

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi

Root text: *Presentation of Tenets* by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen, translated by Glen Svensson. Copyright: Glen Svensson, April 2005. Reproduced for use in the FPMT Basic Program with permission from Glen Svensson

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All page references refer to this root text unless otherwise stated.

Lesson No: 7

Date: 21st March 2013

Now we are studying tenets. As you know, for the various proponents of Buddhist tenets, starting from the Proponents of the Great Exposition, the Proponents of Sutra, the Proponents of Mind Only, and the Proponents of the Autonomy Middle Way, and the Consequence Middle Way, all of them assert that the apprehension of a self, the ego-grasping, is the basis of all suffering and problems. This ego-grasping or apprehension of a self is essentially a mistaken mind, i.e., a mind that apprehends the self of person or the “I” to exist in a way that contradicts reality. This apprehension of a self of persons is the root or source of all problems and suffering.

The GES all the way up to the AMWS have their own particular presentation of what constitutes the selflessness of persons. As discussed in the previous lesson, there are:

1. the coarse selflessness of persons
2. the subtle selflessness of persons

Although we are not permanent and the self, person, or “I” is not permanent, we believe and apprehend ourselves to be permanent and unchanging. We can tell this from our own experiences. We believe that we would never change. Also from our own experiences, we can tell that this acts as the basis for the arising of the afflictions such as strong anger and strong attachment.

This is a very strong belief, that we will never change and that we are permanent. This is called the apprehension of permanence, grasping at things that are impermanent to be permanent. For example, we think that we will live forever or, at the very least, we will live for a very long time, perhaps for a hundred years. This is the coarse apprehension of permanence and, based on this, it gives rise to all kinds of afflictions.

We believe we will live for a very long time, for hundreds of years, or even forever. We believe that things are unchanging and will always remain static. The basis for such an apprehension of permanence comes from the innate belief that there is a person that is able to stand on its own, a self-sufficient person.

According to the GES all the way up to the AMWS, these tenets assert that the subtle apprehension of a self, i.e., the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, is the root of samsara. That is the root of all the

problems and sufferings. In order to eradicate suffering, we must eradicate the root of all the suffering, the ego-grasping, and the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

The way to do that is to generate the wisdom realising the selflessness of persons. This is what we are trying to do here. Gaining an understanding of what we have just discussed is very important.

Now we are talking about what constitutes an apprehension of a self of persons. The GES all the way up to the AMWS agree that:

- The coarse apprehension of a self is the apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent self.
- The subtle apprehension of a self is the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent self.

These two forms of grasping of the self of persons (or apprehensions of the self of persons) are different. One is coarse, the other subtle. We need to have a good understanding of these two different minds: How do they apprehend their respective objects? What is their mode of apprehension?

What I am going to say is not new as we have discussed this before. You should put effort into paying attention. When you try to pay attention, then your understanding of this subject will become better.

When we talk about the self, person, or “I,” we are talking about the same thing.

- There is the belief that the self is permanent.
- There is the belief that the self is unitary.
- There is the belief that the self is independent.

There is such a self: a permanent, unitary, and independent self. There is an apprehension believing in this and this apprehension is called the coarse apprehension of a self of persons.

This apprehension of a coarse self of persons is a mind. What is it apprehending and what is it grasping at? This coarse apprehension of a self of persons apprehends the self, person, or “I” to be permanent, to be unitary, and to be independent.

When this particular mind apprehends the permanent, unitary, and independent self:

- It apprehends such a self to be of a different entity from the body and mind.
- It apprehends such a self to be completely unrelated to the body and mind, i.e., completely separate and different from the body and mind.

It is said in many treatises that such an apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent self is an intellectually acquired affliction. A mind that conceives the person to be permanent, unitary, and independent, i.e., the conception of a soul or atman is intellectually acquired. This means it is formed through thinking.

Wherever you look in the great treatises, they all state that such an apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent self is intellectually acquired. Having said that, we have to think, “Why is such a mind intellectually acquired? Why is it not natural? Why is it said to be a mental construct, something that comes about through thinking?”

Then there is the subtle apprehension of a self of persons. What is that? It is an apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. How does this mind apprehend the person? Such a mind conceives the person to be self-sufficient, i.e., able to stand on its own, without the need to rely on and is independent of the body and mind. Rather it apprehends this person to be the owner or controller of the body and mind.

This belief in an “I” that does not rely on the body and mind, yet is a controller of the body and mind, is an innate belief, i.e., it is not taught but occurs naturally. From the viewpoint of this conception, the aggregates or the body and mind are dependent on and controlled by the self or “I.”

This subtle apprehension of a self that we call an apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, how does this mind work and what is it grasping at? What is it apprehending? It is apprehending a self, person, or “I” that exists as the owner or controller of the body and mind. This self is not dependent on the body and mind. This particular mind apprehends the self or “I,” thinking, “I don’t have to depend or rely on my body and mind. Rather I am the owner or controller of my body and mind. My body and mind are controlled by and depend on me.”

This is totally unlike the previous apprehension of a permanent, unitary, and independent self that apprehends the body and mind to be a completely different entity from and totally unrelated to the self of persons. In the case of the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, it is not like that. It does not apprehend the person or “I” to be of a completely different entity from the body and mind.

Khen Rinpoche: Are you getting somewhere? Nearer the Aljunied MRT? I don’t know how to make it easier than that. Does the reference text have anything on this that is clearer? Did you find anything there? Or is it the same?

Question: Can I confirm that this innate apprehension of a subtle self of persons is *not separate* from the aggregates because it has some relationship with the aggregates but it is *independent* of the aggregates because it is the owner of the aggregates? It has these two qualities: (1) not separate from the aggregates but (2) independent of them.

Answer: This mind, the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, apprehends the “I” as not relying on the body and mind. That means it is independent.

Student: Yes. Being the owner, it is not relying on them and therefore it is independent. At the same time, however, it is not separate from the aggregates. This is different from the coarse apprehension of self of persons where the self is seen to be totally separate from the aggregates.

Khen Rinpoche: In the case of the previous apprehension, the “I” is not completely unrelated to the body and mind. In the case of the apprehension of the self-sufficient substantially existent person, the aggregates or the body and mind are (1) dependent on the “I” and (2) are objects owned by the “I.”

Student: In Tuesday’s class, the teachings were that the “I” is not of a separate entity from the aggregates. It is independent of the aggregates because it is a

controller of the aggregates. It is not a separate entity because it is not totally unrelated with the aggregates. There is some relationship. Therefore it is not totally separate from the aggregates, but it is independent of the aggregates because it is a controller of the aggregates. The aggregates are dependent on the “I.” That means this subtle self of persons is both (1) not separate from the aggregates as well as (2) independent of the aggregates at the same time.

Khen Rinpoche: The previous apprehension (the coarse apprehension of the self of persons), that mind apprehends the aggregates and the person to be of separate and different entities.

In the case of this particular apprehension (the subtle apprehension of the self of persons), there isn't such a manner of apprehension.

- What does the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially person apprehends? It apprehends a person.
- How does it apprehend a person? It apprehends a self-sufficient person that is not reliant on the body and mind.

Such a mind is called the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. There is an innate form of such a mind that arises naturally without it being taught. But such an apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is *not necessarily* innate because there can be an intellectually acquired form of this apprehension. An apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially person can arise due to thinking. This is what we call an intellectually acquired apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

One of the sub-schools of the GES called the Vasiputriyas or Followers of Vasiputra believe that there is a self-sufficient substantially existent person. That apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is intellectually acquired because it is something that arises through following tenets.

These are the two apprehensions of a self of persons:

- the coarse apprehension of a self of persons
- the subtle apprehension of a self of persons

You could use also the word “grasping” which gives you the idea of clinging on or holding on to something. There are these two grasping at the self of persons.

The non-existence of these two apprehensions is the selflessness of persons of which there is:

- the coarse selflessness of persons
- the subtle selflessness of persons

The apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is the subtle apprehension of a self of persons. This is the root of samsara and is a wrong conception, a wrong consciousness. When we say it is wrong, we are saying that although this mind apprehends a person to be self-sufficient substantially existent and such a person appears, such a person does not exist. Although there is such an appearance and grasping, the object that is grasped at does not exist whatsoever. We then have to prove that a self-sufficient substantially existent person doesn't exist.

In the previous lesson, we talked about how a permanent, unitary, and independent self does not exist. Likewise here, with regard to the apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, we have to prove that such a person does not exist whatsoever, although such an apprehension exists.

Self-sufficient person

The great logician, Dharmakirti, stated this line of reasoning in his *Pramanavartika* :

- The subject, the self-sufficient person, does not rely on the aggregates.
- Such a person does not exist naturally because it is, by nature, not one with or different from the aggregates.

The subject of enquiry here is the self-sufficient person that is not relying on the body and mind. Such a self-sufficient person does not exist naturally. Why? Because such an “I” is not established to be either naturally (or inherently) one with or naturally different from the aggregates.

We have this apprehension of a person that is self-sufficient. Such a person appears to us. Although it appears, it does not exist in the way it appears.

This is what we have to establish for ourselves. According to these tenets, anything that exists necessarily exists from its own side. If this self-sufficient person exists, then it has to exist either as (1) inherently one with the aggregates or as (2) inherently different from the aggregates.

First you have to get what we have just stated. Otherwise we cannot continue. We will try.

Is there such a mind, an apprehension of a self-sufficient person? We have to recognise that such a mind is the root of all our problems. It is said to be a wrong consciousness.

What does this mind apprehend? It apprehends a person. It is grasping and clinging on to a person but not just any person. It is clinging on to a person that is self-sufficient. “Self-sufficient” means not relying on the body and mind and being completely independent of the body and mind. It is a controller of the body and mind. There is such a mind and there is such a belief.

Why is it called a wrong consciousness? It is a wrong consciousness because this self-sufficient “I” that is apprehended by this mind does not exist whatsoever. This is what we are trying to establish here.

The great logician Dharmakirti said that if such an “I,” the self-sufficient person, exists, then it is necessarily either inherently one with the body and mind or it has to be inherently different from the body and mind.

What is the subject of enquiry here? It is the self-sufficient person. We are trying to establish whether it exists or not. If it exists, it can only exist in two ways. These two possibilities are exhaustive. If it exists:

- it is inherently one with the body and mind or
- it is inherently different from the body and mind

Not inherently one with the body and mind

Is the self-sufficient person the same entity with the body and mind? No.

Why? If the self-sufficient person is of the same entity with the body and mind, it would entail the fallacy that the body and mind is also self-sufficient substantially existent. This means that the body and mind exist without being dependent on something else. Because they are of the same entity with the self-sufficient person, they cannot exist with a different nature.

What is the problem if the aggregates are also self-sufficient? If we assert that there is nothing wrong in saying that the aggregates are also self-sufficient like the self-sufficient person, it follows then that:

- the aggregates are permanent and
- the aggregates are not dependent on causes and conditions

This will be absurd. It is clear that the aggregates or body and mind are impermanent and are dependent on causes and conditions. Based on these reasons, it follows that the self-sufficient person cannot be of the same entity with the body and mind.

Not inherently different from the body and mind

We have seen that the self-sufficient person cannot be of the same entity with the body and mind. So is the self-sufficient person a different entity from the body and mind? What is the problem if we were to say that the self-sufficient person is of a different entity from the body and mind?

The self-sufficient person is not a different entity from the body and mind. Why? If the self-sufficient person is of a different entity from the body and mind, then when you eliminate the aggregates one after the other, at the end of eliminating all the aggregates, you should be able to find a self-sufficient person standing there on its own.

Khen Rinpoche: Okay, this is just to leave imprints. Those who have completed the Basic Program should understand this. We have talked about the reasoning of one and different numerous times.

This reasoning of being either one or different is an important reasoning that is used in the topic of selflessness and emptiness. This line of reasoning comes up all the time in establishing the view of selflessness. For those of you who have heard this before, by hearing this again now, it should be clearer. For those who are hearing it for the first time, then it is just leaving imprints. Imprints definitely work. Through hearing, listening, reflecting, and so forth, definitely imprints are left in our mental continua. So plant the imprints first and hope the imprints will ripen!

7 Presentation of the grounds and paths

This is explained in two parts:

1. objects of abandonment and
2. actual presentation of the grounds and paths.

7A Objects of abandonment¹

Two types of obscurations are asserted:

1. afflictive obscurations and
2. non-afflictive obscurations.

There is no such thing as the convention ‘obscurations to knowledge’² (Page 4).

According to this school, there are two types of obscurations:

- Afflictive obscurations obstruct the attainment of liberation.
- Non-afflictive obscurations refer to the obstructions to all-knowingness.

“Obscurations to knowledge” does not exist

But in this school it says, “There is no such thing as the convention ‘obscurations to knowledge.’” That means for them the convention or term, “obscurations to knowledge,” does not exist.

We talk about the Buddha’s omniscience or all-knowing mind, i.e., the mind that perceives directly and simultaneously the modes and varieties of phenomena, the two truths. The GES does not believe that there is such a knower, an omniscient mind that can perceive every phenomenon simultaneously and directly in a single moment of cognition. The GES finds it difficult to conceive that the Buddha is like that.

Due to this belief, in this school, the convention, obscurations to knowledge or obscurations to omniscience, does not exist. I am not exactly sure whether this is the reason that the convention, obscurations to knowledge, does not exist in this school.

However the other schools agree that the omniscient mind directly perceives all phenomena in one moment as clearly as we would perceive a handful of fruits or seeds in our palm.

The GES also asserts that the form aggregate of Buddha is true suffering, that it is just like the body we have. Everyone else asserts that the Buddha’s form aggregate is the Buddha.

Afflictive obscurations mainly prevent the attainment of liberation and non-afflictive obscurations mainly prevent the attainment of all-knowingness .

Illustrations of afflictive obscurations are, for example, the conception apprehending the person to be self-sufficient substantially existent and the three poisons that arise due to the force of that [conception] together with their seeds (Page 4).

The conception apprehending the person to be self-sufficient substantially existent is an apprehension of a self and it is an afflictive obscuration. Such a conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is the basis or root

¹ Refer to pgs. 205 – 206 in *Cutting Through Appearances*.

² JN: The term ‘cognitive obscuration’ (*shes sgrub*) has been changed throughout the text to the more familiar ‘obscurations to knowledge’.

from which the three mental poisons arise: ignorance, anger, and attachment.

“Together with their seeds”: Seeds here refer to:

- the seeds that are placed by the conception apprehending a person to be self-sufficient substantially existent and
- the seeds that are placed by the three mental poisons: ignorance, anger, and attachment.

All these are considered to be afflictive obscurations.

[Illustrations of] non-afflictive obscurations are, for example, the latencies (*bag chags*)³ of the conception apprehending the person to be self-sufficient substantially existent and the negative tendencies⁴ of the mind that arise due to the force of those [latencies] (Page 5).

- The seeds of the three mental poisons and the seeds of the conception of the self-sufficient substantially existent person are posited to be afflictive obscurations.
- The latencies of the conception of the self-sufficient substantially existent person are posited to be non-afflictive obscurations.

Seeds and latencies (or imprints, predispositions) are different. The latencies of the conception apprehending the person to be self-sufficient substantially existent is planted by the conception itself. When we talk about the seed of this conception, this seed is also planted by the same conception. What then is the difference between seeds and latencies as both are planted by the same conception?

- Whatever is planted, if it has the potential to arise in the future as that same conception (e.g. the conception apprehending a person to be self-sufficient substantially existent), it is called a seed. If the seed that is placed by the conception apprehending the self-sufficient substantially existent person has the power to produce this conception again in the future, then that would be called a seed.
- The latencies that are placed by the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person *do not* have the power to produce this conception in the future. What they produce is the appearance of a self-sufficient substantially existent person but they are not able to produce the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

Perhaps the analogy of an onion and the smell of the onion would help:

- There is something that is able to produce the smell of an onion but not the onion itself. That is analogous to the latencies (imprints, predispositions) of the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.
- There is something that is able to produce not just the smell of the onion but also the onion itself. That is analogous of the seed.

What does the “negative tendencies” of the mind do? They obstruct the mind from knowing its object.

³ Ven. Gyurme: Latencies can also be translated as imprints, predispositions, or proclivities.

⁴ In the *Lam-rim Chenmo*, “negative tendencies” is translated as dysfunctional tendencies.

When we talk about the qualities of the Buddha, it is said that they are free from the four unknowingnesses.

- The example given in the text is that of the arhat Shariputra. He was not able to tell the total number of the practices of morality that the Buddha had accumulated. He was not able to identify exactly each and every single quality of the Buddha's mind. This factor of unknowingness is posited to be a non-afflicted obscuration and is the factor of unknowingness with respect to obscure phenomena.
- Another example has to do with distance. Despite being an arhat, Maudgalyayana could not see where his mother was born. His mother was born in a very distant place. Because of the place being too far away, he could not see it. That is the factor of unknowingness with respect to distance.

These two factors of unknowingnesses are posited to be non-afflictive obscurations.

- There is also the factor of unknowingness with regard to time. For example, in the lam-rim teachings, there is a story of how Shariputra refused to ordain a particular lay person because he thought that this person did not have the root of virtue to be ordained and to achieve liberation. Because the Buddha is omniscient, he said, "Hundreds of eons ago, while he was a fly, he went around a stupa. For that reason, he has the root of virtue to be ordained and to achieve liberation." Shariputra could not see that. This is the factor of unknowingness with respect to time. This factor of unknowingness is also an illustration of non-afflictive obscurations.
- Another example is the unknowingness that occurs due to the inability to sort out the complexity of a situation or the varieties of objects involved such as the inability to sort out the details of the past lives of an individual, the different past lives, the great number of past lives, and so forth. This factor of unknowingness is with respect to the varieties of objects and the complexity of a situation. Another example given in the text is that of a peacock's tail that contains many different designs, colours, shapes, and so forth. All these are the results of their individual causes. One is unable to see the exact causes of those individual colours, designs, and so forth.

A person is called a foe-destroyer because of having abandoned or destroyed the afflictions. He does not have to destroy anything else other than that. So there are many such factors of unknowingness in the mental continua of foe destroyers or arhats. They may not know many things. But not knowing is not an affliction. It is a non-afflictive obscuration.

We have to know, according to this school, what are posited to be afflictive obscurations and what are posited to be non-afflictive obscurations.

- The afflictive obscuration prevents, interferes with, and hinders the attainment of liberation.
- The non-afflictive obscuration prevents, interferes with, and hinders the attainment of all-knowingness.

These are the differences in what is being obstructed. Therefore there are these two obscurations.

Actual presentation of the grounds and paths

There is the convention of the three vehicles (or yanas). These three vehicles are:

1. the Hearers' Vehicle

2. the Solitary Realisers' Vehicle
3. the Bodhisattvas' Vehicle

There are five paths:

1. The path of accumulation
2. The path of preparation
3. The path of seeing
4. The path of meditation
5. The path of no more learning

There are:

1. The five paths of the hearers
 - The path of accumulation of the hearers
 - The path of preparation of the hearers
 - The path of seeing of the hearers
 - The path of meditation of the hearers
 - The path of no more learning of the hearers
2. The five paths of the solitary realisers
 - The path of accumulation of the solitary realisers
 - The path of preparation of the solitary realisers
 - The path of seeing of the solitary realisers
 - The path of meditation of the solitary realisers
 - The path of no more learning of the solitary realisers
3. The five paths of the bodhisattvas
 - The path of accumulation of the bodhisattvas
 - The path of preparation of the bodhisattvas
 - The path of seeing of the bodhisattvas
 - The path of meditation of the bodhisattvas
 - The path of no more learning of the bodhisattvas

Please read the root text and see what are the fruits of attainment these respective paths.

Questions for Sunday discussion on 24th March 2013:

1. a) Is there a difference between a Buddhist and a proponent of Buddhist tenets?
b) Does a proponent of Buddhist tenets necessarily have to assert or accept the four seals?
2. a) What is the difference between the two truths in this school?
b) If it is an ultimate truth, is it necessarily partless?
3. Is there a difference in the modes of apprehension of the coarse and subtle apprehensions of the self persons?

The purpose of these questions is to help you to gain an understanding of:

- the four seals
- the two truths according to the GES
- the difference between the two apprehensions of the self of persons

When you really understand the two truths and the differences between them in the GES, then, by the way, you would definitely come to understand the meanings of imputed existence and substantial existence.

When you can see the difference between imputed existence and substantial existence, it makes a difference to the mind. For example, you will come to understand that the self of this life - not the self in general, but the specific self or person of this life - according to this school is a conventional truth. Therefore it is an imputed existent. Of course, when we talk about how the person is imputedly existent in the highest school, then the meaning is not the same. Nevertheless you come to have some understanding of what an imputed existent is.

This is something for you to think about: you probably have to say that the specific self or “I” of this life, not the self in general, is a conventional truth. It is an imputed existent as opposed to the self or “I” in general, which is a substantial existent. I am not saying 100% it is like this. Perhaps it is like this. So this is something to analyse and think about.

By understanding the presentation of the two truths, you will come to understand imputed and substantial existents. This crucial understanding serves as a platform for you to appreciate and understand the presentations of the higher schools. Therefore the understanding of the lower school is important.

There is nothing much left for the GES. We should be able to finish this in the next lesson.

Question: A yogic direct perceiver realises the selflessness of a person but it does realise the person. How then does this person actually exist?

Answer: It is very complicated. In order to talk about this, you first have to know that there are positive and negative phenomena⁵. Among negative phenomena, there are usually two divisions:

1. non-affirming negatives
2. affirming negatives

The GES is unable to posit non-affirming negatives. For example, the GES are unable to posit space in the way that the higher schools can. When we talk about space, it is the mere negation of obstructiveness or obstructive contact. The GES cannot and do not know how to posit such a space. For them, if something exists, it is necessarily substantially established. There must be something appearing right there. There must be a substance, some substantiality that is able to perform a function.

In reality, the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is a non-affirming negative. That means it is just a mere negation of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. The GES does not know how to posit the non-affirming negative. While it is a non-affirming negative, for the GES, the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person cannot be a non-affirming negation. They do not know how to posit the non-existence of a self-sufficient substantially existent person that is a mere negation, a non-affirming negative that does not perform any function. For them, everything that exists must necessarily perform a function. That is why we talk about substantial establishment.

⁵ Refer to pg. 230 – 232 in *Cutting Through Appearances*.

As discussed in the previous module, the yogic direct perceiver perceives the emptiness of the self of a person through realising that the aggregates or body and mind are devoid of such a self. Through that, he realises the lack of such a self of persons. I think it is somewhere in the lo-rig text: A yogic direct perceiver through directly realising the aggregates are devoid of such a self of persons implicitly realises the selflessness of persons.

Question: That is the assertion of the Sutra School. But for the GES, how do you explain that the person is substantially existent? If it is substantially existent then it can be found. My question is what is it?

Answer: In this school, substantially existent is mutually inclusive with an ultimate truth. If the mind apprehending the phenomenon cannot be cancelled despite destroying the object or mentally separating it into its parts, that makes the object in question an ultimate truth. That is the meaning of substantial existence. That means the mind apprehending the object cannot be cancelled. But for the case of the person that is self-sufficient substantially existent, that is a different story.

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