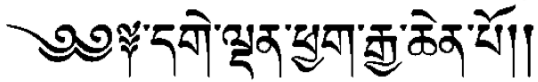


---

# Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

11 August 2009

---

We set a good motivation for receiving the teachings.

## IDENTIFYING THE OBJECT EMPTINESS

### The manner of meditating on special insight

#### IDENTIFYING THE OBJECT OF REFUTATION ON THE SUBTLEST LEVEL (CONT.)

##### Definition of the view of the transitory collection

In our last session *the view of the transitory collection was defined as a deluded wisdom that focuses on the personal self as an object, and has the aspect of apprehending it as inherently established.* In particular, the view of the transitory collection focuses on a personal self which means the 'I' within one's own continuum and grasps that as being inherently existent. It is important to get a clear understanding the object of focus of the view of the transitory collection.

So, what does that view focus on?

*Student: The mere 'I'.*

We have to add the term 'personal' or 'within one's own continuum' to the mere 'I'. The term must be specific, because if we mix up the terms, then that will cause the fault of misinterpretation. Thus, the proper translation for the type of 'I' that the view of the transitory collection focuses on is the personal 'I' or the 'I' that is within one's own continuum. As explained last week, one can focus on the mere 'I' within someone else's continuum and grasp on to it as being inherently existent, but that would not be the view of the transitory collection.

Further more, the definition of the view of the transitory collection presented here is slightly different from that given in the Madhyamaka text, which includes both 'I' and 'mine' within one's own continuum as the focal object. So, is there a difference in the meaning? Can you understand that the meaning of the two definitions is the same?

*Students: They are the same.*

How do they have the same meaning? I am checking with you to see that you understand how they are the same.

*Student: 'I' and 'mine' are the same entity but are different conceptual isolates. They are two aspects of the same person or modality.*

Actually, the view of transitory collection can be presented in two parts: the view of transitory collection which focuses on the mere 'I' within one's own continuum, and the view of transitory collection which focuses on the 'mine' within one's own continuum i.e. in relation to one's aggregates. When you say, for example, 'my nose' or 'my ears' you are referring to something that you possess that is within your own continuum. However the reason why both 'I' and 'mine' come to the same meaning is because one cannot view any part of the aggregates as 'mine' without having the conceptualisation of 'I'. In other words, in order to focus on 'mine', one has to focus on the 'I' within one's own

continuum as well. For that reason, focusing on either 'I' or 'mine' are equally the view of transitory collection.

As explained in the text, one first develops the grasping at the self of phenomena followed by the grasping at the self of persons. Right? As explained in the last session the order in which the two types of grasping at self arise, is that the grasping to the self of phenomena (which includes the aggregates) arises first, and based on that the grasping at the self of person or the individual 'I', arises. Why does grasping at the self of person follow grasping at the self of the phenomena?

*Student: One has to apprehend the aggregates in order to conceive of the person.*

That of course is in accordance with how it is explained. However to be more specific, can a perception of a person arise without relying on any part of the aggregates?

*Students: Yes, perhaps in the formless realm?*

I didn't specify physical aggregates, did I? Apart from the form aggregate, are there not the other aggregates in the formless realm? (*Laughter*)

*Students: Yes.*

Exactly, there are the other four aggregates in the formless realm. So, based on the other aggregates, the beings in the formless realm will perceive a person by first perceiving any of their four aggregates. However, when we refer to our aggregates it seems that our mind immediately relates to our physical body, and that is due our strong grasping at our physical body.

The auto-commentary quotes Nagarjuna:

As long as you conceive the aggregates,  
You will conceive of them as 'I',  
With grasping at the 'I' you create karma,  
And from karma you take rebirth.

The meaning of this has been explained in detail before. So, it should be understood that for as long as there is grasping at self of the aggregates, there will be grasping at the self of persons or the individual 'I'. Then due to grasping to the self of the 'I', one creates karma, which becomes the cause to circle in rounds of samsara over and over again. Do you recall this explanation?

*Students: Yes.*

This verse was also explained in the Madhyamaka teachings. By the way, when Ven. Fedor first came to Tara Institute he had initially agreed to stay only for a year. However when I decided to teach the Madhyamaka text, I felt that given that he would only be here for one year, it would be difficult to try to complete the text in that time. So Fedor said 'If Geshe-la promises to teach the entire text, I will stay until it is completed', and that is how he ended up staying with us for a number of years.

The auto-commentary explains the quote from Nagarjuna:

This is the very root of cyclic existence, thus without refuting the apprehended or conceived object, one cannot abandon the grasping at a self.

In the above explanation, 'this' refers to the ignorance of grasping at a self, which is identified as the root of cyclic existence. The 'apprehended or conceived object' of that ignorance is an inherently existent self, and without refuting that one cannot abandon the grasping at the self. Based on the aggregates one conceives an inherently existent 'I', which must be abandoned in order to overcome cyclic existence. So, what is being explained here is, without refuting the

---

---

apprehended object or conceived object, one cannot abandon the grasping at a self.

What has to be clearly identified here is the focal object of the view that apprehends or conceives grasping at a self of person. What type of person does the view of the transitory collection actually focus on? Is it a conventionally existent person?

*Student: The object of observation is a conventionally existent person, and the view of transitory collections superimposes inherent existence on the mere 'I', and grasps the 'I' as existing independently.*

The main point being made here is that without identifying the 'I' that is being apprehended as an inherently existent 'I', one cannot negate it. The wrong view is apprehending or perceiving an 'I' that is inherently existent. Without first understanding the distorted implications of such an 'I', one cannot possibly negate it. Thus, what has to be specifically understood here is how the 'I' appears to the view of the transitory collection and how it is then apprehended. Without understanding these two factors, one cannot possibly negate or refute an inherently existing 'I'.

What also has to be clearly understood here is that if asked, 'Does an 'I' exist?', then of course the answer is, 'There is definitely an 'I' that exists'. However, the 'I' that appears and which is apprehended by the view of the transitory collection, does not exist. So, even though an 'I' or a person does exist conventionally, the 'I' or person which appears and which is apprehended by the view of the transitory collection does not exist.

The reason why this is being specifically clarified now is because there is the danger of mistaking the conventionally existent 'I' as being the 'I' that is to be negated. It is the 'I' that is viewed or apprehended by innate self-grasping which is to be negated, and not the conventionally existent 'I'. Thus for a meditator, it has to be very clear that it is not the conventional 'I' that is to be negated or refuted, because the conventional 'I' does exist; rather the object of negation is the 'I' or person that is apprehended as existing by the view of the transitory collection or innate self-grasping. If you don't recognise that clear distinction at the outset, then there is a danger of making the assumption that they are the same.

### **How to identify the object of negation**

One way of clearly identifying and recognising the 'I' or the self that is to be negated is to recreate how that 'I' is viewed by innate self-grasping. We can gain a sense of the false 'I' if we recreate a time when, for example, we had a very strong opinion, or times when we either felt very happy and elated, or very sad and unhappy. So, in meditation, one can intentionally recreate any of these times and investigate how that 'I' appears to oneself at that time. How does the 'I' appear then? When investigated, it will be clear that that it is the misapprehended independent 'I' or self that appears to one's mind. When we are engaged in normal worldly activities, we are not really aware of how the misapprehended 'I' is viewed by our innate self-grasping. Thus, without careful investigation, there is a danger of mistaking the conventionally existent 'I' as the 'I' to be negated, and thus fall into the extreme of nihilism.

In relation to the appropriate time for us to investigate the misapprehended 'I' would be, for example, when one has a strong opinion about something, as in when one says, 'I want this', or 'I don't want that', or 'What you say and do, doesn't accord with my feelings'. How does the 'I' or 'me' appear when one has such a strong opinionated mind? If we

were to actually investigate how that 'I' appears to us at that time, we will begin to notice that it appears to us as being independently existent, which means that it does not depend on anything else and exists self-sufficiently. It is as if there is a solid and independently existent 'I' somewhere within us, which 'I' does not appear as being connected or inter-related with the aggregates. or as a mere label or name given to the collection of the aggregates. Rather the 'I' only appears to us as being independent and self-sufficient.

When one recognises this false appearance clearly, then that is called identifying the object of negation. The reason it is called the object of negation is because an independent 'I', does not actually exist. When one is clear about how the 'I' that appears to us is completely fabricated and non-existent, then we will get a sense of selflessness in relation to the 'I'.

In the process of investigation, we might initially have a sense of being able to locate the 'I' somewhere in our body, perhaps within our head or chest. But when we investigate further, we come to realise that a self-sufficient, independently existent 'I' or an inherently existent 'I' cannot be found anywhere, thus it does not exist anywhere. At that time, one also gets a sense of how the 'self' or 'I' is a merely imputed 'I'; thus it is dependent on a label and imputation rather than existing independently by itself. When one has a clear recognition of the 'I' that seems to exist independently and inherently, then that is what is called identifying the object of negation.

### **The necessity of identifying the object of negation**

It is very important to understand what identifying the object of negation means, because without clearly identifying and then refuting the object of negation, one cannot possibly realise selflessness, which is its opposite.

What the auto-commentary specifically explains is that without identifying the object of negation, one cannot possibly refute it. Referring back that earlier quote from Nagarjuna, the auto-commentary also quotes Dharmakirti:

As The Great Logician (Dharmakirti) says:

Without refuting its object,  
It is not possible to abandon it.

The auto-commentary further explains:

The determined object of perceiving a truly existent being, truly existent 'I', and truly existent person are respectively a truly established being, truly established 'I' and truly established person, and these are to be refuted. The manner of refuting them is none other than by gaining the view of their lack of true existence. Having ascertained a person's lack of true existence and meditating on that, one will overcome the grasping at a truly existent person.

So as explained here, the object of negation, that which is to be refuted, is a truly established person, being, or 'I'. An inherently or a truly established person is what is being apprehended by the wrong conception of innate self-grasping. In order to overcome the wrong conception then, one must gain the right view, which is the view of the lack of a truly established or inherently existent 'I'.

The point that is to be understood here is, as mentioned in other texts that it is the case of having the same focal object, but apprehending it in completely opposite way. The meaning of this is that the focal object of both the view of grasping to a self, and the view of selflessness is the same, but the modes of apprehending the object are complete opposites. We need to understand that even though both

views focus on the same object, their mode of apprehension is completely different.

To explain this further, what is the focal object of the view of the transitory collection? It is a person. Likewise, what is the focal object of the view that perceives the selflessness of a person? It is also a person. So, as far as the focal object is concerned, there is no difference, as for both views the focal object is a person.

However the mode of apprehending the person is different, because the view of the transitory collection or grasping at a truly existent personal self apprehends the person as being inherently existent. Whereas, the view that perceives the selflessness of a person apprehends the person as lacking inherent existence. That is how the apprehended object of these two views are complete opposites. By understanding that while the focal object is the same, the mode of apprehension is different, one can understand how one can directly oppose the wrong view. That is the main point that needs to be understood here.

The more one familiarises oneself with the view of selflessness of a person and actually begins to gain the realisation of the selflessness of a person, the more one can understand and see how that directly overcomes, or negates, the wrong view of grasping at a truly existent person. What one can understand from this explanation is that the view of grasping to an inherently existent self is a wrong consciousness.

To be more specific, the more understanding we have of the view realising selflessness, the more we one will be able to develop the wisdom realising selflessness. One must understand that the person actually exists in the way that is apprehended by the wisdom realising selflessness. So the more one becomes familiar with the view that apprehends the person as lacking an inherently or truly existent self, the weaker the misconception or wrong view of an inherently existent self naturally becomes. So as one view becomes stronger, its exact opposite naturally becomes weaker and weaker. Do you see this relationship?

That is the point clarified by Dharmakirti when he said 'Without refuting its object, it is not possible to abandon it'. So if one gets that clear understanding, then one has understood the main point, and anytime that this is explained in the teachings, one will be able recall this point.

The reason why the text specifically goes into great detail about identifying the object of negation and how that object appears, and then cultivating the wisdom that refutes that, is because it is extremely crucial in gaining the profound and unmistakable understanding of selflessness. Understanding this approach is very important, because if we were to just explain that a truly existent person is an object of negation and leave it at that, without really understanding how the inherently existent person appears, we may not get very far in actually overcoming that misapprehension. If we just sit around and repeat 'grasping at a truly existent self is the object of negation', that in itself will not really help us much. We need go further into analysing how the person is actually apprehended by that misconception.

So that explains this comment in the auto-commentary:

Having ascertained a person's lack of true existence and meditating on that, one will overcome the grasping at a truly existent person.

In meditation this is what we have to attempt to do: first ascertain a person's lack of true existence and then meditate on that lack of a truly existent person.

The auto-commentary then goes on to further explain:

For these reasons, the experiential explanation of how the object of negation appears and how it is apprehended is presented first in the following verse.

Again this is referring to identifying the object of negation. The author is explaining how that object of negation appears and how it is apprehended. The author describes it as an experiential explanation, which means that it is not just a fabricated or an assumed explanation but one that is based on personal experience. This also goes to show the extent of the realisations of the author.

#### **HAVING MEDITATED ON SELFLESSNESS ESTABLISHING IMPUTED EXISTENCE.<sup>1</sup>**

*29. In the same state as the previous settling of your mind [in single-minded concentration], you should, like a small fish swimming through clear undisturbed water, examine with very fine consciousness the nature of the self-identity of just who it is who is meditating.*

We can leave the explanation of this verse for our next session. So what I would like you to do as preparation for the explanation is to try to gain an understanding of the verse itself by referring to the commentaries that explain the meaning of this verse. I will then check and quiz you about what understanding you have gained next time. In particular, this verse brings to light the explanation of finding the view from within the meditative state, which is particular to the explanation of mahamudra.

To summarise the main points that are to be reflected upon: we have covered the definition of the view of the transitory collection, and how the view of the transitory collection actually apprehends the 'I'. Also how the 'I' or the person appears to it.

Rather than trying to get a lot of information at one time and having it all jumbled up in one's mind, it is better to have a correct understanding of even one point. That is far more worthy. A jumbled or mixed-up understanding of many points will end up not being really useful anywhere, whereas having a good understanding of even just one point can be applied at any time when it comes up, in readings, discussions or teachings. That is a far better way to further enhance one's understanding.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version  
© Tara Institute*

<sup>1</sup> Described last week as 'having meditated on selflessness establishing designated phenomena'.