
Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Tenzin Dongak

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17 July 2001

As usual, establish a virtuous and positive motivation for listening to the teachings.

As I have mentioned in the past, when we talk about tenets we are talking about the different views in Buddhism. The different schools of tenets come about through various views: the Hinayana tenets are based on the Hinayana view of the selflessness of the self, and the Mahayana tenets are based on the view of the selflessness of phenomena.

5 Explaining the Mind Only School

The view of selflessness of phenomena in the Mind Only tenet is that of a form and it's valid cogniser's emptiness of being different substance.

The intention of proponents of the Mind Only School is to become enlightened for the sake of all sentient beings, and to this end they practise the six perfections. When we proceed to the higher point of view of the Madhyamika the view is the absence of true, or inherent, or natural existence. Again the intention is bodhicitta, the mind wanting to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and the practice are the six perfections.

The divisions followed in the Mind Only chapter are the same as those followed in pervious chapters.

5.1 Definition

The definition of a proponent of the Mind Only tenet is *a proponent of Mahayana tenet who doesn't accept outer meaning and assert self-knowers as being truly existent.*

The Mind Only tenet doesn't assert outer existence whereas the Sautrantrika tenet does. As we mentioned in previous weeks, the Sautrantika School asserts outer existence by proposing a partless particle. They assert coarse forms to be accumulations of these partless particles, and these accumulations of partless particles are called outer form. In the Mind Only tenet, partless particles are not accepted. So therefore coarse forms, which are the accumulations of those partless particles, are also not accepted.

To the Mind only school, whatever form exists is asserted to be of one nature with consciousness. We have discussed the definition of a self-knower in previous weeks, explaining a little what the term 'self-knower' exactly means. Each mind has two parts, the clear and knowing part, which knows outer objects, and the clear and knowing part knowing that mind itself. So one part of that clear and knowing knows the object, and the other part knows the subject.

We have also mentioned in the past the various attributes of a self-knower. A self-knower is focused only inwards, meaning that its object is only mind itself; it is singular which means that it is not concomitant with a main mind and it does not have a mental factor which is concomitant with itself.

Awareness has the division into mind and mental factors. But if it is awareness, then there is no pervasion that it has to be either a main mind or a mental factor, as for example a self-knower. So a self-knower is an awareness, but it is neither a main mind nor a mental factor because it doesn't have a main mind with which it is concomitant, nor does it

have a mental factor which it is concomitant with it.

The function of the self-knower is to generate the memory of the object-possessor. Without a self-knower you would not be able to remember that at a particular time you had a particular awareness. Actually this kind of explanation comes from the Madhyamika point of view and I have mentioned this already several times before. Although I don't know if you remember! (*Laughter*)

There are various names used to describe the Mind Only tenet. Sometimes a person following this school is called a Mind Only Advocate. They can also be called an Advocate of Consciousness (*lit. aspect knowers*) or an Advocate of Yogic Practice. These three terms are synonymous.

The pioneer of the Mind Only tenet was Asanga. Even though Asanga is regarded as the pioneer of the Mind Only tenet, Asanga himself was actually an advocate of the Madhyamika tenet. The reason for saying this is that Asanga wrote a commentary to the *Uttaratantra (Sublime Continuum)* by Maitreya, which reflects the Madhyamika point of view. Since Asanga was the author of this text, one can say that he was actually a follower of the Madhyamika tenet, even though he was the pioneer of the Mind Only tenet. In pioneering the Mind Only system, it wasn't as if Asanga created something new that didn't previously exist in the Buddhist teachings. What he did was to clarify the Mind Only teaching of the Buddha.

In particular Asanga clarified the divisions of phenomena into what are called the three characteristics: **wholly labelled phenomena**, **other-powered phenomena** and **thoroughly established phenomena**. It is asserted that **wholly labelled phenomena** are empty of inherent existence that **other-powered phenomena** and **thoroughly established phenomena** truly exist. This threefold division of phenomena and assertion that other-powered phenomena and thoroughly established phenomena are truly existing, and mentally elaborated phenomena are empty of inherent existence is the Mind Only point of view which was explained by the Buddha, and then clarified by Asanga. Vasubandhu, Dignaga and Dharmakirti are three examples of proponents of the Mind Only tenet.

5.2 Classification

Proponents of the Mind Only tenets can be divided into Mind Only True Aspectarians and Mind Only False Aspectarians.

5.2.1 Mind Only True Aspectarians

The definition of Mind Only True Aspectarian is *a Mind Only, as well as a proponent asserting that the part of the appearance of coarse form to the sense direct perception apprehending form in the continuum of a 'here-seer' (an ordinary being) is not being contaminated by the karmic latencies of ignorance.*

Here we have this term 'here-seer'. You can talk about seeing 'the here', and seeing 'over there', where those who can see only 'the here' refers to those who can only see samsara. That is because they are 'here' in samsara, and can see only what is 'here'. Really this is just a more flowery term for 'ordinary beings'. Those who can see the 'other' side or 'over there' would be those who can see nirvana, and emptiness directly.

It is good to know that all Mind Only proponents agree that, apart from the self-knower, all direct perceptions in the continuum of an ordinary being (meaning a being who hasn't realised emptiness directly) are always contaminated, and therefore will always be mistaken. They are mistaken with regard to the appearing object because, in the context

of the eye-consciousness perceiving form, form will always appear as a different entity from the mind.

The difference between the two Mind Only groups lies in their different assertions regarding the appearance of coarse form. The True aspectarians assert that the appearance of coarse form to the mind is not contaminated by the karmic latencies of ignorance and that the mind is non-mistaken with regards to this appearance.

One part within the appearance of the object to the mind is the appearance of outer existence, and another the appearance of coarse form. The Mind Only True Aspectarians assert that the consciousness is mistaken with regard to the appearance of outer existence but not with regards to the appearance of coarse form. This is because the appearance of outer existence is contaminated by the latencies of ignorance while appearance of coarse form is uncontaminated by the karmic latencies of ignorance.

5.2.2 Mind Only False Aspectarians

(A mind only as well as a proponent asserting that the part of the appearance of coarse form to the sense direct perception apprehending form in the continuum of a here-seer (an ordinary being) is being contaminated by the karmic latencies of ignorance.)

The Mind Only False Aspectarians say that the mind is actually mistaken with regard to both the appearance of outer existence, and the appearance of coarse existence. Both of those appearances are contaminated by the karmic latencies of ignorance.

Both schools agree that the mind is mistaken with regard to the appearance of outer existence. When the mind sees a certain object such as a form it appears as if the object is over there, and that the subject (the mind which is perceiving) is over here. It appears to the mind as if there is this distance between the object and the subject. This appearance of object and subject as being of a different substance is a false appearance.

Remember that the Sautrantika School asserted that form is the cause for what is called the focal condition of the eye-consciousness perceiving form. They assert that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between the object and the mind perceiving the object.

Here however, the outer form is not the cause for the eye consciousness perceiving that form. The outer focal object is not the actual focal condition. Rather the actual focal condition is a karmic potential on the main consciousness. Through the ripening of this karmic potential, the mind and the object are produced at the same time. Here we can see that the mind and the object don't have a cause-and-effect relationship. Rather they are established simultaneously.

The Mind Only School accepts that cause and effect cannot occur simultaneously, so therefore the object and the mind itself cannot have a cause-and-effect relationship. They are also not of different substance as asserted by the Sautrantika. Since they are established simultaneously from a concordant karmic imprint on the mental consciousness they are of same substance.

This Mind Only point of view on how everything is generated from karmic imprints on the mental continuum is very beneficial for one's understanding of cause and effect. I have heard, although I am not sure about it, that at least some parts of modern science assert a point of view similar to the point of view of Mind-Only school. Some groups within modern science assert that the power of outer matter comes about through the power of the mind, but this is just

something that I have heard.

Mind Only also asserts that the grasping at the self as being self-sufficient and a substantially existent is the subtle self-grasping at a self, and that the absence of a self which is self-sufficient and a substantially existent is subtle selflessness.

The grasping at form and its valid cogniser being of separate substance is the grasping at the self of phenomena. Form and its valid cogniser's emptiness of being separate substance is the subtle selflessness of phenomena.

The grasping at form being inherently the base of determination of the concept apprehending form is the other subtle self-grasping at phenomena and form not being inherently the base of determination of the concept apprehending form is the other subtle selflessness of phenomena as clarified by Lama Tsong Khapa.

The Mind Only True Aspectarians have three divisions: the form-mind equalists, the half-eggists and the non-pluralists.

5.2.1.1 Form and Mind Equalists

Form refers to the object, and mind is that which perceives those objects. Why are they called equalists? The text says:

If the Yogacara posits that at the time, when an eye-consciousness apprehending the colour pattern on the wings of a butterfly apprehends (that) colour pattern, at the object's side blue, yellow etc. are shown as individual aspects and that also at the object possessor's (subject's) side the different individual aspects of blue, yellow etc. are generated as true aspects, then he is a form-mind equalist.

Here the text uses the example of the moment when the eye-consciousness perceives the pattern of colours on the wings of a butterfly. Here we have two parts, the object which is the pattern of colours on the wings of a butterfly, and the eye-consciousness perceiving those patterns. The pattern of colour shows many different colours. Just as there are a number of individual aspects of colour shown at the object, so also the eye-consciousness perceiving that pattern of colours is actually made up of the same number of consciousnesses, as there are aspects of colour on the wing. This means that each aspect of colour on the wing actually has one eye-consciousness perceiving it, and the eye-consciousness perceiving the pattern is actually made up of an accumulation of eye consciousnesses equal in number to the number of aspects of colours that form the pattern. Therefore this particular Mind Only group are called form-mind equalists, because they assert an equal number of aspects of form and mind perceiving those forms.

5.2.1.2 Half Eggists

What is the difference between the form-mind equalists and the half-eggists (which means half of an egg).

If the Yogacara posits that at the time of such an apprehension at the object's side blue, yellow etc. are shown as individual aspects, but that at the object possessor's (subject's) side the different individual aspects of blue, yellow etc. are generated without aspect, then he is a half eggist.

Using the same example as the form-mind equalists of the eye consciousness perceiving the pattern of colour on the wings of a butterfly, the half eggists say that that pattern of colours shows various individual aspects of colour. Then they say that the eye-consciousness perceiving the pattern of colour would be generated aspect less in the individual aspects of yellow, blue and so forth.

So therefore they are called half-eggists because they have only half of the assertion of the equalists.

5.2.1.3 Non-pluralists

The third group of True Aspectarians are called Non-pluralists. Here again the example is the same.

If the Yogacara posits that at the time of such an apprehension at the object's side blue, yellow etc. aren't shown as individual aspects but only the aspect of mere colour pattern is shown, and that at the object possessor's (subject's) side the different individual aspects of blue, yellow etc. aren't generated without aspect but the aspect of mere colour pattern is generated without aspect, then he is a non-pluralist.

This is saying that the Yogacara, the Mind Only proponent, posits that at the time of the apprehension of the eye-consciousness apprehending the pattern of colour on the wings of a butterfly, the mere pattern is apprehended by that eye consciousness. So at the object's side the individual colour aspects of blue, yellow, etc – are not shown, only the aspect of mere colour-pattern is shown. When we analyse the object there is a difference from the previous two schools, which say that the different colours are shown individually. Whereas this school says that the individual colours are not shown individually, but as a whole pattern. Also at the subject's or consciousness' side the different individual aspects of blue, yellow, etc are not generated without aspect, but the aspect of mere colour pattern is generated without aspect.

5.2.2.1 Tainted False Aspectarians

Within the False Aspectarians there are two divisions: Tainted False Aspectarians and Untainted False Aspectarians.

This refers to whether or not the nature of the mind is tainted by the stains of ignorance. If they assert that the nature of the mind is contaminated, or tainted by the karmic latencies of ignorance, then they are called Tainted False Aspectarians.

5.2.2.2 Untainted False Aspectarians

If they assert that the nature of the mind is untainted by the karmic latencies of ignorance they are called Untainted False Aspectarians.

5.3 Etymology

The third section, the etymology of the Mind Only School begins by asking why they are called Mind Only? It is because they assert that phenomena exist by being in the mere nature of mind. Why are they called the Advocates of Consciousness¹? It is the same thing; they assert that the way phenomena exist is by being in the mere nature of consciousness.

The next section concerns positing objects.

However maybe we can stop here, and have time for a few questions.

(In the following discussion there were many questions, which merely reviewed various categories that we have studied. This transcript is limited to additional points of clarification. It is also limited by the lack of amplification of audience responses, although these can sometimes be deduced from the reply.)

Geshe-la: What is the difference between a Buddhist and a Buddhist tenet proponent?

Student: A Buddhist goes for refuge to the Three Jewels, while a Buddhist tenet holder also has understood and accepted the four seals of Buddhism.

Geshe-la: What are the four seals?

Student: All compounded phenomena are impermanent, all contaminated phenomena are suffering, all phenomena are empty

and selfless, nirvana is peace.

Geshe-la: Of the four seals of Buddhism the third states that all phenomena are empty and selfless. What does the empty and selfless refer to?

Student: There are different interpretations according to the different tenets, but here the absence of a permanent, single, independent self.

Geshe-la: If you don't posit the emptiness of a permanent, single, independent self then what other kinds of emptiness would you posit?

Student: It depends upon the school.

Geshe-la: You said that each school could have its own interpretation. So the empty and selfless of the third seal is also the selflessness of phenomena? Is that what you are saying?

Student: According to a higher school they could.

Geshe-la: In regard to the selflessness of the person we can posit a coarse selflessness of the person, and a subtle selflessness of the person. The first is the absence of a permanent, single, independent self, and the second is an absence of a self, which is self-sufficient, and a substantially existent.

As the empty and selfless in the third seal we posit the absence of a permanent, single, independent self. If we would not do that then the Vatsiputra Vaibashika, which are regarded as Buddhist tenet holders in this text, would be excluded as such.

When we talk about the selflessness or the absence of a permanent, single, independent self then how many parts or characteristics are we talking about here, and what are they? They are 'permanent', and 'single' and 'independent'.

Permanent refers to not momentarily changing. The self is empty of being permanent because it is changing moment by moment. The 'single' refers to being independent of its parts. The self appears single by appearing to exist independently of its parts. Because it is empty of that, it is empty of being single. It appears as being 'independent' because it appears as being independent of its causes and conditions, and because it is dependent on its causes and conditions it is empty of independent.

Student: Does Mind Only mean all phenomena are mind?

Geshe-la: Both form and and it's valid cogniser are generated from the one concordant karmic potential on the mental continuum. There is this karmic potential on the mental continuum, and one part of that becomes the cause for form, and the other part becomes the cause for the valid cognition apprehending that form. So both form, as well as the valid cognition apprehending that form is generated at the same time from that same karmic potential. Therefore form is said to be in the nature of mind. It is not said to be mind, rather that it is in the nature of mind. So because form and the valid cognition apprehending form don't have a cause-and-effect relationship - they are therefore of one nature.

Student: What is the difference between permanent, partless and independent, and self-sufficiency by way of substantial existence?

Geshe-la: There is a difference in subtlety. The mode of appearing as being able to support itself is when the self appears to be engaging the five aggregates without depending on the five aggregates. It is not like that at all, because the self actually depends on the five aggregates. The person is in reality engaging the aggregates, but not independently of them.

Another way of explaining being 'a substantial existent' is

¹ Nam-rig = aspect-knower

that if in order for it to become an object of mind, it doesn't depend on another phenomena also becoming an object of mind, then it is 'a substantial existent'.

The other way is that the self appears as that which is engaging the five aggregates. If the self appears as being able to support itself, it appears as if it can engage the five aggregates without actually being dependent upon them. In actuality the self is engaging the five aggregates, but it does so by being dependent on them. When the self appears as if it were engaging the five aggregates without being dependent on those aggregates, then we call that appearance of the self as appearing that it is able to support itself.

Student: How is form in the nature of mind?

Form is not mind but of one nature with it. Form and its valid cogniser are generated simultaneously from the same concordant karmic imprint on the mental consciousness.

(After some questions on the definition of valid cognition)

Geshe-la: Out of the various tenets only the Prasangikas posit a subsequent cogniser as a valid cogniser. From the Svatantrika-Madhyamika downwards, all agree that the definition of a valid cogniser is a newly incontrovertible knower. The Prasangika School also say that a valid cogniser definitely has to be a consciousness, and it has to be incontrovertible. So it has to be an incontrovertible knower but they don't say that it has to be new.

(After a number of questions on the categories of inferential cognisers)

Geshe-la: What is the reason through which we posit that the subject is incontrovertible? We say that it is when a quote is free from the three contradictions: it is not contradicted by direct valid perception, it is not contradicted by an inferential cogniser through fact and it is not contradicted by an inferential cogniser through belief. If the quote is free from those three contradictions then it is a quote which is incontrovertible with regard to its meaning. It is something that we can believe, and usually it expresses something that we cannot analyse with reason or fact. As we don't have access to the facts we have to understand it in dependence upon a quote that is free from the three contradictions.

We generate that inferential cogniser by depending upon the proof statement which says: 'Take the quote now 'from generosity comes wealth, and from morality, higher rebirth''. It is incontrovertible in regard to its meaning because it is a quote which is free from the three contradictions. The proof statement has a subject, predicate and a reason.

The reason is that it is a quote that is free from the three contradictions and there is a pervasion. If it is a quote that is free from the three contradictions then it necessarily has to be a quote which is incontrovertible with regard to its meaning. So since this quote 'from generosity comes wealth and from morality, higher rebirth', is a quote free from the three contradictions, it has to necessarily be a quote which is incontrovertible with regard to its meaning.

In which way is the quote free from the three contradictions? Objects of knowledge are divided into manifest objects, and hidden phenomena. Hidden phenomena can further be divided into slightly hidden phenomena, and very hidden phenomena.

Manifest phenomena refer for example to objects of the five senses, which can be perceived directly with sense consciousness. In order to understand them we don't need to depend on reasoning.

Slightly hidden phenomena are phenomena such as

impermanent sound, selflessness of sound and so forth. At the beginning we cannot understand those phenomena through direct perception, and we have to understand them through inference, by depending on valid reasons. By depending on facts and reasons then we can understand slightly hidden phenomena like impermanent sound, selflessness of sound and so forth.

Very hidden phenomena include the subtle relationship, which is expressed in this quote, 'From generosity comes wealth, from morality comes a higher rebirth, and from patience comes beauty'. These subtle karmic relationships are very hidden phenomena, and they have to be understood by the inferential cogniser through belief.

Transcribed from tape by Kathi Melnic

Edit 1: Adair Bunnett

Edit 2: Venerable Tenzin Dongak

Edit 3: Adair Bunnett

Edit 4: Alan Molloy

Check and final edit: Venerable Tenzin Dongak

Edited Version

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