

Transcript of teachings by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Chonyi

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In Lama Tsongkhapa's masterpiece, *The Essence of Eloquence*, he states that other-powered natures are empty of imputational natures. Je Rinpoche is referring to the three natures:

1. Other-powered natures
2. Thoroughly established natures
3. Imputational natures

Other-powered natures

I talked before about other-powered natures. One way of understanding them is that other-powered natures refer to those phenomena that are under the control or influence of their own causes and conditions. In that sense, they are other-powered.

When we look at the divisions of other-powered natures, there are:

1. Pure other-powered natures
2. Impure other-powered natures¹

What are impure other-powered natures? They refer mainly to the contaminated appropriated physical and mental aggregates, i.e., our contaminated existents that are under the control of their causes, karma and afflictions.

If you remember the four seals that attest to a particular doctrine being Buddhist, the second seal says, "All contaminated phenomena are miserable." Our contaminated existents, the contaminated body and mind, are miserable and in the nature of suffering. Why? Because they are other-powered and are under the control of their own causes and conditions, karma and afflictions. Because our contaminated appropriated physical and mental aggregates are under the control of karma and afflictions, therefore they are in the nature of suffering.

We can think about this teaching and apply it to our practice. First we gain an understanding of other-powered natures in general. Then we use an illustration, i.e., our contaminated existents or contaminated appropriated physical and mental aggregates. When you are able to see that your contaminated appropriated physical and mental aggregates are other-powered natures, being

¹ *Cutting Through Appearances*, pg. 263

under the control or influence of your karma and afflictions, then you can see that they are in the nature of suffering.

When we say our contaminated appropriated physical and mental aggregates are other-powered natures, it means that we have no freedom whatsoever. We have to experience our contaminated existents because we are under the control of our karma and afflictions. There is no independence and freedom because they are other-powered natures.

By having and focussing on these contaminated existents, they act as the bases for us to generate all the afflictions—anger, attachment, and so forth—and due to that, we accumulate karma, we experience problems, unhappiness, and suffering. In other words, we experience samsara.

When we focus on these impure other-powered natures, our contaminated appropriated body and mind, acting as the bases for the afflictions to arise, when anger or attachment arises, we should examine our own experience of how these contaminated existents present themselves to us. They present themselves to us in a particular way and what we have to do is to examine whether that presentation or that appearance accords with reality or not. We have to check whether this is an accurate representation of reality. Is that how our contaminated appropriated body and mind exist?

According to the MOS, for example, based on our own experience, when we think of our contaminated appropriated body and mind, we have an appearance of an external body and mind, something that is of a separate or different entity or nature from the mind. They are not in the entity of the mind. So there is an appearance of an external contaminated body and mind.

Although this is how the body and mind present themselves to us—this is what appears to us—according to the perspective of the MOS, such an appearance is false because that is not how the body and mind exist in reality. Although they appear to be external objects, in fact, the body and mind are not external objects. Of course the MOS have many of their own reasons for saying external objects do not exist. This is one example of how, according to the MOS, there is a disparity between how our contaminated body and mind appear to us and how they actually exist in reality.

The MOS says that things appear to us to exist separately, as different entities from the mind. This is how external objects appear. However although there are such appearances, this is not how things exist. According to the MOS, there are no external objects. If there are external objects, then these objects should exist as the bases for applying the term “this or that” *from the side of the objects*.

“This or that” phenomenon does *not* exist as the basis for applying the term “this or that” phenomenon *from the side of the object*. If there are external objects, then phenomena would, from the side of the object, be the bases for applying the term “this and that” and this would have nothing to do with a conceptual consciousness imputing them to be so.

Therefore for the MOS, “this or that” phenomenon that is the basis for applying the term “this or that” exists as something that is imputed by a conceptual consciousness. It does *not* exist from the side of the phenomenon itself. It is only an appearance to the mind. We are not talking about “this or that” phenomenon

itself. We are talking about “this or that” phenomenon *that is the basis for applying the term “this or that.”* That is only an appearance to the mind, i.e., it is only an imputation by a conceptual consciousness.

There are many examples of other-powered natures. When you can understand that “this or that” other-powered nature that is the basis for applying the term “this or that” exists as a mere imputation and not from the side of the object, then it is helpful for managing and dealing with the afflictions because, suddenly, one of the bases for the arising of the afflictions disappears.

Other-powered natures are the conditions for us to be upset or become attached. We need to understand that these other-powered natures—whatever the object in question may be—that cause us to be upset or emotionally involved are only the bases for applying the term “this and that.” The bases for applying the term “this and that” are not coming from the side of the objects but rather they are merely imputations by the mind.

When you think about impure other-powered natures, in particular, our contaminated body and mind, you can see that our contaminated appropriated physical and mental aggregates are empty of the imputational nature which is the object of negation.

An object that exists by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “this or that,” e.g., a form existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “form” is an imputational nature.

- Furthermore it is a non-existent imputational nature.
- It is also the object of negation.
- The emptiness of form existing by way of its own character as the basis of applying the term “form” is a thoroughly established nature.

What then is the purpose of the presentation of the three natures—other-powered natures, thoroughly established natures, and imputational natures—in the MOS?

The purpose of presenting the three natures is to arrive at an understanding of emptiness, the thoroughly established nature. The whole point of arriving at the presentation of the ultimate nature of reality—emptiness—is because it is the antidote to an apprehension of the self. Therefore a thoroughly established nature is an other-powered nature’s being empty of its imputational nature.

In the explanation that I have just given, an other-powered nature is the object, the basis of inquiry. An illustration of other-powered natures is our contaminated body and mind that are the bases upon which we are trying to establish emptiness but our contaminated body and mind is not emptiness.

- Other-powered natures such as our contaminated body and mind are empty of imputational natures.
- **The emptiness that is an other-powered nature’s emptiness of an imputational nature is the thoroughly established nature.**

If an other-powered nature’s emptiness of an imputational nature is the thoroughly established nature, then we have to find out what exactly an imputational nature is. In order to fully understand thoroughly established natures, we have to understand what exactly is the other-powered nature’s

emptiness of imputational nature. What exactly then is an imputational nature? If you don't understand that, you cannot understand what the thoroughly established nature is. The object of negation here is the imputational nature.

By using form as an example, the imputational nature is form existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term "form." The emptiness of such a form is the thoroughly established nature.

What I explained so far is the main reason why there is this presentation of the three characteristics—other-powered natures, thoroughly established natures, and imputational natures. Our contaminated body and mind are other-powered natures. Due to our contaminated body and mind being our objects of focus, often we are upset or we become attached. This brings many problems, suffering, and unhappiness.

What is the evolution of our being upset, angry, or attached that leads to many other problems? When we get upset or become attached, our contaminated body and mind appear to us to exist in a particular way. The problem is that we believe in and completely trust that appearance. This is our situation.

For example, we may conceive that this contaminated body is very beautiful and pleasant. There is a conceptual consciousness conceiving that. When we focus on the body, it is possible to conceive that it is very beautiful and pleasant. The question is: how does the body appear in the perspective of the conceptual consciousness conceiving of a beautiful body? According to the MOS, this body that is the basis for the conceptual consciousness conceiving of a beautiful body does not exist from its own side.

We are not referring to the body here per se and we are *not* saying that the body does not exist from its own side. We are saying that the body that is the *basis* for the conceptual consciousness conceiving of a beautiful body does not exist by way of its own character. According to the MOS, although that is the reality, in the perspective of this conceptual consciousness conceiving of a beautiful body, this body that is the basis of the conceptual consciousness conceiving of a beautiful body appears to exist independent of the conceptual consciousness. Such a body does not exist and it is the object of negation. It is an imputational nature.

As I mentioned in the previous lesson, at the very least, you have to be able to say the terms correctly, whether you know their meanings or not. You should be able to say, for example, "the form existing by way of its own character as the basis of applying the term "form" to the conceptual consciousness apprehending form is the imputational nature. The emptiness of that is the thoroughly established nature." It is very simple.

Khen Rinpoche: It is good to memorise these terms. In the monastery, when we debated or went to class, we could not take our texts along. We were not allowed to bring along our texts.

For example, one had to debate for two hours on this subject. If one had not memorised the text, then there is no way one could debate. How is one to discuss anything? One must be able to discuss something.

In the monastery, we really put in so much effort to memorise the words of the

texts. It takes a lot of time. At that time, I memorised Lama Tsongkhapa's masterpiece, the Essence of Eloquence Distinguishing between the Definitive and the Interpretative. That text is quite long. The words were also very difficult to memorise because there were many similar words all the time. I think it took me more than one year to memorise the whole text of about 115 pages. If it were in English, the length of the text would be doubled, i.e., 230 pages.

Every one in the monastery would put in so much effort to memorise the texts because if you were to go to debate and you don't remember the relevant quotations, then it is very difficult to debate.

On the basis of understanding and knowing the words clearly—for example, “form existing by way of its own character as the basis for the conception of form, that is the imputational nature. The emptiness of form existing by way of its own character as the basis for the conception of form is the thoroughly established nature”—then you can start to see their meaning.

To reiterate, when we talk about other-powered natures, specifically the impure other-powered natures, what we are concerned about is our suffering, our contaminated existents, and our contaminated body and mind. Our contaminated body and mind do not exist in the way they appear to us. For example, our contaminated body and mind appear as external objects. According to the MOS, although they appear as external objects, this is not how they exist in reality.

The contaminated body and mind are not external objects. The body and mind can be the conceived objects of a conceptual consciousness focussing on the body and mind. The body and mind are the bases for a conceptual consciousness conceiving of the body and mind. But this is something that is posited from the side of the conceptual consciousness, *not* from the side of the body and mind. Therefore, due to this reason, there are no external objects. Objects that are the basis of conception by the conceptual consciousness are not established from the side of the objects but by the power of the conceptual consciousness.

Question from Khen Rinpoche: What is the object of negation here? What is the imputational nature?

(Student attempts to answer)

“Form existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “form” to the conceptual consciousness apprehending form”—what I have just said is the object of negation that is the imputational nature.

Question from Khen Rinpoche: Does form existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “form” exist or not?

You should be able to answer straightaway, “Form existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “form” does *not* exist.”

- First, you must be able to say, “Form existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “form”.
- When you can say that, then the next thing you should be able to say is,

“Form existing by way of its own character as the basis of applying the term “form” does not exist.”

Only then can you start to question, “Why doesn’t such a form exist? Who says that? What is the reason that it cannot exist?” Only then can you begin to see the difference between the assertions of the SS and the MOS.

- The SS says that a form that is the basis for applying the term “form” *does* exist by way of its own character.
- The MOS says, “No. Such a form does *not* exist by way of its own character.”

What are the reasons for their different position? Both sides have their own reasons. Let us imagine that there is a young boy called Tashi. According to the MOS:

- Tashi the person exists.
- Tashi exists by way of his own character.
- Tashi is also truly established because Tashi is an other-powered nature.

The SS holds the same position:

- Tashi exists.
- Tashi exists by way of his own character.
- Tashi is truly established.

Tashi is a person. Tashi is an other-powered nature. In the MOS, other-powered natures are *necessarily* established by way of their own character. That means Tashi necessarily exists by way of his own character. So Tashi is not merely imputed by thought. Why? Because, according to the MOS, “existing by way of its own character” means “not merely imputed by thought but existing from its own side.”²

The name “Tashi” refers to the person, Tashi, who exists by way of his own character. But the factor of the name or the expression, “Tashi” is an imputation. It is *not* Tashi the person.

Khen Rinpoche: Mui Cheng (name of a student) is a person. That is no question about that. See Yong (name of student) is also a person. There is no doubt about that either. I am just using different names.

When we say “Tashi,” what is expressed is not the actual Tashi. Although we are referring to the person, Tashi, the name itself, “Tashi,” expresses something that is not Tashi. That is merely imputed.

- Tashi, as a person, exists by way of his own character. He is not merely imputed by mind.
- But the thing that is expressed by the name “Tashi” is merely imputed and does not exist by way of his own character
- The Tashi who is the basis for conceiving of the name “Tashi” to the conceptual consciousness conceiving Tashi does not exist by way of his own character.

Khen Rinpoche: I hope to leave more imprints on you all.

² Refer to chart, *Meaning of terms used to describe the mode of existence of phenomena in the Mahayana schools.*

The Tashi who is the basis for conceiving Tashi by a conceptual consciousness does not exist from the side of the actual Tashi himself. This is not an uncommon mode of subsistence of Tashi. If Tashi exists from his own side, by way of his own character, as the basis for applying the name “Tashi,” then you will have problems as it will lead to some logical fallacies.

We impute the name “Tashi” onto a basis of designation, a set of body and mind, “This is Tashi.” The name “Tashi” is referring to something. It is engaging with an object. Now you need to think about the process of engagement that occurs when the name “Tashi” engages with its object.³

When you say the name “Tashi,” it refers to the object, the actual Tashi. Is the process of engagement coming from the side of the term “Tashi” or is it coming from the side of the basis of designation, the object, i.e., Tashi himself?

The name “Tashi” is engaging with the object, the actual Tashi. This process of engagement is coming from the side of the name itself, *not* from the side of the object, i.e., Tashi himself. If the name “Tashi” referring to the object, the actual Tashi, is coming from the side of the object then you will have problems. Because if the name “Tashi” is coming from the side of the object, then whoever sees the object, i.e., Tashi the person, will know it is Tashi without even being told what his name is.

The very fact that the name “Tashi” is referring to the actual person Tashi is coming from the side of the name itself, *not* from the side of the actual person Tashi. The name “Tashi” engaging with the object—the actual person Tashi—is due to the power of the name itself and the conceptual consciousness conceiving Tashi, *not* from the side of the basis of designation, the actual person Tashi.

The actual person Tashi exists from his own side, by way of his own character. You have to differentiate between these two—the name “Tashi” and the actual person Tashi. We are not talking about the same thing:

- The person Tashi exists from his own side.
- But the name “Tashi” referring to the person Tashi is coming from the side of the name, *not* from side of the actual person Tashi.

Let us use the example of a thief. The thief exists from his own side and exists by way of his own character as a real thief. But the ability or power of the term “thief” to refer to the actual thief is coming from the side of the term “thief” itself, *not* from the side of the object, the actual thief. If the power of the term “thief” referring to the actual thief is coming from the side of the object, i.e., the actual thief himself, instead of coming from the side of the term itself, then whoever sees the object will be able to see that person to be a thief. That means the term or name does not exist by way of its own character, from its own side, as the basis of engagement for the term or name.

When we say a form does not exist by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term “form,” you have to think about *how* the term “form” engages its object.

³ “Natural base of engagement for the term (or name)” is also translated as “existing by way of its own character as the basis for applying the term (or name).”

Does the term “form” engages its object, form, through the power of the term “form” or by power of the actual object itself? The very term “form” engaging with its object, form—this engagement with the actual object—, is coming from the side of the term “form.”

We have spent two to three lessons talking about this. It is difficult but it is important that we understand these assertions of the MOS. Not only do the MOS assert the non-existence of external objects. Basically, the MOS is saying that things and events do not exist by way of their own characters as the bases for the conceptual consciousness conceiving of those phenomena.

Question: The person, Tashi, who exists from its own side, is that person a gross object or an external object?

Answer: In order to answer that question, you have to sort out a few things. When we say Tashi exists by way of his own character, doesn't Tashi exist? But is Tashi the body or is Tashi the mind? We have not even begun to look at this.

This is a most important question: Who is Tashi? Is Tashi the body or is Tashi the mind? Everyone is trying to find the imputed object. When we say “Tashi,” Tashi exists. Tashi is an imputed object.

With the exception of the CMWS, the highest school, everyone else says that the imputed object, in this case, Tashi, can be found when you look for it. They all say that the imputed object when sought can be found. What does this mean? It means that at the end of your investigation, you will definitely be able to find something that you can point to and say, “This is Tashi!”

The CMWS, on the other hand, says that no matter how you look, you will *not* be able to find the imputed object. The CMWS says that the imputed object, when sought, cannot be found. There is nothing that you can point to as the object. This is the view of the highest school. It is very difficult.

Everyone else is saying, “No. Definitely when you look for the object, you will be able to find it. There must be something that you can point to, “This is the object.” If you cannot point to something that is the object, then how can you say it exists? That is their position.

So, in the first place, you must be able to figure out who or what Tashi is.

Who is Tashi? From the MOS's point of view:

- for those proponents who assert that there are eight consciousnesses, Tashi is the mind-basis-of-all. They say that that is the person, the “I”, the self; and
- for those proponents of the MOS who assert only six consciousnesses, they assert that it is the mental consciousness.

Basically Tashi is *not* the body. Whether it is the mind-basis-of-all or the mental consciousness, the point is, it is the mind that is the person. Since Tashi is not the body, how can we talk about Tashi as a gross object?

Khen Rinpoche: You have to think about this a lot!

Question: What is the meaning of (1) existing from its own side and (2) existing

by way of its own character?

Answer: Let us look at the difference between existing from its own side and existing by way of its own character from the perspective of the MOS.

According to the MOS, when you search for the imputed object and, if you are able to find it, then the object exists from its own side. According to the MOS, everything exists from its own side whether it is an other-powered, thoroughly established nature, or imputational nature. Everything exists from its own side because everything can be found when you look for it. That is the meaning of existing from its own side.

What about existing (or being established) by way of its own character? From the perspective of the MOS, existing by way of its own character means this: that object cannot exist as merely being posited by a conceptual consciousness. There is something from the side of the object, something peculiar to the object. In philosophical terms, it has its own uncommon mode of subsistence. It is established through its own uncommon mode of subsistence without being merely imputed by thought—that is the meaning of existing by way of its own character from the MOS perspective.

If we use other-powered natures as an example, other-powered natures do not exist through being merely imputed by the conceptual consciousness, but rather other-powered natures come about through the causes and conditions that are their own uncommon mode of subsistence. Other-powered natures are established by their own uncommon mode of subsistence. This means that for other-powered natures, they are established by their own causes and conditions, from the side of the causes and conditions. According to MOS, they are not established merely through being labelled.

Question: According the MOS, does “existing by way of its own character” the same as “truly existent” and “truly established” in the chart⁴?

Khen Rinpoche: *They all mean the same thing.*

That is enough about this topic. We will move on and try to complete the MOS. From your own side, you have to read and think about it but as a class, we have to move on.

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⁴ Refer to the chart, *Mode of Existence of Phenomena according to the Four Buddhist Tenets*.