

# *Introduction to Tenets*

Basic Program, Jamyang Buddhist Centre

By Geshe Tenzin Namdak

## **Introduction**

To cultivate the spiritual path of the Lam Rim one needs a good understanding of reality. And even in daily life a good understanding of the two truths, conventional and ultimate, helps us to improve the value of our lives. These two levels of reality explain how we are bound by karma and afflictions in suffering samsara and how to achieve liberation and enlightenment. Tenets clearly explain these levels of reality from the point of view of:

- The basis, the reality of us and the world around us,
- The path, what is needed to progress on the spiritual path,
- The result, what are we striving for to attain, what is exactly liberation and enlightenment.

These points are important to understand. It is for this reason that we are studying the subject of tenets. When we study tenets, we are trying to understand what constitutes reality, both the conventional truth and the ultimate truth. The final view of the two truths is in accordance with the presentation of the highest tenets, the Consequence Middle Way school. Why then do we need to study the tenets of the lower schools? Because an understanding of the lower tenets will make us appreciate, and be able to understand better, the final presentation of the two truths. In a similar way we come to know the different interpretations of consciousness realizing the two truths and we learn about the paths that gives us the map to liberation and enlightenment.

The different tenets arose over different periods after Buddha's teachings of Sutra and Tantra. The teachings of the Buddha are commonly arranged according to the three turnings of the wheel of Dharma. In each of the three wheels the Buddha taught differently to various disciples, depending on and in accordance with their interests, intelligence, and level of development. Based on these teachings the schools of Buddhist philosophy developed with each holding different views regarding selflessness, various aspects of consciousness and the spiritual paths to liberation and enlightenment. Over time four schools of Buddhist Philosophy developed:

- Great Exposition School (Vaibhāṣika)
- Sūtra School (Sautrāntika)
- Mind-Only School (Chittamātra)
- Middle Way School (Mādhyamaka) which can be divided into two:
  - Middle Way Autonomy Schools (Svāntrika-Mādhyamaka)
  - Middle Way Consequence School (Prāsaṅgika- Mādhyamaka)

During teachings of the first turning, the first teachings, delivered in Deer Park near Varanasi, the Buddha taught only the course and subtle selflessness of persons as posited by the Great Exposition, Sūtra, Mind-Only, and Middle Way Autonomy schools. In the teaching of the second wheel, the *Perfection of Wisdom Sūtras* taught on Vulture's Peak, he explained the subtle selflessness of both persons and phenomena according to the view now held by the two Middle Way Schools. In the teachings of the third turning of the wheel at Vaishali, he taught the *Sūtra Unraveling the Thought* which clarifies the meaning of the second wheel for trainees who cannot penetrate its profound meaning. The selflessness of phenomena explained in this teaching is held as foremost by the Mind Only School.

## Structure of the Text on Tenets

For this part of Basic Program, we will use *Presentation of Tenets*, by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen, translated from the Tibetan by Glen Svensson. This text is structured in a traditional way explaining the four schools of Buddhist Philosophy. Each school, and its sub-schools, will have its own definition, divisions, and etymology, explaining the meaning of the name of a particular school.

Following this introduction of each school, the text will explain the following:

- Way of asserting objects
- Way of asserting object-possessors
- Way of asserting selflessness
- Presentation of grounds and paths

### Way of asserting objects

This section will explain how a particular school describes reality. Reality can be divided in conventional and ultimate truths. What is the conventional truth that appears to us and what is actual reality? Different school have different interpretations of reality, from more coarser understandings to more subtle explanations. The Consequence School refers to the ultimate truth as being emptiness and everything that exists but is not emptiness is a conventional truth.

Another way to divide objects is in manifest, slightly hidden and very hidden phenomena. These three types of phenomena are distinguished according to how an ordinary person first realizes them. It is axiomatic in Buddhist thought that a manifest phenomenon can be initially realized by a direct valid cognizer of an ordinary being, like a sense consciousness, for example the eye consciousness apprehending the colour blue. Blue is a manifest phenomenon. To initially realize slightly hidden and very hidden phenomena an ordinary being needs to depend on conceptual consciousness using reasoning. For example, the fact that sound is impermanent is a slightly hidden phenomenon. An ordinary person first generates an inferential consciousness realizing that sound is impermanent in dependence on the reason that sound is a product. In a similar way emptiness is also a slightly hidden phenomenon and is realised by the power of reasoning, like with using the proof of dependent origination. Because everything is in the nature of interdependence, nothing can exist all by itself in an inherent manner. To realize a very hidden phenomenon such as the subtle features of karma, a person generates a scriptural inference or inference through belief in dependence upon reasoning establishing that statements expressing such very hidden phenomena are unmistakable. One needs to depend on a valid person with clairvoyance or omniscience, like a buddha, to understand this most subtle aspect of reality.

### Way of asserting object-possessors

To know more about how things appear to our consciousness, it is important to understand the mind and its divisions. This section will explain different interpretations of consciousness and its divisions in the different schools. Object-possessors or subjects include the description of a person and consciousness that understands or apprehends a particular object. Consciousness can be divided in:

- Five sense consciousnesses, which are non-conceptual:
  - Eye consciousness apprehending shape and colours
  - Ear consciousness apprehending sounds
  - Nose consciousness apprehending odours
  - Tongue consciousness apprehending tastes
  - Body consciousness apprehending tangible objects
- Mental consciousness:

- Conceptual mental consciousness uses a meaning generality or mental image like in thought consciousnesses thinking about what you saw before
- Non-conceptual mental consciousness like clairvoyance

Or it can be divided in:

- Valid cognizers: that realize their objects:
  - Direct valid cognizers, like an eye consciousness realizing the colour blue.
  - Inferential valid cognizers like a conceptual consciousness realizing emptiness.
- Non-valid cognizers: that don't realize their objects, like doubt or a wrong consciousness.

Furthermore, this section also discusses what a yogic direct perception is, a very interesting section on how a mind directly realizing ultimate reality is generated. And it also discusses various views on how memory works. Some schools put forward a self-knowing consciousness that is needed to remember events that was perceived by previous moments of consciousness. The Consequence School says that that type of consciousness is not needed because every consciousness realizes the appearance directly and realizes itself indirectly and thus one can remember the person we saw as well as "I saw this person".

### **Way of asserting selflessness**

One of the most important aspect of our spiritual path to liberation and enlightenment is the realisation of emptiness. To understand the most subtle view of selflessness or emptiness, one first needs to understand the more courser explanation. This section will explain interpretations of the different schools of what selflessness of a person and phenomena is. A few main examples of selflessness given in the text are the following, going from a more course explanation to a more subtle:

- Person's emptiness of being permanent, unitary and independent:
  - Permanent: If we were to assert that the self is permanent, that means the self, the person, or "I" is unchanging. But we have to be able to posit a self or person that experiences happiness and suffering. If we assert that the self or person is permanent, how then do we explain that there is a self that experiences happiness and suffering? If the "I" is permanent, i.e., the "I" is unchanging, how does it experience happiness and suffering?
  - Unitary: The self is not unitary, or one, because there is nothing to be found in the body and mind like this or separate from body and mind.
  - Independent: If you were to assert that there is an "I" that is independent, in this context, independence means being independent of causes and conditions. You then have to be able to explain how such an "I" that is independent of causes and conditions exists. You should be able to account for an "I" that is independent of causes and conditions.
- Person's emptiness of being self-sufficient substantially existent: When there is an apprehension of a self-sufficient substantially existent person, there is the idea that there is a person or an "I" that is the possessor of the aggregates. In that sense, the person or the "I" is not dependent on the body and mind. In this relationship, the body and mind have some kind of dependence or reliance on the "I." It is similar to a pilot in an aircraft, being the controller of the people, the people in the plane depend on the pilot but the pilot is more free to fly without depending on the people in the aircraft. This kind of dependence is not realistic, there is no self that is in control over body and mind, without depending on it, that is free from law of cause and effect.
- Person's emptiness of being empty of inherent existence: A self that exist inherently without dependence can not exist because:
  - body and mind depend on causes and conditions and so the person should.

- body and mind depend on parts and collections of parts, and such an inherent self can not be found among parts and collections of parts.
- the person is merely imputed based on the mere collection of body and mind, an inherent independent self can not be found in this process.

By following the different explanations and contemplating on these types of selflessness, one comes to understand the more subtle interpretations. The difference between selflessness of a person and phenomena is that the selflessness of sentient beings and of buddhas are the selflessness of a person and the selflessness of everything else that exists, like a table, a computer, is defined as selflessness of phenomena. The Great Exposition School (Vaibhāṣhika) and the Sūtra School (Sautrāntrika) only accept the selflessness of a person and do not accept selflessness of phenomena. The other schools do accept both but have different interpretations.

### **Presentation of grounds and paths**

To understand how we need to proceed on the spiritual paths, it is important to have the map of this journey. This section will explain what needs to be abandoned, eliminating the afflictions together with their seeds, and what needs to be accumulated, method and wisdom, and how to proceed in one's realization of emptiness from a conceptual one to a direct realization. It will also explain the different three vehicles and how to proceed on those paths:

- The Hearer Vehicle
- The Solitary Realizer Vehicle
- The Bodhisattva Vehicle
- Cause to Enter the Paths:
  - For the Hearers and Solitary Realizers vehicles: renunciation, the uncontrived and spontaneously arising wish to attain liberation from samsara for oneself. This wish is generated through meditation on the various types of suffering of samsara until an effortless wish to be free of these sufferings naturally arises.
  - For the Bodhisattva vehicle: uncontrived realization, spontaneous wish, of the mind of enlightenment, bodhicitta; wanting to become a buddha to liberate all sentient beings. This wish is generated through meditation not only on the various types of suffering of samsara, but also on the wish to free all sentient beings from these sufferings and to achieve that one comes to see that the state of full enlightenment is necessary. This meditation is done until an effortless attitude of bodhicitta—having these two aspirations of freeing all beings and for that purpose one need to attain the state of Buddhahood—naturally arises.
- Results of the Paths:
  - For the Hearers' path: Path of no more learning of the state of Hearer Arhat, liberated from samsara.
  - For the Solitary Realizers' path: Path of no more learning of the state of Solitary Realizer Arhat, or sometimes called Pratyeka Buddha, liberated from samsara.
  - For the Bodhisattva path: Path of no more learning of the state of Buddhahood, liberated from samsara and attainment of full enlightenment.
- The five paths in each of the three vehicles:
  - Path of Accumulation starts with having or getting a conceptual realization of emptiness.
  - Path of Preparation has a conceptual realization of emptiness in the union of calm abiding and special insight and prepares for a direct realization.
  - Path of Seeing starts with a direct, non-conceptual, realization of emptiness, that eliminates the acquired obscurations, formed by wrong views of incorrect tenets.
  - Path of Meditation has a direct realization of emptiness that eliminates the innate obscurations that are there since beginningless lifetime.

- Path of no-more Learning achieves the attainment of liberation in the Hearers and Solitary Realizers vehicles and complete enlightenment in the Bodhisattva Vehicle.

### How to Prepare for the Weekend Classes

To prepare well for coming up weekend classes, students are advised to read the material to be covered in advance. If you do this, you will get more out of the teachings sessions because you will already have some familiarity with the information presented in the teachings and can focus more on the details and meaning. If you don't, no matter how well you think you know the tradition, you can be left struggling in the actual teaching sessions to absorb a mass of new information. That will leave you little mental space to catch the fine detail, contemplate the meaning and to go deeper. Also, if you don't, it will also affect the quality of your participation in the discussion sessions such as your ability to share your experience and understanding with others and to benefit from the experience and understanding of others. In the schedule below an overview of the structure of the course is given. It gives the page numbers of the individual sections in the text, of *Presentation of Tenets*, by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen, and of additional material that will be covered during each weekend. So, one can come prepared to the classes.

### Weekend schedule for BP Students:

**Saturday:** 10:00-11:30 and 11:50-13:00; 14:00-15:00 and 15:20-16:20:

Four Teaching sessions with guided meditations and Q&A

**Sunday:** 10:00-11:30 and 11:50-13:00 and 14:00-15:30:

Two Teaching sessions with guided meditations and Q&A,

And group discussion 14:00-15:00 and final Q&A with Geshela 15:00-15:30

### Weekend schedule for non-BP Students, listeners on private livestream channel:

**Saturday:** 10:00-11:30 and 11:50-12:30; 14:00-15:00 and 15:20-16:10

Four Teaching sessions with guided meditations

**Sunday:** 10:00-11:30 and 11:50-12:30:

Two Teaching sessions with guided meditations

Q&A with Geshela 17:00-17:30

### Order of the Subjects with the Details of Each Weekend

The course will be based on *Presentation of Tenets*, by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen and Geshe Namdak will provide additional material.

Tenets	Page numbers in the text	Weekend Dates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional Material: Introduction to Tenets</li> <li>• Great Exposition School from <i>Presentation of Tenets</i>, by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen</li> </ul>	2-9	3-4 July 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional Material:</li> <li>• Sutra School and Mind Only School from <i>Presentation of Tenets</i>, by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen</li> </ul>	10-19	4-5 September 2021
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Additional Material:</li> <li>• Middle Way Schools from <i>Presentation of Tenets</i>, by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen</li> </ul>	20-30	2-3 October 2021

## Reference Material

For those who like to read more around the subject Tenets, the following list of reference material can be used.

### Translations of texts on Tenets in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition

- *Presentation of Tenets*, by Jetsün Chökyi Gyaltzen, translated from the Tibetan by Glen Svensson
- *Cutting Through Appearances: Practice and Theory of Tibetan Buddhism* (includes translation of Gönchok Jikmay Wangbo's *Precious Garland of Tenets*), by Geshe Lhundup Sopa and Jeffrey Hopkins, Snow Lion Publications
- *Buddhist Philosophy: Losang Gönchok's Short Commentary to Jamyang Shayba's Root Text on Tenets*, by Daniel Cozort and Craig Preston, Snow Lion Publications
- *Maps of the Profound: Jamyang Shayba's Great Exposition of Buddhist and Non-Buddhist Views on the Nature of Reality*, by Jeffrey Hopkins, Snow Lion Publications