

How to ensure success in our studies

Lesson 1

The Savior Nagajuna said:
“*Through the accumulation of merit and wisdom,
one will achieve the two enlightened Truth and Form Bodies,
which arise from these two collections.*”

The final objects of attainment of the Mahayana path are the two enlightened bodies of Buddha: the Truth and Form Bodies. This is the state of existence of the union of these two bodies. To achieve such a state, one has to create the causes as stated by Nagajuna above. One has to accumulate the two collections: the collections of merit and wisdom.

To engage in the practices of the path, which consists of the collections of both merit and wisdom, one's practices must be founded on an understanding of what constitutes reality, what is it that exists. One has to understand what is the **Basis**. Here, it is specifically referring to the understanding of the *Two Truths*.

To be able to accumulate the *collections of wisdom*, one must have a good and thorough understanding on the presentation of the *Ultimate Truth*.

To be able to accumulate the *collections of merit*, one must have a good and thorough understanding on the presentation of the *Conventional Truth*.

In essence, to achieve the two enlightened Truth and Form Bodies, one must cultivate a path which unifies method and wisdom. To practice these two aspects of the path correctly, one necessarily needs a correct understanding of the basis, what constitutes the two facets of reality, specifically the Two Truths: the Conventional and Ultimate Truths.

These Two Truths are very important, it is this very reason that the subject of Tenets is studied. In it, there are many different topics covered, but the main focus is what constitutes reality, the conventional reality and ultimate reality.

The ultimate and highest view is that of the highest tenet, the presentation of the Two Truths according to the Consequent Middle Way School. However, an understanding of the lower tenets will enable one to appreciate and better understand the final and ultimate presentation of the Two Truths [as presented by the Consequent Middle Way School].

The reason one needs to understand the conventional facet of reality, the Conventional Truth, to be able to accumulate the collection of merit or engage in the method aspect of the path, is this:

As long as the phenomenon is a composed phenomenon, its existence is dependent on causes and conditions. Composed phenomena arise from causes and conditions, in fact, from the coming together and interplay of many causes and conditions. For example, for a sprout to arise, many causes and conditions must gather. There must be a seed in the first place, then water, fertilizers, warmth and so forth [must also be present]. It is not the case that there are just one or two predominant causes or conditions that are more important than the others. All necessary causes and conditions must come together. As soon as all the necessary causes and conditions gather, there will be the result, in this case, a sprout, which arises from the seed, water, fertilizer, soil and so on.

In the case of the production of a sprout, one can observe that it is dependently arisen, its existence is contingent on the coming together of all necessary causes and conditions as mentioned. This is dependent arising at the level of causality, the level of causes and conditions. [Similarly], for an eye consciousness apprehending blue to arise, for example, three conditions must gather: an observed object condition, an uncommon empowering condition and an immediately preceding condition. It is only when all of these three conditions come together would there be an eye consciousness apprehending its object.

Therefore, when the causes for the production of a particular phenomenon gather, there will be the corresponding effect. That phenomenon will arise, which is the result of the gathering of its causes and conditions. When it does, this becomes irreversible, one cannot do anything about it nor stop it from arising. For any composed phenomenon to arise, *every* cause and condition must gather. If any of the required causes [and conditions] for its production is missing, as long as just one is missing, then that phenomenon will not arise. Similarly, nothing can be done about it as well. Even the numberless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who possess limitless qualities and powers, cannot do anything about it [nor enable it to arise].

Therefore, it is the same case for the *realizations* to arise in the mind. Regardless of whether it is a big or small realization, for it to arise in one's mind, the necessary causes and conditions must be complete and then gather. Otherwise, no realization will come.

Therefore, if one wishes to have realizations, one then needs to ensure that all necessary causes and conditions are gathered.

In particular, this necessarily depends on:

- 1) Whether one correctly understands the instructions of one's teacher.
- 2) The instructions that one receives from one's teacher has to hit the mark exactly as it is intended.
- 3) Whether one's accumulations of merit and performance of purifications are hitting the mark as well.

If all these conditions are fulfilled: one understands the instructions, the instructions hit the mark and one's accumulations and purifications also hit the target, then the experiences and desired realizations will occur.

*If one analyzes how the instructions of one's guru/ teacher are effective for one's mind, touch one's heart [and move one along the path], all of these can be summarized down to whether one has **devotion** towards **that particular** guru/ teacher or not.*

If one has single-pointed devotion/ faith in one's spiritual master/ one's guru, then even if one receives one piece of short advice, a mere few words, due to one's single-pointed devotion, this will touch one's heart, one will just change [for the better] for the rest of one's life.

Therefore, all [of one's spiritual progress along the path] can essentially be attributed to one's faith and devotion [to one's guru]. If one lacks such faith, devotion and trust in one's guru in whom one is receiving instructions/ teachings from, then even if the guru were to teach one the entire Kangur [the entire translations of Buddha's scriptures], or even if one were to receive [numerous] empowerments and initiations from him, such activities perhaps will not have any significant impact on/ move one's mind.

Within all of the literature on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, including the Great Treatise of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment, one of its major outlines is *'The Root of the Path: Correct Devotion to the Virtuous Friend'*. This outline is then preceded by *'The proper graduated training you undertake after you have relied upon him'*. This latter outline is essentially the rest of the Lam Rim trainings, beginning with *'An exhortation to take full advantage of a life of leisure and opportunity'* all the way up to attainment of enlightenment.

Therefore, all of one's actual trainings, which fall under the section *'The proper graduated training you undertake after you have relied upon your guru'* comes after the first outline, which is: *The Root of the Path: Correct Devotion to the Virtuous Friend'*. This clearly shows that if one wishes to achieve all the realizations, from *'An exhortation to take full advantage of a life of leisure and opportunity'* all the way up to attainment of enlightenment, these depend entirely on having **faith in one's guru**. Without which, all of these realizations and experiences will not arise. This is the implication of the outline.

It is in my personal experience, and I guess all of you can also find such experiences within yourselves, quite evidently that, when one receives instructions/ teachings from one's guru with a strong mindset of faith and particularly, single-pointed devotion, even if these were short sentences/ teachings, these have profound impact on one's mind, will move one's heart. This is very clear.

Returning back to the topic of the ultimate object of attainment of the Mahayana path, the final goal is the achievement of the two holy bodies, the Truth and Form Bodies. Such achievements are entirely dependent on generating all the realizations of the path. To do this, one needs to ensure that all the required causes and conditions for them to come about must gather. Therefore, for this reason, one necessarily needs an understanding of the conventional facet of reality, the presentation of the Conventional Truths.

Therefore, one needs an understanding of dependent arising at the level of causality. There are different levels of subtlety with respect to the meaning of dependent arising. However, an understanding of dependent arising at the level of causality is at the coarse level: that effects are dependent on causes and so on. It is through such an understanding that one comes to understand what is beneficial and what is not, what is virtuous and what is not, what to cultivate and discard.

This is because, if from the onset, one were to attempt to understand emptiness, that everything is empty of inherent existence, then I guess it would be very difficult to engage in any meaningful practice of abandoning that which is to be abandoned and cultivating that which is to be cultivated.

Therefore, if one has a proper and correct understanding of dependent arising at the level of causality, then one's faith in karma and its effects will increase. Such an understanding will assist one in one's practice of love and compassion, the cultivation of the altruistic intention and the practices of the perfections.

Lama Tsongkhapa once asked Manjushri: "What is the quickest way to realize the subtle meaning of dependent arising?" Manjushri replied: "There are three things that you must do:

- 1) Firstly, make heartfelt requests to your guru inseparable from your meditational deities.
- 2) Strive in the accumulation of merit and purify the mind of obscuration.
- 3) Study and analyze the great treatises."

If one analyzes this, Manjushri is essentially exhorting one to 1) develop faith 2) collect merit and purify one's mind of immeasurable mass of negativities and obscurations 3) put effort into studying and analyzing the meaning of the teachings.

Therefore, to realize the ultimate nature of reality, emptiness, all these causes and conditions must gather. One cannot merely develop one aspect and neglect the others.

One is here to learn about the true facets of reality, the conventional and ultimate facets, the two truths. In the process of doing so, one is actually unraveling the meaning of dependent arising at all of its levels, from the coarse to the most subtle. This starts with dependent arising at the level of causality, to dependent arising in terms of [the whole being] dependent [on its parts], down to its most subtle aspect, that all phenomena are dependently designated.

Essentially, by understanding these two facets of reality, one comes to have a very clear understanding of what to abandon/ not practice and what to cultivate/ practice.

Therefore, from the very beginning of the module, one should keep this understanding in one's heart, about why one is studying this topic: **to achieve the goal of the two enlightened Bodies, enlightenment.** To do this, one necessarily needs a correct understanding of the different facets of reality. It is for this purpose that one spends time studying/ analyzing this text.

Therefore, if from the onset one generates such a motivation, based on a correct understanding of the need/ reason to do this, then one will be able to engage in one's studies with enthusiasm, joy and gladness.

One should be aware that in the course of doing so, at times, one may experience problems and obstacles. One may encounter difficulties in one's job or one may experience sicknesses and so on. Such occurrences do happen. When they do, it is very important to make heartfelt requests to one's guru inseparable from one's deity.

One also needs to strive, as much as one is able, in the practices of accumulating merit and purifying one's negativities and obscurations. There can be so much negativities and obscurations within oneself, that even if one has the wish and tries to study, one may find it very difficult to understand.

Under such circumstances, one should do even more to reduce one's different layers of obscurations and negativities while simultaneously exerting continuous effort to read and analyse the texts. Therefore, from one's own side, one needs to **apply continual effort** as the means to eventually succeed in one's understanding.

The subject matter here is profound, challenging and therefore not easy. However, if one gets discouraged right from the very beginning just because one finds it difficult, then one is defeated there and then, nothing will be of any help. One has succeeded in stopping oneself [from studying the treatises]. Rather, if one is sincere in studying and has genuine wish to learn about the facets of reality, then one should develop the mindset of putting in the time and effort, to do one's best regardless of the difficulties encountered.

To actually engage in the practices of a person of great capacity, one has to make transitions from the practices shared with persons of small and medium capacities. One does not jump straight into it but rather progress gradually. This is merely referring to the practices of sutra. When that is done well, one then needs to again make a proper transition from sutra into tantra.

It is well known by many that tantra is the swift path to enlightenment, very powerful and so on. However, the main deciding factor, that makes it possible to achieve enlightenment so quickly with the practice of tantra, is one's practice of guru devotion. This is where one engages in the practice of guru yoga.

Therefore, the reason why tantra is such a quick path to enlightenment, when one analyses carefully and correctly, is essentially due to the practice of guru devotion/ guru yoga in tantra.

In the Noble Eightfold path, the first path is that of 1) '*Correct view*'. The very reason this path is the very first to be cultivated implies that all of one's cultivation/ practices are contingent on one's understanding of the **Basis**, the foundation of what reality is all about. This is the significance [of having correct view as the first sequence of the path].

In philosophical term, it is called basis, in simple terms, it is an understanding of what constitutes reality, the actual situation [that one finds oneself in]. This is primarily referring to the Two Truths, the two facets of reality.

If one has a correct understanding of these two facets of reality, both the Conventional and Ultimate, then whenever one thinks about things and events, one's judgment/ thoughts and understanding will always be correct. This is because, these activities are founded on reality and not [mere visionary fantasies]. One understands reality exactly as it is.

2) Based on '*Correct view*', here referring to correct understanding of reality, whatever thoughts one has will be correct, this is '*Correct thought*'.

- 3) Based on 'Correct [thought]', one would have '*Correct speech*'. Based on correctly understanding what reality is, then one's speech with respect to its meaning and presentation and so on will be correct.
- 4) Likewise, there will also be '*Correct aims of actions*'. If one has correct view, whatever actions one undertakes will be correct.
- 5) Based on correct view, if one has [correct thought], correct speech and correct aims of actions, then '*Correct livelihood*' will come about. This means one will be able to live one's life correctly, specifically living a virtuous life.
- 6) Based on that, one will also develop '*Correct effort*'. Whether it is the practices that one is engaging in, or what one does in life, one will have correct effort, and
- 7) '*Correct mindfulness*'. When one gains control over one's body, speech and mind, then it is that much easier to have mindfulness and introspection.
- 8) With proper mindfulness and introspection, then it is much easier to develop '*Correct meditative stabilization*'.

In essence, having a correct understanding of the different facets of reality becomes very important. To have correct view [in the first place], one needs to understand conventional truths. To understand this, one needs to [initially] understand dependent arising at the level of causality.

[Based on understanding this well], one would gain correct understanding of the conventional truths, based on this, one would be able to gradually cultivate and acquire correct speech and so on, culminating in the attainment of correct meditative stabilization.

From just this discussion, one can understand why it is so important to gain an education, to learn, study and analyse the [philosophical] teachings. Nevertheless, there are still many who do not see the value of studying and learning. Most Buddhist in the world think that there is no need to study and learn too much.

This is a huge mistake: the more one studies and knows, commensurate with that, the greater the depth of one's reflections; the greater the depth of one's reflections, likewise commensurate with that, the greater the depth of one's meditation. This shows how important education, studying, learning and analyzing the [treatises] are. These are [solely meant] for one's [success in] practice.

However, learning and reflection themselves are challenging and difficult. Nevertheless, if one sees the point, how important these are, then even if one knows that it will be difficult, one will be willing to endure, does one's best and continue with one's endeavor. This applies to those who are sincere in learning.

Another aspect to know is this: this is long term. One needs to accumulate one's understanding over time [to build up] extensive knowledge. This therefore takes time. This will not be accomplished by merely coming to class once or twice. If one's attendance in class is infrequent, then nothing will happen.

Therefore, if one is sincere in learning, then one should do one's best not to miss class but attend continuously. This again, is very important.

Even though continuity is very important, however, there are still many other causes and conditions that must be put in place. Those points that are mentioned are just some, there are still many more: In addition to coming to class continually, one should read up the [root and other] texts and participate in discussions.

If all such conditions are gathered, even if one does not understand everything, one will *definitely* get something.

If, after having gathered all such conditions without anything missing, one still does not get anything, then perhaps there are something else to be done.

However, if one does not gather all of such causes and conditions, like not attending classes, not reading, not analyzing, not attending discussions and so on, and then if one were to say, "I am not getting anything...", then what can [the teacher do]?

When one observes the external world, for things and events to occur, like the example of a sprout, all necessary causes and conditions must gather. This applies exactly to the internal world of the mind as well. For certain positive mental states, understandings, experiences, realizations and so on to arise, all the necessary causes and conditions must gather.

If one understands what I have said tonight, then as much as possible, put in time and effort and do one's best.

Lesson 2

As the great Kadampa masters of the past have said: “*All sentient beings by nature have Buddha lineage.*”

What this means is that from time without beginning, since sentient beings were in existence, they have in them this ***Buddha lineage***. All sentient beings have always had this natural potential in them to become Buddhas.

However, if sentient beings do not possess the ***Developmental lineage***, then they will not be able to achieve full enlightenment. Therefore, even though all of us have always had this *Buddha lineage* within ourselves since time without beginning, nevertheless, from one's own side, one needs to put in effort and strive, before one can achieve such results as attaining a good human rebirth or as a celestial being.

Therefore, even though one has this potential to achieve enlightenment within oneself by nature, but if one does not put in effort, then one will not achieve enlightenment. Nevertheless, enlightenment is made possible simply due to one possessing the potential naturally, if it is not, then no matter what one does, it will be a waste of time [and effort].

Just as one has the potential to achieve enlightenment within oneself, likewise, one has the potential to learn and understand the Buddha's teachings. However, how much one can derive benefits from one's studies and learning depend very much on one's personal effort.

When one is getting educated in the Buddha's teachings, learning and studying about them, individual interest and effort are very important.

The Kadampa masters gave the analogy of churning milk to derive butter: although milk is the cause of butter, but if one does not churn the milk, butter will not arise by itself. Therefore the point is this: even though one has the potential to study and learn, what one needs to do is to put in effort. Consciousness is that which is *clear and knowing*, a natural potential and occurrence which one possesses. Therefore, the mind's ability to learn is there, what is left to be done is for one to 'activate' it.

The subject matter being taught is profound and challenging. Putting aside the meanings, one has to struggle even with the words, most of which one may be seeing for the first time.

Nevertheless, one should not become disheartened but do one's best to extract the knowledge. One will find that it will become easier as one goes along, such a process takes time.

For the next one, two or three months, one just has to persevere. From one's own side, one has to persist and put in one's effort to read the texts, not miss classes and participate in discussions.

When one does these, at the end of this module, one will definitely get something. Such understandings that one acquires form the basis for one to better appreciate the teachings of the great teachers like His Holiness the Dalai Lama. One will gain some foundations/ groundings. When one attends His Holiness's teachings, one will get more out of it.

This is just one of the many reasons why one is studying at the center. Since one believes in future lives, by studying and learning the teachings now, one plants [virtuous] imprints in one's mind. With such imprints in one's continuum, one will get better from life to life.

Eventually, one will bring one's understanding/ knowledge to culmination, on that basis, one will be able to generate experiences and realizations on the path. That way, one will be able to eliminate many of one's obscurations and negativities.

Therefore, one should view this with a long term perspective.

Through reminding oneself how fortunate one is and how one is accumulating virtues/ merit along the way, one should generate enthusiasm and joy in having the opportunity to study.

Therefore, one should come to class with a sense of enthusiasm and joy.

Lesson 5

One day I was playing a game but I was not good at it. When the game was over, it displayed a message:

"If you don't succeed, try over and over again."

[Therefore, for you, even] if you wish to study Buddhist philosophy, it will not be easy. If there is a genuine wish to study, then you have to try over and over again. It will not be easy, but you need to try repeatedly.

Not everybody can understand everything exactly in the same way. Everyone is different: there are different intelligence, different karma, different minds, different bodies, even different dresses. So no one is the same.

However, if you put effort in some ways, you *will* learn a little bit about Buddhist philosophy.

What I believe about learning Buddhist philosophy is this:

Even if you do 100 thousand prostrations, make extensive offerings to holy objects and so on, [comparing to] putting effort and giving your time to study Buddhist philosophy, the merit is equal if not more to [those activities]. I think, logically speaking, you get more merit when you study or read the Buddha's teachings, especially philosophy. I think you create more merit than doing 100 thousand prostrations, extensive offerings [to holy objects], much more than that.

Studying leaves positive imprints in your mind, in this way, you will be able to meet the Buddha Dharma in life after life. This way, you will be able to practice and meditate. Due to this, you will be able to achieve liberation as well. For this reason, studying is extremely important.

Therefore, you should put effort into reading, listening [by attending classes regularly], [attending] discussions and so on.

I've also mentioned before, you have to memorize some of the words in the texts. Without which, it is not possible [to understand the meanings].

When you consider how when every person does anything in this life, be it practice or business, how everyone lives, when you really look deep down inside, who is it that one is doing this for, when you think about it, it is all for the 'self / I / person'.

Since there is a 'self / I / person', we do all sorts of different things to make this 'self / I / person' happy. There is definitely a 'self / I / person' that exists. Of course, if there is no such 'self / I / person', then you will not be doing all these things [for yourself]. Therefore, it all comes down to this 'self / person', due to that, we do all sorts of things to please this 'self'.

Even when you are doing things for this 'self / I / person', however, when you are not really thinking so much about it, not being philosophical about it, not thinking what kind of 'self / I / person' you are doing [for the whole of your life], not really checking about it, your mind is not affected by tenets. Since that is the case, you don't really think so much about what kind of 'self / I / person' [you are doing things for]. You nevertheless do things for it.

[For those whose minds are affected by tenets], the philosophers, they think deeper than [those whose minds are not affected by tenets]. Since the 'self / I / person' exists, then it will be this 'self / I / person' that will achieve liberation. It will also be the same 'self / I / person' who circles in samsara as well. [Therefore,] we need to know what is this 'self / I / person' is, how it 'looks' like, how it exists.

Even though there are philosophers [who analyse this], different philosophers analyse differently on how the 'self / I / person' exists. Of course, philosophers can be both Buddhists and non-Buddhists, even among the Buddhist philosophers, there are four different tenet systems, with different assertions on the 'self / I / person'.

As for non-Buddhists, there can be many different types: some non-Buddhist philosophers do not believe in past and future lives, only in the existence of the present life. They came to such a conclusion by thinking that the consciousness/ mind is produced by the physical body. That is, the [existence of the] consciousness/ mind depends on the physical body. They give examples like: butter lamp and its light. The mind is likened to the light whereas the butter lamp is likened to the body. Another example: a carving on the rock. The mind is what is carved onto the rock whereas the body is like the rock. They say that when a person dies, the mind also dies with it and does not continue on. Therefore, the mind depends very much on the body [to exist]. When the body dies, both the body and mind disappear totally, nothing will continue on. In the example, when the rock is totally destroyed, there's no way to see the carving anymore. In this way, such non-Buddhists believe in the non-existence of future lives.

When you think about it scientifically, it is also not easy [to disagree with these non-Buddhists]. They say that whenever you think about feelings and so on, these are all produced by the brain. When your brain is dead, so will your mind. So [they say,] your mind depends very much on your body.

The non-Buddhist philosophers of the ancient past also have such beliefs [as some modern scientists], that when one dies, everything about this person will cease to exist. For them, past and future lives do not exist.

Other non-Buddhists philosophers do not believe in causality. Everything arises spontaneously without any need for a cause for it to occur: suffering suddenly happens; happiness suddenly happens. Nothing depends on causes and conditions to happen. They give the example of: the rising sun, it shines [on earth] suddenly without any need for a cause; water will always flow downwards without any cause; a thorn does not need to have any cause to be sharp. Likewise, some people who kill a lot, who are very violent, live long lives without any cause; those who are very miserly can also be very rich without a cause.

Still other non-Buddhists believe in future lives but do not accept the law of causality nor liberation [from cyclic existence]. The former view can be due to being able to see where they will be born in the next rebirth, as when a rich person sees himself taking rebirth as a very poor person, he would conclude that karma does not exist. The latter view is due to some of them being able to reduce their manifest afflictions through calm abiding meditations. When they achieve the form and formless realms all the way to the peak of samsara, they believe that they have abandoned every affliction and thus achieved liberation there and then. In reality, they have not. This is evident when the time of death arrives. They would be able to see where they will take rebirth in the next life. Due to this, they immediately develop a strong view that liberation does not exist.

Due to such conclusions, many different philosophers develop all sorts of beliefs. Therefore, for Buddhists, it is of utmost importance to prove the existence of past and future lives, to develop the confidence in the mind.

For Buddhists, the established conclusion is that: the mind is not produced by the body, as this is not the substantial cause of the mind, but merely the condition for the production of the mind. This is because, according to Dharmakirti, the Indian pandit/ philosopher who debated with the non-Buddhists, if the body is the substantial cause of the mind, then it would [absurdly] follow that a dead body should possess the mind. This is because, all the causes are there [in the body] to produce the mind. However, this is never the case.

Dharmakirti also said that a person's wisdom or compassion do not totally depend on the body as well. If these minds were produced totally by the body, then it would [absurdly] follow that a stronger body would produce better wisdom and compassion. The weaker body would likewise produce lesser wisdom and compassion. Again, this is not true. He said that no matter how compassionate or intelligent one is, it is not dependent on one's body getting stronger or weaker: if one's body gets stronger, it does not necessary mean that one's wisdom is getting better/ more intelligent. Likewise, if one's body is getting weaker, it does not necessary mean that one has less compassion or has become less intelligent. Since that is the case, the mind does not totally depend on the body to be produced.

Therefore, Dharmakirti said that the substantial cause of the mind must necessary be a similar/ [concordant] cause. This must come from another previous moment of mind. The body cannot be the substantial cause that produces the mind. In this way, he proved [existence] of past lives, as the consciousness of the present life must have come from a substantial similar concordant cause that produced it. Since it cannot be produced by a physical form, then the only substantial cause must be a mind of the [immediate] past life. Otherwise, it would be impossible for the mind of the present life to exist.

Due to the existence of the mind being produced from a mind of the previous life, therefore, for Buddhists, one can understand that there's no beginning of the [existence of the] mind. Since that is the case, therefore, there's also no beginning of life as well.

Similarly, when you analyze further, I think there's also no beginning to every impermanent phenomenon. There is always some sort of continuation [of impermanent phenomena] as these always have to be produced by their respective substantial causes. Since that is the case, then there should not be any beginning to impermanent phenomena, like the mind. You have to check that yourself.

Since the mind has no beginning nor an end, similarly, the 'self / I / person' also does not have a beginning nor an end as well.

Therefore, for [both] non-Buddhists and Buddhists who believe in [the existence of] past and future lives, the [important] question for all to [analyse deeply] is this: what is *it* that [transmigrates] from life to life?

The 'self / I / person' is that which experiences all the happiness and suffering. For those who believe in past and future lives, it is also this 'self / I / person' that continues/ transmigrates from life to life. The non-Buddhists call it the 'soul' and so forth. This would mean the 'self / I / person' or maybe the mind.

For them, they assert that this 'self / I / person' cannot be of one entity with the five aggregates. It must be totally separate from them. For example, the 'soul' or 'self / I / person' must be separate from the body. This is because, when a person dies, its aggregates like the form [of the body] totally disappear, but for them, the 'self / I / person' does not. The body becomes ashes after cremation and disappears [forever] but the 'self / I / person' continues on [to the next life]. Due to this, they say that the 'self / I / person' cannot be of the same entity/ of one entity with the body but is of a totally separate entity, something else other than the body.

Another belief, for them, is that the 'self / I / person' must be permanent. This is because, it never changes but remains as the same [entity]/ soul forever from life to life. Since they believe it does not change, therefore, they believe it is permanent.

They also believe that the 'self / I / person' is single [/unitary], without parts, therefore, it pervades all phenomena.

Thirdly, the 'self / I / person' must be independent, that does not depend on causes and conditions.

For most of the non-Buddhists who believe in past and future lives, that which goes on from life to life, there exists such a 'soul/ self / I / person' [having the characteristics] of being permanent, unitary and independent. This conclusion came from their own sustained analysis.

However, whether this is true in reality is another thing altogether. For them, this is their only philosophy, belief, conclusion.

For Buddhists, all its tenets accept past and future lives. As mentioned earlier, even though they accept the 'self / I / person' exists, they also assert selflessness, which means no 'self / I / person'. Therefore, you need to understand what this means.

The Great Exposition School talks about the coarse level of selflessness of person to be empty of a permanent, unitary and independent person. Such a [type] of person [which is permanent, unitary and independent] does not exist.

What the non-Buddhists believe in, that there is a 'self / I / person' [that is permanent, unitary and independent], all the Buddhist philosophers say that such type of 'self / I / person' does not exist [at all].

Such a coarse self of person are accepted by the Great Exposition, Mind Only and Autonomy Middle Way Schools [see chart: self of persons and phenomena]. Such a self of person does not exist.

First, you need to understand, what the non-Buddhists believe is the 'self / I / person' that transmigrates from life to life, and their reasons for saying so. Then you need to understand how all the [four] Buddhist [tenets] say that such a type of 'self / I / person' does not exist [whatsoever].

The first of the four Buddhist seals assert: all compounded phenomena are impermanent. Now you have to understand and then prove [to yourself] why Buddhists do not believe in a permanent, unitary and independent 'self / I / person', why this does not exist.

You also need to know that impermanent [phenomena] has coarse and subtle levels. Impermanence [in general,] would mean momentary change due to causes and conditions.

The second seal: all contaminated phenomena are miserable. [You need to understand that your own] contaminated impermanent phenomena/ aggregates undergo momentary change, and these come about due to causes and conditions. Specifically, the causes and conditions refer to [your own] karma and the afflictions.

The word 'person' in Tibetan is called '*Gang Sag*'. This does not define what a person is, but is merely an etymology [how the word was derived at]: '*Gang*' means 'full of', '*Sag*' means 'falling over'. In this context, '*Gang*' means 'full of delusions' and '*Sag*' means 'overflowing'. Therefore, this means that we are full of delusions, not only that, these are overflowing!

When you say contaminated phenomenon, this means it is produced or caused by karma and the afflictions, which are in the nature of suffering.

The third seal: all phenomena are empty and selfless. When Buddha said that all contaminated phenomena are suffering, something which is in the nature of suffering, [you need to discover] whether there is anything you can do about it or not. This is where the third seal comes in, where Buddha said that it is possible. This is because, all phenomena are empty and selfless, therefore it is possible [to do something about it].

When you think deeper about how is it possible [to do something about your own suffering], all the suffering and pain come from attachment and anger which are produced by a wrong consciousness, a non-valid mind apprehending/ seeing/ believing objects in a wrong way. Due to this, [one experiences] pain and suffering. When you look deeper, how the anger and attachment arise, all these [minds essentially come from] believing in/ grasping at an independent 'self'. Anger and attachment then arise, which then produce pain and suffering. Therefore, all these boils down to [your own] self-grasping thought, believing that the independent 'I' is there, based on that, all these suffering arise.

So, Buddha said that all phenomena are empty and selfless, which means nothing exists independently, the 'self' does not exist independently. What the self-grasping mind sees and grasps is an independent 'I', not only seeing that but believing a hundred percent that the independent 'self' is there.

So now, you need to analyze [for yourself] whether this kind of mind that believes in an independent 'self' is a valid mind or a wrong mind.

When you do that [properly], you will realize that this kind of mind that believes in an independent 'I' is a wrong mind/ consciousness, which is completely opposite to how the [actual] self [really] exists. In reality, there's no independent 'I', but your mind totally believes that it is there.

Since it is a wrong mind, therefore, there should be some antidote, which understands that there is [never] such an independent 'I' that can exist. Such a mind then becomes antidote to the mind that believes in an independent 'I'. When you understand this, that there's no such an independent 'self / I / person', then you will be able to reduce your self-grasping mind.

When you are able to reduce/ weaken such a mind, then logically [speaking], you will also be able to totally [eliminate]/ get rid of this mind. Therefore, when you understand this, then liberation is possible.

This is why the fourth seal says: Nirvana is peace. This is why this seal is [stated] here: Nirvana is possible. When you understand that you are able to [remove] all your afflictions and its root, the self-grasping [mind], then you understand that nirvana is possible and that it is peace.

When you don't have this [root] affliction, attachment, anger and so on, then peace in [your] mind [actually] starts.

When you [look for] nirvana, [you are actually] not [looking] for some kind of city [out there]. Nirvana is in your heart. Therefore, you don't have to go to another country! Therefore, when you think that "Nirvana is peace", you have to understand that samsara is not far away, [but merely] within your mind. So long as you are under the [control of your] delusion and karma, you will continuously be circling.

Our body is like a pillar, our mind is like someone [within the pillar]. A rope is like karma and delusions. Your mind will always be tied to your body [so long as it is under the control of] karma and delusions. When you take one body, your mind will be [tied with that under] karma and delusions. When you die, another body will [appear] and your mind will go there and again, it will be tied by karma and delusions. In this way, your mind will never let go of the body, it will always be tied to it under [the control of] karma and delusions.

This is how suffering starts. If you are not tied by karma and delusions, your mind will be freed. Even though it abides 'within' the body, it is not really tied to it. You are quite free even when you have the body, your mind is not tied/ bounded by karma and delusions. You are therefore freed from them, there will not be pain and suffering. You are thus liberated from karma and delusions.

Therefore, you have to [know] how many and what types of wrong minds you have. You believe most of the time in what you see to be true. Therefore, you believe you are right, you are the best: whatever you think is right, whatever you say is right, whatever you see is also right. [In that way] you are like a Buddha: everything that you see and believe is a hundred percent right.

Just look at permanence, how you see things: something that is impermanent, not only will you see it as permanent, you also believe in it [wholeheartedly]. Look carefully [within yourself], you say [from your mouth] that it is impermanent, but in reality [deep down in your heart], you believe that which is impermanent to be permanent. Therefore, we [do] have this kind of wrong mind [within us].

For example, when you see Swee Kim yesterday, and you see him again today in class, what we see [and believe] is the exact same person today as yesterday, that there's absolutely no change whatsoever. Not only do we see that, we totally believe that it is the same Swee Kim today as yesterday, isn't it? This means that we believe that Swee Kim is permanent. We also believe that it's the same Swee Kim today from ten years ago, when he becomes old, we will still believe he is the same person.

However, in reality, the Swee Kim of yesterday is already in the past. The Swee Kim of yesterday does not exist today. When you accept impermanence, that means time is divisible. The Swee Kim of yesterday is the past, when that 24 hour time period is over, yesterday's Swee Kim is gone and today's Swee Kim starts. Therefore, it is a totally different Swee Kim, not the same one at all. However, we believe in him as exactly the same person always.

In the same way, you believe in the [permanence] of the world, the mountains and so on. You will never think that the mountain is impermanent, you will think that it will last forever, having a grasping on that [thought]. Likewise, when you think about this world or universe, you also believe that no matter how many billions of years later, it will always be around, even though by then it may have ceased. Therefore, we see permanence and then believe in it as the reality.

When you analyse deeper, the Swee Kim of this morning and the Swee Kim of this afternoon are totally different, however, we believe they are the same. Similarly, when you analyse the Swee Kim that exists an hour ago, then going deeper to the seconds, they are not the same. Yet we believe that they are all the same.

Each second and each moment, [Swee Kim or any impermanent object] is changing, not the same at all, but you just don't understand that. You believe what in reality is impermanent to be permanent. Always there.

It is only when the person passes away that you would say, "Oh, this is the end, he is gone." This is the gross understanding of impermanence, not the subtle one, a very very gross form of impermanence. Even when you think that the Swee Kim of yesterday does not exist today, this is another gross level of understanding, even with this, you failed to understand clearly.

It is only when you see/ really understand that the person is changing all the time, that it is a different person/ not the same person, would you be able to reduce your attachment and anger. You will be able to reduce your [afflictions] when you understand [subtle impermanence].

This is because, there is no more of such grasping. You get angry because you believe that the person that harmed you two days ago is the very same person that you see the next day. Whenever you see that person, you see that it is the exact same person yesterday and today who harmed you. You will never think that it has changed and is a different person altogether.

If you understand this, then the person who harmed you two days ago is gone, does not exist anymore. The person now is a totally different one, not the same person at all. This is just talking about the gross level of impermanence. If you understand even this, you will be able to remove your anger and attachment.

Therefore, in reality, the yesterday's Swee Kim does not exist today, today's Swee Kim does not exist tomorrow. This is because, yesterday's Swee Kim is labeled by yesterday's time, [his existence is] combined with that. When the time goes, yesterday's Swee Kim does not exist anymore. [The problem is], we don't understand that, we believe it is the exact same one. I am not even talking about emptiness, I am merely referring to impermanence, and this, not even about subtle impermanence but just gross impermanence. Therefore, if you are able to understand even that level of gross impermanence, you will be able to change, reduce anger and attachment.

Nevertheless, we believe in the contrary, in even [the gross] permanence. Even if, in reality it is impermanent, we have this kind of believe that it is permanent. We all have that. That is why, one thing is, whatever we believe in, is [actually] not true.

Similarly, when we talk about something which, in nature, is unclean, we believe [wholeheartedly]/ a hundred percent that it is clean. For example, our own bodies. In reality, how it came about is through [contaminated] causes and conditions, and that it is unclean. However, the way our minds see it, especially our own bodies, is totally clean.

When you see others' bodies, in reality it is the same [type of] body, but [you will see that] it is not as clean as your own body. You will always believe that you are cleaner than the others, isn't it?

When you compare your own poo to others', in reality it is no different. You ate exactly the same food [as others] and the same [type of] poo came out. However, when your mind looks at them, yours will not be as disgusting as the others'.

This is how our mind works, when it is related to oneself. It is also the same, when we look at our own bodies, we will always think that our bodies are totally clean. This shows that whatever we see, our minds believe [as absolutely true], but in reality, it is not true at all.

I asked this question a long time ago [during the first batch BP class]: "Why is your own poo not as smelly as others?" Someone replied: "Oh it's self-cherishing!" This is how our minds work. There are so many wrong believe, wrong thinking. In reality it is not true.

This is believing in the 'self'. When you think about believing in the 'self / I / person', when you think carefully, when you look at your own body, sometimes you believe immediately that it is yourself. In reality your body is not the 'self / I / person', but you believe that it is the 'self / I / person'.

For example, when your body [bumps] into a wall or a pillar, immediately, you feel 'yourself' hitting the pillar, your body is the 'self / I / person': "Oh, I've hit myself against the pillar!" You believe your body is your 'self'.

Similarly, when you experience happy or painful feelings, your feeling itself is like the 'self / I / person'. When you understand something, you would say: "I understand!", this is when you discriminate an object, your 'discriminating mind' itself is like the 'self / I / person'. We have such wrong beliefs.

In reality, each aggregate, form, feeling, discrimination, consciousness and so on, they are not the 'self / I / person', but we believe that they are.

When we die, the consciousness moves on to the next life. Due to this, we think the consciousness is the 'self / I / person'. In reality, this is not the case, but we believe in that.

There are therefore so many of such wrong consciousnesses within our minds, which are all based on believing in the independent 'self / I / person'.

Such wrong beliefs/ consciousnesses have many levels: coarse and subtle levels of self of persons and phenomena. We have all these wrong consciousnesses within ourselves.

You should therefore understand that, whatever we believe, whatever we see, is not necessary a hundred percent true. If you understand the four Buddhist seals, then you will be able to understand this. [The reason why] we have so many wrong minds, wrong beliefs is due to that.

When you understand that your mind is not a hundred percent pure, not valid/ correct, through [studying] this subject [of tenets and so on], you can apply [your understanding] to your various practices. For example, the practice of guru devotion. [Kyabjhe Lama Zopa] Rinpoche mentioned many times to [do a retreat on] guru devotion for three months. When you understand that your mind is not totally pure, that there are so many wrong minds within you, [with such an understanding], when you [do a retreat] on the practice of guru devotion, [this understanding] will be able to help [you when you apply] your meditation on guru devotion.

Therefore, the conclusion here, what I am trying to say today is:

1) You have to understand the reasons why some non-Buddhists don't believe in the existence of future lives but merely this life.

2) Then, for those non-Buddhists who believe in past and future lives, what kind 'self / I / person' do they believe goes from life to life. They say it is a permanent, unitary and independent 'self / I / person' that exists that goes from life to life.

3) For Buddhist philosophy, all Buddhist philosophical [tenets] say that such a permanent, unitary and independent 'self / I / person' does not exist. You have to know why each of these [assertions of the non-Buddhists] are flawed. What will be the problem if the 'self / I / person' is permanent, unitary and independent. You have to analyse and prove [to yourself] why such kind of 'self' does not exist.

Therefore, you have to know what the non-Buddhists believe. Next, you have to know how the Buddhist [tenets] do not accept that. This is the entire essence of [studying] tenets: to [initially] understand what the coarse selflessness of person, which is the non-existence of a permanent, unitary and independent person, is all about.

[Nga-wang-pel-den's Word Commentary on Jam-yang-shay-pa's Root Text of Tenets:]

page 45:

Root text:

Because it is permanent, it is not mind. How can the permanent have bondage and release?

Word Commentary on Root Text:

Because the person is permanent, it is not consciousness. When the person is permanent, how can it be bound and free? Such is impossible.

page 82:

Root text:

Ishvara would be the cause of pleasure and pain and would perform sins. That which depends on wish does not have capacity. Pervading all and being partless are contradictory. Because he is permanent, things would always be produced or never produced at all.

Word Commentary on Root Text:

Since you assert that Ishvara is the cause bestowing happiness on persons with faith in him and the cause bestowing pain on those who do not have faith in him, he would not be the creator of all environments and animate beings, because it is seen that pleasure and comfort arise for Buddhists who do not respect Ishvara, and it is seen that pain arises for those respecting Ishvara, whereas the creator of those [actually] is not Ishvara. If Ishvara was the creator of all non-virtuous karma, then since he acts out very powerful sins, he would immediately afterwards boil in a hell. If Ishvara's producing environments and animate beings depends on an awareness wishing to produce environments and animate beings, then since Ishvara would be under the outside influence of that wish, he would not have the capacity to produce environments and animate beings under his own power. If it did not depend on that wish, this would contradict the assertion that it arises from Ishvara's wish. If Ishvara pervades all stable things and animate beings, this contradicts the assertion that he is partless. Since Ishvara is permanent, all environments and animate beings either would always be produced or would never be produced at all.]

Lesson 8

It is good enough [for this module], as long as you have an understanding of :

- 1) The two truths according to the Great Exposition School
- 2) The meaning of the two selflessness of persons, the coarse and subtle
- 3) How the five paths of the three vehicles are traversed
- 4) The objects of abandonment of these paths

If you can, summarize in your own words, your understanding of the Great Exposition School's presentation of the two truths, the three vehicles and the five paths.

With respect to the two truths, posit an illustration for each. Use such an illustration to highlight the difference between the two truths.

With respect to the two selflessness of person, summarize in your own words:

- 1) The non-existence of a permanent, unitary and independent 'self / I / person'. What are the fallacies if such a 'self / I / person' were to exist.
- 2) the non-existence of a self-sufficient, substantially existent 'self / I / person'. What are the fallacies if such a 'self / I / person' were to exist.
- 3) The reasons to establish that a self-sufficient, substantially existent person does not exist.

With respect to the three final vehicles, what exactly are the three final vehicles and their respective five paths. For example, their main object of meditation is the emptiness of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person, however, they differ in the way merit is accumulated. Therefore, the method of traversing the path is different. Also, when they achieve a nirvana without remainder, they go out of existence as the continua of body and mind are severed.

When we look at the Sutra School next, the focus will mainly be their presentation of the two truths. We will not be examining the selflessness of persons as the presentations are the same as the Great Exposition School's presentation of the self of person and the selflessness of person.

As for the presentation of mind in the Sutra School, the valid cognizers and different types of minds, these have been covered in the previous module, as such, these will not be covered next.

Lesson 13

You have to understand why you are learning the four tenets, it is really important [to know the reasons for studying].

You should always link what you have been learning back to the Four Seals, which attest that a doctrine [in question] is a Buddhist [doctrine]. It is a seal that 'guarantees' that the doctrine is a Buddhist path:

- 1) All composed phenomena are impermanent
- 2) All contaminated phenomena are miserable
- 3) All phenomena are empty and selfless
- 4) Nirvana is peace

The second seal: all contaminated phenomena are suffering. [If you accept this], then ultimately, what you are looking for is an end to your problems and sufferings.

Then the question would arise: "Can my miseries ever be ended?"

The Buddhist answer is: all of our miseries and problems can be eliminated. This is because, [the third seal states:] all phenomena are selfless.

Therefore, this means that, whether you can ever put an end to your sufferings, it all depends on your understanding of selflessness.

Even though the four tenets assert their own conclusions, nevertheless, the essence of their respective conclusions on selflessness means that: if you realize them, you can put an end to all of your miseries and problems.

Therefore, if you realize selflessness, then you will be able to put an end to all of your problems and sufferings.

Then the question may arise: "How would a realization of selflessness reduce and destroy my afflictions, [the main cause of my sufferings and problems]?" "How does each tenet system teach selflessness, which is supposedly the antidote that ends all of my miseries?"

Therefore, this is something that you have to learn and discover for yourself in your own experience, practice or meditation. You have to find out from your experiences and see how it works.

When the Great Exposition School and Sutra School explain about selflessness, they only do so with respect to the selflessness of persons. They do not talk about the selflessness of phenomena.

However, once you learn about the Mahayana tenets, which you have just started with the Mind Only School, over and above learning about the selflessness of persons, you also learn about the selflessness of phenomena.

What I am saying now is not like a lecture, rather, you have to think about this yourself. It is something to reflect on, to meditate over:

In our minds, we have different kinds of afflictions. We get upset, we have anger, we also have desire and attachments. For example, when attachment or desire arises, we have to ask ourselves by looking inside ourselves and discover: "How does attachment arise?"

It is very clear that, whenever we get very emotionally involved with an object, very attracted to an object or the person, such an emotional [attachment] would always involve the appearance of a very attractive person or object.

Similarly, when we get upset with a situation or with someone, such an emotional involvement would always be based on an appearance on something [or someone] very unpleasant, that you don't like, something very bad.

However, it is not the mere appearance of an attractive person or object that leads you to be attached. Likewise, it is also not the mere appearance of a very unpleasant situation/ object or person that gets you to be upset.

[What actually leads you to be attached or getting upset] is [essentially] based on an "I":

"That person looks attractive to *me*, I find that person attractive." Then we get emotionally involved. Therefore, the 'I' is always involved.

Similarly: "That person appears unpleasant or ugly to *me*". It is only [when the 'I' is emotionally involved,] then we get upset.

We don't get attracted to a person or an object merely because that object or person appears to pleasant to someone else. Such an object or person has to appear pleasant or attractive to the 'I or me', then would we become emotionally involved.

Likewise, we don't get upset to a person merely because that person looks bad or unpleasant to someone else. The person or the situation has to appear unpleasant to 'me', it is only then would we get upset.

Therefore, in dependence on the object or person appearing either as pleasant or unpleasant to 'me', [it is only] then would I get attached or angry.

Therefore, all the afflictions like anger and attachment always arise in dependence on the sense of an 'I / me'. Whether we get attached or upset at a situation, object or person, such emotions always begin/ arise with a sense of 'I'. The object or person appearing either pleasant or unpleasant to 'me', based on that, we either get attached or upset.

Therefore, the stronger the sense/ attitude of 'I', the more we think this 'I' is everything, the most important, the most precious, commensurate with that strength, that much attachment or anger will arise.

Likewise, we also get very attached to our friends: "people who are *my* friends, *my* side, *my* group," the stronger such ways of looking at '*my* friends', then the stronger the attachment will come. Then: "people who are not on *my* side, not *my* group, *my* enemies, those that *I* don't like," the stronger such ways of looking at '*my* enemies', the stronger will be the anger.

On the contrary, whenever we just relax, let go, loosen the grip on this sense of '*I, me*', we can tell from our own experiences that the more we are able to do that, the more space there will be in the mind, the more relaxed, more loosening on the grip we have, then definitely we can see a corresponding decrease in the anger and attachment we will have. We can see this very clearly from our own experiences.

Of course, friends exist, enemies exist, 'my friends' exist, 'my enemies' exist. However, while they exist, if we are able to loosen the grip on the 'I, ego', thus giving the mind more space, more freedom, the more we are able to do that, then the attachment and anger that usually arise in dependence on seeing/ holding on to '*my* friends' and '*my* enemies' will decrease. Even though such persons remain as friends and enemies, when we loosen the grip on the 'I', the afflictions generated in relation to them will decrease.

Since enemies exist, friends exist, therefore, there will be pleasant and unpleasant objects [that appear to us]. However, if we loosen the grip on the 'I', then the usual anger and attachment that arise due to holding on to such a concept that "they are *my* friends and enemies" will not be as strong.

Therefore, [this shows that,] even having just some idea of selflessness can really help to lessen afflictions like anger and attachment.

Imagine you walk into a jewelry shop, especially for the ladies, you get very excited when you see those diamonds. There is the *appearance* of very beautiful diamonds. Based on [such appearances], the thought arises: "How nice if I can have it!"

'Diamonds' are just examples. This could be anything, so long as it is something that is considered to be very 'desirable', that makes people talk about it. When you look at those diamonds as an example, an object that you find pleasant, then the thought can arise: "How nice if I could have that!"

If say, you act upon that thought and buy the diamond, once it becomes yours, then the 'I' has entered into the 'picture'. The diamond is no longer a mere diamond, but has become *my* diamond.

Therefore, you can see the difference, with regard to the emotional involvement with the object, before and just after buying/ owning the diamond. After the 'I' becomes involved with the object, the attachment has become so much stronger. Not only the object 'looked better', 'became more precious' than before, the clinging/ attachment has become even stronger than before. This is because the 'I' has become involved as the object has become '*mine*'.

The object itself has not changed. It is still [just] a diamond, whether it is in your house or someone else's house. However, what has 'changed' is that the 'I' has become the owner. The 'I' has become involved. Due to this, there is much stronger sense of clinging than before [the 'I' was the owner.]

When you lose the diamond, you also lose sleep. If it wasn't yours, that same object [being lost] from someone's house or shop will never be of any concern to you. You will not worry nor lose sleep over the lost. However, when it is your possession, when the involved 'I' has lost the object, then you get upset and worried.

Therefore, in these examples when we have a very strong sense of 'I', what we maybe grasping at, is essentially a real and permanent 'I', a permanent, unitary and independent 'I'. This is essentially what we are grasping at.

We may also be grasping at a self-instituting 'I' that is able to stand alone, right there, real and self-sufficient.

The Hinayana tenets of the Great Exposition School and Sutra School's explanations of the emptiness of the permanent, unitary and independent self, the emptiness of the self-sufficient, substantially existent person may seem to be complex words. However, what these words actually mean are simply how we [usually] operate [in daily life].

The Hinayana tenets explain that these kinds of 'selves' do not exist. If we understand how there is never has been a permanent, unitary and independent self, above that, if we can understand how, although a self-sufficient, substantially existent person appears, such a 'person' does not exist. If we able to see through, from our own experiences, such types of grasping, then with the little bit of understanding of selflessness of person, we can definitely see the reduction in clinging onto this 'I', which will lead to the reduction in the afflictions, be it anger or attachment. We can definitely see the reduction.

So much has been said about 'meditation of emptiness', what this essentially is, is merely to discover for ourselves that the 'I' which we believed to exist, the 'I' that appears to exist in a particular way, that such type of 'I' does not exist whatsoever. The 'I' that *appears to exist* in a peculiar way, is for us to realize that is not *how* the 'I' exist.

We have to discover for ourselves in our own experience, how when we follow after these beliefs, that there is a real 'I' that is self-sufficient and so on, will lead to the increase in the afflictions.

Conversely, when we are able to use reasons to see why for example, in reality, a self-sufficient, substantially existent person does not exist, and seeing through this, we will definitely come to see for ourselves the reduction in the afflictions that come with it.

Therefore, the entire purpose on meditating on the selflessness of person is to reduce and weaken the apprehension of a self of person. When we reduce and weaken the apprehension of a self of person, we also reduce and weaken the afflictions. When we reduce and weaken the afflictions, we will definitely have less problems, less sufferings.

We can discover for ourselves, by reflecting and meditating on the selflessness of person, the reduction in this self-grasping, we will see the reduction in our afflictions, attachment and anger. This is because, when we have less grasping and clinging on to the '*me, me, me*', then there will be less clinging to '*my* friends, *my* group, *my* enjoyments.' When we have less attachments for them, we will definitely have less anger [as well]. This is because, a lot of times, we get upset because of these things.

Therefore, if you look at the Hinayana's Great Exposition School and the Sutra School, their presentation on the selflessness of persons, this is like the first stage of practice. It is only through meditating and realizing the selflessness of person, that we can see a reduction in our afflictions.

Therefore, we have to realize for ourselves, how a permanent, unitary and independent self does not exist; how a self-sufficient, substantially existent person does not exist. By seeing and discovering for ourselves, using reasons, then we will reduce that grasping at the 'person'. When we reduce the grasping, clinging on to this mistaken identity of 'self', then we will see a reduction in the afflictions. This is therefore, like a first stage of practice that is presented in the first two tenets.

When you come to the Mahayana tenet, starting with the Mind Only School, there is the presentation of the selflessness of phenomena. Why is this so? You can train in the initial stages of merely meditating on the selflessness of person that is presented in the Hinayana tenets. Through this, you can definitely see a reduction in the afflictions like anger and attachment. However, pleasant and unpleasant phenomena still appear to us. There is still appearances of nice pleasant things, good and bad people. Based on those appearances, we still get emotionally involved again. Due to that, we will still get upset, we will still get attached.

This is where the selflessness of phenomena come in to [help]. The reason why we still get upset or attached is because we react to the appearance of pleasant and unpleasant phenomena. There are still such appearances that we cannot stop. This is where the understanding of the selflessness of phenomena [can help].

The Hinayana tenets only explain about the selflessness of persons, from that, we are only dealing with our own involvement of the 'I'. However, this does not deal with the *object* to which the 'I' is attached to or upset with.

Therefore, in the presentation of the selflessness of phenomena, there is the understanding that: although phenomena appear as if they were self-instituted, as if they had a 'self', that there is something that has an identity from the side of the phenomena, although they appear in such a way, in reality, this is not how they exist.

When you combine such an understanding with your earlier understanding on the selflessness of persons, then this becomes an even more powerful tool, for you to work at the afflictions.

With these, you have the two selflessness [as powerful tools to help]. On one hand, you have an understanding of selflessness of persons, how the self does not exist in the way it appears. Above this, you can combine this understanding of selflessness of

persons with the understanding that, phenomena do not exist in the way they appear to you, they do not exist in the way you believe them to exist.

Now, [with these two powerful tools], you have an understanding of the selflessness of yourself, the person, and the selflessness of the phenomena that you are either attached to or you are upset at, don't you think such an understanding is much more powerful than just having a mere understanding that the self does not exist in the way it appears?

When we start looking at the Mahayana tenets, we start with the Mind Only School. On top of the selflessness of persons, they also explain about the selflessness of phenomena. In essence, what we are going to meditate on, is to discover for yourself that, phenomena other than yourself, do not exist in the way they appear. For this school, what 'phenomena do not exist in the way they appear' means is, the non-existent of external objects.

Therefore, to meditate on the selflessness of phenomena means to understand and discover that, phenomena do not exist in the way they appear to us. According to the Mind Only School, although there is the appearance of external objects, but in reality, external objects do not exist.

This is because, when something pleasant appears to our minds, we get attached to it. We get attached because, we believe in the appearance 'something real there' outside of the mind. According to the Mind Only School, such an external object, although it appears, but that is not how it exists.

The Mind Only School explains that, what you see, these forms, sounds and so on, do not exist as separate from your mind, outside of your mind. Rather, how they exist are merely a projection/ appearance of your mind. Specifically, it is a projection of a ripening of karmic seed in your mind. Due to the awakening of this seed, you have this projection/ appearance of an object. Therefore, this is what the object is, which is none other than that, not something external to your mind that is 'real out there'. Therefore, there is no external object.

Your experiencing an appearance of a beautiful object is only due to a ripening of a karmic imprint in your mind. Therefore, there is not an object that is coming from outside your mind.

If we are able understand, according to the Mind Only School's view, that such an appearance of a beautiful object is merely a projection of my own mind, a ripening of a particular karmic imprint in my own mind. Other than this, there is really nothing out there, from its own side that is a real external object. If we develop such an understanding, this will definitely help us to reduce our grasping and attachment to such an 'object'.

Sometimes, you can have exciting dreams. In it, you can get very emotionally involved with being attached or angry with the [appearance] of the dream. However, when you wake up from the dream and realize that it is just a dream, then immediately, all those emotional involvements of fear, attachment, desire and so on that we've had during dream will be gone.

Even if, in the initial moment waking from the dream, there can still be that tense feeling, be it fear, excitement or desire, nevertheless, when you become more awake, then you will realize it was just a dream. Those intense feelings will all be gone.

If we have a world view that there are based on something external object right there outside the mind, that everything, whether pleasant or unpleasant, is coming from the side of the object, then our emotional involvement will be very strong. Everything has nothing to do with your mind.

However, if you think about and follow after the view of the Mind Only School, then if you were to think: "Although there is this appearance of a real external object right there, this is merely a projection of my mind, something that is made up by my mind. What I see is just none other than the result of a ripening of karmic imprint in my mind, there is no real external object right there that is separate from my mind."

If we were to think like that, we can definitely see a reduction in our emotional involvement with the object, whether it is anger or attachment.

According to the Mind Only School, we come to realize that all conventional truths do not exist in the way it appear to us, how there is no external object. This is how we can, over time, reduce our clinging, grasping, anger, attachment and so on.

From this, one can understand that, by delineating the selflessness of phenomena, that is, by understanding what selflessness of phenomena is, you have more powerful tools in your hands to work at the afflictions.

This is because, now, besides having a view of the selflessness of persons, when you add in the view of the selflessness of phenomena, most definitely, what you have at your disposal is much more powerful than merely having the view of the selflessness of persons.

These great treatises are not easy [to understand].

I would normally say that, taking initiations or receiving initiations are nothing [when compared to understanding the great treatises.]

This is because, it is very easy to just sit there, however, whether one has received the initiation is another matter altogether. You can just think that you have received it.

However, thinking about selflessness is much more challenging than taking initiation; it is even much more challenging than *giving* initiation.

Anybody can give initiations. Of course, there is a difference in whether the person is qualified or not. Even if one is merely going through the motions and doing the rituals is very much more easier.

It is much more challenging to present these teachings, and it is much more challenging to under these teachings.

It is only through understanding these teaching would we be able to see a change in the mind. Especially, when you think [deeply] about these teachings, these are the things that would cause the mind to *change*.

Especially when you see the truth for yourself, when you are able to eliminate whatever superimpositions or wrong understandings that you have, you will gain the joy and understanding which is not something that you can gain from an initiation.

When you sit through an initiation, you may think that you are generating 'great bliss'. However, when we don't have the realization of [the real] great bliss, we can't really say we are [generating] great bliss.

[When compared to] the [real] joy that comes from learning and seeing some truth that you discover for yourself, that is something that is certain to bring forth real benefit and joy.

I did mention this before, something which is my own experience, when I think about [the teachings], I may not understand everything. However, if there were somethings that, after I've thought through and gain some understanding, then I will feel "this is [real] joy, how wonderful!"

However, when I sit through the initiations, when I think, "there is bliss", that is all. It is difficult to experience, the [real] joy I find from discovering the teachings. I find it difficult to experience the same joy when I attend initiations.

Through our own discovery of the Buddhist teachings when we study, learn and reflect on them, when we start to see some truth, that kind of joy is very different.

It is only *then* that you can have some faith in Buddha's teachings, and so doing, you can have some faith in Buddha which is heartfelt.

Such [feelings] can only come through discovering, [learning] and reflecting. I don't think it is possible to have such a 'feel', such kinds of discoveries by [merely] sitting through an initiation. Just by taking, receiving and being present in initiations, if you have that same level of faith in Buddha, I find it difficult [to achieve.]

I am referring to us ordinary individuals, most of us are like that. Of course, with the exception of those with very high realizations, when they take empowerments, it is a completely different experience [altogether].

We would like to think that we are like them, however, [in reality], we are not. We are [merely] ordinary individuals, so for us, the way out is through making the discovery ourselves, through learning the Buddha's teachings, to see the authenticity, the truth for ourselves.

When we see the truth ourselves, the joy that we gain is very different. [It is only then that] we really begin to have faith and the real understanding of what Buddha is, real faith in Buddha.

For us, this is the *only* way. That is why, Lama Tsongkhapa keeps on saying that we must learn, we must study and educate ourselves. We must then think or reflect on what we have learnt.

Think about the Four Seals, particularly that: all contaminated phenomena are suffering. Therefore, what we don't want is suffering. To overcome suffering, we [have no choice but to] overcome its cause, which is ego-grasping, clinging to a self, self of person and so on. This is what we need to abandon.

However, can we abandon our sufferings merely by taking initiations? Obviously and definitely not.

Nevertheless, we [always] like to scramble here and there looking for empowerments, still, nothing happens. There is still suffering.

This is because, we have not [really] targeted the root of the problem: ego-grasping, clinging to the self, grasping at a self of person.

To overcome suffering, we have to overcome this grasping at the self of person.

The *only, sole* method to do this is to realize selflessness. To realize selflessness, we have to meditate on selflessness. To meditate on selflessness, we have to find out, learn, study what selflessness is all about.

So, do you see the process [involved]?

[If you do,] then you will [realize] how *important* it is to *study tenets*.

Therefore, you have to see the [purpose] for yourself, no matter how you think about it, no matter from which angle [you analyze from], the conclusion is still the same: you have [no choice but] to learn, educate yourself, [then followed by] reflecting.

Ultimately, what we don't want is suffering, and if what you want is freedom from suffering, liberation from cyclic existence, then this is the one and only way. Particularly, to learn about selflessness.

This is because, before we can even meditate, we have to learn what selflessness is. It is only then that we are able to cultivate the understanding in meditation. Through that, definitely, you will be able to reduce the afflictions, in so doing, definitely, you will be able to reduce suffering and misery.

It is very important to gain an understanding on selflessness before you meditate on it. Nevertheless, even merely gaining an understanding [itself] is not an easy feat [because] it is very difficult.

In my case, when I teach, I find it extremely difficult to teach. Although I do read different texts and commentaries, it is very difficult to be able to summarize and put together coherently that the view is definitely this and not that.

Sometimes, I even wonder whether I am saying and presenting the right [view] or not. So sometimes I do get such feelings, because it is not straight forward, it is not easy. Even merely to settle/ delineate the view, saying what is and what is not, is already very challenging.

So, forget about realization, even merely being able to say/ explain what exactly is and is not, is itself very challenging and difficult.

I thought to say what I've said today, because I thought it may be of benefit. This is because, it is natural that people may wonder: "What's the point of studying?" There is such a disconnect [of yourself with what you are studying].

Therefore, I thought to say something that may be helpful.

So, think through the process again from the beginning and try to relate what you are studying to [how these can benefit] your mind.

When you think about meditation, what exactly are you meditating about? Meditation is essentially going through in your own mind, through your own power, thinking along the lines to say, what I've talked about today, from the beginning:

- 1) For you to be attached or to be upset, does the 'I' have to be involved or not?
- 2) When the 'I' is involved, how does that lead to the arising of the afflictions like anger and attachment?
- 3) How does phenomena other than the 'I' appear to you, when it appears as pleasant and unpleasant, how do you get emotionally involved. Through such a process, do you get upset and attached.
- 4) If you were able to counteract such grasping, will this lead to the reduction in your afflictions?

Therefore, if you wish to meditate, this is what meditation is all about. This is like an outline [of your meditation], something for you to think about, meditate and come to your own discovery.

We have to be certain/ sure why we are studying/ learning tenets.

In essence, the whole purpose is to be able to fight our afflictions/ destructive emotions. The *only* way [to do that] is to reflect and familiarize our minds with selflessness.

So far, we have been looking at the selflessness of persons. By reflecting and familiarizing our minds with the meaning of the selflessness of persons, we will be able to fight and work against our destructive emotions, our afflictions.

Above this, we have just started on the discussions on selflessness of phenomena. By reflecting and familiarizing our minds with the meaning of selflessness of phenomena, we can also attack and work against our destructive emotions/ afflictions.

It is said that by meditation on the selflessness of phenomena, we can even overcome the obscurations that prevents us from achieving enlightenment/ omniscience.

Having said that, what we have to do is to be certain [ourselves], how the meditation on selflessness acts as an antidote to our afflictions. Is it really possible to uproot all our afflictions/ obscurations from our minds?

This is something that we have to think about repeatedly at all times.

We looked at the selflessness of persons. As of now, we know that the coarse selflessness of person is the emptiness of a permanent, unitary and independent self. It is said in the teachings that if, through reflecting, we arrive at an understanding that the permanent, unitary and independent person indeed does not exist whatsoever, then it is said that our afflictions will weaken.

Therefore, what we have to do, in our own experience, is to see for ourselves that indeed, such a person which is permanent, unitary and independent, does not exist whatsoever. We can find and discover that for ourselves.

We should then check: Do our afflictions become weaker or not. This is the discovery we have to make ourselves.

There is also the subtle selflessness of persons, which is the emptiness of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person. This is more subtle than the non-existent of a permanent, unitary and independent person.

Again, it is also said in the teachings that when we realize the non-existent of a self-sufficient person, our afflictions will weaken. This is what is said in the teachings. This is another thing that we have to discover for ourselves. We have discover for ourselves that, through reflecting that indeed, although we have the appearance of a self-sufficient person to us, in reality, the self does not exist in that way.

We have to check and see whether our afflictions do weaken or not. It is said that the afflictions will weaken, this is the discovery we have to make for ourselves.

Therefore, the whole purpose about learning and familiarizing our minds with the selflessness of person is essentially to work against, reduce and destroy our afflictions.

Nevertheless, when we look at things other than ourselves, things or phenomena around us, things appear to us as if they are right there outside of us. We call them external objects.

According to the Mind Only School, although external objects appear, in reality, they have the reasons to say that there are no external objects.

Our experiment is to see, if we were to adopt the Mind Only School's view, that there are no external objects, in fact, that phenomena are selfless in that subject and object do not exist as different entities. It is said in the teachings that if we were to adopt such a world view, that subject and object do not have different entities, then it is said that our afflictions will also be reduced. This is said to be a very powerful tool. This is what we have to discover [for ourselves] whether this is so.

If you can think along the lines of what I mentioned to you in the previous lesson, which was about how we can apply what we've learnt into reflections, the order of the reflections and so on.

The whole purpose is to see for ourselves, when we study, we have to reflect and to discover for ourselves on what we've learnt. In doing so, we can start to taste the teachings, we start to see some truths, some light behind what is mentioned in the teachings. Then this will automatically enhance whatever interests we really have in the teachings, in the practice.

Lesson 19

How understanding the views of the lower tenets are critical to understanding the views of the highest tenet

While it is true that the Middle Way School represents the most profound view of the nature of reality, nevertheless, merely saying that it is the most profound [and wishing to learn merely that] from the beginning has not much meaning. This is because, one can only come to realize that it is the most profound when one is able to compare this with other views.

This is one of the reasons why studying all four tenets is important. It is only when one understands well the coarser view of reality that is propounded by the tenets below the Middle Way School, would one be able to appreciate how subtle and profound the view of reality that this school is propounding.

Without the understanding of the lower tenets, if one were to merely study the Middle Way School's tenets, one would only be able to say that it is profound, but it would not be an understanding/ realization at all.

This is the reason why one needs to study tenets. There are some people who say: "since the Middle Way School is the highest of all tenets, then just study that, why is there a need to study the lower tenets?" Many people feel like that.

One sees the progress, from the coarser to the subtler view, starting with the selflessness of persons, which is asserted by all the schools below the Consequent Middle Way School, to be empty of a self-sufficient, substantially existent person.

Such an assertion, is relatively coarser, as the Mind Only School refutes external objects and explains how such phenomena do not exist. Therefore, such a worldview is relatively more refined than the mere selflessness of persons.

Based on this, when one approaches the Middle Way School, how it is able to refute true existence, then one would appreciate that it is indeed much more profound and subtle. This is due to having understood the views which are coarser.

There are people who will always say this repeatedly: "My time is limited, what is the point of studying all these? Wouldn't it be better if I merely meditate?"

The entire reason that people meditate is to achieve that peace of heart/ peace of mind/ find happiness. It is for this reason that people meditate on the breadth, visualize themselves as deities, develop single-pointedness and so on. The whole point is to look for peace. Indeed, if one meditates on the breadth, focuses on and relaxes the mind, one would definitely get some peace. This is because, peace comes from settling the mind by stopping discursive thoughts. When discursive thoughts subside, one gets peace [of mind.]

When one sits and performs such meditations for fifteen minutes, one may get fifteen minutes of peace. When one sits for one hour, one gets an hour of peace. However, one would not be able to spend an entire life sitting twenty-four hours merely meditating on stopping all thoughts. This means that, one would not get twenty-four hours of peace that comes from such meditations. The entire purpose of doing such meditations is to relax the mind, ultimately, this is to find happiness and to avoid suffering.

This is also the very reason why one educates oneself [in Buddhist philosophy], there is no other reason [for doing that.] In the final analysis, all the studying and learning serve as an investigation/ inquiry as to what are the phenomena that cause sufferings/ problems, who is this 'I' that is feeling the pain. Through education and analysis on the reasons for the cause of suffering, who is the 'I' that is suffering, specifically the teachings on selflessness, if one were to gain a correct understanding through learning and reflecting on this, even if it is at a coarse level, it is definitely helpful. One gets peace [of mind] on the spot. One's mind is more peaceful as one is able to stop the grosser manifestations of the destructive emotions.

When such thinking/ analysis/ meditation leads to a correct understanding of the nature of the self / I / person that suffers and experiences pain, such a correct understanding, even if it is a coarse one, can start to pacify the afflictions. When the understanding is correct, then it would be difficult for the pacified afflictions to return.

From this, one can understand that there is nothing comparable to such meditations. Once the meditation hits the [target], it is very powerful. One experiences and feels it powerfully.

Such meditations on the ultimate nature of the 'I' is the most effective/ powerful method compared to other types of meditation. Meditations like concentration on the breadth or other single-pointed meditations can perhaps help during the time one is doing that, one gets some peace from the discursive thoughts, as these thoughts do settle for that period. However, when one rises from that session, one again has to confront oneself and the world around one, all the discursive thoughts would then return. What would one do then?

In contrast, the meditation on the 'self' is very powerful as it involves thinking/ analyzing from many perspectives. This is a very effective and powerful method than any other meditations in dealing with suffering.

Therefore, whatever education one has received on the Buddhist teachings, studying and analyzing on what one has learnt, particularly one's education and learning on the exact nature of the 'self / I / person', such an understanding, when it is stable and correct, is very powerful in dealing with myriad situations. When one is experiencing whatever difficult situations, due to such understanding, one's mind is not that disturbed/ shaken.

However, merely learning or studying alone is not enough. These activities alone will not bring about any noticeable change. Nevertheless, these are necessary. This is because, on the basis of learning, reading, studying or listening, one engages in thinking and analysis, it is only with reflecting that genuine understanding can come.

When one's understanding is correct and genuine, it is then that one can use them to deal with whatever problems one encounters in daily life. It is only then would one be able to see any immediate and noticeable difference [in one's mind]. Until and when one gets such an understanding, which comes from thinking and reflection, one would not be able to notice any discernible positive changes/ benefits [in one's mind.]

Therefore, one should never entertain such thoughts that learning and thinking about Buddha's teachings like philosophy and so forth are a waste of time. The entire purpose of studying is to arrive at an understanding on what exactly the 'I' and phenomena are, how they exist.