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STAGES OF THE PATH
Middle Length Lamrim

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Transcript of the
Special Insight Section

Indicating the Outlines of the
Middle Length Lamrim (2009 edition)

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Explanation of How to train in Special Insight, the Essence of Wisdom

1. Relying on the prerequisites of special insight

- A. **General presentation:** We need to rely on holy beings, by practicing guru devotion; then we must seek to hear teachings on the view and engage in study; then we must investigate the view within one's own experience.

1. Relying on holy beings:

A. The need to hear and reflect on the scriptures:

We need to reflect on flawless scriptures, such as those taught by Lama Tsongkhapa who expounded only Prasangika. There were many panditas in India expounding the Prasangika view but with many flaws, one must rely only on perfect explanations: mainly those composed by Arya Nagarjuna and his two main disciples Buddhapalita and Candrakirti – and not on any other explanation with regard to the view.

First one hears those explanations and reads those texts, relying on a meaning generality generated through hearing, and one strives to refine their understanding of the text, thinking “this must be like this, this must be like that” etc. Then when one generates this understanding, one engages in reflection in order to generate the wisdom of reflection. This is accomplished through investigation (mainly by engaging in debate), which is the tool that helps us cut the net of doubts with regard to the view. Through that, we generate a realisation of the actual mode of abiding of phenomena, then we must cultivate it and become familiar with it, so we must rely on meditation. If we proceed in this way we will be able to generate the view.

B. The need to follow one of the great trail-blazers as appropriate:

With regard to how to rely on the definitive meaning, there is the teaching explained by Arya Asanga on the **Four Reliances**:

- 1) **Relying on the dharma and not the being:** one must rely on what is taught by such and such a being and not on the person himself. One must investigate the dharma, and cultivate a pure view for the expounder of that dharma.
- 2) **Relying on the meaning and not the words:** among dharma there are the words and the meanings, one should rely on the meaning. Even if some dharma comes in a nicely composed poetic rhetoric this is not main thing, though it is good to present teaching in a nice way, but the most important thing is the meaning behind the words, especially with the science of inner philosophy. So one should check if the meaning expounded by the words is correct.
- 3) **Relying on the definitive meanings and not the interpretative:** there are the interpretable and definite meanings of dharma, so one should rely on latter. Interpretable meaning is that which is not precisely abiding with the actual mode of abiding of phenomena, but was taught for some particular or special reason or context, and as such if investigated would be found to be mistaken. Whereas definitive meaning is that which is never seen as mistaken or wrong however much one investigates the meaning.
- 4) **Relying on pristine wisdom and not on mental consciousness:** to see this definite meaning one should rely on pristine wisdom (*yeshe*), the mind that directly realises ultimate truth and which has no flaw; and not on mental consciousness, those consciousnesses apprehending by way of meaning generality or those having dualistic appearances etc.

Therefore one must know the difference between the definitive and interpretative meanings, relying on the former. As such, one must know the **definitions of the different philosophical schools for definitive and interpretative meanings**:

- 1) **The Vaibhashika and Sautrantika schools** both propound that whatever is a discourse of the Buddha is of definitive meaning, therefore they do not accept the Mahayana sutras and discourses as beings such.

- 2) **The Cittamatraschool**, which explains phenomena in terms of the three natures, was taught in order to suit the capacities and aspirations of some trainees. They define definitive meaning as those which are suitable to be accepted as literal, while interpretative meaning are those which are not suitable to be accepted as literal.

Then among Madhyamika tenets:

- 3) **The Svatantrikas** define definitive meaning as 1) those which teach emptiness directly and 2) which are suitable to be accepted as literal; and define interpretative meaning as 1) those which teach conventional truth directly and 2) which are not suitable to be accepted as literal. Since they accept establishment by way of own characteristics of phenomena, they are in bit of trouble when having to posit this kind of definition and have to posit two points.
- 4) **For Prasangikas** it is much simpler: those that show emptiness directly are definitive, while those showing conventional truth directly are interpretative.

C. On the history of Madhyamaka:

1. The need to seek the view relying on Nagarjuna's system:

The two main trail-blazers of Mahayana are:

- 1) **Asanga** who explained definitive and interpretable meanings based on the *Sutra Unravelling the Thought*, from the point of view of the Cittamatra school. If one thoroughly investigates this exposition one will find it is not acceptable literally, thus by using logic one will find contradictions.
- 2) **Nagarjuna** whose teachings contain no contradictions, in fact the more you investigate his teachings the less mistakes you will find and the more you will find ascertainment. Thus one needs to rely on a system as expounded by Arya Nagarjuna, as the unmistakable flawless commentary and exposition of Shakyamuni Buddha's intentions, and one should rely on the commentaries of Buddhapalita and Candrakirti to understand the thought of Nagarjuna.

2. How the ways of explaining Nagarjuna's intention emerged:

- A. **Identification of the original Madhyamikas:** Aryadeva is considered Nagarjuna's equal, or as father and son, and are called 'Madhyamikas of the original texts'.
- B. **Analysis of the names applied by earlier generations:** Division based on the existence of external objects, both are Svatantrika schools. More is explained later.
- C. **The validity of explanations in accordance with that of Yeshe De on the authors of Madhyamaka treatises and the stages by which the Madhyamaka systems of Sautrantika and Yogacara emerged:**
- D. **Those designations are not suited to Master Candrakirti:**
- E. **The validity of the designations Svatantrika and Prasangika associated with scholars of the later propagation:** This division relates to how the view ascertaining emptiness is generated within the mental continuum.
- F. **Which of the masters to follow:** Lama Tsongkhapa indicates that he will be following the commentaries of Nagarjuna and Aryadeva, by Buddhapalita and Candrakirti.

2. Seeking to hear the Dharma from holy beings:

3. Reflecting on it properly:

B. In particular how the view is settled:

1. **Identification of afflicted ignorance:** Non-afflicted ignorance is like that present in the continuum of Hinayana Arhats, with respect to the workings of karma etc. However, here we are talking about afflicted ignorance which is the root of samsara.

A. Although attachment and the like are in a class discordant with knowledge, they are not chief:

There are three types of antidotes:

- 1) **Erasing:** like love for aversion, it is not an antidote which can totally uproot or abandon delusions but can momentarily suppress them or prevent them from becoming manifest. These antidotes are specific, love cannot be the antidote to attachment, and the antidote for attachment cannot be the antidote for aversion, etc.
- 2) **Final:** this is synonymous with path of no more learning, and is an antidote in mere name.
- 3) **Abandoning:** the wisdom realising selflessness which is the directly opposing mind to afflicted ignorance, and has the power to uproot and permanently abandon ignorance together with all the other delusions.

B. Although in general ignorance is posited as the mere opposite of knowledge, here it is the opposite of the knowledge realising the lack of true existence:

Ignorance is completely opposed / non-concordant / antagonistic to the wisdom of pristine awareness (*yeshe*). This ignorance is the root of samsara and the root of suffering. They are contradictory in terms of their mode of apprehension. There is self-grasping of phenomena and of persons; with persons we perceive the person which is conventionally existing and conceive / cling to this person as existing by way of its own nature / characteristics, freely, not depending on other phenomena etc., this how the person apprehended by self-grasping ignorance. Wisdom understands that the person does not exist in this way.

C. Explaining the two subtle apprehensions of a self as mental afflictions:

A superimposition is putting something on top of something that is already there, here it is putting inherent existence on top of the self, so putting inherent existence where there is no such existence. We talk of superimposition of a self of phenomena and of persons. In the case of the self of persons we superimpose the person being inherently established on top of the conventionally existent person. In terms of the self of phenomena, taking one's object the aggregates etc., we superimpose (or exaggerate / add) the establishment by way of its own nature, this is called grasping at self of phenomena. These two are both ignorance, they have the same mode of apprehension and are the root of samsara, the only difference is the object. This is a unique feature of the Prasangika school, that grasping at a self of phenomena and of persons are not distinguished in terms of subtle and coarse, rather they are the same in terms of their mode of apprehension and as being the root of samsara. This is different from the Svatantrika school, as expounded by Bhavaviveka etc.

D. How ignorance superimposes what inherent existence:

Take the **example of a flower**, how is this flower existing? Where is it? We can point to it saying "it is here!", but if you look for the flower in each and every part of flower, it is impossible to pinpoint the flower. We can say this particular colour, shape and function are the basis of imputation for the flower, but we cannot find the flower in each and every part of that basis. However, if you ask "is the flower existing?" you would have to say that it does exist. How? The flower exists as being merely imputed on the basis of imputation, and so we posit it as being established relatively.

In the Prasangika system we use the **example of the coiled rope which is mistaken for a snake**. When one sees this coiled rope, one can mistake it for a snake, generate the apprehension of "snake" in one's mind, and generate strong fear. However, when we investigate whether this mind is correct or not we find that this mind apprehending "snake" is mistaken, because there is no snake there at all. This mind superimposed the existence of a snake on to the rope, and if you look properly you will not find "snake" anywhere all along the rope and outside the rope. Therefore the mind apprehending "snake" is a superimposing mind, since when you look for its object you cannot find it. There is no snake at all on this rope. In the same way, the self of persons is imputed on the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, but if you look for it on that basis you will not find the self there at all. Similarly also with the self of phenomena, when taking different aggregates as the object of observation, if you look for them you cannot find them anywhere on the basis of

imputation, exactly like “snake” which appears when apprehended but disappears when you look for it.

On the basis of imputation of a snake, the snake's aggregates, is there a snake? “Snake” appears when the snake's aggregates are apprehended, and so we label that “snake”, but you will not be able to find “snake” anywhere on those aggregates. Similarly with the self of person, we label “person” on to the five aggregates of the person, but you will not find “person” anywhere on those aggregates.

So, if on the basis of imputation of “snake” we cannot find “snake”, just like we cannot find it on the coiled rope, what is the difference between apprehending a snake to be a snake and a rope to be a snake? The difference is that it is incorrect to think a rope is a snake, but it is correct or valid to say “snake” about the snake's aggregates. What is different? This is explained according to the Prasangika school by way of the **Three Characteristics**:

- 1) **Renown**: for something to be valid it has to be renowned among conventional valid cognitions.
- 2) **Conventionally valid**: it should not be contradicted or damaged by other conventional valid cognitions. This is the case when one calls a rope a snake, as other valid cognitions will contradict this, for example seeing there is no snake on that rope.
- 3) **Ultimately valid**: not being damaged by a cogniser analysing the ultimate / ultimate analysis.

All existent phenomena are merely relatively established and the meaning that is imputed cannot be found when looked for. As this is the case, if we apprehend a tree to be a human being what is the problem? We impute “human being” on the basis of the five aggregates of a human being and call that a human being, but this is established relatively and if we look for the human being on the basis of imputation we find no human being. But if we impute “human being” on the basis of imputation of a tree what is the problem? If we impute “human being” on the aggregates of a tree we will not find it, but we cannot find it even on the human aggregates! So? First, in the world there is no convention to call trees human beings, and second there are other valid cognitions that would damage this cognition of this tree being a human being, and therefore it is not established conventionally. Thus, although phenomena are merely labelled by conception, that does not mean we can just randomly call anything anything, there needs to be an abiding in the three characteristics.

E. Detailed explanation of the apprehension of a self:

All phenomena that exist, positive and negative, do not exist from their own side, come into existence by way of their own entity, by way of their own power etc. Since they do not exist from their own side etc., all phenomena exist in dependence on other phenomena, like causes and parts. This means that when we look for their entity, it cannot be found under analysis, like the example of the flower: it does not exist from its own side or by way of its own characteristics, rather it is a phenomenon that is established in dependence on its parts etc.

There are various levels of dependence, the most subtle of which is dependence on imputation. In general, all philosophical schools in Buddhism assert dependent-arising but not all arrive at the philosophical view of the Prasangika school, which understands the most subtle level of dependent-arising which is dependence on imputation. Other schools like Sautrantika etc., for them things also exist interdependently, but explain dependent-arising in a coarser way: they do not explain it in terms of dependence on designations, they assert only dependence on parts or causes. When they look for the flower in the parts they find the flower, because when the flower is looked for it must be findable, otherwise it would not exist. For them, for any given phenomenon, if we cannot find it somewhere among the parts it is not an existent phenomenon. Thus, if we cannot find a flower in the flower, the flower does not exist. So they do not arrive at the point asserted by the Prasangikas, saying that although the flower is not found when looked for analytically it exists in dependence on imputation.

On other hand, with respect to the Prasangika school, when they ask “where is the flower? what is the flower exactly when we look for it?”, that which they point to when pointing to the flower is not

the flower, it is the basis of designation. The flower is merely the designation which is given in dependence on the basis. What is basis of imputation? It is the collection of the petals, corolla, stem – all the parts of the flower. So when we ask “where is the flower?”, we say it exists in terms of mere designation in dependence on its parts, it is a name given to the mere collection of those parts, in dependence on those parts. The moment we look for it within the basis of designation, we cannot find the flower, why? Because the flower is not established from its own side, not established within its basis, which means it depends on its designation. This is the actual mode in which all phenomena exist. So here we have a union of the two truths, a flower is empty of inherent existence and it exists merely in dependence on designation and parts. That which appears is the conventional aspect of the flower, while the fact that the flower cannot be found under analysis is its ultimate aspect. Thus, in the Prasangika school, conventional and ultimate truths exist without contradiction within a single basis.

For example the person, “I”, what is it? The person exists designated on the basis of designation. What is the basis of designation? It is the five aggregates. So this “I”, the self, exists in terms of being merely designated on the basis of the five aggregates, it is nominally existent. Does the “I” exist? Yes. Then how does it exist? As a merely designated phenomenon, nominally established in dependence on its basis and designation. On the other hand, if we look at the way in which the conception of inherent existence looks at the person, its observed object is the merely designated person, but how is the person apprehended? It is apprehended as inherently existent, existing from its own side, independently, not as a dependent-arising, not dependent on the basis or imputation. This inherently existent person which is apprehended does not exist at all. The moment we understand how the conventionally existent person does not exist in the way in which it is apprehended by the conception of inherent existence, then we have found the meaning of emptiness. All phenomena exist only in terms of being dependently arisen, there is not a single atom which has inherent existence. Although everything that exists exists in this way, this is not the way we perceive phenomena. We perceive phenomena in a manner completely opposed to that, whatever we see, hear, smell, taste, touch or think of is never ever apprehended as being merely established by way of designation, it is always apprehended as if it were existent from its own side. Thus all consciousnesses, mental and sense, apprehend phenomena in a manner opposed to the way they actually exist. Therefore all consciousnesses of beings who do not realise emptiness directly are said to be mistaken consciousnesses.

1. Explanation that the apprehension of a self is twofold:

Explaining that the **apprehension of a self is of two types:**

- 1) apprehending a self of persons, and
- 2) apprehending a self of phenomena.

As such there are also two types of selflessnesses: a selflessness of persons and a selflessness of phenomena, differentiated merely by their observed objects and not the mode of apprehension itself, which is the same for both: the lack of inherent existence.

- A. **How the two apprehensions of a self are the same in their subjective aspect but still differentiated through their observed objects:**
- B. **The reason for differentiating the two apprehensions of a self in that manner:**

2. Distinctions between the apprehension of a self and the view of the transitory collection:

- A. **The apprehension of an I, the view of the transitory collection, has a person as its observed object:**

There are different positions with regard to the observed object of the view of the transitory collection, since the various philosophical schools understand the person differently. There is not a single Buddhist philosophical school that asserts that the physical aggregate of the person is the person. However, there are other non-Buddhist schools that do assert this, therefore they are examined. Some Buddhist schools assert that the five aggregates are the person, some assert that

only the mind is the person. Here we are talking about the actually existent person which is the observed object of the wrong conception.

It is clear that from Buddhist point of view, as we believe in past lives since beginningless time, the person cannot ever be considered to be the body alone. The physical aggregate is something that is completely limited to a specific rebirth. This time we were born as human beings, this body comes from the sperm and ovum of the human father and mother, the body develops until the person dies and the basis is destroyed. At that point if the person was only the body, the person would be destroyed at that point. Alternatively, usually we use bodies' ashes to make tsa-tsas, but if the physical aggregates had been the person, now when transformed into tsa-tsas the person should be the tsa-tsas! Would be strange no? So if the body is the person, we would have to say that now the person is the tsa-tsas! Or when the ashes are cast into the wind, then we would have to say "I have been cast into the wind", can we say that? So all of us know that the body is not identical with the person.

Some schools say that merely the mind is the observed object, for Cittamatrins it is not the mind but the mind-basis-of-all (*alaya*). They assert the actual person is this special kind of consciousness which is called the *alaya*, but this does not exist, it is a system asserted by the Cittamatrins but is not accepted by all schools. They assert this *alaya* is the person because the other consciousnesses are not stable enough to be posited as the person that goes from life to life. They assert the existence or division of this *alaya* and identify the person with it, however there are great contradictions if we assert this. The *alaya* is asserted to also exist in arya bodhisattvas, but one of the characteristics of the *alaya* is that it is a non-ascertaining consciousness, it does not ascertain its object. Thus, since the *alaya* is the person, it is the bodhisattva; however, it would follow that the arya bodhisattva that has realised emptiness does not understand anything, because of being a non-ascertaining consciousness. This is due to how they assert it, and so the *alaya* being the person on the one hand and being an arya bodhisattva on the other hand creates a contradiction. Other schools assert the mental consciousness as the observed object of the view of self, including some Madhyamika scholars like Bhavaviveka.

Remember that apart from Prasangika all other schools, from Svatantrika down, say that if a phenomenon exists it must be findable in its basis of designation, while if upon analysis we do not find the phenomenon it is said to not exist. However, for Prasangika phenomena exist nominally by means of mere designation, which means that when we look for them we will never find them. Nevertheless, they must possess the three characteristics of conventional existence in order to validly exist: they must be renowned among conventional valid cognitions, they cannot be damaged by other conventional valid cognitions, and they cannot be damaged by analysis looking for the ultimate / ultimate valid cognitions. So if a phenomenon has these three characteristics it is said to exist conventionally, and to exist in this way they do not have to be findable within their basis of designation. So here we need to understand the different meanings given to the designation of person (the one cultivating the path, the one circling in samsara etc.), **the two modes of positing the illustration of a person:**

- 1) The Prasangikas say the mere "I" is the illustration of a person; while
- 2) The other schools say the mental consciousness, or the *alaya*, or some aggregate(s) are the illustration of a person.

So what is the difference between the two modes? The other systems also say that the person is imputed on its basis, but the basis exists substantially. Therefore for them when the person is looked for within the basis it must be found as a substance, otherwise it does not exist. Whereas for Prasangika, the person is *merely* imputed on its basis, therefore neither the person nor its basis exist substantially and thus will not be found when looked for.

This ignorance, the view of the transitory collection, does not observe the aggregates when it apprehends the self. What it observes is the conventional "I" of one's own continuum, but it apprehends it as inherently existent. So the observed object is the mere "I", while the apprehended object is the inherently existent "I". The observed object is not a single aggregate, nor the

collection or combination of aggregates, but rather it is the mere “I” which is designated in dependence on the aggregates. The aggregates are not the conventionally existent “I”, neither is their collection nor their continuum over time. Rather, the “I” is designated in dependence on the aggregates, it does not exist from its own side, which means it is not one of the aggregates nor their collection. This is a very unique presentation of Prasangika school, that the observed object of the view of the transitory collection, which is the existent “I”, is not any of the aggregates and not the collection of aggregates, but rather it is the merely designated “I” in dependence on the aggregates.

B. The difference between observed objects of the two apprehensions of true existence:

These terminologies here are a bit technical. When we speak of the conception of a self of person which is a view of the transitory collection, this refers to an apprehension of a self of person within one's own continuum. So the view the transitory collection observes one's own continuum and conceives the person as established by way of its own characteristics. The same conception conceiving a self in dependence on observing the continuum of another person is not a view of the transitory collection, but it is a conception of a self of persons. So whatever is a view of the transitory collection is necessarily a conception of a self of persons, but whatever is a conception of a self of persons is not necessarily a view of the transitory collection. In other words, “conception of a self of persons” applies to all persons, while “view of the transitory collection” only applies to oneself.

With regards to **the view of the transitory collection, there are two types:**

- 1) the view conceiving “I”, and
- 2) the view conceiving “mine”.

When thinking “I”, what is observed is the person in one's own continuum, conceived of as inherently existent. When thinking “mine”, “my eyes, my ears” etc., here this does not refer to the object that is mine, this is not the view of the transitory collection because it is a conception of a self of phenomena. Rather the view conceiving “mine”, is a conception of oneself in the aspect of a possessor of eyes, ears etc. The way in which these two types, conceiving “I” and “mine”, conceive “I” and “mine” is as existing by way of its own nature. If this were the case, they would be independent, they would not depend on other, they would not be interdependent, but the “I” and “mine” are completely dependent, and so this is a misapprehension / misconception. This is the way to understand these two types, one apprehends “I” and the other the possessor, the “mine”, as something existing independently.

That was for the self of persons, now we discuss the self of phenomena. Phenomena here refers to all phenomena which are not persons. So phenomena which belong to one's own continuum or others', or those outside of the continua of sentient beings such as environments and so forth. Whatever is not a person, any other phenomena, like mountains, oceans etc., conceived of as inherently existent, by way of their own characteristics. The mode of apprehension is exactly the same as the mode of apprehension in the case of self of persons, and they also do not exist the way in which they are apprehended.

Another division we need to understand is that the conception of a self of persons and of phenomena, **afflictive ignorance, is of two types:**

- 1) **innate ignorance:** What does innate mean? It means it is simply or naturally present, always there, it does not need any further condition in order to be developed, it does not come from certain instructions or tenet systems etc. All sentient beings (apart from Hinayana Arhats, pure-ground bodhisattvas and Buddhas) possess this innate ignorance and it is the root of samsara.
- 2) **intellectually acquired ignorance:** This second type is dependent on having studied certain philosophical tenet systems. One generates further wrong conceptions by way of those instructions, and on the basis of the innate ignorance. This type, since they arise on top of the innate, are not the root of samsara.

In the quotation it says: “Delusion is the ignorance that superimposes a non-existent own entity of things. It has the nature of obstructing the view of their emptiness of inherent existence, it conceals them.” Phenomena do not exist by way of their own nature, but ignorance superimposes a self of phenomena to that which does not inherently exist, on to a dependently-arisen phenomena it projects independent existence. So the activity of ignorance is superimposition, and that superimposition has the function of obscuring the actual mode of existence of things. It obscures the actual mode of abiding of phenomena, emptiness of inherent existence, and apprehends them as inherently existent.

This ignorance is the first of the Twelve Links of Dependent-Arising – the explanation of how we revolve in samsara – and as such is the root of samsara; this ignorance is the conception of inherent existence. Other schools, such as Svatantrika, as propounded by Bhavaviveka, make a division between the conception of a self of persons and of phenomena, as if they were completely different things and did not even have the same aspect or the same function. Then due to this distinction they say that the root of samsara is grasping at a self of phenomena, but that in order to eliminate cyclic existence for oneself it is not necessary to realise the selflessness of phenomena, rather it is sufficient to merely realise selflessness of persons. Thus, in order to eliminate the afflictions it is sufficient to realise the selflessness of persons, while in order to eliminating the obscurations to omniscience it is necessary to realise the selflessness of phenomena. However Prasangika say this is wrong, since both have exactly the same mode of apprehension. As such, both selflessnesses are posited here as the ignorance which is identical with afflicted ignorance. Therefore, for the Prasangikas the apprehension of a self of phenomena is also this ignorance which is the root affliction, and is not an obscuration to omniscience. For the other schools this is only an obscuration to omniscience, and so is not necessary to be eliminated in order to attain liberation.

Without going into too much detail, in general all philosophical schools below Prasangika do not realise emptiness correctly. Their way of presenting the conception of a self of persons and of phenomena is completely different from the way the Prasangikas asserts it. For them phenomena exist inherently by way of their own characteristics, and not only this they also make a distinction between the conception of a self of persons and of phenomena. Also with respect to the selflessness of persons, they make a distinction between subtle and coarse, for Svatantrika the subtle is the person being truly existent while the coarse is the person being substantially existent. For Prasangika both selflessnesses of person and of phenomena are identical with afflicted ignorance. Why is there no difference between them in their mode of apprehension? This should be understood precisely. There is no difference between their two modes of apprehension because both conceive of persons or phenomena, which are in fact established by way of mere designation, as if they were established from their own side. Both are afflicted ignorances, so if one abandons this kind of conception, of either self of persons or phenomena, one abandons the afflictive obscurations but not obscurations to omniscience, because the latter are nothing other than the latencies left after the conception of inherent existence has been eliminated. Consider an arya bodhisattva, who abandons the afflictive obscurations completely on the eighth bhumi and from there starts to abandon the latencies, which are the obscurations to omniscience. Thus, the actual conception of inherent existence is the afflictive obscurations, while their latencies are the obscurations to omniscience.

C. Showing that this manner of identifying the apprehension of true existence is asserted by the noble father and son:

Here it indicates by way of scriptures that for as long as we still apprehend the five aggregates as inherently existent, which is an apprehension of a self of phenomena, that long we will have the view of the transitory collection, the conception of a self of persons. So what is the way to abandon this ignorance completely? We must realise the actual way in which all phenomena exist, therefore we must realise the profound view of dependent-arising and emptiness. This view is able to eliminate the view of cyclic existence. What is the aspect of ignorance? It is to superimpose inherent existence where it does not exist, so the way to eliminate it is to understand dependent-

arising and emptiness of inherent existence. This way of proceeding is the correct way, as it is the only way this ignorance can be eliminated, this has been explained by Buddhapalita and subsequently by Candrakirti in *Clear Words*.

2. Demonstration that it is the root of revolving in cyclic existence:

A. Whereas the innate apprehension of a self must be posited as the root of samsara, artificial ones are not suitable to be posited so:

This passage explains that the root of samsara is the ignorance which is the innate conception grasping at a self, not the intellectually acquired conceptions. This is because this conception has to be present in all sentient beings, independently of whether they follow philosophical tenet systems or not. For example, animals also have a cause for samsara, meaning they have an innate conception of inherent existence grasping at a self which causes them to revolve in samsara. There are not two roots of samsara, one being the conception grasping at a self of persons and the other the conception grasping at a self of phenomena. Rather, since both conceptions have the same mode of apprehension, conceiving of inherent existence no matter what object they focus on, the single root is the conception of inherent existence in general.

Here we talk about the various Buddhist and non-Buddhist tenet holders, in order to show that the root of samsara is not acquired by tenet systems:

1) A permanent, unitary, and independent self – is an object to be refuted but it is not an innate conception of inherent existence, this mode of asserting the self only arises due to studying tenet systems. Non-Buddhists also analyse into the nature of reality, and when they analyse the nature of the self some schools come up with the permanent, unitary, and independent self. Why? They think the self has to be something different from the aggregates, because the self cannot be any of the aggregates. Why? Because the aggregates are something which is appropriated / acquired, as such there has to be somebody who appropriates, therefore the self has to be something different from that which it appropriates. Also the aggregates come and go, they undergo change, while the self always remains the same since beginningless time – in fact the self has been revolving in samsara in dependence on the different aggregates they acquire. So the self acquires the aggregates and abandons them, therefore the self has to be permanent because they survive those states. Unitary means that while the aggregates are composed of various phenomena, the self (as they conceive of it philosophically) is something that does not depend on causes and condition, it is not a composite phenomenon, and therefore the self should be a unitary thing. Also the self must be autonomous. Why? Because they think of dependent-arising and they know that the aggregates arise on the basis of causes and conditions, meaning they are not autonomous since they depend on causes and conditions. However the self should be something autonomous, it should not depend on anything other than itself, so the self should not depend on causes and conditions. This kind of conception is mistaken. Since it is an acquired conception due to tenets it cannot be the root of samsara, it only arises on the basis of mistaken philosophical speculations, whereas the innate view of the transitory collection has to be something that has always been present in sentient beings and makes them revolve in samsara independent of having studied tenet systems.

This type of philosophy is only asserted by non-Buddhists, no Buddhist school adheres to this kind of a self for the simple reason that all Buddhist schools assert the Four Seals:

- 1) All compounded phenomena are impermanent – what are compounded phenomena? All those that arise on the basis of causes and conditions. They are all impermanent, why? Because they don't remain there for even an instance, they disappear or disintegrate momentarily.
- 2) All contaminated phenomena are in the nature of suffering – All phenomena that arise on the basis of karma and delusions are by nature contaminated by them, and therefore they are by nature exclusively suffering.
- 3) All phenomena are empty and selfless – This indicates the various levels of emptiness and selflessness, such that it holds for all the lower schools. In the context of Prasangika, we say all phenomena are empty of inherent existence due to being dependently-arisen.

- 4) **Nirvana is peace** – Samsara is exclusively suffering therefore nirvana, which is its complete opposite, is a state completely beyond suffering. In the Prasangika context it includes the two liberations, but in general refers to attainment of irreversible happiness.

These four seals are extremely important and profound. They are postulated by all Buddhist tenet systems, therefore there cannot be a single phenomena which has the characteristics of being a permanent, unitary, and independent self.

2+3) External objects of apprehension being composed of partless particles and internal apprehending consciousness being composed of partless moments of mind – This is the next artificial conception, and is the way in which the Vaibhashikas conceive of grasping on to phenomena, apprehending external phenomena to ultimately exist as partless particles and the mind to be ultimately composed of moments of mind which are partless in time. So the subtlest physical matter and subtlest moments of mind are both partless particles, but these are also assertions which are only acquired conceptions arising due to the speculations of tenet systems. Here phenomena are either a conventional truth or an ultimate truth, so the way they consider the Two Truths is a bit strange: All phenomena which can be destroyed are conventional truths, for example the moment a pot is destroyed by a hammer there is no longer a mind apprehending pot, therefore pot is a conventional truth. In the same way with a piece of cloth, if we started pulling out a single thread slowly slowly the piece of cloth is unravelled, until a certain point when the idea of it being a piece of cloth disappears, there is no longer a mind apprehending cloth after its destruction. Space is an ultimate truth since it cannot be destroyed, we cannot go round with a hammer destroying it such that the consciousness apprehending it ceases. Similarly with partless particles and moments of mind, since they are without directional / temporal parts they cannot be destroyed such that a consciousness apprehending them ceases. This is how they posit conventional and ultimate truths. Thus conventional truths are phenomena which if broken into their parts, physically or mentally, the consciousness apprehending them ceases. Ultimate truths are those phenomena which cannot be destroyed or mentally broken into parts such that the consciousness apprehending them ceases.

These assertions belong only to the Vaibhashika school, they do not accord with reality because there are no phenomena that are without parts, or a moment of consciousness which is not composed of subtler moments of consciousness. So this way of conceiving phenomenon is merely an intellectually acquired conception, because this mode of asserting phenomenon does not accord with reality. Even if we look at the most subtle atom, however small it might be it must have parts. For example it has directions, if we put this atom in the centre and put other atoms around it then at that very moment there is a northern part, southern part, western part and eastern part, which do not become identical parts. The eastern part absolutely cannot become the western part and vice versa, otherwise they would become identical, and we could not differentiate between the eastern and western parts. As a consequence, we could not possibly have a collection of such atoms in order to form larger phenomena. In the same way when we look at the smallest moment of consciousness, what does it possess? It possesses parts: it comes from a past moment and it goes to a future moment, then, even the smallest moment must abide in between its past and its future moments. If those past, present and future parts did not exist one could not say that it comes from the past and goes to the future because all moments would be the same.

We need to understand how Prasangika refutes the existence of phenomena that are partless, as such partless phenomena would be impossible to assert. What Prasangikas assert is exactly in accord with the way things exists, while these Vaibhashika assertions are merely intellectually acquired conceptions.

So do all phenomenon must have parts? What about empty space, does it have parts or no parts? [Ven. Birgit whispers: say it has parts!] The point is, we know these things have parts, since all objects of knowledge have parts, but how do they have parts? What is the way in which space has parts? Space has directions, this is a reason why space has parts. If we have two pots, we can say that the space in one is not the same as the space in the other. In fact we could fill the northern pot with water, thus filling that part of space, but not fill the space inside the southern pot, therefore

they cannot be identical. What about the parts of emptiness? Emptiness also has parts. While ultimate reality is the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena, the emptiness of a pot is not the same as the emptiness of a pillar – in this way emptiness has parts. These parts are all one entity but different isolates. It is very important to remember that all objects of knowledge have parts.

4) Rinpoche did not comment on this.

Coming back to the text, and the quote from Candrakirti: “In those who spend numerous eons as unconscious as beasts and do not perceive this unborn permanent something, the apprehension of a self is still seen to operate.” By the reasoning mentioned in this quote, what binds sentient beings in samsara must be innate ignorance, as artificial ignorances (such as the grasping at a permanent, unitary, and independent self) are merely intellectually acquired and cannot be the root of samsara. The root cannot be an artificial conception that comes through philosophical speculations because this conception also exists in animals etc. who have spent numberless eons without engaging in tenet studies, therefore what binds sentient beings to samsara is necessarily innate and not acquired ignorance.

- B. **Since the innate mode of apprehension does not involve artificial manners of apprehension, it does not help to stop those manners of apprehension:** Since the innate ignorance is independent of the intellectually acquired ignorance, by eliminating the latter one does not eliminate the former. However, since the innate ignorance is at the root of all wrong minds, eliminating this conception would also eliminate the intellectually acquired conceptions.
- C. **The absurdity of opposing innate mental afflictions by merely refuting the referent objects of artificial concepts:** Thinking that uprooting the intellectually acquired conceptions could also oppose the innate ignorance would be as absurd as in the example given: like being afraid of there being a snake in the house and in order to eliminate this fear and determine the snake is gone, you ascertain that the house is empty of elephant!
- D. **Although both the view of the transitory collection and ignorance are the root of samsara, there are not two roots of samsara:**

Here in the quote, Nagarjuna specifically says that the root of samsara is grasping to self of phenomena. The moment one conceives of the aggregates as inherently existent, one necessarily conceives of the person as inherently existent, and on that basis one commits contaminated karma and due to which one is reborn in samsara. In the next quote, on the other hand, Candrakirti says that the view of the transitory collection is the root of samsara. So it seems like the two are contradicting each other because two discordant roots of cyclic existence are not admissible. However, this is not the case as both conceptions are the one root of samsara. This is since grasping at a self of persons and of phenomena are not different, despite being differentiated by their observed objects, since they have the same mode of apprehension. Both have the same mode of apprehension which is inherent existence, the only difference is their observed basis, which is either persons or phenomena. Therefore they are not discordant roots of samsara, as discordant roots would require a different mode of apprehension, rather they are the same root.

- E. **Demonstration that the noble father and son assert the apprehension of true existence to be the root of cyclic existence:** Here it explains how ignorance is the root of all the other afflictions, it pervades or permeates them just as the body sense power pervades all other sense powers.
- F. **How to understand the stages of how mental afflictions arise from the Commentary on the “Compendium of Valid Cognition” as well:**

This commentary was written by Master Dharmakirti, and was written from the Sautrantika school perspective, but it explains very well how delusions arise. So when the “I” is apprehended in one's continuum, that “I” is first observed and then apprehended by the conception as being inherently existent. This mode of apprehension of the conception which grasps to the inherent existence of the person conceives of the person not as dependent but as independent. Once we have apprehended

the “I” like this, whatever appears to be providing the happiness of that “I” is grasped at. We superimpose qualities on those things which seem to provide us with happiness as if they exclusively had desirable qualities, and this kind of apprehension also obscures their faults. Therefore craving arises, which grasps as “mine” those things which are apprehended to achieve the “I”’s happiness. On the basis of grasping onto “I” and “mine” in this way, as being inherently existent, one accumulates karma to be reborn in samsara.

3. One wishing to abandon the apprehension of a self should seek the view of selflessness:

A. The reason why you need to seek the view of realising selflessness if you wish to abandon that ignorance:

1. It is stupid to not make an effort for the pure view to arise in one's mental continuum, despite the wish to abandon ignorance:

This section explains that it is not sufficient to only desire or wish to eliminate ignorance or wish to be free from samsara. It is necessary to engage in analysis with one's intelligence, with all of one's effort and power, using correct reasonings, studying correct texts etc. We need to make the effort to understand exactly what is the root of samsara. If we base ourselves merely on faith and do not analyse with intelligence, this is a completely stupid act. It is necessary to want the extinction in which the two apprehensions of a self explained above have been abandoned. The being who wants to but does not put effort into understanding how apprehending a self becomes the root of samsara has very dull faculties. As well as the being who, despite partial insight into this, does not put effort into generating the pure view of selflessness in his continuum, and thoroughly refute the apprehended object of the apprehension of a self by using scriptures of definitive meaning as well as reasonings. This is because they have lost the vital essence of the path leading to liberation and omniscience but remain indifferent about it. We need to gain correct understanding of emptiness if we want to proceed to liberation and enlightenment. Of course to attain enlightenment we also need bodhicitta, but principally we require the wisdom realising the emptiness of inherent existence and we need to put effort into generating that wisdom.

2. Showing that the apprehension of a self must be abandoned:

A. How it is taught in the treatises:

1. How it is taught by the glorious Dharmakirti:

In *Pramanavartika* it says: “Without these objects being negated, They cannot possibly be abandoned.” We need to refute the self as it is conceived of by the conception of inherent existence. If we do not refute that exact object, if we do not understand precisely the way in which that object does not exist, we are not able to abandon the wrong conception. It is not like the case with an external object, like a thorn which we can pull out of our flesh with the hand. Mentally, in order to eliminate an erroneous conception, the conception which conceives of an inherently existent self, we need to generate the mind which has the exact opposite mode of apprehension – we must be very precise. So we must generate the wisdom realising that the object conceived of by the wrong conception does not exist in exactly this way. In other words that the referent object of the wrong conception does not exist at all.

2. How it is taught by the glorious Candrakirti:

“Once his mind has seen: all afflictions and faults
Arise from the view of transitory collection,
A yogi knows the self to be its object
And performs the negation of the self.”

All the faults of samsara, beginning with birth, ageing, sickness and death, and all afflictions which make us commit actions leading to further rebirth in samsara, arise due to the fault of the view of the transitory collection, which is the conception of a self of person on the basis of one's own continuum. Thus, when the yogi has seen through analysis that in reality the person exists by way of being merely designated in dependence on the aggregates, while the way the conception sees the person is not in this way, but rather as inherently existent; then the yogi knows that this conception

of an inherently existent self is erroneous, and that all faults arise in dependence on this wrong conception. He will therefore make efforts to negate the object “inherently existent person” on the basis of the conventionally existent person.

We have to be very careful with the wording of this quotation, we have to ask ourselves what is the observed object of the conception and what is the referent object of the conception, since “self” is mentioned twice but with different meaning. In the third line we are talking about the mere “I”, the conventionally existent “I”, the observed object. The conception of an inherently existent “I” has as its observed object the merely designated “I”, which conventionally exists and which is mistakenly conceived of as inherently existent. It is the inherently existent “I” that is refuted, not the conventionally existent “I”, the latter is the existent basis which is observed by the wrong conception. The basis exists, that is the merely existent “I”, the dependently arisen “I”, the merely designated “I”, but how is it conceived? How does the conception look at it? It sees the merely imputed “I” as being inherently existent, and that inherently existent “I” is the conceived object, the referent object of the conception and it does not exist at all – this is what is negated in the fourth line.

This verse has to be looked at carefully. All the scriptures of Nagarjuna, Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, Candrakirti, are immaculate, perfect, there is not the slightest syllable that is ever mistaken in those texts. Therefore we have to be extremely careful not to make mistakes, as it would be a disastrous mistake, for example, to negate the existent self which is merely designated on its basis of designation. The only thing to refute is the inherently existent self which is the referent object of the conception and which does not exist. The point is that the observed object has to be an existent thing, it cannot be something that does not exist. It is not on the basis of a non-existent thing that we conceive of inherent existence. For example, the horns of a rabbit are not conceived of as inherently existent as they do not even exist. That which is the observed object of the wrong conception has to be something that exists, so it has to be the “I” that exists, which is the conventionally existent “I”, which exists by mere designation. We do not even consider conceiving of inherent existence with respect to something that does not exist, so the wrong conception necessarily depends on an observed object which exists. This existent object is not refuted, what is refuted is the object which is superimposed onto it, which is the inherently existent person in this case.

In these last two lines, although it sounds as though “self” refers to the same object twice, they are different: one refers to the object which exists and the other to the object which does not exist. In the third line, that “self” is the observed object of the conception, it is the conventional existent “I”, which exists. What does the view of the transitory collection do with that? The “I” that is observed does not exist as an inherently existent “I”, but it is apprehended as inherently existent. This is the “self” in the fourth line, the object negated is the inherently existent “I” which is wrongly conceived and superimposed on to the conventionally existent “I”. So observed is the existent “I”, apprehended is the non-existent “I”, what is refuted is the latter “I”, the inherently existent “I”, which does not exist at all. In the third line we talk about the observed object, in the fourth line the conceived object. The observed object is that which exists conventionally, nominally, but it is conceived of in a wrong way, because it does not exist as an independent entity but is conceived in that way. Now wisdom goes and looks how the observed object exists, it understands that this object exists conventionally, dependently, and in this way it understands that the way it is conceived of by the conception does not accord with reality. In this way, wisdom sees that the way the “I” appears to the wrong conception does not accord with reality. This is the way in which one realises emptiness, there is no other way. This is why we have to continually listen, study, and meditate, because when we have correctly understood how the wrong conception wrongly superimposes inherent existence onto the observed object and how this does not accord with reality, this is how we realise emptiness.

When the conception of inherent existence is there wisdom is not there, and when wisdom is there the wrong conception is not there. So the “I” exists dependently, but the conception sees it as

independently existent. Wisdom analysing selflessness has the same object of observation, but does not conceive of it as inherently existent, instead it sees it in the way it really exists, dependently. So when wisdom is there the view of the transitory collection is not there, and vice versa. And since all afflictions come directly from the root, the view of the transitory collection, the very moment the wisdom realises the emptiness of inherent existence, ignorance is eliminated and therefore all afflictions are eliminated. Like a poisonous tree with many branches and leaves and so forth, when we cut the root all those branches, leaves and fruit do not grow any more.

3. This is also the meaning intended by the protector Nagarjuna:

Wisdom eliminates the apprehension of the conventionally existent observed object as existing inherently. Since this view of the transitory collection gives rise to other wrong views and all afflictions, when it is eliminated so are all of those. Thus, by seeing dependent-arising one eliminates the conception of their being inherently produced (born) by seeing its direct opposite. All phenomena arise / are produced dependently, all phenomena are interdependent, they are empty of independent existence. Why? Because they depend on others, therefore they are empty of self existence. This is how wisdom avoids the two extremes of nihilism and eternalism, by seeing that emptiness and dependent arising assist each other and are not contradictory.

There is a passage by Lama Tsongkhapa: “Without understanding the way phenomena exist, by merely immersing oneself in the mind of definite emergence one will not be able to cut the root of samsara.” So without understanding the mode of existence of all phenomena, dependent-arising and emptiness, just with the mind of renunciation or bodhicitta one will not be able to cut the root of samsara. The only thing that cuts the root of samsara is the proper understanding of emptiness and dependent-arising. All great masters who have come into this world after the Bhagavan have taught this way of existence, so recognising this way of existence is completely pertinent to attaining enlightenment. Not only with respect to the attainment of liberation and enlightenment, but rather everyone needs to understand dependent-arising. It is important also in our daily activities, for the way we live in society, when we are in contact with other beings, when we do our jobs, whatever we do. We may not understand all the subtle aspects of dependent-arising and all of its facets, however if we have even a general understanding our mind will be more open and more relaxed. On the basis of this relaxed and patient mind we have better relationships, we are of more benefit to others, more in harmony with others. The moment we understand just a little bit of the nature of dependent-arising and emptiness, our claustrophobic closed minds are completely eliminated and become immediately more relaxed and open. Therefore all of us must understand even the minimum of dependent-arising. In our life we meet with both positive and negative people and situations, if we have understood a little bit of the way in which phenomena really exist, how they are interdependent, how they depend on other, depend on causes and conditions, our way of confronting these situations will be completely tranquil and relaxed. Not only that, on the basis of this understanding we will easily develop positive attitudes of mind, such as love and compassion. All of those qualities arise on the basis of a correct understanding of the dependent-arising of all phenomena. Also when we talk about love, compassion, bodhicitta and so forth, they arise very easily and intensely the very moment that we understand dependent-arising and emptiness.

To paraphrase a verse by Aryadeva: those who have little merit do not even think about emptiness, but if somebody even generates a slight positive doubt about the nature of profound dependent-arising and emptiness, if someone has a factual doubt with respect to emptiness, even only thinking that maybe emptiness is the nature of phenomena, at that moment the root of samsara scatters, it says it tears samsara asunder. So the minimum understanding of dependent-arising and emptiness completely shatters the root of samsara, for that reason even a little bit of analysis, of positive doubt about the nature of phenomena, will bring tremendous benefits.

4. How it is taught by Aryadeva:

Ignorance conceives of inherently existent phenomena, of something which is not dependent, so when one understands that such phenomena do not exist, that moment one understands emptiness

and cuts the root of samsara. This is the way the conceived object of the conception is not a phenomenon, it is not an existent, as soon as one realises that one cuts the root of samsara.

One can also talk in the following way. When we talk about liberation / nirvana, there are two objects of negation, two things to be eliminated: one is an object that does not exist, whereas the other thing is an object that does exist. That which is the non-existent phenomenon is the so called self, meaning the inherently existent self, the conceived object of the conception of inherent existence, the independent “I” – that does not exist. On the other hand, the conception that conceives of that self, that conception exists. The very moment wisdom realises the non-existence of the self as it is apprehended by the wrong conception of inherent existence, when this self is seen as non-existent, the object of the conception is abandoned / eliminated. And, of course, the conception apprehending that self is also eliminated. The non-existent object is seen to not exist and due to that the wrong conception apprehending inherent existence is eliminated.

There is a passage which is not directly in this lam-rim, but in the lam-rim chenmo it is included in the middling section. It talks about the object and the object possessor. The object possessor is the consciousness apprehending the object. There are two parts of the quotation, in the first part it talks about the object, it does not exist. This is the conceived object of the wrong conception of inherent existence, that object does not exist and therefore it can be negated. In the second part it talks about the object possessor, the consciousness, the conception, that does exist. In order to negate it it must be something that exists. It seems contradictory because the same word is used, in fact what is negated is the object and what is eliminated by that negation is the subject, the conception is eliminated. The confusion only comes from using the same word “negation” for both. So first it says that the object of negation, in order to be negated, must be something that does not exist; on the other hand, with respect to the object possessor, if it did not exist there would be no reason to negate / eliminate it. Sometimes we debate on negating something that does not exist, however in this context we are talking about the object and the object possessor, which is the consciousness, so it is a different kind of debate. Both are said to be negated but the object is negated in the sense of being refuted, while the consciousness is negated in the sense of being eliminated. The conception is a consciousness, whether it apprehends a true or false object, it must have an object, since consciousness is defined by having an object. Therefore in this case it is the object that is conceived by the conception of inherent existence, this object does not exist. What is the object of the wrong conception of inherent existence? In this case it is the inherently existent self. That does not exist, but the conception of it exists.

However, in order for the consciousness to exist it must possess an object, so what is it (since the object “inherently existent self” does not exist)? It is the observed object, the conventionally existent self, that exists, however it is conceived in a wrong way. Although it observes the conventionally existing self, the way the meaning generality of that object appears to that conception is completely opposed to the actual mode of existence of the object. To that consciousness the self appears as inherently existent, it appears as if it had autonomous, inherent, natural, self-powered existence, however this is a wrong mode of apprehension because the self does not exist in this way.

5. **How Shantideva also taught in accordance with that:** All of these are disciples of Nagarjuna who explain in exactly the same way with the same arguments as Nagarjuna did before them.

B. **How it is taught in the sutras:** see text.

3. **Indication that the analysis of scriptures and reasonings is important for abandoning the apprehension of a self:** see text.
4. **In order to abandon the apprehension of a self it is necessary to refute its referent object; the reason for that:**

A. In order to abandon the apprehension of a self it is necessary to negate its referent object:

“If you do not meditate like this on the meaning of having negated the mistaken object”, what does this mean? It is indispensable, on the basis of reasoning and quotations, to meditate and familiarise the mind with the correct meaning. If we familiarise ourselves instead with other meanings of selflessness, such as the emptiness of a permanent, unitary, and independent self, if we meditate on opposing this mode of apprehension, or merely on repulsiveness etc., all of these are not familiarisations with the absence of the object as it is conceived by the conception of inherent existence. Therefore, those do not really touch the conception that grasps at a self of persons and of phenomena. Also if one just withdraws the mind from the object, if one does not use analysis, etc. that cannot be posited as entering into selflessness. One must meditate analysing whether the object conceived by the conception of inherent existence actually exists, and directly harm the wrong mode of apprehension.

B. The reason for that:

1. The existence in general of three ways of apprehending I:

This passage shows that there are three ways in which one can conceive of an “I”:

- 1) **The object is apprehend as truly existent:** This is the conception of a self of persons and phenomena, their apprehension not as dependently-arising but as objectively established.
- 2) **The object is apprehend as empty of inherent existence:** This is wisdom apprehending the object as merely designated on the basis of designation, so it apprehends the “I” as a dependent-arising.
- 3) **An apprehension that does not qualify it as either of those two:** This way of conceiving is like that of ordinary beings who are not affected by any philosophical view. They apprehend things without a particularly strong thought about them, like when we say I come, I go, I sit, I do this or that, one is able to apprehend things as neither inherently existent or empty of inherent existence.

The first of them, what is it? That which is apprehended by this kind of conception is the object of negation, since it does not exist. This mind apprehends the person or phenomena as inherently existent. On the basis of this conception, which is the innate ignorance, the object appears as inherently existent and the conception operates such that it believes that appearance to be true. So when we strongly think *I go, I come, I do this or that*, whatever object appears as inherently existent the conception believes that appearance as true.

The third is apprehending the mere “I”, me, I’m doing, I’m going, this “I” exists conventionally, and this type of apprehension that apprehends a merely existent I is a valid mind. This is because this mind does not specifically qualifies that “I” to exist inherently or be empty of inherent existence, it is a non-analytical mind, it leaves the object as it is. This is a conventional valid cognition, because the self or the “I” is that which functions, it acts, it brings forth results, it experiences. So the mere self, the merely existent “I”, the conventionally existent “I”, is valid and the cognition of it is also valid as long as it is not analysed. However, just because one is not actively involved in a conception grasping at a self of persons or phenomena, that does not mean one is involved in the realisation of selflessness!

The first mode conceives of a truly established, inherently established “I”. The second mode is wisdom, it realises that this kind of objectively established “I” does not exist, because it cannot exist in this way due to being dependently-arising. This is wisdom looking at the object. The third mode is when one looks at the conventionally existent self and one does not have a strong conception of its inherent existence. At the same time, one does not have the wisdom realising its selflessness. So without making any particular investigation, there is the apprehension of the mere “I”, the “I” that exists, which is conventionally established. One makes no analysis of that “I”, of its mode of existence, and it neither strongly appears as truly established nor does it appear empty of inherent existence.

Here we are talking about the mere “I”, the conventionally existent self. This is the same kind of reality as that of the flower. When we say “flower” that is a mere designation in dependence on the basis of imputation, its components: petals, stem etc. The moment we investigate, the flower is not found, it is merely designated in dependence on its parts. In the same way the person is merely designated in dependence on its aggregates, without being findable upon analysis. So the way conventions of the world function, things are established by non-analytical renown without investigating them. They are established by mere designation in dependence on their basis.

2. The need to settle that the very basis with respect to which the apprehension of true existence is mistaken does not exist in the way it is apprehended:

Analysis helps us to understand that the way objects, such as persons and phenomena, are conceived of by the wrong conception do not exist at all. The wrong conception conceives of them as independent entities, while in reality they are dependent entities. The complete non-existence of their inherent existence, that is the understanding of emptiness, this is their true mode of existence. If one looks for the object of negation another way instead of looking for the actual meaning, it would be like trying to find a thief in a meadow after he has gone to the forest. For example, we can talk about *shen-tong* (other-emptiness), which is emptiness as interpreted by the Jonang-pa school, who arrive at the meaning of emptiness in a completely different way. They adhere to emptiness as being inherently existent, which is a completely wrong understanding. So looking for the meaning of emptiness in any way other than analysing the basis as they are apprehended by the wrong conceptions, one will not find the meaning of emptiness.

3. The need to greatly cherish the realisation of the view of suchness, having seen that if you stop the apprehension of true existence, you will turn away from cyclic existence:

By means of correct cultivation of the wisdom realising the emptiness of inherent existence, all mental afflictions are eliminated, all subsequent contaminated actions are eliminated, rebirth in samsara is eliminated, and thereby liberation is attained. This is why it is important to gain correct understanding of the ultimate mode of existence of phenomena. We are also able to proficiently engage in this, it is very important to do it with effort, and profoundly, “you need to know those stages of entering into and turning away from cyclic existence and greatly cherish the realisation of the meaning of suchness. However, it will not come through a vague involvement that fails to distinguish well the objects of observation.”

B. How to generate the view realising selflessness:

1. The stages of generating the two views of selflessness:

A. The stages themselves:

First one generates the concept of a self of phenomena, then on the basis of this one generates the conception of a self of persons. Why? Because in order to have a conception of a self of persons one must first observe the aggregates. On the other hand, it is the opposite when one develops the realisations of selflessness of persons and phenomena: first one realises the selflessness of persons and then one realises the selflessness of phenomena. Why? It is not because one is more subtle than the other, despite the basis being different, as both conceptions have the exact same mode of apprehension. Still it is said that it is easier from the point of view of realisation to realise the selflessness of persons.

The person is designated in dependence on the aggregates, in particular the physical aggregates. Since this is the case, without apprehending the aggregates one is unable to apprehend the person. On the other hand, in terms of realising the selflessness of persons and phenomena, it is easier to realise the selflessness of persons. Why? Because the person is merely designated in dependence on the five aggregates which are the basis of designation. The moment we realise the person is not the five aggregates, but is merely designated in dependence on them, we have already gone in the right direction, we have already eliminated a coarse aspect of the object to be refuted. The person is a dependent-arising, designated in dependence on the five aggregates, this is quite easy to

understand, and as such it is empty of inherent existence. However, it is quite difficult to understand selflessness of phenomena because we must analyse the aggregates, and one must make more intricate investigation into the aggregates. Thus it is simply more difficult to realise that they are empty of inherent existence.

This is the meaning Lama Tsongkhapa has explained in the lam-rim chenmo, and the textbooks of Sera Je are also based on this kind of understanding. When we look at the Drepung textbooks, they say there is absolutely no difference in difficulty between realising the selflessness of persons and phenomena, so even between Sera and Drepung there are differences. In reality these explanations in the textbooks seem to be contradictory assertions, but really they have the same meaning, they are just there to make you think. If one is confronted with different assertions one will think more about the subject matter, so seemingly contradictory statements do not necessarily have contradictory meaning.

Now we look at this quotation from *Precious Garland*. Persons are designated in dependence on the collection of the six elements, therefore the person is not truly established. Since beings are composites of the six elements they are not real, in the same way each element is also a composite and so is not real either. In general, the word *skyes-bu*, which here has been translated as the first word “persons”, is usually translated as “being” or “individual”. The word usually translated as “person” is *gang-zag*. What do they mean etymologically? *Skyes-bu* means someone who is able or endowed with capacity. While *gang* means full and *zag* means obscurations, so *gang-zag* means full of obscurations, somebody who will be born in samsara.

Certain words can be used appropriately for different contexts while generally being quite interchangeable. Sometimes when we have terms like “compounded phenomenon”, “impermanent phenomenon”, “functioning phenomenon”, which in general are synonymous but have different shades, they convey slightly different meanings. For example, “compounded phenomenon” particularly conveys that it is composed of causes and conditions, it does not arise in and of itself. “Impermanent phenomenon” is an equivalent term (since whatever is a compounded phenomenon is necessarily impermanent and vice versa), however using the word “impermanent” instead of calling it “compounded” particularly conveys the meaning of it not abiding, its momentary disintegration. To say “functioning phenomenon” demonstrates another quality, it shows that this phenomenon is able to bring forth a result, able to perform a function. So in general “being” and “person” are interchangeable, however here it is better to use the term “being”, indicating “the able one”.

The being is composed of the six elements: earth, water, fire, wind, space and consciousness. If we look at the being, that being is none of those elements individually, it is not earth, not water, not fire, not wind, not space, not consciousness and also not the collection of those. The individual is a completely different phenomenon from the six elements or five aggregates, they are not identical with any of these individually or collectively. How does the person exist? Merely designated in dependence on them. So the person is not an independent phenomenon, it is designated in dependence on the aggregates and elements. Those aggregates and elements also do not exist inherently, each aggregate and element also is merely designated in dependence on its parts. As such the basis of designation is also merely designated in the sense that the aggregates and elements are also dependent phenomena.

B. The reason for that:

1. Proof through reasoning:

It is not the case that selflessness of person is easier to realise due to being coarser, and selflessness of phenomena more subtle, rather the former is easier to understand due to the basis. And illustrations are easier still, and therefore are used to explain selflessness of persons. For example, apprehending the face in the mirror not to be an actual face, while it still appears as an actual face. Similarly with reflections of the moon on a lake, rainbows, magical illusions etc. It also says in the Heart Sutra “beheld those five aggregates *also* as empty of inherent nature”, which implies the two steps of understanding those selflessnesses, as the person is understood to be empty of inherent nature and then its basis, the five aggregates, are also understood to be as such. Thus it implicitly

indicates that if one has realised selflessness of phenomena one has necessarily realised selflessness of persons, but not the other way round.

2. **Proof through scriptures:**

Therefore, once one has understood the selflessness of persons one should use that same mode of apprehension and apply it to internal phenomena (included in one's own continuum) and external phenomena. However, there is no need to follow the reasoning for each and every phenomenon, as if we ascertain the lack of inherent existence of one phenomenon we can easily understand that it is exactly the same for every other phenomenon.

2. **The actual generation, in stages, of the two views of selflessness:**

A. **Settling the selflessness of persons:**

1. **Identification of persons:**

A. **The actual identification of persons:** See text.

B. **Commenting on the meaning of sutras that teach the self to be merely imputed to the aggregates:**

This quotation is often quoted by H.H. the Dalai Lama:

The so-called self is a fiendish mind and
You have come to hold this view.
The compositional aggregates are empty.
There is no sentient being here.

Just as based on collections of parts
People speak of chariots
Likewise, in dependence on aggregates,
Conventionally, they say “sentient beings”.

“The so-called self”, here self should be understood as the self apprehended by the self-grasping ignorance, the self posited as existing by way of its own nature. “Fiendish mind” is the self-grasping ignorance, grasping at the self as being inherently existent. When it says “you” this should be understood as the author addressing himself directly to this self-grasping ignorance. So why is it fiendish? In this context we could also translate “view” as plural, so also all other wrong views come from this ignorance, and from these all sufferings arise. Therefore it is pointing to self-grasping ignorance as being the root of all suffering and wrong views. “The compositional aggregates are empty” means that the basis of imputation on which the “I” is imputed, the aggregates, are not at all as you apprehend them to be, they are free or empty of being the way you apprehend them. We went through a quotation before that said the person is not earth, water... consciousness, space etc. this is saying the same thing here. However much we look for this “I”, it is completely empty of being established on the basis of these aggregates and therefore it is said in the fourth line “there is no sentient being [or individual] here”.

“Just as based on collections of parts people speak of chariots”. Chariot is imputed on the collection of many different parts, like wheels etc., and this collection of parts functions as a chariot, therefore we call or label it chariot. But if we look at each and every part, taking each part aside and examining “is this the chariot?”, we will never find any part of this collection which we can point to as being the chariot. Nevertheless, being assembled in this way and functioning in this way we label that chariot. “Likewise, in dependence on aggregates, conventionally they say sentient beings”. In the same way as we label chariot on its collection of parts, on the collection of the five aggregates we label “sentient being”, we label “I”, “person”. If we look at each and every part, there is no “person” to be pointed at in each and every one of these parts, but sentient beings being assembled in this way we can say “I”. Thus we say sentient beings exist merely by convention.

C. How to posit that person, the imputed phenomenon, as the object of observation of the innate apprehension of I:

It is true that the collection of the five aggregates are the basis of imputation for us to impute or label person. Therefore the person, being the imputed phenomenon, cannot be the same as the basis of imputation for this imputed phenomenon. We can also talk of a collection in terms of temporal parts, there is a continuity of earlier and later moments of this collection of aggregates, which altogether form the basis of imputation. So the basis of imputation is a collection, and this collection is made up of another collection, which is made up of another collection *ad infinitum* since whatever exists is necessarily made up of parts. These collections of aggregates are only the basis of imputation, none of them individually or collectively are the person itself.

D. Hence the need to differentiate between the self that exists and the self that does not exist: see text.

2. Settling persons as not inherently existent:

A. Settling that the I does not inherently exist:

1. How the view realising selflessness is born from the four essential points being complete:

This explanation of the four essential points is explained very clearly in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, which is based on the lam-rim texts *Manjushri's Own Words* by the 5th Dalai Lama and *Swift Path*, so Rinpoche will give the explanation of the four essential points based on that.

A. Ascertaining the object of negation:

Just as it is explained in *Bodhisattvacaryavatara*: “When you do not touch on the imputed thing, you will not grasp its absence”. Therefore one needs to recognise what is the object to be refuted / negated, the self of person that is non-existent. We need to be able to recognise it and see how it is overestimated by self-grasping, otherwise we are like a person trying to shoot without seeing their target. Usually we give this example: if you do not know how the thief looks like then you will not be able to catch him. Similarly, if you do not know what the object of refutation is or have not identified it properly there is no way you can refute it. When we debate we can posit the object of negation really easily, we just say blah blah blah, but actually this is not useful because one needs to identify / recognise the object in one's own experience, in one's own mental continuum. Otherwise we can just roughly say there is a thief, he is a human being and wears white clothing, which is not very useful if you actually want to catch the thief.

It is explained here as being the feeling of an “I” that is not merely imputed by the mind on the aggregates. It is a feeling of “I” that abides in all sentient beings, even in ants, and in every moment, even in our dreams. It is a feeling of a concrete “I”, an “I” having the aspect of being very solid, that exists on top of the aggregates, not merely depending on the mind, and that appears spontaneously. This is how one identifies the object of innate self-grasping. It is said here that this innate self-grasping, even if it does not meet with specific conditions for it, it always abides there deep down but not very clearly, in a blurry way. However in some circumstances, such as being praised in front of many people, we can feel very strongly this “I” as though it existed in the midst of our body and mind, right there quite concrete. Also if you are criticised or accused wrongly in front of many people, accused of being a thief for example, this concrete “I” appears and if you actually investigate at that time you will be able to recognise it.

When we see it being quite manifest, this concrete feeling of “I”, then we can investigate and see how it feels and how it is. It is explained here that we should investigate the “I” according to the following illustration: when two people go for a walk, even though they may be engaged in conversation, they are still able to keep an eye on the path. In the same way, when this feeling of “I” appears, we should allow our mind to continue instinctively while using a subtle side of our mind (like when we talked previously about introspection, like this) to look at how this “I” appears, and how it is grasped at. However, if you look at it too abruptly, with the fullness of your mind then this feeling will disappear immediately, so you have to look subtly.

This feeling also manifests strongly when you are about to fall off a cliff. You have this strong, concrete feeling of “I”, not thinking “my body is about to fall off the cliff” or “my mind is about to fall” – rather, in the midst of this body and mind, there is this “I” that is about to fall off the cliff. This is the “I” apprehended by the self-grasping ignorance. So one needs to be quite skilful in identifying the self, as once identified it is quite easy to refute. The main problem is to identify it as it is quite difficult to make it appear visibly.

B. Ascertaining the pervasion:

Next we need to investigate the aspect in which the meaning generality of this non-existent self of persons appears. Hypothetically, if the self which is apprehended as inherently established did actually exist in this way, it must be established as either one with the aggregates or as different from the aggregates – there is no third possibility.

So one has to ascertain this. In general, whatever is an object of knowledge has to be either one or many, there is nothing that exists which is anything other than that, that is neither one nor many. In the same way if there is such a thing as a truly established person, then this would have to be either truly one or truly other from the aggregates.

From *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* (not mentioned by Rinpoche): The key point of this is it should lead you to the certainty that, “If it is neither of these two, it cannot exist.”

C. Seeing that the person and the aggregates are not one inherently established entity:

So we have ascertained that the self has to be either truly one or truly different from the aggregates. Now the third point is the ascertainment of how the self is not truly one with the aggregates. If it was the case that the self was truly one with the aggregates, inherently one, it would be such that the self would be completely the same thing as the aggregates. What is wrong with that is that in this case there should not be a discrepancy between the mode of appearance and the mode of abiding. However, we do say “my aggregates” (“my hands”, “my mind” etc.), and when we say that the aggregates and the self appear as different things. They have a different appearance, but if they were completely oneness, truly inherently one with each other, there would be absolutely no differentiation of one from the other, either by way of expressing them and in actual meaning. If the aggregates were inherently one with the self, and if the self was inherently one with the aggregates, there would be absolutely no point in making a distinction between the two in name or meaning. Also, it would absurdly follow that as the aggregates are five in number then there would be five selves; or, conversely, it would absurdly follow that as there is one self then there would only be one aggregate.

Other absurd consequences would be: if the “I” and the aggregates were inherently one, then when we die and the aggregates are burnt or buried or thrown into water, we should think this “I” is also burnt or buried or thrown in water, but this is not the case. In the same way, when we die we say that we take rebirth, but we have to leave these aggregates behind, they do not go on to future lives, they also do not come from previous lives, so if the “I” was inherently one with the aggregates then rebirth would be impossible. Also, how could we posit the attainment of liberation? this would become impossible.

If we concretely identify the “I” with the body, if we posit the body and the self to be completely one, then since the body is matter it would absurdly follow that the self is matter. Usually we also apprehend the self to be inherently one with the mind, this is problematic because consciousness is unobstructed by walls etc. however it is not the case that the “I” is unobstructed by walls etc. We do actually bump our heads against them! We also say “I am cold” or “I burnt myself” or “I was thrown in the water”, but do you think the mind can be cold, or be burnt, or thrown in water? Do you think the mind can bump its head? Impossible right! Also, we usually say “my mind”, not “I the mind”, it is quite weird to say “I the mind”, so we do consider those to be two different things. Also if the self was one with mind, and not at all dependent on the body, it would be very difficult to recognise each other, since how we usually recognise each other is by seeing each other's noses, ears and hair etc.

D. **Seeing that the person and the aggregates are not established as essentially distinct:**

The final essential point is ascertaining the lack of being truly different. Here we are talking about truly established “I”, or the self to be negated. We have already understood the different faults that derive from the assertion that it is truly one with the aggregates, one with the body or one with the mind. Now, we take a different standpoint and understand the different faults derived from asserting the “I” to be truly different from the aggregates.

If it was the case that the inherently existent self was different and separate from its basis of imputation, the aggregates, then it should be findable as something unconnected to the aggregates. In other words: when you eliminate the goat and sheep from a group consisting of a sheep, a goat and a bull; you are able to point to the remaining animal and say, “There is a bull!” In the same way, we would have to be able to take this inherently existing “I”, and say “it is not Form”, “not Feeling”, “not Discrimination”, “not Compositional Factors”, and “not Consciousness”; negate all of those from being this truly existent “I”, and be able to point at what remains and say, “There is the I!” However this is not the case, as you have nothing left to be pointed at.

Since there is absolutely no other place to look for the “I”, if we do not find it then we have to conclude that it is non-existent. There is nowhere else to look for such a truly existing “I” other than on the aggregates. To give an example, if you lose a cow and it could only be in two places, if you thoroughly look in both places and do not find a cow you have to conclude that there is no cow at all. In same way, if you look for this “I” as it is apprehended by the self-grasping on the aggregates and you do not find it you have to conclude that it does not exist.

This explanation of the four essentials is a method to realise emptiness. If you see this inherently existent self and proceed through these four points and in the end you do not realise its non-existence, then how else do you expect to realise emptiness?? Though this is a bit of a joke because actually there are many reasonings to realise emptiness.

Question: However, if we investigate for the conventionally existent “I” by the exact same method we don't find that either, and so would have to conclude that it is also non-existent, but we say that exists – so what is the difference? Couldn't we say the inherent “I” exists conventionally?

Rinpoche: It is true that you do not find it, because the conventional “I” is also relatively existent and existing simply as a convention. So maybe you think whatever is imputed by convention should be findable if you look for it, but it is the same, you will not find it because it is imputed by convention. Just like the flower, it is a convention imputed on the basis, but if you look for it you will not find the flower, in the same way you will not find the mere “I” on its basis of imputation if you look for it. It exists conventionally, if you do not examine its mode of existence, but from point of view of a valid cognition investigating the ultimate nature of phenomena you will not find it. These are some points you have to reflect on intensely as it is quite deep.

Question: This feeling of “I”, as when we are about to fall off a cliff, it seems as though we should not negate this as it protects us from danger, so why is it an object of negation?

Rinpoche: It is true that in such circumstances there is danger. It is just that in these circumstances the object of negation, this concrete “I” appears very strongly in the midst of body and mind but not being body and mind. It is quite easy to say with words, but one needs to see from experience how the “I” feels, then when one engages in investigation you can remember the feeling of concrete “I” you had in such circumstances and investigate whether this actually exists or not.

You need to investigate in this way with regard to the self, to see that it is not established independently, but rather it is established relatively. In order to be successful in this process of the four essential points, you need to really understand what is this object of negation, what is this “I” that you want to negate. So you need to identify it in your own mental continuum, as it is there, this “I” as it is apprehended by your self-grasping, seeing how self-grasping operates in one's own continuum and how it grasps at self. It is always there, this self-grasping, usually it does not appear clearly to us, it only appears clearly in specific circumstances such as when there is fear etc., then at that time you can identify it clearly. Once you have identified it clearly, this totally non-existent

self, seeing how it appears, you can investigate how it exists. Is it absolutely one with the basis of imputation, the aggregates? If so, you can see the different faults that come from asserting that it is truly one with body or the mind. Then, seeing it is not like that, maybe it is truly different from the aggregates? If so, then see what faults derive from there. Conclude with the ascertainment that it cannot be either way, in this way you conclude that such a self does not exist and you have understood selflessness.

In general, we say that there are **three prerequisites to achieving the actual realisation of emptiness:**

- 1) **Make requests to the objects of refuge:** the lama indivisible from the deity-yidam.
- 2) **The accumulation of merit and purification of negativities:** as it is said that those of lesser merit will not even have the slightest positive doubt with respect to selflessness – so if you want to realise it you need to be backed up by a lot of merit.
- 3) **Actual engagement in the meditations:** such as that explained here.

If you engage in these three activities it will not be difficult to realise emptiness, as when all the causes and conditions are gathered together then it is certain that the result will appear.

2. Extensive explanation of the third and fourth points in particular: Explained above.

B. Settling that mine does not inherently exist:

1. That reasoning negating the inherent establishment of the self also negates an inherently established mind; sources for this:

This self as apprehended by self-grasping as existing inherently, if you look for it by means of these four essential points, you will not be able to find it at all. Therefore, through this reasoning the truly established “I” is refuted. If you apply the same reasoning to “mine” then the truly established “mine” is also refuted, since if you refute truly established “I”, you also automatically understand that that truly established “I” is devoid of any attributes.

Just as if you understand that the horns of a rabbit do not exist, you would automatically understand that their attributes, such as length and colour, also do not exist. Similarly, once you realise that the truly established “I” is non-existent, you also realise that its attributes, referred to as “mine”, are also non-existent.

2. The need to know how, through these reasonings, all other persons and their mine are also established as without inherent existence:

First you apply the investigation to yourself and come to understand there is no independently established self, then you apply the same understanding to all beings, from hell beings through to the peak of samsara and right up to buddhahood. You thus understand that all contaminated aggregates of samsaric beings and uncontaminated aggregates of Buddhas for example, and all their attributes (their “mine”) – none of these are established truly.

C. Showing how, in dependence on that, persons appear like illusions:

1. Indicating the meaning of saying like an illusion:

A. The unmistakable manner of appearing like an illusion:

1. How all phenomena are ultimately illusion-like without signs:

These are different examples to illustrate the absence of inherent existence, they are very striking examples and very poetic. The first is that of a mirage: from very far away and if it is very hot, it can look as though there is water in the distance. And sentient beings whose minds are obscured see water and go there in search of it, but as they get nearer they find there is no mirage and no water. It is really exactly like that, things appear as inherently existent but if you actually go looking for them you cannot find anything at all. Therefore you can conclude that there is no such thing as inherently existing phenomena, and that the mind apprehending those is only a liar.

Taking the example of a dream, there is the example of a young lady who longs for a child, then in her dream she is giving birth to a son and so is extremely happy, but later in the dream the son dies

and so she is extremely sad. Such dream experiences feel completely real, but then you wake up and feel “oh it's completely bullshit! It was just a dream!” and it does not affect you so much.

This is to show that all these experiences of happiness and sadness come from grasping at appearances. If one realises that phenomena are not established by way of their own nature the way they appear, then phenomena can be seen as dream-like, and such strong suffering experiences do not occur.

There are many other examples we can find in other lam-rim texts.

2. From among the two that are like an illusion, here it is the appearance that is illusion-like:

There are two ways to understand illusion-like. There are illusion-like ultimate truths, but these are not what we are talking about here, rather we are talking about phenomena (conventional truths) which appear like illusions while being empty. Sense consciousnesses in the mental continua of sentient beings are said to always be mistaken consciousnesses, due to always having the appearance of inherent existence. Among those, arya beings, who have gained a direct realisation of emptiness, understand that there is not one phenomena that is inherently existent, however phenomena still appear as inherently existent to them. To them, phenomena appear as inherently existent but are apprehended to be empty of inherent existence, and so are understood to be illusion-like.

3. The need for the collection of two, the conventional mind to which appearances appear rather than being utterly non-existent and the reasoning consciousness to which the object dawns as empty of existing the way it appears:

4. The way in which phenomena resemble illusions:

These two points stress that for this illusion-like appearance, we need both the mistaken appearance and the emptiness of the object as existing in the way it appears gathered together. Also, one needs to understand that just as with the magician's illusions, making horses and elephants appear, it is not the case that there were horses and elephants at one point but then they disappeared and became illusions. That is not the case, actually they were never established as horses and elephants, but they appear in this way because the eyes of the spectators are affected by the power of the magician's illusion. Thus these illusions appear but there was never a moment in which they actually existed. In the same way, there was never any phenomenon which was not a dependent-arising, or not established relatively; there has never been in existence any inherently existing phenomena. Despite this fact, phenomena do appear as inherently existing to us.

5. Such an emptiness is not a nihilistic emptiness, or a mentally fabricated emptiness, or a limited emptiness, or the like:

Both persons and phenomena are empty of inherent existence, there is not one atom that is truly established. This is why it is possible or correct to say that there are accumulators of actions, agents, etc. and that this whole presentation is correct and valid. Because if such phenomena are empty it does not mean they do not exist at all. Actually all phenomena since forever have been free of independent existence, this is the actual mode of abiding of phenomena; emptiness of inherent existence is just the way things are, not something which was created or invented by the mind. This does not mean phenomena do not exist, so it is not nihilistic, and this emptiness is true of all phenomena, so it is not limited.

“This profound meaning is not unsuitable to become the object of any mind whatsoever.” Profound meaning refers to understanding that dependent-arising is the meaning of emptiness. So this is clearing up a possible doubt, as to whether it is possible to understand this profound meaning even at the time of the path or whether there is anything at all to understand. It is stated here that there exist minds that cognise this profound meaning of emptiness.

This doubt can arise due to misunderstanding certain scriptures. For example, as it says in the condensed Heart Sutra, “The unutterable, inconceivable, inexpressible perfection of wisdom”. However, it is not as though it is unrealisable by mind, one should not understand this line as meaning that, it does not mean it is impossible to realise such an emptiness. Rather what it means is that the meditative equipoise diving into emptiness in the mental continuum of an arya being is so pervaded by bliss, and so amazing, that it is impossible for the arya being to express it exactly and precisely as he experiences it to someone who has never experienced anything like it. This experience cannot be conveyed by words in exactly the way it is realised in the meditative equipoise. So it is a bit like when you eat extremely delicious food, you can only say it is really delicious but cannot convey exactly what the experience of eating it is like to another person. In the same way, the arya being cannot express his experience of the direct realisation of emptiness. Ordinary beings cannot see emptiness the way arya beings see emptiness, directly, they can only see it with a conceptual consciousness, but this does not mean emptiness is not an object of a mind and cannot be cognised or understood. This profound meaning is something that can be settled in terms of view, one can understand that dependent-arising is the meaning of emptiness, and one can come to cultivate it even at the time of the path. This is not something which cannot be put into practice or understood by ordinary beings.

6. Settling out the doubt that the ascertainment of reflections as empty of what they appear to be is an ascertainment of their being empty of inherent existence:

This objection points out that such examples as those mentioned before, like understanding that the reflection of a face in the mirror is not an actual face, are realised by ordinary beings, and when they ascertain these they do so by direct perception. So does that make them arya beings? Since they directly realise the absence of the actual face in the face in the mirror.

7. Even if you realise that a reflection is empty of a face, this is not a realisation of its suchness since you have an apprehension of the true existence of the reflection:

If you understand emptiness on the basis of one phenomenon, then you will come to understand the emptiness of all other phenomena by merely directing your mind to those other phenomena. However, by understanding that the reflection of the face in the mirror is free of being a true face you do not understand the emptiness of that reflection. In order to understand its emptiness you would have to understand it is free of being inherently existent. It is by understanding that the reflection of the face in the mirror is lacking establishment by way of its own nature that you come to understand its emptiness, not merely by understanding that it is free of being an actual face. The fact that the reflection of a face in the mirror is empty of being a face is understood by ordinary beings, while this reflection being relatively existent is not understood directly by ordinary beings. In the same way, other examples such as illusory horses and elephants made up by the magician, or dreams etc. one can easily come to understand that such phenomena, despite appearing, do not actually exist, like when you wake up from your dream you understand that the appearances in the dream were not true. However this is only an illustration of how phenomena exist, it does not follow that if one understands how illusory horses are not actual horses etc., you have therefore understood the profound view of the Madhyamika.

8. The reason why the analogies of reflections and illusory horses, elephants, and so forth have nevertheless been set forth:

It is said that these are suitable examples for the lack of inherent existence of phenomena, since by way of these examples it is easier to understand the lack of true establishment than trying to understand it on the basis of other phenomena. It is thanks to these examples that one can ascertain the direct contradiction between opposites such as: being truly established and lacking true

establishment, being established relatively and being established independently, being established by way of its own nature or lacking establishment by way of its own nature etc.

One proceeds progressively by first ascertaining that these examples, which are renowned in the world as being false, such as the appearances in dreams and reflections, are false. Then, based on this understanding, one comes to understand other phenomena such as mountains etc. as also being false.

9. The need to differentiate between the two realisations, that appearances such as reflections are empty of what they appear to be and that reflections are empty of being inherently established:

In this context, however, it is true that there is a difference between what is understood first and what is understood afterwards. Also when one understands the falsity of certain phenomena renowned in the world as being false, one is not immune from believing other similarly false phenomena. However, when you realise emptiness on the basis of one phenomenon, then by merely directing your mind to other phenomena, without needing to go through the logical reasoning again, you come to realise their emptiness. Although we cannot say that if one realised the emptiness of one phenomena, one automatically realises the emptiness of all other phenomena.

B. The fallacious manner of appearing like an illusion:

Here it is explained what the difficult points are in understanding the view of Madhyamika, relating to the profound meaning. One should understand that all phenomena are not established by way of their own nature or entity, therefore one needs to refute the fact that phenomena are inherently existent. On the other hand, one should not lose the understanding that persons and all other phenomena are established relatively, and that persons are accumulators of actions, experiencers of their results etc. In the midst of this mind understanding the lack of independent nature, one should understand that there are valid accumulators of actions, this is the difficult point to understand in the Madhyamika view. Although all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence, actions, agents etc. are valid.

In general we can say there is a danger if you do not manage to investigate properly. You search the basis of imputation for the flower, you find that there is no flower whatsoever on the basis of imputation, and you can conclude there is no flower whatsoever, that it does not exist at all! Despite there being something that performs the function of a flower, is perceived as a flower etc. you come to believe that the flower does not exist. So there is the danger of falling into extreme of nihilism, but if one goes through the reasoning of dependent-arising called the King of Reasonings, by this method of investigation of the two modes of phenomena one avoids this danger. One comes to understand that there is no flower to be found on the basis of imputation of the flower, but still the flower is a dependent-arising and is valid. Therefore this King of Reasonings of dependent-arising is said to annihilate both extremes of reification and nihilism simultaneously, and therefore avoids these dangers. So if one bases his investigation on this reasoning there will be no hardships.

2. The method in dependence on which things appear like an illusion:

A. How illusion-like appearances arise:

How do these illusion-like appearances arise, how do they appear? Just like the horses and elephants that are manifested by the magician, which appear to the eye consciousnesses of the spectators, and actually also of the magician who created these manifestation, as truly existent. However, although they also appear to the magician, he knows very well they are not actual horses and elephants, so although these appear to his eye consciousness, his mental consciousness ascertains them to be false or illusory.

B. How the collection of the two, a reasoning consciousness and a conventional mind, occur simultaneously with regard to this:

In the same way, by investigating the fact that all inner and outer phenomena are lacking inherent existence, one comes to an ascertainment such that when they appear there is the appearance of inherent existence to the consciousness but also the apprehension of their lacking inherent existence. These two, the appearance of inherent existence together with the apprehension of a lack of inherent existence, mean phenomena will be seen as illusion-like.

This ascertainment is attained in the meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness, then during subsequent attainment all the varieties of phenomenon appear to the consciousnesses, so visual objects appear to eye consciousness etc. However, although they do appear to those consciousnesses as being inherently existent, the yogi knows they are not actually like that because he has seen in meditative equipoise that they are devoid of this kind of existence. Therefore this yogi views all phenomena much like the way the magician views his magical illusions.

C. How there is consequently no need for a separate reasoning settling appearances as illusion-like:

As explained earlier, all inner and outer phenomenon are ascertained to without exception be lacking inherent nature. After one has realised this, then when all the varieties of phenomena appear one knows very well that while they appear as truly established they are not actually truly established. This is the way in which phenomena appear as illusory, this is what we call the illusion-like appearance. It is just the fact that they appear truly but one knows otherwise. Illusion-like appearance is not to be looked for elsewhere, in another signification of emptiness.

D. How the illusion-like subsequent attainment acts on everything:

The illusion-like appearances dawn in the mind at the time of subsequent attainment. During meditative equipoise there is ascertainment of the view, then during the activities of subsequent attainment, such as prostrations, circumambulations etc., which are done conjoined with the taste of what has been ascertained during meditative equipoise: the lack of inherent existence of all phenomena, then naturally the illusion-like appearance of all phenomena will arise in the mind, by merely remembering the view during these activities.

E. Instructions on seeking ascertainment of the illusion-like:

1. How to train in emptiness because of the need to induce ascertainment with respect to both appearances and emptiness:

Here it states the method for positing the absence, as was explained before using the reasonings of the four essential points. You should force the self of persons, the non-existent self to appear to your mind, you should consider how your ignorance exaggerates or superimposes the inherent nature of the self, and clearly identify it. Then consider how it has to be either truly one or truly different from the aggregates. Then recall to mind all the different faults which are the consequences of either of those assertions. Thus you generate an ascertainment that concludes firmly that there is no such thing as a self as apprehended by the self-grasping ignorance. This is how to posit the emptiness.

2. How persons appear illusion-like without your forgetting emptiness:

Now, how to posit the appearance. By examining the appearance, one should understand that the self that does exist is a dependent-arising, it exists conventionally and is established relatively. Thus you understand how to posit appearances by taking to mind this aspect of dependent-origination. Positing the absence is positing that the person is empty of not depending on causes and conditions, and therefore this means that there is a person that does depend on causes and conditions, which is established by this reliance. This is how to posit the appearance. So it is not the case that these two aspects are totally separate from one another, they are totally together.

3. How the analogy of a mirror image is necessary when appearances and emptiness appear to be contradictory:

When positing the emptiness and appearances of phenomena seem to contradict, you should take the analogy of a reflection of a face in the mirror and the like, understand how those illustrations show that such an appearance and mode of existence are not contradictory, then understand that the example is similar to how phenomena appear and exist.

It is easy to understand that the reflection of a face in the mirror is not the actual face, and is empty of actual ears and eyes and so forth. This is true, but it does not contradict the fact that this face in the mirror appears due to the coming together of different conditions, mainly the face being in front of the mirror and the mirror being there, and thanks to these things coming together the reflection of the face appears. If there was no mirror then there would be no reflection possible, and if there was no face standing in front of the mirror then there would be no reflection either, so there is no production or appearance of a face in the mirror independent of these. These conditions have to be there for the reflection of the face to appear.

As for the actual meaning, despite understanding that persons are completely lacking one single atom of being established truly, because of their being a dependent-arising, this does not contradict the fact that persons are accumulating karma, experiencing the results of those, etc. are valid and correct. We need to reflect upon this.

B. Settling the selflessness of phenomena:

1. How there is no difference in subtlety among objects of negation, but rather a distinction between the two selflessnesses on account of their subjects:

Usually the basis of imputation for the person is posited as either the five aggregates (form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, and consciousness aggregates), the six elements (earth, water, fire, wind, space, and consciousness elements), or the six spheres (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mental spheres). All of these – the five aggregates, six elements, and six spheres – are the basis upon which the person is imputed or labelled, therefore understanding this we see that also the basis of imputation is completely relatively established and is free of independent nature.

2. How it is settled:

A. Refutation transferring the reasoning explained earlier:

This is as was explained before, during the explanation of the selflessness of persons. We assert the lack of intrinsic nature on the basis of compounded and uncompounded phenomena, but mainly on the basis of compounded phenomena. Then, with respect to compounded phenomena, we have physical matter and consciousness.

With respect to physical matter, every phenomenon that is physical is made up of parts, there is no partless particle, if we take the tiniest atomic particle that we can find we can see that it is made up of directional parts. The centre part has a border common with the eastern part, and a border common with the western part. However, if the border with eastern part was also common with the border with the western part, if those two borders were touching, they would mix and become one, and as such it would be impossible to build up in further directions. This is why the middle part must have a border in common with the eastern part that is not also in common with the western part, and a border in common with the western part that is not also in common with the eastern part. If the border was common to all three they would be on top of each other, and so these parts could not combine or aggregate to make up the particle. Then each of those parts can always be further divided into further parts in the same way. If this is understood, it becomes obvious that the form aggregates are not partless but made out of parts.

When it comes to consciousness we talk about temporal parts. The smallest unit of time that we talk about in Buddhist philosophy is the instant, and there are 365 instants the time of a finger-snap. So take to mind a consciousness lasting that long. It is part of a continuum of consciousness and therefore has a direct cause (previous instant) and direct result (next instant), it abides in between

those two. In order for the direct cause and result not to mix, this instant has to be divided into three parts: a beginning which touches the direct cause but not the direct result, an end which touches the direct result but not the direct cause, and something abiding in between those two to prevent them from touching. Then in turn, that middle part would also need have those three parts in order for its beginning and end parts not to mix, and so would its middle part... *ad infinitum*. Otherwise all instants of consciousness would become one and we could not posit a continuum. Following this reasoning we can see that there is no instant of consciousness that cannot be further divided in this way without end. So here the instant is posited in the context of practice, as being 1/365th of one finger-snap, but we already know that this instant has parts since science nowadays can posit much smaller instants of time.

B. Refutation by means of another reasoning not explained earlier:

1. Presenting the argument of interdependence:

A. A citation of sources:

B. Explanation of what the sutra quotation means:

C. Praise to the argument of dependent-arising as that which destroys all inferior views:

Looking at the quote from *Commentary on the Middle Way*, it is said here that the unsurpassed reasoning that leads to the realisation of selflessness and emptiness is the king of reasonings of dependent-arising. There is nothing that surpasses this logical reasoning for ascertaining emptiness. This is what was said by the great masters Nagarjuna and Aryadeva, they said this argument of dependent-arising has unsurpassed unequalled qualities. Therefore it is said here that this reasoning is so powerful that even if self-grasping were like a huge mountain and this reasoning small it could completely destroy this mountain of self-grasping and reduce it to dust.

D. Identification of places where the view goes wrong – the extremes of superimposition and deprecation:

There are two main mistakes or dangers one needs to avoid when trying to understand the perfect view of the Middle Way, which is to understand that dependent-arising is the meaning of emptiness. Here “the object aim of the apprehension” is referring to this self that does not exist, the self that needs to be negated, clinging to it as truly existent is falling into the extreme of reification or permanence. However, if one goes too far with one's refutation or negation, negating also the conventionally existent self, that which actually exists and actually does function, thinking that if it is not established by way of its own nature it would not be established or exist at all, then one has missed the point. This means one has not understood dependent-arising.

E. How the two extremes are simultaneously eliminated through the reasoning of dependent-arising:

If one were to ascertain this reasoning of dependent-arising, then by this one reasoning one could block falling into both of these extremes. By ascertaining the fact that these causes give rise to such effects, and that these effects arise due to those causes, one overcomes the extreme of permanence or superimposition, because it shows that phenomena do not exist by way of their own nature, they are not independently existent because they are dependently causes and effects. This reasoning also avoids the extreme of nihilism by positing that phenomena are produced by causes and that the effects produced then act as causes for other phenomena etc. and thus exist dependently. Therefore since they exist dependently phenomena do exist.

F. Presentations of dependent-arising:

Here it explains the dependent-arising of compounded phenomena, which is accepted by all Buddhist tenets, whereas the dependent-arising of uncompounded phenomena is only accepted by propounders of Madhyamika.

One should understand that results arise from their causes or in dependence on their causes. In this way we say that effects rely on causes in order to arise, because they rely on other phenomena to arise this negates their independent establishment. We can say effects are deprived of being established independently because they rely on causes, and because effects arise from causes we

call those effects, it is conceived of as an effect because it arises from a cause. Then from the side of the cause, we posit as a cause something which produces an effect, therefore in this regard causes also depend on effects. So we can see that cause and effect are mutually relative, they depend on each other mutually. In the same way, for example, a child arises from its mother therefore the child arises in dependence on other phenomena; also we posit mother in dependence on her giving birth to a child, therefore the assertion or conception of mother comes from a dependence on the existence of a child. Thus child and mother are relatively existent, they depend on each other to exist. If you take any one phenomenon in the your hand and ask “is this a cause or an effect?”, you cannot say it is one and not the other. It is a cause in terms of giving rise to an effect and it is an effect in terms of coming from a cause, therefore you can see this phenomenon is posited relatively. All phenomena are established in dependence or relatively, there is not one phenomenon that lacks relative existence, rather all phenomena lack independent existence. They are void of independent existence, this lack or this absence is what we call emptiness, all phenomena that exist without exception are completely free of having such independent establishment.

There are **three manners of apprehending dependent-arising:**

- 1) **Meeting:** is positing phenomena as arising due to the coming together or meeting of causes and conditions.
- 2) **Relating:** is to be posited by being related to another phenomenon, such as pleasant unpleasant, good and bad. These are dependently existent, posited in relationship with another phenomenon. In the same way as we posit long and short, we can only conceive of something long in comparison with something short. We can only posit Buddhas in relation with unenlightened sentient beings. In terms of uncompounded phenomena it is the same: we can only conceive of uncompounded space in relationship with that which is free from obstruction which we label uncompounded space; or another uncompounded phenomenon for example emptiness is the mere refutation of the object of negation, in relation with this mere refutation we posit emptiness; in the same way true cessation is posited in relationship with the abandonment of its object of abandonment – of course there are different objects of abandonment corresponding to the ten bhumis etc. – but in general terms, the full fledged Truth of Cessation is posited in relation to the object of abandonment of afflicted obscurations together with their seeds.
- 3) **Depending:** we take for example a chariot or car or plane, in order to conceive of these phenomena different parts and causes and conditions need to be assembled together, and in dependence on all these being assembled we posit chariot or car or plane.

Thinking along those lines you come to understand that whatever is an established base, which is synonymous with existent, is necessarily a dependent-arising.

There is nothing that is not related, not depending, nothing that is independently established. To give examples, we can consider a great scholar, we can only posit him as being a great scholar in dependence on people who are less learned than him, we can only posit him as a great scholar in dependence on someone who is stupid. But if we compare this scholar to another scholar who is even more learned than him, then he becomes the stupid person and the other becomes the great scholar. In same way, if we take someone who is said to be extremely beautiful, we can only posit or conceive of this person to be extremely beautiful in comparison to someone who is uglier than this person. If we compare this so called beautiful person to someone who is even more beautiful, then this person becomes the ugly one. So we can see that ugly/beautiful, smart/stupid, everything, there is not anything that is not relative.

G. How truly established oneness and difference are also refuted by these two arguments:

Everything exists in dependence on other phenomena, is labelled in dependence on other phenomena, there is nothing that exists by way of its own entity – as those two are completely contradictory. Therefore, that which arises dependently cannot also be inherently one with whatever it depends on. If they did exist as one, all actions and agents would be one, but this is

impossible. However, those two cannot be inherently different, since if they are completely different we could not say one depends on the other to arise or be labelled.

One needs to understand that dependent-arising is the meaning of emptiness, and emptiness is the meaning of dependent-arising – this is a crucial point in the Middle Way system. When we talk of emptiness it only refers to a lack or absence of being established by way of its own nature, and this means negating their being independent. Therefore it is a negation of phenomena being independently existent, because the way things actually exist is by way of being dependently existent. In this way, being dependently existent and being free of being independently existent, dependent-arising and emptiness are not contradictory. If one understands this then one has understood the final intention of the Buddha.

In this way one avoids the two extremes of permanence and nihilism. Taking the example of a cliff, we say you fall in either of those extremes like falling off a cliff, so obviously falling off a cliff is a great danger, in the same way there is the danger or hindrance if you fall into either one of these extremes. If you cling to things as being independent then you fall into the extreme of permanence or reification, and if think that nothing exists at all you fall into extreme of nihilism. And falling into either of these extreme you fall into suffering states, samsara.

H. **Statements of this in Nagarjuna's texts:** see text.

I. **How it is praised as a view in which appearances and emptiness are seen as mutual companions:** see text.

J. **Instruction that it is necessary to differentiate between four, inherent existence and non-existence as well as existence and non-existence in general:**

We need to understand the difference between these four: inherent existence, conventional existence, non-existence by way of its own character, and non-existence. Is there anything that inherently exists? No. How would something inherently exist? It would exist independently, but nothing like that exists, something of that sort is non-existent as an object of knowledge. If something exists it has to exist in relation to other phenomena, conventionally. What is the difference between not existing and not existing by way of its own characteristics? That which does not exist by way of its own characteristics does exist, it exists conventionally. If we can make a distinction between these it becomes easy.

If one cannot understand the distinction between those four as explained by the Prasangika school, one may fall into lower tenets, positing that all functioning things must be inherently established, as posited by the propounders of inherent existence, such as the Sautrantika school, who assert that functioning things are ultimate truths, so it is a completely upside down system. If one does not make this distinction, one will fall into the extreme of superimposition, thinking that which does not exist to exist, or the extreme of deprecation, thinking that which does exist to not exist. Also, if one thinks that if a phenomena does not exist by way of its own entity it must be non-existent, like a donkey's horn, if one does not correctly distinguish between those two, then one will assert a system that is very difficult to uphold.

What prevents one from holding such views as above, either permanence or nihilism, is the reasoning of dependent-arising. By understanding that there are no independently existing phenomena the extreme of reification is eliminated, and by being able to posit the functioning of cause and effect without them being inherently existent then one is able to avoid the extreme of nihilism.

In order to overcome those two extremes ascertain interdependence, understand the Middle Way free from extremes, and by overcoming wrong views avoid falling into samsara and all that prevents the attainment of liberation.

2. **How non-products are also established as not truly existent through this and earlier reasonings:**

Here is says that compounded phenomena, including both persons and phenomena, since they undergo production, abiding and destruction, are the basis for most of our conceptual elaborations

and doubts as one might cling strongly to their inherent existence. Once one has realised by means of a perfect reasoning their lack of inherent existence, then it is really easy to understand the lack of inherent existence of uncompounded phenomena, such as true cessations, uncompounded space etc. If one is able to understand compounded phenomena are empty of inherent existence, if one refutes their establishment by way of their own nature, but at the same time one understands that despite existing like that the presentation of bondage in samsara and liberation in nirvana, the object to be known (emptiness) and its knower (valid cognition), etc. are all posited without any contradiction, then one can understand the same on the basis of uncompounded phenomena, as it is even easier. With this understanding one sees that all presentations mentioned are valid, as long as one does not cling to them as being inherently existent.

Thus, we can use the same reasoning as we did for compounded phenomenon, to refute the independent nature of uncompounded phenomena.

Section H settles a doubt. It is said by some that liberation is true while all other phenomena are false. So here it is explained that liberation is not truly existent but is infallible, whereas all other phenomena are false because their mode of abiding and appearing are not concordant.

Section I further explains that Nirvana is true in the sense that it is true from point of view of a mind to which ultimate truth is appearing. It is not true in terms of being able to withstand ultimate analysis, as nothing can. If it could, it would be findable and therefore inherently existing.

3. **Presentation of conventional and ultimate truths:**

A. **The basis on which the two truths are divided:**

The basis of division (what is being divided), is posited as being objects of knowledge, synonymous with existents, established basis and objects of comprehension. Therefore ultimate truth and conventional truth are their divisions.

B. **The number of divisions:**

In terms of number, they are ascertained to be two and are said to be one entity but different isolates. As such, on top of each and every phenomenon the presentation of the two truths is valid.

C. **The meaning of dividing them in that way:**

1. **Presentation of earlier positions:**

This refers to assertions of the early Tibetans, the scholars that arose before Lama Tsongkhapa. So this assertion, that the two truths are different in that their being one is negated, is not the assertion of our own system.

Product and impermanence are equivalents, being different in name. Thus, one posits the phenomenon as not abiding in its second moment, and the other posits the same phenomenon as being the product of causes.

2. **Proving the validity of our own system:**

Definitions will be discussed in detail later, but just to give a brief definition: conventional truths are defined as what exists when not investigated or analysed, we posit conventional truths in this way. Ultimate truths are the non-finding that appears when we look for phenomena by investigation, and which is the actual mode of abiding of phenomena.

In our own system, the two truths are one entity but different isolates. Just as it says in the Heart Sutra: "Form is empty, emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form, form is also not other than emptiness." What is to be ascertained here is that ultimate truths exist on the basis of form, they are not of a different entity than form itself, they exist together, just as the basis to be qualified and its characteristics exist together on that basis. Take for example a pen as the basis to be qualified and its qualities and characteristics, such as colour, shape or its function to write. All of these qualities or characteristics do not exist separately from the pen, in the same way the pen's emptiness does not exist separately from the pen. Likewise with a book, each and every page making up the book can be called a characteristic of the book. So wherever the book is these characteristics go together, each and every page. It is not possible to put the book on one side and its pages on another side, to separate them. In the same way the book's emptiness is present wherever the book is, as what we posit as the book's emptiness is its lack of inherent existence. It is

not the case that we can put the book's emptiness on one side and the book on the other side. Therefore, we cannot have a phenomenon's ultimate truth on one side and its conventional truth on another side, according to the Prasangika school they are one entity and merely designated by different terms.

D. Explaining the meaning of the individual divisions:

1. Conventional truths:

A. Explaining the meaning of the words *conventional* and *truth*:

1. Explaining the meaning of the word *conventional*:

Here conventional is to be understood as being made up by one's own thinking. A conventional truth is what is true from the point of view of the apprehension of true existence, the obscured mind of self-grasping ignorance. The Tibetan term *kun-dzob* means something that is false or a lie, a concealer, so it is something which is not concordant with the actual mode of abiding of phenomena.

Then there is this quotation from Candrakirti. "Delusion is a concealer", delusion is to be understood as the self-grasping ignorance, it is called a concealer (*kun-dzob*) "for it obscures nature", which should be understood as emptiness or the actual mode of abiding of phenomena, it prevents seeing this mode of phenomena. The Buddha said that a conventional truth, or truth for the obscured, is what is seen as truly existent from the point of view of ignorance. "Fabricated things are what he called conventions", these conventions are what exists when not analysed. It is said that whatever is an established base necessarily exists as a convention, but that does not necessarily mean that it is a conventional truth, since one could posit an ultimate truth to show there is no pervasion. Whatever does not exist as a convention would hypothetically have to exist inherently. In other words, all existent phenomena exist as conventions, but not all are conventional truths, since ultimate truths also exist as conventions but are not conventional truths.

Next it settles a possible doubt. Those who have abandoned delusions, abandoned grasping at true existence such as arhats of the lower vehicle and pure-ground bodhisattvas, have no self-grasping ignorance and yet conventional truths still appear to them. It is explained that those beings see conventional truths as mere conventions, which eliminates the term truth from conventional truth. Thus these beings do not see conventional truths as deceptive, but rather as illusion-like, "they are fabricated... rather than truths because they do not exaggerate them as truly existent."

2. Explaining the meaning of the word *truth*:

Conventional truths are what appears to be true from the point of view of ignorance, however there is no true establishment of phenomena, even conventionally.

B. The definition of a conventional truth:

The quotation from Commentary on the Middle Way explains, the "two natures", meaning the two truths, are apprehended on all phenomena by "seeing what is real", meaning ultimate truth, "and what's deceptive", meaning conventional truth. "Objects of seeing the real" are the objects apprehended by the valid cognition investigating the ultimate, while "deceptive objects" are ascertained when one does not engage in analysis. Since there are two objects, ultimate truths and conventional truths, there are also two different consciousnesses which ascertain each of them. It is a valid cognition investigating the ultimate that ascertains ultimate truths, and a valid conventional cognition that ascertains conventional truths.

In order to understand conventional truth, one needs to understand that they are what is true in the point of view of self-grasping ignorance. Thus, in order to understand that a certain phenomenon is a conventional truth, one needs to ascertain that phenomenon to be false. And to ascertain this, one needs to ascertain that it does not exist as it appears, seeing a discrepancy between its mode of appearance and abiding. In this way one understands that it is not an ultimate truth, and as such one understands it to be a conventional truth. Therefore, in order to understand conventional truth on the basis of an object one also needs to understand its ultimate truth.

However, although phenomena such as pot and cotton *are* conventional truths, in order to apprehend them it is not necessary to realise pot or cotton *as being* conventional truths, since they

are realised directly by a conventional valid cogniser. In the same way, although pot lacks inherent existence, it is not necessary to realise that pot lacks inherent existence in order to realise pot. However, it is necessary to understand the lack of true existence of the basis in order to know a conventional truth *to be* a conventional truth, but in order to know a conventional truth such as pot and cotton it is not necessary to know its lack of true existence.

C. Divisions of conventionalities:

Between the Svatantrika and Prasangika Madhyamika schools there is a difference between how conventional truths are posited. Svatantrikas posit two types of conventional truths: perfect and wrong. It is not a distinction between perfect and wrong in terms of the object possessor, but only in terms of objects themselves. Thus perfect conventional truths are impermanent phenomena, or those able to perform a function, while those phenomena such as appearances in dreams, magician's illusions, reflections etc., are posited as wrong conventional truths. Svatantrika posit that worldly beings, attached to a self and not understanding emptiness, understand that phenomena such as reflections and illusions etc. are wrong or deceptive; however a perfect conventional truth cannot be immediately understood as deceptive by those beings.

For Prasangika there is no such distinction among conventional truths, we posit that whatever is a conventional truth is necessarily false or deceptive. We differentiate conventional truths from the point of view of worldly beings, just in terms of being renowned in the world as such, but they are all necessarily wrong from the point of view of an arya. Thus, Prasangikas say there are minds that are affected and those not affected by temporary conditions for being mistaken. For example, when you travel by boat you can see the trees on land moving along although they do not actually move; or if you take certain poisons this can affect your consciousnesses so you have hallucinations. Such minds, being affected by temporary conditions, Prasangikas posit as wrong relative to the point of view of worldly beings, since they are understood immediately to not exist as they appear, but they do not posit this division of perfect and wrong as the Svatantrikas do.

2. Ultimate truths:

It is necessary to understand that all phenomena are subsumed by the two truths, this is an exhaustive division of objects of knowledge. The presentation of the Four Noble Truths is not exhaustive, its purpose is to understand what is to be engaged in and discarded.

With regard to the two truths, conventional truth is easier to understand, while ultimate truth is more difficult since it is the profound meaning of emptiness and the real mode of abiding of all phenomena. It is not something one can understand immediately, one should engage in reflection and meditation on this topic in order to gain ascertainment. What makes it difficult to grasp is that for countless lives we have not been cultivating the habit of understanding it, we have been cultivating its exact opposite. So you should not give up, thinking that understanding ultimate truth is too complicated or difficult. This kind of attitude does not bring any happiness, since then one will just remain under the sway of attachment and anger for however long one holds this attitude, and there is actually nothing beneficial coming from this attitude. However, by understanding the real mode of abiding of phenomena we take the essence of this perfect opportunity we now have, having met the perfect Mahayana dharma, met perfect Mahayana gurus who expound that dharma, and having the capacity to engage in reflection and the practice of this dharma. Therefore it is crucial to take the essence of this opportunity now and make an effort, especially in understanding ultimate truth. Otherwise it is a great loss, as since beginningless time we have always been revolving in samsara, experiencing its different sufferings, and so far we have not managed to do anything about that. Now is the time to change that, and if we do not take this opportunity it would be extremely sad. It is not the case that emptiness is impossible to understand if you actually think about it. If you cultivate this understanding, by engaging in reflection and investigation regarding the profound meaning of emptiness, it is definite you will come to understand it at some point. As it is said in *Bodhisattvacaryavatara*, there is nothing that does not become easier through familiarity. Therefore, if you engage in familiarisation you will definitely generate ascertainment with regard to emptiness and the quality of your realisations will only increase.

This profound emptiness is the ultimate and final intention of Shakyamuni Buddha, as perfectly explained by Arya Nagarjuna who was prophesied by the Buddha himself as the one who will perfectly and correctly propound the profound view of emptiness. Then, as was explained by his disciples Buddhapalita and Candrakirti, those masters give us the perfect explanation with regard to emptiness; and the great master Lama Tsongkhapa himself, who is said to be the emanation of Nagarjuna and Atisha also. So having found these perfect explanations, if one makes effort and strives to understand this topic one will definitely succeed.

A. Explaining the meaning of *ultimate and truth*:

This object, being emptiness, is said to be the holy meaning (*don dam pa*), since it is holy (*dam*), and it is the meaning (*don*). It is the meaning because it is the ultimate mode of existence of all phenomena, and it is holy because it is what is found by the meditative equipoise of an arya being directly realising emptiness. It is a truth in the sense of being undeceptive, because its mode of appearing and abiding are concordant. Therefore it is said to be an ultimate truth (*don dam bden pa*).

In the case of conventional truth, “truth” means that it is true from the point of view of self-grasping ignorance, the apprehension of inherent existence, but in actuality it is not true because the mode of appearing and abiding are not concordant. Therefore it is deceptive, however it is said to be true from the perspective of a wrong consciousness. With respect to ultimate truth it is quite different, since the mode of appearing and abiding of ultimate truths are concordant. Therefore they are true from the perspective of a perfect mind, the pristine awareness of meditative equipoise in an arya being's continuum, which through investigation has found this ultimate truth to be true.

B. The definition of an ultimate truth:

1. Actual definition:

A. How to identify the definition of an ultimate truth:

Here it explains the definition of an ultimate truth. Usually we posit **the definition of being an ultimate truth (*don dam bden pa*)** as: “an object found by a reasoning consciousness (*rigs shes*) analysing the final nature of phenomena and with regard to which that reasoning consciousness analysing the final nature of phenomena becomes a reasoning consciousness analysing the final nature of phenomena.” Or: “an object found by a valid cogniser investigating the ultimate and in dependence on which that valid cogniser investigating the ultimate becomes a valid cogniser investigating the ultimate.”

In the perspective of the pristine awareness of an arya being's meditative equipoise, which cognises emptiness directly, only emptiness appears, it is like water being poured into water, nothing else appears to that mind. It is said that the **three appearances are dissolved**:

- 1) **The appearance of conventional truths.**
- 2) **The appearance of object and object possessor as being different.**
- 3) **The appearance of true establishment.**

In a meditative equipoise that is directly perceiving emptiness single pointedly, these three appearances are dissolved.

A buddha is always in meditative equipoise on emptiness, so what do you think do conventional truths appear to him? Yes. Then what do we do with this assertion that there is only the appearance of emptiness to an arya being directly perceiving emptiness? We say that a buddha is endowed with two omniscient minds: that understanding the mode and that understanding the varieties of phenomena. Thus, the omniscient consciousness understanding the varieties perceives all phenomena directly, this is not contested, while in the perspective of the omniscient consciousness perceiving the mode there are no conventional objects appearing. This is why the definition of ultimate truth is made up of two parts. Ultimate truth is “an object found by a valid cogniser investigating the ultimate”, but actually for a Buddha it is the case that conventional truths are also objects found by such a valid cogniser. This is why the second part of the definition is necessary: “and in dependence on which that valid cogniser investigating the ultimate becomes a valid cogniser investigating the ultimate.” Meaning this valid cogniser becomes a valid cogniser

investigating the ultimate in dependence on the object it finds. Thus if such a valid cogniser finds a conventional truths it would not fulfil the second part of the definition, since a valid cogniser investigating the ultimate does not become a valid cogniser investigating the ultimate in dependence on having found a conventional truth as its object.

As there are two types of objects, there are also two types of minds realising these objects, therefore we posit valid cognisers that analyse the ultimate (or mode) and valid cognisers that analyse the conventional (or varieties). As examples for the first one, the best among all of those minds is the direct cogniser of emptiness, nothing is higher than that, although it is also correct to posit all inferential cognitions that conceptually investigate the ultimate.

What is perceived by a valid cogniser investigating the ultimate? Ultimate truths. What is such a mind? It is a mind that investigates the actual mode of abiding of phenomena. What does it find? It finds ultimate truths, and these exist in the way in which they are found by such a mind. What is the meaning that is found by this valid cogniser investigating the ultimate? We posit emptiness or lack of intrinsic existence. Taking a flower as an example, this valid cogniser or reasoning consciousness checks the mode of existence of the flower, checking how it is actually abiding. What does such a mind find? It finds the final mode of abiding of the flower: its emptiness of inherent existence.

Question: It is said a buddha directly perceives the two truths, so how is it possible that he directly perceives conventional truths, since they are truth for the obscured and they are deceptive, not abiding the way in which they appear, so how can something deceptive appear to a buddha?

Rinpoche: So we talk of varieties and mode of phenomena, varieties are the appearances of all the different phenomena while their mode is the emptiness that exists as a characteristic in each and every phenomena, these two are perceived simultaneously by a buddha. However, while a buddha directly perceives conventional truths, a buddha actually sees that those conventional truths do not exist the way they appear.

B. How it is found by an arya's uncontaminated exalted wisdom of meditative equipoise that knows the mode:

Just as it is explained here, if you have cataracts or something that impairs your vision, it is said you have such appearances as seeing falling hair, while if your eye are working perfectly you do not see such falling hairs. In the same way, those being who are affected by grasping at inherent existence there is this appearance of true establishment, but from perspective of a pristine awareness of meditative equipoise of an arya being directly perceiving emptiness there is no more confusion and no more appearance of true establishment.

C. A source for that:

In the Prasangika system, the examples set forth to illustrate the appearance of true establishment are mainly the appearance of falling hair due to cataracts or the appearance of a snake where there is a coiled rope, while the Svatantrika system mostly uses examples such as illusions etc.

We can posit flower as a conventional truth. Therefore we say the flower is posited by appearing to a conceptual mind, what is a conceptual mind? It is not a sense consciousness, rather it is like when you close your eyes and think of a flower. So is the flower what appears to that mind? Is the flower this appearance? The flower is not this appearance of flower to the conceptual mind, it is not the name “flower” either. So all these things that we like or dislike that appear to our mind are not these actual things that we like or dislike.

Now, each of four schools have a different way of positing the two truths. For the Vaibhashika and Sautrantika systems, the flower is not posited by being imputed by conceptual thought, and it is something we can point to. They would say it comes from a seed and it does exist as it appears, therefore it is truly established. The Cittamatra school would say differently, they would say this flower is not actually what is pointed to, there is no flower there. It actually arises from an imprint that is activated and the imprint is its substantial cause. In this system they would say that the ultimate nature of the flower is that it is empty of being an external phenomenon. The Svatantrika school would say the flower is posited or asserted by the power of appearing to a mind that is not

damaged, so contrary to the lower tenets they do not assert true establishment or true existence of phenomena. They would say the flower is not truly established, but it is established by way of its own nature, and this is what is also refuted by the Prasangika school. So why they say flower exists by its own nature is because if you look for the flower you can find it. Although they would not say the shape or colour are the flower, they would say there is something out there you can point to, that there is a basis of illustration of the flower that is findable. This is quite different from the Prasangika system, which we adopt here, so here we would say that the name of the flower is not the flower, and that the thing that we point to as being the flower is not the flower, since that is the basis of imputation of the flower. If you look for the flower in any part of the flower you will not find flower anywhere, and just this absence is the ultimate nature or truth of the flower, without negating that the flower does exist conventionally.

We say this flower is imputed by name or by concept and therefore we say that it exists, we can posit its existence. So what do you think, is it true that for everything that exists there is a mind that realises this object? Yes. And do you think every consciousness has an object? Yes. Is it the case that if it is a consciousness it necessarily realises its appearing object? In Prasangika school we say there is a pervasion, that every consciousness does realise its appearing object and that the mind of grasping at true existence realises its object, the meaning generality of true existence. The Svatantrika school would say that there is no pervasion. They assert that consciousness does not realise consciousness in the same way that a fire does not burn itself or a sword does not cut itself. These reasonings are used to back up the notion of a self-knower which is not assert in Prasangika. Here we posit objects and object possessors and two modes of realising the object, which is direct or indirect realisations, one by appearing and the other by not appearing to the mind.

D. Indicating that a nirvana is an ultimate truth:

E. It is not the intended meaning of the *Commentary on Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning* that nirvana is a conventional truth:

These two points explain that some scholars posit the Truth of Cessation as being a conventional truth, and how this is mistaken. Among the Four Noble Truths, only True Cessations is an ultimate truth while the other ones are conventional truths.

If True Cessations are ultimate truths they have to be permanent, but are True Cessations not the result of the True Path? So how can they be permanent? It is not its result, if True Cessations were a result they would have to be impermanent or compounded, but they are not. We say True Cessations are the separation result of True Paths, but are not the result of True Path, as there is no pervasion between being a separated result and a result. So we say True Cessations are obtained based on meditating on True Paths and in dependence on having obtained an abandonment. True Cessations or liberation is a state free from bondage, which is attained by having meditated on wisdom realising emptiness, so we call it a separated result but it is not an actual result.

F. A source for positing all phenomena by the power of designation:

G. Establishing as valid that something need not be truly established if it is ultimately true because of the need to differentiate between a truth for a reasoning consciousness and a truth bearing analysis:

H. For something to be posited as conventionally existent it must not be damaged by any valid cognition:

In the quote from *Commentary on the Middle Way*, it says these wrong views propounded by non-Buddhist schools, such as the existence of a creator god, or a world created by Ishvara, or primal matter, etc. are intellectually fabricated and that understanding the absence of those, or destroying those wrong views, does not eliminate innate self-grasping. These belong to the class of intellectually acquired grasping at true existence, which only exists in the continuum of sentient beings affected by tenet systems, while the innate grasping at true existence is present in all sentient beings regardless of having studied tenet systems.

I. Although phenomena are merely posited by the power of conventions, this does not eliminate their establishment by valid cognitions and so forth:

For Prasangika, all phenomena are posited by conventional valid cognisers, and therefore phenomena are posited by being renown among conventional valid cognisers. In this way denominations are attributed precisely to phenomena, so it is not the case that one can call anything anything, for example it is not valid for a flower to be called a pillar. This was already explained earlier, when the three characteristics were explained. First a valid cognition posits a phenomena, second if we would call a flower a pillar then this would be damaged by another valid cognition, and third point is that there should not be any damage either by valid cogniser investigating the ultimate, as when you look for the imputed meaning on flower you cannot find anything. If you could find something that would withstand analysis then this would have to be established by way of its own nature, but this is not the case.

2. Rejecting an objection:

A. Settling out an objection:

Here we settle an objection about a quotation which says a buddha “sees by way of not seeing”.

B. Explanatory answer:

1. **There is no contradiction because the meaning associated with this system is to point out that an exalted wisdom knowing the mode does not observe conventionalities in the perspective of perceiving the ultimate:**

This quote does not mean that the omniscient mind does not see any object at all. What it means is that if phenomena existed in the way they are perceived by the confused mind of self-grasping ignorance, as inherently existent, then such phenomena would have to be seen by a pristine awareness of meditative equipoise in the continuum of an arya being, the most perfect uncontaminated mind, which investigates whether phenomena exist ultimately or not. So if there was such a thing as an inherently existent phenomenon, then that meditative equipoise should definitely see such a thing and find it to be ultimate, but it does not see that at all. This inherent existence that is apprehended by self-grasping ignorance is not seen at all by this most perfect meditative equipoise directly realising emptiness, what it perceives is only the emptiness of inherent existence, and this lack is therefore asserted to be ultimate truth. So what is perceived by this apprehension of inherent existence is posited as the object of negation, since if it did exist it should be observed by the perfect mind, but this is not the case, therefore it is correct to refute this object. Thus this quote that says “seeing without seeing is most excellent” should be understood to mean that this meditative equipoise directly perceiving emptiness does not see any conventional truths and only perceives dependent-arising, the relative establishment of phenomena, the actual mode of abiding of phenomena.

2. A source for that:

3. Elucidating the meaning of that sutra passage:

In the quote, the example of uncompounded space is given. The definition of uncompounded space is the mere absence of obstruction, and here we should understand “see” as synonymous with “realise”. Thus, the mere absence of obstruction is seeing unobstructed space, in the same way to see the absence of the object of refutation is seeing the ultimate. From the perspective of this meditative equipoise there is no appearance of conventional truth whatsoever, no need to mention no appearance of inherent existence, but also no appearance of for example the aggregates, what appears is only the emptiness of the aggregates.

4. **The Sutra on Engaging in the Two Truths explains that in the perspective of perceiving the ultimate with an exalted knower of all aspects, dualistic appearance**

disappears, but it does not teach that the ultimate is not realised:

5. **How such a mode of perception is also set forth in the Explanation of Candrakirti's *Commentary on the Middle Way*:**
6. **The sutra statement that during meditative equipoise there is no movement of the mind posits that there is no movement of conceptual thought:**

Next we have a discussion about what is the meaning of saying that the movement of mind and mental factors are reversed in buddhahood. This does not mean that mind and mental factors are annihilated in buddhahood, but rather that there is no movement of conceptual thought in the omniscient mind.

7. **How the proposition that an ultimate truth is not an object of knowledge and such like are nothing but wrong:**

Then we have an objection from those that assert that ultimate truth is not an object of knowledge. Of course this is quite wrong, since emptiness is the object realised by the meditative equipoise in the continuum of an arya being, it is an object of the omniscient mind and the wisdom realising emptiness. There are various refutations for this objection by different arguments, such as that bodhisattvas engage in vast conduct in order to realise ultimate truth, but all these activities would be totally meaningless, and also Shakyamuni Buddha appeared in this world for the benefit of sentient beings oppressed by ignorance, to show them the ultimate mode of abiding of all phenomena, but this also would be meaningless.

8. **In the perspective of an uncontaminated meditative equipoise, object and subject are not posited as separate:**
9. **Suchness is actualised by way of stopping the movement of conceptual thought:**
10. **If a buddha did not perceive the aggregates and the like, his exalted knowledge of varieties would be deprecated:**

Next we have a discussion about how all the varieties of phenomena appear to the omniscient mind.

11. **The exalted knower of all aspects must know them since they appear to that knower of varieties; hence there are two types of appearing objects:**

The omniscient mind directly realises all the varieties of all phenomena as they are, by means of direct appearance. For example, the marks and signs of a buddha and the extremely beautiful holy body of a buddha do not appear from ignorance, they are not caused by ignorance, but from the dharmakaya. Although this is the case, when ordinary beings perceive the holy body of a buddha they perceive it as being truly establish, due to their consciousness being affected by the imprints or latencies of ignorance.

12. **How the manner in which they appear to an exalted knower of all aspects that realises the varieties differs from the manner in which they appear to other persons:**

The omniscient mind knows all varieties of all phenomena, and therefore knows that sentient beings have the appearance of inherent existence when forms and sounds etc. appear to them. Therefore a buddha knows that when those objects appear to sentient beings who have not abandoned ignorance, they all appear as inherently existent, but that does not mean there is an appearance of inherent existence to the omniscient mind.

“Therefore a buddha knows forms and the like which are not inherently established but still appear to be, yet it is from the perspective of their appearing that way to the ignorant.” It is in dependence on how those phenomena appear to the ignorant that a buddha knows how phenomena appear to be inherently existent, but they do not appear this way to the omniscient mind. “Independently of their appearing that way to those persons, from a buddha's own perspective, he would know not know them in the manner of their appearing that way.” So there may be a doubt as to whether the omniscience mind is deceived or confused by these deceptive appearances, but this is not the case “because they do not appear from pollution existing within the exalted wisdom”, because all pollution has been abandoned, “but due to the essential point that the exalted wisdom necessarily knows all objects of knowledge.”

That being so, all phenomena appear as selfless, not inherently existent entities, from the perspective of an exalted knower of varieties, therefore they appear as illusion-like falsities. When they appear to that exalted wisdom in terms of their appearance to the ignorant, they merely arise as that which is true for the other persons, therefore the omniscient mind is not deceived or confused.

13. It is also set forth like this in the Sixty Stanzas of Reasoning:

14. Although the two truths, their objects, are one entity, it is not contradictory to posit individual exalted knowers in relation to them:

We posit two omniscient minds, one apprehending the mode and one apprehending the varieties of phenomena, because there are two types of objects of knowledge, mode and varieties. However, these two omniscient minds are one entity and different isolates meaning they are merely characterised in this way because of being viewed from a different perspective, but actually they are one entity. Therefore these are not contradictory at all, but just posited or conceived of in these two ways since they are characterised differently with relation to what they perceive.

15. When the two valid cognitions comprehend objects individually on the occasion of the view of the bases or on the occasion of the fruit, you need to know which of the two valid cognitions is active:

Just as in the context of the basis, as unenlightened beings, one can investigate a phenomenon with a conventional or an ultimate valid cogniser; in the same way, in the context of the result, as an enlightened being, we posit two exalted knowers in terms of realising one object.

C. Divisions of ultimate truths:

Here it mentions the division into sixteen types of emptiness, or there is also a division into twenty, however whichever way they are enumerated they are all posited from the point of view of the object that is the basis being characterised with the emptiness. From the side of the emptiness, the apprehension of a lack of inherent nature, there is no difference. Then there is the division in four: emptiness of things, non-things, emptiness of self and emptiness of other. With any of these there is no difference in terms of subtle and coarse.

When the Buddha set forth emptiness, why did he do so mainly on the basis of compounded phenomena? It is because sentient beings usually generate most of their wrong views and conceptual elaborations on the basis of those phenomena. Therefore emptiness is mainly explained using the five aggregates, six elements, six spheres etc., and again there is no difference in coarse and subtle between the selflessness of compounded and uncompounded phenomena.

With the emptiness of self and that of other, there is also no difference in terms of coarse and subtle, but is there a difference in terms of one being easier to understand? It is said there is no difference. This is not the same as self and phenomena, in this case it is also said there is no difference in terms of coarse and subtle, but we say that selflessness of persons is easier to realise than that of phenomena, so why is this the case? It is explained in various lam-rim texts and our manuals that when we already understand that the person is not a concretely existent person, is imputedly existent, then you have gone quite a long way to understand the selflessness of person, that it is

merely imputed on the basis of the five aggregates. This is easier than realising the self of phenomena, because you have not already realised that they are imputedly existent. In other manuals it says there is no difference between them, and that some may realise selflessness of phenomenon before persons. Then of course they would all agree that it is easier to realise that those phenomena that are renowned to be false in the world, like reflection etc., are easier to be realised as false.

There are some contradictions in the literal explanations of different manuals used in different monasteries. In Sera Je they would say there is a difference in terms of difficulty, while in Drepung Loseling and Sera Mey they would say there is no difference. However, if we look at it more deeply, actually we all agree that the selflessness of the person imputed on the basis of imputation, the five aggregates, is easier to understand than that of the basis itself. Another example of such an apparent contradiction is the fact that in the mental continuum of a bodhisattva abiding on the uninterrupted path of seeing there are no conventional minds, and therefore according to Drepung Loseling there is no bodhicitta existing in the mental continuum of this bodhisattva, because it is latent and not manifest and in order to exist it must be manifest, while in Sera Je they would say it does exist because being latent is sufficient for it to be asserted to exist. So actually it is only a superficial contradiction in terms of the terminologies used, but the meaning comes to the same thing. The main purpose of having such differences is to develop the intelligence and wisdom of the students, by engaging them in understanding why these words appear to be contradictory. Also you can have a lot of debate, but when you understand the deepest meaning then there is not much debate left.

Next comes the exposition of different assertions of the Svatantrikas, as explained by Haribhadra and Bhavaviveka. These are very interesting, but we do not have time here.

3. Indication that the number of the two truths is definite:

A. Actual indication:

Here it is explained that the two truths are an exhaustive division of all objects of knowledge, since every object of knowledge has to be either deceptive or undeceptive, the former are subsumed in conventional truths and the latter in ultimate truths.

B. Sources for that:

Then there are quotations from sutras, indicating that there is no third truth, showing all phenomena that exist are subsumed in the two truths. It is the same with the Four Noble Truths, in the sense that there is no fifth truth, since they are exhaustive with respect to what is to be abandoned and adopted.

C. Establishing the validity of the need to become skilled in the two truths:

One needs to understand the division of the two truths in accordance with Nagarjuna's explanations, since he was prophesied by Shakyamuni Buddha himself as the great trail-blazer who will revive the doctrine of the Mahayana, expounding perfectly the view. Then it says in Candrakirti's *Commentary on Middle Way*, that if you look for a path to liberation outside of the explanations given by Arya Nagarjuna, then this is impossible to find. Why is that? Because if one cannot properly posit the two truths it becomes impossible to accomplish liberation. One needs to understand the two truths in order to understand the Four Noble Truths, and on this basis of knowing what to adopt and discard, one discards suffering in samsara. However without understanding the two truths one cannot understand how True Cessations are ultimate truth and that the two truths abide without contradiction in each and every phenomena. If one does not understand this one will enter bad paths which do not lead to liberation because of holding wrong conceptions, meaning grasping at true existence. Therefore, as Lama Tsongkhapa tells us, if you are striving for liberation it is crucial to understand the two truths.

Those texts that are composed by Nagarjuna, and his disciples Aryadeva, Buddhapalita, Candrakirti, and Shantideva, are totally free of any mistake and confusion. Bhavaviveka, Kamalashila, Haribhadra, and Shantarakshita are all propounders of Svatantrika, and they did not propound the

Prasangika view although they were also disciples of Nagarjuna. They certainly did so because of a special purpose, and it does not mean one should scorn those authors or texts, thinking one does not need to study them since they hold inferior views etc. Actually Lama Tsongkhapa, being an emanation of Manjushri, always propounded the Prasangika view and only quoted those masters, but he sent a message to his disciple saying it was not beneficial to scorn those masters who propounded Svatantrika. Although the main system to understand is Prasangika, one should understand that those different systems were expounded for the benefit of sentient beings because of their different capacities and aspirations.

2. Divisions of special insight

- A. The prerequisites of special insight:
- B. The special insight to be cultivated by ordinary beings will mainly be explained:
- C. The actual divisions:
 - 1. Brief explanation:
 - 2. Extensive explanation:
 - A. Explanation of the four:

This division has two types of special insight, each further divided into two. The special insight observing varieties and that observing modes, which are both further divided into full investigation and full analysis, one being coarser and the other more subtle.

- B. Explanation of the three:

- C. Explanation of the six:

The six types are research of: 1) Meanings; 2) Things; 3) Characteristics; 4) Sides; 5) Time; and 6) Reasoning. The last, **Research of Reasoning, is further divided into four:**

- 1) **Reasoning of Dependency:** this is a very important one because it is the type of reasoning needed to understand dependent-arising of both compounded and uncompounded phenomena, and to understand how effects come from their causes.
- 2) **Reasoning of Performance of Functions:** the definition of a functioning thing is that which is capable of performing a function, with this reasoning we understand that each and every functioning thing individually has an uncommon function, such as fire performing the function of burning, and thus, based on this type of reasoning one comes to understand that, for example, if one abandons self-grasping one achieves liberation.
- 3) **Reasoning of Establishment:** is establishing meaning through the three validities (direct perception, inference, and reliable scriptures). Included in this division are the five reasonings to posit ultimate truths: the refutation of being truly one or truly different, the refutation of production from existent non existent, etc. the main one being the king of reasonings dependent-arising.
- 4) **Reasoning of Natures:** “is dedicated to natures that are well-known in the world, such as heat being the nature of fire, moisture being the nature of water, and so forth, to inconceivable natures, and to abiding natures. They are sought without thinking of other reasons for being like that.”

These four are very important to explore.

- 3. Explanation of condensed divisions:

Just as the four mental engagements explained before are necessary for calm-abiding, here again for special insight these four are necessary.

3. How to cultivate special insight

- A. Explaining the meaning of the statement that special insight is cultivated in dependence on calm-abiding:

Here it is explained how calm-abiding and special insight are not distinguished by their objects, so how do we distinguish between them? Special insight investigates, while calm-abiding is a mind that does not investigate. Someone who is a beginner and training in calm-abiding should not

engage in investigation but rather place the mind single pointedly, otherwise if you engage in special insight with investigation from the start there is no way you will achieve calm-abiding.

Once you have achieved calm-abiding, if you just leave your mind there single pointedly nothing further is achieved. At that point you should engage in analytical meditation, using special insight with respect to the varieties and modes of phenomena, in this way you will achieve the union of calm-abiding and special insight.

There are two types of special insight: mundane and supramundane. Mundane is that which meditates on the faults and drawbacks of lower spheres of existence and thus attains higher spheres. Meaning, for example, investigating the faults of the desire realm, in terms of short lifespan, sickness etc., and seeing the advantages of higher states, and in this way progressing along the Four Concentrations. Supramundane observes the meaning of selflessness, understanding all phenomena are deprived of being established by way of their own nature, this kind of special insight is a powerful tool or mind to ascertain those topics. It is very useful to engage in the second type, since we have engaged in the first type many times over since beginningless time.

Lastly, it explains that although it is true that special insight can be used to investigate all the varieties of phenomena, Shantideva, Kamalashila and so forth stressed that the main purpose is to observe the mode.

B. What paths of what vehicle, Hinayana or Mahayana, this system relates to:

Once calm-abiding is attained there is the bliss of physical and mental pliancy, then in that one generates special insight. This is practiced in this way by all the different vehicles, from the lesser vehicles, of Hearers and Solitary Realisers, to Mahayana or Paramitayana, and also in Vajrayana with the exception of Highest Yoga Tantra. Also with respect to the different tenet systems, the union of calm-abiding and special insight is common to all four schools.

In Highest Yoga Tantra there are some special different ways to generate the union of calm-abiding and special insight, in the context of the high realisations of the completion stage. It is said that in the midst of calm-abiding one dwells single pointedly in special insight without any investigation, and in this way one generates union. This is done by observing oneself generated as the deity and one's environment as the immeasurable mansion etc. all having the aspect of lacking inherent nature.

C. Explanation of the actual way to cultivate special insight in dependence on calm-abiding:

One should cultivate calm-abiding and special insight by first having found the view. Having cultivated the view of interdependence, the relative establishment of phenomena, then one engages in meditation of special insight. First one has to engage in investigation to understand what is the way in which phenomena are void of being established by way of their own nature, then one cultivates this in meditation. One should not cultivate meditation on the basis of this investigation being done just once, rather this investigation should be done every time at the beginning of such practice; one should alternate analytical meditation and calm-abiding. Then when one sees one's concentration is decreasing one should stress concentration and lessen investigation and vice versa, so that one's practice of concentration and investigation is well balanced. In this way, one generates a very powerful practice in terms of being able to generate realisations, and mainly powerful in terms of being capable of abandoning the grasping at true existence. Usually we use this example of a butter-lamp that is used to look at drawings on the wall, the lamp needs to be very bright and stable.

Lastly there is a refutation of a doubt. The doubt asserts that calm-abiding is practiced in order to make the mind abide single pointedly without conceptual thought, while special insight is an investigating mind which uses conceptual thought in order to investigate. The answer to that is given in a sutra by the Buddha. If you use two sticks of wood rubbed together to make a fire, that in turn will burn the wood, in the same way one needs to have a union of calm-abiding and special insight in order to destroy the conceptual thought of grasping at true existence.

4. The measure for having achieved special insight through meditations

Explanation of how calm-abiding and special insight unite

Brief summary of the topics of the general path

Lastly we have a conclusion and brief summary of how to engage in the different stages of the path. How one should first contemplate suffering, and among all the different types in particular pervasive compounded suffering, by understanding this one generates the wish for liberation: uncontrived renunciation. On the basis of that, by directing one's mind towards the sufferings of other sentient beings one generates great compassion, this gives rise to the mind of bodhicitta. And one should add to that the most important thing, that which actually cuts the root of samsara, the perfect view of emptiness. In this way the Three Principal Aspects of the Path are presented and this is what is to be practiced.