

## 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: 22

**Date: 30<sup>th</sup> May 2013**

*Question:* The root text states on page 22: “The two conceptions of self are differentiated by way of the mode of apprehension and not by way of the observed object because through observing the basis – the person – and apprehending it to be truly existent it is a conception of a self of phenomena, and through observing the basis – the person – and apprehending it to be self-sufficient substantially existent it is a conception of a self of persons.” Can you please explain what is meant by, “by way of its observed object”?

*Answer:* The two conceptions of self are:

1. the conception of a self of persons and
2. the conception of a self of phenomena.

These two conceptions of self are differentiated:

- by way of their mode of apprehension
- *not* by way of their observed object

The proof is given on the basis of one’s observed object, the person.

- Through observing the basis—the person—and apprehending it to be self-sufficient substantially existent is the conception of a self of persons.
- Through observing the basis—the person—and apprehending it to be truly existent is the conception of a self of phenomena.

In relation to the person, depending on *the mode of apprehension*, the conception could either be (1) the conception of a self of persons or (2) the conception of a self of phenomena. But *both* these conceptions have the *same* observed object, the person:

- The mind that apprehends the person to be truly existent becomes the conception of a self of phenomena.
- But when the mind apprehends the same observed object—the person—to be self-sufficient substantially existent, that is a conception of a self of persons.

The conception of a self of persons and the conception of a self of phenomena are *different* but in this case, they have the *same* observed object, the person.

The two conceptions of self are differentiated: • By way of the mode of apprehension • <i>Not</i> by way of the observed object	Through observing the basis – the person – and apprehending it to be self-sufficient substantially existent	Conception of a self of persons
	Through observing the basis – the person – and apprehending it to be truly existent	Conception of a self of phenomena

*Question:* I find it difficult to distinguish between “existing by way of its own characters” and “existing by way of its own side” for the AMWS.

*Ven. Gyurme:* According to the chart<sup>1</sup>, these two terms are exactly the same. It is just a different way of saying the same thing. They have the same meaning. The only term that is different is true existence.

*Question:* It says in the text that those of the hearer lineage attain small enlightenment by abandoning the conception of apprehending the self-sufficient substantially existent person. Even when he abandons that, he still has a view of the true existence of the self of persons. Why does that not give rise to afflictions that will prevent him from leaving cyclic existence?

*Ven Gyurme:* Are you asking why the conception of a truly existent person is not an afflictive obscuration?

*Khen Rinpoche:* I don't think he is asking that directly. But maybe he is asking that indirectly.

*Khen Rinpoche:* He is basically asking how it can be possible for the hearer arhat to achieve liberation when he still conceives the self to be truly existent.

(Khen Rinpoche asked a few students to attempt to answer this question).

The essence of the question is that although the hearer is said to have achieved liberation after having abandoned the conception of the self of persons, he still apprehends the self to be truly existent. Therefore the hearer arhat has not abandoned the afflictions completely.

To this student, if we were to follow the assertions of the AMWS, the hearer arhat is not actually an arhat because he has not completely abandoned the afflictions. In the continuum of this so-called hearer arhat, there is still the conception of true existence. Therefore there are still afflictions.

(Some other students attempt to answer this question).

*Khen Rinpoche (commenting on a student's answer):* You are saying that the hearers and the solitary realisers are not harmed by the appearance of true existence. This is not true. Whoever has not generated the direct antidote to that conception, the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, will be harmed by that conception.

From the perspective of the AMWS, they say that as long as they have abandoned the conception of a self of persons, they can achieve liberation. But you added that they have achieved liberation, yet at the same time, they still have the appearance of true existence. They have the conception of true existent yet they cannot be harmed by it. That cannot be the case. They have the conception of true existence and they *are* harmed by it.

Student (in attempting answer): For the tenets below the CMWS, they assert that

---

<sup>1</sup> Refer chart on *Meaning of Terms Used to Describe the Mode of Existence of Phenomena in the Mahayana Schools*.

to achieve liberation, you only need to realise the selflessness of persons. The conception that Swee Kim (the student who originated the question) is talking about, the grasping at true existence, is actually the grasping at the self of phenomena. Therefore there is no need to realise the emptiness of the truly existent person because this grasping at the truly existent person is, in the context of the AMWS, grasping at the self of phenomena. That is an obstruction to omniscience.

*Khen Rinpoche: If you all understand that, the answer is somewhere there.*

All the different tenets have their own respective presentations on what exactly are a self of persons and a self of phenomena. You have to be clear regarding what these respective presentations are.

You also have to know their respective presentations on what constitutes an afflictive obscuration and what constitutes a knowledge obscuration. All the tenets assert that, in order to become a foe destroyer (or arhat), one must have destroyed or conquered the afflictions. They are all the same in that regard but as to what the afflictions are, there are differences in the presentations of the different tenets.

The SMWAs posit the afflictive obscurations to be: (1) the conception of a self of persons, i.e., the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and (2) the afflictions that are produced by that conception. The main or root afflictive obscuration is the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. According to the SMWAs, this conception of a person as being self-sufficient substantially existent is the subtlest affliction in existence. Therefore the antidote has to be the mind that realises the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.

- First one has to generate the realisation of the emptiness of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.
- Once that realisation is generated, one familiarises oneself with what one has realised.
- Through that, one is said to be able to destroy the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.
- When that conception is destroyed, one achieves the state of an arhat.
- When one achieves arhatship, the afflictions together with their seeds are destroyed.

The conception of self-sufficient substantially existent person together with their seeds is destroyed. Once that conception is destroyed, it is impossible for one to experience any more afflictions. When one becomes a foe destroyer, one has destroyed and completely abandoned all the afflictions.

Then the question brought up earlier by Swee Kim arises. The arhat has overcome all the afflictions, but he has not realised the emptiness of true existence. Therefore that arhat still has the conception of true existence in his continuum.

If you were asked, “Does the arhat have the conception of true existence?” You have no choice but to say, “Yes.”

At the same time, you also have to say that there is no fault in saying that the arhat has already abandoned all the afflictions. Although the arhat has the conception of true existence, that arhat does not have any more afflictions because he has already destroyed them. The conception of true existence is *not* posited to be an afflictive obscuration. This is according to the perspective of the AMWS.

In order to answer the question that Swee Kim has brought up, you have to say: “According to this tenet, the conception of true existence is not an afflictive obscuration. So there is no contradiction in saying that the arhat has already abandoned the afflictions. He still has the conception of true existence but that is a knowledge obscuration.” This is what the Autonomists would say.

*Question:* How can the appearance of true existence and the belief in this appearance not lead to the generation of afflictions in the mind? Do they have any explanation for this qualm?

*Answer:* They would say that the root of attachment is conceiving the person to be self-sufficient substantially existent. If you destroy the root, then you are not going to have any attachment and the afflictions.

*Question:* This would mean that someone wishing to achieve liberation would not be harmed by the conception of true existence.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Are you saying that the conception of true existence does not harm? Does the conception of true existence harm or not? You seem to be saying that the conception of true existence does not harm the arhat.

*Question:* Among the Mahayana tenets, only the YMWAs posit a coarse self of phenomena<sup>2</sup>. Why is this the case?

*Answer:* It is clear that the Hinayana tenets do *not* assert a self of phenomena. Since the Mahayana tenets assert a self of phenomena, therefore there is a selflessness of phenomena.

When you start with the MOS, the first of the Mahayana tenets, they only posit a subtle self of phenomena, i.e., the conception of object and subject being different substances. For them, that is the subtlest conception of a self of phenomena.

Then you have the AMWS. There are no Middle Way Autonomists who will posit that the conception of object and subject being different substances is the subtle self of phenomena. The AMWS posits the conception of true existence to be the subtle self of phenomena.

The YMWAs do assert that there is the conception of object and subject being different entities. For them, they assert that this conception is a coarse conception of a self of phenomena. Like the MOS, the YMWAs do not assert external objects. With respect to the conception of object and subject being different substances, for the YMWAs, this is a conception of a self of phenomena. It is not the conception of a *subtle* self of phenomena. It is the conception of a

---

<sup>2</sup> Refer to chart on *Selflessness of Person and Phenomena*.

*coarse self of phenomena.*

Then the question arises: “Why do the SMWAs not assert a coarse self of phenomena?” This is because they assert external objects, just like the SS. The SMWAs do not assert a conception of object and subject being different substances to be an object of abandonment. Since they do not assert such a conception, therefore they do not assert a self of phenomena other than the subtle self of phenomena.

*Question:* Can a non-mistaken consciousness view an object dualistically?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Why do you ask this question?

*Student:* Different schools seem to have different views regarding a mistaken consciousness. For example, uncompounded phenomena—that is not realised by a sense consciousness, am I right? For example the absence of permanence is realised in relation to realising that something is impermanent but the absence of permanence itself is actually a permanent phenomenon.

Is it not the case that only a superior being can realise subtle impermanence directly?

*Ven Gyurme:* From the view of the MOS?

*Student:* Yes, I am guessing that you will realise the absence of permanence at the same time. The yogic direct perceiver realizing the absence of permanence is actually a direct valid cogniser realising an imputational nature. An external object does not appear. Is that dualistic? The absence of permanence is actually an imputational nature and a conventional truth. It is said clearly in the text that yogic direct perceivers are necessarily non-mistaken.

*Ven Gyurme:* Your illustration is a yogic direct perceiver directly realising the absence of permanence and implicitly realising impermanence. So the yogic direct perceiver realises impermanence and the yogic direct perceiver also realises permanence?

*Student:* Okay, it is different. Absence of permanence is actually a permanent phenomenon.

*Ven Gyurme:* Absence of permanence is a construct. It is an imputational nature.

*Student:* It is an existent imputational nature. So there is a realisation of that.

*Ven Gyurme:* A yogic direct perceiver directly realising an imputational nature, then ...

*Student:* Is it correct to say that for that kind of consciousness, an external object does not appear? It is just an absence.

*Ven Gyurme:* You are saying among the three types of dualistic appearances, that one is missing.

*Student:* Yes. At first, my illustration was a dream elephant. Then it evolved into an imputational nature. If an unmistaken consciousness can also have dualistic

appearance, then a yogic direct perceiver realising the absence of permanence would not have an external object appearing to it, am I right?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Basically she is trying to ask: “Can a non-mistaken consciousness have dualistic appearance or not?”

*Khen Rinpoche:* The answer is yes.

*Student:* So this is an illustration where the appearance of an external object does not arise.

An imputational nature is a conventional truth. With regard to the appearance of conventional phenomena, what is a conventional phenomenon?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Think about the definition of a conventional truth. According to the MOS and the AMWS, the definition of a conventional truth is “that which is realised through dualistic appearance by a direct valid cogniser that directly realises it.”

A direct perceiver is non-mistaken. For a conventional truth, the realisation is accompanied with dualistic appearance.

*Student:* So an unmistaken consciousness can be dualistic. What then is a conventional phenomenon?

*Khen Rinpoche:* A conventional truth and a conventional phenomenon are the same thing.

*Student:* A dream elephant is not an external object. According to the SS, it is actually a phenomenon source form. It is not the aggregation of partless particles nor is it atomically established. So when we dream of a dream elephant, is there an appearance of an external object?

*Ven Gyurme:* You are trying to find out whether the dream elephant is an external object or not. From the perspective of which school?

*Student:* The MOS.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Why do you want to say that it is from the perspective of the MOS? In the first place, for the MOS, there are no external objects. When one is dreaming, it is possible to have an appearance of an external elephant. If we are referring to the perspective of the MOS, it is very easy. You don't need to think because immediately, you can say no, because they do not assert external objects.

When we dream, anything can appear. There is the appearance of something coming from the side of the object. Therefore it is possible to have an appearance of an external elephant in the dream. You can say that there is an appearance of an external object.

*Student:* How about when I dream about myself in my dream? Should there still be an appearance of an external object then?

*Khen Rinpoche:* There is no problem in saying that there is an appearance. Related to your earlier question, it is clear in the text that, according to the MOS, there are four types of direct perceivers: “Self-cognizing direct perceivers and yogic direct perceivers are necessarily non-mistaken consciousnesses.” (Page 17)

The definition of a self-knower is that which has the aspect of the apprehender. If a self-knowing direct perceiver is necessarily non-mistaken, then the self-knower would necessarily be non-mistaken. Now the question is this: “Do self-knowing direct perceivers have dualistic appearance or not?”

Self-knowing direct perceivers have consciousnesses as their object. A self-knower realises a mind. Is the valid cogniser that directly realises a consciousness a self-knowing direct valid perceiver?

The mind is a conventional truth. What is the definition of a conventional truth? A conventional truth is “an object that is realised through dualistic appearance by a valid direct perceiver that directly realises it.” What are you going to posit to be the valid direct perceiver that directly realises a consciousness?

*Student:* The mind of a buddha.

*Khen Rinpoche:* You mean that sentient beings do not have such a mind? Give me another example.

*Student:* A clairvoyance that reads another mind.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Does the clairvoyance that knows another mind have dualistic appearance?

*Question:* For the MOS, all permanent phenomena other than emptiness are imputational natures. Does that mean uncompounded space exists as merely posited by thought? If so, would that not make uncompounded space just a mental construct?

*Ven Gyurme:* You don’t have to go to the MOS. The SS already asserts that.

*Student:* Is there an uncompounded space that is not a mental construct but needs to be realised through a mental construct?

*Ven Gyurme:* It follows then that there will be infinite regression.

*Student:* So uncompounded space is a mental construct. It cannot fit my mind.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Make your mind bigger.

The new students must also train in asking questions. You can ask anything. It does not matter whether your question makes sense or not. You can ask anything.

*Question:* How do the higher schools refute the lower schools with respect to the findability of the object other than saying that it is not found by a valid cogniser?

*Answer:* Only the CMWS refutes the findability of the object. The rest of the tenets assert that things are findable, i.e., there is existence from their own side.

*Ven Gyurme* (paraphrasing question from a student): What other avenues of reasoning are there to refute true existence other than saying that it is not realised by a valid cognizer?

*Answer:* The MOS asserts true existence mainly in connection with other-powered phenomena.

The MWS refutes that because, from their perspective, the positing of other-powered phenomena is rooted in the mind. According to the MWS, the mind is not truly existent.

The refutation of true existence by the MWS covers *all* phenomena. For them *everything* that exists does *not* exist truly but, in particular, this is a refutation of the view of the MOS that the mind is truly existent.

According to the MOS, many things are truly existent, especially the mind. What does the MOS understand by true existence? To them, those things that are truly existent are not merely imputed by thought but exist from their own side.

All the tenets talk about true existence but they have their own different presentations of what it is. The MOS understands true existence to be this: it is not merely imputed by thought but exists from its own side.

In general the MWS asserts that phenomena do not exist truly but are imputed by mind. This means that there is not a single existent that exists *without* being merely imputed by mind. This is the general procedure of the MWS.

You know that there are two divisions in the MWS. We are now looking at the position of the AMWS. How does the AMWS explain this? They explain that phenomena exist as merely imputed by mind. To them, phenomena are posited through the force of them *appearing* to a consciousness. You cannot talk about an existent without it appearing to a consciousness. This is the meaning of imputation by mind. This particular assertion of the AMWS is a refutation of the position of the MOS.

What is the understanding of the MOS with regard to true existence? It is *not* merely imputed by thought but it exists *from its own side*.

According to the AMWS, phenomena are merely posited through the appearance of phenomena to a consciousness that, in this case, is the non-defective awareness. There is no phenomenon that can exist from its own side (or established by way of its own uncommon mode of existence) without it appearing to a consciousness. Such a thing is not possible.

According to the AMWS, if there is a phenomenon that you can point to that exists or is established by way of its own uncommon mode of existence *without* being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness, then that phenomenon is truly existent. But there isn't such a phenomenon according to the AMWS. If you assert true existence, the AMWS comes up with many different kinds of reasoning to refute true existence.

*Question from Khen Rinpoche:* Does the MOS assert true existence?

*Students:* Yes.



According to the MOS, true existence means not merely imputed by thought but exists from its own side. There are many things that exist from their own side and are not merely imputed by thought. This is true existence to the MOS but the AMWS refutes this.

The general assertion of the MWS is that there is no phenomenon that exists *without* being merely imputed by thought. *Everything* that exists is merely imputed by thought.

It is good that you have questions. Those students who have just enrolled in the Basic Program should be asking more questions. You should put more effort into asking questions because most of the time, it is the older students who are asking the questions. Sometimes they tend to ask too many questions!

*Khen Rinpoche: I encourage the new students to put effort into asking questions. It can be simple questions. Sometimes the senior students ask difficult questions and you don't get anything out of it at all. So you better ask questions yourself. Then you will get something out of it.*

I noticed that the so-called senior students ask too many questions. It is better if the new ones ask questions. This is your homework. If you have questions, you ask them when there is an opportunity to do so. If nobody wants to ask any questions, then the senior students can come up to ask questions.

Translated by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme

Transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng and Patricia Lee

Edited by Cecilia Tsong