

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: 26

Date: 13th June 2013

Student: In the last class, you asked, “Is the inferential cogniser that realises the impermanence of sound a wrong consciousness?” It should be a mistaken but not a wrong consciousness because:

- impermanent sound appears to be inherently existent to that inferential cogniser. Therefore it is mistaken.
- But the inferential cogniser realises the impermanent sound. Therefore it is not a wrong consciousness.

Khen Rinpoche: Your answer is correct. It is not a wrong consciousness.

Question: In the MOS, there are three natures. The other-powered nature comes about by causes and conditions. The imputational nature does not come about by causes and conditions. Does the thoroughly established nature come about by causes and conditions?

Answer: The thoroughly established nature is permanent. A permanent phenomenon does not arise in dependence on causes and conditions. Phenomena that arise in dependence on causes and conditions are other-powered phenomena.

Using the analogies

We talked about the object of negation according to the CMWS. The analogy of mistaking a coil of rope for a snake is perhaps the best illustration that shows how all phenomena are merely imputed by thought.

There are also other examples such as using the analogy of an illusion, a mirage, and so forth. Using the example of an illusory elephant that is conjured up by a magician, we see the illusory elephant due to the spell that has been cast. But if we were to search for a fully qualified actual elephant on the basis of that appearance of an illusory elephant, we will not be able to point to a real elephant there.

When analogies such as the dream elephant or seeing a coil of rope as a snake is applied to the self, the person, or the “I,” when you look for the “I” among the bases of designation, the aggregates, you will *not* be able to point to or find the “I” although the “I” appears to be one with or mixed with the aggregates. When you look for such an “I,” you will not be able to find it.

Perhaps the most important assertion of the CMWS is that all phenomena—everything that exists *including* the self, the person, or the “I”—exist as merely imputed by thought. The way to understand how all phenomena exist as merely imputed by thought is to employ the analogies that were mentioned earlier.

Gaining an understanding of what merely imputed by thought means is very important. We need to understand what it actually means when we say that all phenomena are merely imputed by thought, such as the “I” or the person is merely imputed in dependence upon the bases of designation, the aggregates.

Distinguishing between existence and inherent existence

As we do not have any understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, the emptiness of phenomena, whatever we look at or think about appears to the mind to be truly existent, inherently existent, and existing from its own side.

The most difficult thing for us is not being able to distinguish between existence and inherent existence. Whatever appears to us appears as inherently existent. We think this is how things exist. If they exist, they are necessary inherently existent. It is most important for us to be able to differentiate between existence and inherent existence.

The “I” cannot be found

In his *Precious Garland*, Nagarjuna said that we should look for the “I” on the basis of designation. In this case, the basis of designation is the aggregates, the body and mind. We should investigate to see if the “I” is among the aggregates. As we are made up of the four elements, is the “I” the earth, water, fire, or wind? Or is the “I” the consciousness? We should also investigate whether the “I” is the collection of all of these together.

When we think of the “I,” what naturally comes to mind is that the “I” appears to exist from its own side, from the side of the aggregates. There is an “I” somewhere either on the body or the mind, or both the body and mind, or the collection of all these things. This is how the “I” appears to us. Not only that. We *believe* that the “I” is probably like that.

The question is, “Does the “I” exist in the way it appears?” Although it appears in such a way, will we be able to find the “I” among the basis of designation?

Nagarjuna encourages us to look and search for this “I,” “Is it the body? Is it the mind?” and so forth. He concluded by saying that when you look for it, you would not be able to point to the body, or the mind, or anything else for that matter where you can say, “That is the “I” or the person.”

Although the “I” appears to exist inherently, appears to exist from its own side, and appears to be findable among the bases of designation, the aggregates, i.e., the body and mind, when you look for it, you will not be able to find such an “I.” The fact that such an inherently existent “I” cannot be found when we search for it shows that the “I” does not exist inherently.

The “I” exists!

Instead what you find is the emptiness of the inherently existent “I.” When you look for the “I” among the bases of designation, eliminating them one by one, still you will not be able to find the “I.” This will naturally lead you to think, “If that is the case, does that mean that the “I” does *not* exist?” Although you are unable

to find the “I,” that does *not* mean that the “I” is non-existent. That is incorrect. Obviously the “I” exists. This can be established through common sense and our own experience. Definitely there is a self, a person, or “I” who wishes to be happy and who does not want to suffer. Although you are unable to find the “I,” that does *not* mean that you have found the *non-existence* of the “I.” This is the difference.

The question is, “How does the “I” exist?” The “I” exists, but the “I” is:

- not existing on or among the bases of designation,
- not the body or mind, and
- not the collection of the body and mind.

The “I” cannot be found on the basis of designation yet the “I” exists. The “I” does not exist inherently. The “I” is none other than that which is merely imputed or posited by the mind in dependence upon the aggregates, the bases of designation. There is nothing more to the “I” than that.

Sequence of realising inherent existence

According to the CMWS, first we should reflect on the emptiness of inherent existence on the basis of the “I” rather than thinking about the emptiness of inherent existence of phenomena other than the “I.” It is said that it is easier to gain an initial comprehension of the emptiness of inherent existence when we think about it on the basis of the “I” or person.

However this does not mean that it will be easy. It is *extremely* difficult to understand the emptiness of inherent existence. In order to understand or to realise emptiness, first we have to identify correctly and experience what exactly we are negating, i.e., in philosophical language, the object of negation. In this case, in relation to the “I,” it is the inherently existent “I.”

It is very difficult to be able to identify and experience this because we cannot differentiate between (1) the inherently existent “I” that does *not* exist and (2) the conventionally existent “I” that *does* exist. To us, these two are mixed up. Therefore we find it very difficult to identify correctly and experience the target. What exactly are we targeting at? What exactly are we negating?

How the other tenets assert external objects

The greatest difficulty is to differentiate between actual existence and inherent existence. We think that for anything to exist, it means it must be inherently existent. We cannot differentiate between these two. Because this is so difficult, therefore all the tenets starting from the AMWS and those below it assert that if phenomena exist, they *must* exist inherently. Otherwise they *cannot* exist. *With the exception of the CMWS*, they assert that things exist inherently, are findable, and definitely, you will be able to point to something that you can say is the object.

For most people, to even entertain the idea that phenomena are merely imputed by the mind means that you can simply make up anything with your mind. For most people, this is an untenable idea. How can that be? Definitely there must be something about a phenomenon that comes from its own side, something that is inherently existent. Therefore with the exception of the CMWS, everyone asserts that if it exists, it is *necessarily* inherently existent.

The GES and the SS assert external objects. They assert that the external objects are findable, i.e., when you look for it, you will be able to point to something that is the external object.

The MOS do not assert external objects. According to them, when you look for an external object, you will not be able to find it. Therefore they refute external objects.

Whether it is the assertion of the GES and the SS with respect to external objects or whether it is the refutation by the MOS of external objects, these assertions or refutation of external objects hinge on whether, from their view, external objects can be found or not.

The CMWS's assertion of external objects

The CMWS asserts external objects too but their reason for asserting external objects is unlike the reasons of the GES and the SS. The CMWS do not assert external objects because they are findable.

According to the CMWS, *everything* that exists can *only* exist as merely imputed by mind and is *not* findable upon analysis. Because external and internal objects, the apprehender and the apprehended, and the object and subject exist conventionally (or are conventionally existent), therefore external objects can exist. How do they exist? External objects exist conventionally. They are conventionally existent. The CMWS assert conventionally existent external objects.

The most difficult thing about the view of the CMWS is to understand how things can exist as merely imputed by thought only. It is extremely complicated. While on the one hand, anything that exists exist as merely imputed by thought, on the other hand, it does *not* mean that everything that is imputed by thought exists.

Khen Rinpoche (holding up his key chain): Maybe I will give an example. I have a story about my key chain.

This key chain was given to me by someone six or seven years ago. The first time when I got this key chain, I thought that the "G" (the logo on the key chain) is for Geshe, symbolising Geshe Chonyi. I thought that is why they put the "G" there. This was what I believed for almost for five to six years. In my mind this was a valid belief. But the reality was not that.

How I did I find out after five or six years? There was one nine or ten year old child who saw my key chain. He said "Oh!" He seemed shocked when he saw my key chain. He told his mother, "Geshe-la has this key chain." I still didn't know what he meant and why he was shocked.

You know why? Because this logo on the key chain is the brand name of GUCCI! I didn't know that. That was why the child was quite surprised that I had such a key chain. I asked the mother, "What is this about?" but she didn't say much.

Only later I found out from someone that this is a real GUCCI key chain. After that I had this valid cognition of a GUCCI key chain! The idea that it symbolised Geshe Chonyi is not valid. My mind labelled and made that up, "This means Geshe Chonyi." Whether it was true or not, to my mind, it was true.

If you are someone who knows this brand, you do not see “Geshe Chonyi.” At the end of the day, it is a GUCCI key chain for somebody who labelled it as a GUCCI key chain.

What I am saying here is that your thought labels the object and you believe in that label. In reality it is not that (label). Only later I found out the (correct) label. But that was also labelled by mind, labelled by someone. Now the label I have is valid. So, it is quite complicated.

Also last time, I mentioned the story of being at the Botanic Gardens. It was the same thing. When you say “monk,” it is also a label. It does not exist from the side of my robes. Everyone who sees me wearing these robes thinks that, “Oh, this is a monk” exists from its own side. But in reality, it doesn’t exist from its own side.

I have this name, Geshe Chonyi, but Geshe also does not exist from its own side. You give the name Khen Rinpoche but this also does not exist from its own side. It is very clear. As mentioned, the tourist did not see me as a monk. If that is the case, how can he see Geshe, this label of Geshe. It is not possible.

Existing as merely imputed on the basis of designation

Regardless of the phenomenon in question, that phenomenon does *not* exist from the side of the basis of designation. The phenomenon exists as *merely imputed in dependence* on the basis of designation.

If you were asked, “How does that phenomenon exist?” you can only say, “It exists as merely imputed in dependence on its basis of designation.” This is a most difficult thing to understand. That is why Nagarjuna said in his *Precious Garland*, “A being is not earth, not water,/ Not fire, not wind, not space,/ Not consciousness, and not all of them.”

The person is *not* the elements that make up the body. The person is also *not* the consciousness.

- Does that mean that the person does not exist? No. The person exists.
- *How* does the person exist? The person is the collection of the elements and consciousness. What that means is that the person is none other than that which is merely imputed in dependence upon the body and mind, the basis of designation.
- Because the person is none other than that which is merely imputed in dependence upon the basis of designation, that means the person does *not* exist inherently. The person does not exist from his/her own side.
- The conclusion is that the person is that which is merely imputed in dependence upon the aggregates, the body and mind.

Having said that, some people may wonder and think, “Yes, the person is merely imputed in dependence upon the body and mind but maybe the body and mind themselves exist inherently.” One may have this kind of thought. But even the aggregates themselves, whether it is the body or the mind, also do not exist from their own side. They do not exist inherently.

Relative existences

Imagine that there are two people walking towards one another. As they walk towards one another, someone comes along and crosses the paths of these two people. From the perspective of this person, when he looks at the person on his

right, what he sees is that there is a person going towards the other person. Then when he looks to his left, he feels that the other person is coming towards this person. The fact that there is a person going and there is a person coming is only posited in dependence on the view of this person standing in the middle.

To this person in the middle, what he sees is a person going and a person coming. But this coming and going is only posited in dependence upon the existence of these two people who are in motion. You cannot posit coming and going without depending on these two people moving.

In the texts, there is an example of the mountain on this side and the mountain on the other side. Whether it is the mountain on this side or the mountain on the other side is dependent on a certain perspective.

When you are standing on this mountain looking at the other mountain, you call that mountain, “the mountain on the other side.” However if you were standing on that mountain, then that mountain would become “the mountain of this side.” So the mountain of this side and the mountain of the other side are relative to one another.

What this example shows is that there is no such thing as the mountain of the other side that exists independently on its own, from its own side. If there was a real mountain of the other side existing from its own side as the mountain of the other side, that mountain will *always* be the mountain of the other side. It can never be the mountain of this side. But obviously this is not the case. If you were to stand on that mountain, it becomes the mountain of this side. The fact that it exists as the mountain of the other side is relative and is imputed. Because it is relative, its existence as the mountain of the other side is dependent on something else. Therefore its existence as the mountain of the other side is changeable.

Dependent origination & potential for change

According to the MWS, the main reason why we all can become buddhas is because our minds are not truly existent and therefore they can change. This is different from the view of the MOS. According to the MOS, everything is in the nature of the mind. So everything that exists arises due to the awakening of predispositions that produce the appearances of particular objects.

But for the MWS, everything that exists exist as dependently originated. All phenomena are dependently originated, including the mind. For that reason, all phenomena including the mind do not exist truly or do not exist inherently. Because of not existing inherently therefore, when causes and conditions come together, change can be effected.

All phenomena are empty of existing inherently because all phenomena are dependently originated or dependently arisen. Because phenomena are dependently arisen, when certain factors come together, things do change. You have the arising of certain phenomena and you have the disintegration or disappearance of certain phenomena. Whole varieties of phenomena exist because things are dependently originated or dependently arisen. When the necessary factors come together, you have the appearances of whole varieties of phenomena. This shows that things are dependently originated. If things are dependently originated, they cannot be inherently existent. As all phenomena arise from emptiness, therefore there is some meaning to phrases such as:

- All phenomena are the display of emptiness.
- All phenomena are the play of emptiness.
- All phenomena are in the nature of emptiness.

The object of negation: the inherently existent “I”

When we are emotionally upset or angry because someone points out our faults, criticises us, and puts us down, or when, for whatever reason, we feel very proud, it is possible to get a glimpse of the “I” appearing to exist from its own side, appearing as inherently existent.

At those times when the “I” is upset or hurt, the “I” seems very real. Briefly you can feel that it is somewhere there among the bases of designation. That feeling is very real. When we are criticised, there is the “I” feeling very bad, low, and depressed. At other times when we are praised, we feel this very elevated sense of the “I.” We all have these different experiences of how the “I” appears to be inherently existent from its own side. That is the target and the thing that we need to destroy.

We talked about the object of negation:

- the thing that you are targeting at
- the thing that you are trying to realise is empty and non-existent
- the false sense of the “I” whether it is a depressed “I” or an elevated sense of the “I”

This “I” is somewhere inside you. You feel you can almost touch it. You know it is there. That is the target. That is the object of negation. That is the thing that we need to destroy.

When you have some experience of identifying correctly this false sense of the “I”—the “I” that does not exist but nevertheless appears to be real in either an elevated or depressed way in emotionally charged situations—this is the time to you think about what Nagarjuna said, i.e., “Where is this “I”? Is it the body? Is it the mind?” When you have a good understanding and you do this correctly, then you will start to have a sense of the tightness that is our grasping at the “I” loosening. You feel relieved. You start to understand that this “I” does not exist.

Whether we call it the object of negation or target, essentially it is this false sense of the “I” that appears so real and appears to be findable among the aggregates. The source of all our problems comes from feeling either too full of ourselves or, at the other end of the spectrum, feeling that one is bad, hopeless, useless, and so forth. All the problems and unhappiness come from this false sense of the “I.”

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 coarse and subtle conceptions of a self together with their seeds and the attachment and so forth that arise due to the force of those [conceptions]

together with their seeds are afflictive obscurations. They are posited as obscurations that mainly prevent the attainment of liberation (Pages 26 - 27).

Afflictive obscurations

- The conception of a coarse self of persons is the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person.
- The conception of a subtle self of persons is the conception of a truly existent person.

These two conceptions—the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person and the conception of a truly existent person together with their seeds that they plant on the mind together with the afflictions that arise from those seeds and conceptions—are posited to be afflictive obscurations. The afflictive obscurations hinders the attainment of liberation from samsara so, according to the CMWS, in order to achieve liberation, one must abandon them.

The conception of a truly existent person is not the only afflictive obscuration: The conception of the aggregates as truly existent or the conception of a phenomenon other than the person to be truly existent are also afflictive obscurations.

The conception of a self of persons and the conception of a self of phenomena are both afflictive obscurations. As mentioned in the previous lesson, these two conceptions are not differentiated by their object of negation. Both these conceptions have to be abandoned for liberation to be achieved, i.e., in order to achieve liberation, one must directly realise the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena.

Realising selflessness of persons is not enough

The assertion of the CMWS is different from the other tenets up to the Autonomists. The Autonomists and the tenets below them assert that, in order to achieve liberation, you *only* have to realise the selflessness of persons. You do not need to realise the selflessness of phenomena. According to the CMWS, in order to achieve liberation, you must realise *both* the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena.

Why is it that the CMWS asserts that, in order to achieve liberation, you must abandon *both* the conception of the self of persons and the conception of the self of phenomena whereas, according to the other tenets, you only need to abandon the conception of the self of persons? The difference in their positions comes about due to what is posited to be the root of samsara.

The AMWS and the tenets below it posit that the root of samsara is the conception of the self of persons. According to them, this is ignorance, the root of samsara. That being the case, you only need to get rid of that conception in order to achieve liberation. Therefore according to these tenets, all you have to do is to directly realise the selflessness of persons. With that realisation, you will be able to achieve liberation.

The CMWS also assert that ignorance is the root of samsara but for this school, ignorance is not only the conception of the self of persons. The conception of the self of persons is ignorance that is the root of samsara. But the conception of the self of persons arises on the basis of the conception of the self of phenomena, specifically conceiving the aggregates, the body and mind, to be inherently

existent. Therefore for the CMWS, ignorance is posited to be the conceptions of *both* the self of persons and the self of phenomena.

In order to achieve liberation, one must realise directly the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena before one is rid of ignorance. The assertion that one *must* abandon the conception of the self of phenomena in order to achieve liberation is a *unique feature* of the CMWS.

Obscurations to knowledge

The latencies of the conception of true existence and all factors of mistaken dualistic appearance that arise due to the force of those [latencies] are obscurations to knowledge. They are posited as obscurations that mainly prevent the attainment of omniscience (Page 27).

If both the conception of the self of persons and the conception of the self of phenomena are posited to be afflictive obscurations, what remains is called the obscurations to knowledge (or knowledge obscurations):

- These are the latencies (or imprints, predispositions) placed on the mind by the conception of true existence.
- Not only that, all the mistaken dualistic appearances that arise due to the force of those latencies are also posited to be the obscurations to knowledge. They mainly hinder the attainment of omniscience or full enlightenment. Therefore in order to achieve omniscience, one must abandon the obscurations to knowledge.

The hearers and solitary realisers do not abandon the obscurations to knowledge nor are they capable of abandoning them. On the Mahayana path, the abandoning of the obscurations to knowledge does not begin till *after* the eighth bodhisattva ground is achieved. On the Mahayana path, the afflictive obscurations are abandoned when one achieves the eighth bodhisattva ground (or the eighth bhumi). Only then does the abandoning of the obscurations to knowledge start.

I will talk a little bit more about the Mahayana paths and grounds according to the CMWS in the first two lessons of the next module when we look at the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*. Without some basic understanding of the paths and grounds, it makes things a bit complicated when we look at the *Heart of the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra*.

7B Actual presentation of the grounds and paths

There is no difference in terms of superiority among the views that are the objects of meditation of the persons of all three vehicles because all three are similar in taking the subtle selflessness of persons and the subtle selflessness of phenomena as their main objects of meditation (Page 27).

Although the persons of all three vehicles do not have different objects of meditation, they differ with respect to their main objects of abandonment.

There are differences with respect to their main objects of abandonment because hearers and solitary realizers take the two conceptions of a self together with their

seeds as their main objects of abandonment, whereas bodhisattvas take the latencies of those [conceptions] as their main objects of abandonment (Page 27).

There are differences between the Hinayana and Mahayana with respect to their main objects of abandonment.

The suchness that is qualified by the abandonment of the two conceptions of a self together with their seeds in the continuum of a hearer or solitary realizer foe destroyer in meditative equipoise is a nirvana without remainder, whereas such a suchness in the continuum of a hearer or solitary realizer foe destroyer in post-equipoise is a nirvana with remainder (Page 27).

Nirvana without remainder and nirvana with remainder

The nirvana that is in the continuum of a hearer or solitary realiser arhat (or foe destroyer) is the factor of abandonment of the afflictive obscurations, i.e., the mind's emptiness of true existence. This suchness of the mind in the continuum of an arhat is posited to be nirvana or the sorrowless state. Now you know what nirvana is.

There is nirvana with remainder and nirvana without remainder. According to the CMWS, one achieves the nirvana without remainder first followed subsequently by the achievement of nirvana with remainder.

What is nirvana without remainder? Nirvana without remainder is the factor of abandonment of the afflictive obscurations in the continuum of a superior in meditative equipoise. To keep it simple, when the hearer or solitary realiser arhat is in the meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness, what he has achieved in his mind is a thorough abandonment of the afflictive obscurations. This state of abandonment, while he is in meditative equipoise directly focusing on emptiness, is nirvana without remainder.

Why is it called a nirvana without remainder? When that arhat is in meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness, in that state of realisation, all dualistic appearances have completely subsided. This means that no dualistic appearances remain. For that reason, it is called a nirvana without remainder.

When that arhat arises from meditative equipoise and enters post-equipoise, he still has dualistic appearance. The dualistic appearances come back again. He also has the appearance of truly existent phenomena, i.e., phenomena appear as truly existent.

This arhat has already abandoned all afflictive obscurations and achieved nirvana yet, in post-equipoise, he has all these mistaken dualistic appearances. Therefore when the arhat is in post-equipoise, that state is called nirvana with remainder.

For those of the Great Vehicle lineage who are definite in that lineage from the very beginning, the [complete] abandonment of the afflictive obscurations occurs simultaneously with the attainment of the eighth ground, and the [complete] abandonment of the obscurations to knowledge occurs simultaneously with the actualizing of the four bodies (Page 27).

Khen Rinpoche: All right. That is the end of tenets!

Exam on Sunday, 23rd June 2013

As mentioned before, the exam is scheduled for Sunday, 23rd June at 10.30am in the morning.

Try to study as much as possible and as much as you are able to for the exam. As I mentioned before, the *only* reason for having exams is that it gives us the reason to learn and to study. That is the only reason. There is no other reason. It is the preparation and reviewing of the information that is of the utmost importance.

It is not about doing well or not doing well, passing or not passing. I don't see any meaning or point in someone who doesn't really study but comes for the exam. Even if this person manages to pass the exam, I don't see any meaning in that. What is the point? I notice that there are people who just come and sit for the exam. Even if they pass, I don't see any great purpose in that.

Of course the choice is yours. I mean that if you like to do that, you can come. No one is stopping you. But it doesn't fulfil any purpose in the end. What is more important is the constant engagement with the material. Looking at the material, thinking about what you have learnt—that is what matters.

Try to learn as much as possible. I understand it is difficult but learning the Buddhadharma is a meritorious and virtuous activity. Especially since we all have the opportunity to do so now. We are so fortunate just to have the opportunity to do this. No matter how well or badly we may be doing in our studies, the point is that we have the opportunity to study the Dharma. This shows that we are very fortunate indeed.

As much as possible, while we are still alive, not stricken down with some serious sickness, or facing many major obstacles, while there is still the opportunity, we should learn as much as possible.

From my side, even to teach is not an easy thing. I also find it difficult but I always think that sharing and teaching this subject helps me to accumulate merit. It is virtuous and meritorious. This is what keeps me going. Otherwise it is challenging to teach these topics.

Therefore as much as possible, continue to learn and to study. We should, as much as possible, leave imprints in our minds. It is also very important to constantly make aspirational prayers that, from life to life without break, we will always be able to meet the teachings of the Buddha, be able to hear and reflect on these great treatises, and to be able to practice these teachings. It is very important to meditate on how fortunate you are even if you are only able to get a little bit of information out of this. Every time you are able to learn a new word or some new concept, you should feel how fortunate you are.

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