



Course XV
What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class One

1) Give the title of the primary text we will be reading for our study of the art of interpretation; name its author, and give his dates. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

Our study will be based on the *Essence of Eloquence, on the Art of Interpretation*, written by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419).

དྲང་ངེས་ལེགས་བཤད་སྣིང་པོ།

drange lekshe nyingpo

ཇེ་ཙོང་ཁ་པ།

je tsongkapa

2) Our text compares and contrasts the beliefs of two of the great schools of classical Indian Buddhism—the Mind-Only School and the Middle-Way School—about what Lord Buddha really meant, and how to determine what Lord Buddha really meant, when he turned the wheel of the Dharma. Name the important source that each school uses to make their presentation, and the author of each. (Tibetan track name source, and also each school, in Tibetan.)

a) Mind-Only School:

The Mind-Only School makes their presentation based on the *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras (Samdhinirmochana Sutra)*, an explanation by Lord Buddha of his own teachings. More specifically, they rely on the *Chapter Requested by the Bodhisattva Paramarta Samudgata* which is the seventh of the work's ten chapters.

མདོ་སྡེ་དགོངས་འགྲེལ།

dode gongdrel

གུང་སེམས་དོན་དམ་ཡང་དག་འཕགས་ལུ་པའི་ལེན།

jangsem dundam yangdak pak shupay leu

b) Middle-Way School:

The Middle-Way School makes their presentation based on the Sutra Taught at the Request of the Realized Being named "Never-Ending Wisdom"

འཕགས་པ་སློབ་གྲོས་མི་ཟད་པས་ལུས་པའི་མདོ།

pakpa lodru misepe shupay do

3) Nowadays some people say that a knowledge of emptiness is not the main point of Buddhism, while others say that emptiness is something known only intuitively, and not from a foundation of determined, organized study. Describe a quotation by Lord Buddha himself that disproves these ideas.

Je Tsongkapa himself gives a quotation from the Sutra Requested by the Realized Being Rashtrapala which says that "beings must wander here" in suffering life "because they have no knowledge of the ways of emptiness," and that "those with compassion" (meaning the Buddhas and others) "use skillful means and millions of different reasonings to bring them into it."

4) Why do we have to learn to distinguish between the literal and figurative; why do we have to learn to interpret what the Buddha said, in order to find out what he really meant?

This is primarily to learn the true meaning of emptiness, which was described in the three different turnings of the wheel of the Dharma in apparently contradictory terms by Lord Buddha himself.

5) Describe three different levels of the terms "literal" and "figurative."

a) On the level of expression: do the words a person speaks and their intended meaning match each other (literal), or not (figurative)?

b) On the level of reality: does the way which an object appears to be and the way the object is match each other (literal), or not (figurative)?

c) On the level of understanding: do we understand the two realities with an accurate state of perception (*tsad-ma* or *pramana*) that sees what they are (literal), or do we understand them with only an approximate understanding (*yid-dpyod*) that only has a rough understanding of what they are (figurative)?

6) Je Tsongkapa points out that—if what the Buddha said must be divided into what he said that was figurative and what he said that was literal—then the Buddha's own statements about when he was being figurative and when he was being literal cannot necessarily be taken literally. Rather, we must in the end rely on what is logical and makes sense to us. Describe the three logical tests recommended by Lord Buddha, and state the source for them.

Lord Buddha advises us to accept his words only after we've finished a careful examination of them, testing them like gold—in the fire, by cutting, and by using a touchstone. These three tests refer, respectively, to checking whether the particular statement or belief in question contradicts our own direct, accurate experience; our own deductive, accurate perceptions; or the words of a being whom we have established correctly as being infallible.

7) If many of the beliefs of schools like the Mind-Only are actually wrong, then why is it so important for us to study them carefully?

Lord Buddha taught the various schools of ancient India for the very reason that their beliefs were helpful in bringing people of various capacities and personalities further along the Buddhist path. Many beliefs of the Mind-Only school, although technically incorrect, nonetheless function to help get us thinking clearly about emptiness, and the idea of the world and its inhabitants being a projection of our minds.

8) How can the principle of "figurative and literal" be useful to us in our daily lives?

We can come to a better understanding that—if the Buddha himself spoke figuratively when it was helpful to students to do so—then we must be very careful in judging the people around us, who could well be special beings who are trying to bring us and others further along in our thinking.



Course XV
What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Two

1) In his answer to the bodhisattva in the *Commentary on the True Intent of the Sutras*, Lord Buddha states that he was referring to three different lacks of things when he said that no existing object at all had any nature of its own. Name these three. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

a) A lack of any definitive nature

མཚན་ཉིད་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མེད་པ།

tsennyi ngowo nyi mepa

b) A lack of any nature of growing

སྐྱེ་བ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མེད་པ།

kyewa ngowo nyi mepa

c) A lack of any nature of being ultimate

དོན་དམ་པ་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མེད་པ།

dundampa ngowo nyi mepa

2) Name the famous three attributes which form the cornerstone of the beliefs of the Mind-Only School, and which relate to the three different lacks of things mentioned in question one. After naming them, describe them briefly. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

- a) **Constructs.** The creations of words or mental images through which we perceive the world; these creations can correspond to existing or to non-existing things.

གཏུན་བརྟན་གསལ།

kuntak

- b) **Dependent things.** Changing things, which come from causes and conditions.

གཞན་དབང་།

shenwang

- c) **Totality, meaning emptiness.** The lack of self-existence (a particular non-existing form of constructs) that applies to all objects, especially to dependent things.

ཡོངས་གྲུབ།

yongdrup

3) Constructs are said to "lack any definitive nature." Explain what it means in the Mind-Only School when we say this; and then contrast it to what we mean in the Middle-Way School when we say this.

- a) **Mind-Only School:** A thing lacks any definitive nature when it is only a construct of "names and terms" (words and mental pictures); when it does not exist from its own side through some unique nature of its own. Of all the things taken in by the three attributes, the fact that things lack any definitive nature only applies to constructs; those in dependent things and totality do exist by definition.

- b) **Middle-Way School:** An object lacks any definitive nature when you look for it independent of its mental label or name and cannot find anything. No object in the universe has any definitive nature.

4) Explain, for each of these three attributes, *why* it is that they can be described as the corresponding lack of a self-nature. (Don't forget to keep on your Mind-Only School hat!)

- a) **Constructs don't have any definitive nature because they are only constructs of names and terms (words and mental pictures); they do not exist from their own side through some unique nature of their own.**
- b) **Dependent things don't have any nature of growing because they never grow by themselves, but rather by virtue of other factors.**
- c) **Totality is the lack that both dependent things and totality itself has of being ultimate. Dependent things are not the thing perceived by the direct perception of emptiness, and so are not an unchanging ultimate. Totality is the precise lack of an ultimate in the sense of a self-nature, a lack of what emptiness denies. Constructs also lack a nature of being ultimate but are not delved into much here since few people who understood them as imaginary would mistake them for ultimate.**

5) Describe briefly Je Tsongkapa's refutation of the idea of the Jonangpa school of Tibet that changeless totality, or emptiness, is a self-standing, positive object.

He says it is a complete contradiction to say (1) that the wording of the sutra (the *Commentary on the True Intent*) is to be taken completely literally (Lord Buddha says in several ways that emptiness is a simple absence of something that does not exist), and at the same time say (2) emptiness is not the simple exclusion of what we deny when we speak of "no-self."

6) Give finally an illustration for each of these three lacks of a self-nature, or attributes. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

- a) **Constructs are like a flower that grows in mid-air. (Not that it doesn't exist by the way, only that it is only imaginary or an object in the mind.)**

ཀུན་བརྟགས་ནམ་མཁའི་མེ་ཏོག་དང་འདྲ།

kuntak namkay metok dang dra

- b) Dependent things are like a magic show; it doesn't appear to us that a pot and our perception of the pot are "of the same substance" in the sense of growing from the same karmic seed, but they are, so there is the sense of an illusion.

གཞན་དབང་སྐྱེ་མ་དང་འདྲ།

shenwang gyuma dang dra

- c) Totality is like empty space, a simple lack of physical matter, in the sense of being the simple lack of a non-existent self-nature.

ཡོངས་གྲུབ་ནམ་མཁའ་དང་འདྲ།

yongdrup namka dang dra



Course XV
What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Three

1) The second time he turned the wheel of the Dharma, Lord Buddha characterized all existing objects in five apparently very extreme ways. We have finished discussing the first; list here the latter four. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

a) Nothing that exists ever grows

མ་སྐྱེས་པ།
ma kyepa

b) Nothing that exists ever stops

མ་འགགས་པ།
ma gakpa

c) All existing things are extinct, and have been so from the very beginning

གཞོན་མ་ནས་ཞི་བ།
suma ne shiwa

d) All existing things have, by their very nature, gone completely beyond the state of grief

རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ཡོངས་སུ་སྤང་ན་ལས་འདས་པ།
rang shin gyi yong su nya-ngen le depa

2) Why is it we can say that constructs neither grow nor stop?

They do not exist by definition, and so they can neither grow nor stop, since growing and stopping are events that must exist by definition in order to happen at all; conversely, if something does grow or stop, it must do so by definition (in the Mind-Only School).

3) Why are constructs themselves free of the mentally-afflicted side of things?

Constructs are "extinct" or free—from the beginning—of the mentally-afflicted side of things, and also in a state beyond all grief (or involvement with mentally-afflicted things) because they are unproduced things.

4) Why, according to the sutra, can we say that totality neither grows nor stops?

Because it is "an unproduced thing that continues in the time of changeless changelessness, and in the time of unshaking unshakability"; meaning it neither changes in the time back to the beginning, nor in the time up to the end, of it.

5) Why does the sutra called *Commentary on the True Intent* explain the latter four characterizations only with regard to the first and last of the three lacks of a self-nature, and not with regard to the middle one? (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

Dependent things do exhibit growing and stopping, and they do so by definition. And the vast majority of dependent things are taken in by the mentally-afflicted side of things, so they could not be referred to as "extinct" or free of this mentally-afflicted side of things, nor also "beyond" the "grief" that it represents.

གཞན་དབང་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྱིས་སྐྱེ་འགག

shenwang ranggi tsennyi kyi kye gak

གཞན་དབང་ཕལ་ཆེར་ཀུན་ཉོན་གྱིས་བསྐྱུས།

shenwang pelcher kunnyon gyi du

6) If we do take the latter four characterizations as applying to dependent things as well, then how must we interpret them? (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

We have to take the "growing" and "stopping" to refer to "by definition," but *in the specific sense of* growing and stopping without the appropriate causes and conditions. We can then interpret being "extinct" or "beyond grief" as beyond the state of existing without these causes and conditions.

རང་གི་རྒྱ་རྒྱུན་མེད་ནས་མ་སྐྱེ་བ་དང་མ་འགག་པ།
ranggi gyukyen mene makyewa dang magakpa



Course XV
What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Four

1) The sutra called the *Commentary on the True Intent* next turns to the question of how we identify the three attributes. It helps us understand the attribute of constructs by showing how they relate to dependent things. List the three ways in which the sutra says that constructs relate to dependent things. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

- a) **Dependent things are the "arena" in which the constructing state of mind acts. They are the thing you are thinking of with a construct such as "this is a stick."**

ནམ་བར་རྟོག་པའི་སྒྲིབ་ཡུལ།
nampar tokpay chuyul

- b) **Dependent things are the object towards which the attribute of constructs is applied; they are what you apply your words or thoughts towards. They are what receives the labels.**

ཀུན་བརྟགས་པའི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱི་གནས།
kuntakpay tsennyi kyi ne

- c) **Dependent things display the typical features of a factor, or a changing thing**

འདུ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་མཚན་མ།
duje kyi tsenma

2) In explanations of the process of making constructs that follow from the sutra references just mentioned, a distinction is made between the dependent thing that is the object of the constructing state of mind; the constructing state of mind itself; and the construct that "lies between" them. Explain these three as they occur in the example of the boy named Tashi.

A man and his wife have a baby boy. About a day later, the father chooses the name "Tashi" for the boy. "Tashi the boy" is a construct that lies between the object it is applied to (the boy that was born) and the constructing state of mind (the father thinking of the boy as "Tashi" and naming him "Tashi").

3) In the illustration of the boy named "Tashi," what is the indication that (according to the Mind-Only School) the construct does not exist by definition?

If the idea or construct of "the boy named Tashi" existed by definition, he would exist from his own side through his own unique way of being. This means then that, even before the constructing state of mind (his father's decision to name him "Tashi") did its thing a day later, everyone would have said "Oh! Tashi is born!" the minute the boy-child came out of the womb; but in fact they cannot do so until they start thinking of him as Tashi, later.

4) The sutra goes on to use the three expressions "arena in which the constructing state of mind acts" and so on as a basis for describing dependent things and totality (or emptiness) as well as constructs. In other words, these three expressions are being used to get at the real meaning of the three attributes in the Mind-Only School; and more especially how they relate to each other. Describe this interrelation of the three attributes.

The function of these three expressions at this point in the sutra is to explain how the three attributes help define each other. We create in our minds certain constructs about, for example, a boy named Tashi. Some of these constructs are true; for example, "Tashi is a boy." Some of the constructs are false; for example, "The fact that Tashi is called 'Tashi' is something that exists naturally, by definition." In either case, the constructs are applied towards a dependent thing: the boy that came out of his mother's womb. The fact that the false constructs are not true of the dependent thing—the fact that the dependent thing or boy is free or empty of any such quality—is the totality or emptiness of Tashi. The true constructs are helpful in establishing what Tashi *is*, as opposed to what he is not.

5) The text states that this principle of establishing the three attributes with different objects applies to a whole list of different objects. Name some of them. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

The principle is said to apply to all the different subject matter of the first turning of the wheel of the Dharma: to the five heaps; the twelve doors of sense; the twelve links of dependent origination; the four types of sustenance; the six elements; and the eighteen categories.

ཕུང་པོ་ལྔ་།

pungpo nga

སྐྱེ་མཆིད་བཅུ་གཉིས་།

kyeche chunyi

ཉིན་འབྲེལ་ཡན་ལའག་བཅུ་གཉིས་།

tendrel yenlak chunyi

ཟས་བཞི་།

se shi

ཁམས་དྲུག་།

kam druk

ཁམས་བཅོ་བརྒྱད་།

kam chopgye

6) Describe two ways in which something could be "empty" or "devoid" of something; then state which of these two ways is more relevant here when we say that totality (or emptiness) is "empty" of certain constructs. (Tibetan track also give two different Tibetan verbs that help illustrate the difference.)

The distinction is between the *absence* of something in another place (the fact that there is no chair in a certain room) and the *fact that something is not* another thing (the fact that a checkered rope is not a snake). Here the latter is more the sense: dependent things are not the self-existent things that our constructs impute them to be. The Tibetan verb for the first concept is *mepa* (the opposite of "to exist" or *yupa*.) and the Tibetan verb for the second concept is *minpa* (the opposite of "to be something" or *yinpa*).

མེད་པ།	ཡོད་པ།
<i>mepa</i>	<i>yupa</i>
མིན་པ།	ཡིན་པ།
<i>minpa</i>	<i>yinpa</i>

7) Constructs can be applied either to the essence of an object or to some feature of an object. Give an example of each of these for the first of the four arya truths. (Tibetan track also name this principle in Tibetan.)

When you are applying a construct simply to the essence of the first of the four arya truths you are saying about it simply, "truth of suffering." Then you are applying a construct to the main feature of this truth when you say, "The truth of suffering is something that a person should realize is happening to them."

ངོ་བོ་ལ་ཀུན་བཏགས་པའི་ཀུན་བརྟགས།
ngowo la kuntakpay kuntak

བྱུང་པར་ལ་ཀུན་བཏགས་པའི་ཀུན་བརྟགས།
kyapar la kuntakpay kuntak



Course XV

What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Five

1) What does the expression "the outcome of the exchange" refer to? (Tibetan track also give the Tibetan for this expression.)

The "outcome of the exchange" refers to the "profit" or "conclusion" that the bodhisattva Parmarta Samudgata gains from his verbal exchange with Lord Buddha, asking him what he meant when he seemed to contradict himself especially during the second turning of the wheel. The outcome is that the bodhisattva comes to understand that Lord Buddha was being figurative during the first and second turnings of the wheel, and literal during the third.

གྲུབ་དོན།

drupdun

2) Name the three famous turnings of the wheel of the Dharma, the three great convocations, and state (a) when they were primarily taught; (b) where they were primarily taught; (c) for whom they were primarily taught; (d) their basic subject matter; and (e) what, from the point of view of the "outcome of the exchange," their view was on whether things have their own nature or not. (Tibetan track all in Tibetan!)

(1) First turning of the wheel of the Dharma—

Period: Primarily during the early part of Lord Buddha's teaching.

Name: The Turning of the Wheel on the Four Truths

བདེན་བཞིའི་ཚུལ་འཁོར།

denshiy chunkor

Place: Sarnath, near Varanasi

འཕྲུལ་ཁྲ་སི

varanasi

Disciples: Those of the lower way

ཉན་ཐོས་ཐེག་པ།

nyentu tekpa

Basic subject matter: The four realized truths

འཕགས་པའི་བདེན་པ་བཞི།

pakpay denpa shi

View: Every existing thing exists by definition

ཚོས་རྣམས་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་པ།

chunam ranggi tsennyi kyi druppa

(2) Second turning of the wheel of the Dharma—

Period: Primarily during the middle part of Lord Buddha's teaching.

**Name: The Turning of the Wheel on How Nothing Exists
by Definition**

མཚན་ཉིད་མེད་པའི་ཚོས་འཁོར།

tsennyi mepay chunkor

Place: Vulture's Peak, in Rajagirha

བྱ་ཚོད་ཡུང་པོའི་རི།

jagu pungpoy ri

Disciples: Those of the greater way

ཐེག་ཆེན།

tekchen

Basic subject matter: Emptiness

སྟོང་པ་ཉིད།

tongpa nyi

View: No existing thing exists by definition

ཚོས་རྣམས་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་པ།

chunam ranggi tsennyi kyi ma druppa

(3) Third turning of the wheel of the Dharma—

Period: Primarily during the latter part of Lord Buddha's teaching.

Name: The Turning of the Wheel on Fine Distinctions

ལེགས་སྤྱིའི་ཚོས་འཁོར།

lekchey chunkor

Place: Vaishali

ཡངས་པ་ཅན།

yangpachen

Disciples: Those of all ways

སྟོན་པ་ཐམས་ཅད།

tekpa tamche

Basic subject matter: The three attributes

མཚན་ཉིད་གསུམ།

tsennyi sum

View: Some things exist by definition, and some do not, and we must make fine distinctions between them

ཚོས་རྣམས་ལ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་གྲིས་གྲུབ་མ་གྲུབ་ལེགས་པར་བྱེ།

chu nam la ranggi tsennyi kyi drup madrup lekpar che

3) According to the Mind-Only School, which of these three turnings of the wheel (also called "groups of sutra") were spoken literally, and which are figurative, or something we must interpret further? According to the Middle-Way School, which are to be taken on face value, and which are not? Why so, in each case?

a) **Mind-Only School: The first two are figurative, and the last one literal, because it is neither true that all things exist by definition, nor that nothing exists by definition; some are one and some are the other, and the only literal teaching is the one (the third turning of the wheel) where Lord Buddha made these distinctions.**

b) **Middle-Way School: The first and the last are not to be taken on face value, but the middle one is, because it is true that nothing exists by definition (as stated in the middle one), and not true that everything exists by definition (as stated in the first) or that some things do and some things do not exist by definition (as stated in the last). But remember that, in this school, "literal" means any teaching in which Lord Buddha referred clearly to emptiness; and "figurative" means any teaching in which he did not.**

4) Give, in English, the four expressions that the bodhisattva Paramarta Samudgata uses to express the fact that (according to the Mind-Only School) the first two turnings of the wheel are figurative.

He says that they have something higher; that they leave an opening; that they have to be interpreted further; and that they can serve as a basis for contention.

5) What, in the context of the *Commentary on the True Intent*, is the real criterion that decides whether a person belongs to the "lower way" (Hinayana) or the "higher way" (Mahayana)?

The question is whether or not their views on emptiness belong to the lower two ancient schools of India (the Abhidharma or Higher-Knowledge School and the Sutrists or logic and perceptual-theory school) or the higher two schools (Mind-Only and Middle-Way).

6) Name and explain the image that is being referred to in the expression "wheel of the Dharma"? (Tibetan track name in Tibetan and explain in English.)

The Dharma is being compared to the Precious Wheel of the Wheel-Empowered King or Chakravartin. In commentaries to the mandala offering, this wheel is described as some 2,000 miles in diameter; it is like a spaceship that can travel half a million miles a day, and carries the King and his four armed forces to the four continents, thus giving him power to rule. Just so, the spiritual realizations we get when we are taught the Dharma—especially the path of seeing or direct realization of emptiness—allow us to conquer new spiritual territory quickly and effectively. The parts of the wheel are also compared to the eight-fold path of realized beings.

འཁོར་ལོས་བསྐྱར་བའི་རྒྱལ་པོའི་འཁོར་ལོ་རིན་པོ་ཆེ།
korlu gyurway gyalpoy korlo rinpoche

7) Name the two classical types of "wheels of the Dharma." (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

The "wheel of the Dharma that is teachings" refers to physical teachings, whether verbal or written. The "wheel of the Dharma that is realizations" refers to the spiritual realizations we gain from learning the Dharma, especially the direct perception of emptiness during the path of seeing.

ལྷུང་གི་ཚོས་འཁོར།
lunggi chunkor

ཏོགས་པའི་ཚོས་འཁོར།
tokpay chunkor

8) What does it mean to "turn" the wheel of the Dharma?

Lord Buddha or any other holy teacher speaks the wheel of the Dharma which is teachings, and thereby triggers in the disciple the wheel of the Dharma which is realizations, and this continues from generation to generation.



Course XV

What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Six

1) When we refer to the first turning of the wheel as something which is either figurative or literal, are we speaking about any teaching that Lord Buddha gave during the initial period of his teaching career? Give an example to explain why or why not. (Tibetan track answer in English and give the example in Tibetan.)

We are not talking about any teaching that Lord Buddha gave during the initial period of his teaching career, because there are teachings that he gave during this time that we do not have to examine as to their true meaning. An example would be his advice to the Group of Five at Varanasi urging them to "be sure to wear your lower robes in a neat circle."

ལྷ་སྡེ་ལ་ཤམ་ཐབས་ལྷུ་མ་པོར་བགོ་བར་བྱའོ། །ཞེས།

nga dela shamtab lumpor gowar jao, shey

2) When we speak of the final turning of the wheel as being "literal," are we talking about anything that was taught during the final period of Lord Buddha's teaching career? Give an example to explain why or why not. (Tibetan track answer in English and give the example in Tibetan.)

Again we are not, because not everything taught during the final period of Lord Buddha's teaching addressed the fine distinctions between what exists by definition and what does not. An example would be the teaching Lord Buddha gave, just before entering his final nirvana, on appropriate monastic behavior, entitled the *Summary of Vowed Morality*.

འདུལ་བ་མདོར་བསྡུས་རུང་མཐུན་དུ་གྲགས་པ།

dulwa dordurung tundu drakpa

3) Name three goals that the *Commentary on the True Intent* has in mind for us when it takes the trouble to divide the three turnings of the wheel into the categories of figurative or literal.

- a) **The sutra wants to prevent us from taking on face value the blanket statements that either all things exist by definition, or no things exist by definition.**
- b) **The sutra wants us to learn that constructs do not exist by definition, but that dependent things and totality do exist by definition.**
- c) **The sutra wants to provide us with an effective way of understanding emptiness, by using the three attributes: the fact that dependent things lack certain non-existent types of constructs is the emptiness or totality of things.**

4) Je Tsongkapa takes pains to disprove the idea of some Tibetan thinkers that all three turnings of the wheel were meant literally. These thinkers would even say that Lord Buddha was speaking literally when he said (actually in order to attract some non-Buddhist groups) that things do have some kind of self-nature. What object do they say that Lord Buddha was referring to, and how is this object sometimes misinterpreted? (Tibetan track name the object in Tibetan and explain the misinterpretation in English.)

These thinkers believe that Lord Buddha was referring to the "essence of the Ones who have Gone That Way," or the Buddha nature that each being possesses. This is actually primarily the emptiness of our minds, which provides the potential for us to see our minds one day as enlightened. This nature or potential is frequently misinterpreted as referring to some Buddha within us that somehow already exists, and which we must simply reveal. From here it is easy to go on to the error of believing that we do have some self-existent self-nature.

དེ་བཞིན་གཤམ་པའི་སྣང་པོ།

deshin shekpay nyingpo

5) What is the position of the sutra called the *King of Mystic Words* on the actual order of the three turnings of the wheel? (Tibetan track name the sutra and give the order in Tibetan.)

Proceeding from the idea that the three turnings of the wheel must each be higher than the preceding, the system of this sutra is to order the three as (1) the turning of the wheel where Lord Buddha taught the four realized truths; (2) the turning of the wheel where Lord Buddha made fine distinctions between what does and does not exist by definition; and (3) the turning of the wheel in which Lord Buddha taught that nothing exists by definition.

གཟུངས་རྒྱལ་གྱི་མདོ།

sunggyel gyi do

བདེན་བཞིའི་ཚེས་འཁོར།

denshiy chunkor

ལེགས་པར་བྱེ་བའི་ཚེས་འཁོར།

lekpar cheway chunkor

མཚན་ཉིད་མེད་པའི་ཚེས་འཁོར།

tsennyi mepay chunkor

6) Is there a difference between the "final period of the teaching" and "final turning of the wheel"?

Yes: the "final turning of the wheel" is defined primarily by subject matter, and not by period.

7) After deciding that other more extensive definitions may be problematic, the great textbook writer of Sera Mey Tibetan Monastery, Kedrup Tenpa Dargye (1493-1568), gives a very revealing general definition of the first turning of the wheel of the Dharma. Write it here. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

He gives the definition as, "A sutra of the lower way, whichever of the three turnings of the wheel it belongs to." We must interpret "three turnings" in the definition as referring to the three historical turnings; and "lower way" as referring to "for those who can only understand selflessness in a more simple interpretation."

འཁོར་ལོ་གསུམ་པོ་གང་རུང་དུ་གྱུར་བའི་ཐེག་དམན་གྱི་མདོ།

korlo sumpo gang rung du gyurpay tekmen gyi do

8) How does Kedrup Tenpa Dargye then distinguish between the disciples for whom the second wheel was turned, and the disciples for whom the third was turned?

He does so on the basis of whether or not they need to re-interpret the meaning of selflessness, as taught in the second turning of the wheel, through relying on works such as the "Chapter Requested by the Bodhisattva Paramarta Samudgata."

9) The main sutra of the Mind-Only School, called the *Commentary on the True Intent*, says that the specific disciples for whom the third turning of the wheel was taught are "those who have entered, perfectly, every one of the different ways." This seems to imply that it was taught for students of both the higher and lower ways, which would seem like a contradiction; how does Kedrup Tenpa Dargye clarify this point for us?

He divides the three intended audiences as follows:

- a) Those who can only grasp the system of the three attributes with regard to the lack of a self-nature to persons, as presented in the first turning of the wheel;
- b) Those who can grasp the system of the three attributes with regard to the lack of a self-nature to objects as presented in the second turning of the wheel, without requiring any re-interpretation such as that given in the "Chapter Requested by the Bodhisattva Paramarta Samudgata"; and

- c) Those who can grasp the system of the three attributes with regard to the lack of a self-nature to objects as presented in the second turning of the wheel, but only if they rely on a re-interpretation such as that given in the "Chapter Requested by the Bodhisattva Paramarta Samudgata." Since those in this category *can* understand the content of the second wheel with help, then by implication they can also obviously understand the content of the third wheel; and have in this sense entered then both the higher and the lower ways.



Course XV

What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Seven

1) Who was the innovator who revived the Mind-Only School system in this world; what book did he base this work on; how do we know that this was the book?

The great innovator of the Mind-Only School was Master Asanga; he used the *Commentary on the True Intent*; and we know this because of at least five references to the work in his *Compendium*, as well as in the *Levels of the Bodhisattva* and his other works.

2) This innovator sets forth the meaning of thusness largely through a description of the two extremes, and how to avoid them. Name the two states of mind that hold to these two extremes. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

a) The act of "concocting things," which means holding that something exists or has a particular quality when in fact it does not at all.

སྒྲོ་འདོགས།

dron dok

b) The act of "discounting things," meaning holding that something which really does exist or really does have a particular quality does not at all.

བསྐྱར་འདེབས།

kurndep

- 3) Describe the difference between an extreme and the view which holds to the extreme. (Tibetan track also give the Tibetan name for "extreme.")

Technically speaking, an "extreme" represents the thing which either concocting things or discounting things is grasping on to—and therefore does not exist at all. In the Mind-Only School, for example, the two non-existent extremes would be represented by a construct that existed by definition, or a dependent thing that did not exist by definition. The view which holds to the extreme would believe in either or both of these.

མཐའ།

ta

- 4) Describe the specific idea which, according to the Mind-Only School, is held by the view of "concocting" something. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

It is believing that a construct (such as the fact that the boy Tashi is what the name "Tashi" refers to) could exist by definition—from its own side, through its own unique identity.

ཀུན་བརྟགས་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་ཡོད་པར་འཇིན་པ།

kuntak ranggi tsennyi kyi yupar dzinpa

- 5) How, according to the Mind-Only School, would you help someone get over the extreme view of concocting something?

You would demonstrate to them how any object you could choose to take at all is devoid of constructs that existed ultimately.

- 6) According to the Mind-Only School, what causes the extreme of concocting things?

It is, to put it briefly, the tendency to hold things as having a self-nature: ignorance.

7) Describe the idea which, according to the Mind-Only School, is held by the view of "discounting" something. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

It is believing that a dependent thing, or totality, could ever fail to exist by definition.

གཞན་དབང་ཡོངས་གྲུབ་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་པ།

shenwang yongdrup ranggi tsennyi kyi madruppa

8) How, according to the Mind-Only School, would you help someone get over the extreme view of discounting something?

Demonstrate to them that, if dependent things for example did not exist by definition, then they could not exist at all; and if they did not exist at all, then there would be nothing to apply constructs to, and no constructs either.

9) Who, according to the Mind-Only School, is guilty of the extreme of discounting things?

They say it is the Middle-Way School, who claim that nothing exists by definition, and who are thereby effectively denying the existence of dependent things and totality.

10) Describe, in a brief sentence, the Middle-Way idea about these two extreme views. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

Concocting something is to say that—if something exists—it must exist by definition; and if something did not exist by definition, then it could not exist at all.

ཡོད་ན་རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་གྲུབ་དགོས།

yu na ranggi tsennyi drup gu

རང་གི་མཚན་ཉིད་ཀྱིས་མ་གྲུབ་ན་མིད་དགོས།

ranggi tsennyi kyi madrup na me gu



Course XV

What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Eight

1) What, according to the Middle-Way School, is "the ultimate" (also called "ultimate truth" or "ultimate reality")? (Tibetan track answer in Tibetan.)

They say that "the ultimate" or "ultimate truth" refers to emptiness, which is described as the fact that no existing object has a self-nature.

ཚཱ་མཐམས་ཅད་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ་ཉིད་མེད་པ་ནི་དོན་དམ་བདེན་པ་ཡིན།

chu tamche kyi ngowonyi mepa ni dundam denpa yin

2) Is there a difference, in the Middle-Way School, between something being "the ultimate" and something existing "ultimately"? Why or why not? (Tibetan track use Tibetan to answer.)

When they say something is "the ultimate," they mean that it exists "as ultimate reality or truth." When they say that something exists "ultimately," they mean that it exists from its own side, or by definition: which means that it cannot exist at all.

དོན་དམ་བདེན་པར་ཡོད་པ།

dundam denpar yupa

དོན་དམ་པར་ཡོད་པ།

dundampar yupa

3) How does the Middle-Way School describe deceptive reality? (Tibetan track name in Tibetan and describe in English.)

They say that deceptive reality is that reality which deceives a certain state of mind (which is itself called "the deceived"). This reality is called "deceptive" because it seems to be one way (self-existent) but is really something else (a projection forced on us by our karma).

ཀུན་ལྡོམ་བདེན་པ།

kundzob denpa

ཀུན་ལྡོམ།

kundzob

4) Now how does the Mind-Only School draw the difference between "ultimate reality" and "deceptive reality"?

They say that anything which exists by definition (meaning dependent things and totality) is an example of ultimate reality. They say that anything that doesn't exist by definition (meaning constructs) is an example of deceptive reality.

5) Explain how the Consequence part of the Middle-Way School describes what it means to "exist as an external object."

They say that physical objects which are not subsumed within our being (such as trees and outside sounds) exist as external objects; things like our arms are not external objects, because they are physical things subsumed within our being.

6) Explain how the lower two schools—the Higher-Knowledge (Abhidharma) School and the Sutrists School—describe what it means to "exist as an external object."

They say that something exists as an external object if it is something which consists of tiny, partless particles: physical particles with no sides. They extend "partless" to mean something which can not be divided any further mentally, and something which is indivisible in terms of time—something of inconceivably small duration.

7) The followers of the lower half of the Middle-Way School (the "Independent" or Svatantrika group) may be divided into two philosophical camps. Name them. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

They may be divided into those who are, in certain of their beliefs, closer to the Sutrists School (these are the Sutrists-Leaning Independents) or closer to the Mind-Only School (also called the Deep-Practice School) (these are the Practice-Leaning Independents).

མདོ་ལྗེ་སྣོད་པ་དབུ་མ་རང་རྒྱུད་པ།

dode chupa uma rang-gyupa

རྣལ་འབྱོར་སྣོད་པའི་དབུ་མ་རང་རྒྱུད་པ།

nelnkor chupay uma rang-gyupa

8) One of these camps describes in yet a different way what it means to "exist as an external object." Name them, and state their belief.

The Sutrists-Leaning Independents say that something exists as an external object if it is something which consists of tiny physical particles with no *identifiable* or *perceptible* sides.

9) This question has two separate parts. (a) What do the members of the Mind-Only School (and those of the Independent part of the Middle-Way School who lean towards them on points such as these) have in mind when they say that "nothing exists as an external object"? (b) What do the Consequence group and the Independents who lean the other way have in mind when they say that they are wrong?

a) All they are saying is that things don't exist as external objects in the way that the lower two schools describe an external object. They are *not* saying that there are not objects which are external to our being.

b) These two schools say that when we speak of external objects existing or not we don't have to address the idea of "external" as it is presented in the two lower schools.

10) What does the Mind-Only School mean when they say that the valid perception which is the subject that perceives a physical object, and the physical object which it perceives, are "of the same substance"? (Tibetan track also give the Tibetan for this concept.)

They do *not* mean that the physical object is made of the same stuff as the mind; rather, they mean that the subject and the object have grown from a single karmic seed.

གཟུགས་དང་གཟུགས་འཛིན་གྱི་ཚད་མ་རྫས་གཞན་གྱིས་སྣོང་བ།

suk dang sukdzin gyi tsema dzeshen gyi tongpa

11) Explain where the name of the Mind-Only School comes from.

Je Tsongkapa explains this point in his *Illumination of the True Thought*. He first quotes the *Sutra of the Tenth Level*, which says that "these three realms of existence are mind only." He goes on to explain that the real meaning of "mind only" here is that "the mind is the main thing" that creates the world, and not something physical, or some creator god. He says that the expression "mind only" is therefore only an abbreviation for the expression "mind alone is the main thing." The way that the mind creates the world is by causing us to collect karma; the point is not that we just make up the world with our mind.



Course XV
What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Nine

1) Now that we have examined how the Mind-Only School thinks that Lord Buddha taught emptiness, we turn to what the Independent group in the Middle-Way School thinks—which hinges on an idea of multiple levels of selflessness. Name this concept in general, and list its three parts. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

They stress the idea of three degrees of selflessness: the subtle lack of a self to persons; the gross lack of a self to things; and the subtle lack of a self to things, this last being real "emptiness."

བདག་མེད་ལྷ་རགས་གསུམ།

dakme trarak sum

གང་ཟག་གི་བདག་མེད་ལྷ་མོ།

kangsak gi dakme tramo

ཚོས་ཀྱི་བདག་མེད་རགས་པ།

chu kyi dakme rakpa

ཚོས་ཀྱི་བདག་མེད་ལྷ་མོ།

chu kyi dakme tramo

སྟོང་ཉིད།

tongnyi

2) Name the even grosser idea of the self of a person which relates to this Independent-group concept. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

A self or person which is an unchanging, independent whole; this can be described as what is denied when we speak of the gross lack of a self.

རྟོག་གཅིག་རང་དབང་ཅན་གྱི་བདག་

takchik rangwangchen gyi dak

3) Name the kinds of practitioners on the first track; state the "vehicle" or way they belong to; and name the type of "self" that they come to realize does not exist. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

Those of the "Listener" track, who belong to the lower vehicle or way come to see that there exists no self-nature of a person where the person is a self-standing, substantial thing. This, according to the Independent group, describes the non-existent object whose emptiness is the subtle lack of a self-nature to the person, which is the first of the three degrees of selflessness mentioned above.

ཉན་ཐོས་།

nyentu

ཐོག་དམན་།

tekmen

རང་རྒྱ་ཐུབ་པའི་རྗེས་ཡོད་དུ་གྲུབ་པ།

rang kyapay dzeyu du druppa

4) Name the kinds of practitioners on the second track; state the "vehicle" or way they belong to; and name the type of "self" that they come to realize does not exist. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

Those of the "Self-Made Buddha" track, who also belong to the lower vehicle or way, come to see that there exists no self-nature of things wherein a valid perception of a physical object and the physical object which the perception holds are empty of any separate substance (meaning, that they do come from the same karmic seed.) This is the second degree of selflessness: the gross lack of a self to things. This kind of "being empty" by the way is not "real" emptiness according to the Independents; and "Self-Made Buddhas" of course means those who can reach a lower nirvana in this life without depending on a spiritual guide, but only because they have had many thousands of teachers in their past lives.

རང་རྒྱལ།

rang-gyel

ཐེག་དམན།

tekmen

སུ་དང་སུ་དཔེ་འདོན་གྱི་ཚད་མ་རྫས་གཞན་གྱིས་སྤོང་བ།

suk dang suk dzin gyi tsema dze shen gyi tongpa

5) Name the kinds of practitioners on the third track; state the "vehicle" or way they belong to; and name the type of "self" that they come to realize does not exist. (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

Those of the Bodhisattva track, who belong to the higher vehicle or way, come to see real emptiness or the fact that every existing object is empty of any true existence. This is the third degree of selflessness: the subtle lack of a self to things.

གུང་སེམས།

jangsem

སྣོང་པ་ཉིད།

tongpanyi

ཚེས་ཐམས་ཅད་བདེན་པས་སྣོང་པ།

chu tamche denpe tongpa

6) In the Independent group of the Middle-Way School, what does it mean to say that a thing "exists truly"? (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

In this school, an object exists truly when it exists from its own side through some unique identity of its own, rather than simply being established as existing by having appeared to an unaffected state of mind. Objects like this don't exist, and this is the ultimate meaning of "emptiness."

སྣོ་གཞོན་མིད་ལ་སྣང་བའི་དབང་གིས་བཞག་པ་མ་ཡིན་པར་ཡུལ་རང་གི་སྣོན་

མོང་མ་ཡིན་པའི་བསྣོད་ལུགས་ཀྱི་ངོས་ནས་གྲུབ་པ།

lo nume la nangway wang gi shakpa mayinpar yul rang gi tunmong ma yinpay du luk kyi ngu ne druppa

7) The word "substantial" (as opposed to "constructed") in the great books of Buddhism has five distinct meanings. Name and describe each one briefly. (Tibetan track also give the Tibetan for "substantial" and "constructed.")

- a) **"Substantial" in the sense of actually existing: any actually existing object, as opposed to the non-existent "self-natures" that the two tendencies of holding to a self-nature think exist.**
- b) **"Substantial" in the sense of doing something: functional things (an actual Chevrolet car), as opposed to general, unchanging identities of things (the idea "car").**
- c) **"Substantial" in the sense of being stable and unchanging: unproduced empty space, as opposed to changing things.**
- d) **"Substantial" in the sense of being self-standing: the physical things that a state of mind perceives and the state of mind that perceives them, as opposed to concepts or constructs. This ultimately refers to things that can come into our mind without first having to think of their parts and synthesizing them (say, colors like red, or our awareness of red), as opposed to things that can only come into our mind if we first think of their parts and synthesize them (say, something like the idea of "an American person," which can only come into our mind if we first think of his head, arms, legs, etc).**
- e) **"Substantial" in the sense of being the kind of self-standing we deny when we speak of no "self-standing self": a person who is independent of the five heaps or parts of the person, and who directs or controls them.**

The Tibetan for "substantial" is *dzeyu*; and for "constructed" is *takyu*.

རྗེས་ཡོད།

dzeyu

བརྗེས་ཡོད།

takyu

8) It's easy to confuse the idea of "persons of three scopes" in the teachings on the steps of the path to enlightenment (*lam-rim*) with the idea of people on the three tracks mentioned above. Describe the difference between the two. (Tibetan track give the name for each in Tibetan, and then describe the difference in English.)

"Persons of the three scopes" in the teachings on the steps of the path to enlightenment refers to a persons spiritual capacity or motivation, and includes: (1) people who want to avoid the three lower realms, only for their own sakes; (2) people who want to avoid all three realms of the circle of suffering life, and reach their own nirvana only; and (3) people who want to avoid the three lower realms and avoid all three realms and reach total enlightenment, so they can help all beings reach this same enlightenment. "People on the three tracks" refers to a persons ability to understand emptiness, and includes: (1) those on the Listener track, who hope to reach the nirvana of this track and who (according to the Independents) can see only up to the subtle lack of a self-nature to the person; (2) those of the Self-Made Buddha track, who hope to reach the nirvana of this track and who can see only up to the gross lack of a self-nature to things; and (3) those of the Bodhisattva or Mahayana track, who hope to reach total enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and who can see real emptiness. Je Tsongkapa notes, in the *Great Book on the Steps to Enlightenment (Lamrim Chenmo)* that those on the first two tracks are both people of the second or medium scope.

ལྷོས་བུ་གསུམ།

kyebu sum

ཐེག་པ་གསུམ།

tekpa sum

9) It's also easy to confuse the three tracks with the three different ways mentioned in scripture, especially since the Tibetan for both is the same. State the difference. (Tibetan track name and clarify the three ways in Tibetan.)

The "three tracks" refers to the Listener, Self-Made Buddha, and Bodhisattva (or Mahayana) tracks mentioned above. The "three ways" mentioned are the Lower Way, the Higher Way, and the Diamond Way (also called "Way of the Secret Word"); although technically the Diamond Way is just a part of the Higher Way, which is more correctly divided into the "Perfection Part of the Higher Way" and the "Diamond Part of the Higher Way"

ཐེག་དམན།

tekmen

ཐེག་ཆེན།

tekchen

རྡོ་རྗེ་ཐེག་པ།

dorje tekpa

གསང་སྤྲུགས་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ།

sangngak kyi tekpa

ཕར་ཕྱིན་གྱི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ།

parchin gyi tekpa chenpo

གསང་སྤྲུགས་ཀྱི་ཐེག་པ་ཆེན་པོ།

sangngak kyi tekpa chenpo



Course XV
What the Buddha Really Meant

Answer Key, Class Ten

1) When three different types of being look at the same object, they see three different objects. Are each of them having a valid perception, or not?

They are all having a valid perception, given their karmic circumstances.

2) The *Abbreviation of the Greater Way* says that "each being, according to their class, has differing perceptions of a single thing," and that therefore "we can say that these things have no reality." Does this mean then that we should never consider anything one way or the other? Why or why not?

As the text of the *Overview of the Middle Way* points out, we cannot draw this conclusion. This is because, for example, certain systems of spiritual teaching do give definite results, whereas others do not.

3) The Mind-Only School has asserted that there are things that can exist from their own side, through some unique identity of their own. The Independent part of the Middle-Way School has asserted that the perception of things depends on their appearing from their own side to a state of mind which, from its side, is unerring. How does the Consequence part of the Middle-Way School assert that things exist? (Tibetan track answer in Tibetan.)

They say that things exist only as projections, from our side

རྫོག་པས་པར་བཏགས་ཅོམ།

tokpe par taktsam

4) What does Je Tsongkapa say his own position in this regard is? (Tibetan track in Tibetan.)

At the end of his text on the art of interpretation, he openly declares that he follows the teaching of the Consequence group of the Middle-Way School: "Who on earth who understood these things would fail to take the system of the realized being Nagarjuna as their own?"

ལཱ་ལྷན་ལུགས་བཟང་གཙོ་བོར་མི་འཇིན་སུ།

ludrup luksang tsowor mindzin su

5) When we say that things are only projections, does that mean that we can make anything anything we want it to be?

No it does not, because we only have those projections that are forced upon us by our karma.

6) Does the fact that things are only projections mean that leading an ethical way of life is unimportant?

No, it becomes more important, because our projections are forced on us by our past deeds, good or bad. Someone who really understands emptiness immediately understands that it is absolutely essential to lead an ethical life.

7) Why does the Consequence presentation of the meaning of emptiness have especially important implications for our own search for enlightenment?

Given that things are creations of our projections forced on us by our past karma, then we can—by leading an extraordinarily virtuous way of life—actually put an end to the projections of aging and death, become a tantric angel, and enter a tantric paradise in this very life.

8) The *Heart Sutra* says that the real goal of Buddhism is to "stop the process of aging and death" through "stopping our ignorance." Is this a literal or a figurative statement? If it is literal, then why have we not seen any person who stopped the process of aging and death?

It is literal, and we have not seen these people because we are like the human who sees the cup of liquid as water: we do not yet have sufficient good karma to see someone else achieving this goal.