

Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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Please adopt a proper motivation for listening to the teachings

4.4.2 Object Possessors

We are now at the fifth heading. The first four headings, which included the objects themselves have already been completed, so we now commence with object possessors. There are three categories of object possessors: person, awareness, and sound.

4.4.2.1 Person

Geshe-la says the definition of a person is: **The ‘I’ which is labelled on the basis of designation, which is any one of the five aggregates.** The base of designation, the five aggregates, have already been mentioned. They are the aggregates of form, feeling, recognition, compositional factors and consciousness.

We now come to an example of a person. What is the ‘I’? When we talk about the ‘I’, we are saying that it is labelled on any one of the five aggregates. The ‘I’ is the object of the mind that thinks ‘I’. That thought arises in relation to a particular object, which is the ‘I’. For example the thought ‘I’ is not usually directed towards our hand, our arm, our feet or our body. Nor is it directed to our mind, because we know that not one of those are actually the ‘I’. Yet there is still this thought that thinks ‘I’. The object of this thought, the object to which this thought is directed to, is ‘I’. Geshe-la says that is his idea of what the ‘I’ is and he is not going to say anything more. [Laughing] Together with thought of ‘I’ comes the thought of liking and disliking and so forth.

The text gives two different examples of a person. We have the mental consciousness, and the continuum of the aggregates as examples for person. The Sutra school following the *Abhidharmakosa* posit the continuum of the aggregates as an example of a person. Whereas the Sutra school following Reason, the ones that follow the *Seven Treatises on Prime Cognition*, posit mental consciousness as an example of a person.

4.4.2.2 Awareness

The next object possessor is awareness. The text says the definition of awareness is: **that which is clear and knowing.** The definition of awareness thus has two points: *clear*, and *knowing*, and there are various ways in which ‘clear’ and ‘knowing’ can be explained.

There is one school of thought which relates the ‘clear’ to the object, and the ‘knowing’ to the mind itself. This school of thought says that the object appears clear to the mind, and through appearing clear to the mind, the mind knows the object.

Geshe-la says he does not follow this school of thought; he has his own idea what *clear* and *knowing* means. Another way of looking at *clear* and *knowing* is that one relates both the ‘clear’ and the ‘knowing’ to the mind itself. It says the mind is clear because it has the nature of clarity, not being any of the five categories of form, and not having any kind of shape or colour. That is the nature of clear or clarity.

Out of that clarity, or within that clarity, objects can appear to the mind, are reflected within the mind. This appearance of the object to the mind on the basis of the clarity of the mind will be the knowing part. So ‘knowing’ relates to the appearance of objects to the mind, and ‘clear’ refers to the clarity or clear aspect of the mind. The clear aspect of the mind is defined as **being free from shape, colour and so forth.**

For the definition of awareness to be fulfilled, the object has to possess the characteristics of being both clear and knowing.

Following on from this, there can be various categories of awareness. For example we have mind and mental factors. We also have, as it says in the text *valid cognisers*, and we have *awarenesses that are not valid cognisers*.

Valid Cognisers

The definition of a valid cogniser is: **a newly incontrovertible knower.** When we look at the definition of a valid cogniser, then there are three characteristics: new, incontrovertible and a knower. For an awareness to be a valid cogniser, all three characteristics need to be complete.

New

‘New’ refers to just what it says; it refers to a mind that has to be a new mind. It refers to the first instance when the awareness or the mind realises its object. At that first instance, the mind is new. From then onwards, the second instance, the third instance, and so forth are no longer regarded as new. They become what are called *subsequent cognisers*. The definition of a subsequent cogniser is: **A knower which realises what has already been realised.** The second and third instances realise what has already been realised by the first instance.

So according to this school, subsequent cognisers can not be a valid cognition. For this school a valid cogniser has to be the first instance. The reason why the definition mentions ‘new’ is to eliminate the subsequent cognisers as valid cognisers. This is to avoid any confusion between subsequent cognisers and valid cognisers.

The Sanskrit term for valid cogniser is *pramana*. However, there are two schools of thought with regards to what *pra*, and hence, a valid cogniser means. One school of thought, to which the Sutrists school, the Mind Only school and the Svatantrika-Madhyamika school belong, assert that *pra* means new. Therefore they posit that a valid cogniser has to be a **newly** incontrovertible knower. Those three schools all say that a valid cogniser has to be the first instance when the mind realises its object.

The second school of thought, which is according to Madhyamika Prasangika, assert that *pra* means **main**. Hence, according to Prasangika, a valid cogniser has to be a knower which is incontrovertible with regards to its main object. It does not have to be a newly incontrovertible knower, it only has to be an **incontrovertible knower.**

At this point, however, *pra* means new, and is mentioned to eliminate subsequent cognisers as valid cognisers.

Incontrovertible

*Incontrovertible*¹, the second characteristic in the definition of valid cognition, is mentioned in order to avoid confusion with a type of mind called *correct assumptions*. For a mind to be a valid cogniser it has to actually realise the apprehended object. It has to be incontrovertible with regard to its apprehended object. Correct assumptions are minds in concordance with reality, but they are not incontrovertible.

When we meditate on the impermanence of our aggregates we will first generate the correct assumption understanding that impermanence. Only later will there be a valid cognition. Having meditated for some time we will generate a mental picture of our impermanence. However this first understanding will not yet be incontrovertible, even though it is in concordance with reality.

Thus in order to avoid confusion between a correct assumption and valid cognition, incontrovertible is included in the definition.

Knower

The third characteristic mentioned in the definition is that a valid cogniser has always to be a *knower*. This is mentioned in order to refute the Vaibashika who assert that physical sense powers can be valid cognisers. In order to refute this, the definition of valid cogniser includes ‘knower’. So a valid cogniser always has to be a knower; it always has to be a consciousness.

Within valid cognisers there are direct valid cognisers and inferential valid cognisers.

Direct Valid Cognisers

The definition of a direct perception is: **a knower which is unmistakable and free from concepts.** A direct perception is a mind which is unmistakable and free from concepts. A direct valid cogniser is: **a knower which is newly incontrovertible and free from concepts.**

There are four kinds of direct valid cognisers: self knowing direct

¹ Trans: Non-contrary to the truth

valid cognisers, sense direct valid cognisers, mental direct valid cognisers, and yogic direct valid cognisers.

This particular text that we are using is a very condensed explanation of all these various categories of mind - valid cognisers, direct perceptions and so forth. Geshe-la says he would like to start teaching the text *Mind and Awareness* which covers these topics in much greater detail. He says he would like to start teaching that text for six weeks on Fridays, commencing in August. Whoever wants to come can come, it does not matter how many people there are.

Direct Self-Knowing Valid Cogniser

Of the types of direct cognisers, the first one is a self knowing direct valid cogniser. The definition of a self knowing direct valid cogniser is, first of all a valid cogniser, a knower which is incontrovertible and new. Then because it is a direct cogniser, it also has to be free from conception and non-mistaken.

Then, the text says, it has to focus only inwards. What this means is that a self knowing direct valid cogniser focuses only inwards on the mind. There is no other object apart from the mind for a self knower.

Then it says a self knower has to be single. Geshe-la says his interpretation of why it says single is that there is no mental factor that is concomitant with the self knower. And the self-knower is also not concomitant with any main-mind. So the self knower always stands by itself.

In one sentence the definition of the self knowing direct valid cogniser is ***a knower which is newly incontrovertible, free from concepts, single and focusing only inwards.***

Where it says a direct perception is to be unmistakable as well as free from concepts, it is unmistakable with regard to the appearing object. A direct perception does not mistake its appearing object for something else. A direct perception has to be free from concepts.

We have two ways of apprehending an object. There is the way a direct perception apprehends an object, and the way a conceptual mind apprehends its object. Direct perception is a non-conceptual mind. So we have to know how a non-conceptual mind apprehends its object, and how a conceptual mind apprehends its object.

A non-conceptual mind, like a direct perception, apprehends its object in a direct way. That is why it is called a direct perception. We can say that the object appears to the mind in the 'raw', it is fresh. What this means is that there is nothing between the mind and the object. The object can appear to the mind directly. That is why it is called a direct perception.

To a conceptual mind, even though the object appears to the conceptual mind, the object does not appear to the mind directly or raw. Rather it appears to the conceptual mind through a generic image, or *the meaning generality*. Geshe-la gave the example that when we cover our hand with a piece of cloth, we are not able to directly see the hand in the raw. The only way we know that the hand is there is through a mental image that appears to the mind. There is something in between the object and our mind apprehending the object. If we take the cloth away, then we can see the object directly; there is nothing between the mind and the object. That is the difference between the conceptual mind and direct perception.

Sense Direct Valid Cognition

The definition of sense direct valid cognition is: ***a knower which is newly incontrovertible, free from concepts, and arises in dependence upon its uncommon empowering condition of a physical sense power.***

Here it talks about the five physical sense powers, such as the eye sense, nose sense, ear sense and so forth. It is asserted that those five sense powers are a subtle clear form. Modern scientists assert sense powers which are clear form and can actually be seen. (Geshe-la points behind his ear.)

Geshe-la says he is not quite sure whether that is what Buddhists refer to when they say sense power. But apart from that, we do not have anything that modern science could posit as a sense power in these days.

The various sense consciousnesses, the eye consciousness, the ear consciousness, and so forth, arise in dependence on their uncommon empowering condition of the respective sense powers, like the eye sense, ear sense and so forth. When these various senses degenerate (for example through old age), then the various consciousnesses which arise in dependence upon those sense powers (for example the eye sense consciousness), also become weaker.

Mental Direct Valid Cogniser

The next direct valid cogniser is the mental direct valid cogniser. The definition is basically the same with as the sense direct prime cogniser. The only difference is the uncommon empowering condition, which is the mental sense power.

When we talk about six categories of consciousness, then we refer to the five sense consciousnesses and the mental consciousness. The difference between those six consciousnesses is the uncommon empowering condition in dependence on which they arise. If those consciousnesses arise in dependence on a physical sense power, then they become of the five sense consciousnesses. If the consciousness arises in dependence upon its uncommon empowering condition of a mental sense power, then the consciousness becomes mental consciousness. The difference lies in the uncommon empowering condition.

Yogic Valid Direct Cogniser

The last of the valid direct cognisers is the yogic valid direct cogniser. If we look at the various parts of the definition, then first it says it is that which arises in dependence upon the empowering condition of the concentration that is the union of calm abiding and special insight. Here the empowering condition is the union of calm abiding and special insight.

Calm abiding refers to a state of concentration that has two characteristics, abiding and being held by the bliss of pliancy. Abiding refers to the fact that this mind can remain focused on the object of meditation for however long it wishes.

Superior or special insight refers to discriminating wisdom which is being held by the bliss of pliancy, which arises through the force of analysing the object while in calm abiding.

One has achieved what is called superior insight on the object of meditation at the moment when this bliss of pliancy is induced through the force of analysis. At that moment one also attains what is called the union of calm abiding and special insight. The attainment of special insight, and the attainment of the union of calm abiding and special insight are the same thing.

In dependence on this union of calm abiding and special insight, one directly realises subtle impermanence, which refers to the momentarily changing nature of phenomena. If we realise the impermanence of our hand moving and so forth, we just realise coarse impermanence, but we do not necessarily say that we realise impermanence.

In order to realise subtle impermanence, we have to understand the momentary changing nature of phenomena. In the definition it says a yogic direct cogniser is a mind which either realises directly subtle impermanence or coarse or subtle selflessness, in dependence upon the uncommon empowering condition which is the concentration of the union of calm abiding and special insight.

Coarse selflessness refers to the absence of permanent, singular and independent self, and subtle selfless refers to the absence of a self supporting substantial existing self.

The definition of yogic valid direct cogniser is therefore rather long. It is: ***a transcendental wisdom which, in dependence upon its empowering condition which is the concentration of the union of calm abiding and special insight, realises directly either subtle or coarse selflessness, or subtle impermanence.*** If we have achieved this kind of mind, then we have yogic direct valid cognition. As the definition mentions, there can be three types: one that realises subtle impermanence, one which realises coarse selflessness and one which realises subtle selflessness.

We have now finished the first category of valid cognisers. The next category is inferential valid cognisers. This is a knowledge which is also newly incontrovertible, and which arises in dependence upon its base, which is a valid reason. We can talk

about this valid cogniser on next Tuesday.

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