

The Sevenfold Reasoning

Chandrakirti · Chandrakirti

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The Sevenfold Reasoning Chandrakirti

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One of the principal texts used in the study of Madhyamika philosophy in Tibetan Buddhism is Chandrakirti's Madhyamakavatara, the Supplement to (Nagarjuna's) "Treatise on the Middle Way". Chandrakirti represents the Prasangika-Madhyamika school as opposed to the Svatantrika-Madhyamika school of Bhavaviveka, Santiraksita and so on. In the Gelukpa presentation of Sutra and Tantra, Prasangika philosophy is the highest system, i.e., the correct system, of explaining the phenomena of the world and the way in which they exist. The viewpoint of the Prasangika system is thus the basis for practice in both the Vehicle of the Perfections* and the Vehicle of the Secret Mantra*, the one following the Buddha's Sutra teachings and the other following his Tantric teachings.

The main body of the Supplement is divided into ten chapters, each chapter dealing with one of the ten Bodhisattva stages. Each of these stages has a particular perfection* associated with it. Thus, the first chapter deals with the actions and concerns of a Bodhisattva from the time he begins to practice, through his actual entry into the path of the Great Vehicle* and up to and including his attainment of the first Bodhisattva ground* and the perfection emphasized at that time, giving.

The sixth chapter describes the perfection of wisdom and is by far the longest in the Supplement, consisting of two hundred and twenty-six verses. Forty-seven of those verses (verses 120 through 167) deal directly with the method of meditation which will be described here.

Because this paper is a somewhat more modest undertaking than that which would be required for a treatment of so large a portion of text, I intend to confine myself mainly to an explanation of Chandrakirti's presentation of the Sevenfold Reasoning* found in the Clear Exposition of the Presentation of Tenets, a Beautiful Ornament for the Meru of the Subduer's Teaching of Jang-gya (Icang skya hu thog thu ye shes bstan pa'i sgron me, 1717-1786) along with an explanation of the context of the Sevenfold Reasoning in Buddhist philosophy as a whole. The Presentation of Tenets is a moderately detailed, systematic exposition of the tenets of the Buddhist and non-Buddhist philosophical schools of India as they are preserved

in Tibetan religious culture.

Jang-gya's presentation of the Sevenfold Reasoning is clear and concise, as is the rest of his chapter on the system of the Prasangika-Madhyamika. He first outlines the sources of this form of reasoning in Sutra and in Nagarjuna's Fundamental Stanzas on the Middle Way Called "Wisdom" (prajna-nama-mula-madhyamaka-karika). Then he presents the Sevenfold Analysis as it is stated when the analogue of a chariot and its parts is used to exemplify a person* and his aggregates*. Having done that, he states the reasonings as they apply to a person. He closes with the explanation of the way in which a person, though completely without inherent existence, is still nominally existent.

L1: [The Place of Meditation on Emptiness in Buddhist Practice]

It will be of benefit to establish the context within which the Sevenfold Reasoning functions before going on to a description of it. This meditation is designed as a means of liberation from cyclic existence and although it can be used as a basis for debate or philosophical dialectic, this is not the way in which it is supposed to function within the framework of Madhyamika. It is noteworthy that Jang-gya feels called upon to comment on the proper role of reasoning:²

In particular, these statements of the many forms of reasonings which come to a conclusion about reality were made for the sake of clarifying the path of liberation for the fortunate. They were not made for the sake of those who are intent on debate.

Buddhapalita's [commentary on Nagarjuna's Treatise on the Middle Way says],

~ "What purpose is there in teaching dependent-arising*?
~ I will explain. The Teacher whose nature is composition [i.e., Nagarjuna] saw that sentient beings are tormented by various sufferings. In order to liberate them from their sufferings he accepted the task of teaching the reality of phenomena just as they are. Therefore he began the teaching of dependent-arising."

[Chandrakirti's] Supplement says [VI: 118ab],³

~ "[He] taught investigations in the Treatise [on the Middle Way] not out of attachment of disputation but for liberation; they are teachings of reality."

~ 161.
~ The analyzes in the treatises were not composed out of attachment to debate;
~ Rather thatness is revealed for the sake of liberation.
~ If in correctly explaining thatness, the works of others are discredited,
~ There is no fault.

The Great Being [Tsong Khapa] taught,

~ "Every one of these investigations through reasoning which were set forth in the Treatise on the Middle Way were done so merely so that sentient beings might obtain emancipation".

Chandrakirti says in the first verse of the first chapter of his Supplement.⁴

~ Hearers* and middling realizers of suchness are born from the Kings of Subduers [i.e., from Buddhas].

- ~ Buddhas are born from Bodhisattvas.
- ~ A compassionate mind, non-dual understanding* and the altruistic mind of enlightenment* are the causes of Sons of Conquerors [i.e., Bodhisattvas].

~ [I.1]

~ 1.

~ Hearers and Middling Buddhas [i.e. Solitary Realizers] are born from the Powerful Able Ones;

~ Buddhas are born from Bodhisattvas;

~ And the mind of compassion, the wisdom of non-duality,

~ And Bodhicitta are the [three] causes of Conquerors Sons.

Buddhas are the causes of Hearers and Solitary Realizers because it is from Buddhas that they acquire the teachings, principally of dependent-arising, which enable them to attain their respective paths. Buddhas are born from Bodhisattvas because the Bodhisattva path leads to Buddhahood. What then are the causes of a Bodhisattva?

A compassionate mind is a mind that perceives sentient beings suffering and desires to spare them that suffering. This kind of mind can induce an altruistic mind of enlightenment, a mind that not only perceives sentient beings suffering and pities them but promises to bring about the end of that suffering through the attainment of highest enlightenment. The altruistic mind of enlightenment is the thought, "May I attain complete perfect Buddhahood so that I will be able to rescue all sentient beings from the sufferings of cyclic existence*."

A non-dual understanding is a wisdom* consciousness that is free of the two extremes of permanence and annihilation. A wisdom consciousness is a discriminative mind; discriminative means that it can apply standards, such as the Sevenfold Reasoning, and select correct perceptions from incorrect perceptions.

The view of the extreme of permanence is

- 1) the intellectually acquired idea that phenomena exist as they are perceived in normal perception, that is as concrete entities which are inherently there, and
- 2) the innate conception that phenomena exist in this way.

Both of these are affirmative reactions to the false appearance itself of phenomena as concrete, inherently existent entities.

The view of the extreme of nihilism is the idea that phenomena are without a mode of existence that they do possess; in Prasangika, although no phenomenon is inherently existent, all phenomena exist conventionally as nominalities or designations — all phenomena are dependent-arisings.

Chandrakirti makes it clear that "non-dual" here means lacking the two extremes as explained above and does not mean cognizing the absence of the duality which is a difference of entity of subject and object.⁵ Although a non-dual wisdom such as the latter is the goal of meditation, on emptiness* in the Cittamatra system of tenets and is a rough form of the wisdom which realizes emptiness in Yogacara-Svatantrika-Madhyamika, there is no wisdom consciousness which realizes an emptiness of this kind of non-duality in Prasangika. Non-duality in this system either refers to the non-existence of the extremes of permanence and annihilation or the non-appearance of a cognizing subject and its object during a direct perception* of emptiness. Such a non-appearance does not entail non-existence.

It is necessary for a yogi to do some meditation and develop a compassionate mind before he can generate an altruistic mind of enlightenment. A mind of enlightenment is the desire to put into practice those things that will bring about the end of suffering for all migrating beings and, subsequent to that desire and its concomitant vow, the actual practice of the meditations and various modes of conduct that will result in the ability to do so.

Besides being a cause of the altruistic mind of enlightenment, compassion* also paves the way for and sustains non-dual wisdom. The generation and development of non-dual wisdom is entailed in the practice of the sixth of the six perfections. The six perfections are among the practices which a Bodhisattva does in order to attain the ability to free sentient beings from their suffering. Thus, compassion provides motivation for the practice of meditations that will bring about the wisdom which cognizes emptiness.

Furthermore Chandrakirti delineates three forms of compassion in his Supplement (I: 3-4):6 compassion which observes suffering sentient beings alone; compassion which observes phenomena; and compassion which observes the unapprehendable.

- ~ I.3
- ~ 3.
- ~ I bow down to that compassion for living beings
- ~ Who from first conceiving 'I' with respect to the self,
- ~ Then thinking 'This is mine' and generating attachment for things,
- ~ Are without self-control like the spinning of a wheel.
- ~ I.4
- ~ 4ab.
- ~ Living beings are seen to be transient and empty of inherent existence,
- ~ Like a moon in rippling water.

-- The first kind of compassion has as its object all sentient beings. Its aspect is the wish to free all sentient beings from suffering. Aspect* is a very broad term but here means the attitude taken by the mind towards its object or the mode of operation of the mind towards its object. Compassion observing sentient beings, in its strongest form, would be based on the understanding of the reasons behind migrators' sufferings and their powerless rebirth over and over again in cyclic existence. These reasons will be discussed later. Here it is only necessary to note that they involve understanding the mechanism of the conception of inherent existence* but do not require that the yogi have had meditative experience of the emptiness of inherent existence.

-- The second kind of compassion outlined by Chandrakirti, compassion which observes phenomena, has the same aspect as before but its object is different. Tsong Khapa, in his commentary on the Supplement, the Illumination of the Thought (dgongs pa rob gsal) comments:7

~ The compassion which apprehends phenomena does not apprehend sentient beings alone; it apprehends sentient beings who disintegrate momentarily. Therefore, its objects are sentient beings qualified by momentary impermanence. When [a yogi] has certainty that sentient beings are disintegrating momentarily, he has refuted within his mind that there is a permanent, partless and independent sentient being. Due to that he can have certainty that there is no sentient being who is a different entity from [his mental and physical] aggregates.

~ At this point he understands that sentient beings are imputed to merely the collection of their aggregates. Therefore, since his object comes to be sentient beings who are imputed merely to the phenomena of their aggregates and so forth, "[compassion] apprehending phenomena" is spoken of.

~ Impermanent sentient beings are merely an illustration. "Observing phenomena" can refer also to the observation of sentient beings who are without existence as self-sufficient or substantial entities*.

Chandrakirti himself went no further than to say "migrators upon whom falls the suffering of impermanence in each and every moment."⁸ Note, however, that Tsong Khapa merely says that it is from the realization of impermanence of sentient beings that the rest is entailed. The first entailment, that there is no permanent, partless and independent sentient being, is not one of the principal realizations in Prasangika-Madhyamika; such a sentient being is a philosophical imposition rather than being a self of which there is an innate conception*. (These terms will be discussed later).

The conception of a self-sufficient or substantially existing person, however, does have an innate form. For Prasangikas it is the coarser form of the obstructions to liberation from cyclic existence*. For the Svatantrika-Madhyamikas and all other Buddhist tenet systems the negation of self-sufficient existence alone is enough to insure liberation from cyclic existence; thus, for them the conception of self-sufficient or substantial existence is the subtle form of the obstructions to liberation.⁹

-- The third kind of compassion is that which observes the unapprehendable. The unapprehendable, Chandrakirti explains, are emptinesses of inherent existence.¹⁰ Therefore, the objects of this form of compassion are sentient beings qualified by emptiness or, as Tsong Khapa glosses it, by non-true existence.¹¹ (In Buddhist philosophy, 'non-true existence' means not truly existent or empty of true existence; it is not some special kind of existence which is a subsistence of what does not exist.)

The important point here is that while all three types of compassion have the same aspect, the desire to liberate all sentient beings from the burden of their sufferings, the objects in the cases of the second and third varieties are qualified by modes of existence that require a degree of meditative investigation into reality. In order to be able to generate the third form of compassion it is necessary to have some experience with the production of non-dual wisdom.

It was explained above that for a yogi to generate an altruistic mind of enlightenment and then put into action the practices necessary to attain a position where he would have the ability to aid sentient beings involves the practice of the sixth perfection, that of wisdom. Even if the yogi is a practitioner of Tantra, he must generate a mind of enlightenment. In his Great Exposition of the Stages of the Path Tsong Khapa says:¹²

~ The Conqueror [Buddha] spoke of two Great Vehicles (Mahayana), the Great Vehicle of the Perfections and that of the Secret Mantra. There is no Great Vehicle apart from those. Into whichever one of these two you enter, the only portal is an altruistic mind of enlightenment. When you have produced that in your continuum, even were you to produce nothing else, you would still be called a person of the Great Vehicle. And when you lack it, no matter what good qualities you have, such as cognition of emptiness for instance, you will fall to the levels of the Hearers and their like.

Furthermore, without a non-dual wisdom which cognizes emptiness a yogi would be unable to practice correctly the stage of completion* of the Highest Yoga* class of Tantras and would thus be unable to accomplish the accumulation of wisdom* which when fully developed becomes a Buddha's Truth Body*. Tsay-chok-ling Ye-shay-gyel-tsen (tshe mchog gling ye shes rgyal mtshan, 1713-1793), the tutor of the eighth Dalai Lama, says:13

~ It is said that this profound view of the middle way [i.e., emptiness] is the life of both the Sutra and Tantra paths; it is also said, particularly with respect to Highest Secret Mantra [i.e., the Highest Yoga Tantra] that there is no chance of having an actual path of Mantra without this view.

Thus both non-dual wisdom and an altruistic mind of enlightenment are necessary even in Tantra.

There are many other ways of explaining the relationship between meditation on emptiness, meditating compassion and the generation of a mind of enlightenment. For instance, Tsong Khapa in his Three Principal Aspects of the Path presents the generation of an altruistic mind of enlightenment and meditation on emptiness as the second and third members of the triad of principal practices. Compassion he does not explicitly treat but it may be inferred, as does his commentator Lo-sang bel-den-den-bay-nyi-ma (blo bzang dpal Idan bstan pa'i nyi ma, the fourth Panchen Lama, 1781-1854), that it is a precursor to the attainment of a mind of enlightenment. In his commentary the generation of a mind of enlightenment is explained following the sevenfold precepts of cause and effect* of the Indian Buddhist philosopher and yogi of the eleventh century C.E., Atisa.¹⁴ In Atisa's system the fifth step in the generation of an altruistic mind of enlightenment is that of great compassion. The remaining aspect of the three aspects enumerated by Tsong Khapa is renunciation. It is a prelude to both of the other two.

Tsong Khapa says in his Three Principal Aspects of the Path:15

- ~ If you do not have the wisdom
- ~ Which cognizes the way things are,
- ~ Even if you have cultivated renunciation
- ~ And an altruistic mind of enlightenment
- ~ You-cannot sever the root of cyclic existence.
- ~ Therefore, make effort in the means
- ~ Of realizing dependent arising.

Aryadeva says:16

- ~ When selflessness is seen in objects,
- ~ The seeds of cyclic existence are destroyed.

Thus the yogi must practice meditation which develop his non-dual wisdom. If he has generated an altruistic mind of enlightenment but balks at meditating on emptiness, then his dedication of himself to relieve all sentient beings of their sufferings is merely words. If he cannot liberate himself from cyclic existence, how can he have the ability to liberate countless numbers of sentient beings?

This has been a broad overview of the manner in which meditation on emptiness fits into the philosophy and practices of a Buddhist yogi according to Chandrakirti and other Prasangika-Madhyamika philosophers. Let us now narrow our focus and examine the way in which a yogi would begin to meditate on the emptiness of true existence of persons using the

Sevenfold Reasoning. It will be helpful to discuss first the structural framework which explains the manner in which phenomena and, in particular, persons are conceived to exist inherently.

L1: [The Object of Negation: The Conception of a Self]

Chandrakirti introduces his presentation of the Sevenfold Reasoning with the following verse [VI: 120]:17

- ~ [A yogi] sees in his mind that the afflictions* and
- ~ the faults
- ~ Arise from the false view of a transitory
- ~ collection*.
- ~ Having understood that the object of this is self*,
- ~ He negates self.

Tsong Khapa in his commentary on the Supplement, the Illumination of the Thought, comments:18

- ~ A yogi, desiring to engage in reality, desiring to remove all the faults which are the afflictions, now analyzes thinking, "What is the root of this wandering in cyclic existence?" When he has analyzed thus he will see in his mind that the afflictions of desire [hatred, confusion and so on] and the faults of birth, aging, sickness and death arise without exception from the false view of a transitory collection. The false view of a transitory collection is an afflicted knowledge in the form of the thoughts "I" and "mine", conceiving these two to be inherently existent. [The afflictions and the faults] are results of the false view of a transitory collection.

The thrust of this passage is that the sufferings of cyclic existence and the afflictions through whose activity more suffering is induced are the results of the false view of a transitory collection. If this can be destroyed, then the yogi can attain liberation from cyclic existence. What then is the false view of a transitory collection and what is wrong with it — why does it inevitably lead to suffering and the afflictions?

In order to explain this, it is first necessary to explain a little about self. Chandrakirti said:19

- ~ Having understood that the object of this is self, the yogi negates self.

'Self in the first line means the nominally existent person, the so called mere-I. This self is a phenomenon that exists conventionally. It is the object of observation of the false view of a transitory collection. The false view of a transitory collection errs in conceiving this mere-I to be an inherently existent I, or inherently existent person. This inherently existent person is the self in the second line of the above quotation. It does not exist either ultimately or conventionally and it is the object to be negated* when the yogi meditates on an emptiness of a person. The emptiness of a person is a person's lack of inherent existence.

That the self which is the object of observation of the false view of a transitory collection is existent and is not an object to be negated is made clear by Tsong Khapa:20

- ~ At that time [a yogi] desiring to destroy all faults should destroy their root, the

false view of a transitory collection. These will be destroyed, moreover, through understanding the nonexistence of a self, that is [the non-existence of] a natural existence of the self which is the object of that [false view of a transitory collection].

Thus, it is important to know that self in Buddhism has two disparate meanings. In some instances it means inherent existence, natural existence or self-sufficient existence — none of which are existent in any way whatsoever, even conventionally. They are completely incorrect. Chandrakirti, in his Commentary on (Aryadeva's) "Four Hundred Stanzas on the Yogic Deeds of a Bodhisattva", defines the term:²¹

~ Here, 'self is an inherence or nature of phenomena, i.e., a non-dependence on anything else. The non-existence of this [inherence] is selflessness.

Jang-gya glosses this as meaning that the mode of innate* conception of self is that the phenomenon to which a self is falsely attributed is conceived to exist objectively through its own nature without being posited there by the power of thought. His definition of this sense of self, therefore, is objective existence*, i.e., existence in the object through its own nature. This kind of conception of existence carries with it the feeling of an independence of the object from the subject, a feeling of an object which is not merely imputed there by thought. Examples of such a usage of 'self are the terms 'conception of a self*' and 'selflessness'.

At other times, 'self can mean the person or I. As these terms are technically used in Prasangika philosophy they refer to the conventionally existent person which does have existence as a mere nominally imputed to the collection of the five mental and physical aggregates. Such a self cannot be found when searched for with an ultimate analysis and thus has no ultimate existence, as is the case with any phenomenon in the Prasangika system. Ultimate analysis is a search to find a phenomenon which really exists in the way in which the world conceives it to exist. Therefore, this nominally existent self, although it is existent, is not existent in any way that corresponds to the normal perceptions of the world. Examples of such a usage of 'self are 'self which accumulates actions*' and 'emptiness of inherent existence of a self.'

Here is a brief summary of the different meanings of self and related terms. (§ indicates a reconstruction of the Sanskrit from the Tibetan).

The terms within each group in the right-hand column are mutually inclusive of each other. For example, person, I and mere-I are equivalents. The terms in the left-hand column, on the other hand, are broader than their "synonyms" on the right: every instance of existence as a self-sufficient or substantial entity is an instance of self but every instance of self is not an instance of existence as a self-sufficient or substantial entity.

The type I self, the mere-I, is the person as it actually is and as it should be apprehended. This self is a conventionally existent I which is imputed to the five aggregates which are its particular bases of imputation*. It is the so-called "base which is empty", the foundation of the negation* of inherent existence; inherent existence itself is the object of negation*.

Tsong Khapa explains the position of this self in the context of meditation on emptiness as follows:²⁵

~ In the beginning the yogi analyzes only the self: "Is this so-called self which is the object of the conception of a self existent by way of its own entity or not?"

~ A yogi, through negating the self which is inherent existence, destroys the false view of a transitory collection. This done he has turned away from all faults.

Self in the term 'conception of a self is an incorrectly imposed mode of existence which does not exist in reality. The self which is the observed object of the conception of a self, however, is an existent phenomenon. This latter self is technically the basis of analysis in meditation on emptiness. The analysis of which it is the basis is an inquiry into whether or not the existent self does or does not exist as an inherently existent phenomenon, that is, as a self of the former type (type II in the table). The type n self, inherent existence, is not the basis of analysis because if it were the Yogi would be analyzing whether inherent existence inherently exists or not.

The mere-I is an existent phenomenon. The selves of types n (inherent existence), in (self-sufficiency), and IV (permanent, partless independence) are not. They are classified not as phenomenon but as nonexistent imaginaries*. 'Mere' in the term 'mere-I' eliminates the false imposition of a type n, m or IV self as the mode of existence of this I. The mere-I is an I qualified as being non-inherently existent.

The type II self, inherent existence, is the referent object* of a subtle conception of a self in the Prasangika system. A suitable conception of a self is so named because it is a strong, difficult to remove conception. It conceives a person, for instance — its object of observation* — to be inherently existent; the inherently existent person is its referent object. An object of observation is nominally existent. The referent object of a false conception of a self has no existence whatsoever.

The type III self (self-sufficient or substantial existence) is the referent object of a coarse conception of a self of persons in Prasangika. Conceiving a person to be a self-sufficient or substantial entity is conceiving it as having a different character from the aggregates which are its bases of imputation. It is seen as in control of and not dependent on the aggregates. The example used is that of a head salesman and the other salesmen who are under him. Just as the head salesman and his subordinates are all salesmen, so; a self-sufficient or substantially existent self is not innately conceived to be a different entity from its aggregates. Such a conception of difference of entity is only intellectually acquired.²⁶ A self-sufficient or substantially existent self is a self that is substantially existent, which is to say, self-sufficient; the "or" shows a qualifying opposition.

The type IV self (permanent, partless and independent) is the referent object of the coarsest conception of a self of persons in the Prasangika system. It corresponds to the self as postulated by non-Buddhist systems such as Vedanta.

The mine, type V in the table, can be divided into two varieties. The mine which are of the subject's own continuum — are the objects of observation of the false view of a transitory collection which conceives mine. The mine of the continuums of persons other than the subject are objects of observation of the conception of a self of phenomena external to the continuum of the subject. The latter mine does not have the importance of the former nor is it as central a subject of discussion in the literature of emptiness as is the former. For, the false view of a transitory collection is the principal fetter obstructing liberation from cyclic existence.

The nature of the mine is a subject of much controversy. Chandrakirti, in his Clear Words (a commentary on Nagarjuna's Fundamental Text Called "Wisdom"), and Tsong Khapa, in his Ocean

of Reasoning (a commentary on Nagarjuna's Fundamental Text Called "Wisdom" following Chandrakirti's commentary), define mine as the phenomena of the subject's own five aggregates. Chandrakirti says,²⁷

~ That which pertains to the self is the mine; the term refers to one's own five aggregates.

~ The [conventionally existed] self is the object of the conception of an I. The mine, the aggregates and so on, are the objects of the conception of mine. Due to the pacification, i.e., the non-arising or non-observation, of the true existence [of the I and mine] the yogi annihilates the conception of an I and the conception of mine.

Tsong Khapa says, commenting on the same verse [XVIII: 2cd]:²⁸

~ ... [because of] the pacification of the true existence of the self, i.e., the person who is the object of the conception of an I, and of the true existence of mine, i.e., the aggregates which are the objects of the conception of mine.

Nga-wang-ben-den (ngag dbang dpal Idan, b.1797), in his Annotations for [Jam-yang-shay-ba's ('jam dbyangs bzhadpa)] "Great Exposition of Tenets", adduces many more examples of this definition of mine from the Clear Words, the Supplement, Chandrakirti's Autocommentary on the Supplement and Tsong Khapa's commentaries on both the Fundamental Text Called "Wisdom" and the Supplement.²⁹

Many of these quotations treat mine only tangentially. Many, for example, do not have as their main topic the I and mine themselves but rather the destruction of the false view of a transitory collection or the relationship between the cognition of the emptiness of true existence of an I and the cognition of the emptiness of true existence of mine.

In at least two places, however, Tsong Khapa gives explicit explanations of mine. In his Illumination of the Thought he says,³⁰

~ The object of apprehension of an innate false view of a transitory collection which, conceives mine is just mine: do not hold that one's own eyes and so forth are its.

~ The aspect [of the innate false view of a transitory collection] is the observation of that object and the conception that the mine is naturally existent.

~ Now [a qualm might arise as follows]: [Chandrakirti, in his] Autocommentary to [the line of the Supplement beginning] "This is mine", [1: 3b],³¹ says: "This is the apprehension of any phenomenon other than the object of the conception of an I; [this apprehension] thinks "This is mine." Apprehending a base such as an eye, there is the conception, "This is mine." This conception is explained to be the conception of mine. How is this so?

~ The meaning of this is that having seen an eye, example, to be mine, there is a conception that this mine is truly existent. However, this is not a teaching that [something which is] an example of mine is an object [of the conception of mine].

The crucial phrase here is "Having seen an eye, for example, to be mine." Tsong Khapa is saying that an eye, while it is a base which can be characterized as being mine, is not always characterized as being mine.

This accords with the oral tradition explanation of the false view of a transitory collection which conceives mine. This explanation may be paraphrased as follows:³²

~ First [the subject] observes [his own] I and conceives it to be naturally existent. Then, observing the eyes, ears and so forth, he generates the thought "mine". Observing that mine, he conceives it to be naturally existent. This is the false view of a transitory collection which, conceives mine.

~ However, all instances of the false view of a transitory collection are necessarily instances of the conception of a self of persons. This is because the import of the apprehension of mine is apprehension of an I, since the apprehension of mine must be associated with the apprehension of an I.

Tsong Khapa explains in his Ocean of Reasoning?³

~ The [conventionally existent] I is the base which generates the thought "I." There is a consciousness observing it which as its aspect conceives [the conventionally existent I] to exist naturally. This is both an innate false view of a transitory collection which conceives of an I and a consciousness which is ignorant with respect to a self of persons.

There is a consciousness observing the [conventionally existent] mine which as its aspect conceives [the conventionally existent mine] to exist naturally. This is both an innate consciousness which is a false view of a transitory collection conceiving mine and a consciousness which, is ignorant with respect to the mine of a person.

The consciousness which observes the bases of mine, the eyes and so forth, and conceives them in this way [i.e., as naturally existent] is a conception of a self of phenomena other than persons. Therefore, the apprehension of mine is not an apprehension of those [phenomena].

Jam-yang-shay-ba uses the first two paragraphs of this passage as support for his assertion of a mine which is a person who makes his mental and physical aggregates into possessions.³⁴ The aggregates, exemplified as "the eyes and so forth," are the bases of designation of the mine imputed to them. This mine is not a different entity from the person; it is the person considered from a different point of view — as the maker into mine or the possessor.

Jam-yang-shay-ba's commentator, Nga-wang-ben-den, quotes the final paragraph of the passage from Tsong Khapa's Ocean of Reasoning in support of his assertion that mine refers to the phenomena of the subject's own continuum, his aggregates, his former and future lives and so on. For him, the "consciousness which observes the bases of mine" and is a conception of a self of phenomena other than persons is an apprehender of the eyes and so forth of any continuum. Rather than asserting that a mine is necessarily a person as does Jam-yang-shay-ba, he merely restricts the spectrum of suitable objects to those of the subject's own continuum.³⁵

These views fall into either the theory that mine are phenomena specified or qualified as the possessions of a person or the theory that mine is the entity which does the specifying. Another view is the assertion of Jay-tsun-pa (Rje-btsun-pa), the textbook writer for the Chay (Byes) college of Sera monastery, that mine is a third category apart from both persons and phenomena other than persons.³⁶

The two conceptions of a self — types VI, VII in the table — and the conception of mine (type VIE) are mental consciousnesses which are mistaken about the actual mode of existence of persons and other phenomena. They conceive what is not inherently existent to be inherently existent. There are, however, conceptions of I and mine which are not misconceptions. These are the correct conceptions of I and mine and are sometimes called by

the same names as those motivated by ignorance.

In normal perception these valid cognitions are invariably found mixed with the after-effects of ignorance which cause objects to appear as if inherently existent. This is one of the unique features of Tsong Khapa's presentation of Madhyamika; he seeks to preserve the valid cognition of conventional phenomena. It should be kept in mind, however, that valid cognition of phenomena in ordinary worldly perception does not produce knowledge about their actual mode of existence.

Therefore, since our concern here is with the mechanism of the incorrect conception of reality and the means to correct that misconception, when these terms are used here they will refer to these false conceptions.

The English term 'conception of a self' is actually only an approximation of bdag-tu-'dzin-pa (Skt.: dtmagrdha). A "conception of a self" is more strictly a conceiver of a self: it is a mental consciousness whose function is to conceive a self. 'Conception' in the strict sense of the word is the process in which a phenomenon is conceived. Moreover, a conception of inherent existence may be broken into four parts, only one of which is the conceiver. The other three parts are the so called objects of the conception: the object of observation*, the referent object* and the appearing object*.

It has already been explained that the referent object of a conception of inherent existence is an inherently existent phenomenon and that this referent object does not exist. An inherently existent phenomenon seems to exist because an image of it appears to a conceiver of inherent existence. Although this appearing object seems to have its locus in the external world, it is an internal generic image. It exists itself, but the object to which it refers, an inherently existent phenomenon, has no existence. The object of observation is a conventionally existent phenomenon. It is not known by a conceiver of inherent existence except in the sense that the referent object corresponds to this phenomenon in so far as it is imagined to be inherently existent.

The type VI conception of a self — the conception of true existence — is the conception of either persons or phenomenon other than persons as having a mode of existence that they do not have in reality. 'Self' here means a self of type n, m or IV. This self is the referent object of the type VI conception of a self. Its objects of observation are the type I self — the mere-I — and conventionally existent phenomena.

The type VII conception of a self, the conception of an I, has two varieties. The conception of a self of the person which is of the subject's own continuum is the false view of a transitory collection which conceives of an I. The conception of a self of persons who are of continuum other than the subject's continuum is not a part of the false view of a transitory collection. The type VII conception of a self is usually called the conception of an I. 'Conception of a self' almost always refers to that of type VI in the table, the conception of true existence. Furthermore, the term 'conception of an I' almost always refers to the conception of an I which is one of the two types of the false view of a transitory collection.

The conception of mine (type VIII in the table) has two divisions in exactly the same manner as the conception of an I. In the same way, the term 'conception of mine' usually refers to the conception of mine which are the subject's own continuum.

The false view of a transitory collection corresponds to the conceptions of I and mine, with

the proviso that these are the subject's own I and mine. The "I" in the term 'conception of an I' is the mere-I discussed previously. The false view of a transitory collection takes the mere-I of that same person's continuum and conceives it to be a truly existent I. Likewise, it takes the phenomena of that same person's continuum, the parts of the body, consciousnesses, mental factors and so on, which have been qualified or specified as mine, and conceives them to be truly existent mine. Or, following the other view, it takes the mine which is the possessor of these phenomena and conceives it to be a truly existent mine. The mere-I and the mine are the objects of observation of the false view of a transitory collection. The truly existent person and the truly existent mine are its referent objects.

'False view of a transitory collection' translates the Tibetan term 'jig-tshogs-la-lta-ba which is in turn a translation of the Sanskrit original *satkayad sti*. The Tibetan literally reads "view of what is a collection and is disintegrating". *Satkaya* comes from the verbal *sad* which is from the root *Qsad*, to perish, plus *kaya*, corpus, collection.³⁷ The *sat* is not from the verbal root *Qas* (to be) which has *sat* as its present participle meaning being or existent. Contemporary Sanskritists, however, appear to build the word from the *sat* of *Qas*.³⁸

The "disintegrating collection" is the collection of mental and physical aggregates. If the object of observation of the false view of a transitory collection is the mere-I, why is it called a view of the aggregates?

Nagarjuna says in his Precious Garland of Advice for the King:³⁹

- ~ As long as a conception of the aggregate exists,
- ~ So long therefore does a conception of I exist.
- ~ Further, when the conception of I exists,
- ~ There is action; from that further there is birth.

Again, from that same text,⁴⁰

- ~ Just as without depending on a mirror
- ~ An image of one's face Is not seen, so also [there is no]
- ~ I Which does not depend on the aggregates.

Although the actual object of a false view of a transitory collection is the mere-I, this object will not appear unless the aggregates appear first. The mere-I, as mentioned previously, exists as an imputation to the five aggregates. If the five aggregates do not appear, then neither can it. Moreover, unless the five aggregates are conceived to exist truly the false view of a transitory collection does not come into being. Thus, Tsong Khapa explains that a conception of a self of phenomena other than persons is a cause of the conception of I and Mine.⁴¹

Since, as was seen above, the false view of a transitory collection is the root of cyclic existence, how is it proper for it to have a cause itself? Would not this cause then be the root of cyclic existence? Tsong Khapa's answer is that although the conception of a self of phenomena other than persons and the false view of a transitory collection have different objects, the way in which they conceive these objects to be truly existent is the same.⁴² It is not the object of observation but rather the conception itself that is the causal factor in bringing about rebirth and suffering.

The modes of existence of persons and of other phenomena are asserted to be exactly the same. A person is any sentient being: the yogi himself, other human beings, animals, bugs

and so on. Phenomena, as the term is used in the expression 'conception of a self of phenomena,' includes all phenomena which are not persons; plants, rocks, houses, chariots, space, emptinesses and all instances of the five mental and physical aggregates save one. (The exception is the person, the mere-I, which is considered to be an aggregate in the division of compositional factors*. Generally speaking, all impermanent phenomena in the universe are included within the five aggregates.)

Therefore, in Prasangika, both persons and all other phenomena are empty of inherent existence. Persons, however, also lack existence as self-sufficient or substantial entities and as permanent, partless and independent selves. Phenomena other than persons are not meditated upon as being empty of these modes of existence for the simple reason that there is no innate conception of either of these two in phenomena other than persons. Indeed, in Prasangika, there is no innate conception of persons' existence as permanent, partless and independent.

The following tables will clarify the relationship between the various modes of the conception of a self.

(The innate conception of an I, the innate conception of mine and the innate conception of a self of internal phenomena are the principal fetters which bind a sentient being in cyclic existence.)

These tables follow Jang-gya's system of explaining the different modes of conception of a self. There is debate on some aspects of this. Jay-tsun-pa, for instance, makes the initial division threefold; in addition to a conception of a self of persons and a conception of a self of phenomena other than persons there is a conception of a self of mine.⁴³

Jam-yang-shay-ba (jam dbyangs bzhadpa), the textbook writer for the Go-mang (sgo mang) college of Dre-bung monastery argues that mine is not what is possessed but is the possessor. Thus, the object of the conception of mine is a type of person: this type of person is the same entity as the person who is the object of the conception of an I.⁴⁴

Note that on the above charts all the modes of the conception of a self except one have two forms: innate* and artificial. The explanation of the false view of a transitory collection has been of its innate form. The innate conception of a self is a habitual affirmation of the way in which phenomena appear. In Prasangika-Madhyamika, phenomena are not just conceived to exist truly, they also appear to do so.

The obstructions which must be gotten rid of in order to attain Buddhahood are divided into two types, the obstructions of the afflictions*, or obstructions to liberation, and the obstructions to omniscience*. The obstructions to liberation are the conceptions of a self of both persons and phenomena. The obstructions to omniscience are mainly the predispositions established by the conception of true existence which cause phenomena to appear from their own side as if they were truly existent. In Prasangika the error involved in the conception of a self is not merely a gratuitous error on the part of the perceiving subject, it is a mistake made in response to the way in which the object appears due to the subject's previous conditioning.

Artificial conceptions of a self are based on intellectually acquired theories about the nature of phenomena. The conception of a person as permanent, partless and independent being is an artificial conception that might rise, for example, from the study of Vedanta. Artificial conceptions of a self are not limited to philosophers, however. They may

masquerade as common sense; common sense is usually nothing more than culturally acquired values which only seem to be universal.

An example of an artificial form of the false view of a transitory collection is the conception of an inherently existent person who has no relationship with his mental and physical aggregates. The false view of a transitory collection, whether it be innate or artificial, cannot apprehend its object, the mere-I or the mine, without the prior appearance of the aggregates. The innate form affirms this appearance and conceives of a self or mine which is associated in some way with the aggregates. Jang-gya states it succinctly:⁴⁵

~ [This is] the way in which an innate conceiver of true existence conceives the person to be naturally existent in the aggregates. It does not conceive [the person thus] after having analyzed whether [the person] is the same as or different from [the aggregates]. It conceives the person thus] through the power of ordinary habituation without any reason at all. The mode of conception which [conceives them to be] one [entity] or different [entities] does not exist in an innate mind.

It should be noted that in Tsong Khapa's system of explaining the operation of the mind, an innate mind is not necessarily a mind which conceives a self. There is an innate mind which is a valid cognizer and is often present in correct perception but is not valid with respect to the mode of existence of phenomena. It therefore is not a correct perception which can act as direct aid to liberation from cyclic existence.

It was explained above that in Prasangika both persons and other phenomena are conceived to exist in the same way by the innate conception of a self. It was also explained that despite the fact that the conception of a self of the aggregates must take place prior to the false view of a transitory collection there is only one root of cyclic existence this being so because the mode of conception is the causal factor and not the object observed. When it comes to practice however a yogi begins his meditation on emptiness with meditations on the emptiness of a self of persons. Tsong Khapa says in the Essence of the Good Explanations:⁴⁶

~ The conception of a person the observation of which generates the thought "I" and of the phenomena of his continuum as the two selves are the principal fetters [which bind one to cyclic existence]. Therefore these two conceptions are the principal bases which are negated through reasoning.

This establishes that the chief obstacles to be gotten over are the conception of a self of persons, in particular, the conception of an I and the conception of a self of the internal phenomena those which belong to the subject's own continuum. The former is part of the false view of a transitory collection. The latter is the inducer of the false view of a transitory collection.⁴⁷ Or interpreted in a different way the latter is the false view of a transitory collection which conceives mine.

It is impossible to say that the false view of a transitory collection or the even broader conception of a self of persons is the only obstruction to be removed. Since the conception of a self of the aggregates is a part of the conception of a self of phenomena, rebirth and suffering cannot be halted without meditation on the emptiness of phenomena also. Chandrakirti says in his Commentary to the Supplement.⁴⁸

~ When worldly conventionalities are analyzed thus [i.e., through a Sevenfold Analysis] they do not exist. They do however, exist through non-analytical renown. Therefore, a yogi,

when he analyzes [the chariot and the person] through this series [of reasons] will penetrate the depths of reality very quickly.

Jang-gya also indicates that the Sevenfold Reasoning is an easy means of realizing emptiness.⁴⁹

L1: [The Actual Meditation: The Sevenfold Reasoning]

The first point in the Supplement at which the Sevenfold Reasoning is given in full is at VI: 151. Chandrakirti says:⁵⁰

~ In order to clarify what has been explained for the sake of establishing that the self [i.e., the person] is merely an imputation, I will show and explain an example external [to the person]:

- ~ A chariot is neither asserted to be other than its parts
- ~ Nor non-other; it is not asserted to possess them.
- ~ It is not in the parts nor are the parts in it.
- ~ It is not the mere collection [of the parts] nor is it [their] shape.
- ~ Just so [should a yogi understand a person and its aggregates].
- ~ 194.
- ~ It is like a cart, which is not other than its parts,
- ~ Not non-other, and does not possess them.
- ~ It is not within its parts, and its parts are not within it.
- ~ It is not the mere collection, and it is not the shape.

Chandrakirti shows that if a yogi examines the bases of the designation (chariot), i.e., the wheels, axle, body and so forth that give rise to the designation 'chariot', he will be unable to find any chariot there. The only chariot that does exist is the imputed chariot itself.

Here, in brief, are the seven aspects of the Sevenfold Analysis:⁵¹

- ~ 1) There is no chariot which is other than its parts,
- ~ 2) There is no chariot which is the same as its parts,
- ~ 3) There is no chariot which inherently possesses its parts,
- ~ 4) There is no chariot which inherently depends on its parts,
- ~ 5) There is no chariot upon which its parts are inherently dependent,
- ~ 6) There is no chariot which is the mere collection of its parts,
- ~ 7) There is no chariot which is the shape of its parts.

Likewise, there is no self, i.e., person, who can be found among or separate from its bases of designation*, the mental and physical aggregates of its own continuum, when that person is searched for by means of the Sevenfold Reasoning.

Technically the phenomenon imputed*, the person, and the bases of imputation*, the aggregates, are conventionally existent. This, indeed, is why a yogi must be careful not to negate too much and fall to an extreme of annihilation. However, it is said that only a yogi who has had some experience with the cognition of emptiness can have an idea of this conventional existence which isn't based completely on ideas about inherent existence. Every perception that the beginning yogi has is colored with the appearance of inherent existence.

There is no way for him at that point to break away from his habitual affirmation of that appearance.

The Sevenfold Reasoning is an analysis of the mode of existence of the person from the point of view of its relationship with the aggregates of its own continuum. It appears to have grown out of several progressively more extensive analyses based on this same context.

Buddha spoke in Sutra of twenty false views of a transitory collection on the paradigm of the aggregate of form and the self:⁵²

- ~ Form is not the self;
- ~ The self does not possess form;
- ~ In form there is no self;
- ~ In the self there is no form. (4*5)

Likewise with each of the other aggregates: feelings are not the self, etc. These are given negatively; they are illustrations of an analysis of false views of a transitory collection and not of the conceptions themselves.

According to Tsong Khapa the twenty false views of 'a transitory collection' are:⁵³

- ~ The view that forms, which are not the self, are the self;
- ~ the view that the self, which does not naturally possess forms, does [naturally possess forms];
- ~ the views that the inherent existence of the self in forms
- ~ and of forms in the self are the case when they are not.
- ~ [These same modes of viewing apply to the other four aggregates.] (4*5)

Not all of these twenty conceptions are considered by Prasangika philosophers to be actual false views of a transitory collection. The view that forms are the self has forms as its object of apprehension, not the self. The view that the self inherently exists in forms is also a species of the conception of a self of phenomena. These views are all called false views of a transitory collection because they either have the same object of observation as the false view of a transitory collection or they have an object of observation which is a phenomenon associated with the self. The aggregate of forms, for example, is one of the bases of imputation of a self.⁵⁴

Moreover, a consciousness which innately conceives of a self does not analyze whether its object of observation is the same as or different from the bases of imputation of that object.⁵⁵ Chandrakirti explains that "there is no [innate] apprehension [of a self] separate from the aggregates."⁵⁶ Thus, the false view of a transitory collection must be preceded by observation of the aggregates which are the bases of imputation of the person who is its object. This person is not considered to be either the same as or different from the aggregates. Conceiving their sameness or difference is a function of the artificial conceptions of a self.

Despite the fact that the fourfold analysis embodied in the twenty false views of a transitory collection is based on sameness, as in the first, and difference, as in the other three facets, it is applicable to the innate, non-analytical form of the false view of a transitory collection. For, if a self exists the way that it is conceived to exist by the innate conception of true existence, when analyzed it must exist either as the same entity as its bases of imputation or as a different entity from them.⁵⁷ These two positions cover all possibilities.

Nagarjuna, in the twenty-second chapter of his Fundamental Text Called "Wisdom," adds one more position to the above four:⁵⁸

- ~ The Tathagata is not the aggregates; nor is he other
- ~ than the aggregates.
- ~ The aggregates are not in him nor is he in them.
- ~ The Tathagata does not possess the aggregates.
- ~ What Tathagata is there? (5)

As explained above, the conception of a self which is a different entity from the aggregates which are its bases of imputation is only artificial. In particular, this new position of unrelated difference is said not to arise except in the non-Buddhist philosophical systems.⁵⁹

Chandrakirti expands the fivefold reasoning to seven (7) with the addition of refutations of the positions that a self is the mere collection of the aggregates which are its bases of imputation or is the shape of the form aggregates. The position that the self is not the mere collection of the aggregates is a refutation of the position held by the Svatantrikas and others that the mental consciousness, i.e., the continuum or collection of moments of the mental consciousness, is the self which takes rebirth. The position that the self is not the shape of the form aggregates is said by both Jang-gya and Jam-yang-shay-ba to be a refutation of a position held by other Buddhist tenet systems.⁶⁰

The Sevenfold Reasoning has nine essentials, or stages, in its practice. The first two must be done before the others, but the remaining seven may be done in any order that seems appropriate.

In brief they are:

- 1) the essential of ascertaining the object to be negated*,
- 2) the essential of ascertaining the pervasion*,
- 3) the essential of realizing that the phenomenon imputed* is not the same as its bases of imputation*,
- 4) the essential of realizing that the phenomenon imputed is not different from its bases of imputation,
- 5) the essential of realizing that the phenomenon imputed is not dependent on its bases of imputation,
- 6) the essential of realizing that the phenomenon imputed is not the support upon which its bases of imputation are dependent,
- 7) the essential of realizing that the phenomenon imputed does not possess its bases of imputation,
- 8) the essential of realizing that the phenomenon imputed is not the mere collection of its bases of imputation,
- 9) the essential of realizing that the phenomenon imputed is not the shape of its bases of imputation.

There is an implicit tenth essential which follows from the practice of the other nine, that of

- 10) realizing the non-inherent existence of the phenomenon imputed.

In the case of the conventionally existent self, or mere-I, and the aggregates of its own

continuum, the mere-I is the phenomenon imputed and the aggregates are its bases of imputation.

In the case of the example which illustrates the Sevenfold Reasoning, the chariot is the phenomenon imputed and its parts are the bases of imputation.

L2: [1. The Essential of Ascertaining the Object to be Negated]

The Sevenfold Reasoning is an ultimate analysis. An ultimate analysis is of the reality of phenomena, the way they actually exist. The crux of any ultimate analysis is that phenomena appear to exist inherently but in reality do not. Thus, when phenomena are searched for with a mind which applies strict criteria of eligibility for this kind of existence, they cannot be found. What is being sought in ultimate analysis is a way for a phenomenon to exist inherently through meeting the criteria which are being set for it. These criteria are not intricate and difficult to understand logical traps; on the whole, they involve merely the application of simple standards of logical consistency.

In order to search for an inherently existent phenomenon, it is necessary for a yogi to know what it is for which he is searching. It is said that everything that is seen in normal perception both appears to the subject to be inherently existent and is habitually affirmed by him to be so. (The latter is the innate conception of inherent existence.) In order for a yogi to work successfully against his conception of inherent existence, it is necessary for him first to cultivate the sense which he has of it so that he is fully aware of it. This implies a willful engagement in the appearance and conception of inherent existence; however, it is only in relation to some other possibility (i.e., nominal existence) that the object of negation can become obvious.

Therefore, sometimes a yogi first cultivates an understanding of nominal existence.

Tsong Khapa says:⁶¹

~ If you understand the way in which phenomena are established in this system, i.e., merely by power of thought, then you will easily understand the conception which is the opposite of that, the conception of true existence.

The way in which phenomena are established merely through the power of thought is like the way in which a snake is imputed to a rope. Just as there is no snake which can be found among the parts of the rope or as the collection of the parts of a rope, so with an I which is imputed to the aggregates or a chariot imputed to its parts. Neither the aggregates taken separately, nor the continuum of former and later moments of the aggregates, nor the collection of the aggregates are to be taken as an example of an I. The I exists merely imputed in dependence on the aggregates of his own continuum.⁶²

The fifth Dalai Lama presents an explanation of the way in which the object of negation is to be ascertained in his Sacred Word of Manjusri:⁶³

~ Sometimes the I seems to be related with the body.
~ Sometimes it seems to be related with the mind.
~ Sometimes it seems to be related with, the other individual aggregates (i.e., feelings, discriminations and composition factors). At the end of the arising of such a variety of appearance, we come to identify an I which exists in its own right, which exists inherently, which from the start is self-established, as if undifferentiated from the mind

and body which are (also) mixed like milk and water.

~ This is the first essential, the ascertainment of the object which is negated in the theory of selflessness. We should analyze until deep experience of it arises. Having generated such in the mental continuum, we crystallize an identification of the I conceived by the innate conceiver of an I as a self-established (phenomenon). This I has a relation with one's own aggregates like that of water put into water.

This is the sense that there is an I which is self-established and which is blended with the aggregates which are its bases of imputation. The yogi can identify this feeling when he is accused wrongly of doing some misdeed.

Another instance of it is the vivid feeling of an I which comes about when walking in the dark and becoming frightened by bumping into an unknown object. If, at the time he is meditating, the yogi has no vivid sense of an I, he can fabricate one by recalling such incidents where the sense of I was strong.

There is a grosser feeling of substantial existence which is technically called the conception of self-sufficient or substantial existence. The subtle feeling discussed above nurtures this feeling. The conception of self-sufficient or substantial existence is the conception of a self which does not possess a character which accords with the character of the mental and physical aggregates; on this occasion the yogi would feel that he himself is there without depending on the aggregates. This mode of conception can only arise with the person as its object. There is never an innate feeling of a chariot, for instance, which does not depend on the parts of the chariot which are its bases of imputation. The yogi nurtures this feeling of inherent existence both in the actual meditative session and in everyday pursuits until it becomes evident and even until it seems like the most plausible way for phenomena to exist. Without a strong feeling for this kind of thing-ness of phenomena, there can be no understanding of what it means for phenomena to be without such a quality. The lack of this inherent existence is their emptiness and the cognition of that emptiness is the purpose of this meditation.

L2: [2. The Essential of Ascertaining the Pervasion]

At this point it is necessary to set up this series of meditations as a logical operation. In the Sevenfold Reasoning there are two logical subjects, a chariot, given as an example, and a person. Actually any phenomenon can be the subject, but it is normal to start with the person and an example such as a chariot and latter apply the reasonings to other phenomena.

Stated in the form of a consequence*, the Sevenfold Reasoning becomes:

~ Concerning the subject, a person, it follows that it is not inherently existent because it does not exist in any of these seven ways.

"These seven ways" are the seven ways of existence which are analyzed in the third through the ninth essentials. They are all ways in which, a phenomenon could be seen to be inherently existent.

The pervasion* that must be ascertained here is:

~ Whatever does not exist in any of these seven ways is necessarily non-inherently existent (i.e., not inherently existent).

~ This means that any phenomenon which cannot be found to exist in one of these seven ways must not be inherently existent. Put another way, it means that if a phenomenon were inherently existent, it would have to exist in one of these seven ways.

The yogi must ascertain, with conviction, that if there is a phenomenon that exists the way in which it appears to him to exist, it must exist in one of these seven ways; he must be convinced that all possibilities of inherent existence in this context (i.e., looking at the phenomenon imputed and its bases of imputation) are subsumed in these seven options.

It is enough, here, to consider the first two reasonings, that the self is not the same as the aggregates and that the self is not different from the aggregates. If any two phenomena are taken as examples, it can be seen easily that there are but these two options. Either the first is the same phenomenon as the second, or it is different. There is no third possibility. The entire universe can be divided into some one particular phenomenon and everything else in the universe.

These two options cover every possibility for inherent existence. Either a chariot is inherently, naturally the same entity as its parts or it is itself a different entity from them. Likewise, the self must either be one entity with the mental and physical aggregates or it must be a different entity. There can be no third possibility.

The remaining five aspects of the Sevenfold Reasoning are elaborations on either one or the other of these or both. They are included for the sake of letting the mind become thoroughly imbued with a sense of the unfindability of an inherently existent phenomenon.

The positions that the phenomenon imputed is not its bases of imputation and that the phenomenon imputed is not different from its bases of imputation are sufficient for a logical proof of the thesis that the phenomenon imputed has no inherent existence. However, the innate false view of a transitory collection is not logical; it does not analyze and determine that there is a relationship of sameness or difference.⁶⁴ Such an analysis is a function of an ultimate analysis such as the Sevenfold Reasoning. Thus it is said that the seven aspects of the Sevenfold Reasoning are presented with a view towards the mode of operation of the false view of a transitory collection.⁶⁵

L2: [3. The Essential of Realizing that the Phenomenon Imputed is not the Same as its Bases of Imputation.]

'Phenomenon imputed' and 'bases of imputation' is technical language for, in the example, a chariot and its parts. When an axle, two wheels, a body of a certain shape and so on arranged in a certain way are seen or thought of, immediately an image arises which is all ready to be called 'chariot'. It may be that only some of the parts are necessary for the thought "chariot", but whatever provides the necessary stimulus is the basis of imputation.

So, in more concrete language, this is the essential of realizing that the chariot is not the same as its parts or that the person is not the same as the mental and physical aggregates which are its bases of imputation. The way to realize this is first to produce the strong feeling that a person and its bases of imputation, the aggregates, are inherently one thing, that a person is there, appearing as if inseparably mixed with the aggregates or with some aggregate or aggregates that seem particularly important. Since this feeling has been cultivated in the first essential, it should come easily now.

Then the yogi thinks that if the person and the aggregates were the same, certain faults would arise. For example, if the person and the aggregates were naturally one entity, it would be absurd to assert a person or self, since person or self would merely be synonyms of aggregates or of one of the aggregates. (Then the yogi might think that this was indeed true, that the self is the mental consciousness, for instance. In this case he could apply analysis again and ask himself whether mental consciousness is not just a synonym of person. Or, he could ask himself whether the present moment of the mental consciousness is the self or the next moment, etc. Since there is only one self, there could not be a plurality of moments.)

Moreover, if the person and the aggregates were naturally one entity, then, just as there are many aggregates, there would have to be many selves. The yogi could ask himself which self should eat: should he let some go hungry and just feed one, or should he eat many meals? This may sound ridiculous, but it is necessary to challenge some of the suppositions of ordinary thought just because ordinary thought is so embedded in the conception of inherent existence. If the yogi can find himself a situation in which it would really make a difference to him that there were many persons (in his own continuum) and he sees this as a consequence of the way he views things, this reasoning will have an impact on him and start to break down his sense of the person as being inseparably mixed with the aggregates.

Another technique would be for him mentally to separate his aggregates, or even just the parts of his body, one from another and then visualize each one as being the person, as what he holds to be himself. At some point, if he searches long and hard enough for some unity among these, he will be faced with the inability to find a self like the self that originally appeared to him. At that point he has a cognition of an emptiness of the person's being the same as the aggregates.

Another fault which would arise if the person and the aggregates were naturally the same is that, since the aggregates have the attributes of production and disintegration, the person would have the attributes of production and disintegration also.⁶⁶ If this production and disintegration were only nominal (i.e., conventionally existent), there would be no problem. However, if they were production and disintegration which naturally exist, several faults would follow, since production and disintegration of this sort are characterized as being production from something unrelatedly different and a complete cessation. Although the mind does not ordinarily enter into these distinctions, this is not some land of complicated philosophical definition; it is a consequence of the way that a mind dominated by the apprehension of inherent existence perceives these to be.

If the person had inherently existent production and disintegration, then it would be inherently different from the other persons in its own continuum. Since inherent difference means unrelated difference, the person of this life would then be unrelated to the persons of past lives and future lives.

Chandrakirti says:⁶⁷

- ~ The phenomena which are based on Maitreya and Upagupta
- ~ Are different and thus not included within one continuum.
- ~ Whatever are naturally separate.
- ~ Are not suitable to be included within one continuum.

- ~ [CHITTAMATRA.2.2.1.2-ib1-iic]
- ~ Phenomena dependent upon Maitreya and Upayagupta

- ~ Are not included in the same continuum because they are other.
- ~ Thus it is not reasonable that whatever are different by way of their own characteristics
- ~ Are included within the same continuum.

Jang-gya mentions three faults that would arise from the unrelated difference of past and future lives in the same continuum:

- 1) it would be impossible to remember past lives,
- 2) actions done would be wasted, and
- 3) one would meet with the results of actions (i.e. karma) that one had not done.⁶⁸

The remembrance of former lives is commonplace in the philosophical literature of India and Tibet. The ability to recall past lives, moreover, is not limited to Buddhas and advanced Bodhisattvas but is a power that can be attained by any yogi if he applies himself in meditation. Thus, the impossibility of remembering former lives contradicts an experience that is, or can be, common to yogis.

If the person were inherently produced at birth and inherently disintegrated at death then it would be inappropriate to speak of former and later lives in the continuum of that person. For, that person's continuum would only endure for one lifetime. It would follow from this that the predispositions* which are the results of actions done would only be effective within the life in which they were produced. Thus, any merit done for the sake of attaining Buddhahood in the future, for example, would be completely destroyed at death and would thus be wasted. Similarly, birth in favorable circumstances, or in one of the hells, or in whatever circumstances obtain, would not be the result of actions done in past lives by a person in the same continuum as the subject.

L2: [4. The Essential of Realizing that the Phenomenon Imputed Is not Inherently Different from its Bases of Imputation]

This is the essential of realizing that the person is not a different entity from the aggregates which are its bases of imputation. There is no innate form of the conception of a self which corresponds to this. There is an artificial form of the conception of a self of persons which conceives its object to be different from its bases of imputation. Further, there is an innate form of the conception of self-sufficient or substantial existence which is similar to this conception: it differs in that it conceives the person as having merely a different character from the aggregates, not as being a different entity from them.

The object of negation proper of the Sevenfold Analysis is the inherent existence of a person. This is the object of negation which is what is nonexistent in the theory of selflessness. There is also an existent object of negation of the Sevenfold Reasoning; it is the innate conception of an inherently existent person. It exists because it is a consciousness. The innate conception is necessary in order to have the artificial conception — when it is destroyed, the artificial conception is also destroyed. Conversely, it is a principle of Tsong Khapa's that when an analysis is done following the artificial mode of conception of true existence, this analysis serves as a branch of refuting the innate form.⁶⁹ The reason is that the artificial forms represent possible forms of the mode of existence of the I and the aggregates if the I inherently existed.

In order to practice the fourth essential (or, in the enumeration of seven aspects, the

second aspect), the yogi first generates a strong sense of an inherently existent person; this is the first of the nine essentials, that of ascertaining the object to be negated. Then he clears away any sense of the aggregates in his mind and determines whether or not he has such a feeling of "I" left over. If the sense of an I persists, he then must decide whether it is sensible to have this feeling or not. In order to do this, he applies the second aspect of the Sevenfold Analysis.

If the person and the aggregates which are his bases of imputation are inherently different, then, since they are also simultaneous, they must be unrelat edly different.⁷⁰ For two phenomena to be inextricably related they cannot be both simultaneous and different entities. If a person and the aggregates which are his bases of imputation are unrelat edly different, a number of faults accrue:

-- 1) The person would not have the characteristics of the aggregates in question. Here, characteristics refers to production, cessation and abiding — attributes shared by all impermanent phenomena. In the gross sense of production and cessation this would lead to the absurdity that the person would not be born and would not die.

-- 2) In the subtle sense of production and cessation this would mean that the person would have to be a permanent phenomenon, a non-product. It would then follow that it would not be suitable to impute the person to the aggregates. The person would be changeless, whereas its bases of imputation would be in constant disintegration and change.

-- 3) Furthermore, if the person were inherently different from the aggregates which are its bases of imputation, it would have to be apprehendable separate from them. A self which had a different character from the aggregates would have to be apprehendable without the apprehension of the aggregates just as the aggregates, which all have different characters, can all be apprehended separately. Such a self would not be able to know, experience and so on as the aggregates do or, if it did, its knowledge and the knowledge of the mental aggregates which are its bases of imputation would be unrelat ed.

The yogi applies this analysis and determines whether or not the conception of a person is appropriate in these circumstances. If he has had a firm experience of the unfindability of a person which is the same as its aggregates, then, if he moves on to this essential and refutes inherent difference, he may be able to realize an emptiness of the person. However, the mind is so thoroughly accustomed to conceiving inherent existence that the yogi would really have to apply himself and will probably have to move on to the other essentials in order to work effectively against the whole spectrum of modes of conception towards which the false view of a transitory collection has tendencies.

* * *

Thus, the remaining five reasonings are for the sake of driving home the meaning of no inherent existence and making it a living fact for the yogi.

L2: [5. The Essential of Realizing that the Phenomenon Imputed Is not Dependent on its Bases of Imputation]

This is the third aspect of the Sevenfold Reasoning, that the person is not inherently dependent on the aggregates which are its bases of imputation. Here the simile is used that the self and the aggregates appear to be like a lion in a forest. The aggregates are more

extensive than the self which appears to be somewhere within them, but not one of them. This is a branch of the fourth essential, that the self and the aggregates are not different, but with an emphasis on the aggregates as not being the base of the self. The same reasoning that applies in the fourth essential applies here.

L2: [6. The Essential of Realizing that the Phenomenon Imputed Is not the Support upon which its Bases of Imputation are Dependent]

This is a refutation of the sense that the aggregates are dependent on the person. The conception of the person and the aggregates in this case is said to be like a forest in snow, where the aggregates are the forest and the person is the snow pervading the forest and surrounding it. Put another way, the self is like a bowl in which, like yogurt, are the aggregates. Again this is a branch of the fourth essential, this time with the self not being the base of the aggregates. The reasoning which was effective in the essential can be applied here also.

L2: [7. The Essential of Realizing that the Phenomenon Imputed Does not Possess its Bases of Imputation]

There are two ways in which it is possible to possess something. One is like someone possessing a cow, in which case the possession is of a different entity; the other is like someone possessing his own head, in which case the possessor and the thing possessed are the same entity.

If the yogi feels that he possesses his aggregates in the manner of someone possessing his own head, then he can ask himself just what it is that is performing the action of possessing. No matter what aggregate or set of aggregates the self is identified as here, they or it will have to possess themselves. For instance, if the self is felt to be the mental consciousness, then, since the mental consciousness is also one of the aggregates, there would be a mental consciousness which, as the self, possesses the mental consciousness — that same particular mental consciousness, no other. That is to say, there would be two mental consciousnesses. (This is tantamount to saying that one person would have two heads; one being the head that he is, the other the head that he possesses.)

This reasoning is also applicable in the third essential, where the object imputed and the bases of imputation are seen to not be the same entity. Likewise, this part of the seventh essential is a branch of the third essential and the reasoning laid out for that essential is also applicable here.

If a person possessed his head, on the other hand, as if possessing a cow, then it would have to be shown that this person was a different entity from his head. The reasonings outlined in the explanation of the fourth essential refute this.

L2: [8. The Essential of Realizing that the Phenomenon Imputed Is not the Mere Collection of its Bases of Imputation]

The "mere collection" is just the unarranged collection of all the bases of imputation. For example, to assert that a chariot is the mere collection of its parts would be like saying

that pile of an axle and two wheels and so on would be a chariot and could take you on a journey.

In Prasangika the collection of the aggregates is the correct basis for the imputation of a person. However, the collection of the aggregates cannot be correctly considered to be either the same as or inherently different from the aggregates. If they were same, then either (1) just as there are many aggregates there would be many collections or (2) just as there is only one collection there would be only one aggregate. If they were naturally different, then the collection would have a different character from the aggregates, a position refuted in the fourth essential.⁷¹

The mere collection cannot be the person because it is incorrect to assert that a phenomenon imputed is the same as its bases of imputation. This is one of the unique features of Prasangika; in Svatantrika-Madhyamika, for example, the person is a mental consciousness, i.e., it is its own basis of imputation.

Jang-gya says that this point is difficult to understand. He gives as authority for its veracity a quotation from a Sutra⁷²

- ~ Just as a chariot is spoken of
- ~ In dependence on its parts,
- ~ So, in dependence on the aggregates,
- ~ There is the convention 'sentient being'.

This is interpreted in Prasangika as meaning that the person is not the aggregates.⁷³

Furthermore, if the person were the mere collection of the aggregates of its own continuum, the fault would follow that agent and object of action would be one. In Buddhist terminology, the aggregates are appropriated at the time of rebirth by the person; the person is their appropriator. The person is said to "take up" a new collection of aggregates. If the person were the same as the collection of the aggregates, it would follow that the person appropriated itself at the time of rebirth and this is clearly absurd.

This essential is a branch of the third (that the person and the aggregates are not the same) with the reservation that at the time of doing the third essential the yogi would not be considering the collection of aggregates but only the aggregates themselves.

L2: [9. The Essential of Realizing that the Phenomenon Imputed Is not the Shape of its Bases of Imputation]

The feeling that someone is identical with his shape is very common. When a certain person walks into the room he is recognized primarily through his physical appearance. Here the yogi has only to think that shape is merely physical, whereas the aggregates are both mental and physical. If the self really were just the shape of the aggregates, then it would not be possible to know anything, and so on. Further, if the person were both the shape of his body and his consciousness, there would be two persons.

L2: [...]

The reasonings shown here to illustrate these nine essentials are mainly those which, could

be used when meditating on the person and the aggregates. Some of the reasonings which refute the inherent existence of a chariot, i.e., which refute the inherent existence of phenomena other than persons, are different. The most obvious example of this is in the case of the ninth essential where the reasoning given, that the bases of imputation include both mind and body, applies only to sentient beings; the bases of imputation of Chariot do not include any non-physical phenomena. In the case of a chariot the reasoning would be that if a chariot were the shape of its parts, then a model of a chariot could be a chariot.

It is not necessary for a yogi to do all the reasonings or to expend the same amount of energy on each. He need only meditate on those essentials which are helpful in getting rid of the modes of wrong conception of the person and the aggregates which are important to him and then, within those, he need meditate only on the arguments that are effective. However, he would have to do at least the first two reasonings, that the self and the aggregates are neither the same nor different, in order to establish the necessary pervasion.

It is important for the yogi to spend some time, in the beginning, becoming familiar with the various reasonings. This is why the example of the chariot is given. Sometimes it is easier to see the arguments as they are set up for a simple phenomenon such as this than to work solely with the person.

Then, when fluency is gained with the reasonings and the pervasion has been ascertained, the yogi can ascertain the lack of an inherently existent self through using the reasonings that are effective for him.

Although it may seem as if the yogi would be repeating arguments to himself forever when he uses the Sevenfold Reasoning, this is not the case. The nine essentials are to be thoroughly practiced until the point comes where the nonexistence of a self such as was identified in the first essential is cognized.

The first valid cognition of emptiness that the yogi has is called an inferential cognition of emptiness. Inferential here means that it is a cognition based on realizing the pervasion of certain reasons (the Sevenfold Reasoning) by a certain predicate (non-existence of an inherently existent Self), not one in which the whole logical structure of the meditation has to be kept consciously alive once the inference has been generated. An inferential cognition of a lack of inherent existence can be tested by turning the attention of the mind to some other object; if a cognition of the emptiness of inherent existence of that object is generated without dependence on any further reasoning, then the yogi knows he has a valid cognition of emptiness.

Once the yogi has cognized emptiness by means of the Sevenfold Analysis, he has begun to destroy the false view of a transitory collection which conceives an I. There are no special reasonings which attack the conception of mine.

Nagarjuna says:74

- ~ When there is no self,
- ~ How could there be mine?

Chandrakirti says in the Supplemental: 165ab):75

- ~ Because there is no object without an agent,
- ~ There is no mine without a self.
- ~ [VI.165]

- ~ 208.
- ~ Since without an agent there is no [object of the] action,
- ~ Without a self there is no mine.
- ~ Therefore Yogis who see that self and mine are empty
- ~ Will attain liberation.

The same analytical consciousness which realizes the emptiness of a person can realize the emptiness of mine merely by turning to it. No new reasons are needed because without an I (an owner), the mine (the owned) is impossible.

When the yogi has cognized and has become thoroughly accustomed to the emptiness of both I and mine, he has destroyed the false view of a transitory collection in both its innate modes. Having done that, he is liberated from cyclic existence. At this point it is only his compassion that keeps the yogi in the world.⁷⁶

L1: [Another Kind of Self-Inquiry: Chandrakirti's Sevenfold Reasoning on Selflessness, by Greg Goode]

- ~ A chariot is not asserted to be other than its parts,
- ~ Nor non-other. It also does not possess them.
- ~ It is not in the parts, nor are the parts in it.
- ~ It is not the mere collection [of its parts], nor is it their shape.
- ~ [The self and the aggregates are] similar.
- ~ 194.
- ~ It is like a cart, which is not other than its parts,
- ~ Not non-other, and does not possess them.
- ~ It is not within its parts, and its parts are not within it.
- ~ It is not the mere collection, and it is not the shape.
- ~ – Chandrakirti, Supplement to (Nagarjuna's)
- ~ "Treatise on the Middle Way"

L2: [Introduction]

When I was about ten years old, my friends and I would throw rocks at each other. This led to a kind of self-inquiry, as I later found out. Smack! My friend's rock hit my arm. "I got you," he said with glee. "No you didn't," I retorted smugly, "You only got my arm." Then he went for something closer to home. Bonk! The rock landed on my head. Now I got you!" "No, that was only my head." Later, I thought a lot about this, for many years in fact. There was no place a rock could land that I thought was truly me. In fact, whatever "X" could named was not me, because it was "My X." But where was the "I"? It's not as though I didn't have a strong sense of it. I did, especially at first. This is why I looked so hard for it for so many years. But no matter where I looked, it seemed to keep shifting around, almost as though it was always in back of me! Even as a youth, years before I had ever heard of Buddhism or nondualism or Chandrakirti, the inability to find the "I" really did begin to weaken my sense of its reality.

The Sevenfold Reasoning is a Buddhist meditation on the ultimate nature of things – persons (the “I”) and phenomena. In the traditions of Buddhism that utilize the Sevenfold Reasoning (such as the Dalai Lama's sect, the Gelukba Madhyamikas), the ultimate nature of things is said to be emptiness. The Sevenfold Reasoning is based on the teachings of Chandrakirti, an 8th-century Indian Buddhist teacher. Chandrakirti provided a way to inquire into the ultimate or final nature of things, as a way to help relieve suffering. In doing so, he extended the arguments of Nagarjuna (2nd-3rd century), whose monumental Treatise On The Middle Way had systematized the teachings in the Perfection of Wisdom Sutras (100BCE – 100CE). According to these sutras and teachings, it is the ignorance or misconception about the way things exist that keeps sentient beings in suffering and cyclic existence. Sentient beings have the conception that phenomena (as well as they themselves!) exist in a very solid, independent way, whereas nothing really exists in this way. When this conception ceases, ignorance ceases, and suffering ceases.

The Sevenfold Reasoning is a set of inferences that one contemplates deeply. Even though they are an intellectual process, it is known as a meditation in the Buddhist Middle Way teachings. The reasonings are to be gone into intensely, with the full force of one's feelings about how things are. The reasonings are not a method of “no-thought” or of turning the mind away from objects. Instead, objects are taken full-strength, faced directly and forcefully. When these powerful reasonings are gone into fully, one's view of one's self and the world is deeply shaken. For a moment it might feel as if the earth has turned upside down, or one has fallen into a huge crevasse. Thereafter, things, including one's sense of self, do not really have the same inert heaviness any longer. In Middle Way treatises, it is said that if the Sevenfold Reasoning seems too abstract, intellectual or irrelevant, and if it does not engender deep feelings of something having shifted, then perhaps it is not the best meditation for now.

L2: [Mistaken Conception]

What is this mistaken conception of how things exist? It is partly a matter of feeling and partly a matter of thinking.

- The feeling component is partly a felt sense that things are somehow really there, solid, independent, separate from us, and somehow casting themselves towards us.
- The thinking part is an intellectual sense of things as self-sufficient and independent of everything.

To flesh out this intellectual strand of total independence from everything, Middle Way treatises speak of three kinds of independence. For example, if a cup exists inherently and independently in the way that matches our conception of “independent of everything,” then it exists

- ~ 1) independent of causes and conditions,
- ~ 2) independent of its own parts,
- ~ 3) and independent of being observed by a mind.

For suffering beings, the feeling and intellectual sense of inherent existence apply to any cognizable object, whether it is a school bus, the feeling of joy, “2+2=4.” This is an example of the conception of the inherent existence of phenomena.

This sense or conception applies not just to phenomena but also to people, including

ourselves. We appear to exist inherently just like the coffee cup. For example, after a swift kick in the shin or a false accusation (or a true one!), a very palpable sense of an inherently existing self arises. Blood and anger might arise, the stomach might get queasy. “How could they do that to me? I’ll show them!” This sense, fired by the pain of indignation, seems to point to a self that is really there, and at the moment, very offended. This sense of self (not the insulted-ness but the self that has suffered the insult) is a sense that feels like I am really there. This sense does not seem like a self that depends on causes and conditions. It does not seem to be dependent on the parts and pieces of the body/mind, and it does not seem to be dependent upon being imputed by thought. It seems like one very wronged but very real self. This is an example of the sense of inherent existence -- the inherent existence of the “I.”

It is said in Middle Way Buddhism that this conception of inherent existence is a misconception. It is said to be a misconception because although things appear to exist in this way, they actually do not exist in this way. Although the conception of inherent existence is present, inherent existence itself can nowhere be found. This unfindability of inherent existence is the emptiness that Middle Way Buddhism teaches about.

L3: [Note on the Teachings of Emptiness:]

There is a traditional caveat given to those desiring to study the teachings or reasonings on emptiness. The caveat, which is given in most texts and scholarly commentaries on the subject, warns that emptiness does not entail utter non-existence, nihilism, or psychological depression. It also advises that the teachings on emptiness should only be studied by

- ~ 1) those who burst out in tears at the mere mention of the word "emptiness,"
- ~ 2) those whose hair stands on end at the mention of the word, or
- ~ 3) those who have faith in such teachings and who feel certain that emptiness does not negate conventional cause-and-effect as presented in the Buddhist path.

The reason for this caveat is to prevent a nihilistic approach to life and the Buddhist path. The teachings on emptiness attempt to show that spiritual progress is possible exactly because things are empty. But the nihilistic reaction to the teachings is an off-track misunderstanding, which manifests partly as

- ~ 1) a mistaken belief that since everything is empty there is no conventional cause-effect relation between phenomena, and
- ~ 2) a hopeless feeling that there is no point to spiritual progress.

Most teachings on emptiness attempt to counteract this nihilistic approach. See, for example, the works referred to in the footnotes at the end of this article.

L2: [What the Reasonings Refute – Inherent Existence]

The Sevenfold Reasonings refute inherent existence, which is also called the “object to be negated.” The conception of inherent existence, along with the grasping feelings discussed above is called the “object to be abandoned.” Inherent existence itself is called the “object to be negated.”

The Sevenfold Reasonings work like this: once inherent existence is deeply understood not to exist, then the conception of inherent existence (along with the grasping) will be abandoned

spontaneously. That is, once we thoroughly negate the “object to be negated,” the “object to be abandoned” will no longer appear.

How does this work? We see a cup. Because it appears to really be there under its own steam, independent of causes, independent of its parts, and independent of being perceived, it appears to be inherently existent. Not only does it appear to be inherently existent, we might also actually believe that it exists this way. This appearance and this belief make up the conception of inherent existence. The conception of inherent existence is said by Middle Way Buddhism to be the root of suffering. Moreover, just because we have the conception of inherent existence does not mean that inherent existence really exists. It is sort of like having the idea of a unicorn, or seeing a snake where there is only a rope. Just because we have the conception of an object does not establish the existence of that object.

The Sevenfold Reasoning provides a meditative way to look for inherent existence and see that it is not findable. Once inherent existence is clearly seen to be not-findable, the conception of inherent existence will cease. The end of this misconception is said to be the end of cyclical existence, and amounts to the Buddhist Third Noble Truth – the cessation of suffering. The Sevenfold Reasonings are part of the Buddhist Fourth Noble Truth, which is the path leading to the end of suffering.

The reasonings explore the questions,

-- “What is the relationship between the car and the parts of the car?”

-- and “What is the relationship between my self and the parts of my body/mind?”

If the car really existed inherently the way it appears to, then this inherent existence entails certain things about the parts of the car. If the I existed inherently as it seems to, then this entails certain things about my body and mind. Using the Sevenfold Reasoning, we can see whether these entailments make sense. If we can see that the implications of inherent existence are not true, then we can see how inherent existence itself cannot exist. If we can see this, then the conceptions of inherent existence will cease and there will be freedom from suffering.

L2: [What the Reasonings Do Not Refute – Conventional Existence]

If things do not exist truly or inherently, do they exist at all? Or do they totally and utterly lack existence? The Buddha is quoted as saying, “What the world accepts, I accept. What the world does not accept, I do not accept.” In the Middle Way teachings, it is said that things do exist conventionally. The conventional existence of the cup is the everyday ability of the cup to hold tea, to be washed and dried, and to shatter if dropped. The cup is a mere nominality or imputation or “say-so,” asserted by the mind dependent upon certain pieces and parts. This conventional cup serves the purpose of a cup even though if it were analyzed with the Sevenfold Reasoning, it would not be found. The fact that it would be unfindable under this analysis is not significant, since nothing could withstand that analysis. The purpose of the Sevenfold Reasoning is not to negate every possible thing that can be negated; rather, it is to negate inherent existence – the conception of which causes suffering.

The Sevenfold Reasoning is not applied to refute the conventional, everyday existence of things, such as the teacup, the self that goes to the grocery store, or the Yankees who won the 2000 Subway Series.

There are three main reasons for not refuting conventional existence.

- 1) One is that conventional existence, according to Middle Way Buddhism, is not the cause of suffering. Therefore, there is no necessity to refute it.
- 2) Two, not refuting conventional existence allows Buddhism to be able to “speak with the world” by accepting what the world accepts.
- 3) Three, not refuting conventional existence provides a way for Buddhism to present the Four Noble Truths and the eight-fold path to the end of suffering.

Even though the Buddhist teachings are vast and profound teachings, they are still conventional existents. By not refuting conventional existence while indeed refuting inherent existence, Buddhism itself can tread the Middle Way between the extremes of existence [and non-existence].

-- If conventional existence were refuted along with inherent existence, the Buddhist path would not be possible since nothing would be said to exist. Refuting conventional existence would err on the side of nihilism. Retaining conventional existence avoids this extreme.

-- On the other hand, if inherent existence were not refuted, then too the Buddhist path would not be possible. Inherently existent things are independent of everything and therefore causeless, untouchable and eternal. If things existed inherently, they would be forever frozen in place, and no change or progress along the Buddhist path would be possible. Suffering entities would forever remain suffering entities. For Buddhism not to refute inherent existence would err on the side of eternalism.

Avoiding both extremes is the Middle Way.

L2: [The Sevenfold Reasoning - Preparation]

In Middle Way treatises, there are two preliminary steps that facilitate the Sevenfold Reasoning. Their purpose is to make the reasonings “up close and personal,” to help put the “object to be negated” clearly in sight.

-- The first step is for the meditator to generate a clear sense of inherent existence. This can be done by imagining, for instance, a serious, embarrassing and public insult, and then deeply experiencing the thoughts and feelings that occur. These arisings are said to depend on the conception of inherent existence. This process of summoning up the feelings is not dangerous, and the effort does not make the sense of inherent existence stronger and more firmly entrenched. Rather, it allows the meditator to generate a clearer, more visceral image of what is to be negated. It keeps the meditator's conception of the “object to be negated” from being too thinly intellectual, and keeps the meditation from being merely a word-game. It is a lot of work!

-- The second preliminary step is to review the overall dynamic of the Sevenfold Reasoning. You can proceed like this, following this pattern: If X, then Y. Not Y. Therefore, not X.

- 1) If the inherent existence of the chariot (or the self) were established, then this inherent existence would be findable in at least one of the seven ways.
- 2) It is not findable in any of the seven ways. (The Sevenfold Reasoning itself is gone through in this step.)
- 3) Therefore the inherent existence of the chariot (or the self) is not established.

The reasonings are based on a common-sense search for the object called inherent existence,

based on the example of, say a cup, a chariot, or one's self. If inherent existence of the cup is a findable thing, existing the way it appears, then it ought to be either the same as the parts of the cup, or different from the parts of the cup. This is analogous to looking for a cat in the house. If she is findable in the house, then she is either in the living room or somewhere other than the living room. But if she is found not to be in the living room and not to be anywhere else in the house, then we can safely say there is no cat in the house. Indeed, if we can feel as certain about the dynamic of the Sevenfold Reasoning as we feel about the cat analogy, then this very insight starts to chip away at our conception of inherent existence, and a feeling of peace and joy can result.

L3: [The Sevenfold Reasoning on the Selflessness of Persons]

Personal things often rivet our attention while impersonal things are hardly noticed. The conception of inherent existence of persons (such as one's self) causes more suffering and is harder to remove than the conception of inherent existence of non-personal phenomena such as cars and trees. According to Middle Way Buddhism, both kinds of conceptions must be refuted in order to end the ignorance that causes suffering and cyclical existence. The conception of the inherent existence of phenomena is the root of the conception of the inherent existence of persons. This is because the senses perceive phenomena such as shapes, sounds, colors, textures, etc. The mind, if it considers the final nature of these phenomena, considers them to be inherently existent. For some phenomena, perhaps the shape of an arm, a hand, or a face, or the sound of a voice, the mind attributes the entity of person. For the mind that considers the final nature of this person, the person is considered to be inherently existent. In Middle Way teachings, it is said that without realizing the selflessness of persons, it is not possible to realize the selflessness of phenomena.[2] So the meditative reasonings are done first on persons. Even so, it is often recommended to beginners to familiarize themselves with the reasonings by using the example of a car, or chariot, as in Chandrakirti's example.

We will simply list the seven steps for these phenomena, and then examine the reasonings in terms of persons.

L3: [The Sevenfold Reasoning on the Selflessness of Phenomena:]

- ~ 1) The car is not inherently the same as its parts.
- ~ 2) The car is not inherently different from its parts.
- ~ 3) The car is not inherently dependent upon its parts.
- ~ 4) The car is not inherently the substratum upon which its parts depend.
- ~ 5) The car is not inherently the possessor of its parts.
- ~ 6) The car is not inherently the mere collection of its parts.
- ~ 7) The car is not inherently the shape of its parts.

L2: [The Sevenfold Reasoning on the Selflessness of Persons:]

The reasonings on the selflessness of persons try to find the true person. They search by trying to isolate the inherent existence of the person in relation to the parts the body/mind. For purposes of one's meditation, the parts of the body/mind include everything related to what one thinks of as one's self. It can be any physical, mental, moral or psychological phenomenon whatsoever. We might think of ourselves as a body, a mind, set of memories, or a collection of character values, or something that essentially includes all of

these. The reasonings go like this. With a firm sense of this inherent existence in mind, we try to isolate it – is the inherent existence of the self exactly the same as the parts of the body/mind? Is it different from the parts? These first two steps of the Sevenfold Reasoning logically cover all the bases. The self is either inherently the same as, or different from, the parts. The other steps of the reasonings are valuable to go into because they keep the meditation from being purely an intellectual exercise. We might, for example, truly feel that the self owns the body/mind. This is the conception to get at, even though it is logically entailed by the self being different from the body/mind. Once all the reasonings are gone through in depth and the inherent existence of the self is not found anywhere, this can upset one's conception of the way things are. At first it is disorienting and perhaps scary. Later, it can be the source of great joy.

- ~ 1. The self is not inherently the same as the parts of the body/mind.
- ~ 2. The self is not different from the parts of the body/mind.
- ~ 3. The self is not dependent upon the parts of the body/mind.
- ~ 4. The self is not inherently the substratum upon which the parts of the body/mind depend.
- ~ 5. The self is not inherently the possessor of the parts of the body/mind.
- ~ 6. The self is not inherently the mere collection of the parts of the body/mind.
- ~ 7. The self is not inherently the shape of the parts of the body/mind.

Taking these one at a time,

L3: [1. The self is not inherently the same as the parts of the body/mind.]

If we understand the parts as various groups of physical, mental, and psychological factors, we ask: Is the self equal to these things? Is it equal to them individually? If it is, then certain counterintuitive results apply. The self would be equal to each body part or each thought individually. The self would be many just as the parts are many. But we don't think of the self as many, so it cannot be found in all the parts taken individually. How about the parts taken as a whole? This is also not what we think of when we conceive of the inherent existence of the self. If the self is equal to the parts and the self is single, then the parts must be one single entity. This is clearly not the case. Also, if the self is equal to all the parts, then we could never get our hair cut, or lose a finger or gain a new thought. For that newly missing or added element changes the overall parts. If the self is equal to all the parts, this new addition or deletion would mean that we have a new self. But our strong intuition is clearly that the self can undergo change. So the self cannot be equal to all the parts. It is not just that we have not looked hard enough. We have looked at the possibility of the self being the parts. In the parts we have found the lack of inherent existence of the self. It cannot be there.

L3: [2. The self is not inherently different from the parts of the body/mind.]

If the self were inherently different from its parts, then too odd things result. You would be able to apprehend the self somehow in total isolation from the parts. Conceptually, you would be able to strip away the elements of the body/mind until none are left but nevertheless still be able to point to the self. You would have to still be able to distinguish this partless self from someone else's self. Where would this partless self be? It must be able to have a different location from the body. As they might say in Missouri, "Show me that self with no parts." The self would be one thing and the parts would be a totally separate thing. So the self is not inherently different from the parts of the

body/mind.

L3: [3. The self is not inherently dependent upon the parts of the body/mind. (an effect of the parts)]

Is the self inherently dependent upon the parts? Sometimes we think so. Sometimes the self appears as something above and beyond the parts, but somehow supported or buoyed up by the parts. This relation of dependence is another case of (2) above, the self being a different entity from the parts, which has been refuted. If the self is dependent on the parts, it must be different from the parts. Why is dependence given as a separate meditation in addition to mere difference? So we can gain insight on the falsity of the sense we often have that dependence on the body/mind is a special way that the self truly exists. It is almost as though the sense of inherent existence is hiding out in the sense we have of dependence. (i.e. like a real effect)

Besides the problem that dependence entails difference, which was refuted, there is another problem with dependence. That is, what is the link between the self in question and this particular set of parts such that this self is dependent upon the parts? Why isn't another self dependent upon the parts? Conversely, why is the self in question dependent on these particular parts and not my next-door neighbor's parts? Two more odd consequences follow if there were inherent existence of the self in dependence on the parts. (a) The self related to these parts... What makes that self my self? This supposedly inherently existent self fails to satisfy the criteria that would make it my self. I would need another self to bind the parts and the self together under the auspices of "mine," but this second self does not exist. Even if it did, there would need to be yet another self to make that one mine, and so on ad infinitum. And (b), why is there not more than one self dependent upon the same set of parts? Why not? This is consistent with the conditions given. Since this self is totally different from the parts, I cannot see this self; other selves can be supported by the same parts. These are all natural conclusions if there is a self different from the parts that is inherently dependent upon the parts. In a search for the inherently existent self which depends on the parts of the body/mind, this self has proved unfindable. (i.e. The effect cannot be the same or different then its causes.)

L3: [4. The self is not inherently the substratum upon which the parts of the body/mind depend. (the cause of the parts)]

Do the parts inherently depend upon the self, which serves as their substratum? This is another case of the refuted alternative (2) above, the self being inherently different from the parts. And it is similar to alternative (3) above, with the dependence running in the opposite direction. Similar consequences occur with this alternative.

"Why these parts? Why this particular self? Show it to me in isolation from the parts. No! Not that one over there, this self!"

In addition, since we are looking for the substratum in this case, trying to isolate it as the inherently existent self, it is especially instructive to meditate on this? Can more than one substratum support the same set of parts? Either simultaneously or in succession over time? Assume for the moment a relation of an inherently existing self as the substratum of the parts of the body/mind. Is it the same at time T1 as at time T2? Going by the reasoning of case (4), there is no reason it cannot be a different self and no proof that it is the same self. But if it is different, then we have the absurd conclusion that the same body/mind is supported by two selves over time. Then, I would be an inherently different

self at T2 than I am at T1. And if the body can depend on two selves simultaneously, then I am different from myself even now! Therefore, the inherent existence of the self cannot lie in its being the substratum on which the parts of the body/mind depend. (i.e. The effect cannot be the same or different then its causes.)

L3: [5. The self is not inherently the possessor of the parts of the body/mind.]

This is yet another case of (2), the self being different from the parts, as well as a bit of (1), where the self is the same entity as the parts. But it is very fruitful to go through this meditation completely on its own, since we have often have a strong conception that the self possesses the parts of the body/mind. This alternative deserves its own meditative refutation.

Perhaps the self possesses its parts in the way that I possess my hand. This would be a case in which I am the same entity as my hand (as in (1) above.) If this alternative is gone into, it becomes quite doubtful, since for me to conceive strongly of possessing my hand, I must mentally pull away from the hand for the moment at least, and conceive of myself as something other than the hand. For me to be truly the same entity as the hand, I cannot possess the hand. A thing cannot possess itself. So the self cannot possess the parts in this way.

Or, perhaps I possess my hand in the way that I possess the car. This is a case of (2) above, the possessor and the possessed as two separate entities. In addition to the impossibility of the self being a different entity from its parts, what is there in common that links the parts and the self as possessor and possessed? Just what is it that serves as the possessor of the hand? It is not the hand or any other part of the body or mind. Where is it? We can only come up with a vacuity, the emptiness of the inherent existence of such an inherently existing self.

L3: [6. The self is not inherently the mere collection of the parts of the body/mind.]

Perhaps the self is inherently the mere collection of the parts of the body/mind. The falsity of this one is a little harder to realize. Our sense of inherent existence of the self seems to put a little distance between the parts and the self. We seem to conceive of a bit of a gap between appropriator and appropriated, between agent and action, between "my" and "body/mind." In this alternative, all there is, is the body/mind. Why even talk about the self? There would be no need to have something called "the self" which is exactly the parts of the body/mind. Agent and action would be one. Self and body/mind would be one. The self would be redundant, and unfindable. Also, in the Middle Way schools of Buddhism that employ the Sevenfold Reasoning, it is said that the conventional self is not the parts themselves, but is posited on the basis of the parts. Based on apprehending those particular parts, a designated self is said to exist conventionally. It is not the parts, but is based on the parts. The appropriator and appropriated are slightly and subtly different. There is room to make sense of "my life," "my actions." A self redundant with the parts cannot exist inherently. (i.e. The whole cannot be the same or different then its parts.)

L3: [7. The self is not inherently the shape of the parts of the body/mind.]

This alternative investigates whether the self is inherently the shape of the parts of the body/mind. Can this be? According to this, self would be a physical thing. Non-physical components such as a mind and thoughts and values do not have a shape. Even though these non-physical things are not inherently the self (as we saw in (1) above), it certainly makes

no sense for them to be totally irrelevant to the self, as they would be if the self were merely the shape of the parts. Also, if the self is the shape, then this allows no change in shape without a corresponding change in identity of the self. Over time the shape of the body changes. People grow, gain weight, perhaps take up yoga or weightlifting and tone up. Perhaps they lose a limb, lose their hair, become bent with age. Even in the absence of these kinds of shape changes, there are the perceptual shape changes due to changes in posture, standing vs. sitting. There are other shape changes due to the angle from which the parts are viewed. From the left or the right, from near or far, the appearance of the shape changes. The shape criterion misses the point of our conception of the inherent existence of the self, since according to that conception, the inherently existing self is able to persist through changes in shape of the parts. So the self is not inherently the shape of the parts.

L2: [Conclusion]

These reasonings search for the inherently existent self. If it does exist, then logically, it must be either the same as the parts of the body/mind, or different. If it is different from the parts, then there are several seemingly likely candidates proposed for what the self is and how it stands in relation to those parts. But in every case, the self was looked for and not found. What was found instead was an absence, a vacuity, which is the lack of this inherently existing self. The more we understand the dynamics of the Sevenfold Reasonings, the more clearly we can see how the inherently existing self cannot exist. We have the conception that things exist inherently. But upon examination, we see deeply that they cannot possibly exist in this way. There is an earth-shattering shift when this meditation is done at a level deeper than intellectual word-play. And if one refutes the object of inherent existence over and over, using the examples of different kinds of phenomena, one will see something new begin to happen. Persons and phenomena will be conceived as conventionally existent but lacking inherent existence. This is the end of the conception of inherent existence, and the end of painful and afflicted arisings such as the following:

“How could she do that to me? That is absolutely not permissible! I have done so much for her, and this is the gratitude I get!”

If these feelings are greeted with even an intellectual, inferential cognition of the emptiness of inherent existence, the sense of anger and indignation will dissolve right then and there! And should the conception of inherent existence ever come to an end, then feelings and beliefs like these will arise no more. According to the Buddhist Middle Way teachings, this is the end of suffering and the end of one’s cyclical existence.

[End]