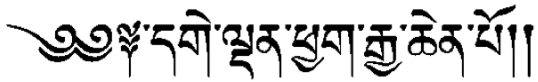

Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness



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13 October 2009

As usual we will spend five minutes in meditation. (*Pause for meditation*)

In our last session we finished the first heading from Kyiwo Tsang's commentary, 'Meditating upon oneself as an object', and commenced the second, 'Applying it to others'. So was it clear how the teachings were related to those headings?

2. APPLYING IT TO OTHERS (CONT)

This heading refers to meditating on the selflessness of other persons and phenomena. In *Precious Garland* Nagarjuna said: 'Because the 'being' encompasses the six elements, it is not ultimate'. Using that quote as a basis, the main syllogism is: Take the subjects 'persons and other phenomena' - they cannot exist as independently existents or inherently existents, because they are imputed upon their parts.

The last part that we covered from the auto-commentary read:

Thus, without any distractions one places one's focus single-pointedly upon the space-like emptiness, which is a mere negation of truly established existents.

3. USING THE MIND AS AN OBJECT TO FOCUS ON

The auto-commentary states:

Otherwise the subtle basis of imputation of the self is also said to be the extremely subtle wind and mind.

Here the auto-commentary is pointing out that according to highest yoga tantra, the basis of imputation of a person or being, is the subtle wind and mind.

As presented in earlier sessions, mahamudra can be categorised into sutra mahamudra and tantra mahamudra. Using the mind as the object to focus on, the tantra system is said to be a means to overcome the very subtle misconceptions that cannot be removed merely by following the sutra system. Thus, even when presenting sutra mahamudra in the text, there is periodic reference to the subtle mind and wind. This is an indication that mahamudra is ultimately a means for recognising the ultimate nature of the extremely subtle mind, which is based upon subtle wind.

According to the explanation given in highest yoga tantra, the subtle wind and mind serve as the basis for achieving all mundane and supramundane goals, i.e. samsara and nirvana. To explain this further, in the death process when the very subtle mind occurs (which is the clear light state), a yogi who is familiar with the practice will conjoin the example clear light with the meaning clear light on the path, which leads them to liberation and enlightenment. Whereas for an ordinary being, the subtle wind and mind become the basis for taking rebirth in samsara again. So, this covers the statement, 'Otherwise the subtle bases of imputation of the self is also said to be the extremely subtle wind and mind'.

The auto-commentary continues:

Thus, in accordance with those who have imparted sound instructions and said, 'In order to realise the

ultimate nature of mind, one must first recognise the mind', the following verses are presented:

33 *In this state of single-minded concentration [on space-like voidness] you should further analyse the true nature of your mind, this bare clarity that appears with no form. Upon it many [different conceptual thoughts] arise, without any obstacles, [causing you to remember many things and make associations] which your mind then wanders after.*

34 *But the mind or consciousness itself is [merely a steadily flowing stream of] unobstructed clarity or awareness without any discontinuity. Such a mind, however, appears to be an independently existing entity which does not rely on anything else for its existence, and you grasp at it as such. Concerning the object implied [by such grasping, a mind existing truly independently], the great protector Shantideva has said,*

35 *'It is false to consider streams of instants and groups of parts, such as a rosary or an army, [to be independently existing entities in themselves]'. Thus as Shantideva has explained with scriptural authority and logic, you should single-pointedly concentrate on this state of the non-self-existence of the mind-a mode of existence that is completely different from the way things ordinarily appear.*

In verse 33 and the first part of verse 34 the mind itself is being identified. As stated it is a 'bare clarity that appears with no form'. So, an attribute of the mind is that it is void of being form or physical matter. 'Upon it many different conceptual thoughts arise without any obstacles' means that there is nothing to obstruct various conceptual thoughts from arising in the mind. The analogy of a butter lamp is used to explain 'But the mind or consciousness itself is merely a steadily flowing stream of unobstructed clarity or awareness without any discontinuity'. Unlike a butter lamp, where the rays of light cease when the flame is extinguished, the continuous stream of clarity and awareness of mind never ceases to exist.

Of course the commentary will give a more detailed explanation later on, so I'm just referring to the meaning of the lines from the verse. The mind needs to be clearly identified, because it is the basis of the investigation as to whether or not it exists independently or inherently. Thus to establish the non-inherent existence of mind, one must first be able to clearly identify what the mind is.

The second part of Verse 34 reads: 'Such a mind, however, appears to be an independently existing entity, which does not rely on anything else for its existence, and you grasp at it as such'. Having first identified the actual entity of the mind, the root text now explains that sentient beings perceive the mind as existing independently, without relying on anything else. So, what is being specifically identified here is the object of negation in relation to the mind being the bases of investigation.

Verse 35 begins with a quote from Shantideva's text, which relates to refuting the object of negation. As the verse says, through 'scriptural authority and logic' one refutes the object of negation and thus establishes the mind as lacking true existence or inherent existence.

The auto-commentary then quotes Chandrakirti's *Madhyamakavatara*:

Chandrakirti also states:

It is taught that mind alone creates the great variety,
Of the worlds of sentient beings and environments.

Thus, as the mind has been shown to be the very source of sentient beings and the environment, when one recognises the mind for what it is, it will be a great feat unlike any other.

What is being presented here is how the mind is the originator for both living beings and the environment. Therefore, it would be a great feat indeed when one actually recognises the mind for what it is. In summary, one needs to first identify the mind, and then understand how the mind appears and is apprehended by ordinary sentient beings. This is the process of removing the misconceptions in relation to the ultimate nature of mind.

In identifying the particular features of the mind that are explained here, one also brings to mind the particular attributes of the mind that were explained earlier in the text. As you would recall, the mind has three main attributes: by nature the mind is very clear and bright; it is void of all obstructions such as forms; and it also is the basis on which all phenomena is cognised. In relation to those attributes, the mind was also described to being like a mirror. All phenomena appear to the mind just like a mirror reflects all external phenomena. It is because of these attributes that the mind is considered a unique object to focus on for developing calm abiding and developing the realization of emptiness. The earlier explanations are also to be understood in this context.

The commentary then continues:

When investigating the mind within the continuity of the previous meditative equipoise, this mind which is void of being established as form or matter...

In this context investigating the mind refers to investigating the conventional mind. Thus it is the conventional mind that is initially investigated. Even though the conventional mind is being used, it is still good for us to incorporate the understanding of the lack of inherent existence or true existence of the mind itself. Then the understanding of both the conventional mind and the emptiness of the mind will be enhanced simultaneously.

It is also good for us to acknowledge the fact that it is very difficult for us to focus on the mind, because unlike other external objects the mind is an obscure object. There are different explanations of the method in how one uses the mind as an object to focus on. In this context is that it is a later moment of mind that focuses on earlier moments of mind. Because the mind is a continuity of different moments, we focus on an earlier moment of mind. This explanation withstands the objection that 'mind can not focus on itself, just as light cannot illuminate itself and a sword cannot cut itself'. However the explanation of a later moment of mind focusing on an earlier moment of mind cannot be affected by this objection.

As the commentary then further explains:

...is like the sun being free from clouds, unobstructed, and is the basis of all conceptual thoughts and superstitions to arise and issue forth

Thus one recognises the mind as being devoid of form or matter. Furthermore, just like the sun shines very brightly and clearly when clouds do not obstruct it, the mind has the entity of being clear.

While it does have a basis, the mind's very entity is that it is devoid of form. Because the mind has that attribute it is easy to mistake the attribute of vacuity for the lack of inherent existence or emptiness of the mind. So, there is the danger for some who, when identifying the conventional mind,

come to the wrong conclusion that they have actually realised the emptiness of mind.

However, even though there is this danger, the mind is a good object to focus on because it has the attribute of vacuity. Recognising the vacuity enables one to get closer to the understanding of the lack of inherent existence of the mind as well.

The example of the mind being like the unobstructed sun means the nature of the mind is very clear. That nature serves as the basis of all good or bad thoughts to arise from within the mind. His Holiness the Dalai Lama mentioned in one of his teachings that if one can first get a sense of the vacuity of the mind and reflect on that, and intentionally cease all preconceptions and thoughts, then when thoughts do reoccur again, it should dawn upon oneself that these thoughts arise from none other than the mind itself. This technique is way to help us identify the mind.

We have now covered the explanation of the lines, 'this mind which is devoid of form or matter, is, like the sun being free from clouds, unobstructed and is the basis of all conceptual thoughts and superstitions to arise and issue forth'.

The auto-commentary continues:

...unlike the rays of a butter lamp that cease when the flame extinguishes, the mind's continuity of clarity and knowing is unceasing.

This refers to the definition of the mind as being clear and knowing, and that this attribute of clarity and knowing is unceasing. As an earlier moment of mind ceases, a later moment comes into existence, thus the continuity of clarity and knowing is unceasing.

The auto-commentary further states:

To the awareness that apprehends one's own mind it appears as a self-sufficient entity, which is not depended upon anything else, and is apprehended in that way.

Here 'awareness' refers to a deluded awareness of ordinary beings, specifically the misapprehension of 'the mind appearing as a self-sufficient entity which is not depended upon anything else'. This of course is contrary to its actual mode of existence, which is that it is merely imputed by conception and merely labelled. However when the mind appears and is apprehended by ordinary beings, it does not appear as being merely labelled and imputed by conception. Rather it appears as being independently existent, existing from its own side. That appearance is refuted with a quotation from Shantideva's text. So, this is how the object of negation is introduced in relation to the mind. Is that clear?

Here of course the object of negation relates to the mind. Another very important point, in fact a unique point, is that the very appearance of any object to a sentient being is actually the object of negation. As ordinary beings when we perceive the vase with our eye consciousness, it appears as actually existing from its own side, self-sufficiently and independently. There is no other way for the vase to appear to us other than as a self-sufficient and independently existing vase. We are totally convinced with that appearance of a vase, and we relate to it as being independently and self-sufficiently existent. So, this very appearance of a vase is to be negated. The object of negation in relation to a vase is an independently and self-sufficiently existent vase; because a vase cannot exist in that way it has to be negated. As mentioned previously, a vase exists merely in dependence on the labelling and conceptualisation of that vase. Thus, the

unique point made here is that our manner of identifying the object is the very object of negation.

The way of establishing the lack of inherent or true existence of a vase is to reflect upon how the vase does not exist in the way that it appears to our eye consciousness. Thus it is a matter of re-affirming to ourselves that things do not exist in the way that they appear to our eye consciousness. When one can actually affirm that, then in relation to the object being perceived one has affirmed the object of negation.

Normally we have no doubts about a vase existing in the way that it appears to us. We immediately think, 'I'm seeing a vase'. We are totally convinced that a vase that is independently and self-sufficiently existent is actually the mode of existence of the vase. However what is being explained here is that very appearance needs to be negated. In other words the object of negation is non other than the appearance of the object to the eye consciousness.

Verse 35 uses the phrase: 'with scriptural authority and logic' which indicates how to establish something as being valid. 'Scriptural authority' refers to citing an authoritative text, in this case Shantideva's text, to explain the lack of inherent existence of the mind. We can leave that explanation for our next session.

It is not a matter of just going through the text quickly, just giving some explanations and moving on. That would not really serve much purpose. Rather, it would be really good to fully understand the points being made. Here it is identifying the object of focus, which is the mind. What is it? How does it actually appear? Then go a little bit further, trying to get a sense of the entity of the mind, trying to really reflect upon that and internalise the understanding that one gets. This would be the proper way of studying of the text.

So first of all one tries to identify what the entity of the mind is, then one tries to establish the object of negation, which is a truly established or truly existent mind, and then confirm that such a mind does not exist. That is something which one needs to reflect upon.

In relation to the conventional mind, when the vacuity of the conventional mind dawns upon oneself, one needs to be able to relate that to the non-inherent existence of the mind. However there is the danger of assuming that the voidness of the mind is the emptiness of the mind. It is easy to come to that wrong conclusion. Thus, at the very outset, as one establishes the identity of the conventional mind, it is very important also to get a proper understanding of the emptiness of the mind as well. That would be the safest approach to establishing the non-inherent existence or emptiness of the mind. If we can understand the relationship between the relative and ultimate nature of mind, we will not fall into the trap of confusing the conventional attribute of vacuity for the emptiness of mind.

We can go into the explanation of the quote from the *Bodhicharyavavata* later on. However, just to touch it briefly, Shantideva uses the analogy of a rosary and an army to describe merely imputed and merely labelled phenomena. Both the rosary and army are a collection of many parts that you label as a single entity.

To elaborate a bit further, even though we identify a rosary as a single object, it is in fact made up of many individual beads, and if we were to separate the beads then the rosary no longer exists as such. So even though we may identify a rosary as a single object, in reality it is an entity that is made up of many different parts. Likewise we may identify an army as a single unit, but it is made up of many soldiers.

Similarly, even though we refer to the mind as a single entity, it is in fact made up of many separate moments of mental continuums.

To be more specific, when put a rosary in front of us and look at it and think about it, it really appears to us as an entity that exists independently. However when you investigate how the rosary exists, it is, as mentioned earlier, dependent on each of the beads for its existence. But it doesn't appear to us in that way when we first look at the rosary.

Anyway a more elaborate explanation of these particular analogies can be presented in our future sessions. However next week is the discussion, so it would be good to reflect upon the relationship between inter-dependent origination and emptiness, and also how all phenomena are like an illusion. In relation to this verse 108 of the *Guru Puja* says:

Samsara and nirvana lack even an atom of true existence, while cause and effect and dependent arising are unailing. We seek your blessings to discern the import of Nagarjuna's thought, which is that these two are complementary and not contradictory.

In previous sessions, we explained how interdependent-origination arises as emptiness and how emptiness arises as interdependent-origination. That same point is being made in this verse when it refers to 'the import of Nagarjuna's thought, which is that emptiness and inter-dependent origination are complementary and not contradictory.

The same point is made in Lama Tsong Khapa's *Three Principle Paths*¹. One needs to reflect on, and discuss these points, to try and enhance one's understanding of them. The more we enhance our understanding of how inter-dependent origination and emptiness are not contradictory but complementary, the more we will really enhance our understanding of the correct view. Then when we do practices such as the *Guru Puja*, we will have a deeper understanding of the meaning of its verses. And the same is true of other teachings, where these points recur again and again.

As mentioned earlier, the next session is discussion. It would be good for you to do the discussion with a good motivation as well as the intention of enhancing one's understanding. The exam will follow that, and it is also good to do that in a good state of mind. It would be good for older students to impart their understanding and knowledge without being miserly, and share it in a good way.

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¹ The relevant verses from Three Principles of the Path as quoted in *The Principle Teachings of Buddhism*, Classics of Modern Asia, 1988 are:

11 You've yet to realise the thought of the Able as long as two ideas seem to you disparate: The appearance of things - infallible interdependence; and emptiness - beyond taking any position.

13 In addition, the appearance prevents the existence extreme, emptiness that of non-existence, and if you see how emptiness shows in cause and effect you'll never be stolen off by extreme views.