

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: 3

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In the last lesson we looked at who is a proponent of Buddhist tenets. A person who propounds Buddhist tenets firstly is a Buddhist. As discussed, whether someone is a Buddhist or not is determined by whether that person accepts the Three Jewels as their objects of refuge. On top of that he accepts the four seals. The four seals are the four features that attest to a particular teaching or doctrine to be Buddhist. These are the two characteristics that constitute the person who propounds Buddhist tenets.

The proponent of Buddhist tenets is a Buddhist, that is:

- someone who accepts the Three Jewels as their objects of refuge
- someone who also accept the four seals

How many divisions of proponent of Buddhist tenets are there? There are four divisions of proponents of Buddhist tenets:

1. The Proponents of the Great Exposition (Sanskrit: *Vaibhasika*),
2. The Proponents of Sutra (Skt. *Sautrantika*),
3. The Proponents of Mind Only (Skt. *Cittamatra*) and
4. The Proponents of the Middle Way (Skt. *Madhyamika*).

These are the four divisions of proponents of Buddhist tenets. This number is definite. There are only four and not more than four divisions. These proponents of Buddhist tenets are all followers of the Buddha.

As I mentioned in the previous lesson:

- the Proponents of the Great Exposition and the Proponents of Sutra are the followers of the first turning of the Wheel of Dharma.
- the Proponents of the Middle Way are the followers of the second turning of the Wheel of Dharma.
- the Proponents of the Mind Only are the followers of the third turning of the Wheel of Dharma.

Great Exposition School

The explanation of the Great Exposition School (Skt. *Vaibhasika*) has seven outlines:

1. definition,
2. divisions,
3. etymology,

4. way of asserting objects,
5. way of asserting object-possessors,
6. way of asserting selflessness and
7. presentation of the grounds and paths.

1 Definition

The definition of a Proponent of the Great Exposition is: a person propounding Lesser Vehicle (*Skt. Hinayana*) tenets who does not assert self-cognizers but does assert truly existent¹ external objects (Page 2).

“Self-cognisers” is also translated as self-knowers.

The Proponents of the Great Exposition are those who:

- do not assert self-cognisers,
- assert truly established external objects, and
- propound Hinayana tenets.

In the traditional study of Buddhist philosophy, the study of lo-rig (mind and awarenesses) is usually done before the study of tenets. This is why the tenets module comes after lo-rig. In the lo-rig module, one would have studied the different kinds of mind such as the self-knower. On the basis of that understanding, it is not so difficult when one looks at this definition. When you are looking at this subject without any prior understanding of lo-rig, then it will be more challenging.

Self-knowers

The Proponents of the Great Exposition do not assert self-knowers (also known as self-cognisers), but the Proponents of Sutra and the Proponents of the Mind Only do assert self-knowers.

As covered in lo-rig, when we talk about the consciousnesses, we can look at them in terms of other-knowers and self-knowers. Consciousness itself is clear and knowing. According to those who assert self-knowers, within the collection of one consciousness:

- there is a part of the consciousness that knows an object other than itself. This is the other-knower.
- there is also another part of the consciousness that knows itself. This is the self-knower.

For example, for an eye consciousness apprehending blue, within that collection of an eye consciousness apprehending blue:

- there is a part of that mind that knows itself. This part of the mind is the self-knower.

¹ Refer to page 179 in *Cutting Through Appearances, Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism*, by Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins (New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1989), henceforth referred to as *Cutting Through Appearances* for short. For the sake of clarity, “truly established” will be substituted for “truly existent.”

- there is another part of that mind to which the object blue appears clearly and this eye consciousness is cognising the object blue. This part of the mind is called the other-knower.

The Proponents of the Great Exposition do not assert self-knowers, i.e., they do not assert that the consciousness has the ability to see itself clearly. As you know, a self-knower is that which has the aspect of an apprehender. So the Proponent of the Great Exposition does not assert self-knowers. I think that this is easy to understand for those who studied lo-rig in the previous module.

To summarise, the Proponent of the Great Exposition asserts that consciousnesses are only other-knowers and consciousnesses do not have the aspect that look at the consciousness itself clearly.

Truly established external objects

The Proponents of the Great Exposition assert truly established external objects. They assert (1) external objects, and they assert that (2) these external objects are truly established.

What does an “external object” mean? An external object is a coarse object that is formed through the aggregation of many subtle particles coming together forming a coarse object that is suitable to be apprehended by a sense consciousness and therefore it is a condition for the production of, for example, a sense consciousness apprehending it. External objects exist before the consciousness apprehending them can be generated. So the Proponents of the Great Exposition assert external objects.

On top of that they assert that external objects are truly established. This is because for them anything that exists has a substance about it. There is something right there that exists independently as a substance. This has nothing to do with the mind imputing it. They don’t know how to explain or assert a position where the mind plays a part in the existence of the object. For them, there is something right there that exists independently as a substance and therefore, things are truly established.

The Proponents of the Great Exposition are unable to posit that there is a part of phenomena that is imputed by consciousness. Rather for them, if things exist, they are truly established in the sense that there is something right there independently. This something can be called “substance.” Therefore, to the Proponents of the Great Exposition, everything that exists is necessarily substantially established.

When these distinguishing features exist, then that makes the person in question a Proponent of the Great Exposition. When there is a person who does not assert self-knowers but who asserts truly established objects and is a proponent of Hinayana tenets, then that makes him a Proponent of the Great Exposition.

Of course it is not possible to understand everything at once, but you have to memorise the definition. When you do not memorise the definition, there is nothing for you to think about. For now, if you are able to say a person who is a Proponent of the Great Exposition does not assert self-knowers but asserts truly established objects and is a proponent of Hinayana tenets, that is enough.

On the basis of being able to recall these few points and on the basis of having this information in your mind, after a while, naturally questions will arise, "What is a self-knower? What is an external object? What does truly established mean?" Then it will become clearer and clearer as you start to think about these points. The basis for you to understand from the very beginning what a Proponent of the Great Exposition is is memorising the definition. Without that, there is no basis for you to learn and understand.

2 Divisions

There are three divisions:²

1. Proponents of the Great Exposition from Kashmir,
2. Proponents of the Great Exposition from the Western Region (Skt. *Aparantakas*) and
3. Proponents of the Great Exposition from the Central Region (Skt. *Magadhas*).

3 Etymology

Why are they called 'Proponents of Particulars'?

They are called such because they propound tenets through following [Vasumitra's] *Great Exposition of Particulars* (Skt. *Mahavibhasa*) or, alternatively, they are called Proponents of Particulars because they propound the three times to be particulars [i.e., instances] of substances (Page 2).

There is a set of teaching called *The Seven Knowledges* that was composed primarily by Buddha's main disciples, the Arhats Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. *The Seven Knowledges* is not the actual speech of the Buddha. The Proponents of the Great Exposition take these teachings to be the teachings of the Buddha. The *Great Exposition of Particulars* mentioned in the etymology are the commentaries on *The Seven Knowledges*. It is said that this particular text is huge and is composed of about 100,000 verses. Later in time Vasubandhu condensed the essential meaning of the *Great Exposition of Particulars* and wrote the *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* (Skt. *Abhidharmakosa*).

Here we are looking at the etymology of why they are called "Proponents of Particulars." One explanation is that they are followers of the text, *Great Exposition of Particulars*.

"Alternatively, they are called Proponents of Particulars because they propound the three times to be particulars [i.e., instances] of substances": Composed phenomena have the factors of production, abiding, and disintegration. For the Proponents of the Great Exposition, these three factors can be related to the

² There is also a division into 18 sub-schools: Majority Community, One Convention, Proponents of World-Transcendence, Much Hearing, Proponents of Imputation, Monument Ones, Eastern Mountain Ones, Western Mountain Ones, Abiding Firmly, Proponents of the Existence of All, Vatsiputra Followers, Dharmottara Followers, Bhadrarayana Followers, Mahasammata Followers, Great Teaching, Dharmagupta Followers, Kashyapa Followers and Uttara Followers. [*Maps of the Profound* (Hopkins) pages 210-217]

three times. For the Proponents of the Great Exposition, the three times are particulars or instances of substances.

An example to understand the three times to be particulars of substances is this. A golden cup is made from gold. This golden cup is melted down and transformed into a golden plate. Later, the golden plate is again melted down and remoulded into a statue. As the golden cup becomes a golden plate, its entity has changed as it is no longer a cup but it has become a plate. When it is melted down again and remoulded into a statue, its entity changes again into that of a statue. As the golden objects undergo transformation, their entities change but the fact that the substance is gold has not changed.

Another example: the sprout of the past, present, and future. The sprouts of these three times are different and change as the past sprout is not the present sprout and the present sprout is not the future sprout. But the sprouts of the past, present, and future are sprouts that, being a substance, have not changed.

The future sprout is posited at the time of the seed. The present sprout is posited when the sprout first arises. The past sprout is posited when the sprout matures, becomes a tree and bears fruit. The sprout ceases to exist. At the time of the fruit, there is no sprout left.

When you think about the explanation of the past, present, and future sprouts, their entities have changed but the substance of them being a sprout has not changed because the substance remains. The substance, sprout, exists in the past, present, and future sprouts.

Another example: A young girl can be said to be a future mother. In future, when she conceives and gives birth, she becomes a mother. When she passes away from this life, then she is a past mother.

Just like the substance, sprout, that exists in the past, present, and future, so this substance, mother, also exists in the past, present, and future.

Someone who propounds the three times to be particulars of substances is called a Proponent of Particulars.

4 Way of asserting objects

The definition of thing is: that which is able to perform a function.

Thing, existent, and object of knowledge are equivalent.

There are two types of things:

1. permanent things and
2. impermanent things.

Examples of permanent things are uncompounded space, analytical cessations, and non-analytical cessations.

Examples of impermanent things are created phenomena, products, and impermanent phenomena (Pages 2 – 3).

According to the Great Exposition School (GES), thing, existent, and object of knowledge are mutually inclusive. The presentation of the GES is different from what we learned in lo-rig.

According to the GES, there are two types of things:

1. permanent things
2. impermanent things

We are not going into details in class. Those who are interested to know a little bit more about the GES's idea of what constitutes reality, you can do so in your private discussions or during the Sunday sessions. For those who have done the previous module, there is not much to be said about this although there are some slight differences but generally we had covered them. For those who are new and would like to learn more, you can do so privately.

Another way of dividing things is into:

1. conventional truths and
2. ultimate truths.

The definition of a conventional truth is: a phenomenon such that an awareness apprehending it is cancelled if it is broken up or mentally separated into its individual parts.

Illustrations [of conventional truths] are, for example, a vase and a woollen cloth because if a vase is broken with a hammer, the mind apprehending it is cancelled, and if a woollen cloth is separated into its individual threads, the mind apprehending it is cancelled (Page 3).

According to the GES, a vase is an illustration of a conventional truth because when the vase is smashed with a hammer, the valid cogniser apprehending the vase ceases to exist. When you conceive a vase, you are conceiving it in terms of its shape that looks like a vase. When the vase is smashed, the mind apprehending it is cancelled or ceases.

Another subtler example: the water in a cup. According to Buddhist philosophy, water is an aggregation of eight different kinds of particles. This is the Buddhist formulation of what constitutes atomic reality. The particles are earth particle, water, fire, and wind. There are four others: form, smell, taste, and touch.

Water is an aggregation of these eight particles. Let us assume that water has this nature. If the water is individually isolated into its different parts, i.e., we take away its smell, its taste, and so forth, one by one, at the end of it, there will be no water left and the mind apprehending the water is cancelled.

These are some of the examples that illustrate what a conventional truth is, whether it be a vase that is smashed by a hammer or mentally isolating the eight particles that make up water, the mind apprehending the vase or water is cancelled or ceases.

For the Proponents of the Great Exposition, conventional truth is also referred to as conventionally existent, conventionally established, or imputedly existent. According to the GES, these are different ways of saying the same thing.

The definition of an ultimate truth is: A phenomenon such that an awareness apprehending it is not cancelled if it is broken up or mentally separated into its individual parts.

Illustrations [of ultimate truths] are, for example, directionally partless particles, temporally partless [moments of] consciousness, and uncompounded phenomena.

The *Treasury of Manifest Knowledge* (Skt. *Abhidharmakosa*) says: “Those things – such as a pot or water – that the mind cannot engage if they are broken or mentally separated into other [things] exist as conventional [truths]. Others exist as ultimate [truths].”

The three times are asserted to be substances. A pot is asserted to exist also at the time of the past of the pot and at the time of the future of the pot (Page 3).

This school asserts directionally partless particles. This refers to the smallest possible particle. We can say that this is the basic building block of matter. For them, such a particle is directionally partless. Such a directionally partless particle is an ultimate truth. For them, the smallest particle is directionally partless. We cannot do anything to destroy this directionally partless particle or mentally break it up into something smaller because it is the smallest possible particle. So for them, it is an ultimate truth.

Similarly, when we talk about consciousness, there are temporally partless moments of consciousness. For the GES, for the same reason, in terms of time, the smallest moment of time is also an ultimate truth.

Uncompounded space would also be an illustration of an ultimate truth. Perhaps the reason why it is an illustration of an ultimate truth is because uncompounded space is permanent. Therefore it does not undergo change. For that reason, it fits into the definition of being an ultimate truth. Perhaps just as uncompounded space itself does not undergo change, therefore the valid cogniser apprehending the uncompounded space will not undergo change as well, i.e., the valid cogniser cannot be cancelled.

According to this school, ultimate truth, ultimately existent, ultimately established and substantially existent means the same thing.

Substantially established vs. substantially existent

According to the GES, if it is an established base, which means it is an existent, it is necessarily substantially established. All phenomena are necessarily substantially established, but whatever is substantially established is not necessarily substantially existent. Substantial existence is related to the ultimate truth.

In general, when we say something is substantially existent or substantially established, they mean the same thing. But, in this particular context, when we are looking at the divisions of established base, according to the GES, substantially existent and substantially established do *not* mean the same thing.

- Although all phenomena are substantially established, they are not necessarily substantially existent.
- According to this school, all phenomena are necessarily truly established but,

at the same time, it does not mean that everything is necessarily ultimately established.

- For this school, if it is an established base, it is necessarily truly established but whatever is truly established is not necessarily ultimately established because if something is ultimately established, it is substantially existent and that is an ultimate truth.

Going back to this school's understanding of conventional truth, a vase is a conventional truth. The word for conventional is "*kun rdzob*." In the higher schools, "*kun rdzob*" is translated as "obscurational." We cannot translate it as either conventional or obscurational all the time because it depends on the context.

There are different ways of looking at the word, "*kun rdzob*." In this context, the vase is a conventional truth. It is conventional because its existence is the aggregation of many factors coming together. When everything comes together, that phenomenon comes into being and that phenomenon is produced. Therefore it is a truth. The vase, in this sense, is a conventional truth.

A directionally partless particle is not a conventional truth because a directionally partless particle is the smallest possible particle and it stands alone on its own without depending on anything else. The element of having to depend on something else is not there. Therefore it is not a conventional truth. It is an ultimate truth.

	CONVENTIONAL TRUTH	ULTIMATE TRUTH
Great Exposition school (Vaibhasika)	A phenomenon which is such that, if it were broken or mentally separated into parts, the mind apprehending that object would cease	A phenomenon which is such that, if it were broken or mentally separated into parts, the mind apprehending that object would not cease

Question: Referring to the definition of a Proponent of the Great Exposition, it is mentioned that they assert truly established external objects. Is a truly established external object the same as an inherently existent object?

Answer: What the highest school says about a thing not being truly established is the very thing that the GES says does exist, i.e., true establishment.

Question: What exactly are Hinayana tenets? Do Mahayanists hold such a view? The Consequence Middle Way School (CMWS) asserts that all arhats realise the same emptiness at the point of achieving liberation. Why is it called Hinayana tenets when eventually all arhats realise the emptiness defined by the CMWS?

Answer: Literally speaking, the Mahayana is the Great Vehicle and the Hinayana is the Lesser Vehicle. For the person who enters the path, whether he is entering a Hinayana path or a Mahayana path, he has entered a path. The difference between these two paths depends on whether there is bodhicitta in the person's mind or not. There is a difference in terms of the vastness of the motivation in the mind. Someone who has bodhicitta is someone who has entered the Mahayana path. Otherwise, he is someone who has entered the Hinayana path. Therefore there is a Mahayanist and a Hinayanist.

The question then is: Is a Mahayanist and a Hinayanist the same as a proponent of Mahayana tenets and a proponent of Hinayana tenets?

Earlier on we saw that there are four proponents of Buddhist tenets:

1. The Proponents of the Great Exposition
2. The Proponents of Sutra
3. The Proponents of Mind Only and
4. The Proponents of the Middle Way

The Proponents of the Great Exposition and the Proponents of Sutra are the proponents of Hinayana tenets.

The Proponents of Mind Only and the Proponents of the Middle Way are the proponents of Mahayana tenets.

Is there a Proponent of Great Exposition who has entered the Mahayana path? When you think about it, there is no reason to say, “no” as it is possible that there is someone who is a Proponent of the Great Exposition that are Hinayana tenets but who has entered a Mahayana path.

It is also possible to say that there are hearer arhats who are Proponents of the Middle Way or the Proponents of Mind Only.

When you think about this, you should be able to see that a Hinayanist is not necessarily a proponent of Hinayana tenets. Likewise a Mahayanist is not necessarily a proponent of Mahayana tenets.

What we have said so far is non-contentious and is quite clear. But when we look at what exactly are Hinayana tenets and what defines Hinayana tenets, this is something that we need to think about.

Can we say that Hinayana tenets are a system that believes in truly established external objects and not the self-knower? Can the system include the assertion of truly established external objects and self-knowers, which is the definition of the Sutra School?

When these defining characteristics are put together, can these defining characteristics be the defining characteristics of what constitutes the Hinayana tenets?

Is there someone who is a proponent of Mahayana tenets and is a Hinayana arhat? Yes, it is possible.

One can also say that there can be a proponent of Hinayana tenets who has entered the Mahayana path.

So there is a difference between a Hinayanist and a proponent of Hinayana tenets.

Question: A Proponent of the Great Exposition is defined as a person who asserts truly established external objects. According to the chart (extract appears below), a conventional truth is truly established but not truly existent. In this context then, is the external object referred to in the definition a conventional truth or an ultimate truth?

Answer: In this school, conventional truth, conventionally existent, conventionally established, and imputedly existent are mutually inclusive, i.e., they mean the same thing.

Ultimate truth, ultimately existent, ultimately established, and substantially existent are mutually inclusive, i.e., they mean the same thing.

In this school, anything that exists, a phenomenon, is necessarily truly established.

In general convention, truly established and truly existent means the same thing.

In the perspective of the higher schools, especially the CMWS, truly established, truly existent, and inherently existent means the same thing. Also for the higher schools, substantially established, and substantially existent are the same.

But in this school, one has to make a difference. In this school, although everything is substantially established, it does not mean that everything is substantially existent.

In general, established and existent means the same thing but when affixed to “substantially,” in this school, then substantially established and substantially existent do not mean the same thing.

In this school, truly existent means an ultimate truth. So truly existent, ultimate truth, ultimately existent, ultimately established, and substantially existent are mutually inclusive, i.e., they mean the same thing.

		Ultimately established Truly Existent	Truly established	Establishment by way of its own character	Inherent existence Existing from its own side
Great Exposition school	Ultimate truth	YES	YES	YES	YES
	Conventional truth	NO	YES	YES	YES

With reference to the above chart, according to the GES, conventional truth is not truly existent and not ultimately established, whereas ultimate truth is truly existent and ultimately established.

Are the two truths truly established? Yes, both are truly established. For this school, both conventional truth and ultimate truth are established by way of their own character, inherently existent, and exist from their own side.

Perhaps the reason why people are confused is because the imprints of the CMWS are too strong in the mind! To the proponent of the CMWS, truly established, truly existent, inherent existence and so forth are the same.

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