exist now, and we also have the problems of the present being unrelated to the past and to the future and so forth, and the self not being able to act as an agent creating action and so forth.

### 3.5.1.2.2.1.6.5. Identifying the self that is the basis of bondage and liberation

If the self doesn't exist intrinsically, then what is the self that is bound to cyclic existence, and what is the self that is liberated from cyclic existence. The root text reads:

*The self that continually gives rise to intense 'I'-grasping - Awareness in migrators and that gives rise to awareness Grasping whatever belongs to it as mine, Is from ignorance, uncritical and conventional.*

The **Realists** say that since the self cannot be found in any of the seven ways it does not exist, and therefore there is no self that is bound to cyclic existence, or that is liberated from cyclic existence.

The **Prasangikas** say that there is no such fault. Even though the self is not findable in any of the seven ways, it still exists and can be bound to cyclic existence or can be liberated from cyclic existence. The fault of a non-existence of self, because the self is not findable in the seven ways, does not apply. The self still exists despite not being findable in the seven ways, because it continuously gives rise to intense 'I'-grasping awareness in the mental continuum of migrators. It gives rise to the awareness that grasps at whatever belongs to the self as mine.

*Mirror:*

[This] self *is* established *from ignorance* to the mind of those that are *uncritical* and *conventional*.

Since the self gives rise to the self-grasping at 'I' and 'mine', it therefore exists.

The fourth line states that this self is established 'from ignorance, uncritical and conventional'. Here, 'ignorance' is not to be taken literally. 'Ignorance' is only used figuratively here, and refers to the 'I'-grasping in the minds of ordinary individuals. The self that is the object giving rise to intense 'I'-grasping-awareness and grasping at 'mine' arises from the 'I'-grasping of an ordinary individual's mind. Here it is referred to as ignorance, because such a mind doesn't know suchness. Normally ignorance refers to a mind that apprehends reality in a distorted manner, but here it actually refers to a valid

awareness, the 'I'-grasping in an ordinary individual's continuum. Here it talks about the self being actually established by that awareness, but it is referred to as 'ignorance' because it is an awareness that is clouded with regard to suchness – it hasn't realised suchness.

### 3.5.1.2.2.2. Refuting that 'mine' is inherently established

When we talk about 'mine' the term 'I' is implicitly included. As soon as one thinks in the context of 'mine', one automatically thinks in the context of 'I'. The reference for the term 'I', or the focal object of the thought thinking 'I', is the mere 'I'. It is not any of the mental aggregates, and is also not the form aggregate, but only the mere 'I'. Having negated the inherent existence of self of the 'I', now the inherent existence of 'mine' is refuted. The objects of the 'I' are what is referred to as 'mine'.

*Because there is no karma without agent Therefore without self 'mine' does not exist. Therefore yogis observing the lack of self And 'mine' become utterly liberated.*

*Mirror:*

*Without* an inherently existing *self* inherently existing *'mine' does not exist because* the *karma* of a non-existent agent does not exist.

The *yogis observing* and meditating on *the lack of* an inherently existing *self* and *'mine' become utterly liberated* because the self and 'mine' don't exist inherently.

You should contemplate the mode of existence of 'I' and 'mine', understanding that the lack of an independent 'I' and 'mine' will harm self-grasping.

All the great texts such as the great *Lam Rim* and Lama Tsong Khapa's commentary *Clear Words* and so forth, explain that the selflessness of person has to be realised first and then the selflessness of phenomena. How does this fit in here with the example of the chariot?

In order to realise the selflessness of person, one really has to realise the absence of the inherently existent person and one has to eliminate the person as existing in the seven ways. Does doing this on the chariot example contradict statements that the selflessness of person has to be realised first?

Likewise, with Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltzen's syllogism, 'Consider the subject 'self' - it lacks true existence - because it is a dependent arising; for example: like the reflection of form'. Here the opponent will realise the three modes in relation to the example, the reflection of form, before realising the three modes in relation to the subject of self. Wouldn't that also contradict the statement that the selflessness of person has to be realised before the selflessness of phenomena?

Just realising the selflessness of an external phenomenon is not regarded as realising the selflessness of phenomena. To realise the selflessness of phenomena one has to realise the selflessness of the aggregates. In order to realise the selflessness of the aggregates, which are 'mine', one has to first realise the selflessness of the self, which is the 'I'. According to Jetsun Chokyi Gyaltzen and Lama Tsong Khapa there is no contradiction, because the realisation of the selflessness of phenomena constitutes

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the realisation of the selflessness of the aggregates. And the selflessness of the aggregates is only realised subsequently to the selflessness of person. First one realises the lack of the intrinsic existence of 'I', and only subsequently to that can one realise the lack of intrinsic existence of 'mine'.

Does generation from self exist or not?

*Student: It does not exist.*

What is the meaning of generation from self?

*Student: It has no meaning.*

If you say that the generation from self does not exist, there has to be some kind of reason why it doesn't exist. First you have to posit a meaning of generation from self, then you have to explain why that meaning is non-existent. For example, if you say that Damien does not exist to someone who doesn't know Damien, it doesn't mean anything to them. That Damien doesn't exist only means something to people who know Damien.

The meaning of the generation from self is that if something were generated from self then it would exist in such and such a way. So you have to give a meaning of the generation from self, and then you give the explanation of why that is impossible.

*Student: The result exists at the time of the cause.*

So the effect doesn't exist at the time of the cause?

*Student: Yes.*

Are you sure?

*Student: Yes.*

Is the Damien that exists now the Damien when Damien was 10 years old?

*Student: No.*

Then didn't you go to school? *[laughter]*

*Student: But the Damien that went to school when he was 10 years old isn't the Damien that exists now.*

So first of all let's agree whether you went to school or not *[laughter]*.

*Student: The stream of karma that was called Damien. is still going, but it may have changed somewhat since.*

Doesn't the Damien that existed when you were 10 years old also exist now?

*Student: Yes, the past Damien exists.*

Didn't you spend some time in the mother's womb?

*Student: That Damien of today didn't spend time in my mother's womb.*

Damien was not born from the mother's womb?

*Student: But the Damien of today wouldn't fit! [laughter]*

Are you saying that you weren't born from your mother?

*Student: No. I am not saying that. I was born from my mother's womb.*

If you weren't born from your mother's womb, then how were you born?

*Student: I was born from my previous moment.*

If one is born, one and has to be born in any of the four

ways: from a womb, from an egg, through heat or moisture or miraculous birth. All five types of beings are born in those four ways.

In Nepal when I was debating the position I am taking now, Geshe Dawa made a remark about me being very insistent about that debate. Don't confuse meaning with definition. One can't give the definition of something that doesn't exist, but you can give a meaning of something that doesn't exist - its mode of existence.

Ask for the mode of generation of intrinsic existence. What is the meaning of generating other? For example what is the belief of those who accept generation from self? What do they accept? What do those who accept generation from other believe?

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*Edited Version*

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