

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

Lightly edited and some footnotes added by Joan Nicell, Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, October 2005.

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

Lesson No: 14

Date: 16th April 2013

As mentioned in the previous lesson, we have to be certain about and sure from our side as to the reasons why we are learning the tenets. The main point is to enable us to fight our afflictions and destructive emotions. The only way to do that is to reflect on and to familiarise our mind with selflessness.

So far we looked at the selflessness of persons. By reflecting, meditating on, and familiarising our mind with the meaning of the selflessness of persons, we are supposed to be able to fight our afflictions.

On top of that, we started a discussion on the selflessness of phenomena. By reflecting on and familiarising our mind with the meaning of the selflessness of phenomena, we can also work against our afflictions. It is said that by meditating on the selflessness of phenomena we can even overcome the obscurations that prevent us from achieving omniscience and enlightenment.

Having said all that, what we have to figure out and be certain about is how the meditations on the selflessnesses can act as antidotes to our afflictions. Is it really possible to uproot all our afflictions and all our obscurations from our mind? This is something we need to think about all the time over and over again.

We know that the selflessness of persons is the emptiness of a permanent, unitary, and independent self. It is said in the teachings that when we understand that such a permanent, unitary, and independent person does not exist whatsoever, our afflictions will be weakened. What we have to do is to generate this understanding from our own experience, by seeing for ourselves that indeed such a person—a permanent, unitary, and independent self—does not exist whatsoever. We have to discover this for ourselves. We then check whether our afflictions are weakened or not. This is the discovery that we have to make on our own.

Then there is the subtle selflessness of person: the emptiness or non-existence of a self-sufficient person. The non-existence of a self-sufficient person is subtler than the non-existence of a permanent, unitary, and independent self. Again the teachings say that when we realise the non-existence of a self-sufficient person, our afflictions will be weakened. This is also something that we have to discover for ourselves through thinking and reflection, to be able to realise that indeed such a self-sufficient person—although it appears to us and we have

experienced it—in reality, such a self does not exist in such a way. This is the discovery we have to make for ourselves. When we make that discovery, we should check whether our afflictions are weakened or not. In the teachings, it is said that the afflictions will be weakened when we achieve this realisation. So once again this is a discovery that we have to make for ourselves.

Essentially, the whole process of learning and then familiarising our mind with the selflessness of persons is to work against our afflictions, i.e., to reduce and destroy our afflictions. But still when we look at our own experiences, when we look at things around us other than at ourselves, phenomena appear to us as if they were right there, outside of us. We call them external objects.

According to the MOS, although external objects *appear*, in fact, in reality, there are no external objects. They have their reasons for saying this. So our experiment now is this: to adopt this view of the MOS that there are no external objects, that in fact phenomena are selfless, i.e., subject and object do not exist as different entities. It is said in the teachings that when we see that subject and object are not different entities, our afflictions will also be reduced. It is said that this is a very powerful tool. We have to discover whether this is true or not.

Think along the lines that I mentioned in the previous lesson; I explained then the order in which to reflect and how we can reflect on some of these things. The point is to make the discovery for ourselves. We have to reflect on what we have learnt. In doing so, when we start to taste the teachings and see some truth and clarity behind what is mentioned in them, this automatically enhances whatever interest we already have in the teachings and our practice.

How many divisions are there for the MOS? There are two divisions: (1) Mind Only True Aspectarians and (2) Mind Only False Aspectarians.

There are three types of Mind Only True Aspectarians: (1) Proponents of an Equal Number of Apprehendeds and Apprehenders, (2) Half-Eggists, and (3) Non-Pluralists.

Let us continue with the root text.

There are two types of False Aspectarians:

1. Tainted False Aspectarians and
2. Untainted False Aspectarians (Page 15).

Mind Only Tainted False Aspectarians & Mind Only Untainted False Aspectarians

There are two types of Mind Only False Aspectarians:

1. Tainted False Aspectarians who assert that the *nature* of the mind¹ is polluted by the stains of dualistic appearance.
2. Untainted False Aspectarians who assert that the nature of the mind is *not* polluted by the afflictions. Rather the afflictions are adventitious.

¹ *Ven Gyurme*: I did not say that the mind is polluted. I said that the *nature* of the mind is polluted.

The Tainted False Aspectarians assert that there is dualistic appearance on the buddha ground. Buddhas have the dualistic appearance of, for example, yellow, blue, and so forth. There are mistaken appearances on the buddha ground. Are the buddhas mistaken? No, buddhas are not mistaken but nevertheless there are mistaken appearances and dualistic appearances, according to the Tainted False Aspectarians.

The Untainted False Aspectarians, on the other hand, assert that there is no dualistic appearance on the buddha ground. It seems that they are saying that on the buddha ground, there are no appearances of blue, yellow, and so forth.

In short, the difference between the Tainted False Aspectarians and Untainted False Aspectarians lies in whether they assert that the nature of the mind is polluted by stains of dualistic appearance or not.

TAINTED FALSE ASPECTARIANS	UNTAINTED FALSE ASPECTARIANS
They assert that the nature of the mind is polluted by the stains of dualistic appearance.	They assert that the nature of the mind is <i>not</i> polluted by the afflictions. Rather the afflictions are adventitious.
They assert that there is dualistic appearance on the buddha ground. On the buddha ground, yellow, blue, and so forth appear to the buddhas. There are mistaken appearances and dualistic appearances on the buddha ground but a buddha is not mistaken.	They assert that there is no dualistic appearance on the buddha ground. On the buddha ground, there are no appearances of blue, yellow, and so forth.

3 Etymology

Why are they called ‘Proponents of Mind Only’?

They are called ‘Proponents of Mind Only’ because they assert that phenomena are merely the nature of mind, and they are called Proponents of Cognition because they assert that all phenomena are merely the nature of cognition.

4 Way of asserting objects

There are two types of objects of knowledge:

1. ultimate truths and
2. conventional truths.

The definition of an ultimate truth is: that which is realized by the direct valid cognizer directly realizing it by way of the vanishing of dualistic appearance.

Ultimate truth, final reality (*Skt. dharmata*), sphere of reality (*Skt. dharmadhatu*), and final mode of abiding are equivalent.

There are two divisions of ultimate truths:

1. subtle selflessness of phenomena and
2. subtle selflessness of persons.

When the subtle selflessness of phenomena is divided by way of the bases of emptiness, there are twenty emptinesses. When they are condensed, there are eighteen; when they are condensed, there are sixteen; when they are condensed, there are four emptinesses, and so forth.

Illustrations of the subtle selflessness of phenomena are, for example, the emptiness that is a form and the valid cognizer apprehending that form being empty of being different substances and the emptiness that is a form being empty of existing by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term ‘form.’

An illustration of the subtle selflessness of persons is, for example, the emptiness that is a person being empty of being self-sufficient substantially existent (Page 15).

Ultimate truth

In the MOS, an ultimate truth, thoroughly established nature, and emptiness are mutually inclusive. Here we have one definition of an ultimate truth in the root text.

There are different definitions for an ultimate truth as different tenets have different definitions. As there are many definitions, one can look at the ultimate truth from different perspectives.

I am giving you now another definition of an ultimate truth: the final object of observation of a pure path. In this context, “pure path” refers to the wisdom directly realising emptiness.

Here is another different way of understanding what an ultimate truth is. When an object becomes the object of the mode of apprehension of a particular mind and by meditating on and familiarising the mind with that object, one can eliminate the obscurations from the mind, then that object would be an ultimate truth. This is how you can understand an ultimate truth here.

Definition in the root text

The definition of an ultimate truth in accordance with the root text is “that which is realised by the direct valid cogniser directly realising it by way of the vanishing of dualistic appearance”:

- “That which is realised” is the object, an ultimate truth that, in this case, is emptiness.
- Emptiness is realised by the direct valid cogniser directly realising it. What is the direct valid cogniser in this instance? It is the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. Emptiness is realised by the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness.
- How does the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness realise emptiness? It realises emptiness *directly*.
- What does it mean when we say the wisdom perceiving emptiness realises emptiness directly? When the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness realises emptiness, it does not realise emptiness with any dualistic appearance. Rather emptiness is realised by this direct valid cogniser directly realizing it through the subsidence of dualistic appearance.
- What does this mean? When this wisdom directly perceiving emptiness realises emptiness, in the perspective of this mind:
 - (1) there are no conventional appearances.
 - (2) There is no concept or feeling of subject or object. Instead, there is the feeling that these two, i.e., subject and object, are merged. In other words, there is no duality between subject and object.
 - (3) There isn’t any appearance of an external object.

It is through the subsidence of such dualistic appearance in the manner that I have explained that the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness realises emptiness. Therefore the definition of an ultimate truth is “that which is realised by the direct valid cogniser directly realising it by way of the vanishing of dualistic appearance.”

Etymology

Let us now look at the etymology of an ultimate truth, not its definition. In English, the individual words do not fully convey the meaning. In Tibetan, there are the words *don* and *dam pa*. When they are put together, it is *don dam*.

- In this context, on its own, *don* means object.
- *Dam pa* is translated in the lam-rim as “holy” or “pure.” In the philosophical context here, it can be translated as “ultimate.”
- So *don dam* is the ultimate object.

But you cannot translate it like that all the time.

In this context:

- *Dam pa* can be read as the meditative equipoise of a superior being.
- *Don* is the object.
- When you put them together, *don dam* means an object of the meditative equipoise of a superior being.

The words for an ultimate truth in Tibetan is *don dam bden pa*. We explained *don* and *dam pa*. Here *bden pa* means truth. When we put them together, *don* is the object that refers here to emptiness. Emptiness is the object of which mind? In this case, emptiness is the object of the meditative equipoise of a superior being.

<i>don</i>	Object. In this context, it refers to the emptiness that is the object of the meditative equipoise of a superior being.
<i>dam pa</i>	Ultimate. In this context, it means the meditative equipoise of a superior being.
<i>don dam</i>	Ultimate object
<i>bden pa</i>	Truth
<i>don dam bden pa</i>	Ultimate truth

In the perspective of the meditative equipoise of a superior being, in the case of emptiness, there is no discord between reality and how it appears. It is true in the perspective of the meditative equipoise of a superior being. Therefore emptiness is an ultimate truth.

There is another shorter way of looking at this:

Sometimes you can take *don dam* to mean an ultimate awareness, which, in this case, is the meditative equipoise of a superior being. In the perspective of this ultimate awareness, the meditative equipoise of a superior being, emptiness is true because it exists in the way it appears. Therefore it is an ultimate truth because it is true in the perspective of the meditative equipoise of a superior being.

DEFINITIONS OF AN ULTIMATE TRUTH

- In the root text: that which is realised by the direct valid cogniser directly realising it by way of the vanishing of dualistic appearance
- The final object of observation of a pure path.
- If the object that you are meditating on, taking that object to be the object of the mode of apprehension of your mind, can eliminate or purify the obscurations from your mind, that object is an ultimate truth.

If you think that you do not need these complications, you can take ultimate truth and emptiness to mean the same thing. But if you really want to understand this, then you have to look at an ultimate truth and its meaning in greater detail.

Divisions of emptiness

There are many divisions of emptiness. As mentioned in the root text, there are twenty emptinesses, there are eighteen emptinesses, there are sixteen emptinesses, and so forth. These divisions are not made on the basis of there being different objects of negation, i.e., the objects that are being refuted. Rather these divisions are made because of the difference in the bases of emptiness.

When emptinesses are condensed, there are four emptinesses:

1. Emptiness of things
2. Emptiness of non-things
3. Emptiness of nature
4. Emptiness of other-nature

- Emptiness of things: “Things” refer to functioning things, the many different composed phenomena such as forms and so forth. Their emptiness is called the emptiness of things.
- Emptiness of non-things: “Non-things” refer to uncomposed phenomena such as uncompounded space. The emptiness that exists on these uncomposed phenomena is the emptiness of non-things.
- When you divide emptiness into these two—the emptiness of things and the emptiness of non-things—all emptinesses are subsumed under them. The emptinesses are the same but the bases of the emptiness are different.
- When emptiness is divided into four, there is the emptiness of nature, i.e., the emptiness of emptiness.
- The fourth emptiness, the emptiness of other-nature, refers to the emptiness of nirvana.

There are many divisions of emptiness such as the emptiness of the internal, the emptiness of the external, and so forth but all divisions of emptinesses are referring to the bases of emptiness.

- The emptiness of the internal: The five sense powers such as the eye sense power, and so forth are included in the continuum of a person. Therefore they are internal, like the emptinesses of these five sense powers.
- The emptiness of the external: “External” refers to those phenomena that are not conjoined with the continuum of a person such as a form that we can see. The emptiness of such a form would be the emptiness of the external.

I am not going into the details of the twenty emptinesses, eighteen emptinesses, sixteen emptinesses, and so forth.

Subtle selflessness of phenomena

Two illustrations are given for the subtle selflessness of phenomena:

1. “The emptiness that is a form and the valid cogniser apprehending that form being empty of being different substances.”
2. “The emptiness that is a form being empty of existing by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term ‘form.’”

The first illustration deals with the sense consciousness. The second illustration deals with the conceptual consciousness.

The emptiness that is a form being empty of existing by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term “form”

This is something you have to focus on. It is not easy. First, you must identify exactly what is being negated or refuted? Let us look at the second illustration: The emptiness that is a form being empty of existing by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term “form.”

Object of negation

The object of negation is the object that exists by way of its own character as the basis for the applying the term “object”² to the conceptual consciousness apprehending the object. Let us use the example of blue. Blue exists by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue. This is the object of negation.

Blue appears to the conceptual consciousness to be the basis for applying the term “blue.” This blue appears to exist naturally from its own side, by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue without depending on the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue. This is the object of negation.

According to the MOS, in reality, such a blue does not exist from its own side, i.e., as its own uncommon mode of subsistence and by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “blue” in relation to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue.

For the time being, let us talk about blue in general without talking about blue as being the basis for applying the term “blue.”

According to the MOS, in general, blue is an other-powered nature and in this school, that means blue is necessarily truly established. This means that it exists by way of its own character. This is how blue exists.

- Both the SS and the MOS assert that blue exists by way of its own character and that blue is truly established.
- Both the SS and the MOS assert that there is a blue that exists as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue.
- Although both the SS and the MOS assert that there is a blue that exists as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue:
 - according to the SS, this blue that exists as a basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue exists as its own uncommon mode of subsistence. This means it exists from its own side, by way of its own character, whereas

² “Existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term (or name)” is also translated as “natural referent of terms (or names)” or “natural base of engagement for the term (or name).” For ease of understanding and clarity, only “existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term (or name)” will be used in sections relating to this topic in the transcripts.

- according to the MOS, this blue that is a basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue does *not* exist by way of its own character.

This is the difference.

The blue that is merely imputed by conceptuality

The MOS asserts that:

- there is a blue that is a basis for applying the term “blue,”
- *but* the blue that is the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue does *not* exist by way of its own character.
- It exists as merely imputed by the conceptual consciousness.

To recap:

- (1) There is a blue.
- (2) Blue exists by way of its own character.
- (3) There is also a blue that is a basis for applying the term “blue.”
- (4) But the blue that is existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue does not exist.
- (5) The blue that is the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue does not exist by way of its own character. It is merely imputed by the conceptual consciousness.

You really have to focus and listen. Your brain has to be very alert.

Khen Rinpoche: If your brain is dead, then nothing goes inside.

The blue that is the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue exists but it does *not* exist by way of its own character. It does not exist as its own uncommon mode of subsistence. How does it exist? It exists as merely imputed by a conceptual consciousness.

The blue that is the basis for applying the term “blue” exists. But the blue that is the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue does not exist from the side of blue. Rather blue as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue exists as a mental construct, merely imputed by the conceptual consciousness.

Presenting the fallacies

There is a blue that exists as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue. However, blue does not exist as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue from its own side, by way of its own character.

If there is a blue that exists by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue, without depending on a conceptual consciousness, then what is the problem?

The problem is this: For example, think of a flat-based bulbous thing. A flat-based bulbous thing is essentially a vase. The consequence then is that when you see a flat-based bulbous thing, naturally you will think of a vase. If the flat-based bulbous thing exists by way of its own character, from its own side, as the basis for applying the term “vase,” then simply by seeing the flat-based bulbous thing, you would generate the thought “vase.” This is because you should be

able to see “vase” immediately if the flat-based bulbous thing exists from its own side, by way of its own character, as the basis for applying the term “vase.”

But this is not so. Therefore the basis for applying the term “vase” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending vase is merely imputed by the conceptual consciousness.

Arya Asanga gave an example of a person who is known by three different names. If that person exists naturally, i.e., from his or her own side, as the basis for applying those three names to the conceptual consciousness apprehending that person, it will follow that there would be three different persons. It would incur the fallacy of there being three separate individuals. But here we are talking about a single person.

What if there are two different persons having the same name? If these two different persons existed from their own side, by way of their own character as the bases for applying, say, the name “John,” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending these two persons that would mean that these two separate individuals would become one person.

We now go back to the example of blue. Blue does not exist by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue. If blue exists by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “blue,” everyone who looks at it would necessarily see blue. It should be like that because it is not dependent on terms.

Summary

- There is a blue that is the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending it.
- However the blue that is the basis for applying the term “blue” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending blue does *not* exist by way of its own character.
- Rather it is merely an imputation by the conceptual consciousness.

For that reason, the text refers to “a form being empty of existing by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term ‘form.’” What we have to understand is:

- (1) What does it mean when we see the sentence, “a form being empty of existing by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term ‘form.’”
- (2) What is the problem if “a form exists by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term “form”?”

This is something that will become clearer over time if you think about it. You have to work at trying to get it. It will become clearer over time *only* if you think about it. If you don’t want to work at it or think about it, then it will never become clearer.

- We have to know the words such as, “a form being empty of existing by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term ‘form.’” There is no choice.
- It is only on the basis of knowing the words that you can move on to the next step of finding out what they mean when the text says, “a form being empty of existing by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term ‘form.’”

- Only after that can you think about the next point, “What if form exists by way of its own characteristics as a basis for applying the term ‘form’?”
- Only then can you figure out *how* a form exists as a basis for applying the term “form,” i.e., it exists as something that is merely imputed by conceptuality.

From your side, the first thing you must do is that you must know the words. You must be able to say them as easily as you recite Om Mani Padme Hum. You have no choice. Otherwise you have no basis to work with. How are you going to ask questions? What are you going to think about? You would have nothing to think about, right? If there is nothing to think about, how can there ever be any understanding? So the first thing is that you must be able to say the words.

Questions for discussion on Sunday, 21st April 2013

1. What are the differences in the presentation of the two truths by the Great Exposition School and the Sutra School?
2. What is a conventional awareness according to the Sutra School? Why is it called a conventional awareness?
3. What is an ultimate awareness according to the Sutra School? Why is it called an ultimate awareness?
4. What are the reasons for the Sutra School’s assertion of external objects? What are the reasons for the Mind-Only School’s refutation of external objects?
5. Why do the Great Exposition School and the Sutra School not assert a selflessness of phenomena?

Translated by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme

Transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng and Patricia Lee

Edited by Cecilia Tsong