

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: 18

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6 Way of asserting selflessness

The way of positing illustrations of the coarse and subtle selflessness of persons is similar to the Autonomists and below.

An illustration of the selflessness of phenomena is, for example, the emptiness that is a form and the valid cognizer apprehending that form being empty of being different substances.

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 abandonment

The conception of a self of persons together with its seeds and the three poisons arising due to the force of that [conception] together with their seeds are posited to be afflictive obscurations.

The conception of [things] as being true¹ together with its seeds, the latencies of that [conception], and all mistaken dualistic appearances that arise due to the force of that are posited to be obscurations to knowledge (Pages 17 – 18).

According to the MOS, what are the objects of abandonment? “The conception of self of persons together with its seeds and the three poisons arising due to the force of that conception together with their seeds are posited to be afflictive obscurations.” I don’t think I need to explain this. We talked about this many times. You should not have any problem understanding what I just read.

Khen Rinpoche: Does anyone have problems with this? When you read this, do you understand? Is there any part of this long sentence that you don’t

¹ Things being true means things existing in the way that they appear in terms of appearing to be external to the consciousness apprehending them and in terms of appearing to exist by way of their own characteristics as a basis for applying terms.

understand?

If all of you understand that then there is no need for me to say anything. If there is anything that you don't understand then you have to speak up and I will try to explain it. Otherwise I will just move on.

Afflictive obscuration: conception of self of persons

According to the MOS, the conception of a self of persons is the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

- The conception of self-sufficient substantially existent person is an afflictive obscuration.
- The seeds of that conception are also afflictive obscurations.
- The three mental poisons that arise due to the force of the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person are also posited to be afflictive obscurations.

Obscuration to knowledge: conception of true existence

According to the MOS:

- The conception of true existence (translated in the root text as “the conception of things as being true”) that is the conception of subject and object as being different substances is a knowledge obscuration (or obscurations to knowledge).
- The seeds of that conception are also posited to be knowledge obscurations.
- The latencies that are deposited on the mental continuum by that conception are also posited as knowledge obscurations.
- The mistaken dualistic appearances that arise due to the force of those latencies—the latencies of conceiving subject and object as different substances—are also posited to be knowledge obscurations.

Seeds and latencies

I had explained the difference between seeds and latencies. You must know that there are times when these two terms are translated in the same way, i.e. using the same word in English. Most of the time, these two terms mean the same thing but there are also times when they do not mean the same thing. You must know the difference between a seed and a latency.

A “seed” is pretty straightforward in English. No one translates it in a different way. But for “latencies”, there are many translations of the word “*bag chags*” such as proclivities, predispositions, and imprints.

Let us take the conception of subject and object being different substances. This is the conception of true existence according to the MOS.

- There is the seed of this conception.
- There is also the latency of this conception.

Both the seed and the latency of this conception are *similar* in that both are planted or placed on the mental continuum by the same conception.

The *difference* is that:

- The seed of the conception of subject and object being different substances has the potential to produce that same conception again whereas
- the latency of that conception of subject and object being different substances do *not* have the power to produce that conception. What it produces are the mistaken dualistic appearances.

7B Actual presentation of the grounds and paths

Those of the hearer lineage conjoin the view realizing the selflessness of persons with a small accumulation of merit for the sake of their own welfare, while those of the solitary realize lineage conjoin the view realizing the selflessness of persons with a middling accumulation of merit for the sake of their own welfare, and, in dependence on having cultivated that for at least three lifetimes, one hundred eons, and so on, actualize their respective enlightenments (Page 18).

The three vehicles

Earlier I talked about the three yanas, i.e., the three vehicles and the five paths. They are the same here.

What are the three vehicles? They are:

1. Hearers' Vehicle
2. Solitary Realisers' Vehicle
3. Great Vehicle or the Mahayana

The hearers and the solitary realisers have:

- the selflessness of persons as their main object of meditation and
- the conception of the self of persons, an afflictive obscuration, as their main object of abandonment

They meditate on the selflessness of persons in order to abandon the conception of the self of persons for the purpose of their own welfare.

The hearers and solitary realisers are the same in having the conception of the self of persons as their object of abandonment and they are the same in having the selflessness of persons as their main object of meditation. They are also the same in that they meditate on the selflessness of persons in order to accomplish their own welfare.

Having said that, in what way are they different? The solitary realisers are able to conjoin the view realising the selflessness of persons with an accumulation of merit over a period of hundred eons whereas the hearers are not able to do that. Since there is a difference in their ability to accumulate merit, definitely there must be a difference in the results they achieve. In term of the results that they achieve, we can talk about a superior result and a lesser result.

Bodhisattvas conjoin the view realizing apprehenders and apprehendeds being empty of being different substances with a great accumulation of merit for the sake of others' welfare, and, in dependence on having cultivated that for at least three countless great eons and so on, actualize their respective enlightenment (Page 18).

- The main object of meditation of the bodhisattva is the selflessness of phenomena.
- The main objects of abandonment of the bodhisattva are the knowledge obscurations.
- Their purpose of cultivating the path is for the welfare of others.
- It is said that the bodhisattva accumulates merit over a period of three

countless great eons.

	Hearers	Solitary Realisers	Bodhisattvas
Object of meditation	Selflessness of persons	Selflessness of persons	Selflessness of phenomena
Object of abandonment	Afflictive obscurations, i.e., the conception of the self of persons together with its seeds and the three poisons arising due to the force of that conception together with their seeds.	Afflictive obscurations, i.e., the conception of the self of persons together with its seeds and the three poisons arising due to the force of that conception together with their seeds.	Knowledge obscurations, i.e., the conception of true existence together with its seeds, the latencies of that conception and all mistaken dualistic appearances that arise due to the force of that conception.
Accumulation of merit	Able to conjoin the view realising the selflessness of persons with an accumulation of merit for at least three lifetimes.	Able to conjoin the view realising the selflessness of persons with an accumulation of merit over one hundred eons.	Able to conjoin the view realising the selflessness of phenomena, i.e., the apprehender and apprehended as being empty of being different substances with an accumulation of merit over a period of three countless great eons.
Purpose of cultivating the path	For their own welfare	For their own welfare	For the welfare of others

True Aspectarians assert that when hearer and solitary realizer foe destroyers pass beyond sorrow without remainder their continuum of awareness is severed. They assert that it is impossible to sever the continuum of awareness of a buddha superior because they assert that for the bodhisattva who attained enlightenment initially as a complete enjoyment body in Akanishta, the continuum of similar type of aspect of that complete enjoyment body is not severed as long as samsara is not empty, but rather it enacts the welfare of others through various emanations in accordance with the fortunes of each individual disciple. The individual lineages of the three vehicles are definite because they assert that sentient beings, since beginningless time, are of three different lineages or dispositions and thus have three different aspirations, and thus have three different ways of practicing, and thus will attain three different results (Page 18).

The Mind Only True Aspectarians are similar to the Proponents of the Great Exposition and the Proponents of Sutra in that they assert that when the hearer arhats and the solitary realiser arhats pass beyond sorrow without remainder, their mental continua are severed.

- The Hinayana tenets also assert that when someone achieves buddhahood, i.e., when one becomes a buddha, when a buddha passes beyond sorrow, the continuum of awareness of a buddha is severed.
 - The Mahayana tenets do *not* assert that the continuum of awareness of a buddha is severed when a buddha passes beyond sorrow without remainder.
- So there is a difference between the explanations of the Hinayana tenets and the Mahayana tenets with respect to a buddha.

According to the Hinayana tenets, the continuum of awareness of a buddha is severed when a buddha passes beyond sorrow without remainder. This is not

what is asserted in the Mahayana tenets. According to the Mahayana tenets, one travels through all the ten bodhisattva grounds and then one achieves enlightenment. One achieves enlightenment initially in the pure land called Akanishta. When one achieves enlightenment, one achieves the sambhogakaya or the complete enjoyment body. This complete enjoyment body is the basis of emanations, i.e., from this complete enjoyment body, various emanations are emitted to work for the welfare of sentient beings. The Mahayana teachings say that once enlightenment is achieved, a buddha works uninterruptedly for the happiness and welfare of sentient beings.

The four kayas

The Mahayana teachings explain enlightenment or buddhahood in terms of the four kayas or four bodies.

In general, there are the two bodies:

1. the truth body (the embodiment of truth or the dharmakaya) has two divisions:
 - the wisdom truth body
 - the nature truth body
2. the form body (the embodiment of form or the rupakaya) also has two divisions:
 - the complete enjoyment body (sambhogakaya)
 - the emanation body (nirmanakaya)

Such a presentation of the four kayas or the four bodies is not found in the Hinayana teachings.

What is the wisdom truth body? It is the mind of a buddha that directly perceives all phenomena as they are.

What is the nature truth body? According to the MOS, the nature truth body is the emptiness of the mind of a buddha superior existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term, “mind of a buddha superior.” We talked many times about form not existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “form.” Here the attribute is the same but the object that we are using this time is “the mind of a buddha superior.”

So the attribute is this: the mind of a buddha superior does not exist by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term, “the mind of a buddha superior.” What you need to understand is if it exists by way of its own character, what is the problem?

Once you understand that the attribute is something that cannot exist by way of its own character as the referent of a term, then the non-existence of that is emptiness. The emptiness of the mind of a buddha superior or a self of phenomena is the nature truth body. In short, the suchness of the mind of a buddha is the nature truth body.

It is said that one first achieves enlightenment in the pure land called Akanishta in the aspect of the complete enjoyment body. This complete enjoyment body is the basis of emanation from which various emanations are sent out to help sentient beings. It is said that this complete enjoyment body lasts forever until samsara is emptied. The complete enjoyment body possesses five certainties:

1. Certainty of place: it abides only in Akanishta.
2. Certainty of retinue: its retinue consists of only bodhisattva superiors.
3. Certainty of Dharma: it teaches only the Mahayana Dharma.
4. Certainty of time: it lasts forever until samsara is emptied.
5. Certainty of the body: it is beautified or ornamented by the 32 signs and the 80 exemplifications.

The complete enjoyment body is the basis of emanations of the emanation body. There are different emanation bodies. One of the divisions of the emanation body is called the supreme emanation body such as that of our kind founder, Shakyamuni Buddha. This supreme emanation body teaches all kinds of Dharma, not necessarily only the Mahayana, and has all kinds of disciples who have the pure karma to be able to meet with the supreme emanation body. Unlike the complete enjoyment body, there is no certainty that the supreme emanation body will abide until the end of samsara. The emanation body (nirmanakaya) is not necessarily adorned with the signs and exemplifications.

In short, the complete enjoyment body possesses the five certainties but this is not the case for the emanation body.

The basis of the presentation of the four kayas is made on the premise that the continuum of awareness of a buddha is *not* severed after a buddha passes beyond sorrow without remainder because you cannot talk about the four kayas if a buddha disappears. Perhaps this is one of the things that sets the Hinayana and Mahayana tenets apart from one another. The Mahayana tenets have a detailed presentation of the four kayas whereas the Hinayana tenets do not have such a presentation.

The Mind Only True Aspectarians' assertion of the three final vehicles

The True Aspectarians assert that there are three final vehicles. What is the reason for the True Aspectarians asserting that there are three final vehicles? The reason is “because they assert that sentient beings, since beginningless time, are of three different lineages or dispositions and thus have three different aspirations, and thus have three different ways of practicing, and thus will attain three different results” (Page 18).

The Mind Only True Aspectarians have to assert that there are three final vehicles because they have already asserted that when a hearer arhat passes beyond sorrow without remainder, his continuum of awareness is severed. When the continuum of awareness is severed, there is nothing beyond that. One dies as a hearer arhat.

The True Aspectarians also assert that when solitary realiser arhats pass beyond sorrow without remainder, their continua of awareness are also severed and they die as solitary realiser arhats. This is a different result from the hearer arhat. The solitary realisers are not going to achieve anything more than that. In that sense, that is definite. Then there are the buddhas. That is why they assert three final vehicles.

Another reason why the Mind Only True Aspectarians assert that there are three final vehicles has to do with sentient beings being of different dispositions. They assert the mind-basis-of-all. Predispositions are deposited on this mind-basis-of-all so the mind-basis-of-all is the repository of these predispositions or imprints.

According to the True Aspectarians, the mind-basis-of-all is truly established. There is an imprint that is stored in the mind-basis-of-all that predisposes that person to be a hearer. That imprint makes it definite that the person will be a hearer. When that person enters the path, he enters the hearers' path. That is the path he will travel on. He will achieve the hearers' enlightenment and become a hearer foe destroyer. In that sense, the lineage is definite for that person.

Likewise, it is the same with the imprint that predisposes someone to be a solitary realiser or to be a bodhisattva who aspires to be a buddha. These imprints are stored in the mind-basis-of-all. These imprints predispose that person to be of a certain lineage.

In that sense, it is certain that sentient beings are organised into these three different lineages. It is definite that some will become only hearers, some will become only solitary realisers, and some will become only buddhas. This is their explanation but is not necessarily the truth or accord with reality.

Definite and indefinite lineages

There are some hearers who have the predisposition to be able to achieve enlightenment. Therefore we talk about (1) the definite hearer's lineage and (2) the indefinite hearer's lineage.

What is the hearer's lineage? The hearer's lineage refers to the lineage or the potential that enables one to achieve the hearer's enlightenment. Having said that, there is the definite hearer's lineage and the indefinite hearer's lineage.

Those who are of the definite hearer's lineage refers to those sentient beings who definitely enter the hearer's path, travel on it to the end, and achieve the hearer's enlightenment, i.e., become hearer foe destroyers or arhats.

Those who are of an indefinite hearer's lineage are those who may initially aspire to the hearer's enlightenment, wanting to become a hearer foe destroyer. They enter the hearer's path from the path of accumulation, progressing to the hearer's path of preparation. Along the way, they may meet with a virtuous friend, a guru of the solitary realiser's path or even a Mahayana guru. They then switch their path. Let's say that this person who initially aspired to the hearer's enlightenment switches path and enters the solitary realiser's path. In doing so, he travels that path to the end and becomes a solitary realiser arhat. Such a person is considered to be of an indefinite hearer's lineage.

There are also those who are of definite solitary realiser's lineage and indefinite solitary realiser's lineage.

There are also those who are of definite Mahayana lineage and indefinite Mahayana lineage.

According to the True Aspectarians, there are two types of arhats:

1. Those who are definitely going to pass beyond sorrow without remainder. In so doing, their continua of awareness are severed. That means they will remain as arhats and die as arhats.
2. Those who, after having achieved arhatship and *before* passing beyond sorrow without remainder, enter the Mahayana path. In so doing, they will

become a buddha in the future.

This is what the True Aspectarians say of the hearer arhats and the solitary realiser arhats.

In short, these are the reasons why the Mind Only True Aspectarians assert that there are three final vehicles.

False Aspectarians do not assert that when hearer and solitary realizer foe destroyers pass beyond sorrow without remainder their continuum of awareness is severed because, although they assert that, at that time, the continuum of mere awareness that is included in true sufferings and true origins is severed, they assert that mere awareness goes on to the buddha ground. Therefore, they assert one final vehicle (Page 18).

The Mind Only False Aspectarians do not assert that the whole continuum of awareness is severed at the time of passing beyond sorrow without remainder. They assert that only that part of the continuum of awareness that is included in true sufferings and true origins is severed and the mere awareness goes on to the buddha ground, i.e., mere awareness is *not* severed at the time of passing beyond sorrow without remainder. That mere awareness goes on to enlightenment. For that reason, the False Aspectarians assert one final vehicle.

From the discussion today, what you have to understand is that:

- The True Aspectarians assert three final vehicles. From your side, you have to know why they assert three final vehicles, what are the rationale and the reasons they use to support their assertions?
- The False Aspectarians assert only one final vehicle. You have to understand why they assert only one final vehicle.

That is it for the MOS. Next we will go on to the Middle Way School.

Remember I gave you some homework to do? Can I have a volunteer to read out what you have written? The volunteer should be someone who is quite confident that what he/she has written is reasonably good. The volunteer should not be a student of the previous Basic Program but those enrolled as a new student.

Khen Rinpoche: If no one wants to read then I will stop here.

Definitive and interpretative teachings

According to the proponents of GES and the SS, i.e., the proponents of Hinayana tenets or Hinayana followers, I would say that the vast majority of them, if not all, assert that the Buddha's words are to be taken literally. Therefore everything the Buddha said is true.

However the Mahayana tenets such as the MOS assert that the Buddha's teachings must be classified into (1) teachings that require interpretation and (2) teachings of definitive meaning

Many followers of the Hinayana in the past and even till this day do not accept that the Mahayana teachings are the teachings of the Buddha. I think it boils down to their worldview. According to most of these followers, they think that the

Buddha only speaks the truth. To them, whatever the Buddha says can be taken literally so they must take the teachings literally.

They then approach the Mahayana sutras with this kind of worldview. Taken literally, the Mahayana teachings do not make sense to them and cannot fit their mind. On the one hand, they think that whatever the Buddha said must be true. On the other hand, because these teachings cannot fit their mind and do not make sense to them, to them these teachings are not true and cannot be taught by the Buddha. Therefore they conclude that the Mahayana teachings are not taught by the Buddha.

The MOS divides the scriptures into two categories:

1. scriptures that are suitable to be read or taken literally
2. scriptures that are not suitable to be read or taken literally

The MOS says that all the teachings of the Buddha are not necessarily suitable to be taken literally. As there were three turnings of the Wheel of Dharma, the MOS accept that the scriptures from the first turning of the Wheel of Dharma and the second turning of the Wheel of Dharma were taught by Buddha but they do not accept that these teachings are suitable to be taken literally. For the MOS, only the teachings or the sutras from the third turning of the Wheel of Dharma are suitable to be taken literally.

Take for example, the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras* that belong to the second turning of the Wheel of Dharma. In the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, you can find statements such as, “Form does not exist inherently” or “Form is not produced inherently.” The MOS accepts that these statements were made by the Buddha but they say that these statements cannot be taken literally.

For the MOS, one cannot say, “Form does not exist inherently” because for the MOS, that is how form exists.

According to the MOS, one has to understand what is the intent or the meaning of these statements. For example, the statement, “Form is not produced inherently,” cannot be taken literally and requires interpretation. This statement means that form is not produced from a cause that is of the same nature as that form. Form and the cause of form are of separate natures. The cause of form is a separate nature from form, so form is not produced from a cause that is of the same nature as form.

In the Mahayana view, all the Buddha scriptures or teachings cannot be taken literally. Therefore there is a division of the scriptures into:

1. sutras of interpretative meaning
2. sutras of definitive meaning

There is much discussion about the differences between these two kinds of sutras and also the various kinds of logic and reasoning that are used to establish whether a teaching or scripture is a sutra that requires interpretation or is a sutra of definitive meaning.

We have to understand that the Buddha gave teachings according to the interests and dispositions of his disciples to fit their minds. Because of that, the words that were used by the Buddha and what the Buddha said are not necessarily the final truth or even necessarily true. They were not necessarily indicative of the final intent of the Buddha.

I guess the proponents of Hinayana tenets saw the Buddha as an honest person. Of course the Buddha is honest. The Buddha is omniscient and knows everything. So whatever the Buddha says must be true. One should just accept that.

However the Mahayana view is that the Buddha taught to benefit sentient beings and his teachings accorded with the dispositions of sentient beings. Therefore there is always the possibility that what the Buddha said may not represent what he really thought.

Now you have to decide which position is better: the Hinayana perspective or the Mahayana perspective. Is it better to take everything literally or is it better not to take everything literally? There is a competition between these two positions. We should support whichever position is more reasonable and makes more sense.

Question: Usually we say that the substantial cause of consciousness has to be that which is clear and knowing. Here in the MOS whether it is form or consciousness, they both arise from the ripening of a karmic latency or predisposition, which is a non-associated compositional factor. So now the cause of form is not form and the cause of consciousness is not consciousness. It seems then that the notion of a substantial cause falls apart.

(Khen Rinpoche asks a senior student to answer the question).

Answer by student: A phenomenon does not only rely on a substantial cause but many other cooperative conditions for it to come about.

Khen Rinpoche: You did not answer her question did you?

Student: She asked whether the substantial cause of a mind has to be mind?

Khen Rinpoche: So your answer is?

Student: Yes, the substantial cause of a mind has to be a previous moment of mind ...

Khen Rinpoche: Has to be?

Student: Yes.

Khen Rinpoche: In the MOS, isn't the substantial cause the ripening or awakening of *one* karmic latency that produces both the object and the subject apprehending the object?

Student: No.

Khen Rinpoche (quoting from a text) : The MOS refutes external objects. The main argument is that when one of the karmic latencies stored in the mind-basis-of all is awakened or ripens, this acts as the substantial cause for producing both the form and the eye consciousness apprehending the form. It is this karmic latency that is the substantial cause for producing *both* the object and subject. If we say the substantial cause of form is form, that will entail the acceptance of external objects.

Student: In the MOS, you do not have external objects but you have an object due to the ripening of a karmic seed. You have the previous moment of that form and the consciousness that apprehends it. Therefore that becomes the substantial cause for the next moment of form and consciousness arising due to the ripening of a subsequent imprint. That is my understanding.

Khen Rinpoche: Think about it. Does any one have another answer?

What we are trying to find out here is what exactly the substantial cause of consciousness is. It is very clear in all the MOS literature that it is the latency that is deposited in the mind-basis-of-all. That latency acts as the substantial cause for the consciousness, producing both form and the consciousness apprehending that form.

Do you accept that or not? Is the substantial cause of consciousness a karmic imprint? The point about this qualm is the implication if we were to say that the substantial cause of consciousness is a karmic imprint. The main reason for proving reincarnation or rebirth has to do with the substantial cause of consciousness being that which is clear and knowing. What the MOS says seems to go against this commonly accepted position and what logicians like Dharmakirti mentioned in his text. This is something that requires much thought in order to come out with a coherent or reasonable answer.

Question: When the Mind Only True Aspectarians say that the hearer arhats and the solitary realiser arhats pass beyond sorrow, what is it that passes beyond sorrow?

Answer: When the hearer and solitary realiser become arhats, they achieve a nirvana with remainder. The person who achieved the nirvana with remainder is the person who is going to die. When he dies, he achieves the nirvana without remainder. When the arhats pass beyond sorrow without remainder, i.e., when they achieve the nirvana without remainder, the continuum of the awareness is severed.

But that is *not* the same as saying that there is nothing left. The continuum of the awareness is severed but that does not mean that there is no basis. There is something that can be pointed to, but what exactly is that something? We have to think about it from the perspective of the tenets that assert that the continuum of awareness is severed and think about what they may say. In reality there is no such thing.

Although the continuum of the awareness is severed, they must definitely assert that there is something left over. There is a basis. Why? In the first place, they assert there is a nirvana without remainder that is emptiness. If there is emptiness, then you need a basis of emptiness. What is that basis?

There are:

1. Nirvana with remainder
2. Nirvana without remainder
3. Non-abiding nirvana

These tenets have their own way of explaining what a nirvana without remainder means. When one achieves the nirvana without remainder, the continuum of awareness is severed. Because there is such a thing as a nirvana without remainder, therefore there must be a basis. There must be something that you

can point to.

Student: I was wondering what that basis is.

Answer: Perhaps one may get some idea from this. There is some similarity with the assertion of the CMWS with regard to the factor of disintegratedness. The factor of disintegratedness is the past tense of disintegration. After disintegration what follows is a state of disintegratedness.

The CMWS is unique in asserting that that factor of disintegratedness is impermanent, is a functioning thing, and a composed phenomenon. The MOS do not assert this but maybe we can think about the CMWS's assertion of the factor of disintegratedness being a composed phenomenon.

Khen Rinpoche: OK. Next we start on the Middle Way School.

Questions for Sunday discussion:

1. After someone achieves a nirvana without remainder, what is the basis of emptiness?
2. a) What is the selflessness of phenomena according to the Mind Only School?
b) What are the faults of asserting that phenomena possess a self?
3. Besides establishing the selflessness of person, what is the purpose of establishing the selflessness of phenomena?
4. Why do the Mind Only True Aspectarians assert three final vehicles?
5. Why does the Mind Only School divide the Buddha's scriptures into those of interpretive meaning and those of definitive meaning?
6. a) Why is it that the Mahayana tenets are able to posit a presentation of the four bodies unlike the Hinayana tenets?
b) How does understanding the presentation of the four bodies enhance one's understanding of a buddha?

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