Transcript of the teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi on Special Insight at Amitabha Buddhist Centre

Root text: *Medium-Length Exposition of the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Lama Tsongkhapa.


For overall structure and to facilitate easy cross reference, the main headings from the course book are included in these transcripts; they are indented and in italics.


When included in these transcripts, these outlines are indented and in bold Calibri font to differentiate them from the headings from the course book.

Lesson 9

15 June 2019

Root text, p.43—46. Review. Q & A: Why we need to realize selflessness of phenomena. Why the two selflessnesses are not realized together. Difference between appearance and apprehension. Mistaken consciousness & valid cognition. Verses from the *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*. Importance of preparing for class.

REVIEW

In the previous session, we talked about the object of observation of an innate view of the transitory collection. As stated on page 43,

The object of observation of an innate view ... naturally generates an awareness thinking “I.”

Two types of the view of the transitory collection
This view of the transitory collection then apprehends the ‘I’ as existing by way of its own character. There are two types of the view of the transitory collection:
1. The view of the transitory collection of the ‘I’
2. The view of the transitory collection of ‘mine’

What is the object of observation of the view of the transitory apprehending ‘mine’? It is
just ‘mine’ itself. So, it is the very ‘mine’. Such a view of the transitory collection then apprehends the ‘mine’ as existing by way of its own character. Therefore, you should know that there are these two kinds of the view of the transitory.

- Both of these views of the transitory collection—one apprehending the ‘I’ and the other apprehending ‘mine’—are views of the transitory collection.
- Both of them are also the conception of the self.
- These two views of the transitory collection are both conceptions of the self of persons.

What is the conception of the self of phenomena? It is, for example, the conception apprehending the eyes, ears and so forth in your own continuum and the continua of others as existing by way of their own character.

**Both are ignorance**

Both the conception of a self of persons and the conception of a self of phenomena are ignorance. They are afflicted ignorance. These two kinds of ignorance prevent us from seeing the nature of things. They have the nature of obstructing our perception of the reality of things. Because they obscure the seeing of the nature of things, these conceptions actually end up apprehending what is *not* the nature of things to be the nature of things. Because of these mistakes, they are the roots of cyclic existence.

- Both the conception of a self of persons and the conception of a self of phenomena are ignorance.
- They are afflicted ignorance.
- They are both the roots of cyclic existence.

**The unique assertions of the Consequence Middle Way School**

We also say that the conception of a self of phenomena is the basis for the conception of a self of persons. For the Prasangika School (Consequence Middle Way School), both of them are afflictions.

Why is it that in the Consequence Middle Way School, these two conceptions—the conception of a self or persons and the conception of a self of phenomena—are afflictions? Why is it that in this school, they are both posited as the roots of cyclic existence?

Their assertions are unique. The other schools do not share these assertions. So, why is it that they are posited in this way? For example, in the Autonomy Middle Way School, the conception of a self of phenomena is said to be a knowledge obscuration (i.e., an obstruction to omniscience) rather than an afflictive obscuration.

Why is there this difference between the assertions of the Autonomy School and the Consequence School?

*Khen Rinpoche: This is a question for you. Do you understand what I am asking? Somebody say something. Then I will know how much you understand.*

Do you see the difference between the assertions of these two schools?

- In the Consequence School, the conception of a self of phenomena is an affliction
- In the Autonomy School, it is not an affliction but an obstruction to omniscience.
Do you see the difference in the assertions?

- What is asserted by the Consequence School is true.
- What is asserted by the Autonomy School is not true.

Why is there this difference?

*Khen Rinpoche: Just say a short answer. I don’t want a long answer. “It is because of this ...”*

*Student 1:* Because the Autonomy Middle Way School does not believe in external objects. They posit that external objects are in the nature of the mind. It arises from the mind as a cause and effect. To realize that external objects are in the nature of the mind is enough for them to be liberated.

*Khen Rinpoche:* Your answer doesn’t really address the question. You have to give an answer that addresses the question directly.

The Autonomy School asserts that the conception apprehending the aggregates as truly existent is not an affliction. It is not an afflictive obscuration. Rather, it is a knowledge obscuration (or an obstruction to omniscience).

However, for the Consequence School, a conception apprehending the aggregates as truly existent is an affliction. It is an afflictive obscuration. It is not a knowledge obscuration. Why does the Consequence Middle Way School say that the conception of true existence is an affliction?

Basically, the question boils down to this: Is the conception of true existence the root of cyclic existence?

*Khen Rinpoche:* Okay, I don’t think you all want to think too deeply. If you want to think more deeply, then OK, we can talk more. Otherwise, I just stop at this.

*Student 1:* It is an afflictive obscuration because for the Consequence Middle Way School, when you able to negate the self of a person, you will be able to use that to negate the self of phenomena. Because the Autonomy Middle Way School does not assert external phenomena, when they negate the self of a person, there is no afflictive obscuration over there.

*Khen Rinpoche:* I don’t know what you are saying. OK. I better keep it simple.

Both of these conceptions—the conception of a self of persons and the conception of a self of phenomena—are the roots of cyclic existence. The conception of a self of phenomena is generated first. After that, the conception of a self of persons is generated. *Both* of them are the roots of cyclic existence. Both of them obstruct the seeing of the nature of things. So, both of them are mistaken conceptions

Please listen carefully to this without forgetting. If you hear something, but you don’t retain it and you keep on forgetting, then even though you keep hearing it, you will not be able to understand this.
All the tenets systems assert that the conception of a self of persons is the root of cyclic existence. There is no difference there. There is no debate or disagreement about this point.

However, when it comes to identifying what this conception of a self of persons is, then that is when we see the difference. This is because the Autonomy Middle Way School and (the schools) below that all share the assertion that this conception of a self of persons is the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. This is the root of cyclic existence.

The Consequence Middle Way School says that the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is not the root of cyclic existence. The root of cyclic existence is actually something subtler than that. This conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is something coarser than what it really is. So, the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is not the main cause causing one to circle in samsara.

How does the Consequence School identify the conception of a self of persons? They say that it is not the conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person. Rather, it is a conception that, upon observing the person, apprehends the person as existing by way of its own nature. So, this is the root of cyclic existence. The conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is not the root of cyclic existence.

The conception of a self-sufficient substantially existent person is a coarse conception of a self of persons. So, what is the subtle conception of a self of persons? It is the conception of a person as existing by way of its own nature. According to the Consequence School, that is what causes a person to circle in samsara.

You can see that all the schools have the same assertion in saying that the root of cyclic existence is the conception of a self of persons. However, they have different ways of positing what this conception of a self of persons is. All the tenet systems agree that the conception of a self of persons is an affliction. It is an afflictive obscuration. There is no disagreement regarding this point.

The Consequence School has a different way of identifying the conception of a self of phenomena. It is different from the lower schools. They posit that the conception of a self of phenomena is a conception that upon observing a phenomenon other than persons, it apprehends it as existing by way of its own nature.

So, for the Consequence School, the conception of a self of persons and the conception of a self of phenomena are equally subtle. It is not the case that one is coarser and the other is subtler. So, the object of negation is the same. What is different is the object of observation, what we call the basis of emptiness.

~ Pertaining to the attainment of arhatship
In order to attain the state of a foe destroyer (or an arhat), one has to abandon the conception of a self of persons. For the Consequence School, in order to attain the state of foe destroyer, one also has to abandon the conception of a self of phenomena. Why?
Because the two conceptions have objects of negation that are of equal subtlety, i.e., their objects of negation do not differ in terms of subtlety. Therefore, in order to attain the state of foe destroyer and to be liberated from samsara, one also has to abandon the conception of a self of phenomena.

All the tenet systems agree that in order to attain the result of a foe destroyer, i.e., to become an arhat, one must abandon the conception of a self of persons. The unique assertion of the Consequence School is that in order to attain the state of a foe destroyer, you also need to abandon the conception of a self of phenomena. According to them, if you do not abandon the conception of a self of phenomena, you cannot attain the state of an arhat.

Why do they say this? Why do they have this unique assertion? It is because, according to them, the objects of negation of the two conceptions do not differ in terms of subtlety. So, if it is necessary to abandon the conception of a self of persons, then it is also necessary to abandon the conception of a self of phenomena. In the Consequence School, in order to attain the state of a foe destroyer, one needs to abandon both the conception of a self of persons and the conception of a self of phenomena. In other words, one has to directly realize the selflessness of persons and the selflessness of phenomena. Without such a realization, one cannot become an arhat.

The essential point is that in the Consequence School, just as the conception of a self of persons is an afflictive obscuration, the conception of the self of phenomena is also an afflictive obscuration. You should be able to explain why in the Consequence School the conception of a self of phenomena is an afflictive obscuration. One should be able to explain why the conception of a self of phenomena is also the root of cyclic existence.

In order to have a deep understanding of the points here, you need to think about and reflect on the points, for example, by comparing the various tenets and so on. If you do not do that, then you are just looking at things superficially.

The conception of a self of phenomena is the root of cyclic existence. In the Consequence School, first, you generate the conception of a self of phenomena. After that, you generate the conception of a self of persons.

- Between the two—the person and phenomena—phenomena appear first.
- For example, when you encounter a person, the basis of imputation of that person appears to you first. Based on that appearance of the aggregates as existing truly, one generates a conception of the self of phenomena.
- Then based on that, the ‘I’ appears and that then leads to the conception of a self of persons.
That is the order.

If there is anything that you do not understand, feel free to ask questions. By asking questions, the points become clearer.
Q & A

Why we need to realize selflessness of phenomena

Student 2: Why is the self of phenomena a cause of the afflictive emotions if let’s say the person has already realized the emptiness of the ‘I’, the self itself? If he has realized the emptiness of the ‘I’, then shouldn’t it be the case that there will already be no more anger or attachment? So, even if a self of phenomena exists, it shouldn’t be the cause of afflictive emotions anymore.

Sze Gee: You are saying that one has realized the selflessness of persons but this person has not realized the selflessness of phenomena. Then you are saying that simply by realizing the selflessness of persons, there should be no more afflictions. So, why is there a need to abandon the conception of a self of phenomena?

Student 2: Yes. Why do you name it as an afflictive obscuration?

Khen Rinpoche: In order to eradicate the conception of a self of persons, meaning you want to abandon it from the root, you need to realize the selflessness of persons. Similarly, in order to eradicate the conceptions of a self of phenomena, you need to realize the selflessness of phenomena. In order to abandon the conception of a self of phenomena, you have to realize the selflessness of phenomena.

Student 2: The Consequence Middle Way School’s point of view describe both the selflessness of phenomena and the selflessness of persons as afflictive obscurations. My stance is that it should just be the selflessness of the person. If you realize the emptiness of a person, you will naturally realize the emptiness of phenomena because the object of negation is the same. So, there’s no need to name the conception of the self of phenomena as an afflictive obscuration.

Khen Rinpoche: In general, if someone realizes the selflessness of persons, such a person does not necessarily realize the selflessness of phenomena and vice versa, if someone realizes the selflessness of phenomena, this person does not necessarily realize the selflessness of persons.

According to some scholars, when realizing the two selflessnesses, the selflessness of persons is realized first. After that, one realizes the selflessness of phenomena. However, according to other scholars, this sequence is not definite. The order for the realization of the two selflessnesses is not definite. In other words, there are some scholars who say that some people realize the selflessness of phenomena first and some people realize the selflessness of persons first.

Therefore, we cannot say that someone who realizes the selflessness of persons is pervaded by realizing the selflessness of phenomena or that someone who realizes the selflessness of phenomena is pervaded by realizing the selflessness of persons. We cannot say that.

Therefore, in order to realize the selflessness of persons, you need to abandon the conception of a self of persons. In order to realize the selflessness of phenomena, you need
to abandon the conception of a self of phenomena.

This question comes up: If you realize emptiness in terms of a single basis, do you realize emptiness in terms of all phenomena?

Student 2: I think so. Maybe you have to put in a bit of work but it will be quite easy for you to realize the emptiness of phenomena once you have realized the emptiness of a self of persons.

Khen Rinpoche: There is actually no pervasion or no necessity that a person who has realized emptiness in terms of one basis realizes emptiness in terms of all bases.

However, it is said in the text that by realizing emptiness in terms of one basis, in dependence on that, without hardship, by simply thinking about the emptiness of other phenomena, immediately you will realize their emptiness. However, it does not mean that someone who has realized the emptiness of one basis realizes the emptiness of all bases. The conclusion is: If you want to abandon the conception of the self of phenomena, you need to realize the selflessness of phenomena.

Why the two selflessnesses are not realized together

Student 3: How can I then explain why we need to remove one after another, since the subtlety of negation is the same?

Sze Gee: Are you saying that since the object of negation is the same in both conceptions, why don’t you realize the two selflessnesses together?

Khen Rinpoche: The answer to your question is about the same as that given to the previous question. Even though the two conceptions are such that their objects of negation do not have any difference in subtlety, the two conceptions of self do differ in terms of their bases of emptiness. In other words, when you realize these two selflessnesses, you have to look at different bases. You have to say, “This basis is such that the object of negation does not exist.” Then you have to look at another basis. That basis also is such that the object of negation does not exist. There are different bases of emptiness. There is this one, that one and so on.

As I mentioned previously, there is no pervasion that someone who realizes one selflessness will realize the other selflessness. If you realize the selflessness of persons, it is not necessarily the case that you will realize the selflessness of phenomena and vice versa. This means that it is not necessarily the case that both selflessnesses are realized together.

This is because of the fact that when you realize that the conceived object of the conception of the self of persons does not exist, it does not necessarily mean that you also realize that the conceived object of the conception of the self of phenomena also does not exist.

In terms of the ease or difficulty of attaining these realizations, you cannot really say that there is a difference between the two. For example, in terms of the difficulty of realizing
the selflessness of a pillar and the selflessness of a vase, you cannot really say that there is any difference between the two. However, this does not mean that when you realize the selflessness of a vase, you also realize the selflessness of a pillar. You cannot say that. To make things even simpler, let’s drop the selflessness part. It is equally easy or equally difficult to realize a pillar and to realize a vase. There is no difference. However, if you realize a vase, you don’t necessarily realize the pillar. If you realize a pillar, you don’t necessarily realize a vase even though there is no difference in difficulty in realizing the two objects.

This basically means that you cannot say that the two are realized together simply because there is no difference in the difficulty of realizing the two. Even though the objects of negation are equally subtle, it does not mean that you realize the two selflessnesses together.

**Student 4:**
- In order for the conception grasping at a person as existing from the side of the aggregates to be generated, i.e., innate ignorance, first, there has to be an appearance of a person existing from the side of the aggregates.
- After that, there has to be a belief that that appearance is true.
- Following that, there is a conception grasping at (the self of) persons.

My question is: What creates this appearance of the person as existing from the side of the aggregates and the belief that that appearance is true?

**Khen Rinpoche:** God created it. I am joking.

**Student 4:** The conception grasping a person as existing from the side of the aggregates is called innate ignorance. Before that, there is the appearance and then there is the belief. What do we call them? Is it also ignorance?

**Difference between appearance and apprehension**

**Khen Rinpoche:** There is a need to differentiate between appearance and apprehension.

It is possible for there to be an appearance of this or that thing as truly existent without the apprehension of them to be truly existent.

Why is there this appearance of true existence? It is caused by the latencies or imprints deposited by a previous conception of true existence. To answer your question directly, the latency of a conception of true existence causes the appearance of true existence.

To explain this more extensively, you should know that foe destroyers or arhats have abandoned the conception of true existence. So, they are free from samsara. They have abandoned both the conception of the self of persons and the conception of the self of phenomena. However, they still have the appearance of true existence.

An arhat is not equal to a buddha. An arhat or foe destroyer still has the appearance of true existence. Why? Because they have not abandoned the latencies of the conception of true existence. Because they have not abandoned those latencies of the conception of true existence, they still have the appearance of true existence.
You should know that if there is the appearance of true existence, this does not mean that there is the conception or apprehension of true existence. As long as one has not attained buddhahood, there will be the appearances of true existence. This is why, as I have explained in the past, in the Consequence School, the minds of all sentient beings, with the exception of those that directly realize emptiness, are all mistaken minds. All minds of sentient beings other than minds that directly realize emptiness are mistaken minds.

Why are all of these minds mistaken consciousnesses? It is because they have the appearance of true existence. Even though phenomena are empty of true existence, they appear to truly exist. Any consciousness that has this appearance of true existence is a mistaken consciousness.

**Mistaken consciousness & valid cognition**

Hearing this expression, mistaken consciousnesses, you may think, “Well then, all these consciousnesses that are mistaken do not realize their objects.” However, in the Consequence School, it is possible for a consciousness to be a mistaken consciousness and be a valid cognition at the same time. Being a mistaken consciousness and being a valid cognition are not mutually exclusive.

For us, true existence appears. We also apprehend true existence. So we have both the appearance and the apprehension of true existence.

- What causes the apprehension of true existence? The conception of true existence is caused by the seed of the conception of true existence.
- What causes the appearance of true existence? It is caused by the latency of the conception of true existence.

These two words, seed and latency sometimes are used without distinguishing between them. But in certain cases, the two are not the same.

- You can understand the seed of the conception of true existence as what produces a later conception of true existence.
- You can understand the latency of the conception of true existence as what causes the appearance of true existence.

But whether you are talking about the seed or latency of the conception of true existence, both of them are deposited by the conception of true existence. However, one is subtler than the other one. The latency of the conception of true existence is posited as a knowledge obstruction (or obstruction to omniscience).

**Student 5:** For ordinary beings, is the appearance of true existence always accompanied by the apprehension of true existence?

**Khen Rinpoche:** In ordinary beings, we would say that when there is the appearance of true existence, ordinary beings will assent to that appearance and apprehend true existence.

**Student 6:** Just now you said that the mistaken consciousness equates to valid cognition. Is that right?

**Sze Gee:** No, Rinpoche said that you can have a mistaken consciousness at the same time.
as a valid cognition. He is not saying that all mistaken consciousness are necessarily valid cognitions.

**Student 6:** I remember Khen Rinpoche mentioned in *Lorig* last time that a mistaken mind is valid with respect to the appearing object but it is not a valid cognizer, just like a dream elephant that appears to the dream consciousness. Even though the dream consciousness is a wrong consciousness, it is still valid with respect to the appearance of the dream elephant. Even though it cognizes the appearance of the dream elephant, it is not a valid cognizer. It is only valid. Is this the same thing? Because I remember clearly you said that it is valid with respect to the appearing object but it is not a valid cognizer.

**Khen Rinpoche:** What is your question?

**Student 6:** My question is what is the difference between being valid with respect to the appearing object and a valid cognition? Can you say that a mistaken consciousness or wrong consciousness is a valid cognition?

**Khen Rinpoche:** To give an example to illustrate this explanation, it is possible to have a mistaken consciousness that is at the same time a valid cognition. Consider this example in the Consequence School—the inferential cognizer realizing emptiness. In the Consequence School, this is a valid cognition. However, it is at the same time a mistaken consciousness. According to the Consequence School, this is an example of a consciousness that is both a valid cognition and a mistaken consciousness. Therefore, in the Consequence School, being a valid cognition and being a mistaken consciousness are not mutually exclusive meaning they do not have to contradict each other.

The example that you mentioned of a dream consciousness to which the elephant appears is a mistaken consciousness. It is also a wrong consciousness. Therefore, it is not a valid cognition.

However, in the Consequence School, a consciousness is pervaded by being a valid cognition with respect to its appearance. So, then this dream consciousness of the elephant is a valid cognition with respect to its appearance.

3. **Showing that this identification of ignorance apprehending true existence is asserted by the Superior father and his spiritual son** (p.14)

Prior to this, Lama Tsongkhapa explained that the view of the transitory collection, the conception of the self of persons and the conception of the self of phenomena are all conceptions apprehending this or that basis as existing by way of its own nature. He explained that all of these are ignorance. They are confusion.

Here, in this outline that we are looking at, he is pointing out, “This explanation is not my own fabrication. Actually, I have a source for saying all this. In fact, this explanation is given by the Superior, the father and his spiritual son, i.e., Nagarjuna and Aryadeva”.

**This is also set forth by the Superior, ...**
... Whereby the twelve links [of the dependent-arising of cyclic existence] cease. (p. 44)

In this first stanza, it is said that the conception “which apprehends things produced/ From causes and conditions to be real/ Was said by the Teacher ignorance.” The conception apprehending things as existing by way of their own nature was taught to be ignorance. This beginningless ignorance is what brings about the twelve links.

In the next stanza, it is explained that if one sees that the conceived object of this ignorance does not exist, then this ignorance will cease. As a result of that, the twelve links of dependent-arising will cease.

At the bottom of the page, we have a commentary on what it means to apprehend things as real as mentioned in the beginning of the first stanza.

To conceive things to be real ...
...
... the apprehension of “I” [as inherently established] exist. (p. 44—45)

This statement is saying that as long as you grasp to the aggregates as truly existent, you will have the conception of the self of persons. As long as you have not overcome the conception of the aggregates as truly existent, you will not be able to overcome the view of the transitory. From this explanation, we can understand that the conception of self of phenomena is a root of cyclic existence.

Also, Āryadeva’s Four Hundred ...
...
I will set forth just discourse on this. (p. 45)

The first line, “Just as the body sense power [pervades] the body,” talks about the example of the body sense power pervading the body. We have the five physical sense powers—the eye sense power, the ear sense power, the nose sense power, the tongue sense power and the body sense power. What this is saying is that the eye sense power, for example, is based on or supported by the body sense power. The body sense power pervades the eye sense power. If the body sense power ceases, then the other sense powers that are supported by it—the eye sense power, the ear sense power, the nose sense power and the tongue sense power—will also cease.

What does this example illustrate? Bewilderment or confusion is a mind that apprehends true existence even though there is no true existence. This bewilderment is actually the support of all afflictions. So, this bewilderment pervades all afflictions. By meditating on dependent arising and the emptiness of inherent existence, one will be able to destroy bewilderment. By destroying bewilderment, all afflictions, such as attachment and anger, will also be destroyed.

In order to overcome the afflictions, we have to overcome bewilderment. How do we overcome bewilderment? We have to understand dependent arising and the emptiness of
inherent existence. For that reason, we have to work hard to study the texts that teach dependent arising and the emptiness of inherent existence.

This is saying that bewilderment is the condition giving rise to all afflictions. Therefore, if you want to abandon the afflictions, you have to abandon bewilderment. In order to destroy bewilderment, we have to see the emptiness of inherent existence.

Concerning the bewilderment so described, ...

... clearly speaks to this point. (p.45—46)

Khen Rinpoche: Is it necessary for me to explain the meaning of this paragraph? Any questions or no questions? When you read this, do you understand what it is saying or you don’t understand? Is the meaning clear? Is there anything that you don’t understand in this paragraph?

Student 7:

As long as the aggregates are apprehended [as inherently established],
So long thereby does the apprehension of “I” [as inherently established] exist. (p. 45)

My question is this: There is someone who realizes the emptiness of ‘I’ to be truly existent, but subsequently, have not realized the emptiness of phenomena. So, when he apprehends phenomena subsequently to be inherently existent, does he still apprehend the ‘I’ to be inherently existent even after he has realized the emptiness of the ‘I’?

Sze Gee: So, you are saying that someone realizes the selflessness of persons but he does not realize the selflessness of phenomena. So, he apprehends the aggregates as inherently existent. As a result of that, does he lose his realization of selflessness?

Student 7: Does he still apprehend the ‘I’ as inherently established according to this second line?

Khen Rinpoche: If a person has realized the selflessness of persons, then he will not apprehend a person as inherently existent. But if he has not realized the selflessness of phenomena, then it is possible for him to apprehend the aggregates as inherently existent.

Suppose there is someone who realizes the selflessness of persons but has not realized the selflessness of phenomena. For such a person, we can probably say that there is neither the acquired conception of the self of persons nor the acquired conception of the self of phenomena. As long as one apprehends the aggregates as inherently existent due to the influence of tenets, one will not be able to overcome the conception of the ‘I’. So, in such a person, there will not be an acquired conception of the ‘I’ that is due to the influence of tenets. Then, we can say that this citation means that as long as one apprehends the aggregates as inherently existent under the influence of tenets, so long one will have the apprehension of ‘I’.
The essence of this question is basically this. If there is someone who has realized the selflessness of person, it is still possible for this person to have the innate conception apprehending the aggregates as inherently existent. However, it is not possible for him to have the acquired conception apprehending the aggregates as inherently existent.

“When I realize selflessness, then I will no longer have the acquired conception apprehending the ‘I’ as inherently existent. I will also not have the conception apprehending the aggregates as inherently existent.”

As long as you have a very forceful apprehension of aggregates as inherently existent due to the influence of tenets, you will not be able to realize selflessness.

You need to understand the difference between an acquired conception and an innate conception. There is a difference between an intellectually acquired conception of the self and an innate conception of the self.

- The acquired conception of the self depends on reasons and being influenced by tenets.
- However, the innate conception of the self does not rely on reasons or being exposed to various tenets. It arises naturally.

Look at this quotation from the Precious Garland that says, “As long as the aggregates are apprehended [as inherently established], So long thereby does the apprehension of “I” [as inherently established] exist.” The question that arises with relation to this citation is that if one realizes the selflessness of persons, can one still apprehend the aggregates as inherently existent? This person realizes that the ‘I’ does not exist truly. Can this person still apprehend the aggregates as truly existent? What would you say?

From this citation, we understand that as long as there is a conception of the aggregates as truly existent, there will be the conception of the ‘I’ as truly existent. You can have the person who has realized the selflessness of persons but this person has not realized the selflessness of phenomena. Will this person have the apprehension of the aggregates as truly existent?

Since this person has not realized the selflessness of phenomena, we should say that this person still has the apprehension of the aggregates as truly existent. That being the case, the conception apprehending ‘I’ as truly existent will exist in the continuum of this person.

Then you would have to say, “It follows that in his continuum, there is the conception of the ‘I’ as truly existent because there is the apprehension of the aggregates as truly existent.”

This is exactly what this citation seems to be saying. So, to avoid that complication, I think we can interpret the first line of this quotation as referring to the acquired apprehension, the acquired conception of the aggregates as inherently existent. Then, it means that as long as one still has the acquired conception of the aggregates as inherently existent, so long will one have the conception of the ‘I’ as inherently existent.

Khen Rinpoche: Of course, you need to think about this citation. Otherwise, it is a little bit
Also, [Āryadeva] says that, ...

... appears as the meaning of dependent-arising. (p.45)

Here, it is saying that in order to overcome ignorance, we have to realize that the meaning of emptiness appears as the meaning of dependent arising. We have to realize this.

Now, what does it mean to realize that the meaning of emptiness is the meaning of dependent arising and vice versa? What does it means for the meaning of dependent arising to appear as the meaning of emptiness?

This raises the question, “When you realize the meaning of emptiness, do you necessarily realize that the meaning of emptiness is the meaning of dependent arising?”

When someone realizes emptiness, is there the pervasion that the meaning of emptiness appears as the meaning of dependent arising? What does it mean to say that the meaning of emptiness appears as the meaning of dependent arising?

If you read the text quickly, your understanding will be superficial. If you want to get a deep and profound understanding of this text, you have to look at all the words individually and think about them. For example, we have this phrase here, “the meaning of emptiness appears as the meaning of dependent arising.” You have to think about this. What does this mean?

When emptiness is realized, does the meaning of emptiness appear as the meaning of dependent arising? What does it mean? Does this mind realizing emptiness also realize dependent arising?

In this case, probably, we have to say, “No.” The mind that realizes emptiness does not realize dependent arising. This is because emptiness is a non-affirming negative whereas dependent arising is a positive phenomena. So, you probably cannot say that the mind realizing emptiness also realizes dependent arising.

You have to think about these two statements. The meaning of emptiness appears as the meaning of dependent arising and the meaning of dependent arising appears as the meaning of emptiness.

What does it mean for this meaning to appear? Does this mean that one realizes the meaning? When the meaning of emptiness is realized, does the meaning of emptiness appear as the meaning of dependent arising? This is something we have to think about.

The Three Principal Aspects of the Path
There is a stanza that is related to what we have discussed from Lama Tsongkhapa’s Three Principal Aspects of the Path.
[10]
One who sees the cause and effect of all phenomena
Of both cyclic existence and the state beyond sorrow as forever unbetraying,
And for whom any object trusted in by the grasping mind has completely disappeared,
Has at that time entered the path pleasing the Buddhas.

It talks about entering “the path pleasing the Buddhas.” What is this path? Is this path referring to a path realizing emptiness?

[11]
If the appearance of dependent relation,
Which is unbetraying, is accepted separately from emptiness,
And as long as they are seen as separate,
Then one has still not realized the Buddha’s intent.

It is said that in this case, one would still have “not realized the Buddha’s intent.” What is “the Buddha’s intent”? Is it emptiness or is it something else?

So, we have these questions related to these two stanzas:

- When we talk about entering “the path pleasing the Buddhas,” does this refer to the realization of emptiness?
- In stanza 11, at the end in this particular situation, when it says, “Then one has still not realized the Buddha’s intent,” is this realization of emptiness “the Buddha’s intent”?

[12]
If [these two realizations] are happening simultaneously without alternation,
And from merely seeing dependent relation as completely unbetraying
The definite ascertainment comes that completely destroys
The way all objects are apprehended [as truly existent],
At that time the analysis of the ultimate view is complete.

What does it mean when it says, “the analysis of the ultimate view is complete”? Is this referring to the realization of emptiness?

So, there are three questions ensuing from these three stanzas. That is the homework for you. There are many commentaries on The Three Principal Aspects of the Path. You can read them and try to find the answers. Then we can discuss them next time.

Did you get all the three questions?

These three questions relate to the three objects mentioned in the last lines of the three stanzas. Are they the same or not? Are they all referring to one thing? You should do some reading and then come to a conclusion. Then next time when we meet, we can discuss this. You should be able to get your hand on commentaries on this text, The Three Principal Aspects of the Path.

On top of preparing for those answers to the questions, you should also read our text,
meaning our translation of the *Medium Length Special Insight*. As I mentioned in the past, before you come to class, you should always read ahead. So read a few pages before you come.

*Sze Gee* (clarifying a student’s question): Is your question, “Is the conception of true existence the consciousness to which the object appears but is not ascertained?”

*Khen Rinpoche*: According to the seven types of consciousnesses that are presented in *Lorig*, in the subject of minds and awarenesses, this is according to the lower tenet systems where basically you have the valid cognition and non-valid cognitions. The valid ones are the direct valid perceiver and the inferential direct perceiver. On top of those two, you have the other consciousnesses: subsequent consciousness, correct assumption, wrong consciousness, doubt and the awareness to which the object appears but is not ascertained.

Among these seven types of consciousnesses, why one is the conception of true existence? It is actually a wrong consciousness. Why? Because it engages its object in an erroneous way. Why does it satisfy this definition? This is because even though things do not exist truly, this mind engages the object as existing truly.

Simply put, the answer to your question is the conception of true existence is not an awareness to which the object appears but is not ascertained. Rather, it is a wrong consciousness from among the seven types of consciousnesses. Because this conception of true existence is a one-pointed adherence, so then it adheres in a fixed way.

**IMPORTANCE OF PREPARING FOR CLASS**

To conclude, please try your best to read before you come to class because if you do some preparation before you come to class, then the discussion would be clearer when you come and we meet.

When you read and you find that there are things that you don’t understand, you should make a note. Then based on those points that you are not clear about, you can ask questions and seek clarification. Of course, if you understand everything, you don’t have to take notes of any specific points.

But you have to read because if you don’t read then you don’t know what you don’t understand. And then when you come to class and you listen to the explanations, they do not make any impact on your mind. As a result, you forget everything easily.

How can you make the contents stay in your mind? How do you retain that content without forgetting it? This is really contingent on your interest and your inquisitiveness. If you read and you find that there are something that you don’t understand and because you are interested and you are curious, then you have this wish wanting to find out what the meaning should be. Because of the effort that you put in, the hardships you undergo in order to clarify your doubt, in order to find answers to your questions, when you get those answers, you will not forget them easily. But if you have not gone through this process and you are just asking questions spontaneously without much thought about
them, then even you get the answers, they will not stay in your mind.

What is crucial in this process of memorization is your ability to see something as important and to focus your mind on it. If you regard something as important, then you will focus your mind on it. As a result, you will not forget it. It will stay in your mind. If you do not have that kind of focus, then it is easy for you to forget things.

Whether or not you are able to focus your mind depends on your level of interest. If you are very interested, you will be able to focus and you will be able to remember. If your interest is very weak, you will not be able to focus your mind and remember things.

There is a quotation, probably from Aryadeva, where he talks about the qualities of a student. It is mentioned that the students that are suitable vessels should have interest.

*Khen Rinpoche: Do you remember? It is a quotation from somewhere in the lam-rim.*

The point is you need to have interest. If you have interest, things become easy. If you don't have interest, then things are going to be very difficult.

*Khen Rinpoche: It all depends on your level of interest. How great is your interest? If you are interested in something, something will happen.*

This topic that we are going through, i.e., emptiness, is difficult. So, you should not feel discouraged if you don't understand. Even if you don't understand these explanations, you should try to maintain your interest and not become discouraged. You need to generate this determination, wanting to understand emptiness. You should ask yourself, “If I don’t generate such determination now, then when am I going to generate it?”

It is useful for you to reflect on the precious human rebirth that is endowed with the freedoms and privileges. You have to remember that this precious human rebirth is difficult to obtain. Based on that, you should generate strong determination and courage.

Even though there may be things that you don’t understand, you must persist in listening to the explanations and study. You should think, “At the very least, I will be able to deposit imprints in my mind.” So, there is no need to feel discouraged. You should persist in listening to the explanations. The fact that we cannot understand something now is because in the past, we failed to deposit the imprints. If we deposit imprints now, then in the future, we will be able to study new material. The point is that if you actually have the imprints, then when you read something, immediately, you will understand it. So, you should think, “I am going to deposit the imprints for realizing emptiness. Life after life, I am going to deposit these imprints so that I will understand and realize emptiness.”

In Lama Tsongkhapa’s instructions, he mentioned that there are three conditions to fulfil if we want to realize emptiness:
1. We need to regard our guru as being inseparable from our deity. Then we make requests to him.
2. We need to purify our negativities and accumulate merit.
3. We have to engage in hearing and contemplation with respect to the texts that explain
emptiness.
So, we have to work hard at these three conditions. Without working hard yet expecting
to realize emptiness, hoping to understand emptiness without putting in any effort, this
is not correct. So, we have to put in the hard work.

Interpreted by Toh Sze Gee. Transcribing team: Phuah Soon Ek, Patricia Lee, Lau Geok
Chin, Alison Wong, Rachel Tan, Aki Yeo, Julia Koh and Vivien Ng. Edited by Cecilia Tsong