

Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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གྲུབ་མཐུན་རྣམ་གཞག་བཤམ་པ།

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We have all just recited this single verse which contains refuge and bodhicitta. It is important that when we recite these words we actually generate these motivations in our mind. Taking refuge causes us to enter the Buddhist path, and generating bodhicitta causes us to enter the Mahayana path.

Inferential Cognisers

Having finished with direct valid cognisers last time we now proceed to what are called inferential cognisers. The definition for an inferential cogniser is: *a newly incontrovertible determinative knower, which is generated in dependence on its base, which is a perfect reason.*

The term ‘determinative knower’ particularly relates to the conceptual mind.

Without being too strict about whether there is one hundred percent pervasion, the difference between inferential cognisers and direct cognisers is that one has to realise its object through reason, while the other realises its object through the object appearing directly to the mind.

For example manifest outer objects like sound, smell, taste, tangibles and so forth can be realised by the various sense consciousnesses directly. Just by seeing a particular form, or seeing a particular shape we can realise and understand that shape or form.

If we go to a more subtle level and try to realise, for example, the impermanence of that form, or try to realise the selflessness of that form, then while we are ordinary beings¹, we cannot do that through direct perception. This is because at the level of an ordinary person direct perception cannot realise such subtle or hidden phenomena. At the level of an ordinary person these hidden phenomena have to be realised through inference. The mind which is generated through the force of reasoning is a conceptual mind.

The text gives three divisions for inferential cognisers:

1. Inferential cognisers which are generated through the force of fact.
2. Inferential cognisers which are generated through renown.
3. Inferential cognisers which are generated through belief.

With regard to the objects of knowledge of the different cognisers, there are three divisions: manifest objects of knowledge, hidden objects of knowledge, and very hidden objects of knowledge.

Manifest objects of knowledge refer to those phenomena which we can see directly with our sense consciousnesses, like sounds, smells, tastes and so forth.

Hidden objects of knowledge are slightly more subtle and ordinary beings at first cannot understand them directly.

We cannot understand them through direct perception, and we have to understand them by depending upon inference. We have to depend upon what we call the force of fact. Examples of hidden objects of knowledge are the impermanence of sound and the selflessness of sound. Liberation and enlightenment also fall within this category.

Examples of **very hidden phenomena** would be, for example, the fact that from practising generosity one will attain wealth in a future life, or that from practising morality one will attain a higher rebirth. These subtle karmic relationships are called very hidden phenomena, and they have to be realised in dependence upon the reason of belief.

1. Inference Through the Force of Fact

With regard to the first of the three inferential cognisers, the inferential cogniser which is generated through the force of fact, an example of which would be the inferential cogniser which realises that sound is impermanent, is generated through the force of a syllogism. The syllogism which is posited is: ‘Take sound, it is impermanent because it is a product.’ The perfect reason which is posited here is that sound is a product. Since sound is a product, therefore it has to be impermanent, because we know if something is a product it is something which has come about through causes and conditions. It follows then that since sound has come about through causes and conditions, one can infer that sound is necessarily impermanent.

Another example for the first kind of inferential cogniser would be the inferential cogniser that understands selflessness. For example there is selflessness of sound. An example for the perfect reasoning which could be posited is: ‘Take sound, it is selfless because it is neither a single self nor many selves.’

2. Inference Through Renown

The second kind of inferential cogniser is the inferential cogniser generated through renown. The syllogism which would be posited here is: ‘Take the moon, it is suitable to be called a rabbit possessor, because it is an object of conception.’ What is being said here is that because something is an object of conception one can actually give that object any name. Here, the moon is being named after a rabbit because sometimes it seems that one can see the shape of a rabbit on the moon.

3. Inference Through Belief

The third kind of inferential cogniser is called the inferential cogniser generated through belief.

The example given is an inferential cogniser that realises that the quotation from *The Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, ‘from generosity comes wealth and from morality comes a higher rebirth’, is incontrovertible with regard to its meaning. This inferential cogniser is again generated in dependence upon a syllogism, which is: “Take the quote ‘from generosity comes wealth and from morality higher rebirth’; it is incontrovertible with regard to its meaning, because it is a quote which is free from the three contradictions”.

This quotation can not be understood through the reason of fact because the subtle karmic relationship that it is trying to explain is a very hidden phenomena. The only proof which one can posit is that it is stated like that in a particular scripture. Therefore, because this inferential cogniser is generated through the force of believing in this particular

¹ Any person below the path of seeing.

scripture it is called inferential cogniser generated through belief.

The reason which we gave earlier for the quotation being incontrovertible was because it is a quote which is free from the three contradictions. Those three contradictions are related to the three kinds of objects of knowledge we mentioned before, that is manifest, hidden and very hidden objects.

Whatever the quotation expresses, it will always be contained within one of those three categories of knowledge. In order to know whether a quotation is incontrovertible we need to analyse its various manifest, hidden and very hidden meanings with the three kinds of valid cognisers, direct valid cogniser, inferential cogniser through fact, and inferential cogniser through belief.

If the manifest phenomena expressed by the quotation are not contradicted by direct valid cogniser, then the quotation is free from the first contradiction. If the hidden phenomena expressed by the quotation are not contradicted by the inferential cogniser through the force of fact, then it is free from the second contradiction. If the very hidden phenomena expressed by the quotation are not contradicted by inferential cogniser through belief, then it is free from the third contradiction.

What do we mean when we say that a quotation is not contradicted by a direct valid perception? For example the table-cloth on Geshe-la's desk is yellow, which we can very easily understand just by looking at the cloth. If a quotation contradicted this and said that the cloth on Geshe-la's table was red, then a direct valid perception would directly contradict that quotation.

The example of something being contradicted by an inferential cogniser through the force of fact is if a quotation says that sound is permanent. This would be contradicted by the inferential cogniser through fact which realises impermanent sound.

An example is thinking about this statement and concluding, 'sound cannot be permanent because actually it is a product. Since it is a product it has to be impermanent.' Through the inferential cogniser realising that sound is impermanent, the original statement would be contradicted. This inferential cogniser that understands that sound is impermanent is an example of the inferential cogniser being generated through the force of fact. The object of analysis (the impermanence of sound) is a hidden phenomena. Then already the quotation is free from the first two contradictions, not being contradicted by a direct valid cogniser and an inferential cogniser arising through fact.

If the quotation asserts, for example, that from generosity one will not attain wealth in a future life, that statement refers to a very hidden phenomena. Whether or not wealth is generated from generosity is a very hidden phenomena. If the quotation says that one will not attain wealth from practising generosity, that is contradicted by an inferential cogniser that is generated through the force of belief.

So if a quotation passes these three tests, if we have analysed it with these three kinds of valid cognisers, then we know that the quotation is incontrovertible with regard to its meaning, and we can believe what that quotation is saying.

It is just as the Buddha said in the sutras, 'My monks and

scholars, those of you who are of sharp faculty should not accept what I say just because I am sitting here on a high throne. You should analyse everything that I say just as you would analyse gold before you buy it, by burning it, cutting it and rubbing it. Only when you have found that what I have said passes those three tests of burning, cutting and rubbing, should you accept it, in the same way you would buy gold only if it passes those three tests.' Those three tests are actually related to the three ways of checking whether or not a quotation is correct.

In *A Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna it says, 'from generosity comes wealth, and from morality a higher rebirth'. That is the meaning of what that quotation is trying to express. Once we have found that this quotation is not contradicted by any of those three valid cognisers, then we can generate an inferential cogniser, actually realising that from our generosity comes wealth, and from morality comes a higher rebirth. By depending upon this syllogism, we take this particular quotation as incontrovertible with regard to its meaning.

Dharmakirti said that this inference through belief is normally preceded by inference through the force of fact. For example, we said before that the existence of liberation from cyclic existence, and the existence of complete enlightenment are hidden phenomena. They can be realised through investigating all the various facts and obvious reasons to which we have access. What this means is that we do not have to take it on faith that liberation and enlightenment exist. We do not have to be a buddha to understand that they exist.

If we sit down and think about it then through our own analysis we shall be able to understand that those phenomena exist, because we have access to the reasons that prove that they do exist. That is why these inferential cognisers are said to arise through the power of fact.

Once through this process we have understood that those various hidden phenomena which are expressed in the teachings of the Buddha (like impermanence, selflessness, liberation and enlightenment), do in fact exist, then through the force of that we shall also generate the realisation that the more subtle aspects of the Buddha's teachings, like for example the various aspects of the law of cause and effect, are also true. We shall be able to realise that those teachings are actually incontrovertible and non-mistaken with regard to these very hidden phenomena.

Dharmakirti is saying that those hidden phenomena, like impermanence or selflessness, can be understood through investigation and reason. We can prove them.

Through reasoning we prove that the misconceptions holding sound to be permanent or holding the self of the person to be existent, are wrong. The inferential cogniser realising impermanent sound realises the absence of the apprehended object of the wrong mind holding sound to be permanent; the inferential cogniser realising selflessness realises the absence of the apprehended object of self grasping.

Dharmakirti says that through proving the hidden then one will generate faith in the Buddha's teachings. So Geshe-la wrote down for himself how he thinks it works, and that is what he what follows.

As we said before, we have a grasping at compounded phenomena as being permanent, and we have a grasping at

the existence of a self of a person. . One of them is called the grasping at permanence, and the other is called grasping at self of a person.

Through valid analysis and valid reasoning we can realise that compounded phenomena are actually not permanent but impermanent. We can also realise that the person doesn't actually have what is called a self of a person, but that the person is actually selfless. So that grasping at the self of a person is a wrong mind, and grasping at compounded phenomena as permanent is also a wrong mind.

Then, through analysis we understand the absence of the apprehended object of those two kinds of grasping. We understand the absence of permanent compounded phenomena, and we understand the absence of the self of a person. Having understood the absence of the self of a person then we understand selflessness, they go hand in hand.

This wisdom that understands selflessness acts as an antidote to the grasping at a self of a person. Once we generate that wisdom then we understand that the grasping at a self of a person is actually a wrong mind - we understand that the object at which that mind is grasps is non-existing. Once we understand that, we understand that therefore that mind is a completely wrong mind. Therefore it can be opposed by the wisdom which understands the absence of its object, or the wisdom which understands selflessness.

Since it is a wrong mind and can be opposed by its antidote, we can remove it from our mind. Since we can stop the root of cyclic existence we can also stop cyclic existence. Therefore liberation exists and is attainable.

So we understand 'there is something we can do about it'. So that would be how one understands, through reasoning and analysis, that liberation exists and is possible.

Furthermore, because we have already understood that self-grasping is a wrong mind, and that it can be opposed by the wisdom realising selflessness, we also understand that on top of purifying our mind from self-grasping and its seeds, we are also able to purify our mind from the imprints or karmic latencies of that self-grasping through meditating on the wisdom realising emptiness, and by completing the accumulations of merit. So basically through completing the two accumulations - wisdom and merit - we are able to purify our mind even from the subtle imprints of self-grasping. Once we understand this we also know the attainment of enlightenment is possible. All of this can be realised through the force of reasoning. One does not have to take any of this on faith.

Having understood all of this one understands that all those hidden phenomena - impermanence, selflessness, liberation and enlightenment - that are expressed in the teachings of the Buddha actually do exist. Then through the force of that realisation, we also realise the truth of the very subtle phenomena which are expressed in the teachings of the Buddha, like the subtle karmic relationship of the law of cause and effect. One realises that they also have to be true. At this moment, the third inferential cogniser through belief would be generated.

Having generated an inferential cogniser through belief, we understand that the teachings of the Buddha are indeed incontrovertible, that they are valid.

Since the teachings are incontrovertible also the teacher has to be incontrovertible. Through realising the teachings as valid teachings we realise the Buddha as being a valid being. That was an explanation of what it says in the text, that by reasoning that the quotation has the three purities, or is free from the three contradictions, one generates an inferential cogniser. One understands the quotation that posits, 'from generosity comes wealth and from morality comes a higher rebirth', is incontrovertible with regard to its meaning.

The text goes on to say that the inferential cogniser generated through renown will always be an inferential cogniser which is generated through the force of fact.

If it is a direct perception there is no pervasion that it is a valid direct perception, and if is inferential cogniser there is no pervasion that it has to be an inferential valid cogniser. For example neither the second moment of the direct perception apprehending form, nor the second moment of the inferential cogniser realising impermanent sound are valid cognisers. They are both what are called subsequent cognisers. The reason is because they are not new any more.

Geshe-la says we have already covered this point. Everything that is said here was actually explained when a valid cogniser was defined. For a mind to be a valid cogniser it has to be a newly incontrovertible knower. In the second and third moments they are not new any more but old. Here the text gives this quote from *The Correct* by Dharmottar:

The first moments of a direct perception and inferential consciousness are valid cognisers. Later moments, which do not differ in establishment and abiding and are continuations of them, have forsaken being a prime cogniser. Sameness in establishment and abiding on this occasion are said to refer to sameness of effect.

We now proceed to the next point where the text starts to talk about awarenesses which are not valid cognisers. You might remember that at the very beginning awareness was divided into two: valid cognisers, and awarenesses which are not valid cognisers. We are finished with the first division, and now we start with the second.

There are five different kinds of awareness which are not valid cognisers: subsequent cognisers, doubt, correct belief, wrong minds and awareness to which the object appears but is not ascertained. These five and the two kinds of valid cognisers make up the seven divisions of mind and awareness. You might have heard already of these seven divisions. When we teach mind and awareness in August we can go into those seven divisions in more detail.

The definition of awareness which is a non-valid cogniser is a knower which is not newly incontrovertible. A valid cogniser was a knower which is newly incontrovertible, and awarenesses which are non-valid cognisers are knowers which are not newly incontrovertible.

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