

## 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: 25

**Date: 11<sup>th</sup> June 2013**

*Question:* For both the MOS and the AMWS, their definitions of a conventional truth indicate that a valid cogniser is required to realise a conventional truth.

I thought a conventional truth is necessarily apprehended by a mistaken consciousness and not by a valid cogniser. For example, in lo-rig, we learnt that an object is apprehended first by a sense direct valid cogniser, followed by a mental direct valid cogniser, before proceeding to the conceptual consciousness that labels the object. Since ordinary beings are dominated almost all the time by their conceptual consciousnesses that are mistaken consciousnesses, there is hardly any valid cognition to speak of. Would this not suggest that ordinary beings are unable to realise a conventional truth?

*Answer:* Lo-rig is presented from the point of view of the SS. For example, an eye consciousness apprehending blue is a non-mistaken consciousness.

The SMWAs also assert external objects. I would think therefore that, perhaps, they also assert that the eye consciousness apprehending blue is a non-mistaken consciousness. I would say that for the SMWAs, the sense consciousnesses are non-mistaken.

I think your question has to do with the definition of a conventional truth in relation to how a sense consciousness is non-mistaken. You cannot put these two together. The consciousness that posits blue is the eye consciousness apprehending blue. When the eye consciousness apprehends blue, how does it realise blue? That realisation is accompanied by dualistic appearance.

The fact that the realisation of blue by an eye consciousness apprehending blue is accompanied by dualistic appearance does not make the eye consciousness apprehending blue a mistaken consciousness. The presence of dualistic appearance does not necessarily entail that the consciousness is a mistaken consciousness.

*Ven Gyurme:* Are you saying that the eye consciousness, i.e., a sense consciousness, positing blue as a conventional truth is *not* the consciousness apprehending blue?

It is not necessary to say that the eye consciousness apprehending a vase is the consciousness that posits the vase as a conventional truth. A vase is a

conventional truth. Blue is a conventional truth. The reason why a vase is a conventional truth is because it is realised through dualistic appearance by a valid direct perceiver that directly realises it. The valid direct perceiver that directly realises it is the main mind that posits the existence of the phenomenon in question. In this case, it is a vase and it is a conventional truth.

What do you think is the consciousness that certifies that blue is a conventional truth? What is the direct valid cogniser that directly realises blue in a dualistic manner? If you take the example of a vase, then it is the eye consciousness apprehending a vase. If it is blue, then it is the eye consciousness apprehending blue. If it is a sound, then it is the ear consciousness apprehending a sound.

There is a thought thinking of blue that is induced by an eye consciousness apprehending blue. The thought that thinks of blue is *not* a valid cogniser but a subsequent cogniser. This is from the perspective of the lower schools.

### Valid cognisers

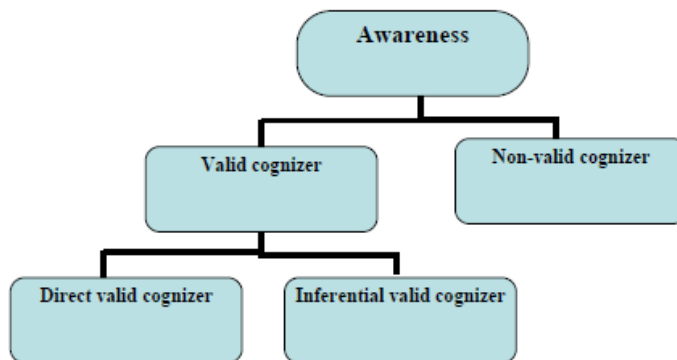
There are two types of awarenesses:

1. valid cognizers and
2. non-valid cognizers.

There are two types of valid cognizer:

1. direct valid cognizers and
2. inferential valid cognizers.

Self-cognizing direct perceivers are not asserted, and a sense consciousness in the continuum of a sentient being is necessarily a mistaken consciousness. Mental consciousnesses and yogic direct perceivers can be either mistaken or non-mistaken (Page 25).



In the last lesson, we saw how the Prasangikas' way of asserting of object-possessor is different in many ways from the lower tenets. As I mentioned in the last lesson, according to the Prasangikas:

- the valid cogniser is a knower that is infallible with respect to its main object and,
- unlike the lower tenets, a valid cogniser need *not* be newly incontrovertible.

The Prasangikas' division of valid cognisers is the same as the lower tenets.

There are two types of valid cognisers:

1. direct valid cognisers

## 2. inferential valid cognisers

What is a direct valid cogniser?

- It is a valid cogniser that is *not* generated directly in dependence on a sign.
- It is a knower that is infallible with respect to its object of the mode of apprehension.

An inferential valid cogniser is:

- a valid cogniser that *is* generated directly in dependence upon a sign and
- it is a knower that is infallible with respect to its object of the mode of apprehension.

There are three divisions of direct valid cognisers:

1. sense direct valid cognisers
2. mental direct valid cognisers
3. yogic direct valid cognisers

Self-knowing direct valid cognisers are not asserted.

As stated in the root text, “A sense consciousness in the continuum of a sentient being is necessarily a mistaken consciousness. Mental consciousnesses and yogic direct perceivers can be either mistaken or non-mistaken.”

These are the differences between the Prasangikas and the lower tenets.

### ***Mistaken and non-mistaken consciousnesses***

According to the Prasangikas, a sense consciousness in the continuum of a sentient being is necessarily a mistaken consciousness. While it is necessarily mistaken, it is *not* necessarily *not* a valid cogniser. This means that there is a common locus between a mistaken consciousness and a valid cogniser.

One of the fundamental assertions of the CMWS is that all phenomena necessarily do not exist by way of their own character, whereas starting from the AMWS and the tenets below it, they all assert that if something exists, it necessarily exists by way of its own character.

#### *Sense consciousnesses*

According to the Prasangikas, everything that appears to the sense consciousness in the continua of sentient beings necessarily *appears* to exist by way of its own character or existing from its own side. Although phenomena appear like this to a sense consciousness, in reality, they do *not* exist by way of their own character or from their own side.

Therefore according to the Prasangikas, sense consciousnesses in the continua of sentient beings are necessarily mistaken. That is not all. According to the Prasangikas, with the exception of the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, *all* other consciousnesses are mistaken because whatever appears to those consciousnesses, there is always the appearance of true existence, or the appearance of things existing by way of their own character, or things existing from their own side.

Based on this explanation as to why every consciousness with the exception of the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness is a mistaken consciousness, you

should be able to understand why, “mental consciousnesses and yogic direct perceivers can be either mistaken or non-mistaken” (Page 25).

An illustration of a mistaken mental consciousness is a clairvoyance knowing another mind. It is a mental consciousness but it is not the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness. Therefore it is mistaken.

What is an illustration of a non-mistaken mental direct perceiver? Perhaps we can posit an uninterrupted path of the Mahayana such as the uninterrupted path of the Mahayana path of seeing. This is the wisdom directly realising emptiness in the continua of sentient beings. It is a mental direct perceiver and it is non-mistaken.

*Mental direct perceivers*

In the lower tenets, mental direct perceivers are necessarily free from conceptuality. According to the Prasangikas, there can be mental direct perceivers that are conceptual consciousnesses. An illustration would be the thought remembering blue that is induced by an eye consciousness apprehending blue. This is a subsequent cogniser that, in this school, is a valid cogniser. Of the two, this is a mental direct valid cogniser that is conceptual.

The object of enquiry here is the thought remembering blue that is induced by an eye consciousness apprehending blue. Why is it a valid cogniser?

According to the Prasangikas, what is a valid cogniser?

According to the Prasangikas, a mental direct perceiver is not necessarily free from conceptuality. There are mental direct perceivers that are conceptual consciousnesses.

*Yogic direct perceivers*

A yogic direct perceiver can be either mistaken or non-mistaken. Yogic direct perceivers are generated in dependence upon their uncommon empowering condition, a concentration that is a union of calm abiding and special insight. This is the same as the assertion of the lower tenets.

With the concentration that is a union of calm abiding and special insight as its uncommon empowering condition, there are three types of yogic direct perceivers depending on the object it realises. In this school, there are:

1. yogic direct perceivers realising subtle impermanence
  2. yogic direct perceivers realising coarse selflessness
  3. yogic direct perceivers realising subtle selflessness
- The yogic direct perceivers realising subtle impermanence and the yogic direct perceivers realising coarse selflessness are mistaken consciousnesses.
  - The yogic direct perceivers realising subtle selflessness are non-mistaken consciousnesses.
  - Yogic direct perceivers can be conceptual or non-conceptual.

<b>Sense direct valid cogniser</b>	Is a mistaken consciousness	
<b>Mental direct valid cogniser</b>	Is either mistaken or non-mistaken	

<b>Yogic direct valid cogniser</b>	Is either mistaken or non-mistaken	<u>Mistaken consciousnesses:</u> 1. Yogic direct perceiver realising subtle impermanence 2. Yogic direct perceiver realising coarse selflessness
		<u>Non-mistaken consciousness:</u> Yogic direct perceiver realising subtle selflessness

There are two types of direct valid cognizers:

1. conceptual direct valid cognizers and
2. non-conceptual direct valid cognizers.

Illustrations of conceptual direct valid cognizers are, for example, the second moment of an inferential cognizer realizing sound to be impermanent and a remembering consciousness that is a factually concordant memory of blue generated through being induced by a sense direct perceiver apprehending blue (Page 25).

If there is anything that you don't understand or you don't get the line of reasoning, you should ask immediately. The only way to see the differences is to first understand, according to the Prasangikas, what a valid cogniser is. You also need to understand what a direct valid cogniser and an inferential valid cogniser are. When you understand their characteristics clearly, then you will be able to see the differences. You must not mix these up with what you learnt earlier. What you learnt earlier is according to the lower tenets. Of course there may be some confusion but it is important to see the differences in the assertions of the Prasangikas.

An illustration of a non-conceptual direct valid cognizer is, for example, a sense direct perceiver apprehending a form.

If it is a direct valid cognizer it does not necessarily have a perceptible object because if it is a yogic direct perceiver it necessarily does not have a perceptible object. This is so because perceptible object and manifest object are equivalent (Page 25).

Remember from the last lesson that, in this school, manifest object and perceptible object are mutually inclusive. Manifest or perceptible objects are those objects that one can realise directly without the need for further thought and dependence on any reason. We experience them directly.

For example, sound is a perceptible object. The moment a sound reaches the ear, you hear it. You know that it is a sound and you don't have to think about it. When you place something sweet or sour in your mouth, you will be able to taste it immediately. You do not have to posit a reason to experience the taste. Such objects are manifest objects and perceptible objects.

On the other hand, the impermanence of sound, the emptiness of inherent existence, and the emptiness of establishment by way of its own character are objects that you can only come to realise initially by thinking about them and by using many reasons. Such objects are hidden objects.

*Ven Gyurme*: In Tibetan, it sounds like an existential statement, “If it is a direct valid cogniser, it is not necessarily a perceptible object because if it is a yogic direct perceiver it is necessarily not a perceptible object.”

The illustration given here is that a yogic direct perceiver is necessarily not a perceptible object. Therefore there are direct valid cognisers that are not necessarily perceptible objects.

If it is a subsequent cognizer it is necessarily a direct valid cognizer.

There are four types of inferential cognizers:

3. inferential cognizers through the power of the fact,
4. inferential cognizers through renown,
5. inferential cognizers through an example, and
6. inferential cognizers through belief.

Inferential cognizer through renown and inferential cognizer through an example are included in inferential cognizer through the power of the fact (Pages 25 - 26).

This is similar to what we learnt before in terms of the divisions of the inferential cogniser. We did look at the:

1. inferential cognisers through the power of the fact
2. inferential cognisers through renown
3. inferential cognisers through belief

If it is a valid cognizer, it is not necessarily non-mistaken with respect to its determined object because an inferential cognizer realizing sound to be impermanent is a consciousness that is mistaken with respect to impermanent sound (Page 26).<sup>1</sup>

The example given here is of inferential cogniser realising sound to be impermanent.

- It is an inferential cogniser.
- It is a valid cogniser.
- It is a conceptual consciousness.
- It is a mistaken consciousness.
- It is mistaken with respect to its determined object.

If it is a consciousness, it necessarily realizes its object of comprehension because the generic image of the horns of a rabbit is the object of comprehension of a conception apprehending the horns of a rabbit, and the generic image of permanent sound is the object of comprehension of a conception apprehending sound to be permanent (Page 26).

According to the lower tenets, all conceptual consciousnesses are necessarily mistaken. The reason they are mistaken consciousness is because they are mistaken with respect to their appearing object that is a meaning generality.

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<sup>1</sup> JN: ‘Impermanence of sound’ has been changed to ‘impermanent sound’ (*sgra mi rtag*).

Here it is saying that the thought that realises the meaning generality or mental image is *not* mistaken. “If it is a consciousness, it necessarily realizes its object of comprehension”: This means that regardless of the consciousness in question, that consciousness is realising something, is realising some object.

An illustration is a dream consciousness that has the appearance of a dream elephant. The dream consciousness is a mistaken consciousness but that dream consciousness is realising something. What it realises is the dream elephant appearing as an elephant.

For the Prasangikas, what is the sign that shows that this dream consciousness realises its object, i.e., the dream elephant appearing as an elephant? Because when you wake up from the dream, you remember, “I dreamt of an elephant.” So you remember that vivid appearance you saw in your dream. What is the consciousness that realises that appearance? It is the dream consciousness.

With regard to the thought apprehending permanent sound, the root text is saying that the thought apprehending permanent sound apprehends or realises the meaning generality.

The point here is that the Prasangikas’ way of asserting consciousness is different in many ways from the lower tenets. This is something that you need to figure out. You need to take time to think about it.

Is an inferential cogniser realising impermanent sound a wrong consciousness? It is a wrong consciousness because it erroneously engages in its object of the mode of apprehension.

## 6 Way of asserting selflessness

The person being empty of being self-sufficient substantially existent is asserted to be a coarse selflessness of persons and the person being empty of true existence is asserted to be the subtle selflessness of persons.

A gross object composed of partless particles and the valid cognizer apprehending it being empty of being different substances<sup>2</sup> is posited as a coarse selflessness of phenomena and the aggregates – the basis of designation – being empty of true existence is posited as the subtle selflessness of phenomena (Page 26).

Because the Prasangikas assert external objects, they assert that the external object and the consciousness apprehending them *are* different substances. Therefore the Prasangikas do *not* assert the coarse selflessness of phenomena that is the emptiness of subject and object being different substances.

In other monastic textbooks in the Gelug tradition, I am not sure if they assert that the Prasangikas posit a coarse selflessness of phenomena. According to Jetsunpa’s monastic textbook of Sera Je College, the coarse selflessness of phenomena is posited.

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<sup>2</sup> Since Proponents of the Middle Way refute partless particles, a gross object composed of partless particles does not exist and hence also a valid cognizer apprehending that does not exist. Thus, since both are non-existent it can be said that they are empty of being different substances.

The two [subtle] selflessnesses are differentiated by way of the basis of emptiness and not by way of the object of negation because the refutation of the object of negation - true existence - upon the basis of a person is the subtle selflessness of persons, and the refutation of the object of negation - true existence - upon the basis of the aggregates and so forth is the subtle selflessness of phenomena.

The two [subtle] conceptions of self are differentiated by way of the observed object and not by way of the mode of apprehension because observing the basis - the person - and apprehending it to be truly existent is posited as the subtle conception of a self of persons, and observing the basis of imputation - the aggregates and so forth - and apprehending it to be truly existent is posited as the subtle conception of a self of phenomena (Page 26).

### **All phenomena are merely imputed by the mind**

According to the Prasangikas, all phenomena are merely imputed by thought. The word “merely” negates (or eliminates) establishment by way of its own character or existence from its own side.

This is very difficult and challenging. According to the Prasangikas, everything that exists does so as merely imputed by thought. To explain this, the Prasangikas always use the classic example of mistaking a coil of rope to be a snake. Under certain conditions, such as foggy weather or when daylight fades and yet it is not completely dark, there may be a coil of rope in the distance but what you see is a coiled snake.

*Khen Rinpoche: This happens often in my hometown. At Kopan, you not only see the rope but sometimes the real snake comes! In the early days, the rooms were not so good. The wooden houses had a lot of holes and sometimes snakes would come in. When we went to bed, we would see the snake.*

So when the conditions are right, you would see the coil of rope as a snake. There is an *appearance* of a snake right there from the side of the rope. Not only is there such an appearance, you *believe* in that appearance. Based on that, fear arises. Due to the coil of rope appearing to be a snake and you believing in that appearance of a real snake, you become afraid.

From the side of the coil of rope, you will *not* be able to find a snake on the rope. From one end of the rope to the other end, you will not be able to find anything about the coil of rope that is a snake. There is *no* snake on the rope. The coil of rope appearing to be a real snake is merely an imputation by the mind. Nevertheless you become afraid because you do not realise that it is your mind that has imputed the coil of rope to be a snake.

In this example, the person does not realise that his/her own mind has imputed a snake on the coil of rope but, in reality, there is no snake there. Instinctively the mind believes there is a snake on the rope without realising it is imputed by thought. When you look for the snake on the rope, you will not find a snake. Yet at the same time, there cannot be a snake *that is apart* from the coil of rope. You will not be able to find a snake that is separate from that coil of rope.

When you walk closer and closer towards the rope, you will start to realise that there is no snake on the coil of rope. It is possible then to realise, “Oh! This is



made up by my mind. The snake is merely imputed by my mind.” You will realise, “It is my own mistake.” When you see that the coil of rope is actually a coil of rope, you will realise that you have been mistaken all along. The snake is actually made up and imputed by the mind. But earlier on, you did not realise that you are mistaken. Earlier on, you did not realise that the snake is imputed by the mind.

### ***How the “I” exists***

Using this as an example, the Prasangikas explain how the “I” exists: the “I” is that which is merely imputed in dependence upon the aggregates that is the bases of designation. The “I” is none other than that which is merely imputed in dependence upon the aggregates. In reality that is how the “I” exists, what the “I” is.

But how does the “I” appear to our mind? The “I” appears to exist from the side of the aggregates. We believe that there is an “I” within the aggregates, that the “I” is the aggregates, coming from the side of the aggregates, and is *not* merely imputed by thought. This is how the “I” appears to exist to us.

Is this how the “I” actually exists in reality? If the “I” exists from the side of the aggregates, then when we look and search for it among the individual aggregates, we should be able to point to something that is the “I.” But the “I” is *not* findable upon analysis.

When we look for the self, the “I,” or the person among the aggregates that are the bases of designation for the “I,” we will not be able to find the “I.” Nor is the “I” the collection of the aggregates. Just as you will not be able to find the snake on the coil of rope, likewise one will not be able to find the person on the aggregates that are the bases of designation.

The “I” is not the aggregates and cannot be found on the aggregates. Is there an “I” that is separate from and is not the aggregates? When you eliminate the aggregates one by one, you will not be able to find an “I” there in the end.

Going back to the example of seeing the coil of rope as a snake. Just as you are not going to find a snake on the coil of rope, you will not be able to find a snake *that is separate* from the coil of rope. Likewise one cannot find the self or the person on the aggregates or among the aggregates. You will also not be able to find the “I” or self that is separate or apart from the aggregates.

The “I” is none other than that which is merely imputed in dependence upon the aggregates. Like the “I,” the person, the aggregates are also merely imputed by mind.

### ***Object of negation or refutation***

According to the Prasangika, everything that exists is *necessarily* merely imputed by thought. There isn’t anything that can exist *without* being merely imputed by thought. According to the Prasangikas, anything that is said to exist and yet is *not* merely imputed by thought becomes the object of refutation or object of negation. This is what is meant by a “self” or self-establishment.

- If there is a person who can exist without being merely imputed by mind, existing from his own side, that is the self of persons.
- If there are phenomena other than persons that can exist from their own side

without being merely imputed by mind, that is the self of phenomena. So these are the self of persons and the self of phenomena. These are the two selves—persons existing from their own side and phenomena existing from their own side.

- The non-existence of a person existing from its own side is the selflessness of persons.
- The non-existence of phenomena other than persons existing from their own side is the selflessness of phenomena.

According to the Prasangikas, there is *no* difference in the objects of negation with respect to the two selflessnesses, whether it is the selflessness of persons or the selflessness of phenomena. The object of negation is true existence or inherent existence. The object of negation is the same. So the two selflessnesses are *not* differentiated by the object of negation.

- The non-existence of the object of negation in relation to a person is the selflessness of persons.
- The non-existence of the object of negation in relation to phenomena is the selflessness of phenomena.

In the next lesson, we will complete the remaining presentation of the Prasangikas. The discussion on the object of negation in accordance with the assertion of the Prasangikas will come up again and again when we look at the *Heart of the Perfection of the Wisdom Sutra* in the next module.

*Question:* According to the Prasangikas, is there a common locus between a mental direct perceiver and yogic direct perceiver?

*Answer:* The Mahayana uninterrupted path

*Question:* “A gross object composed of partless particles and the valid cognizer apprehending it being empty of being different substances”: this sounds assertion of the MOS, i.e., the object and subject being the same entity.

*Answer:* In the first place, does a gross object composed of partless particles exist? It does not exist because there are no partless particles. If partless particles do not exist, then you cannot posit a gross object that is made up of partless particles. Therefore a gross object that is composed of partless particle does not exist. If the gross object that is composed of partless particle does not exist, then there cannot be a valid cogniser apprehending it. If that is the case, then these two cannot be of the same substance. Because of their respective status, they are not of one substance. Therefore they are empty of being different substances.

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