

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: 19

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Question: “The five sense objects – forms and so forth – are produced on the basis of a substance that is an inner consciousness in dependence upon the latencies of common and uncommon actions deposited upon the mind-basis-of-all.” (Page 16). What are the consciousnesses that deposit common and uncommon actions and what will these latencies produce?

Answer: The mind-basis-of-all is the basis of infusion of the latencies of all actions. What deposits those latencies on the mind-basis-of-all? This can be any consciousness.

- If you assert a collection of six consciousnesses, any of the six consciousnesses can be the depositor of the latencies of actions.
- If you assert a collection of eight consciousnesses, on top of the usual six consciousnesses, you add the afflicted mentality. So the afflicted mentality can also be a consciousness that deposits the latencies of actions.

All these latencies are deposited on the mind-basis-of-all that is the basis of infusion of the latencies of all actions. The mind-basis-of-all is neutral.

Latencies of common and uncommon actions

Let us look at the latencies of common actions. All of us are able to see the water in a cup. We all have the common or shared appearance of the water in a cup. That is due to the ripening of the latencies of common actions.

While we are all able to see the water, it is possible for an individual to see certain things about the water that other people cannot see, i.e., there is the appearance of something that is not shared with others. We can call that an uncommon latency. I guess we could look at it in this way.

We can also say that it is an uncommon latency that accounts for human beings being able to see that liquid as water because what we see as water is not seen as water, for example, by the hell beings. That latency that causes us human beings to be able to see the cup of liquid as water can be an uncommon latency, i.e., something that is unshared with others and is peculiar to human beings only.

I think we can talk about latencies of common and uncommon actions in such a way. This is something for you to think about.

We have finished with the Mind Only School. Now we will look at the fourth

tenet, the Middle Way School.

The Hinayana tenets

The GES and the SS are the Hinayana tenets. Those Hinayana tenets only propound a selflessness of persons and not a selflessness of phenomena. The Hinayana tenets propound that, just by realising the selflessness of persons, one would be able to eradicate all the destructive emotions or afflictions. Why is this so? This is because all the destructive emotions or afflictions arise from the sense of the “I.” The stronger the sense of the “I” or self, the stronger is the anger or attachment that is induced by that sense of the “I.” According to the Hinayana tenets, if we can eradicate this false sense of the “I” and realise the selflessness of persons, we will be able to eradicate all our afflictions.

In the Hinayana tenets, in the presentation of the selflessness of persons, they talk about the emptiness of a self-sufficient person. They propound that the self-sufficient person does not exist whatsoever. By realising that the self-sufficient person does not exist, it is said that our three mental poisons will decrease. Realising the selflessness of persons is the method to pacify our destructive emotions. When our destructive emotions are pacified, correspondingly the suffering that we experience will decrease.

It is very important to gain a good understanding of what I just said. Although there is a very extensive presentation of all conventionalities in the four Buddhist tenets, as I mentioned before, we should focus on their presentation of what constitutes reality, their view.

The Mahayana tenets

Review of the MOS’s refutation of external objects

The presentation of the Mahayana tenets starts with the presentation of the view of the MOS. You may have noticed that the presentation of the MOS is more profound than the Hinayana tenets. For example, the MOS asserts that the objects of the senses such as form, sound, smell, taste, and touch do not exist in the way they appear to us. The MOS explains how phenomena exist very differently from how they actually appear to us.

According to the MOS, phenomena such as form and so forth, although they appear to exist as external objects, in reality, those appearances are hallucinations and are false because phenomena are only established through the ripening of latencies. This ripening of latencies produces the appearance of phenomena such as form and the mind perceiving it.

This is how the MOS explain the existence of phenomena such as form and so forth. Although they appear to us to have an external objective existence, i.e., they appear to exist as external objects, in reality, they do *not* exist as external objects. Form comes into being through the ripening of latencies or imprints that are stored in the mind-basis-of-all.

Such a worldview is founded on the fundamental premise that the mind is truly established. In the MOS, the mind is given primacy and is very important. The truly established mind holds the imprints or latencies of actions. When these latencies ripen, they produce the appearance of form and so forth and the consciousness that perceives those form and so forth.

According to the MOS, due to the ripening of the latencies of ignorance, the appearance of external objects such as external forms is produced. This is a false appearance. We mistakenly believe that there are external forms and we mistakenly believe that they are beautiful forms. Based on that belief, we get emotionally involved, we get attached, and so forth.

According to the MOS, it will be very helpful if an individual realises that those appearances are false. Although there is the appearance of an external object, in reality, external objects do not exist. Objects exist only through the ripening of an imprint that is deposited on the mind. It is coming from the mind and is not coming from outside. This will help us to work against our attachment, anger, and other afflictions.

As mentioned earlier, this particular worldview of the MOS is based on the fundamental premise that the mind is truly established. To the MOS, the mind is everything. It is possible to experience pain or pleasure by focusing on the mind itself rather than focusing on objects other than the mind. When we focus on the mind itself, it is possible to feel pain, hurt, happiness, pleasure, and so forth. Based on these feelings of pain or pleasure that are derived from focusing on the mind, then anger or attachment can arise due to these emotions. So we also need a method to deal with the anger and attachment induced by the feelings of pain or pleasure that comes from focussing on the mind itself.

Worldview of the MOS is not enough: the assertions of the MWS

According to MOS, there are the appearances of forms and so forth to the mind that arise due to the ripening of latencies. But when we talk about the mind itself, the mind is truly established. There can be a grasping at the mind, i.e., when the mind is happy, there is the grasping at happy feelings and when the mind is unhappy, there is the grasping at painful feelings. This in turn gives rise to attachment, anger, and so forth. In this case, the view that there are no external objects does not help in dealing with the attachment or anger directed at the mind and mental events. This why we need to know the assertions of the MWS. We need a method to deal with that kind of attachment.

According to the MWS, all phenomena—outer and inner—are *not* truly established. While phenomena are not truly established or truly existent, phenomena appear *as if they are* truly established or truly existent. The mind assents to that appearance. This is what we call the apprehension of true existence that is a perverse or wrong consciousness. Why? This is because although phenomena appear to be truly existent, in reality, they do not truly exist. Therefore the mind that apprehends true existence is a wrong consciousness.

It is insufficient simply to hold the worldview of the MOS that external objects do not exist. We need a method to deal with the apprehension of true existence. Therefore there is a need to understand the presentation of the final tenets, the MWS. The explanation of the MWS of how phenomena do not truly exist is a method to eradicate and destroy the destructive emotions.

The Buddha gave many teachings over a long period of time. It is said that the purpose of all these teachings is to lead sentient beings to be able to establish for themselves what reality really is—especially what constitutes the person or self, what is the ultimate nature of the person, and what is the ultimate nature of phenomena. That is the ultimate purpose behind all the teachings given by

the Buddha. Therefore the heart essence of the entire buddhadharma that we are studying, learning, and reflecting on is the presentation of what constitutes reality: the ultimate nature of the person and the ultimate nature of phenomena. It becomes extremely important to delineate for ourselves what exactly is the ultimate nature of the self and the ultimate nature of phenomena.

With regard to delineating the ultimate nature of the self and the ultimate nature of phenomena, the Buddha also said many things in many teachings. The ultimate and most profound teachings on selflessness are the teachings or the views that are propounded by the MWS.

Why we need to study all the tenets

While it is true that the MWS represents the most profound view on the nature of reality, just saying that it is the most profound from the onset is not very meaningful. This is because you can only come to realise its profundity when you compare it to other existing views. This is one of the reasons why the study of the four tenets is important. It is only after understanding well that the views of reality propounded by the tenets below the MWS are coarser that one can come to fully appreciate how very subtle and very profound the assertions of the MWS are.

Without understanding the lower tenets and simply studying the tenets of the MWS tenets, you can only say that they are profound and that is about it. But this is not an understanding at all. It is not a realisation. This is the reason why you need to study tenets.

There are students who ask, “Why do we need to go through all the tenets? Since the MWS is the highest tenet, we should go for that. Why do we need to start from the bottom?” Many people feel like that.

You should see the progression from the coarser view to the subtler view. We started with the selflessness of persons according to all schools from the AMWS to the GES. All of them assert that the self-sufficient substantially existent person does not exist whatsoever. Relatively speaking, that is a coarse view.

The MOS then refutes external objects, explaining how there are no external objects. Their worldview is a little bit more refined than the selflessness of persons.

When we come to the MWS, we shall see how the MWS refutes true existence. Then we see how their view is indeed much more profound and much subtler because we already have some understanding of the coarser views.

There are also people who say this over and over again, “My time is limited. I don’t have much time. What is the point of me studying all these things? Won’t it be much better if I meditate?”

Why do we want to meditate? What is the reason? There is only one reason: we want to have peace in the heart, peace of mind, and to get happiness. For that reason, people meditate on the breath, some meditate on themselves as the deity, and some try to develop single-pointed concentration. The purpose of doing all this is to look for peace.

When we meditate on the breath and try to focus our mind, we do get some peace. This comes from settling the mind and by stopping all our busy thoughts. When the busy thoughts subside, of course we get some peace. When we meditate and focus on our breath to feel peaceful for 15 minutes, we will get 15 minutes of peace. If we sit for an hour, we will get an hour of peace. But we are not going to spend our lives sitting there for 24 hours, stopping all kinds of thoughts. We will not be able to get 24 hours of peace by doing that.

The whole purpose of meditation is to find happiness and to avoid suffering. There is no other reason. That is also the reason why we educate ourselves by learning the Dharma. There is no other reason. We study these subjects to investigate what are causing us problems and who is this person or “I” who is feeling the pain.

Through this education, we can think through things such as why we suffer and who is the “I” who is suffering. In particular, with regard to the teachings on selflessness, even though we may gain only a coarse understanding but if it is a correct understanding that comes from analysis and thinking, it definitely helps a lot. There and then, you get peace. Your mind becomes more peaceful and you will be able to stop the grosser manifestations of your destructive emotions.

This is meditation that involves thinking and analysis. When this analysis and thinking start to lead to the correct understanding of what is the nature of this “I” or self who suffers or experiences pain, even though our understanding is coarse, it can start to pacify our afflictions. If our understanding is correct, when the afflictions are pacified, it is difficult for them to come back again.

Nothing can compare to this kind of meditation because once it hits the mark, it is very powerful. You can really experience and feel the difference. This kind of meditation on the ultimate nature of the “I” is more effective and more powerful than any other kind of meditation.

There are many kinds of meditation such as meditation on the breath, on single-pointedness, and so forth. When you do these kinds of meditation, it helps for 15 minutes or an hour. You will get some peace as your discursive thoughts settle for a while. But when you arise from the meditation, you have to confront the world again and all kinds of thoughts will return. Then what are you going to do?

The meditation on the nature of the self is powerful because it is something that involves thinking and analysis from various perspectives. It is very effective and more powerful than other meditations that deal with these things.

Whatever education in Buddhist teachings that you have received, in particular the learning and understanding of what exactly the person or “I” is, is very helpful. When that understanding is stable and correct, it is helpful in dealing with all kinds of situations. Even when you are experiencing difficult situations, the mind is not that disturbed and shaken.

But learning is not enough. Just hearing, reading, and studying is not enough because those activities alone will not bring about any noticeable change. On the basis of learning, reading, listening, and studying, the more important thing is to think and analyse. Real understanding can only come about from such reflection and analysis, “It is like that!”

With that kind of understanding, definitely you can use it to deal with problems in your daily life. You will see immediate and noticeably different results. Until we gain such an understanding that comes from thinking and reflection, we will not notice or feel any positive change or benefit. So do not ever think that learning and thinking about the teachings of the Buddha is a waste of time. Never think in such a way because, as I mentioned earlier, the essence behind studying all this is to ultimately arrive at an understanding of what exactly is the “I” and how phenomena exist.

Middle Way School

The explanation of the system of the Proponents of Non-Nature (*Skt. Nihsvabhavavadin*)¹ has three outlines:

1. definition,
2. divisions, and
3. meaning of each division.

1 Definition

The definition of a Proponent of Non-Nature (*Skt. Nihsvabhavavadin*) is: a person propounding Great Vehicle tenets who does not assert true existence even conventionally.

2 Divisions

There are two divisions:

1. Autonomists (*Skt. Svatantrika*) and
2. Consequentialists (*Skt. Prasangika*).

3 Meaning of each division

The explanation of the Autonomy School and the Consequence School (Page 19).

Those proponents of Buddhist tenets who assert that phenomena do not truly exist, i.e., those who assert that there is not even a single atom of true existence out there, are the Proponents of the Middle Way. The Proponents of the Middle Way have two divisions:

- Both are *similar* in asserting that phenomena do not truly exist.
- The Proponents of the Middle Way who assert that while phenomena are not truly existent, phenomena *do* exist by way of their own character are called the Middle Way Autonomists (*Svatantrika-Madhyamika*).
- The Proponents of Middle Way who asserts that just as phenomena do not truly exist, phenomena do not exist by way of their own character as well are called Middle Way Consequentialists (*Prasangika-Madhyamika*).

The teachings on how all phenomena lack even an atom of true existence comes from the second turning of the Wheel of Dharma where the Buddha said this

¹ JN: Changed from ‘Middle Way School (*Skt. Madhyamika*).’

many times in the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*.

It was Nagarjuna and his spiritual son, Aryadeva, who clearly elucidated the meaning of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*. Nagarjuna was the trailblazer² of the Middle Way School. Even though, Nagarjuna father and son, “father” referring to Nagarjuna and “son” referring to Aryadeva, were the ones who clearly elucidated the meaning of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutras*, their explanations were done according to the general structure of the Middle Way School. They did not divide the structure of the Middle Way into the Autonomy Middle Way School (AMWS or *Svatantrika Madhyamika*) and the Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS or *Prasangika-Madhyamika*). They merely explained the general structure of the Middle Way. While in reality Nagarjuna and Aryadeva were Middle Way Consequentialists themselves, they did not explicitly identified themselves as such but merely presented the general system of the Middle Way as it is.

Subsequently there came to be different interpretations of what Nagarjuna and Aryadeva taught. It was Buddhapalita and Chandrakirti who clearly showed and explained that what Nagarjuna and Aryadeva had taught were indeed the tenets of the CMWS. They asserted that the views of Nagarjuna and Aryadeva were essentially the views that formed the views of the CMWS. They asserted that the presentation by the AMWS was incorrect.

Later on, the Indian master Bhavaviveka rejected the presentations of Buddhapalita and Chandrakirti and formulated his own explanation of what exactly were the thoughts of Nagarjuna. Thus he became the trailblazer of the AMWS.

Who is the one who started the CMWS? There are different views. Some say it is Chandrakirti. Some say it is Buddhapalita.

So those are the two schools of the Middle Way: the AMWS and the CMWS. Both are *similar* in asserting that phenomena do not truly exist. There is not even an atom of true existence.

Assertions of the AMWS

But the AMWS asserts that phenomena exist by way of their own character. Although things do not have an atom of true existence, phenomena do exist by way of their own character. Proponents of this view are called the Middle Way Autonomists.

The AMWS asserts that, if a phenomenon exists, it necessarily:

- exists by way of its own character,
- exists inherently, and
- exists from its own side.

According to the AMWS, if someone were to say that a phenomenon does not exist by way of its own character, does not exist from its own side, and does not exist inherently, such a phenomenon does not exist.

If things do not exist from their own side, then what exists? How do you explain

² A trailblazer is someone who starts a tradition.

the existence of the object? The AMWS cannot accept that phenomena exist merely by being imputed by mind as there must be *something* that exists from the side of the object. For them, if a phenomenon exists as merely imputed by mind, then one can make up anything with one's mind. So the AMWS says, "If you assert phenomena exist as merely imputed by mind, it is tantamount to say that things do not exist." Because for the AMWS, they do not know how to explain existence and non-existence if they have to accept that things are imputed by mind. They do not know how to define what exists and what does not exist if *everything* is merely imputed by mind. Therefore for the AMWS, there *must* be something coming from the side of the object.

Exist from its own side/exist inherently/exist by way of its own character

With the exception of the CMWS, all the other Buddhist tenets (the AMWS, the MOS, the SS, and the GES) are the same in asserting that phenomena must (1) exist from their own side, (2) exist inherently, and (3) exist by way of their own character.

Why? This is because, when you look for the object, you must be able to find it. This is what is meant by things "existing from their own side," i.e., when you search for the imputed object, you can point to something that is the object. For example, when you look for the "I," there must be something that you can point to that is the self. According to all these tenets, there is the "this or that."

Only the CMWS asserts that the imputed object, when sought, is not findable. That means you cannot point to the thing that is the object when you look for it. Only the CMWS says that. Starting from the AMWS and the tenets below it, they say that when you look for the imputed object, you will be able to find it. You can definitely point to something that is the object.

Refuting true existence

Proponents of the Middle Way, be it the AMWS or the CMWS, are similar in asserting that phenomena do not truly exist. There is not even a single atom of true existence. There is no true existence, no true establishment.

The AMWS asserts that phenomena do not have a single atom of true existence. Phenomena are not truly existent, not truly established. How then does the AMWS explain the non-existence of true existence? For example, conventional phenomena are not truly existent. If conventional phenomena are truly existent, they have to exist in the perspective of a valid cogniser or ultimate awareness.

Here an ultimate awareness, in this context, refers to the meditative equipoise of a superior that is the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. If conventional phenomena are indeed truly existent, this means that they not only appear as truly existent—they appear in the way they exist—but they will have to exist in the perspective of the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness.

However conventional phenomena do not exist in the perspective of the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. Since that is the case, this means that there are no truly existent conventional phenomena. This is one of the explanations of how conventional phenomena do not truly exist because it does not exist in the perspective of the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness.

According to the AMWS, the meaning of (1) true existence, (2) true establishment, and (3) ultimate establishment is: "Established by way of its own

uncommon mode of existence without being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness³.” This is the self of phenomena and is the object of negation. *Not* established by way of its own uncommon mode of existence without being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness is the meaning of *not* truly existent, *not* truly established, and *not* ultimately established

We have not yet started with the meaning of “Established by way of its own uncommon mode of existence without being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness.” First we have to know the words. This is the explanation of true existence, true establishment, and ultimate establishment, according to the AMWS. The opposite of that is the meaning of the non-existence of true existence, the non-existence of true establishment, and the non-existence of ultimate establishment. First, we must be able to say all the words.

Please read pages 20 to 21 on your own because if I were to go through everything, there is no time. The outlines 1-4 are quite straightforward.

1. definition
2. divisions
3. etymology
4. way of asserting objects

If there is anything that you don’t understand, you can bring it up in class. Otherwise I will not read through all this in class as it will take time. I will explain the meaning of true existence according to the AMWS. We should be able to finish the AMWS in one or two lessons. It is important that you read the root text.

Question: In the MOS, the mind is truly established. In Lesson 17, it was mentioned that: “All things are accepted to be the common locus of being truly established and being a falsity.” Is “truly established” here according to the AMWS different from “truly established” as in “the mind is truly established”?

Answer: In the MOS, other-powered natures and thoroughly established natures are truly established whereas imputational natures are not truly established.

What is the meaning of true existence and true establishment according to the MOS?

- If it exists as *not* merely imputed by thought, then it is truly existent. It is truly established.
- If it exists as merely imputed by thought, then it is *not* truly existent. It is *not* truly established.

If it is not merely imputed by thought but exists by way of its own character and exists from its own side, then that means it is truly established. That is the meaning of true existence and true establishment according to the MOS.

(Student misheard Khen Rinpoche saying in the beginning of the class that, according to the MOS, *only* the mind is truly established)

³ Refer to chart on “Meaning of Terms used to Describe the Mode of Existence of Phenomena in the Mahayana Schools.”

It is not *only* the mind. *Primacy* is given to the mind. Why do they have such a worldview? This worldview is based on the premise that the mind is truly established.

Question: A conventional truth is defined as that which is realised by the direct valid cogniser directly realizing it by way of being together with dualistic appearance. What is the meaning of “together” here?

Answer: For example, the eye consciousness apprehending blue, that eye consciousness apprehends blue by way of being accompanied with dualistic appearance. What accompanies the realisation of blue is the dualistic appearance.

Translated by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme

Transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng and Patricia Lee

Edited by Cecilia Tsong