

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: 20

Date: 16th May 2013

Question: You explained that it was the characteristic of Mahayana tenets that they posit the four bodies of a buddha. Is that the only basis for positing the difference between the Hinayana and Mahayana tenets or are there some other differences between the Hinayana and the Mahayana tenets?

Answer: As mentioned in one of the previous lessons, one of the things that set the Mahayana tenets apart from the Hinayana tenets is the presentation by the Mahayana tenets of what a buddha is. They talked about the four bodies or four kayas of a buddha. I think the Hinayana tenets are not able to make such a presentation.

I wonder if the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta is also one of the things that sets the Mahayana tenets apart from the Hinayana tenets. I wonder whether the Hinayana tenets accept that there is a mind of enlightenment or not.

Using the assertion of external objects as a point of differentiation between the Hinayana and Mahayana tenets is not feasible I think because one of the sub-schools of the AMWS and the CMWS itself also assert external objects. These two are Mahayana tenets.

When you look at the Hinayana tenets, I do not think there is a presentation of progressing towards enlightenment by traversing the ten bodhisattva grounds. Such a presentation is not made in the Hinayana tenets.

This is something that requires further thought. I would think that the presentation of the four bodies is one of the key distinguishing features of the Mahayana tenets that sets them apart from the Hinayana tenets. The Hinayana tenets do not have such an explanation of the four bodies of a buddha.

We have completed the MOS and we started on the MWS in the previous lesson.

When you look at the presentation of the view of selflessness, you can see that there is a progression in terms of the subtlety of the explanations as we move from one tenet to the next. When you compare the presentation of the view of selflessness in the Hinayana and Mahayana tenets, you will find that the presentation of the view of selflessness in the Mahayana tenets is deeper and more profound. Even within the Mahayana tenets, one sees also differences in the subtlety of their respective presentations of selflessness.

All the four Buddhist tenets present a view of selflessness. All the four Buddhist tenets are the same in asserting that the root of all our problems, the root of cyclic existence, and the root of all our suffering is the conception or apprehension of a self, the grasping at the self. All Buddhist tenets say the same thing. They all say that the only way to eradicate the apprehension of a self is through realising selflessness.

You have to know that all the Buddhist tenets say the same thing with regard to what is the root of all our problems, the apprehension of a self. The only antidote to the apprehension of a self is to realise selflessness.

Having said that, the four Buddhist tenets have their own way of asserting what this apprehension of a self is exactly and they have their own assertions as to exactly what is the view of selflessness that is the antidote to the apprehension of a self. As you move through the tenets, you will see that the presentation of selflessness becomes increasingly more profound and extensive.

The most important understanding that a Buddhist can have and the most important concept to settle is this view of selflessness. What exactly is selflessness? This is the most important concept to settle and to delineate clearly in your mind. What exactly does that mean?

We talked about the eightfold noble path, one of which is right view. When one arrives at the correct meaning of selflessness, I think one can consider this understanding of selflessness to be **right view**.

What is right view? Right view is seeing things as they are, understanding what reality is and how things exist exactly. This is of crucial importance. This is the reason why we educate ourselves about the four Buddhist tenets.

Why do we have to study the tenets? The point is to discover what reality is. How do things and events and we ourselves exist? What is their nature? Why is it so important to have right view, i.e., realising things as they are? Why is it so important to realise the nature of phenomena and the nature of reality? Because when we have the right view, when our understanding of reality is correct, then our interaction with reality will be valid.

On the basis of right view, you have right analysis, right thinking, or **right thought**. When you look at our lives, all our problems, unhappiness, and suffering always come from our misconceptions and distorted perceptions of reality. We go against reality. We suffer because we have all these wrong conceptions. If we want to stop our problems and suffering, we have to stop these wrong conceptions. The only way to stop these misconceptions is to gain an exact understanding of how things exist. Therefore right view is the basis for right thinking, right perception, and our correct interaction with reality.

On basis of right view we have right thought. On the basis of right thought, one has **right speech**. Our physical and verbal actions will be realistic and not harmful to others. Based on right thought, you will know what to say, what not to say, when to say something, and when not to say something.

When we have that then we have **right action**. We can perhaps relate right action to living our lives according to karma, abandoning non-virtues and creating virtues. All these can only come from right thought, the right perception

of reality that comes from right view.

Then **right livelihood** would follow naturally. One would engage in right livelihood and apply oneself by exerting **right effort**.

So you see how we start from right view, then you have right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, and right effort. On the basis of all these then comes **right mindfulness**, the correct kind of mindfulness. Without the earlier understandings, it is not possible to have correct mindfulness.

On the basis of right mindfulness comes **right concentration**. Right concentration here is not talking about just having single-pointedness of mind, the ability to concentrate. That is not the point. The right concentration that is part of the eightfold noble path is the concentration that has selflessness as its object of observation. This is the kind of concentration we need.

The whole point of developing mindfulness is to be able to develop this single-pointedness of mind focusing on the ultimate nature of reality, selflessness. The goal is not to gain single-pointedness of mind for the sake of having a single-pointedness of mind. It is a tool. With right concentration, with calm-abiding (or meditative serenity) focusing on selflessness, one strives to develop special insight. With special insight, you will finally be able to overcome the afflictions. This is the distinguishing feature of Buddhist teachings.

As I mentioned to you before, you have to discover and realise for yourself how extremely important it is to learn and educate yourself, going more deeply into the Buddhist teachings. We have to study the Great Treaties which is what we are trying to do here.

You say you want to meditate but you must know how to meditate. What do you want to meditate on? What is the purpose of your meditation? As I mentioned in the last lesson, one of the most important thing is to discover for ourselves—through learning, educating ourselves, and practising—how we exist, how others exist, how do phenomena exist, and what is the ultimate nature or final reality?

Learning about the ultimate nature of reality as presented in the tenets is not an easy feat. Many conditions must come together for hearing the explanations, reading the texts and different commentaries, discussing with your peers, and thinking about what you have learnt. You have to do all these in order to gain an understanding and to clarify and improve your understanding of selflessness.

If you do not think what you have learnt over time, just listening will not lead to any understanding. You need to analyse, looking at the presentation of selflessness from all the different angles, using different avenues of reasoning, logic, and so forth. Only then will you be able to eliminate your qualms, your lack of understanding, and your doubts.

2 Divisions

There are two divisions:

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

3 Meaning of each division

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

There are two divisions of proponents of the Middle Way:

1. Middle Way Autonomists (*Svatantrika-Madhyamaka*) who assert existence by way of its own character.
2. Middle Way Consequentialists (*Prasangika-Madhyamaka*) who *do not* assert existence by way of its own character.

So what differentiates the AMWS from the CMWS is their assertion that phenomena exist by way of their own character.

Existing by way of its own character

What is existence by way of its own character and what is non-existence by way of its own character? What is the difference between these two?

Existing by way of its own character means that when you search for the imputed object, you will be able to find it, i.e., you will be able to point to something that is the imputed object.

Since the AMWS asserts that all phenomena exist by way of their character, i.e., when you look for the imputed object, you will be able to find it, this means that the person also exists by way of its own character, because the person can be found when you look for it. According to the AMWS, you will be able to point to something and say, “There it is!” Ultimately you can identify, “That is the person. That is the self.”

This is the fundamental premise of the AMWS—there is something you can point to that is the very thing itself. So for the “I,” they posit that the mental consciousness is the illustration of the person. They thought about it and after eliminating various possibilities, they say, “If you have to say who the person is, the mental consciousness is the person.”

The AMWS asserts that, if it is an existent, it necessarily exists by way of its own character. Why? Because when you look for the imputed object, definitely you will be able to point to something that is the object. Therefore the object can be found. In other words, if you are not able to find the object when you look for it, that means it does not exist at all.

As discussed in the previous lesson, the Proponents of Middle Way, both the AMWS and the CMWS, do not assert true existence. Both of them are the same in asserting that phenomena do not truly exist. But:

- the AMWS says that the meaning of true existence is *not* the same as the meaning of existing by way of its own character, whereas
- the CMWS says that true existence and existing by way of its own character are different ways of saying the same thing. They mean the same thing.

Autonomy School

The explanation of the Autonomy School (*Skt. Svatantrika*) 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 an Autonomist is: a Proponent of the Middle Way who, by way of accepting autonomous reasons, does not assert true existence even conventionally.

Autonomist (Skt. *Svatantrika*) and Proponent of the Middle Way who Propounds Inherent Existence are equivalent (Page 20).

True existence

Let us try to understand the meaning of true existence. The AMWS have their own take on what true existence is exactly. Their interpretation can be traced to what the Buddha said in the *Descent into Lanka Sutra*. There is a quotation from the *Descent into Lanka Sutra* that reads, “All phenomena exist through appearing to the consciousness. All phenomena exist conventionally and all phenomena do not exist ultimately.”

Exist conventionally

The Buddha said, “All phenomena exist conventionally.” What is the reason that Buddha said that? All phenomena exist conventionally because all phenomena are posited to exist through the force of the phenomena appearing to a consciousness. This is the reason why all phenomena exist conventionally and not ultimately.

Exist ultimately

For, if a phenomenon can exist *without* being posited through the force of appearing to a consciousness, then that phenomenon would be ultimately existent.

According to the AMWS, if a phenomenon is established by way of its own uncommon mode of existence¹ without being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness², that phenomenon exists ultimately. That phenomenon is truly existent. This is the meaning of true existence to the AMWS.

But according to the AMWS, there is *no* phenomenon that you can point to that is established by way of its own uncommon mode of existence *without* being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness. Therefore phenomena do *not* exist ultimately or truly exist. All phenomena have to exist *conventionally*.

¹ “Established by way of its own uncommon mode of existence” means “existing from its own side.”

² Refer to chart on “Meaning of Terms used to Describe the Mode of Existence of Phenomena in the Mahayana Schools.”

How do things exist according to the AMWS? In order for something to be considered as an existent, it has to be something that is *appearing* to a mind. All phenomena are posited because they appear to a mind, through appearing to a consciousness. Therefore it exists. Here “posited by mind” means that that phenomenon *must* appear to a mind. Because it appears to a mind, therefore that phenomenon can be posited. Therefore it is an existent.

On top of that, the AMWS also assert that there must be something also from the side of the object, i.e., there must be existence from its own side.

These two collectively account for the existence of any given phenomena. For anything to exist:

1. It must appear to a mind
2. There is also existence from the side of the object.

When these two come together, that is how things exist. Therefore the AMWS do *not* accept that phenomena are established by way of their own uncommon mode of existence *without* being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness.

Returning to the quotation from the *Descent to the Lanka Sutra*, all phenomena exist because they appear to a consciousness, i.e., through the force of appearing to a mind. What then constitutes this mind?

The AMWS and CMWS have a different assertion as to what this mind is—a mind that when a phenomenon appears to it, the phenomenon can be considered an existent.

According to the AMWS, this particular mind has to be a non-defective awareness.

In what way is an awareness non-defective? It is non-defective, i.e., there is nothing wrong with that particular mind existing by way of its own character. The factor of it existing by way of its own character is non-defective because it cannot be harmed by a reason.

- According to the AMWS, all phenomena that exist must exist by way of its own character.
- According to AMWS, if it is an existent, that phenomenon is necessarily posited through the force of it appearing to a non-defective awareness.
- If an object is not posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness, then that object is a non-existent, i.e., it does not exist.

2 Divisions

There are two divisions:

1. Sutra Middle Way Autonomists (*Skt. Sautrantika-Svatantrika-Madhyamika*)
and
2. Yogic Middle Way Autonomists (*Skt. Yogacara-Svatantrika-Madhyamika*).

The definition of a Sutra Middle Way Autonomist is: a Proponent of the Middle Way who propounds a presentation of conventionalities through mostly conforming with the Proponents of Sutra.

The definition of a Yogic Middle Way Autonomist is: a Proponent of the Middle Way who propounds a presentation of conventionalities through mostly conforming with the Proponents of Mind Only (Page 20).

In these two definitions, the words, “mostly conforming,” mean most of the time but not all of the time.

4 Way of asserting objects

Existence by way of its own characteristics, existence from its own side, and inherent existence are equivalent.

Uncompounded space, true cessations, the past and future, and the subtle selflessness of persons are both non-affirming negatives and conventional truths.

Ultimate truth, final reality, and the subtle selflessness of phenomena are equivalent (Pages 20 – 21).

- Existence by way of its own character, (2) existence from its own side, and (3) inherent existence are mutually inclusive.
- Ultimate truth, (2) suchness, and (3) the subtle selflessness of phenomena are mutually inclusive.

You see here that there is a difference in the presentation of the two truths according to the AMWS and the MOS.

According to the MOS:

- Emptiness is an ultimate truth.
- The subtle selflessness of persons is an ultimate truth.

According to the AMWS:

- The subtle selflessness of persons is a conventional truth.
- The subtle selflessness of phenomena is an ultimate truth.

According to the AMWS, ultimate truth and emptiness are mutually inclusive. Emptiness here is the selflessness of phenomena, the emptiness of true existence. Therefore, according to AMWS, the subtle selflessness of persons is not an emptiness.

The definition of the two truths, conventional truth and ultimate truth, is not given in the root text but it is similar to the MOS³.

	Conventional truth	Ultimate truth
Autonomy Middle Way school (Svatantrika Madhyamaka)	An object that is realised in a dualistic manner by the direct valid cogniser that directly realizes it.	An object that is realised in a non-dualistic manner by the direct valid cogniser that directly realizes it.
Mind Only school (Cittamatra)	That which is realized through dualistic appearance by a valid direct perceiver that directly realizes it	That which is realised through the subsidence of dualistic appearance by a valid direct perceiver that directly realizes it

³ Refer chart on the “Two Truths.”

According to the AMWS, what is an ultimate truth? An ultimate truth is a truth for the ultimate awareness. You can read “ultimate” here as referring to the ultimate awareness. An ultimate awareness here refers to the meditative equipoise of a superior being, i.e., the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness.

In Tibetan, ultimate truth is *don dam bden pa*:

- *Don* means object,
- *Dam* is short for *bden pa* which means holy or ultimate.
- *Bden pa* in this context refers to the ultimate awareness, the meditative equipoise of a superior being.

The object here is emptiness. Emptiness is an ultimate truth. All phenomena, other than emptiness, are conventional truths.

Although emptiness is an ultimate truth, emptiness does not exist ultimately.

- Why does emptiness not exist ultimately? Because emptiness exists conventionally.
- Why does emptiness exist conventionally? Because it is posited through the force of appearing to a mind.

According to the AMWS, if it is an existent:

- It is necessarily *not* ultimately existent.
- It necessarily exists conventionally.

There is a reason why you have to make a distinction between (1) emptiness being an ultimate truth and (2) emptiness being not ultimately existent. There is a difference. Although emptiness is an ultimate truth, it does not exist ultimately. Why is it that emptiness, an ultimate truth, does not exist ultimately? Because everything that exists, *including* emptiness, have to exist conventionally. According to the AMWS, nothing can exist without being posited through the force of appearing to a mind. If it is posited through the force of appearing to a mind, that means it exists conventionally and it does not exist ultimately.

Sutra Middle Way Autonomists assert that the five sense objects – forms and so forth – are different entities from consciousness and that they are gross external objects composed of partless⁴ particles.

Yogic Middle Way Autonomists assert that the five sense objects – forms and so forth – are one entity with the consciousness apprehending them (Page 21).

I assume that you understand these two paragraphs. I will move on.

5 Way of asserting object-possessors

The mental consciousness is asserted to be the illustration of the person.

They assert a collection of six consciousnesses.

There are two types of awarenesses:

1. valid cognizers and

⁴ This needs to be investigated since Jamyang Shayba in his *Great Exposition of Tenets* says ‘Because of being refuted by many, it is mistaken that Proponents of the Middle Way and of Mind Only assert partless particles.’

2. non-valid cognizers.

There are two types of valid cognizers:

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

Sutra Middle Way Autonomists do not assert self-cognizing direct perceivers.

Yogic Middle Way Autonomists assert all four types of direct perceivers. Self-cognizing direct perceivers and yogic direct perceivers are necessarily non-mistaken consciousnesses, while the other two, [sense direct perceivers and mental direct perceivers,] can be either mistaken or non-mistaken.

Proponents of Sutra, Proponents of Mind Only, and Autonomists all accept that:

- a direct perceiver is necessarily a consciousness free from conceptuality,
- a subsequent cognizer is necessarily a non-valid cognizer,
- a consciousness that is mistaken with respect to its determined object is necessarily a wrong consciousness,
- if it is a mistaken consciousness with respect to a phenomenon, it is necessarily not a valid cognizer with respect to that phenomenon,
- if it is an inferential cognizer, it is necessarily not a valid cognizer with respect to its appearing object, and so on.

We had discussed these points in the previous module on lo-rig so there is no need to repeat them.

6 Way of asserting selflessness

The person being empty of being permanent, unitary, and independent is asserted to be a coarse selflessness of persons, while the person being empty of being self-sufficient substantially existent is a subtle selflessness of persons.

Yogic Middle Way Autonomists assert that a form and the cognizer apprehending that form being empty of being different substances is a coarse selflessness of phenomena.

All phenomena being empty of true existence is asserted to be the subtle selflessness of phenomena.

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

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 (Pages 21 - 22).

We will do the “Presentation of the grounds and paths” in the next lesson.

Question: A non-defective awareness is asserted to be a consciousness that is established by way of its own character because it cannot be harmed by reasoning. Does that mean that since a wrong consciousness is also established by way of its own character, therefore a wrong consciousness is also a non-defective awareness? In fact all consciousnesses are established by way of its own character, therefore all consciousnesses are non-defective awareness.

Answer: A non-defective awareness cannot refer to every mind. A non-defective awareness specifically refers to a valid cogniser.

For example, a mirage appears to an eye consciousness. Just because a mirage appears to an eye consciousness, you cannot say that the mirage is posited to exist. There has to be a non-defective awareness that refers specifically to a valid cognizer.

Phenomena are posited through the force of them appearing to a non-defective awareness. Because these phenomena appear to a non-defective awareness, therefore we say that they exist. The positer here is the mind to which a phenomenon appears and it is a non-defective awareness. We cannot say that this non-defective awareness means all kinds of mind. Specifically, it has to be a valid mind.

Question: Both the MOS and the AMWS assert that an object exists by way of its own character, relying on a consciousness to impute it for its existence. How is the assertion of the AMWS subtler in this respect to the assertion of the MOS?

Answer: In the MOS, although they assert that phenomena are in the nature of mind, at the same time, they assert that there are truly existent phenomena such as the mind itself. For the AMWS, although they do not assert external objects, they do assert true existence. Phenomena are truly existent including the mind itself.

You need a method to deal with the destructive emotions such as anger and attachment that have the mind as their focus. Just the concept of there being no external objects cannot harm the attachment to, for example, mental sensations, mental feelings such as pleasurable feelings, because these mental sensations such as pleasurable feelings are real and are truly existent. In this case, asserting that the mind is truly existent cannot help in dealing with such situations whereas understanding that even the mind is *not* truly existent does help.

The position of the AMWS is more powerful than the MOS. The worldview of the MOS that everything is in the entity of mind is helpful in dealing with attachment to objects other than the mind but ultimately, they think that the mind is truly existent. They still apprehend a truly existent mind. Therefore afflictions based on that apprehension can arise.

But the AMWS not only asserts that phenomena other than mind are not truly existent, they also assert that the mind itself is not truly existent. This is so much more powerful. The AMWS explains how the mind do not exist in the way it appears to us. Although it appears to be truly existent, that is not how it exists.

The most profound explanation about the emptiness of true existence comes only in the CMWS. It is the presentation of the CMWS that is the most profound because they assert that *all* phenomena exist as merely imputed by thought, imputed by mind, and that phenomena exist as mere name.

You can see that there is a difference between the presentation of the MOS and the presentation of the MWS. The assertions of the MWS is more profound in that not only is phenomena, other than the mind not truly existent, even the mind itself is not truly existent. So this is more profound than the MOS.

But within the MWS, you have these two schools:

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

We haven't started on them yet. If you think about it, there must be a difference between these two. As to what a difference is, this is something much more difficult to distinguish in both understanding and in actual experience.

Question: In MOS, they proved the non-existence of external objects by proving there is no such thing as a directionally partless particle. Here the higher schools assert that there is a partless particle. How do they prove that there is a partless particle?

Answer: What you just said is the assertion of the Sutra Middle Way Autonomists (*Skt. Sautrantika-Svatantrika-Madhyamika*). Remember that there assertions are “*mostly* conforming with the Proponents of Sutra.” (Page 20).

[The recording is cut off at this point.]

(The gist of Khen Rinpoche's answer is that while the Sutra Middle Way Autonomists do not posit a *directionally* partless particle, they do assert that there are partless particles).

Translated by Ven. Tenzin Gyurme

Transcribed by Phuah Soon Ek, Vivien Ng and Patricia Lee

Edited by Cecilia Tsong

**MEANING OF TERMS USED TO DESCRIBE THE
MODE OF EXISTENCE OF PHENOMENA IN THE MAHAYANA SCHOOLS**

	Mind Only School	Autonomy Middle Way School	Consequence Middle Way School
Established by way of its own character	Not merely imputed by thought but exists from its own side	The imputed object when sought is findable	The imputed object when sought is findable
Truly established	Not merely imputed by thought but exists from its own side	Established by way of its own uncommon mode of existence without being posited through the force of appearing to a non-defective awareness	The imputed object when sought is findable
Existing from its own side	The imputed object when sought is findable	The imputed object when sought is findable	The imputed object when sought is findable
Existing inherently	The imputed object when sought is findable	The imputed object when sought is findable	The imputed object when sought is findable