

Study Group - “Buddhist Tenets”

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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གྲུབ་མཐུན་རྒྱུ་མ་གཞག་བཤམ་པ།

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Please establish as your motivation, 'I have to become enlightened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and in order to be able to achieve this I am now going to listen to the holy Dharma'.

We have finished the definition, division and etymology of the Mind Only School. We now start with the next section, which concerns the positing of objects.

5.4 Mode of Asserting Objects

The definition of *an object of knowledge is that which is suitable to be made an object of mind.*

Objects of knowledge can be divided into other-powered, wholly labelled and thoroughly established.

5.4.1.1 Other-Powered

The definition of *an other-powered is that which is generated through causes and conditions.* Other-powered can be divided into pure other-powered and impure other-powered. Examples of **pure other-powered** are the non-dual wisdom in the continuum of an Arya, or the marks and signs of a Buddha. An example of **impure other-powered** is the contaminated aggregates of an ordinary being.

5.4.1.2 Thoroughly Established

The definition of a *thoroughly established is the final focal object of a pure path.* A 'pure path' can have various objects of meditation. When we talk about a thoroughly established, we are talking about their final object of meditation. The 'pure' in pure path refers to liberation. So 'pure path' refers to a path leading to liberation. The final object of meditation of a path leading to liberation is emptiness. Here, therefore, 'pure path' refers to the non-dual wisdom in the continuum of a Learners-Arya realising emptiness. The final meditation object of that path is emptiness, and that is what we refer to as a thoroughly established. Thoroughly established is synonymous with emptiness.

5.4.1.3 Wholly-labelled

The definition of a *wholly labelled is that which is fabricated by the conception apprehending it.*

Other-powered, thoroughly established and wholly labelled are referred to as the three characteristics, and all objects of knowledge are divided into those three characteristics.

Wholly labelled can be divided into existent wholly labelled and non-existent wholly labelled. The self of the person falls into the category of non-existent wholly labelled. Examples for existent wholly labelled are non-compounded space or meaning generality.

The Mind Only proponents assert that out of the three characteristics both other powered and thoroughly established are truly existent, inherently existent, naturally existent and existent from their own side. But wholly labelled are not truly existent and inherent existent, even though they exist from their own side and are naturally existent.

Mind only asserts that other-powered have to be truly

existent since they are the basis of thoroughly-established, which they assert to be both truly existent and true.

Following the text, there are two types of objects of knowledge: ultimate truth and conventional truth.

5.4.2 Ultimate Truth

The definition of *ultimate truth is that which is to be realised in a non-dual manner by a direct valid cogniser realising it directly.*

Here 'direct valid cogniser' refers to the non-dual wisdom realising emptiness in the continuum of a Learner-Arya. This wisdom non-dually realising emptiness is the main object-possessor, or the main subject of the object emptiness. It realises emptiness in a non-dual manner, which means that it is free from the three kinds of dualistic appearance: it is free from conventional appearance, it is free from the object and subject appearing as being different, and it is free from the appearance of the self of phenomena.

The text then says that ultimate truth, suchness, the sphere of Dharma, and the final mode of abiding are synonyms. In each case these terms refer to the final object of meditation of the non-dual wisdom realising emptiness in the continuum of an Arya being.

Ultimate truth has two divisions: a subtle selflessness of phenomena and a subtle selflessness of person.

We have already posited form and its valid cogniser's emptiness of being of a different substance, in addition to form being empty of being inherently the object of determination of the concept apprehending it. These are two examples for the subtle selflessness of phenomena.

The example for the subtle selflessness of a person is the absence of a self of a person that is self-sufficient and a substantially existent.

5.4.2.1 Subtle Selflessness of Phenomena

Selflessness of phenomena can have various divisions by way of the base of the emptiness. One can have 20 emptinesses, or if one condenses it a little, 18 emptinesses, or if it is further condensed 16 emptinesses, and if you even make it even more condensed there are four emptinesses.

The 20 emptinesses are divided by way of the base. They are inner emptiness, outer emptiness, outer-inner emptiness; emptiness of emptiness, great emptiness, ultimate emptiness, compounded emptiness, non-compounded emptiness, emptiness beyond extremes, emptiness of beginningless and endless, indestructible emptiness, nature emptiness, emptiness of all phenomena, emptiness of definition, non-focused emptiness, Emptiness of identitylessness of non-functioning, emptiness of functional phenomena, emptiness of non-functional phenomena, nature emptiness, other-identity emptiness.

5.4.3 Conventional Truth

The definition of *conventional truth is that which can be realised in a dual manner by the direct valid cogniser realising it directly.*

Conventional truth can be sub-divided into other-powered and wholly labelled. Other-powered and compounded are synonymous. Wholly labelled phenomena and non-compounded phenomena other than ultimate truth are synonymous.

In the definition of conventional truth, an example of a direct valid cogniser would be the eye consciousness realising yellow, or the eye consciousness apprehending blue. Both realise their object in a dual manner, because the object itself - yellow or blue - is a conventional

phenomenon. So when a conventional phenomenon appears to the mind, then you already have a dual appearance.

Wholly labelled and non-compounded phenomena other than ultimate truth are synonymous. Within existent phenomena there are permanent and impermanent phenomena. Within permanent phenomena there are thoroughly established and wholly labelled.

All existent wholly labelled are permanent and synonymous with permanent phenomena other than thoroughly established. Here we are just repeating what we have already mentioned, which is that all functioning phenomena are accepted as a common basis between truly existent and false, and all suchnesses are accepted as a common basis between truly existent and true.

All non-compounded phenomena other than suchness, are accepted as a common basis between falsely established and false. If it is suchness there is a pervasion that it is a non-affirming negative. The examples for non-affirming negatives other than suchness are the same as in the Sautrantika tenet.

The text then merely repeats what has already been mentioned, that form and so forth (meaning the other objects of the senses) are not established as outer phenomena.

Instead they are generated from the inner substance of consciousness in dependence upon the placing of common and uncommon imprints on the mental consciousness called the mind-basis-of-all. Therefore the five sense objects are empty of being an accumulation of partless particles, as is asserted by the Sautrantika tenet.

The Sautrantika tenet asserts that the five sense objects are accumulations of partless particles, and therefore they exist somehow separately from the mind. The Mind Only School says that phenomena are empty of being an accumulation of partless particles. Rather they are generated from within the mind in dependence upon common and uncommon karmic latencies placed on the mind-basis-of-all.

Next we come to the difference between the Mind Only True Aspectarians and the Mind Only False Aspectarians. The Mind Only True Aspectarians assert that form and so forth (the five objects of the senses) are not what is referred to as outer meaning. They are not outer existence but they are still coarse forms or substances. The Mind Only False Aspectarians say that they are neither outer existence, nor are they coarsely established phenomena.

Both True and False Aspectarians agree that the five objects of the senses are not outer established phenomena. However Mind Only True Aspectarians say that form and so forth are coarse phenomena, while the Mind Only False Aspectarians say that they are neither outer established nor are they even coarse phenomena.

In the discussion, which follows, student questions and responses are in italics, Geshe-la's questions and responses are in normal typeface.

What is the definition of objects of knowledge?

Something that is suitable to be posited as an object of mind.

It is important to memorise these definitions and divisions. Not only does one have to contemplate and meditate on the meaning of these texts, but one also has to memorise these definitions. Once a student of Gen Loden told me that it is completely unnecessary to memorise those various definitions, and that it is enough to meditate in order to

become enlightened. When I asked him, 'Well if you don't memorise anything out of the lam rim, then how do you meditate on the lam rim?' that monk didn't have anything to say. So it is very important to try to memorise some definitions.

The definition of an object of knowledge is that which is suitable to be posited as an object of mind. Then we said that it can be divided into what are called the three characteristics. What are they?

Thoroughly established, wholly labelled and other-powered.

So what's the definition of other-powered phenomena?

Something dependent on causes and conditions.

How many categories of other-powered phenomena are there?

Two – pure and impure.

What's the definition of thoroughly established phenomena?

The final focal object of a pure path.

What is the meaning of pure path?

The non-dual path followed by an Arya being.

Why is that path called a pure path?

It refers to liberation. It's the path of an Arya, so it is a non-dual wisdom and has no subject.

If you say that it is a pure path because it's a non-dual mind, then we can also posit that the self-knower is non-dual.

When you are asked, 'What is a pure path?' then you posit the non-dual transcendental wisdom in the continuum of an Arya being. However if you are asked 'Why is that wisdom a pure path?' Then you say, 'because the 'pure' here refers to liberation as it is a path which leads to liberation. Therefore it is called a pure path.' If you investigate in this manner, then you will generate a good understanding.

If you know how to investigate a subject properly by dividing it up into a step-by-step analysis, then once you know the method with regard to one subject, you will also be able to properly investigate other topics and subjects.

So what is the definition of wholly labelled phenomena?

Mentally fabricated by the concept apprehending it.

What is an example for wholly labelled?

I'm just reading it out of the notes! The self of person is wholly labelled.

That's correct, and if we want to posit an existent wholly labelled you could posit such things as non-compounded space, or a meaning generality appearing to the concept. In fact all permanent phenomena apart from emptiness can be posited as existent or wholly labelled.

So what is the definition of ultimate truth?

Things that exist the way they appear.

That is the definition of 'true'. What you were saying is that if there is no discrepancy between appearance and mode of existence, then that is the meaning of 'true', and if there is a discrepancy between appearance and existence, then that's the meaning of false. However that is not really the definition of ultimate truth. Even in non-Dharmic terms, just at an ordinary day-to-day level we refer to something as being true if it exists in the same way as it was explained. We also refer to something as being false if there is a discrepancy between the explanation and the actual existence.

So then what is the definition of ultimate truth?

A direct valid perception of the apprehension of an object without dual subject-object appearance.

That which is to be realised in a non-dual manner by the direct valid cogniser realising it directly.

Is there a translation of the definition in the text you have? Is it similar?

The text says 'That comprehended by a valid perception perceptually comprehending it, through dualistic appearance' is the definition of concealer truth.

Do you have any questions? Otherwise we will go on to object-possessors.

Question partly inaudible. It may be as follows - If an object arises at the same time as a consciousness arising, what is the basis of the meaning generality being an object of the next moment?

Trans: So you are asking whether form can become the condition for the conceptual thought thinking about form, which is introduced by the direct perception apprehending form? You are asking whether it's a cause-effect relationship?

There is no difference between Mind Only and Sautrantika with regard to this point. That is because the form that is realised by the eye consciousness does not exist simultaneously with the concept apprehending form, which was introduced by that eye consciousness. They don't exist simultaneously. So it is valid to say that the concept apprehending form is generated from form. So form is the determinate object of the concept apprehending form. Thus there is no difference between the Mind Only and the Sautrantika.

What is the difference between grossly established and externally established?

The way form appears as coarse is that just by the mere appearance of form, you have coarse appearance. If a form appears then everything that is non-dually of one substance with the form will also appear to the eye consciousness. It is not necessarily apprehended but it will appear. So together with form, the impermanence of form will appear, the coarseness of form will appear and so forth.

Are gross forms apprehended?

According to the True Aspectarians, you could say that the eye-consciousness apprehends coarse form. However we have already said previously that the False Aspectarians assert that the appearance of form is contaminated by the karmic potential of ignorance. That, we have already said is a false, deceptive appearance. So according to the True Aspectarians the eye-consciousness apprehending form would apprehend coarse form.

What are the different classifications of emptiness apart from their base?

Oh you mean the 20, 18, 16 emptinesses and so forth? They are the same - the only difference is their base.

For example we have inner emptiness, outer emptiness and inner-outer emptiness. An example for inner emptiness would be the emptiness of the eye consciousness apprehending form. An example for outer emptiness would be the emptiness of the apprehended object form. An example for inner-outer emptiness would be the emptiness of subject and object combined. An example for the emptiness of emptiness would be the emptiness of the emptiness itself. Going through the various kinds of emptinesses, it is always be the same. The base of great emptiness is according to size. The base of negation of the

emptiness without beginning or end would be cyclic existence or samsara.

There is a debate where somebody might say, Samsara does not have an end, because it is the base of the emptiness without beginning or end?' The answer to this is that there is no pervasion. Even though it is the base for that emptiness, samsara can still have an end.

For ultimate emptiness the base of emptiness is nirvana. The base of indestructible emptiness is virtue, such as virtuous karma, or the truth of the path. In the same manner the various emptinesses are just differentiated by their base.

So for each type of emptiness is there a limited number of bases?

The emptiness of the object thumb you could call the 'thumb emptiness'. Here you have the base of the thumb, and the absence of the self of phenomena on the base of the thumb would be the emptiness of the thumb. Therefore this emptiness could be called the 'thumb emptiness', by virtue of its base. Or, since you have five fingers, and each finger has its own emptiness, you have five different kinds of emptinesses of finger.

What I meant was can all the 20 types of emptinesses apply to one base?

No.

So, the base and the type of emptiness are linked?

They are not unrelated phenomena; they are related. For example on the table in front of me it is valid to say that the emptiness of the vase does not exist there because there is no vase. It's just like in the *Heart Sutra* where it says, 'There's no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no truth of suffering, no truth of cessation, no path and so forth. You can posit the emptiness of each and every object - of the four noble truths, the 12 dependent links and so forth.

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Edited Version

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