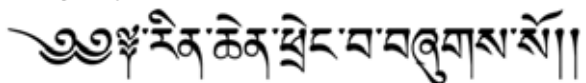

Nagarjuna's Precious Garland



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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After generating a positive motivation we will engage in the practice of meditation. [Meditation]

We can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: for the purpose of benefitting all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment myself, so for that purpose I will listen to this profound teaching and put it into practice well.

2.2.2.2.1.1.3.2. Refuting an answer to that

The verse (which we quoted in our last session) reads:

86. *Otherwise, if each exists,
Why without fuel is there no fire?
Likewise why is there no water, wind, or earth
Without motility, obstructiveness, or cohesion.*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the meaning of the verse thus:

If you [an opponent to our system] say that because each of the four individual elements exists from their own side, there must be an inherently existent composite;

This relates to a question posed by the lower Buddhist school systems. Basically, they say that as each of the individual elements exists from its own side, then that naturally implies that a composite of individual elements would also exist from its own side.

In response to that Gyaltsab Je says:

Why then, when fuel, which combines the three elements, is not present, is there no fire? There would have to be, because [according to you] each of the four elements exists inherently from their own side.

Gyaltsab Je explains that the assertion is refuted with this rhetorical question, 'Why without fuel is there no fire? While it is natural not to have fire without fuel, your assertion implies that this is not so. As the elements exist inherently from their own side, according to you, there would have to be fire without fuel'.

The logic being used here is that if the elements were to exist inherently from their own side, then that would imply fire could exist without fuel, which is clearly not possible. Common sense tells us that without fuel, there cannot be fire. But if the elements were to exist inherently from their own side, then that would imply that they do not depend on each other for their existence. If that were to be the case, then fire would have to exist without depending on fuel, which is a combination of the other elements, and that is clearly not possible. This is how the assertion of the lower schools is refuted.

Gyaltsab Je goes on to say:

Similarly, there absurdly would be water without motility, obstructiveness, or maturation; there absurdly would be wind without obstructiveness, maturation, or cohesion; and there absurdly would be earth without motility, maturation, and cohesion. That is because [according to you] they all exist from

their own side, without having to depend on each other.

This is a clear explanation.

2.2.2.2.1.1.3.3. Dispelling further debate

The relevant verse reads:

87. *If [it is answered that] fire is well known [not to exist without fuel but the other three elements exist by way of their own entities],
How could your three exist in themselves
Without the others? It is impossible for the three
Not to accord with dependent-arising.*

As Gyaltsab Je explains the position of the lower schools:

If you say it is well known that fire cannot exist by itself without fuel and therefore it is dependent on fuel, but the other three exist by themselves without depending on others;

An opponent might say, 'Well, it is obvious that without fuel there cannot be fire—that is well known! It is thus quite clear that fire depends on fuel, but the other three elements do not have to depend on each other'. So, this further confirms their assertion of inherent existence.

In response Gyaltsab Je explains:

Then if fire itself cannot exist without the other three, how could the other three elements exist by themselves without depending on others? It cannot, because it is impossible for the other three elements not to accord with dependent arising, because they do depend on others.

This clearly explains that if fire (one of the four elements) has to depend on another (the other elements in fuel) then how could the other elements also not depend on each other? That would be absurd! As mentioned, *it is impossible for the other three elements not to accord with dependent arising, because they do depend on others.*

The following verses are similar in meaning, so if you understand the logic of one, then you should be able to apply it to the rest quite easily. Basically, the main point is the refutation that things exist independently, -not having to depend on others.

2.2.2.2.1.1.4. Refuting proofs for inherent existence

The relating verse reads as follows:

88. *How could those—that themselves
Exist individually—be mutually dependent?
How could those—that do not themselves
Exist individually—be mutually dependent*

In his commentary Gyaltsab Je explains the position:

If you say, although the elements do depend on each other, they still exist from their own side;

This again relates to some lower Buddhist schools which insistently posit existence from its own side. This position is then refuted by Gyaltsab Je:

How then could the elements be mutually dependent? They could not, because [you say] they individually exist by themselves.

The logic used by the Prasangika is that if the elements exist individually by themselves, then by default that would mean they are not mutually dependent. As Gyaltsab Je explains:

If they do not exist individually by themselves, then they could not exist in dependence on each other from

their own side either, because they do not exist individually from their own side.

The commentary then further posits another objection from the lower schools:

If you say, wherever there is earth for example, the other elements are there from their own side as well, because their characteristics are there;

The position of the lower schools is that if the characteristics of the four elements exist from their own side, then the individual elements would also have to exist from their own side. The characteristics of each of the four elements are: earth is hard and obstructive, water is wet and moistening, fire is hot and burning and wind is light and moving.

The lower schools say that if the characteristics themselves exist from their own side, then naturally the elements would also have to exist from their own side too. The lower Buddhist school systems use this logic to clearly acknowledge the presence of these characteristics. However, they say, if earth does not exist from its own side then its characteristics of being hard and obstructive also cannot exist from their own side.

Clearly the earth does have characteristics. But for the lower Buddhist schools, since earth and the other elements exist from their own side they assert that the characteristics also have to exist from their own side. Thus if earth itself does not exist from its own side, then it would not be possible for the characteristics of earth to exist as well. So they say to the Prasangika, 'as you agree that the elements such as earth have their own characteristics, this implies that earth itself exists from its own side'. That position is refuted in the next verse:

*89. If it is the case that they do not themselves exist individually,
But where there is one, the other three exist,
Then if unmixed, they are not in one place,
And if mixed, they do not themselves exist individually*

In explaining the meaning of the verse, Gyaltsab Je says:

If they do not individually exist by themselves but wherever there is one, the others exist there as well. In that case, do the four elements exist inherently being mixed together or [inherently] unmixed? The latter is not possible, because being unmixed they cannot be in the one place.

If they are not mixed or combined then they couldn't be in one place together, and therefore saying that they are unmixed contradicts the logic of them being together in one place.

The commentary then refutes the second point made in the verse:

The first instance is not possible either, because if mixed they cannot themselves exist individually.

Here, the refutation is that if they are inherently mixed, then they could not themselves exist individually. If they are mixed inherently it would not be possible to posit individual elements. That is how the position of the lower schools is refuted.

The next verse relates to another assertion made by the lower Buddhist schools:

*90. The elements do not themselves exist individually,
So how could their own individual characters exist?*

What do not themselves individually exist cannot predominate.

Their characters are regarded as conventionalities.

This is positing another objection by the lower Buddhist schools. Gyaltsab Je explains:

How could the individual characteristics exist from their own side? They do not because the individual elements do not exist from their own side. If you say when they are mixed some elements have predominance over others, therefore predominance within their characteristics is also observed;

In response to that view, our system says:

However, even though there is predominance when they are mixed, they are not predominant from their own side, because individually they do not exist from their own side.

First of all it is obvious that when the elements are combined, within that combination there could be one element that is more predominant. For example if you mix colours, the resulting hue will be influenced by the predominant colour. Likewise when the elements are mixed, then depending on the intensity of each element, one could be more predominant than the others. Although this is true, the element could not be predominant from its own side. Why? Because individually, they do not exist from their own side. Since individually they don't exist from their own side, when they are mixed and one is predominant, the predominance cannot exist from its own side.

Having refuted that position, another objection is raised. As the commentary reads:

If you say, this goes against the *Abhidharma sutra* which individually presents the characteristics of the four elements;

Here, the lower system is saying to the Prasangika, 'If, in relation to the four elements, you claim that things do not exist from their own side, then that would go against the *Abhidharma sutra*, which clearly presents the individual characteristics of the elements'. As mentioned previously, the characteristics of the earth are that which is hard and obstructive, the characteristics of water are that which is wet and moistening, the characteristics of fire are that which is hot and burning and the characteristics of wind are that which is light and moving. These characteristics of the elements are clearly presented in the *Abhidharma sutra*. So according to the lower Buddhist school system, the Prasangika are contradicting the presentation in the sutra.

In refuting that objection, Gyaltsab Je explains:

It does not [go against the *Abhidharma sutra*] because the characteristics of the elements are presented as conventional existence - merely nominated and labelled and not existing from their own side.

The Prasangika system says that the *Abhidharma sutra* does indeed present the characteristics of the four elements individually; however those characteristics define the conventional existence of the four elements, meaning that they are merely nominated and labelled by conception. So the four elements are conventionally existent, but do not have the characteristics of elements that exist from their own side.

2.2.2.2.1.2. Refuting inherent existence of evolutes [or derivatives] of the elements

[Trans: Other translations use 'derivatives from the elements']

The elements themselves are the basis, and the derivatives arise from the four elements. This section is a refutation of the inherent existence of the derivatives of the elements.

With respect to this, the first two lines of verse 91 read:

*91ab. This mode [of refutation] is also to be applied
To colours, odours, tastes, and objects of touch;*

As Gyaltsab Je explains:

All colours, odours, tastes and tangible objects also lack inherent existence, because the same refutation that applied earlier to the elements can also be applied here.

Just as the individual elements were refuted as being inherently existent, likewise the derivatives of the elements (colour, odours, taste and tangible objects and so forth) also lack inherent existence, and the same logic that was applied in verse 83 can also be applied here.

As the commentary states:

Here you can also apply [just as in verse 83] 'The three forms are not tangible objects, they are not in it', and so forth.

2.2.2.2.1.3. Applying the refutation to other phenomena

This heading is sub-divided into two:

2.2.2.2.1.3.1. Actual application

2.2.2.2.1.3.2. Sources for the emptiness of inherent existence

2.2.2.2.1.3.1. Actual application

This heading is covered in the remainder of verse 91 and in verse 92, which read:

*91cd. Eye, consciousness, and form;
Ignorance, action, and birth;*

*92. Agent, object, and action,
Number, possession, cause and effect,
Time, short and long, and so forth,
Name and name-bearer as well.*

Gyaltsab Je gives this explanation of the meaning of these lines:

The categories such as eye, consciousness and form; ignorance, karma and rebirth; agent, task and action; numbers such as one and so forth; possessor and possessed that comes from meeting; cause and effect; time; short and long; forms such as round and square; name and name-bearer such as thing and that which possesses a function (just like the self), when analysed, are found to be false.

Just as the self is analysed and found not to exist from its own side, so too when these categories presented in the verse are analysed, they are also found to be false, meaning they are found to lack existence from their own side. So this section is specifically related to the refutation of other phenomena as being inherently existent. Just as the self, when analysed, is found to lack inherent existence, and is thus false and not true, likewise all of the categories presented here are also found to be false.

2.2.2.2.1.3.2. Sources for the emptiness of inherent existence

This outline is sub-divided into four:

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.1. All phenomena as empty of inherent existence

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.2. Explanation

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.3. Stating proofs

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.4. No fault of falling to a view of annihilation

2.2.2.2.1.3.2.1. All phenomena as empty of inherent existence

*93. Earth, water, fire and wind
Long and short, subtle and coarse,
As well as virtue and so forth are said by the
Subduer
To be ceased in the consciousness [of reality].*

[Trans: The literal translation of the Tibetan words reads 'thin and thick' instead of 'subtle and coarse'.]

As the commentary reads:

Earth, water, fire and wind; long and short; thin and thick; virtue, non-virtue and that which is non-specified (also meaning neutral), they all lack any inherent establishment, because if they did then it would have to be perceived by the arya bodhisattva who is in meditative equipoise, but rather to their consciousness or in the face of their perception these all cease. This is said by the Subduer, Buddha Shakyamuni.

It is essential that these points, which I have explained in detail during previous teachings, are understood. The main point being made is that all of the phenomena listed here lack any inherent establishment but exist conventionally.

If they were to actually exist inherently, then they would have to be perceived by an arya bodhisattva in meditative equipoise. In the face of the perception of an arya in meditative equipoise, all of these phenomena are said to cease. That is what Buddha Shakyamuni explained. The fact that they cease in the face of the perception of an arya in meditative equipoise, shows that they do not exist inherently. If they were to exist inherently, they would have to be perceived by the arya being who is in meditative equipoise.

One needs to understand these further points, which were also explained in earlier teachings: The non-appearance of conventionality to an arya being in meditative equipoise is said to be emptiness. That is because; only ultimate reality appears to an arya being in meditative equipoise. That which appears in the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise is ultimate reality, and that which does not appear or ceases is conventional reality.

So if conventional existence were to appear, it would then have to appear as ultimate reality or emptiness. The very fact that conventional existence does not appear to their consciousness is reason that conventional existence is false and referred to as relative or conventional existence; they are in the category of relative truth and not ultimate truth. Only the ultimate reality of existence appears to the arya being who is in meditative equipoise. As explained in the teachings, in the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise, the only appearance is emptiness. So, this needs to be understood.

From this logic one also needs to understand that in the face of the perception of an arya being who is in meditative equipoise, the non-existence or ceasing of conventionality is posited as emptiness. This also implies that in the face of the perception of an Arya being in meditative equipoise, conventionality is the object of negation. So, this two-fold aspect to the logic needs to be understood well.

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Edited Version

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