

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi

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

Lesson No: 11

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We had looked at the two truths in accordance with the Sutra School (SS).

According to the SS, a conventional truth is a phenomenon that is posited by a conceptuality imputing it. Examples of conventional truth would be uncompounded space and true cessation:

- Uncompounded space is a mere negation of obstructive contact.
 - True cessation is the factor of abandonment of the afflictions.
- Uncompounded space and true cessation are merely imputed by conceptuality. There is nothing more to these phenomena other than that.

Any other phenomenon whose existence *cannot* be posited by the conceptual mind imputing it is an ultimate truth. According to this school, examples of ultimate truths would be a person, a vase, a pillar, and so forth. The existence of these objects cannot be posited by a conceptuality imputing them.

According to the SS, a vase is an ultimate truth. This means that the vase's existence cannot be posited merely by a conceptual mind imputing it. Rather the existence of a vase can only be posited by an ultimate awareness. The ultimate awareness here, in the case of the vase, is the direct valid cogniser apprehending vase.

What is it that posits the existence of the vase? That mind has to be an ultimate awareness, in this case, a direct valid cogniser apprehending vase. To this ultimate awareness, the way in which the vase exists and the way it appears are in accord. According to this school, just as the vase appears to exist by way of its own character, this is how the vase exists in reality.

In this school:

- An ultimate truth has to be posited by an ultimate awareness.
- A conventional truth cannot be posited by an ultimate awareness. It has to be posited by a conventional awareness.
 - A conventional truth is posited by a conventional awareness.
 - A conventional awareness refers to a conceptual consciousness.
 - A conceptual consciousness can only posit conventional truths.
 - A conceptual consciousness is not an ultimate awareness. It is a conventional awareness.

If we think about the two truths in accordance with the definitions of this school, if the phenomenon in question, by nature from its own side, has the potential to produce an effect, it would be an ultimate truth. If not, then it would be a conventional truth:

- An ultimate truth has to be a composed phenomenon, a functional thing.
- A conventional truth has to be an uncomposed phenomenon.

Mind Only School

The explanation of the Mind Only School (*Skt. Cittamatra*) has seven outlines, as before.

1 Definition

The definition of a Proponent of Mind Only is: a person propounding Great Vehicle tenets who does not accept external objects but does assert truly existent self-cognizers.

Proponent of Mind Only (*Skt. Cittamatrin*), Proponent of Cognition (*Skt. Vijnaptivadin*), and Yogic Practitioner (*Skt. Yogacarin*) are equivalent (Page 14)

You will remember that the GES and the SS both assert truly established external objects.

Now we have the MOS. The Proponents of Mind Only do *not* assert external objects but they do assert self-knowers, just like the Proponents of Sutra. On top of asserting self-knowers, the MOS asserts that self-knowers are truly existent.

| | GES | SS | MOS |
|--------------------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| Asserts external objects | Yes | Yes | No |
| Asserts self-knowers | No | Yes | Yes |

What exactly is an external object? The Proponents of Sutra assert directionally partless particles as the basis of aggregation. Through the aggregation of these particles, a gross object is formed that becomes an object that is apprehended by a sense consciousness. According to the Proponents of Sutra, first, there must be an object, in this case, a gross object or form. Only then can you have a sense consciousness apprehending it. The object comes *before* the subject apprehending it. This is how the Proponents of Sutra assert that a sense consciousness apprehending form is generated, i.e., it is generated *after* the form itself has come into existence. A gross form comes into existence through the aggregation of directionally partless particles. This is the meaning of an external object.

The Proponents of Mind Only differ greatly in this respect. They do not assert that first, you must have such an object existing out there and only then do you have the consciousness apprehending it. Therefore the Proponents of Mind Only, the Cittamatrins, do not accept that there is such a thing as an external form. There is form but it is not an external form. What is form? It is none other than that which is of the same entity with the consciousness.

Khen Rinpoche: This is quite difficult to understand. Even for myself. It is not easy.

It is a little complicated to explain. Sometimes it looks like I understand. Sometimes I also don't understand.

We are now talking about the MOS. The Proponents of Mind Only, the Cittamatrins, assert form but they do not assert that there is a form that is outside the mind, i.e., that is of a different nature or entity from the mind. There is no external form, so to speak.

For them how does form exist? The form that they posit is a form that has the same entity as consciousness. According to the Proponents of Mind Only, form is none other than the factor of appearance that appears to that consciousness as form. There is no external form, i.e., a form that is of a different entity from the mind. The MOS does assert form but what exactly is it according to this school? According to the MOS, it is none other than the factor of appearances to the consciousness. Everything is in the entity of mind.

Illustrations that can help us understand this:

- Dream appearances: In a dream, there are all kind of appearances, but those appearances in the dream are not outside of the mind. They are not separate from the dream consciousness. They are essentially mind too.
- The appearance of two moons: While in reality there is only one moon, nevertheless there is the appearance of two moons to some people. That appearance is not something that exists outside of the mind. That appearance is essentially an appearance to the mind.
- The appearance of a cup of liquid: When we see a cup of liquid, we have the appearance of water. That appearance of water is just the factor of appearance to the mind. There isn't any external water out there that is of a different entity from the mind. There isn't a phenomenon that can exist without depending on the mind. There are no external objects.
- It is only through the force of karma that we see there is the appearance of water. According to the MOS, the appearance of water is none other than the factor of appearance. There is no external water that is of a different entity from the mind. When a hungry ghost sees the same cup of liquid, they do not have the appearance of water. They see pus.

The MOS uses this example to prove that there are no external objects that are of a different or separate entity from the mind. Because of that, due to different imprints, different beings see different things. There is no external water. What we see as water appears as nectar to the gods. That same cup of liquid appears as molten iron to the hell beings.

When we think about this example—one cup of liquid appearing as different things to different beings—we then have to ask, “What exactly is this water that is appearing, according to the perspective of the MOS?” What we can say about the water is that it is just a factor of appearance. The water is an appearance to the mind. There is no external water out there

We see our own home as pleasant. We see our own body as attractive. Perhaps we also think that our own clothing is attractive. This is what we see, “I have a nice house, a nice body, a nice dress.” We have these appearances of a nice house, a nice body, and nice possessions. While we may have these nice appearances, according to the MOS, there really isn't the nice house that is appearing to us. It does not exist externally as a different entity from the mind. When the gods look at the house or the body that we have, what they see is

disgusting to them.

A pigsty does not have a bedroom or living room. The pigs do everything in one area. That is what pigs do, but they are quite happy with that. But when we look at a pigsty, it is disgusting. We wouldn't want to live there. We can't even stand the smell. The way the gods look at us, our possessions, and our belongings is similar to how we as human beings regard the pigsty.

This is not straightforward. It is complicated.

We have an appearance of a nice house, a nice body. For us, this is what exists. You cannot say they don't exist. They exist. It is the same thing for the pigs. There is an appearance of a nice little pigsty. We cannot say the pigsty is not nice. To the pig, it exists as a nice pigsty. We cannot say that the pigs are completely mistaken and that we are 100% correct.

Like the cup of liquid that appears as water to a human being and as pus to a hungry ghost, you cannot say that what appears to a human being as water is the only truth. For us, what appears as water exists as water. This is how we regard it. But that is *not* the only truth because, for a hungry ghost, they see the water as pus. To them, this is what exists. So what exists as pus or what exists as water is none other than the factor of appearance to a hungry ghost and a human being respectively.

The appearance of the cup of liquid as water to a human being is due to the ripening of karma. Likewise when the hungry ghost sees the cup of liquid as pus, that appearance is also due to the ripening of a particular karma. In that sense, both appearances are unmistaken.

We can talk about one individual, for example, a person. That person's enemy has a certain view of that person. That person's friend would have a different view from the enemy. Someone who is a stranger would have a completely different view of that person. This one person is thus viewed differently by three different people. It is not as if there are different objects. The same object is viewed differently by three different people. What this means is that there is no external enemy. How the enemy exists is that which appears to our mind.

Based on these reasons, the MOS does not accept external objects. To them, external objects do not exist and everything that exists is in the nature of the mind. According to the MOS, everything arises from the awakening of the latencies or imprints. When the imprints ripen, one would have all these different appearances of different phenomena. These are essentially the appearances of the mind.

According to MOS, the mind is truly existent and that would also make a self-knower truly existent.

The Proponents of Mind Only assert that form and the eye consciousness apprehending form are produced simultaneously. The production is not serial but simultaneous. That means *both* the object that is apprehended and the subject apprehending it comes into being *at the same time*.

The MOS does not assert any object that is separate from the mind. Everything is none other than in the nature of mind.

If everything is none other than the mind itself, how do you posit an object that is apprehended by the mind? There has to be an object of the consciousness. How does the MOS explain this?

The Proponents of Mind Only say, “It is not a problem.” They give the example of an illusionist conjuring up different kinds of illusions, such as an illusory elephant. Although there is the appearance of an elephant, there isn’t a real elephant out there. That appearance of an elephant is just a factor of appearance.

Nevertheless when this illusory elephant is conjured up, there can be a consciousness apprehending it. In this case it is an eye consciousness apprehending the illusory elephant. What exactly then is that illusory elephant? It is just an appearance to the mind. Although it is an appearance to the mind, nevertheless an eye consciousness apprehending it is being generated.

Another qualm is this: If external objects do not exist, how do the main minds and the mental factors arise?

Again, the MOS says, “No problem.” They use the example of a mirage. Although there is a mirage appearing as water, there is no real mirage out there other than what is appearing to the mind.

The Proponents of Mind Only assert that external objects do not exist. But for us, we believe that there are external objects. There is the appearance of external objects and we believe in it. If the MOS says that there are no external objects, how do they account for this appearance of external objects?

The MOS says that the appearance of external objects is due to the mind being polluted by the latencies of ignorance. According to the MOS, there are no external objects, but due to the mind being polluted by the latencies of ignorance, this mistake arises.

Although there are no external objects, due to the latencies of ignorance, external objects appear to the mind. This example comes from the classic texts: the vision of falling hairs. There is this appearance of falling hairs when in reality there are no falling hairs. Although in reality there is no such thing but there is still such an appearance.

Likewise, according to the MOS, while there aren’t any external objects, it doesn’t mean that you cannot have the appearance of external objects. It happens. Basically it is a mistake. This is something we have to think about over and over again: What do the Cittamatrins, the Proponents of the MOS, mean when they say that there are no external objects and that everything is in the nature of mind? What does that mean, “Everything is in the nature of mind”?

All the different examples that I mentioned earlier are to help you understand this crucial position of the MOS.

Just think of the example of form: how form appears differently to different beings. For the MOS, this means that everything is the appearance of the mind. If there is an external form that is of a separate entity from the mind, then everyone who looks at it should see the same thing.

Way of asserting objects

When the MOS talks about the basis—about reality, about what exists—it does so in terms of the two truths:

1. Ultimate truths
2. Conventional truths

There is also a classification of phenomena, i.e., everything that exists, into one of the three natures:

1. Other-powered natures
2. Thoroughly established natures
3. Imputational natures¹

Other-powered natures

In this context, other-powered natures refer to composed phenomena. Why are composed phenomena other-powered natures? This is because composed phenomena/impermanent phenomena/functioning things cannot come into being by depending on themselves. They are not self-powered. Composed phenomena are created and they come into being by depending on causes and conditions. Therefore they are other-powered.

In connection with the MOS's explanation of other-powered natures, you have to know that some proponents of the MOS assert the collections of the eight consciousnesses. On top of the usual six—the five sense consciousnesses and one mental consciousness—they add two more: the afflicted consciousness and the mind-basis-of-all.²

The mind-basis-of-all is the repository or holder of all the imprints or predispositions that are deposited there. Through the awakening of the imprints that are planted on the mind-basis-of-all, composed phenomena come into existence. This is how composed phenomena are other-powered.

Composed phenomena cannot exist beyond the very first moment that they come into being. They can remain only for as long as that first moment when they come into being. They disintegrate in the very next moment. Composed phenomena do not have the power to remain for more than one moment. Therefore they are other-powered.

In short, other-powered natures here refer to composed phenomena. They are under the power or the control of their own causes.

Thoroughly established natures

| Thoroughly Established Natures (synonymous with emptiness and ultimate truth) | |
|--|---------------------------|
| Emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person | Selflessness of persons |
| Emptiness of the object and subject that are of different entities | Selflessness of phenomena |

¹ *Cutting Through Appearances*, pages 260 – 264.

² The collections of eight consciousnesses are the five sense consciousnesses (eye consciousness, ear consciousness, nose consciousness, tongue consciousness, and body consciousness), the mental consciousness, the afflicted consciousness and the mind-basis-of-all.

Why are they called thoroughly established natures? This is because they will never change their aspect into something else. They are thoroughly established as they are. I am not talking about the definition of a thoroughly established nature. I am only talking about its etymology.

Imputational natures

Imputational natures are those phenomena that are imputed by the conceptual consciousness apprehending them. You could say imputational natures are those phenomena that are established as merely imputed by conceptuality.

An illustration of an imputational nature would be un-compounded space. Un-compounded space is an imputational nature because un-compounded space does not exist by way of its own character. It is just the factor of superimposition by conceptuality.

These three natures are thus subsumed under the two truths:

1. Ultimate truths:
 - Thoroughly established natures
2. Conventional truths:
 - Other-powered natures
 - Imputational natures

According to the MOS:

- Thoroughly established natures and other powered natures are (1) truly established and (2) they exist by way of their own character
- Imputational natures are (1) *not* truly established and (2) they do *not* exist by way of their own character.
- All three natures are (1) inherently existent and (2) exist from their own side.

| MIND ONLY SCHOOL | Three natures | Ultimately established/ Truly existent | Truly established | Establishment by way of its own character | Inherent existence/ Existing from its own side |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------|--|---|
| | Thoroughly established natures | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| | Other-powered natures | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| | Imputational natures | No | No | No | Yes |

These are the things that you have to memorise:

- The Proponent of Mind Only does not assert external objects unlike the Proponent of Sutra.
- The Proponent of Mind Only asserts self-knowers like the Proponent of Sutra. The MOS specifically asserts that the self-knowers are truly existent.
- The Proponent of Mind Only posits the three natures and the two truths.

2 Divisions

There are two divisions:³

1. Mind Only True Aspectarians (*Skt. Satyakaravadin*) and
2. Mind Only False Aspectarians (*Skt. Alikakaravadin*).

The definition of a Mind Only True Aspectarian is: a Proponent of Mind Only who asserts that a direct perceiver apprehending form in the continuum of an ordinary being does not engage, polluted by the latencies of ignorance, in the factor of its appearance as a gross form.

The definition of a Mind Only False Aspectarian is: a Proponent of Mind Only who asserts that a direct perceiver apprehending form in the continuum of an ordinary being does engage, polluted by the latencies of ignorance, in the factor of its appearance as a gross form (Page 14).

True Aspectarians and False Aspectarians⁴

Suggested alternative translation by Ven Gyurme:

- The definition of a Mind Only True Aspectarian is: a Proponent of Mind Only who asserts that the appearance as a gross form to a direct perceiver apprehending form in the continuum of an ordinary being *is not* polluted by the latencies of ignorance.
- The definition of a Mind Only False Aspectarian is: a Proponent of Mind Only who asserts that the appearance as a gross form to a direct perceiver apprehending form in the continuum of an ordinary being *is* polluted by the latencies of ignorance.

Both Mind Only True Aspectarians and Mind Only False Aspectarians assert that there is an appearance as a gross form to the sense consciousness apprehending it. The difference is that:

- One asserts that appearance as a gross form to the sense consciousness apprehending it is not polluted by latencies of ignorance whereas
- the other asserts that that appearance as a gross form to the sense consciousness apprehending it is polluted by latencies of ignorance.

True Aspectarians

For the True Aspectarians, there is this appearance of a gross (or coarse) form to the sense consciousness apprehending it. How does this appearance appear? The appearance of form appears distant from the subject, i.e., there is the appearance of an external form.

Let us take blue as an example. There is an appearance of an external blue. That appearance of external blue is a result of that mind being polluted by latencies of ignorance.

Having said that, there is also the appearance of blue as blue that is not polluted by the latencies of ignorance. Here we are talking about two different things:

³ Alternatively they can be divided into Followers of Scripture (followers of Asanga's *Treatises on the Grounds*) and Followers of Reasoning (followers of Dharmakirti's *Seven Treatises on Valid Cognition*).

⁴ *Cutting Through Appearances*, pages 250-259.

- The appearance of external blue is said to be polluted by the latencies of ignorance.
- The appearance of blue as blue is said to be not polluted by the latencies of ignorance.

Furthermore, (1) The factor of appearance of blue as blue and (2) the factor of appearance of blue as a gross (coarse) form, these two factors are *not* polluted by latencies of ignorance:

- The factor of appearance of blue as blue is not polluted by latencies of ignorance because blue exists as blue.
- The factor of appearance of blue as a gross form is not polluted by latencies of ignorance because gross form also exists.

We are only talking about the True Aspectarians now.

False Aspectarians

With regard to the factor of appearance of an external blue, the False Aspectarians are the same as the True Aspectarians in saying that that factor of appearance is polluted by the latencies of ignorance.

The False Aspectarians are different from the True Aspectarians in the sense that they assert that (1) the factor of appearance as blue as blue and (2) the factor of appearance of blue as a gross form are polluted by the latencies of ignorance.

The False Aspectarians are saying that blue does not exist in the way it appears. The factor of appearance of blue as blue does not exist in the way it appears. This is the difference between the False Aspectarians and True Aspectarians.

| | Factor of appearance as external blue | Factor of appearance of blue as blue | Factor of appearance as blue as a gross form |
|--------------------|--|---|---|
| True Aspectarians | Polluted by latencies of ignorance | Not polluted by latencies of ignorance | Not polluted by latencies of ignorance |
| False Aspectarians | Polluted by latencies of ignorance | Polluted by latencies of ignorance | Polluted by latencies of ignorance |

Khen Rinpoche: That is it! If you don't understand, ask. It is complicated. Sometimes I also wonder whether what I said is exactly what it should be. But I try to base my explanations on the texts and try to explain accordingly.

Question: For the True Aspectarians, are the factors of appearance of blue as a gross form and blue as the term blue, other-powered natures and conventional truths? For the False Aspectarians, are the factors of appearance of blue as a gross form and blue as a term blue, non-existent imputational natures?

Answer: It seems that the True Aspectarians assert gross form whereas the False Aspectarians do not assert gross form.

According to the True Aspectarians, even though the five sense objects – forms and so forth – are not external objects they are accepted to exist as gross objects.

According to the False Aspectarians, the five sense objects – forms and so forth – are not gross objects because if they were gross objects they would necessarily be external objects (Page 16).

Going by this, you can say that:

- For the True Aspectarians, the factor of appearance of blue as a gross object and the factor of appearance of blue as blue can be asserted to be other-powered nature whereas
- for the False Aspectarians, because they do not assert gross objects, therefore you cannot say that they are other-powered natures.

Question: The imputational natures that are in the category of non-existents are subsumed under imputational natures by way of term but are not fully qualified conventional truths. They are not conventional truths because they are non-existents. My question is why do they put it there and not categorised non-existents outside the category of established base?

Answer: Earlier, when I talked about the imputational natures, I said that the imputational nature is a phenomenon that comes into existence by being merely imputed by a conceptual consciousness. That is the explanation of an imputational nature that is an existent. That is not the definition of an imputational nature per se. In general, an imputational nature is that which is merely imputed by a conceptual consciousness. But whatever that is merely imputed by the mind does not necessarily exist.

The point here is that there are:

- Imputational natures that are existents would fall under conventional truths.
- Imputational nature that are non-existents would not fall under any of the two truths because, in the first place, they do not exist.

Phenomena that are subsumed by the two truths have to be existents.

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